

Christ Reformation Church

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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“Come to the Banquet”

February 16, 2014

Sermon Text: Matthew 22:1-14

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:1-16

Introduction-

In our study of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we have been learning about God’s *covenants*. God establishes His relationship to His creatures by means of covenant. He is the one who sets the terms, and these terms serve as the guidelines for His relationship to man,

and man’s relationship to Him. In the New Covenant, the terms are *faith in the full, finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only righteousness by which we can be accepted by God*. Christ then is the Mediator of this covenant. Apart from Christ, there is no relationship with God, no life, and no hope because only those who are of faith in Christ are in this New Covenant relationship to God.

All human beings who presume to set the terms themselves, who insist that they will write their own covenant and have God sign it, are arrogant, foolish, and will end in hell. People gnash their teeth and spit at God, accusing Him of injustice because He alone sets the covenant terms. But this hatred is only evidence of their fundamental sin – that they would murder God if they could, and be God themselves. All idolatry, all false religion, all atheism, is nothing less than the creatures demanding that God endorse the covenant THEY have written, and submit to their terms. He will not.

Never. The Creator will not serve the creature.

Here are some very helpful and accurate observations about God's establishment of covenants. They are quotes from a very early reformed Baptist name Nehemiah Coxe who ministered in England in the mid 1600's –

“The general notion of any covenant of God with men, considered on the part of God or as proposed by him, may be conceived of as a declaration of his sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits he will bestow on them, the communion they will have with him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them.”

Coxe goes on then to state some principles based upon this statement (quoted from Coxe's Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ):

1. It is not from any necessity of nature that God enters into covenant with men but of His own good pleasure....For the Lord does not owe to man the good promised in any covenant He makes with him.

2. A covenant is the foundation of a special relationship between the parties involved in it.

3. The immediate and direct end therefore, of God's entering into covenant with man at any time is the advancing and bettering of his state. God never made a covenant with man in which His goodness to man was not abundantly manifest (ie, plain). Yes, such is His infinite bounty that He has proposed no lesser goal to His covenant transactions with men than to bring them into a blessed state in the eternal enjoyment of Himself. And therefore, when one covenant (through the weakness of man in his sinful state) has been found weak and unprofitable as to this great goal...God finds fault, abolishes it, and introduces another in which full provision is made for the perfect salvation of those that have interest (ie, a share) in it.

Hebrews 8:7-8 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. (8) For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

4. The kindness and condescending love of God in entering into covenant with man strengthens that bond of love and obedience to God that man is under by the law of His creation by adding a new obligation to it. So the

sin of man in breaking covenant with God rises higher, and is accompanied with greater aggravations....

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,

5. Therefore, the revelation of the counsel of God's will in a covenant proposed to man is so far from excluding a restipulation (response, agreement to the terms of the covenant) on man's part, that it renders it a necessary duty on man. The case is not like federal (covenant) transactions between equals where one party is at liberty to refuse the covenant offered by the other party. But the sense of our *infinite distance* from God as creatures, and the dependence we necessarily have upon Him, and the *duty we owe Him* by the unalterable law of our creation (as well as our own advantage and profit), *obliges us* to accept with holy fear and thankfulness both the benefits He offers to us and the terms on which they are offered in His covenant. We must diligently

perform what He commands and directs us to for the goals proposed in the covenant.

The incredible news of the gospel however is that in the New Covenant established in Christ, *all we need do is accept what has been done. Receive the gift of righteousness put before us, and this reception is effected by mere faith alone.*

Listen as Coxe goes on:

6. Yes this restipulation (and consequently the way and manner of obtaining the blessings of a covenant...) *necessarily varies according to the different nature and terms of those covenants that God at any time makes with me.* If the covenant be of works, the restipulation must be by doing the things required in it, even by fulfilling its condition in a perfect obedience to its law. Fittingly, the "reward" (of a covenant of works) is of debt according to the terms of such a covenant. (Thus, the only "reward" of the Old Covenant is *condemnation and death*).

BUT if it be a covenant of free and sovereign grace, the restipulation required is a *humble receiving or hearty believing of those free promises on which the covenant is established.* Accordingly, the reward or covenant

blessing is immediately and eminently of grace.

