**Special Presentation**

Romans 1:16-17

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**Transcriber’s Note:** The recording started during Jeff’s prayer.

**Jeff:** We are so thankful for Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask now that You will make us mindful of what we possess in Him. Lord, teach us continually the great riches of salvation that we have in Christ.

Father, we also pray that You will bless us as we continue to live our lives according to His word and will. And Lord, we pray that You would conform us increasingly to the image of Your Son in that regard as well. We know, Lord, that both our salvation and what You do in us by way of sanctification are not separated one from another though they be a distinct work. We ask, Lord, that You would continually then craft us after the image of Your Son.

Father, thank You for Your Spirit that You have given to us who has been given to us as a deposit and a guarantee, a down payment of better things yet to come. Lord, we anticipate those better things, and yet now we live in this life. We enjoy peace and happiness and joy and the fruit of the Spirit. And Lord, as we enjoy these things we look to You as the Giver of every good and blessed thing from above.

Father we pray, knowing that we can bring our requests to You. So we lift up Don Maurer and ask that Your hand would be upon him. We pray that You would grant him healing. Lord, we know that in this life we will suffer many and various things—sickness, common instances of sickness and even uncommon instances. But Lord, we praise and give you thanks that you have enabled the body to ward off those things that are due to common illness. We pray, Father, that Don would recover well from this. We pray that You would preserve his life and protect his heart through it all.

Lord, we ask now that You would be with us as we study. We pray, Father, that Your hand would be upon us, that we might learn from the past and that we might not repeat its errors but that we might take its successes and implement them in our own present day. We ask, Lord, that You would be with us each and every step of the way, that Your glory might be manifest in all that we do, for we do it for that very purpose. And Lord, we ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Okay. Well I want us to do today is that we will look together at the Reformation. We’re coming up on that time of year when we remember the Reformation. And so we’re going to take a week just to think about it. I think that what we’re going to do is that we’re going to think about some of the history of the Reformation. I’ve got a particular lesson that applies to all of us in terms of lively means of Reformational thinking even in our own day.

What I want us to do is to turn to Romans. This isn’t going to be an exposition of Romans per se. But we are going to think about this text because it was so important in Martin Luther’s own life as he worked through these things that we’re going to talk about today. So let me have you turn to it. I’ll read Romans 1—not the whole chapter!—but I’ll have us turn to Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. Let me read you the word of God.

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith: As it is written: ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

Well I want us to think today about this outline. After some introductory things I want us to think about the downpour that confronted Luther. I want us to think about the doctrine and the challenge of Luther. And I want us to think about the Deity that changed Martin Luther.

So first of all let me talk to you about the downpour that confronted Martin Luther. We all know about the thunderstorm. I’m sure that if you know anything about Martin Luther that you know about the thunderstorm that he was caught in. And remember, he gets caught in this thunderstorm. He thinks he’s going to perish. It must have been a pretty bad thunderstorm. And he cries out, “Saint Anne,”—

**Ted Wood:**I—

**Jeff:** Go ahead, say it.

**Ted:** I will become a monk.

**Jeff:** “And I’ll become a monk.” So that’s the story we all know. But I want us to think about some other things that led up to this and may well have contributed to some of the things that would manifest themselves later in his life.

For example, one of the things that I think often goes unnoticed is the fact that Martin Luther grew up in a time in Germany wherein people were just actually superstitious. Just think about even the saints themselves. In Germany the saints themselves were basically taken from old pagan deities and baptized into the medieval catholic church, and they were made, as it were, saints. This was a way for the medieval catholic church as it spread universally to sort of wrap within its bonds and within its arms those pagan tribes that were going to be sort of baptized into the church, and yet allowed them to keep what was most familiar to them—their own deities. And so the church at some point had to end up sifting through those saints that were actually saints of the church and those pagan deities that had been embraced by the church for those reasons.

So there was a natural superstition that was characteristic of people living at that time, and in Germany in particular as we think about it today. For instance, if you think about Martin Luther’s parents, one of the things that is often not told about Luther’s mother is that while they were growing up she believed that the neighbor lady was a witch. And she believed that she was particularly out to get her children. And so she believed that that in order to shield her children that she had to be nice to the lady next door because this lady next door was a witch, and so on.

Now you might think to yourself that this is sort of like the Santa who sits on the shelf. You tell your kids, “Santa’s watching you!”, that sort of thing. And maybe it was like that. But that’s not the way it comes across in the writings. The way it comes across in the writings is that she actually believed that the woman was a witch. And that shouldn’t surprise us, because Roland Bainton tells us in his biography about Martin Luther that they believed in thins like wood fairies and dwarfs and things like that. This was just a natural superstition that people lived with during those days.

