

Second Sunday of Easter: Ezekiel 37:1–14

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1 Cor. 9:19 (KJV) For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

To be free from all men is to be free from the opinions of men. Not that we want to be arrogant, but most of us have lived our lives in the mind of another person - wanting their approval. You can go to the other extreme, not caring at all.

To be free from all men is to be free from the opinions of men. This is truly a Christian perspective. In heaven he won't have to make himself the servant of all; everyone will be who they are and there will be no need to tell anyone to serve his neighbor. In this life, you probably cannot love anyone if you have to, because there would be some righteousness attached to it. Loving your neighbor is not the Gospel. Love is the effect, the fruit of the Gospel, which we in ourselves are incapable of.

For freedom Christ came. He came to set men free. Although I am free from putting on appearances, I live a real life. How? I don't walk before men. Paul walked before God. If you walk before men, which many do today, you can trick men sometimes, but not if they have sharpened detectors. Sometimes God lets us think we're tricking others. He likes to play those kinds of games with Joseph's brothers. We're always before the Lord, and there is nobody who is not before the Lord. It's just that he absconds - God who hides himself in masks. We can be separated from where God is, but he is faithful. If he's hiding from us, you can be sure he loves us. But where he is, in the presence of the Lord, there is joy forevermore. You can be sure that when you love your neighbor, when you have the fruit of the Holy Ghost in your life, no one will ever have to tell you, your joy will be full. How did you do with loving your neighbor this last week? How many of you fell short? How many of you turned inward? This is where sin lies; inward. The result of a lack of faith is that we turn inward on ourselves, and start trusting in ourselves.

Martha is turned in on herself, even though she's doing outward works. Sometimes people do outward works so they won't have to suffer. They keep busy to avoid conviction. They avoid people who have words of life for them.

We live in a culture that isn't liberated from the obsession of self.

There is no catch to it. It is a gift of God, freely given, unconditionally. By faith we receive the "unconditional." This is offensive and is probably the greatest scandal, that we can do nothing before God. Even our faith, which comes from outside of us, is a gift.

Not that works are not done, it's that faith is not put in them. Christ...through the Gospel...and teaches that conscience is not to trust in works but rely only on God's mercy. You may actually not believe in God, but be a moral person. You might invoke the name of God...just cause. You may go through religious motions

Christianity today has been reduced to morality. Where it has been reduced to morality there is no law of God. Just be a nice person, and when your conscience convicts you, you'll say "I'll try harder." This is not hearing the Gospel. To hear the Gospel is to say, "I can do nothing."

Ephes. 2:1-2 (KJV) And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; [2] Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

If you were dead in trespasses, what could you have done? Religion could be the course of this world. You can walk according to your own works, which you will use to compare yourself to others: "I'm not as bad as them." In the story Jesus tells about the Publican and the Pharisee, the Pharisee prayed, "I'm not like other sinners. I'm not like that family. I'm not like other men, sinners." This has appeal. Why aren't you like them? "I've done some things. I work hard. I'm friendly. I try to help my neighbors." If you really took count, how many of you find a struggle getting to church on Sunday. The rest of your week is spent thinking about whom? If your thoughts are turned to the Lord, give the glory to God.

Ephes. 2:2-3 (KJV) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

The mind can be a very religious mind. I could have had a very high opinion of myself, and how I always love my neighbor. Until Christ comes, there is no real conviction. "I don't commit adultery. I don't murder anyone. So Lord, thank you that I'm not like other men." The religion of Jesus is one of the heart. Were you angry with your brother this week? Were you turned inward this week? What was your heart meditating on this week? Did you trust in Him for everything? What you trust in is your god. In a crisis what do you run to? What thoughts do you run to? "Well, I got a real bad deal in life, so I can't be judged like other men." Who here were born in Adam? That wasn't such a good deal, was it? Who allowed this? God. Was God taken by surprise? Have you come to an understanding of The Happy Fault of Adam's Sin, without using it? Without Adam's sin we would not need a savior. Only sinners need a Savior.

Ephes. 2:3-5 (KJV)

Ephes. 2:10 (KJV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. We are his workmanship, so why are we working so hard. He is the author and finisher of our salvation. Why do I have to get sweaty about it? The good works are the works of Christ, a dead person, crucified in Christ, has been made alive in Christ, and Christ now lives in them.

Ephes. 2:11-13 (KJV) Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; [12] That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: [13] But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. You are made very near to God. He's closer to you than you are to yourself.

Ephes. 5:21-23 (KJV) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. [22] Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Husbands, are you saviors of your wife's body? Is your life laid down for her?

Ephes. 5:24 (KJV) Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. In some things, religious things, spiritual things? No. The Word of God says something very unpopular to some of you women, something you like to pretend you didn't hear: "in every thing." Is this the Word of God? Are you a Christian? Does

the Word of God mediate your life? Say amen, though sometimes your flesh and heart fail you. The next verse, of course, is the balance.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

How did Christ love the church? He gave himself to the point of crucifixion. He dint' shut up though he was in the face of, If you say one more word you're dead."

Ephes. 5:26 (KJV) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Husbands should love their wives by giving himself for her and washing her with the water of the Word. What she might not want is taking the Word, like I've always said, with all water and no blood. A churlish man, like Nabal, is a very stingy man. He may be married to a virtuous woman, and he may not know it, but he may not know that she is carrying him, and that the weight of the whole family falls on her.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Ephes. 5:26 (KJV) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Wife and Church are synonymous. How did you do this last week, wife? Have you been submitting to your husband in everything? If not, this is called sin. Have you been worrying and taking thought for your life? That is sin. Take no thought for your life, for tomorrow. "What will happen to my family?" The reason your family suffers, and sometimes financially, is because you take thought for tomorrow and are not taking care of what's right in front of you. The seeds of the word are choked. It is a metaphor, but it goes beyond that.

Ephes. 5:30 (KJV) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

He's made a marriage covenant with you in blood. We are married to the Lord. Your Maker has become your Husband.

Ephes. 5:31 (KJV) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

You ought to leave those things behind. You can at least leave behind the gods from the other side of the flood, like Abraham, your father, knew. Sometimes God takes people to heaven,

Christians. Sometimes you can relate, and the place people run to is, "God took something from me." This is a place they run to when something comes down in their life. This is not a good place to run to. God becomes a father to the fatherless. Our Maker is our Husband. He becomes all that we need. When my father and mother leave me, God becomes my father. Is he a good father, your father? YES! Some of you are thinking this through. This is a question of faith or unbelief. We don't know the power that faith unlocks in us and how much we can receive. Some people are afraid that if they did receive everything from the Lord, their offence against God would be over and how could they live. Their whole life is predicated on being offended with someone; their neighbor, their relatives, their natural children. Offences run rampant in the world today, and in the flesh.

Ephes. 5:31-32 (KJV) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. [32] This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Whatever my mother and father were, and I do honor them by the mercy and grace of God, but I speak concerning Christ, who is now my mother and my father. Where is Christ? "Are you speaking of spiritual things?"

Ephes. 5:33 (KJV) Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. You can do something to discourage this. You fathers are called to be holy; to walk before God where you can admit that God knows every thought you're thinking. This is an indicative. You receive holiness, or sanctification, in Christ. He is our holiness, our righteousness, and he has been made to us sanctification. There is another aspect of sanctification that is worked out the rest of our days. When a wife or children see that man walking holy before the Lord, it makes it easier for them to revere him. But if they see a churlish man who is paying lip service in the church, they aren't stupid - they figure it out.

It is not some sweaty thing you do. Holiness too is a gift. Many people can do sanctification, which are works of self-righteousness and a way to defend themselves against God.

Let me give you an allegory: Hosea - an amazing book that can be totally misunderstood. In my opinion, it is the deepest book in the Old Testament, showing Christ's love. I'll read it anyway. You children, if you have questions ask your father or mother. Hosea was a prophet

around 785 BC. The book of Hosea shows God's judgment on spiritual whoredom - adultery - having other idols - breaking the first commandment.

Hosea 1:1-2 (KJV) The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. [2] The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.

When I depart from the Lord to my own reasoning, my own wits, to my own lust, there is a word for it; we'll politely call it spiritual adultery.

Hosea 1:9 (KJV) Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. How would you like to call your child that?

Hosea 1:10 (KJV) Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Is God a little mixed up here? Do you understand this book now?

Hosea 1:11 (KJV) Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

You could believe some things and start receiving some benefits right now. Look at the children who God calls, the children of this age - gentiles in the flesh, without hope in this world - sinners. They hated God, though they may have said, "I love you Jesus," and maybe hated the least of the brethren, though they would not call it that. "I'm indifferent." We are good at justifying ourselves. "God is really mad at me. He hasn't given me a wife yet. When will he?" When he wants. You have every opportunity to receive the grace and mercy of the Lord every day, to be the servant of all, and to get rid of the repellent you wear - the perfume you wear in your fear, your worry, and your anxiety. It repels people, and a lot of other things.