7. Therefore the good and glory of any covenant that God makes with men...is to be measured chiefly by its promises and terms. If one covenant is established on better promises than another, it is from there and for that reason to be esteemed a better covenant than the other.

What the Apostle Paul has been telling us here in Galatians then is that the New Covenant (known as the Promise before Christ established it in His blood and perfect life) is a BETTER covenant than the Old! Why? Because its promises are better. Instead of a curse, it brings a blessing – it brings life and justification. Why would we ever want to pursue an inferior covenant that promises life according to terms that we can never fulfill? Yet this is precisely what a false gospel of works pressures us to do.

The grace and mercy and kindness of God is shown to us in that when man has violated a covenant and thus forfeited any hope of blessing from that covenant, God has always come and established a better covenant with better terms.

That God even determines to enter into a covenant with us is pure grace and mercy. That He ever decides to

communicate that covenant and its terms to us is pure grace and mercy toward us. WE could never, ever discover HOW to be right with God unless He chose to reveal that way to us. Listen to Coxe once more:

“Our knowledge and understanding of them must entirely depend upon divine revelation. No one can pretend (to have) acquaintance with the secret of God except as He has been pleased to reveal it in His word. This light must guide all our inquiries after it. Our feelings in things of this nature must be strictly governed by this rule, because the nature of them is such as transcends the common principles of reason or natural light...(because) learning not guided by Scripture light in these inquiries (ie, what are the terms by which the sinner can be righteous before God) can only *form an ingenious error and lose a man in the labyrinth of his own imagination and uncertain guesses....(he) can reach no further than to ‘err with reason’ and so wander from truth in a path seemingly more smooth but no less dangerous than others light upon.*

In these things lies the spring (source) of most mistakes and corruptions of doctrine and practice in matters of religion. Men easily find out and agree in the true dictates of the law of nature but in things pertaining to the covenants of God, how varied are their

sentiments! ...One error admitted about the nature of God's covenant transactions with men strangely perplexes the whole system or body of divinity and entangles our interpretation of innumerable texts of Scripture. By this means, jars and contentions have been perpetuated in the church to the great grief and hindrance of all, the offence of the weak, and the greater scandal of the blind world. *The covenant of God is His secret and only He can make us know it.*"

You see then how a true understanding of the nature, terms, blessings, and curses of God's covenants is vital to our souls? If we are to be right with God, and if we are to direct others into the right Way, then we must know that way thoroughly and accurately. We must know that the New Covenant brings justification and blessing, while the Old Covenant can only curse anyone to thinks they can set themselves right with God by doing works.

The New Covenant as Invitation

If you were going to celebrate some unusually joyful event in your life, you might decide to have a big party. Perhaps you would make it a particularly lavish event with special catering and decoration. You want to share your happiness with others, and

so an invitation to this gathering would be a prize.

When God determined in eternity past to enter in to the New Covenant relationship with Him, and thus participate in His banquet, He sent His ambassadors out far and wide to call people to come. Here is the parable that Christ told to describe the grace of the New Covenant --

Matthew 22:1-14 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, (2) "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, (3) and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, **but they would not come.** (4) Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' (5) But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, (6) while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

(7) The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (8) **Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were**

not worthy. (9) Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. (10) And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

(11) "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. (12) And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. (13) Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) For many are called, but few are chosen."

Listen again to it as told by Luke-

Luke 14:15-24 When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (16) But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. (17) And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

(18) But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' (19) And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' (20) And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

(21) So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, **'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'** (22) And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' (23) And the master said to the servant, **'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. (24) For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'**

Now, remember this great observation of Nehemiah Coxe that we read earlier:

"Therefore, the revelation of the counsel of God's will in a covenant proposed to man is so far from

excluding a restipulation (response, agreement to the terms of the covenant) on man's part, that it renders it a necessary duty on man. The case is not like federal (covenant) transactions between equals where one party is at liberty to refuse the covenant offered by the other party. But the sense of our *infinite distance* from God as creatures, and the dependence we necessarily have upon Him, and the *duty we owe Him* by the unalterable law of our creation (as well as our own advantage and profit), *obliges us* to accept with holy fear and thankfulness both the benefits He offers to us and the terms on which they are offered in His covenant."