So here’s Martin Luther. He’s walking through the woods and a storm breaks out. He thinks that it’s going to take his life and he cries out to St. Anne to aid him.

The interesting thing is that St. Anne is the patron saint of miners. And so his father was a successful copper smelter. So St. Anne would have been a particularly popular saint in the Luther home growing up, and so he cries out to her.

But the question is: Is there more to the story than that? And the interesting thing is that I think there is probably more to this story than that. I want you to think about Luther’s dad. As I said, he was into the copper-smelting business; he was quite successful. He may have owned eight or nine businesses of his own. Luther often tells us that he grew up poor, but I’m not sure that he was just saying that by memory or just trying to identify with the peasants, or if he really did see himself as growing up in a poor home. Maybe by comparison it was. But his father certainly wanted him to take over the business and get into that business with him.

And one of the things that he wanted to do was that he wanted to send Luther out to study law so that Luther could work the legal end of this. And when Luther went away to become a lawyer he went away to the University of Erfurt. And while he was there he actually did quite well. He actually showed himself to be quite a brilliant fellow. In fact one of his fellow students said that Luther’s genius was the talk of the whole university. When he graduated with his Master’s degree there were seventeen graduates. He graduated second in the class. So Luther was a pretty bright fellow.

When you think about this, when you think about Luther as sort of being a bright fellow, one of the things you have a tendency to think is that this is a fellow who thinks through things pretty carefully. And yet there is a sense in which you don’t take the boy out of his home town, out of his upbringing, out of his own culture. So you have this really bright guy, this guy who has some superstition as a part of him.

Now he comes into contact with two brushes with death. One is the thunderstorm in 1505; that’s where he says, “St. Anne, I will become a monk.” But the other one is in 1504. In 1504 he’s walking with a friend of his, and he stabs himself with his dagger. It’s apparently pretty sharp and pretty short, and he pierces an artery in his leg. And he starts to bleed profusely and ends up lying down. His friends run off to get help. They come back and he has lost a lot of blood in the meantime. The surgeon comes to get him, sews him up but doesn’t sew him up well. That night he opens up again and starts to bleed profusely; he almost loses his life.

At that time he cries out to Mary, the mother of Jesus: “Save me!” And obviously his life is spared, and then in 1505 he runs into this thunderstorm.

Now here’s the interesting thing about this. When you think about Martin Luther I think that you think about this guy who is basically on track to become a lawyer and is happy about that. And he gets caught in this thunderstorm and in a pinch says, “All right, all right; I’ll become a monk!” But when you really think about his life and what’s going on in his reading habits and how he talks about these old days, one of the things that you realize is that here is a guy who is really interested in the Bible, and really interested in theology; not abstract theology but Biblical theology. He wants to know what the Bible has to say about his own situation.

And so oftentimes at school while studying law he would spend way more time studying the Scriptures than he will studying law. And it wasn’t that he didn’t like studying law. What he said was, “I like to study the law. I don’t care about all the commentary on the law where I read this guy saying this and that guy saying that, and pretty soon the law doesn’t mean anything because everybody has a different take on it. I can just do away with that; I’m not interested in it.”

So here’s a guy who’s studying law; he’s doing really well in it, right? He graduates at seventeen from his Master’s program, and yet he doesn’t want to do that.

Here’s the interesting thing. In his second brush with death in 1505, the interesting thing is that he goes home in the middle of the semester. And that’s the interesting thing about this whole story. Scholars speculate; they kind of wrestle through this. Why in the world is this guy going home in the middle of the quarter, making a 53-mile journey in the middle of the quarter? And some speculate—and there is reference to this in his later letters when Luther writes to his dad,--that some think that his dad thought that he wanted to join the monastery. He had an inkling about this, and so he brought his son home to introduce him to his new wife.

**Ted:** Whose wife? Luther’s wife?

**Jeff:** Luther’s dad selected a girl for Luther, so he brought Luther home to meet his future wife. Luther writes later about this and says, “Do you remember when?”—that kind of thing,--“and I wasn’t having any of that,” and so on. But it looks like the family had an inkling that Luther wanted to leave his studies and go into the monastery, and they were trying to prevent that.