Hosea 2:1-3 (KJV) Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah. [2] Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; [3]

Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

Wilderness - dry land - have you ever been in one?

Hosea 2:4-5 (KJV) And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. [5] For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

What gives you bread? Is it your own wits again? Is it your own talents and gifts? Does God get glory for all your talents and gifts? Spiritual idolatry is when we attribute the blessings to ourselves.

Hosea 2:5-6 (KJV) For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. [6] Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. Just receive it - who God has chosen. God has chosen the weak things, the base things, the despised things, the things that are not. Have you ever thought about the are nots? What are they not? They are not very glorious; although they think they're glorious and really have something together. Maybe they do have something together outwardly, but that is not where the marriage of our Lord is. For freedom Christ has died.

Ezekiel 37:1 (KJV) The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

God has again taken the church into a desert. Israel is the church. The true Israel of God is the church, not Israel from below, but those who put their faith and trust in Christ. You'll see them in the OT.

Ezekiel 37:2 (KJV) And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. Have you felt dried out, and maybe had to drag yourself to church - for the kids? Beware of that, "for the kids."

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. God likes to talk absurdities because he knows we're a reasonable people. Let me give you a poetic picture. I'll take you in the Sprit and show you something -

my bride, the church. I don't know what you thought the church was, but this is the church which you will see as we read on. Imagine looking at some bones scattered somewhere?

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Is the impossible situation you're in today, is it really so hopeless? You couldn't really have faith that God could raise those bones, could you? This dead situation? this dead relationship? The Church, the Bride of Christ, appears to be dead.

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. A true prophet says, "Thou knowest." The natural mind sees the bleached, dry bones. The situation - I'm surrounded by two million Islamic militants. You who what to go to heaven quick, go to downtown Baghdad and preach the Gospel. You don't even have to go to Baghdad. All you have to say is, "Mohamed is a false prophet." God deals with absurdities. He traffics in absurdities. The resurrection and the virgin birth are absurdities. Have you gotten past those?

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. I don't know anything as I should, But you know, Lord. What if you were asked a question, would you be quick to have an answer? Who do you think can't live?

Ezekiel 37:4 (KJV) Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. They're out there looking numb. They're spacing out and looking out the window. They're having deathly thoughts; self-accusatory thoughts, blaming thoughts, and thoughts of separation.

Ezekiel 37:4 (KJV) Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. How do you know someone has heard the Word of the Lord? They believe anything God says. If they don't believe what God said about them, in particular who they are in Christ, and are turned in on themselves, on their cares and fears, they just go farther into the dry desert.

When the law is preached, what do they do? What do they think? 2 Cor - there is a veil over their eyes when Moses is read, but when they turn to the Lord the veil is torn away. Jesus, his name is blasphemed and taken vain all over television land, and even here. How many of you have done this seven times? He's used to it, but it is sin and breaks the first commandment. When you break the first, you've broken them all.

Ezekiel, tell them this: Ezekiel 37:5 (KJV) Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: I'll cause the Holy Ghost to be breathed into you and fill you with the burden of the Word, the Gospel of God. It will not be about what you've done or will do, but about what He's done. Don't forget now, that I've got this robe on. I have to say YOU, not US. Ezekiel 37:7 (KJV) So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

As the Word of the Lord is spoken, prophesied to the wife, she is washed. His very life is a prophesy.

Ephes. 5:26-27 (KJV)

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, [27] That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Presenting to himself a glorious church, a church without spot and blemish, is what Christ is interested in. I'm talking about dry bones, bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh, his wife, his Bride. Who are you joined to? Do you still think you are your own? You're not your own. You've been bought with a precious price, the blood of the Lamb. When you think you're on your own you have unmediated relationships. You start treating your wife like she is a slave and not a wife; or a slave and not a husband, or like a parent who is undeserving of honor. You just shine people on. This will work, but it does show up in your life. If you're not leading mediated relationships then what determines your relationship? Usury. This person is useful, but they're not useful enough. Who have you been mad at this last week? Why? Because you weren't their servant. You could make your mind up, but Christ has made you servants. We can't do that ourselves. There is a delight in that type of servant. There is nothing left to do for righteousness, for justification.

Ezekiel 37:9-10 (11) Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. God has not given up on the church; they just not dried out enough yet. Don't worry. The

Turks are coming. Something is coming. The things men are trusting in, their reason, their story, are all going to be blown away.

Ezekiel 37:12-(13) And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, Graves can be the cave we live in too. Both deaths he's going to open.

Ezekiel 37:14 (KJV) And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord. The land is the of rest - shalom.

This all comes down to something God has done. The Word of God is the Spirit of prophesy, and Jesus Christ is that Spirit. He's saying that if you believe you become a partaker of his nature, by receiving.

Thesis 18: It is certain that a man must despair of his own abilities before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

Are you despairing of your own abilities? Thou Knowest, Lord. The Spirit of the Lord knows.

He who acts simply in accordance with his ability and believes that he is thereby doing something good does not seem worthless to himself, nor does he despair of his own strength. Indeed, he is so presumptuous that he strives for grace in reliance on his own strength. The law, on the other hand, won't allow such presumption: The law wills that a man despair of his own ability, for it leads him into hell and makes him a poor man and shows him that he is a sinner in all his works.

How does this work? The law comes and convicts. The voice of the law is everywhere in the world and it creates fear - terrorizes. You may not believe it. Don't worry about it. Joseph's brothers were not worried - for a while.

What is hell? The foretaste of hell in this life, and there are a lot of ways you could say it, is being turned inward on yourself. Or being in a situation you can't do a thing about, where you're cornered on every side. It is being turned inward on you continuously, and having to go over thing again and again trying to justify yourself. Even in what I'm saying right now, you'd be looking for evil. He kills before He makes alive. Those bones were dead. How did they get dead? The mercy of God.

The law, on the other hand, won't allow such presumption: The law wills that a man despair of his own ability, for it leads him into hell and makes him a poor man and shows him that he is a sinner in all his works.

Have you seen that you're a sinner in all your work? Or are there no self-motive or self-justification in what you do, and that you're not simply doing things to keep God out? If someone says they're going to try harder, you can believe that they are an unbeliever. They have not come to utter despair yet. "You have a really nice house, and I really like that vase you got." It's a wonderful, but it is not life. Go for it if you want to settle for that. Some of you are even envious of that. You're like most Christians. You think that Jesus is about getting more and better stuff. This is how he is presented today in the world today, as the one who meets heartfelt needs – gets you a new car. Maybe God wants you to stay with your old car, and maybe he'd even cause that to explode. What wouldn't do to get at you? If he gave his Son to be crucified, how shall he withhold any good thing? People want their wants met, not their needs. They think what they want is always what they need. Who understands what you need better; you or the Lord? "I want to look good." For whom? "I want to trick them into thinking I'm something I'm not." Who would you want to appear together for? I like the honor I get from my friends; they understand me more. They use ultimate despair, whining, self-pity, to back down the theologian of the cross. "Why should I even try?" You don't need to. Just keep doing that and watch where it leads you. Some of you young people are getting detectors. You won't be backed down by that ultimate despair trip - the cunning tears of hell, according to CS Lewis.

If only I'd been a better person. The cause of such ultimate despair is that we are still trapped in a false regard for our works – so much so, perhaps, that in a kind of perverse pride we think that not even the grace of God can blot out our failures. The only thing that is going to blot out your failures and mine is the grace of God.

The implication is that by avoiding sin we could better our status in God's sight. Regard for our own ability is still the presumption by which we operate. But then we have not utterly despaired of our own ability. We have not surrendered the belief that we manufacture our own destiny by "doing what is in us." Your destiny is manufactured by the one who died for you.

The "utter despair of one's own ability" of thesis 18 is not the "ultimate despair" of one still caught in the trap of presumption, but rather a despair that is "preparation to receive the grace of Christ." Utter despair of any hope in ourselves.

Paul said they were pressed out of measure in Asia so they would no longer trust in themselves but in God who raises the dead. How many of you trust in yourselves? I'm going to do something to make up for it. Receive your husband, the one who gives his life for you.

Indeed, we can say, utter despair of our own ability is not something we achieve on our own. There is no way you can come to utter despair on your own. You'd go on forever hoping in yourself, your sincerity, your piety, your goodness. Paul said he wanted to be found not having a righteousness of his own. Do you still have a right to judge, the Word of God even? "Well, I've got some understanding."

The grace of Christ has brought me hope. Because it seeks to prevent the ultimate despair that will inevitably result when we rely on ourselves and our abilities. Utter despair brings about final surrender of faith in self.

Have you come to final surrender of faith in self? I don't know. The only thing I can say is, "Thou knowest."