Historically, what Jesus is telling those Jews is that they were very wrong in presuming that they would enter His Kingdom merely because they were Jews. He had sent His prophets many times, and they killed them.

Matthew 23:31-39 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (32) Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. (33) You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? (34) Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute

from town to town, (35) so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. (36) Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (37) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (38) See, your house is left to you desolate. (39) For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

THEY are the ones who refused the King's gracious invitation. These covenant people whom God had delivered from slavery in Egypt and thus who should have been the FIRST to accept His invitation, are the very ones who slighted it. And so the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles. To the poor. To the unworthy.

But the King's invitation is NOT to be rejected or despised. To reject it is to despise it. It is to reject His grace and kindness. It is to despise His Son. And often these rejections of invitation are accompanied by flat our murderous

hostility, until these people who were so remarkably privileged to be invited finally murdered the King's own Son. Israel, you see.

But further, we see that Nehemiah Coxe's observation is quite correct. If I, for example, invite you over to my house for a banquet, even if that banquet is going to be a very remarkable one for which I have gone to great expense and effort, you and I are equals. I am not a king and you are not my servant. You may choose to RSVP and send your apologies for not coming, and I would have no right to kill you! You would not be committing a great crime.

But when a human being, a sinner with no right to stand in the presence of God, is offered gracious covenant terms by the King, the gaining of which requires only that he *come* to the wedding feast of the King's Son, and that invitation is spurned, such a person is rightly called wicked.

But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business

To such people you see – and these kind surround us today – the invitation is not even worthy of their notice. They cast it aside like junk mail. Others are so evil that when the Son Himself comes to invite them, they kill

Him. Are not such people worthy of the King's rage? Surely they are.

The King Sets the Required Attire

Consider this interesting event as well from Matthew 22-

(11) "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. (12) And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. (13) Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) For many are called, but few are chosen."

Here is an example of a man who came to the banquet. He didn't disregard the invitation entirely like the others. But what he did do was decide that HE would set the terms of the covenant. The King had set the dress code already, but this guy determined that he would come dressed according to his own code. So he rightly was expelled and he perished.

The applications of these things really are quite obvious, aren't they? Let's go back to Galatians for a moment:

Galatians 1:6-9 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- (7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

See it? WE do not set the terms of the covenant and our relationship to God. HE does. And those terms now are faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone.

Galatians 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. (12) For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:14-16 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you

force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (15) We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; (16) yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 3:1-2 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (2) Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:10-11 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

Galatians 4:28-31 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the

Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

(31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

For those of you who are in Christ by faith alone, these things should be of great encouragement to you. God has set the terms of the New Covenant by which we come into saving relationship with Him. The New "Deal" is that all of His requirements have been met by Christ, that His Spirit comes to those who receive these covenant terms, gives them a new heart and a new mind, sets them fully justified before God, adopted into His family. There is nothing more to be done. We simply learn now to live as the new people we are –walking in the Spirit and putting to death the deeds of the flesh. Not to earn anything more. But because we already have it.

And then for anyone here today or who might be listening elsewhere and you are not in Christ. Or maybe you are someone who believes you are, but in fact you are not because YOU have decided that you will set the covenant terms, making your own deal with God and expecting Him to concede to them. You might be such a person who has simply disregarded and slighted the

King's invitation. Or maybe you are one who has professed religion, who claims to be a Christian and in right standing with God, but in reality YOU have decided what you will wear to the wedding feast.

It won't work. And these things should make you shudder and tremble. You cannot enter the kingdom of God in the wardrobe of moralism. You cannot cleanse yourself of sin by washing the outside of the cup while your heart remains unchanged. Washing yourself isn't in the terms of the New Covenant. Being really, really "good and moral" is not one of the terms God has put in the New Covenant.

Until a lost sinner humbles himself and accepts the terms God has revealed to us – faith in Christ's work alone – then that person is like a homeowner who decides to write his own contract, goes down to the bank with it, and informs the bank president that now payments are due only once each year, the interest rate is 1%, and oh, he will be paying in Russian currency.

Foreclosed! It won't work.