



Beginning in July, 1531, three students attempted to record lectures that Martin Luther delivered at the Wittenberg Seminary. This meditation is excerpted from a recent translation by Haroldo Camcho. (Haroldo Camacho, Martin Luther's Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (1535). Irvine: 1517 Publishing, 2018. pp.22-24)

Galatians 1:4 - “. . . who (the LORD Jesus Christ), gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age . . .”

Thus what stands at the forefront of the Christian's knowledge and true wisdom is this: *“That Christ was given over to death not for our righteousness or holiness, but for our sins.”* These sins are altogether true, they are huge and many, infinite and invincible. They are real, potent, and of great consequence. Therefore, don't think they are mere trifles and as such can be canceled out by good works. Neither give in to hopelessness when you feel overwhelmed by them, in life or in death. Rather, learn here from Paul to believe that Christ was given, not for made-up sins, or for water color sins (actual latin is, 'fictitious', or 'painted sins'), or for petty sins, but for immense and enormous sins. Not for one or two but for all. Not for sins that you have overcome (for neither man nor angel can overcome the slightest sin) but for sins that you cannot overcome. And unless you count yourself among those who say, “Our sins” meaning those who hold this doctrine of faith and teach it, learn it, love it, and believe it, there is no salvation for you.

Therefore, make a diligent effort so that not only when you are away from temptation but when you are being tempted and in the struggles of death you will also have this faith and also when your conscience is smitten, remembering your past sins. When the devil blasts against you with great violence, when he tries to drown you with surging swells, floods, and entire seas of sins to drown you in fear, to pull you away from Christ, and to sink you into despair, that is when I say that you can declare with all confidence, “Christ, the Son of God was given not for the righteous and holy but for the unrighteous and sinful. If I were righteous and had no sin, it would not be necessary for Christ to be my Reconciler. Why then Satan, you faker of holiness (in Latin, Luther actually sarcastically mocks Satan by calling him St. Satan in total jest), do you try to get me to look for holiness within myself, when in reality, I have nothing in me but the most disgusting sins?”

These are not make-believe sins; neither are they just tidbits of sin. They are sins against the first table: great skepticism, doubts, hopelessness, despising God, hate, ignorance, blaspheming God, thanklessness, abusing the name of God, negligence, despising one's own self, despising God's word, and others. That's not all; there are the sins of the flesh in the second table: dishonoring one's parents, disobeying the law, and coveting your neighbour's goods, his wife, and such. However, these are slight compared to the first. I know that I have not murdered, nor fornicated, nor robbed, nor committed other sins of the second table. But in fact, I have done them in my heart. Therefore, I am a violator of all the commandments of God.

What's more, Satan is such a fanciful magician that he changes my right living and doing into my greatest sins. He perpetrates this damage to such an extent that my sins become so heavy, infinite, horrible, and invincible that what I thought was my righteousness only gets in the way between God and me. That is why “Christ, the Son of God, gave Himself to die for them, to take them away, and thus save all who believe.”



I'm not just saying that. I've experienced on my own how difficult it is to believe every day (when the conscience is full of conflict, especially) "that Christ gave Himself," not for the saints, the righteous, and the seemingly unworthy, as if they were His friends. Rather, He was given for perverse sinners, for the unworthy, and for His enemies, who are worthy of nothing but God's wrath and eternal death.

Therefore, armed with these and similar statements of Holy Scriptures, we can respond to the devil when he accuses us:

"You are a sinner; that is why you are condemned."

Let us respond like this:

"You say I am a sinner and that is why I am justified and saved."

"No," says the devil, *"you will be lost."*

"No," I respond, *"because I take refuge in Christ, who gave Himself for my sins. Therefore, Satan, you won't be able to defeat me, for you intend to crush me, to depress me with the greatness of my sins, and to oppress me with grief, mistrust, hopelessness, hate, contempt, and blasphemy against God. I want you to know that when you say that I am a great sinner, you have actually given me an armour plate and weapons against you. With your own sword, I'll cut your throat and will trample you because Christ died for sinners. What's more, you in fact preach to me the glory of God because you remind me of God's fatherly love toward me, a poor and miserable sinner. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life' (John 3:16). And every time that you argue back that I am sinner, you still remind me of the benefit that is mine in Christ, my Redeemer, for it was His shoulders and not mine that took the load of all my sins, for the Lord 'laid on him the sins of us all' and 'he was struck down for the rebellion of my people' (Isaiah 53:5-8). Therefore, when you say that I am a sinner, you don't stress me out (Latin: "You don't terrify me."), but rather comfort me without measure."*

If the devil alleges any other definition of Christ, tell him, "Your definition and what you define is false. Therefore, I do not accept it." . . . Christ is no debt collector but He who by His sacrifice has paid the penalty for the sins of the entire world. If you are a sinner (as we certainly all are), don't picture Christ as a judge on his bench over a rainbow. Otherwise, you will be terribly distraught and lose all hope in His mercy. Rather, hang on to His true definition, that Christ the Son of God and of the Virgin is not someone that threatens, oppresses, and condemns us over our sin. Neither does he require for us to render an account over our past life. Rather, He gave Himself for our sins and with only one sacrifice has taken away the "sins of the world." He has hung them on the cross and all by Himself has completely extinguished them.

Learn this definition diligently. In particular, make use of this pronoun "ours." Have full confidence that these syllables devour all your sins. You may know with all confidence that Christ has taken away not just the sins of certain people but also yours and those of the whole world. You can believe that Christ was given not just for the sins of others but also for yours. Take hold of this and don't let go. Don't let yourself wane away from this sweetest definition of Christ in which the very angels in heaven rejoice. According to the proper and true definition of Christ, He is no Moses, no oppressor, no butcher. Rather, he is merciful toward you; He is the giver of grace, righteousness and life. He gave Himself, not for our merits, holiness, right doing, and Spirit-led life. **He gave Himself for our sins.**



Questions for meditation.

- 1. What phrases or word pictures jump out at you as the most impactful? Why?**
- 2. What phrases spark questions in you? Why?**
- 3. Which phrases makes you a bit uncomfortable? Why?**
- 4. What is your big takeaway from this meditation?**