Utter despair prepares someone to receive the grace of Christ. "God knows I've tried. Nobody understands me,"

is the ultimate despair that leads to death. They look to Jesus as the author and finisher. They don't look to themselves but to the Lord. The Bride is the one he frees.

One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ,

We are free of all men and have become the servant of all, but not because we have to. It is just as a wife who wants to please her husband in all things. You are joined to the Lord, bone of his bone, and you are who he says you are, flesh of his flesh. There is a conspiracy to keep you from understanding this. He does have good and practical things for you in this life.

One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me shall not die eternally" (John xi. 25), and also, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36), and, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4).

For Luther, Christian liberty is a gift given through the Word - the Gospel concerning his Son. To preach? Christ means to provide. He believes the preaching. Faith in the promises of

God, trusting God's Word, gives the human being everything God's law demands.

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. Faith unites your soul with Christ - trusting your husband. You're not trusting Nabal. I wouldn't advise any wife to trust Nabal. Abigail was his wife and she somehow trusted the Lord. She knew the Lord had gotten her in the situation, and that he would get her out.

When you're married to Christ, it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. You're holding his righteousness, and he is holding your evil. For instance, one of the things he's given you of himself is a new name; clean garments. Ez. Chapter 3 - "take away the filthy garments, and put on him clean, white garments" - symbolic of snow. White and black are not as we think in the natural realm. Put a new miter on his head and make sure nothing can get in there that is not of Christ.

When you're married to Christ, it follows to everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Here occurs, "the joyous exchange," which permeated the hymns of the church. The soul is full of sins and death... Fear and worry, anxiety and selfishness, being turned inward, he gets them all. He's quite capable of dealing with them. You might worry about there being no bread, and he will give you the grainery - all the bakeries in America.

Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. Aren't you glad? It depends on how much you have to give him. No wonder he has to show us we are sinners, through the law. How did you do with loving everyone and God this last week? The standard rule of this church is: When the law commands you to do something, you are forbidden to do it. No. You're only forbidden to do it in yourself. But through Christ, you're like Paul - you live in Romans 7. If I'm totally depraved, how can I do any good works? That will work too. God is not to be messed with in your abstract jungle of words.

Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring

of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. Sins, death, pains of hell - He's the one who gathers them all. All my hellishness he gathers to himself. Will you let him? Imagine your husband - he's quite capable of handling all of that. You're not. If you want to work hard for another 10 years, go ahead.

Christian liberty is the direct result of this divine intervention...free in Christ.

God brings you to faith; he shows you there is no hope in anything else. Everything you've ever trusted in let you down. The groom is grooming you. It's in his hands. All you're asked to do, and have been given grace to do, is believe him, your husband. He knows what's in you. If he can deal with dead bones...

Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious bride, "without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word" [Cf. Eph. 5:26-27] of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hos. 2[:19-20] says.

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness.

There is some good news. We're talking about spiritual adultery. They went after the gods of the people surrounding them. Be joined to the Lord.

1 Cor. 6:15 (KJV) Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. As members of Christ, you partake of all the gifts of your bridegroom. The marriage vow is a pledge of all, everything I am. "Could I please die for you daily, for the rest of my life; for you and our children?" Yeah - it sounds good to me. Or is it "Could I please use you? You have beautiful hair and I like your eyes."

1 Cor. 6:15-16 (KJV) Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. [16] What?

know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. You join yourself to other idols, other stories, the torrents of modernity...

1 Cor. 6:17-18 (KJV) But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. [18] Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. The world says that fornication is a normal thing. If you live by this Word of God, you scorn the things of this world.

Taxes are so high because fathers have abdicated. There is a curse on the land because fathers have abdicated. I don't need to be married to have children. The State will raise them. We're in Babylon. The church is in Babylon and you'd better serve the king. Taxes aren't going down, and neither is the cost of gas and oil. They're demanding more. Don't worry about it; it's only for 70 years.

1 Cor. 6:19-(20) (KJV) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Judges 21:25 (KJV) In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. In America, when the Word of Christ leaves, then heavy judgment and law has to come in. More legislation is inevitable.

The Book of Ruth, in my opinion, is the most concise view of law and Gospel in the entire Old Testament.

Ruth 1:1 (KJV) Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. Ruth leaves, and her 2 sons marry Moabites, and then they die; sick and pining die. Orpah wept and cried, and Ruth stayed with the daughter of Israel. She goes back to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Ruth 2:3-(5)-6 [5] Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? [6] And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: Boaz wants to marry Ruth, but there is a law that the nearest kinsman must redeem the land of Naomi's sons.

Ruth 4:1-(4-6) (KJV) [4] And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am

after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. [5] Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

[6] And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it. Boaz tells the nearest kinsman that he must also marry Ruth, a Moabites.

-the Bible says, while we were yet sinners.

Ruth 4:7-(8) (KJV) Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

Ruth 4:7-(10) Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. Have you been purchased? What if you forget - next week? You still belong to Christ. You need to read the four chapters of Ruth. He purchased her, the Moabitess. What's this got to do with us? It depends on whether or not you've been a Moabitess. Ruth really wasn't a Moabitess in her heart, because she heard the law from her mother-in-law. The Moabites had another god. Ruth 1:16-17 16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. I'm not letting go because there is no life outside of the God of Israel.

Christian liberty is simply one aspect of the alien righteousness granted by grace alone. It is the result of having been bound to Christ in this royal marriage. Whom the son sets free is free indeed. Share in everything he has.

Let this suffice concerning the inner man, his liberty, and the source of his liberty, the righteousness of faith. He needs neither laws nor good works but, on the contrary, is injured by them if he believes that he is justified by them.

What is the glorious liberty of the Children of God? There is a certain speech they have, a word of wisdom. Your children will have this speech if they are "engaged" all the time. Father's, engage your children. Mother's, teach them the catechism.

What Christ has done takes care of all justification and righteousness, not money. In the world you have to keep certain laws. "I'm a Christian, so give me a new Cadillac." Be content. Is anybody content today? Is anybody not anxious about their life, what they're going to wear, how they are going to be perceived. Akin joined himself to a Babylonian garment and gold. If he's into greed, into gold, he troubles his own house. A woman who is contentious pulls down her own house.

Let this suffice concerning the inner man, his liberty, and the source of his liberty, the righteousness of faith. He needs neither laws nor good works but, on the contrary, is injured by them if he believes that he is justified by them.

If you have law or good works, or your great expectations and sincerity about how you're going to try harder, you'll come to the place where you say, "I'm going to give up," and that would be good.

How do you serve the world without seeking your own advantage? By being married to a rich man.

Through faith, a man is restored...that he may not be idle, but provide...he must do such works freely, only to please God.

This would prevent a man from whining about supporting his wife. Though a wife and children should be very thankful, particularly in an age when men have abdicated.

Not for righteousness. It affects the daily life of a Christ...for Christian liberty frees Christians from their obsession...insofar as I act as a justified sinner; I am free to act without concern for my own self-interest. God has so taken care of me that I might be empowered to take care of my neighbor.

He ought to think: "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches?

I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my

neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”

Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christ's to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.

What's the big exchange? What's that all about? Our heavenly Boaz fulfilled the law. The law had a claim on you. You sinned; therefore you deserve to be miserable, to worry - today. It means we're freed from that. Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed. We're married to someone.

Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?

Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's.

What do you want to give him today? You could start with your own righteousness, if you had any.

Romans 7:4 (KJV) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Ephes. 5:32 (KJV) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

You belong to another. You can sometimes understand the spiritual, if you look at the natural. Why do people worry and live a life of anxiety and fear? Unbelief. They don't trust their husband. What if a wife is so caught up in herself, that she never learned more about who her husband is, what he was doing, and was and what he had for her? Remember also what the

husband is like. It's a two-way street. Christ engages us with his law, then he fulfills the law, and then for the rest of your days, he exchanges all you have for all he has. "I don't want to give up my righteousness. My grandmother gave me that, and I don't want to give it up." What if the wife just talked about herself and never about her husband, what he thinks, and what his plans are? A wife receives life from her husband. Either that, or she has no need of her husband, except for the paycheck. Don't forget the husband's side. This is who he goes to first. A wife must be made to get her life from her husband. She can even think evil of her husband, but there are consequences for that kind of marriage: envy, comparing, or being turned inward, and having shrinking little world. "People who agree with me, that is who I associate with." This causes a lot of unrest and complaining. It comes down to what I want and not what I need - idolatry. It doesn't mean that she has to trust Nabal. If a husband makes mistakes, it doesn't mean he's not a good husband. There can be a continual complaining in the church (wife) about our needs not being met. I'm not interested in meeting needs. The only need I'm interested in today is what you think about your standing before God.

Our need is Christ - to receive him. Our need is to believe that he has delivered us, that he does deliver us, and that he will yet deliver us, because we always need deliverance.