So why does he go home? Some believe that he goes home in order to tell his parents, “Hey, I’m dropping out of law school and I’m going into the monastery.” Regardless, it’s not just a typical jaunt home, and then on his way back he runs into the thunderstorm. Whatever happens at home, he’s on his way back and he does run into the thunderstorm. And that’s when he says, “Saint Anne, save me; I want to become a monk.”

And so what Luther does immediately after that is to enter the Augustinian order; he becomes a monk. Now the interesting thing there is that there are all kinds of interesting stories about this. Again this may just be Luther’s personality. You probably heard the story about when he becomes a priest and he’s serving his first Communion. He has to say the words of institution over the elements, believing that this actually becomes and is transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He fumbles the wafer as it were, runs out and embarrasses his father and gets more cause for attention; all kinds of stories like that. This is an intense fellow.

But what I want us to think about is the doctrine that challenged Luther, because I think this is important. To my way of thinking this is really the interesting thing; the story is great. But the question that we have to ask is this: Why was Luther so obsessive?

You’ve heard the stories about Martin Luther. He goes to confession and he confesses everything he does, every little thing. And then he leaves the confessional. And while he’s leaving the confessional he remembers some things that he hasn’t confessed, and so he says, “Oh, I’ve got more!”

Well, Von Staupitz was his confessor during those days in the seminary. And Staupitz was so fed up with Luther because he was so over-scrupulous. In fact what he said is this. Staupitz said, “Brother Martin, God is not angry with you; you are angry with God.”

And you know, when you think about that, you think to yourself: You know, there’s a lot of truth in that. Now God was angry with Luther as a sinner; God is angry with everyone as sinners. And yet here is this sinner angry with God. And it manifests itself in this repeated confession. And I think the question is this, and I love this one. Staupitz says, “Look here! If you expect Christ to forgive you, come with something to forgive!—parricide, blasphemy, adultery,--instead of all these peccadilloes.”

I love that. You know that Staupitz was actually kind of exaggerating here. Parricide is killing your parents; you know what I mean? “Tell me that you killed Hans,” that sort of thing. But anyway, this is the kind of person he was.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves is: Why was Luther so scrupulous? I think this is the question that we have a tendency to take for granted because we don’t actually explore it. And what I mean by this is that Luther was so scrupulous because he had a bad case of OCD. Is that why? If it wasn’t in his nature, was it just some bent in his nature that made him continually ask himself? Was there something about his personality? That’s what I’m asking. Is that why Luther was so scrupulous, having confessed so much?

Now you might be tempted to say that God made Luther this way, and thankfully He did; the reformation of the church was all the result, and so forth. But the question that we have to ask is this: Is that really the case? Or is there something else at the root? And I think there is something else at the root. And I think the something else at root was the covenant theology that was present in the day of Martin Luther.

I think that when we understand what it was that Martin Luther had to read in his studies once he enters into the monastery, not only is he studying Scripture, but he goes into the Augustinian order because he can study. And that’s what he really wants to do; he really wants to study the Bible. And so what they do is that they put him on not only the study of the Scriptures, but they put him on the doctrinal track, and he begins to study theology.

In fact it’s really interesting, because he was permitted to have a Bible until he gets put into the doctrinal track, and then they basically take the Scriptures away from him, and he has to study all the doctors.

Now when we go back to Martin Luther and what he said about law, he said, “I love studying the law.” He had to buy the *Corpus Juris,* a massive and expensive book that all lawyers were expected to have. He loved studying that, but he hated studying all of the commentary on the law.

So here he was, studying the Scriptures and loved doing it. And now he’s studying all of the theologians and what they have to say, and he hates it. And you can see that in his comments in *Table Talk* when he talks about some of those days. But it’s the covenant theology of Luther’s day that’s at root. I think it is the reason for his conscience being the way it was, at least in part.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, when we think about the covenant theology of his day, one of the things that I think we have to remember is that covenant theology is something we talk about today. I identify myself as a covenant theologian; I believe in covenant theology.

But you have to remember that there was such a thing in the history of the church as the covenant idea, which transitioned into covenant theology. But it wasn’t the covenant theology that we have today. In other words, this idea of covenant certainly grows out of the Scripture. But theology develops over time.

So for instance, we have a Christology in the Bible. But it took several hundred years for the church to deal with heresy and so on in order to develop a clear understanding of what we mean by Jesus Christ being the Son of God. In other words, there were people who said: Well, think about Jesus. Jesus is one Person in two natures.

Now that’s the orthodox formulation of that. But before that people were saying: No, Jesus is two persons. No, He’s not two persons; He has one nature and He’s got some fleshly stuff.