Hosea is an extreme allegory of the church. Ezekiel and the bones in the desert is an allegory. In Hosea, the wife is not looking to her husband to meet her needs. The church is not looking to her husband. Men will always let you down, because they're like you.

Gay people - that is the effect of abdication of fathers. They are outwardly rebellious and show a disdain or hatred for men. They made a decision to hate long ago, and to express their hatred. They are to be pitied, like Forde says. They're already under judgment. If they wanted to take communion, they should be truly repentant. There's worse than that that goes on here every day. You're already a sinner. How many of you are confessed sinners? We are spontaneously totally depraved and totally righteous. 1 John is a book of contradiction until you see through the eyes of law and Gospel. He understands through the truth of law and Gospel. This is a gift. There are two of us, and they are both simultaneous. You are un-blamable and un-reproachable in his sight.

You women, who will get up tomorrow, what will you talk about all day? Your husband? There was nothing comely about Jesus that we would desire him. He is despised of all men. How would you like to be married to despised of all men. He's not useful, but he does own all things. He's a beggar and doesn't look too good, so we would not desire him. The good news is

that the wife has a good husband in Hosea. She can't come to him until she admits her sin. He can even allow her to have pain and go into the desert because of her un-thankfulness. He gave her the land of Israel flowing with milk and honey and she's not thankful. She doesn't know the story of our being slaves in Egypt.

We have been created in Christ Jesus, that we would bring forth fruit. (Romans 7)

This is GOOD NEWS! Romans 7:1 (KJV) Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? The law only has dominion for as long as you live. Are you dead, and hidden with Christ in God?

Romans 7:2 (KJV) For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. The law keeper died.

Romans 7:3 (KJV) So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. We were all married to the law, in Adam. Look at how you judge others by the laws you have, the standards you have. Didn't you used to judge people by what they did for you?

Romans 7:4 (KJV) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. Fruit is the byproduct.

OBATOTC, THESIS 28: The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it.

When the Lord met you, did he discover that you were a good law-keeping person, or did he create something in you that is pleasing to him now? However, The love of man comes into being through attraction to what pleases it, which always ends in hatred, according to Bonhoeffer.

Now we have arrived at the opposite side of the great arch described by the Disputation. All else has been shorn away, put to death.

You haven't loved enough to be a Syro-Phoenician woman, and won't until something you love more than your own life is threatened.

What remains is simply the creative love of God. The innermost nature of the operation of the previous thesis is now announced. It is love, the love of God that creates out of nothing, calls into being that which is from that which is not. What is nothing? That is what we were, in Adam. Or, you could call it vanity - all is vanity - everything under the sun is vanity - nothing, flesh. It's already dead.

...calls into being that which is from that which is not. This love of God that creates its object is contrasted absolutely with the love of humans. Human love is awakened by attraction to what pleases it.

If you have human love, it is about usury. If your relationships are unmediated, they will be divided. At one point, it just doesn't make it. No one can meet all your needs - satisfy you. It's really your wants that are the problem.

Human love is awakened by attraction to what pleases it.

It must search to find its object and, one might add, will likely toss it aside when it tires of it.

Discipline of Disillusionment – marriage, after 5 years, becomes drudgery. I didn't know there were problems associated with marriage, and that you had to support a family.

The proof of the thesis Luther finds simply in the fact that the love of God flows forth to the unlovely:

Luther: The first part [of the thesis] is clear because the love of God that lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For this reason the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons. Thus Christ says: "For I came not to call the righteous but sinners" [Matt. 9:13].

All of this flows forth strictly from the cross. It is the outcome of the theologia crucis.

How many of you would qualify in the natural for that? How many of you haven't attained to that yet? How many don't have arms?

But the love of man seeks its own good. This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good that it may enjoy, but where it may confer

good upon the bad and needy persons. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35], says the Apostle.

Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For this reason the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons. "I'm avoiding them. They might want something I have." Ruth was a Moabitess, which was a bad name in Israel. She was joined to Boaz and gave birth to Obed, and Obed had Jesse, and Jesse had David, and the royal bloodline flows from the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. God creates the fruit of the lips (Isa 57). Fruit comes because you're joined to Christ. If you abide in the vine fruit is inevitable. Ruth bears fruit because of the life Boaz gives her daily.

"I love you," is the important thing your children hear from you. The more important thing is the pronouncement of "I love you." Why does God forgive us? Because he loves us. When you marry the Lord, two things happen: He gets all that you have, you get all that he has. The question is, what do you have? You have sin, death, fear, worries, anxieties; you weight 480 pounds, haven't taken a bath in 2 months, haven't brushed your teeth in 2 years; and, you have high opinion of yourself. What does He do? Song 1:4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee It is the Lord who draws us. No man seeks God. "Ever since I've been a child I've really loved Jesus." Which Jesus did you love? Which did you think you loved? How about the opposite being true? Draw your own conclusion about how you've related to Jesus. "I thought he was useful, and that he would prop up my god-project. And then I came to church and my indignation reached its highest pitch."

All of your sins I've taken. You just haven't believed enough to have big enough sins. Melancthon wouldn't eat without saying prayers, and he would get all heavily convicted about it if he didn't. He was just a little sinner. Luther said, "You need to be a big sinner like me." Big sinners realize they have only one place to unload. You could go to a Psychiatrist, but they can't get down deep enough.

Where is the glorious liberty of the children of God? In the Gospel. Out of the forgiveness of Christ today, a new creation comes forth. It is the love of God toward the bride. Eschatologically speaking, Bride, there is not one spot in you. He sees you as perfect as Jesus right now, but this is eschatological. As long as we're in this world we have a flesh and a heart

that fails us, and this is why the husband, Jesus, cleanses you every day. Sometimes the wife needs to be washed of her inability to receive.

Put your ring on. He's promised you everything. And he has promised you daily washings in this life - hourly, and minutely. A Christian is one who is continuously convicted of sin. But greater than that, he walks in forgiveness - the love of God towards us, the Bride. Have you got the ring of faith? That is a gift. All of our sins, fears, worries, cares, judgment, evil thinking, and being turned inward - let him have them. "Well, I'll try to be good and cover them up, or make up for them, or pray harder." Look to the groom - the groomer. Look to the one who is always washing. Look to Eph 5 - mystery. When God is talking about how husbands should relate to their wives - Christ loved the church, gave himself for her, and washed her. God will never stop washing us. He will never give up on us. His Word says that he's taken all the sins that would condemn you, the fears, and anxieties, and worries.

We are really beggars. I fear for you if you have anything to bring to God. He's your husband, and he wants to be related to you as the giver of the gift. You wives, you could relate to your husbands like this if you want to see things happen in your marriage. Your husband is your gift. You husbands, if you're hearing the Word, the means of grace are so important for your wife and children. I can't make you have communion daily. If you see your need, if you've been made poor in spirit and have been brought to humility, you will say you need all the help you can get - even from that person.

Give everything to Jesus, particularly your sins. He takes them all. "But, but, but...." You might have one or two this week. Will you let your groom, your husband, take them? Will you enter into the joyous exchange? There's nothing to give you if you've been good lately. Have you been selfish with someone you love? Have you been out of sorts and angry, judging them? Whatever the enemy accuses you of, your confession should be "According to the law, you're absolutely right. I am selfish under the law, but I'm no longer under the law, but under the Gospel of Jesus, who has taken all my sins, and given me all his righteousness. You're wasting your time here, Satan."

He even wants all those accusations you still buy into. Give them to him. When you agree that all these things are true about you, you take the ground out from under the accuser. The jury is in, and the jury says, "Not guilty. My son's blood has paid for all their crimes."

Thank you, Lord, for so great a gift - your Son, and for the propitiation for all of our sins. We are free today in Christ. Free to be slaves by choice and not by constraint. We are free to be our brother's keepers and look on the cares of others without regard to ourselves. Free to know that you are the fulfiller of the law, and we do nothing by ourselves. We thank you for love and forgiveness. "I forgive all of your sins for Christ's sake - every last one of them - even future sins." Remember the cleansing word you've been given.

AMEN

Sermon Notes - Don O'Connor - 9/23/07

(The message through Jennifer's ears.)

1 Cor. 9:19 (KJV) For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

To be free from all men is to be free from the opinions of men. Not that we want to be arrogant, but most of us have lived our lives in the mind of another person - wanting their approval. You can go to the other extreme, not caring at all.

To be free from all men is to be free from the opinions of men. This is truly a Christian perspective. In heaven he won't have to make himself the servant of all; everyone will be who they are and there will be no need to tell anyone to serve his neighbor. In this life, you probably cannot love anyone if you have to, because there would be some righteousness attached to it. Loving your neighbor is not the Gospel. Love is the effect, the fruit of the Gospel, which we in ourselves are incapable of.

For freedom Christ came. He came to set men free. Although I am free from putting on appearances, I live a real life. How? I don't walk before men. Paul walked before God. If you walk before men, which many do today, you can trick men sometimes, but not if they have sharpened detectors. Sometimes God lets us think we're tricking others. He likes to play those kinds of games with Joseph's brothers. We're always before the Lord, and there is nobody who is not before the Lord. It's just that he absconds - God who hides himself in masks. We can be separated from where God is, but he is faithful. If he's hiding from us, you can be sure he loves us. But where he is, in the presence of the Lord, there is joy forevermore. You can be sure that when you love your neighbor, when you have the fruit of the Holy Ghost in your

life, no one will ever have to tell you, your joy will be full. How did you do with loving your neighbor this last week? How many of you fell short? How many of you turned inward? This is where sin lies; inward. The result of a lack of faith is that we turn inward on ourselves, and start trusting in ourselves.

Luther on Christian Liberty:

Freedom means to be justified as a sinner. It means to be free from the curse of sin - obsession with the self - being turned in on the self.

Martha is turned in on herself, even though she's doing outward works. Sometimes people do outward works so they won't have to suffer. They keep busy to avoid conviction. They avoid people who have words of life for them.

We live in a culture that isn't liberated from the obsession of self.

To be free is to be absolutely dependent on God, in Paul's terms becoming a slave of God - a bond slave. This is utterly abhorrent to contemporary religiosity. Much of modern religion... elements of ancient medieval ...modern religious thought.

It is neither safe nor right.

Like Paul, he saw himself captured by the Word of God. To be free is also to be free from the law for the wrong person. Personal relationship to God in Christ. A clear conscience...from the justification of the sinner. That is, the unqualified justification of the sinner.

There is no catch to it. It is a gift of God, freely given, unconditionally. By faith we receive the "unconditional." This is offensive and is probably the greatest scandal, that we can do nothing before God. Even our faith, which comes from outside of us, is a gift.

Not that works are not done, it's that faith is not put in them. Christ...through the Gospel...and teaches that conscience is not to trust in works but rely only on God's mercy. You may actually not believe in God, but be a moral person. You might invoke the name of God...just cause. You may go through religious motions

Christianity today has been reduced to morality. Where it has been reduced to morality there is no law of God. Just be a nice person, and when your conscience convicts you, you'll say "I'll try harder." This is not hearing the Gospel. To hear the Gospel is to say, "I can do nothing."

Ephes. 2:1-2 (KJV) And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; [2] Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

If you were dead in trespasses, what could you have done? Religion could be the course of this world. You can walk according to your own works, which you will use to compare yourself to others: "I'm not as bad as them." In the story Jesus tells about the Publican and the Pharisee, the Pharisee prayed, "I'm not like other sinners. I'm not like that family. I'm not like other men, sinners." This has appeal. Why aren't you like them? "I've done some things. I work hard. I'm friendly. I try to help my neighbors." If you really took count, how many of you find a struggle getting to church on Sunday. The rest of your week is spent thinking about whom? If your thoughts are turned to the Lord, give the glory to God.

Ephes. 2:2-3 (KJV) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

The mind can be a very religious mind. I could have had a very high opinion of myself, and how I always love my neighbor. Until Christ comes, there is no real conviction. "I don't commit adultery. I don't murder anyone. So Lord, thank you that I'm not like other men." The religion of Jesus is one of the heart. Were you angry with your brother this week? Were you turned inward this week? What was your heart meditating on this week? Did you trust in Him for everything? What you trust in is your god. In a crisis what do you run to? What thoughts do you run to? "Well, I got a real bad deal in life, so I can't be judged like other men." Who here were born in Adam? That wasn't such a good deal, was it? Who allowed this? God. Was God taken by surprise? Have you come to an understanding of The Happy Fault of Adam's Sin, without using it? Without Adam's sin we would not need a savior. Only sinners need a Savior.

Ephes. 2:3-5 (KJV)

Ephes. 2:10 (KJV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. We are his workmanship, so why are we working so hard. He is the author and finisher of our salvation. Why do I have to

get sweaty about it? The good works are the works of Christ, a dead person, crucified in Christ, has been made alive in Christ, and Christ now lives in them.

Ephes. 2:11-13 (KJV) Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; [12] That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: [13] But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. You are made very near to God. He's closer to you than you are to yourself.

Ephes. 5:21-23 (KJV) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. [22] Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Husbands, are you saviors of your wife's body? Is your life laid down for her?

Ephes. 5:24 (KJV) Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. In some things, religious things, spiritual things? No. The Word of God says something very unpopular to some of you women, something you like to pretend you didn't hear: "in every thing." Is this the Word of God? Are you a Christian? Does the Word of God mediate your life? Say amen, though sometimes your flesh and heart fail you. The next verse, of course, is the balance.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

How did Christ love the church? He gave himself to the point of crucifixion. He dint' shut up though he was in the face of, If you say one more word you're dead."

Ephes. 5:26 (KJV) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Husbands should love their wives by giving himself for her and washing her with the water of the Word. What she might not want is taking the Word, like I've always said, with all water and no blood. A churlish man, like Nabal, is a very stingy man. He may be married to a virtuous woman, and he may not know it, but he may not know that she is carrying him, and that the weight of the whole family falls on her.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Ephes. 5:26 (KJV) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Wife and Church are synonymous. How did you do this last week, wife? Have you been submitting to your husband in everything? If not, this is called sin. Have you been worrying and taking thought for your life? That is sin. Take no thought for your life, for tomorrow. "What will happen to my family?" The reason your family suffers, and sometimes financially, is because you take thought for tomorrow and are not taking care of what's right in front of you. The seeds of the word are choked. It is a metaphor, but it goes beyond that.

Ephes. 5:30 (KJV) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

He's made a marriage covenant with you in blood. We are married to the Lord. Your Maker has become your Husband.

Ephes. 5:31 (KJV) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

You ought to leave those things behind. You can at least leave behind the gods from the other side of the flood, like Abraham, your father, knew. Sometimes God takes people to heaven, Christians. Sometimes you can relate, and the place people run to is, "God took something from me." This is a place they run to when something comes down in their life. This is not a good place to run to. God becomes a father to the fatherless. Our Maker is our Husband. He becomes all that we need. When my father and mother leave me, God becomes my father. Is he a good father, your father? YES! Some of you are thinking this through. This is a question of faith or unbelief. We don't know the power that faith unlocks in us and how much we can receive. Some people are afraid that if they did receive everything from the Lord, their offence against God would be over and how could they live. Their whole life is predicated on being offended with someone; their neighbor, their relatives, their natural children. Offences run rampant in the world today, and in the flesh.

Ephes. 5:31-32 (KJV) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. [32] This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Whatever my mother and father were, and I do honor them by the mercy and grace of God, but I speak concerning Christ, who is now my mother and my father. Where is Christ? "Are you speaking of spiritual things?" You're darned toot'in I am.

Ephes. 5:33 (KJV) Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. You can do something to discourage this. You fathers are called to be holy; to walk before God where you can admit that God knows every thought you're thinking. This is an indicative. You receive holiness, or sanctification, in Christ. He is our holiness, our righteousness, and he has been made to us sanctification. There is another aspect of sanctification that is worked out the rest of our days. When a wife or children see that man walking holy before the Lord, it makes it easier for them to revere him. But if they see a churlish man who is paying lip service in the church, they aren't stupid - they figure it out.

It is not some sweaty thing you do. Holiness too is a gift. Many people can do sanctification, which are works of self-righteousness and a way to defend themselves against God.

Let me give you an allegory: Hosea - an amazing book that can be totally misunderstood. In my opinion, it is the deepest book in the Old Testament, showing Christ's love. I'll read it anyway. You children, if you have questions ask your father or mother. Hosea was a prophet around 785 BC. The book of Hosea shows God's judgment on spiritual whoredom - adultery - having other idols - breaking the first commandment.

Hosea 1:1-2 (KJV) The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beer, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. [2] The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.

When I depart from the Lord to my own reasoning, my own wits, to my own lust, there is a word for it; we'll politely call it spiritual adultery.

Hosea 1:9 (KJV) Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. How would you like to call your child that?

Hosea 1:10 (KJV) Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was

said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Is God a little mixed up here? Do you understand this book now?

Hosea 1:11 (KJV) Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

You could believe some things and start receiving some benefits right now. Look at the children who God calls, the children of this age - gentiles in the flesh, without hope in this world - sinners. They hated God, though they may have said, "I love you Jesus," and maybe hated the least of the brethren, though they would not call it that. "I'm indifferent." We are good at justifying ourselves. "God is really mad at me. He hasn't given me a wife yet. When will he?" When he wants. You have every opportunity to receive the grace and mercy of the Lord every day, to be the servant of all, and to get rid of the repellent you wear - the perfume you wear in your fear, your worry, and your anxiety. It repels people, and a lot of other things.