So there were all these ideas being put forward. And once you looked up the Scripture and what was recognized as the Scriptural formulation of theology, some of these didn’t hold up. And what you have emerging in the 450s was the Chalcedonian formula of Christology. So theology develops out of the Scripture and it develops through the life of the church.

Well, that’s true of covenant theology. It doesn’t just pop out on the very first day that we read the Bible; it develops over time. So let me give you some ideas about the covenant ideas that were coming into play at this time.

For instance, a covenant idea was that in the 11th century Rome was a the leading church, the first among equals. And the idea was that if you were disloyal to Rome and to the papacy, then you could be cut off. And so there was this idea of covenant relation in the 11th century.

Or for instance, in the 12th century there developed sacerdotal theology. In other words, there’s this idea that the covenant God becomes the bread and the cup and the wine. And so the idea is that there’s a covenant union between God and the elements, and therefore between me and God as I take the elements.

Now those are covenant ideas that begin to work their way into the medieval church. But the first covenant theology basically develops with a guy by the name of Gabriel Biel. He lived from 1420 (some say 1425) to 1495. Now I want you to think about this because Luther’s dates are 1483 to 1546. So Luther would have been born before Biel dies. And Luther would have read Biel’s work. This would have been required reading in the monastery.

So Gabriel Biel comes up with the first idea of covenant theology as a system of theology. If you want to read more about this you can read about it in an academic work by a guy by the name of Obermann. He wrote *The Harvest of Medieval Theology,* and this whole thing is in there.

Biel has this idea: (*a Latin phrase):* *“To the one who does what lies within him,* God does not deny grace.” This (the second part) is not up there, but that’s part of his formulation and so I included it. So God does not deny grace to the one who does what lies within him.

So the idea of this is that if you do your best, God will not deny you grace. Now that is works righteousness, okay? That’s works righteousness. This is not what we would call *condign merit.* Condign merit means that you actually did the thing you were required to do. That is, you didn’t get close; you did it. That would be condign merit.

This is not condign merit. This is what is called *congruous merit.* You did your best. You did your best and God accepts it as such.

Now let me just tell you something; here’s the thing I want you to know. This idea is alive and well today. You see it in the books of Joel Olsteen. You see it today in the new perspective on Paul. You see it in Arminianism. You see it in Federal Vision theology. And what is that? It’s this: God knows that we can’t keep the law, and so what does He accept? All of these groups say that in place of condign merit and obedience to the law, He accepts what we’re able to offer, and that’s faith. God accepts faith in place of our works and says, “It’s congruous merit; that’s what you’re able to offer Me; that’s what I’ll accept.” A lot of people believe that.

**Ted:** I think that is the common belief.

**Jeff:** It is the common belief.

**Ted:** I mean, if you talk to anybody who hasn’t studied the Scriptures or hasn’t been touched by the Spirit, they will say that. “I’m doing the best I can. I’m really a good person because I’m doing the best I can.” That’s not faith; it’s everything else I do.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ron Baling:** That’s a misreading of the Scripture that talks about “your reasonable service.”

**Jeff:** Oh yeah; I think that’s a misinterpretation of that verse. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** They’re searching to try to prove that they’re good enough.

**Jeff:** For sure. Now here’s the deal. So you have this theology that says that God accepts your best; God accepts the best you can offer; that’s on the one hand. Now on the other hand you have another issue. And this other issue coupled with (the previous idea) drives Luther to the edge. And that other issue is a debate over God’s sovereignty between two camps: the Nominalists and the Neo-Augustinians.

Now let me just tell you a little bit about the debate here. What you have to understand is that the Neo-Augustinians were not Augustinians like today’s Reformers; that’s a misunderstanding of them. But what you have to understand is that they said that God’s grace is so big that you just have to let go and let God; that was the idea. Just let God kind of absorb you.

Actually, Von Staupitz, Luther’s confessor, was a Neo-Augustinian. And this is why he keeps saying to Luther, “Luther, stop being so angry with God. Just let go and let God. God’s grace is so big!”

And Luther would say that Von Staupitz was the guy who basically helped him out of what we’re going to talk about next. And they remained friends for a long, long time after Luther broke with the medieval catholic church. And so that’s Neo-Augustinianism, and Luther was exposed to it.

But Luther wasn’t a Neo-Augustinian; Luther was a Nominalist. Now the Nominalists, in terms of God’s sovereignty, basically said this. They said that God is basically naked in His sovereignty with *potential absoluta.* He was absolutely sovereign. In fact, if you think about the Nominalists and what they taught, they were on the border of saying that God is so free that God could actually choose to be different than He was. In other words, God is a gracious God. But God is so free that God could have chosen to be a non-gracious God. That’s the kind of belief they had in the naked, absolute sovereignty of God.