Hosea 2:1-3 (KJV) Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah. [2] Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; [3] Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

Wilderness - dry land - have you ever been in one?

Hosea 2:4-5 (KJV) And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. [5] For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

What gives you bread? Is it your own wits again? Is it your own talents and gifts? Does God get glory for all your talents and gifts? Spiritual idolatry is when we attribute the blessings to ourselves.

Hosea 2:5-6 (KJV) For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. [6] Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. Just receive it - who God has chosen.

God has chosen the weak things, the base things, the despised things, the things that are not. Have you ever thought about the are nots? What are they not? They are not very glorious; although they think they're glorious and really have something together. Maybe they do have something together outwardly, but that is not where the marriage of our Lord is. For freedom Christ has died.

Ezekiel 37:1 (KJV) The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

God has again taken the church into a desert. Israel is the church. The true Israel of God is the church, not Israel from below, but those who put their faith and trust in Christ. You'll see them in the OT.

Ezekiel 37:2 (KJV) And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. Have you felt dried out, and maybe had to drag yourself to church - for the kids? Beware of that, "for the kids."

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. God likes to talk absurdities because he knows we're a reasonable people. Let me give you a poetic picture. I'll take you in the Sprit and show you something - my bride, the church. I don't know what you thought the church was, but this is the church which you will see as we read on. Imagine looking at some bones scattered somewhere?

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Is the impossible situation you're in today, is it really so hopeless? You couldn't really have faith that God could raise those bones, could you? This dead situation? this dead relationship? The Church, the Bride of Christ, appears to be dead.

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. A true prophet says, "Thou knowest." The natural mind sees the bleached, dry bones. The situation - I'm surrounded by two million Islamic militants. You who what to go to heaven quick, go to downtown Baghdad and preach the Gospel. You don't even have to go to Baghdad. All you have to say is, "Mohamed is a false prophet." God deals with absurdities. He traffics in absurdities. The resurrection and the virgin birth are absurdities. Have you gotten past those?

Ezekiel 37:3 (KJV) And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. I don't know anything as I should, But you know, Lord. What if you were asked a question, would you be quick to have an answer? Who do you think can't live?

Ezekiel 37:4 (KJV) Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. They're out there looking numb. They're spacing out and looking out the window. They're having deathly thoughts; self-accusatory thoughts, blaming thoughts, and thoughts of separation.

Ezekiel 37:4 (KJV) Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. How do you know someone has heard the Word of the Lord? They believe anything God says. If they don't believe what God said about them, in particular who they are in Christ, and are turned in on themselves, on their cares and fears, they just go farther into the dry desert.

When the law is preached, what do they do? What do they think? 2 Cor - there is a veil over their eyes when Moses is read, but when they turn to the Lord the veil is torn away. Jesus, his name is blasphemed and taken vain all over television land, and even here. How many of you have done this seven times? He's used to it, but it is sin and breaks the first commandment. When you break the first, you've broken them all.

Ezekiel, tell them this: Ezekiel 37:5 (KJV) Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: I'll cause the Holy Ghost to be breathed into you and fill you with the burden of the Word, the Gospel of God. It will not be about what you've done or will do, but about what He's done. Don't forget now, that I've got this robe on. I have to say YOU, not US. Ezekiel 37:7 (KJV) So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

Ephes. 5:25 (KJV) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

As the Word of the Lord is spoken, prophesied to the wife, she is washed. His very life is a prophesy.

Ephes. 5:26-27 (KJV)

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, [27] That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Presenting to himself a glorious church, a church without spot and blemish, is what Christ is interested in. I'm talking about dry bones, bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh, his wife, his Bride. Who are you joined to? Do you still think you are your own? You're not your own. You've been bought with a precious price, the blood of the Lamb. When you think you're on your own you have unmediated relationships. You start treating your wife like she is a slave and not a wife; or a slave and not a husband, or like a parent who is undeserving of honor. You just shine people on. This will work, but it does show up in your life. If you're not leading mediated relationships then what determines your relationship? Usury. This person is useful, but they're not useful enough. Who have you been mad at this last week? Why? Because you weren't their servant. You could make your mind up, but Christ has made you servants. We can't do that ourselves. There is a delight in that type of servant. There is nothing left to do for righteousness, for justification.

Ezekiel 37:9-10 (11) Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. God has not given up on the church; they just not dried out enough yet. Don't worry. The Turks are coming. Something is coming. The things men are trusting in, their reason, their story, are all going to be blown away.

Ezekiel 37:12-(13) And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, Graves can be the cave we live in too. Both deaths he's going to open.

Ezekiel 37:14 (KJV) And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord. The land is the of rest - shalom.

This all comes down to something God has done. The Word of God is the Spirit of prophesy, and Jesus Christ is that Spirit. He's saying that if you believe you become a partaker of his nature, by receiving.

Thesis 18: It is certain that a man must despair of his own abilities before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

Are you despairing of your own abilities? Thou Knowest, Lord. The Spirit of the Lord knows.

He who acts simply in accordance with his ability and believes that he is thereby doing something good does not seem worthless to himself, nor does he despair of his own strength. Indeed, he is so presumptuous that he strives for grace in reliance on his own strength. The law, on the other hand, won't allow such presumption: The law wills that a man despair of his own ability, for it leads him into hell and makes him a poor man and shows him that he is a sinner in all his works.

How does this work? The law comes and convicts. The voice of the law is everywhere in the world and it creates fear - terrorizes. You may not believe it. Don't worry about it. Joseph's brothers were not worried - for a while.

What is hell? The foretaste of hell in this life, and there are a lot of ways you could say it, is being turned inward on yourself. Or being in a situation you can't do a thing about, where you're cornered on every side. It is being turned inward on you continuously, and having to go over thing again and again trying to justify yourself. Even in what I'm saying right now, you'd be looking for evil. He kills before He makes alive. Those bones were dead. How did they get dead? The mercy of God.

The law, on the other hand, won't allow such presumption: The law wills that a man despair of his own ability, for it leads him into hell and makes him a poor man and shows him that he is a sinner in all his works.

Have you seen that you're a sinner in all your work? Or are there no self-motive or self-justification in what you do, and that you're not simply doing things to keep God out? If someone says they're going to try harder, you can believe that they are an unbeliever. They have not come to utter despair yet. "You have a really nice house, and I really like that vase you got." It's a wonderful, but it is not life. Go for it if you want to settle for that. Some of you are even envious of that. You're like most Christians. You think that Jesus is about getting more and better stuff. This is how he is presented today in the world today, as the one who meets heartfelt needs – gets you a new car. Maybe God wants you to stay with your old car, and maybe he'd even cause that to explode. What wouldn't do to get at you? If he gave his Son to be crucified, how shall he withhold any good thing? People want their wants met, not their needs. They think what they want is always what they need. Who understands what you need better; you or the Lord? "I want to look good." For whom? "I want to trick them into thinking

I'm something I'm not." Who would you want to appear together for? I like the honor I get from my friends; they understand me more. They use ultimate despair, whining, self-pity, to back down the theologian of the cross. "Why should I even try?" You don't need to. Just keep doing that and watch where it leads you. Some of you young people are getting detectors. You won't be backed down by that ultimate despair trip - the cunning tears of hell, according to CS Lewis.

If only I'd been a better person. The cause of such ultimate despair is that we are still trapped in a false regard for our works – so much so, perhaps, that in a kind of perverse pride we think that not even the grace of God can blot out our failures. The only thing that is going to blot out your failures and mine is the grace of God.

The implication is that by avoiding sin we could better our status in God's sight. Regard for our own ability is still the presumption by which we operate. But then we have not utterly despaired of our own ability. We have not surrendered the belief that we manufacture our own destiny by "doing what is in us." Your destiny is manufactured by the one who died for you.

The "utter despair of one's own ability" of thesis 18 is not the "ultimate despair" of one still caught in the trap of presumption, but rather a despair that is "preparation to receive the grace of Christ." Utter despair of any hope in ourselves.

Paul said they were pressed out of measure in Asia so they would no longer trust in themselves but in God who raises the dead. How many of you trust in yourselves? I'm going to do something to make up for it. Receive your husband, the one who gives his life for you.

Indeed, we can say, utter despair of our own ability is not something we achieve on our own. There is no way you can come to utter despair on your own. You'd go on forever hoping in yourself, your sincerity, your piety, your goodness. Paul said he wanted to be found not having a righteousness of his own. Do you still have a right to judge, the Word of God even? "Well, I've got some understanding."

The grace of Christ has brought me hope. Because it seeks to prevent the ultimate despair that will inevitably result when we rely on ourselves and our abilities. Utter despair brings about final surrender of faith in self.

Have you come to final surrender of faith in self? I don't know. The only thing I can say is, "Thou knowest."