But what they also said was that God puts a leash on himself. It’s sort of like this big dog that runs around. God is this naked sovereign God who is just ready to chew up everybody. So what He does is, He knows this and so He puts a leash on Himself. And the leash is called *potential ordinand;* it is the covenant. God puts a covenantal leash on Himself. In other words, He knows the way He is. And so He says, “Okay; I promise to be merciful to you.”

Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. The Nominalists adopted Biel’s view of the covenant. So now you have these two things. You have a God who is absolutely sovereign and who puts a covenantal leash on Himself, and a God who says, “If you do your best I’ll show you mercy.” And the question is, how much is good enough so that I have mercy?

And that’s what Luther is dealing with by way of covenant; that’s what he has to deal with. He has to deal with how much is good enough so that I can be subject to the mercy of God and not the absolute sovereignty of God which is going to unleash His wrath upon me.

Now that is what’s behind all that’s going on with Luther, and he’s tormented by it. And this is the thing I would say to you. I would say to you that one of the things that we need to take care of is that our theology matters. I mean, what we think is the most important thing in our lives.

You know, this is the thing I struggle with in today’s church. In today’s church so many people just want to be told what to do. They just want the practical. “Just give me something I need to do. Just tell me what I’m supposed to be doing; that’s all I care about. You can leave all that thinking up to the theologians because I really don’t care.”

I want to tell you men something. I have at times been accused of being impractical in my teaching, okay? But I want to tell you something. I always say this before I preach. I always get up in the pulpit and we have a minute to prepare our hearts. I may pray something different at any given time. But one of the things that I always pray is: “Lord, let me recede into the background. By Christ, come forward and minister to His people. And please don’t forget that I’m one of Your people as a minister. Minister to me through the preaching of the Word.”

And I want to tell you something. The thing that has enabled me to stand in the loss of my wife is what I believe, hot what I’m always doing. What I believe is the rock upon which I stand that enables me to do things.

And when I think about Luther’s problem I think about that very thing. I think: Here’s a guy who believes that this was true. He believed that God was leashed, and he believed that God offered mercy to those who did their best. He believed those things, and he was in anguish as a result. He constantly had to confess because he never knew what was good enough.

Now I want to tell you something. Fast forward to today. We think to ourselves that this was just Luther back in the days of medieval Catholicism. But think of today. Think of today outside of Roman Catholic circles.

Think of the New Perspective. Here is N. T. Wright. N. T. Wright is an Anglican theologian. He’s retired now, but he’s up there. And he’s talking about covenant faithfulness.

And he says this; this is what he teaches. He says that covenant faithfulness keeps you in the covenant with God. He would say that salvation is not about justification and the imputation of righteousness. No, salvation is about ecclesiology; it’s about covenant faithfulness and staying in the covenant.

Somebody at one of the conferences where he was teaching raised his hand and said, “Dr. Wright, how much covenant faithfulness is enough?” And this is what he said; this was his response: “If you’re asking that question you don’t need a theologian; you need a psychiatrist.”

Everybody laughed. But the guy who asked it knew; I mean, he knew. And the reason why he asked it is because he knew about this guy by the name of Martin Luther who was dealing with how much is good enough.

This is a problem that hasn’t gone away. It’s alive and well in various areas of life and in the church today—not just in Roman Catholicism with the sacramental system, but in the New Perspective and the Federal Vision and all these different areas; that’s the problem.

So you can see the problem. God has to leash Himself. The question is how much is enough? As long as you do your best He’ll give you mercy. How much is good enough? And that’s why Luther had to confess all these peccadilloes.

Now *the Deity who converted Luther.* Luther was called to visit Rome. I think they understood his restlessness, and so they wanted him to go and do something. You know, that’s not a bad thing. When Elijah comes down the mountain at Sinai and says, “I’m the last one of the elect,” God says, “Go and do something; here’s a job for you to do.” But it’s because he has the right theology. He says, “You don’t need me to give you a Theology 101 class; you need to put that theology into action.”

But Luther was restless, and so they sent him to Rome. The interesting thing is that they don’t go the easy way; they go the hard way. I don’t know if that was because of Luther’s sacrificial and kind of penitential mindset. But they go to Rome. And when they go to Rome Luther is disappointed by what he encounters.