Utter despair prepares someone to receive the grace of Christ. "God knows I've tried. Nobody understands me,"

is the ultimate despair that leads to death. They look to Jesus as the author and finisher. They don't look to themselves but to the Lord. The Bride is the one he frees.

One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ,

We are free of all men and have become the servant of all, but not because we have to. It is just as a wife who wants to please her husband in all things. You are joined to the Lord, bone of his bone, and you are who he says you are, flesh of his flesh. There is a conspiracy to keep you from understanding this. He does have good and practical things for you in this life.

One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me shall not die eternally" (John xi. 25), and also, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36), and, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4).

For Luther, Christian liberty is a gift given through the Word - the Gospel concerning his Son. To preach? Christ means to provide. He believes the preaching. Faith in the promises of God, trusting God's Word, gives the human being everything God's law demands.

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. Faith unites your soul with Christ - trusting your husband. You're not trusting Nabal. I wouldn't advise any wife to trust Nabal. Abigail was his wife and she somehow trusted the Lord. She knew the Lord had gotten her in the situation, and that he would get her out.

When you're married to Christ, it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. You're holding his righteousness, and he is holding your evil. For instance, one of the things he's given you of himself is a new name; clean garments. Ez. Chapter 3 - "take away the filthy garments, and put on him clean, white garments" - symbolic of snow. White and black are not as we think in the natural realm. Put a new miter on his head and make sure nothing can get in there that is not of Christ.

When you're married to Christ, it follows to everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Here occurs, "the joyous exchange," which permeated the hymns of the church. The soul is full of sins and death... Fear and worry, anxiety and selfishness, being turned inward, he gets them all. He's quite capable of dealing with them. You might worry about there being no bread, and he will give you the grainery - all the bakeries in America.

Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. Aren't you glad? It depends on how much you have to give him. No wonder he has to show us we are sinners, through the law. How did you do with loving everyone and God this last week? The standard rule of this church is: When the law commands you to do something, you are forbidden to do it. No. You're only forbidden to do it in yourself. But through Christ, you're like Paul - you live in Romans 7. If I'm totally depraved, how can I do any good works? That will work too. God is not to be messed with in your abstract jungle of words.

Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. Sins, death, pains of hell - He's the one who gathers them all. All my hellishness he gathers to himself. Will you let him? Imagine your husband - he's quite capable of handling all of that. You're not. If you want to work hard for another 10 years, go ahead.

Christian liberty is the direct result of this divine intervention...free in Christ.

God brings you to faith; he shows you there is no hope in anything else. Everything you've ever trusted in let you down. The groom is grooming you. It's in his hands. All you're asked to do, and have been given grace to do, is believe him, your husband. He knows what's in you. If he can deal with dead bones...

Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious

bride, "without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word" [Cf. Eph. 5:26–27] of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hos. 2[:19–20] says.

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness.

There is some good news. We're talking about spiritual adultery. They went after the gods of the people surrounding them. Be joined to the Lord.

1 Cor. 6:15 (KJV) Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. As members of Christ, you partake of all the gifts of your bridegroom. The marriage vow is a pledge of all, everything I am. "Could I please die for you daily, for the rest of my life; for you and our children?" Yeah - it sounds good to me. "Could I please use you? You have beautiful hair and I like your eyes."

1 Cor. 6:15-16 (KJV) Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. [16] What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. You join yourself to other idols, other stories, the torrents of modernity...

1 Cor. 6:17-18 (KJV) But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. [18] Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. The world says that fornication is a normal thing. If you live by this Word of God, you scorn the things of this world.

Taxes are so high because fathers have abdicated. There is a curse on the land because fathers have abdicated. I don't need to be married to have children. The State will raise them. We're in Babylon. The church is in Babylon and you'd better serve the king. Taxes aren't going down, and neither is the cost of gas and oil. They're demanding more. Don't worry about it; it's only for 70 years.

1 Cor. 6:19-(20) (KJV) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Judges 21:25 (KJV) In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. In America, when the Word of Christ leaves, then heavy judgment and law has to come in. More legislation is inevitable.

The Book of Ruth, in my opinion, is the most concise view of law and Gospel in the entire Old Testament.

Ruth 1:1 (KJV) Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. Ruth leaves, and her 2 sons marry Moabites, and then they die; sick and pining die. Orpah wept and cried, and Ruth stayed with the daughter of Israel. She goes back to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Ruth 2:3-(5)-6 [5] Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? [6] And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: Boaz wants to marry Ruth, but there is a law that the nearest kinsman must redeem the land of Naomi's sons.

Ruth 4:1-(4-6) (KJV) [4] And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. [5] Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

[6] And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it. Boaz tells the nearest kinsman that he must also marry Ruth, a Moabite.

If I was associated with a Moabite - the Bible says, while we were yet sinners.

Ruth 4:7-(8) (KJV) Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

Ruth 4:7-(10) Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. Have you been purchased? What if you forget - next week? You still belong to Christ. You

need to read the four chapters of Ruth. He purchased her, the Moabitess. What's this got to do with us? It depends on whether or not you've been a Moabitess. Ruth really wasn't a Moabitess in her heart, because she heard the law from her mother-in-law. The Moabites had another god. Ruth 1:16-17 16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. I'm not letting go because there is no life outside of the god of Israel.

Christian liberty is simply one aspect of the alien righteousness granted by grace alone. It is the result of having been bound to Christ in this royal marriage. Whom the son sets free is free indeed. Share in everything he has.

Let this suffice concerning the inner man, his liberty, and the source of his liberty, the righteousness of faith. He needs neither laws nor good works but, on the contrary, is injured by them if he believes that he is justified by them.

What is the glorious liberty of the Children of God? There is a certain speech they have, a word of wisdom. Your children will have this speech if they are "engaged" all the time. Father's, engage your children. Mother's, teach them the catechism.

What Christ has done takes care of all justification and righteousness, not money. In the world you have to keep certain laws. "I'm a Christian, so give me a new Cadillac." Be content. Is anybody content today? Is anybody not anxious about their life, what they're going to wear, how they are going to be perceived. Akin joined himself to a Babylonian garment and gold. If he's into greed, into gold, he troubles his own house. A woman who is contentious pulls down her own house.

Let this suffice concerning the inner man, his liberty, and the source of his liberty, the righteousness of faith. He needs neither laws nor good works but, on the contrary, is injured by them if he believes that he is justified by them.

If you have law or good works, or your great expectations and sincerity about how you're going to try harder, you'll come to the place where you say, "I'm going to give up," and that would be good.

If we see that only they justify us, then they become sin, but Luther adds immediately that all this is an eschatological reality and applies to the Christian as saint, while she or he is still at the same time a sinner. If they take advantage of this, ...content with faith, not so, dear friend. That would indeed be proper...spiritual human beings...but. resurrection of the dead...some progress in that...perfected for future life...ethical...justification by faith...image of the marriage, that is, the soul to Christ, they are treated in the last part to this booklet, Christian Freedom, dutiful subject of all.....so the servant hood of a liberated person...control one's own body...dealing with other people....contrary will in his own flesh. It seeks its own advantage.

How do you serve the world without seeking your own advantage? By being married to a rich man.

Through faith, a man is restored...that he may not be idle, but provide...he must do such works freely, only to please God.

This would prevent a man from whining about supporting his wife. Though a wife and children should be very thankful, particularly in an age when men have abdicated.

Not for righteousness. It affects the daily life of a Christ...for Christian liberty frees Christians from their obsession...insofar as I act as a justified sinner; I am free to act without concern for my own self-interest. God has so taken care of me that I might be empowered to take care of my neighbor.

He ought to think: "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches?

I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."

Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one

should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christ's to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.

What's the big exchange? What's that all about? Our heavenly Boaz fulfilled the law. The law had a claim on you. You sinned; therefore you deserve to be miserable, to worry - today. It means we're freed from that. Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed. We're married to someone.

Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?

Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's.

What do you want to give him today? You could start with your own righteousness, if you had any.

Romans 7:4 (KJV) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Ephes. 5:32 (KJV) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

You belong to another. You can sometimes understand the spiritual, if you look at the natural. Why do people worry and live a life of anxiety and fear? Unbelief. They don't trust their husband. What if a wife is so caught up in herself, that she never learned more about who her husband is, what he was doing, and was and what he had for her? Remember also what the husband is like. It's a two-way street. Christ engages us with his law, then he fulfills the law, and then for the rest of your days, he exchanges all you have for all he has. "I don't want to give up my righteousness. My grandmother gave me that, and I don't want to give it up." What if the wife just talked about herself and never about her husband, what he thinks, and

what his plans are? A wife receives life from her husband. Either that, or she has no need of her husband, except for the paycheck. Don't forget the husband's side. This is who he goes to first. A wife must be made to get her life from her husband. She can even think evil of her husband, but there are consequences for that kind of marriage: envy, comparing, or being turned inward, and having shrinking little world. "People who agree with me, that is who I associate with." This causes a lot of unrest and complaining. It comes down to what I want and not what I need - idolatry. It doesn't mean that she has to trust Nabal. If a husband makes mistakes, it doesn't mean he's not a good husband. There can be a continual complaining in the church (wife) about our needs not being met. I'm not interested in meeting needs. The only need I'm interested in today is what you think about your standing before God.