For instance, he goes to Rome and he sees the Mass being celebrated at a record pace. He said, “By the time I could do one Mass the priests were finished with three or four or five Masses.” He said it was at a record pace. He said that the priest would stand up and say in Latin to the common people, “Bread it is and bread it shall remain.” Everybody would get a laugh after that after the Mass was said.

You’ve got to wrap your mind around the mindset of Luther. There was an indulgence that Luther could have had while he was there. And he actually writes: *“I wished my parents were not alive. I wished they were dead so that they could get this indulgence for themselves in purgatory.”* I mean, that’s the kind of devotion that Luther had.

But while he’s there he climbs the *sanctus scalia,* supposedly the steps that Jesus is on while He’s before Pilate. Supposedly you could climb these steps, and at each step you would say the rosary. You would get so much time off of your stay in purgatory. And that’s actually still the case today.

Luther gets to the top. He is going to dedicate all this work to his grandparents who were dead. He gets to the top and he says, “But is it really true?” So you can tell that there are doubts in the man as he’s fully embracing the whole system. And so he goes to Rome.

Now while he was in Rome he was also lecturing. And he’s lecturing through the Bible. He’s doing his doctoral work. He’s been reading the theologians, and now he’s teaching, and so he works his way through the Psalms in 1513. He works his way through Romans in 1515, and he’s in Galatians in 1517.

Now if you know anything about the Reformation you know that on October 31, 1517, Luther nails the 95 Theses to the door at Wittenberg. And so he is lecturing through Galatians at this time.

It’s actually interesting. If you go back and read his Romans commentary, one of the things that you can see is that he’s still a Nominalist when he writes the Romans commentary. Even though the Romans commentary has good things in it, he’s still a Nominalist.

But it’s in 1517 when he writes the Galatians commentary, and listen to what he writes in it. This is page 182: *“Hereby it appears that the doctrine of the gospel which of all others is most sweet and full of most singular consolation speaks nothing of our works—of the works of the law—but of the inscrutable mercy and love of God towards most wretched and miserable sinners. Our most merciful Father, seeing us to be impressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and that we could never be delivered from it on our own power, sent His only Son into the world and later put on Him all the sins of all the men, saying, ‘Be Thou Peter that denier, Paul that persecutor and cruel oppressor, David that adulterer, that sinner who did eat the fruit in Eden, that thief who hanged upon the cross. Be that person who has committed all the sins of all. See therefore Thou pay and satisfy for them.”*

That’s amazing! All of a sudden he’s coming to see. I’m going to go a little further here. He says, *“Therefore I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into Paradise.”* He continues: *“Now the whole of Scripture took on a new meaning. And whereas before the justice of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”*

Now that’s where we find Luther. We find Luther basically coming to an understanding of the gospel.

Now I’ve said this to you before. Luther was great; I love Martin Luther. But there are problems with Martin Luther. For instance, this is one of the problems with Martin Luther. We talk about covenant, right? Now when Luther heard the word *covenant,* he heard the word *merit.* He heard the idea of doing your best.

So for instance, when you look at Genesis chapter 15, and it says that “Abraham fell into a deep sleep and God passed through the halves,” and promised to secure the blessedness of Abraham, Martin Luther said, “Yes and amen.”

But then when it said in Genesis 17, *“Walk before Me and be blameless,”* he said, “A pox on your house!” Why? Because for him this idea that the covenant would contain both this blessedness of reconciliation with God and an obligation to walk before Him and be blameless, that smelled of merit.

And so what did Luther do? Luther said, “Forget the covenant; we’re going to the idea of the testament.” Why? Because if you write up your will you’re a testator. You leave upon your death everything to the beneficiary. And he said, “That’s what we have in God. We don’t have any of this obligatory stuff; we have a testament. Jesus Christ died and left it all to me.”

Now I want to tell you something. If you’ve ever read *Christian Maturity: The Five Views of Sanctification,* the very first one to be presented is the Lutheran position. The author writes an entire article on sanctification that is really not about sanctification; it’s really about justification. And do you know what he says at the very end of the article? He says, *So you can see that sanctification is just the art of coming to terms with my justification.”*

In other words, as a Lutheran he has such an aversion to anything that is obligatory. Then he says, *“Sanctification is nothing but coming to my grips with my justification.”* And here’s the thing. The thing is, that is a problem, because what do you do?

Let me ask you this. If you’re a Lutheran, what do you do with *“Repent therefore for the forgiveness of your sins?”* What do you do with that?

You see, as Reformed people we would say that conditionality is a problem. In other words, conditionality is congruous merit. If you do this then God will give this. We would say that’s works righteousness.

But what we do say as Reformed people is this. We say that there are conditions--not conditionality!—but there are conditions within the covenant of grace. But the covenant of grace itself meets those conditions. In other words, it says, *“Repent therefore for the forgiveness of your sins.”* But we understand repentance to come after we’ve been effectually called into union with Christ. And therefore God enables in us the conditions that He requires. And so there’s a big difference between conditionality and the conditions that are met in the gospel message itself. And so this is a huge thing with Luther.

Now what is the lesson today? Well, there are a number of lessons that hopefully you’ve caught along the way. But what I want you to think about along with me is this law and grace issue.

The law and grace issue is a big deal. Luther said that law and grace is so important that a person could show himself to be a theologian if he understands the difference. And what was the difference for Luther? Luther said that you have to ask with every passage of the Bible: Is this gospel or is this law? And what he said was that the height of Christian maturity is that we distance ourselves from the law.

Now that is not Reformed theology; that is Lutheran theology. But I want you to know something. Lutheran theology has crept into Reformed theology, and it has crept into the church.

In other words, let me put it this way. The very thing that Luther wanted to avoid happens in the church. Do you want to know how it happens? Here’s how it happens. The minister stands up in front of his church. And when he does he basically preaches to them law. He preaches sermons to them that indicate that they can’t possibly measure up to what the Scripture requires of them, no matter what it happens to be.

And then what he says at the end of the sermon is this. He says: “Now isn’t it great that there is grace? Isn’t it wonderful that there is grace? Now here’s the next move.”

Now how do you know that you are the recipient of such wonderful grace? Well what happens is, if you are the recipient of grace, it’s that God does a work in you and you produce fruit. And do you see what happens all of a sudden, what just happened here? Now I know that I have grace by what I do. And that’s exactly the thing that Luther wanted to avoid, and it’s the thing that every one of us should want to avoid.

I want you to know this; I’ve talked to you about this before. We oftentimes will say this. Legalism is on one side and antinomianism is on the other side. And here’s what we do. We say, “Boy, I’m getting a little too legalistic, and so I need to go antinomian.” Antinomianism is anti-law. I need to start remembering that grace is so absolutely free that I don’t need to do anything in order to please God.

And then I’m over here and I say to myself, “Oh, my life is characterized by a little too much license. I’ve been living in a way that I shouldn’t have been living. I need to tighten up the ship again. I’ll come over here to legalism.” What does the law require? I start asking myself those kinds of questions, getting myself tighter in the ship. And pretty soon I’m saying, “This is feeling pretty good; I need to get over here again.” And your life begins to go back and forth.

But do you realize that both of these—legalism and antinomianism—are antithetical to union with Christ? Both of them are antithetical to union with Christ. I’m not going to go into it, but these are basically related to one another.

Union with Christ means that I have both the forensic and I have the transformative in Jesus Christ. These two things are antithetical to that. The antidote to legalism and antinomianism is union with Jesus Christ. It’s in Christ that I know I’m forgiven and that my life is being transformed. That’s Reformed theology.

**Jordan Obaker:** I’ve got a question.

**Jeff:** Yes; go ahead.

**Jordan:** I struggle with this.

**Jeff:** Just so you know, everybody struggles with this. *(Laughter)*

**Jordan:** And I think that where I struggle with this is primarily with 1 John.

**Ted:** Sure.

**Jordan:** “We know that we love God if we keep His commandments.”

**Ted:** Right.

**Jordan:** If you’re in the light, you don’t walk in the darkness.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Jordan:** Now I will say that I’ve heard recently that the true definition of legalism is that you are trusting in your works for your salvation. I would say I don’t; I don’t believe that if I’m good enough that I will be saved. My problem is that if I’m not acting good enough, have I been saved?

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Well that’s just a variation of that same problem; that’s what I’m saying.

**Jordan:** But I guess to me it teaches that if you believe that the gospel transforms, then you should expect to be transformed.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right.

**Jordan:** And I struggle with this: Have I been transformed enough? I sat down and I truly thought about it. I said, “Where am I compared to a year ago, two years ago, ten years ago?” I would say that every day is steps forward, steps back. But on the whole I’m moving forward. I would say yes; I’ve been transformed. But in those moments where I take steps backwards, that’s what I struggle with.

**Jeff:** Do you remember *Pilgrim’s Progress?* Christian meets Faithful. Faithful tells him the story of his conversion and his journey. And he tells him, “Moses came and beat the daylights out of me because my heart inclined to Romans 7:1-3.”