Our need is Christ - to receive him. Our need is to believe that he has delivered us, that he does deliver us, and that he will yet deliver us, because we always need deliverance.

Hosea is an extreme allegory of the church. Ezekiel and the bones in the desert is an allegory. In Hosea, the wife is not looking to her husband to meet her needs. The church is not looking to her husband. Men will always let you down, because they're like you.

Gay people - that is the effect of abdication of fathers. They are outwardly rebellious and show a disdain or hatred for men. They made a decision to hate long ago, and to express their hatred. They are to be pitied, like Forde says. They're already under judgment. If they wanted to take communion, they should be truly repentant. There's worse than that that goes on here every day. You're already a sinner. How many of you are confessed sinners? We are spontaneously totally depraved and totally righteous. 1 John is a book of contradiction until you see through the eyes of law and Gospel. He understands through the truth of law and Gospel. This is a gift. There are two of us, and they are both simultaneous. You are un-blamable and un-reproachable in his sight.

You women, who will get up tomorrow, what will you talk about all day? Your husband? There was nothing comely about Jesus that we would desire him. He is despised of all men. How would you like to be married to despised of all men. He's not useful, but he does own all things. He's a beggar and doesn't look too good, so we would not desire him. The good news is that the wife has a good husband in Hosea. She can't come to him until she admits her sin. He can even allow her to have pain and go into the desert because of her un-thankfulness. He gave her the land of Israel flowing with milk and honey and she's not thankful. She doesn't know the story of our being slaves in Egypt.

We have been created in Christ Jesus, that we would bring forth fruit. (Romans 7)

This is GOOD NEWS! Romans 7:1 (KJV) Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? The law only has dominion for as long as you live. Are you dead, and hidden with Christ in God?

Romans 7:2 (KJV) For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. The law keeper died.

Romans 7:3 (KJV) So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. We were all married to the law, in Adam. Look at how you judge others by the laws you have, the standards you have. Didn't you used to judge people by what they did for you?

Romans 7:4 (KJV) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. Fruit is the byproduct.

OBATOTC, THESIS 28: The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it.

When the Lord met you, did he discover that you were a good law-keeping person, or did he create something in you that is pleasing to him now? However, The love of man comes into being through attraction to what pleases it, which always ends in hatred, according to Bonhoeffer. The love of man says, "Oh, you sure are purty! I love you, particularly when you have that sweet potato pone, Ma."

Now we have arrived at the opposite side of the great arch described by the Disputation. All else has been shorn away, put to death.

You haven't loved enough to be a Syro-Phoenician woman, and won't until something you love more than your own life is threatened.

What remains is simply the creative love of God. The innermost nature of the operation of the previous thesis is now announced. It is love, the love of God that creates out of nothing, calls into being that which is from that which is not. What is nothing? That is what we were,

in Adam. Or, you could call it vanity - all is vanity - everything under the sun is vanity - nothing, flesh. It's already dead.

...calls into being that which is from that which is not. This love of God that creates its object is contrasted absolutely with the love of humans. Human love is awakened by attraction to what pleases it.

If you have human love, it is about usury. If your relationships are unmediated, they will be divided. At one point, it just doesn't make it. No one can meet all your needs - satisfy you. It's really your wants that are the problem.

Human love is awakened by attraction to what pleases it.

It must search to find its object and, one might add, will likely toss it aside when it tires of it.

Discipline of Disillusionment – marriage, after 5 years, becomes drudgery. I didn't know there were problems associated with marriage, and that you had to support a family.

The proof of the thesis Luther finds simply in the fact that the love of God flows forth to the unlovely:

Luther: The first part [of the thesis] is clear because the love of God that lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For this reason the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons. Thus Christ says: "For I came not to call the righteous but sinners" [Matt. 9:13].

All of this flows forth strictly from the cross. It is the outcome of the *theologia crucis*.

How many of you would qualify in the natural for that? How many of you haven't attained to that yet? How many don't have arms?

But the love of man seeks its own good. This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good that it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy persons. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35], says the Apostle.

Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. For

this reason the love of man avoids sinners and evil persons. "I'm avoiding them. They might want something I have." Ruth was a Moabitess, which was a bad name in Israel. She was joined to Boaz and gave birth to Obed, and Obed had Jesse, and Jesse had David, and the royal bloodline flows from the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. God creates the fruit of the lips (Isa 57). Fruit comes because you're joined to Christ. If you abide in the vine fruit is inevitable. Ruth bears fruit because of the life Boaz gives her daily.

"I love you," is the important thing your children hear from you. The more important thing is the pronouncement of "I love you." Why does God forgive us? Because he loves us. When you marry the Lord, two things happen: He gets all that you have, you get all that he has. The question is, what do you have? You have sin, death, fear, worries, anxieties; you weight 480 pounds, haven't taken a bath in 2 months, haven't brushed your teeth in 2 years; and, you have high opinion of yourself. What does He do? Song 1:4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee It is the Lord who draws us. No man seeks God. "Ever since I've been a child I've really loved Jesus." Which Jesus did you love? Which did you think you loved? How about the opposite being true? Draw your own conclusion about how you've related to Jesus. "I thought he was useful, and that he would prop up my god-project. And then I came to church and my indignation reached its highest pitch."

All of your sins I've taken. You just haven't believed enough to have big enough sins. Malangthon wouldn't eat without saying prayers, and he would get all heavily convicted about it if he didn't. He was just a little sinner. Luther said, "You need to be a big sinner like me." Big sinners realize they have only one place to unload. You could go to a Psychiatrist, but they can't get down deep enough.

Where is the glorious liberty of the children of God? In the Gospel. Out of the forgiveness of Christ today, a new creation comes forth. It is the love of God toward the bride.

Eschatologically speaking, Bride, there is not one spot in you. He sees you as perfect as Jesus right now, but this is eschatological. As long as we're in this world we have a flesh and a heart that fails us, and this is why the husband, Jesus, cleanses you every day. Sometimes the wife needs to be washed of her inability to receive.

Put your ring on. He's promised you everything. And he has promised you daily washings in this life - hourly, and minutely. A Christian is one who is continuously convicted of sin. But

greater than that, he walks in forgiveness - the love of God towards us, the Bride. Have you got the ring of faith? That is a gift. All of our sins, fears, worries, cares, judgment, evil thinking, and being turned inward - let him have them. "Well, I'll try to be good and cover them up, or make up for them, or pray harder." Look to the groom - the groomer. Look to the one who is always washing. Look to Eph 5 - mystery. When God is talking about how husbands should relate to their wives - Christ loved the church, gave himself for her, and washed her. God will never stop washing us. He will never give up on us. His Word says that he's taken all the sins that would condemn you, the fears, and anxieties, and worries.

We are really beggars. I fear for you if you have anything to bring to God. He's your husband, and he wants to be related to you as the giver of the gift. You wives, you could relate to your husbands like this if you want to see things happen in your marriage. Your husband is your gift. You husbands, if you're hearing the Word, the means of grace are so important for your wife and children. I can't make you have communion daily. If you see your need, if you've been made poor in spirit and have been brought to humility, you will say you need all the help you can get - even from that person.

Give everything to Jesus, particularly your sins. He takes them all. "But, but, but...." You might have one or two this week. Will you let your groom, your husband, take them? Will you enter into the joyous exchange? There's nothing to give you if you've been good lately. Have you been selfish with someone you love? Have you been out of sorts and angry, judging them? Whatever the enemy accuses you of, your confession should be "According to the law, you're absolutely right. I am selfish under the law, but I'm no longer under the law, but under the Gospel of Jesus, who has taken all my sins, and given me all his righteousness. You're wasting your time here, Satan."

He even wants all those accusations you still buy into. Give them to him. When you agree that all these things are true about you, you take the ground out from under the accuser. The jury is in, and the jury says, "Not guilty. My son's blood has paid for all their crimes."

Thank you, Lord, for so great a gift - your Son, and for the propitiation for all of our sins. We are free today in Christ. Free to be slaves by choice and not by constraint. We are free to be our brother's keepers and look on the cares of others without regard to ourselves. Free to know that you are the fulfiller of the law, and we do nothing by ourselves. We thank you for love and forgiveness. "I forgive all of your sins for Christ's sake - every last one of them - even future sins." Remember the cleansing word you've been given.

AMEN

SOURCE

Sermon Notes - Don O'Connor - 9/23/07

(The message through Jennifer's ears.)