**Transcriber’s Note:** Romans 7:1-3, NKJV. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”

***Jeff:******That’s the whole idea. We died to our first bad husband, Adam the first, and are remarried to Adam the Second. We’re like the spouse who was married to an abusive husband. He died, and now she is remarried and loves a wonderful husband.***

***But one day she doesn’t get a chance to vacuum the carpet, and she knows that drove her first husband batty. Or she didn’t make the roast exactly as she should have made it, and that drove him nuts. And every time she doesn’t do what her first husband expected from her she is afflicted in her conscience. Then her second husband comes home and says, “You’re not with the first husband anymore. That’s not the way you need to live, right? With me you’re safe; you’re in a union that will last”—that kind of thing. And she’s not going to be judged on whether or not the carpet is all torn in one direction.***

***And yet it’s that motivating grace where she desires to please that second husband. She knows that she doesn’t judge her relationship on whether or not her works are good enough.***

*Jordan:* ***Yes; I think I get to that point eventually.***

*Jeff:* ***Yeah.***

*Jordan:* ***It’s a struggle that I have. Another analogy is where the first husband says, “Make my steak medium rare.” I have to do it or else there are going to be consequences.***

*Jeff:* ***Yeah.***

*Jordan:* ***The second husband will say, “You don’t have to make it medium rare to be saved. However, medium rare is how I like it; it represents my character.” All analogies break down, but in the law God reveals His character to us.***

*Jeff:* ***Yes.***

*Jordan:* ***And so if I make a dinner and I make chicken, it’s like “Well I told you that what I like is medium rare steak, and you chose to make chicken. So do you really love me?” That’s the struggle I have. I don’t feel that I need to do it to be saved. But when I don’t it causes me to question: Do I really love Him because I chose to do something other than what He said?***

*Jeff:* ***There are a couple of different directions you could go with that.***

*Ted:* ***You’re right on track.***

*Jeff:* ***There are a couple of directions where you could go with that. For instance, if chicken is a sin—which of course it is!—*(Laughter), *you chose to do that, right? That is your heart inclining to your first husband. But if chicken isn’t a sin but it’s not the preference of your new husband, then what was the reason for your preference? That’s an example of not cooking as wisely as one could but not necessarily sinning as a result.***

*Jordan:* ***What I’m thinking of is that the steak is the law; the steak is the Ten Commandments.***

*Jeff:* ***Yes. But for instance, the law has hard lines. But the law has some latitude which requires wisdom in its application, right? So there are hard lines: Don’t kill. But I’m angry in this situation. And the question then becomes: Is that anger of the same species as murder—Matthew 5? Or is this a righteous anger—Ephesians 4? And there is latitude in discerning what it is that I’m experiencing, and it takes wisdom to discern that.***

**Jordan:** I personally feel more like Luther in the peccadilloes. I personally think that the latitude is making excuses.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jordan:** The law is wholly perfect. There is no way in our human sinfulness that we can do it in thought, word and deed. And so I feel like I’m sinning way, way, way, way more than I think I even realize I am.

**Ted:** You are. *(Laughter)*

**Jordan:** Yes. And you talked about intentional sins and unintentional sins. I’m sure the unintentional ones are way up there. But the intentional ones are way up there.

**Jeff:** Yes. But I would say to you that there has to be a trajectory.

**Jordan:** Yes.

**Jeff:** There has got to be a trajectory. There has got to be a moving—

**Ted:** How much moving? *(Laughter)* It depends on how much moving.

**Jeff:** I think that in terms of entry that’s where the consequences are. In terms of living, I think that’s where you’re in the peccadilloes. Do you know what I’m saying? In other words, if you say that in terms of living, my life has really changed; my whole outlook on life has changed. And you don’t need to give examples. But you say, “My life has changed.” But other days you say, “Did I sin here? Did I sin there?” Those are the peccadilloes that Luther was struggling with. And there is not an integration of what Christ has done for me where I can look back on my life and say what a wonderful thing He has done! But in day-to-day living I become more introspective.

**Jordan:** I think I would say that I eventually come to receive Christ. But I dwell on odious sins.

**Jeff:** Yes. Well that just may be—

**Ted:** Go ahead, say it.

**Jeff:** What kind of ministry have you been under? *(Laughter)* Well, let’s pray. Gracious God, thank You for this day and for the time You’ve given us to be together. Bless us now as we go into the day. And we pray, Father, that You will make the abundance of Your grace clear to us, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*