

Who Gave Himself for Our Sins.

by Martin Luther

Christ's sacrifice is a comfort to those troubled by the enormity of sin, and a true conception of Christ is essential for overcoming the devil's accusations.

Scripture: Romans 5:8, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "Christ's Atonement", "Sin Redemption"

Description

Martin Luther emphasizes the central theme of Paul's epistle, focusing on the purpose of Christ's sacrifice for our sins. Luther highlights the futility of self-merit and the necessity of Christ's atonement for the forgiveness of sins, challenging the idea that our own efforts can remove sin. He underscores the greatness of Christ's sacrifice, emphasizing the vicious nature of sin and the need for complete reliance on Jesus for redemption. Luther encourages believers to embrace the truth that Christ died for all sins, even the most ingrained and stubborn ones, offering eternal life through faith in Him.

Transcript

Paul sticks to his theme. He never loses sight of the purpose of his epistle. He does not say, "Who received our works," but "who gave." Gave what? Not gold, or silver, or paschal lambs, or an angel, but Himself. What for? Not for a crown, or a kingdom, or our goodness, but for our sins. These words are like so many thunderclaps of protest from heaven against every kind and type of self-merit. Underscore these words, for they are full of comfort for sore consciences.

How may we obtain remission of our sins? Paul answers: "The man who is named Jesus Christ and the Son of God gave himself for our sins." The heavy artillery of these words explodes papacy, works, merits, superstitions. For if our sins could be removed by our own efforts, what need was there for the Son of God to be given for them? Since Christ was given for our sins it stands to reason that they cannot be put away by our own efforts.

This sentence also defines our sins as great, so great, in fact, that the whole world could not make amends for a single sin. The greatness of the ransom, Christ, the Son of God, indicates this. The vicious character of sin is brought out by the words "who gave himself for our sins." So vicious is sin that only the sacrifice of Christ could atone for sin. When we reflect that the one little word "sin" embraces the whole kingdom of Satan, and that it includes everything that is horrible, we have reason to tremble. But we are careless. We make light of sin. We think that by some little work or merit we can dismiss sin.

This passage, then, bears out the fact that all men are sold under sin. Sin is an exacting despot who can be vanquished by no created power, but by the sovereign power of Jesus Christ alone.

All this is of wonderful comfort to a conscience troubled by the enormity of sin. Sin cannot harm those who believe in Christ, because He has overcome sin by His death. Armed with this conviction, we are enlightened and may pass judgment upon the papists, monks, nuns, priests, Mohammedans, Anabaptists, and all who trust in their own merits, as wicked and destructive sects that rob God and Christ of the honor that belongs to them alone.

Note especially the pronoun "our" and its significance. You will readily grant that Christ gave Himself for the sins of Peter, Paul, and others who were worthy of such grace. But feeling low, you find it hard to believe that Christ gave Himself for your sins. Our feelings shy at a personal application of the pronoun "our," and we refuse to have anything to do with God until we have made ourselves worthy by good deeds.

This attitude springs from a false conception of sin, the conception that sin is a small matter, easily taken care of by good works; that we must present ourselves unto God with a good conscience; that we must feel no sin before we may feel that Christ was given for our sins.

This attitude is universal and particularly developed in those who consider themselves better than others. Such readily confess that they are frequent sinners, but they regard their sins as of no such importance that they cannot easily be dissolved by some good action, or that they may not appear before the tribunal of Christ and demand the reward of eternal life for their righteousness. Meantime they pretend great humility and acknowledge a certain degree of sinfulness for which they soulfully join in the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But the real significance and comfort of the words "for our sins" is lost upon them.

The genius of Christianity takes the words of Paul "who gave himself for our sins" as true and efficacious. We are not to look upon our sins as insignificant trifles. On the other hand, we are not to regard them as so terrible that we must despair. Learn to believe that Christ was given, not for picayune and imaginary transgressions, but for mountainous sins; not for one or two, but for all; not for sins that can be discarded, but for sins that are stubbornly ingrained.

Practice this knowledge and fortify yourself against despair, particularly in the last hour, when the memory of past sins assails the conscience. Say with confidence: "Christ, the Son of God, was given not for the righteous, but for sinners. If I had no sin I should not need Christ. No, Satan, you cannot delude me into thinking I am holy. The truth is, I am all sin. My sins are not imaginary transgressions, but sins against the first table, unbelief, doubt, despair, contempt, hatred, ignorance of God, ingratitude towards Him, misuse of His name, neglect of His Word, etc.; and sins against the second table, dishonor of parents, disobedience of government, coveting of another's possessions, etc. Granted that I have not committed murder, adultery, theft, and similar sins in deed, nevertheless I have committed them in the heart, and therefore I am a transgressor of all the commandments of God.

"Because my transgressions are multiplied and my own efforts at self-justification rather a hindrance than a furtherance, therefore Christ the Son of God gave Himself into death for my sins." To believe this is to have eternal life.

Let us equip ourselves against the accusations of Satan with this and similar passages of Holy Scripture. If he says, "Thou shalt be damned," you tell him: "No, for I fly to Christ who gave Himself for my sins. In accusing me of being a damnable sinner, you are cutting your own throat, Satan. You are reminding me of God's fatherly goodness toward me, that He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In calling me a sinner, Satan, you really comfort me above measure." With such heavenly cunning we are to meet the devil's craft and put from us the memory of sin.

St. Paul also presents a true picture of Christ as the virgin-born Son of God, delivered into death for our sins. To entertain a true conception of Christ is important, for the devil describes Christ as an exacting and cruel judge who condemns and punishes men. Tell him that his definition of Christ is wrong, that Christ has given Himself for our sins, that by His sacrifice He has taken away the sins of the whole world.

Make ample use of this pronoun "our." Be assured that Christ has canceled the sins, not of certain persons only, but your sins. Do not permit yourself to be robbed of this lovely conception of Christ. Christ is no Moses, no law-giver, no tyrant, but the Mediator for sins, the Giver of grace and life.

We know this. Yet in the actual conflict with the devil, when he scares us with the Law, when he frightens us with the very person of the Mediator, when he misquotes the words of Christ, and distorts for us our Savior, we so easily lose sight of our sweet High-Priest.

20For this reason I am so anxious for you to gain a true picture of Christ out of the words of Paul "who gave himself for our sins." Obviously, Christ is no judge to condemn us, for He gave Himself for our sins. He does not trample the fallen but raises them. He comforts the broken-hearted. Otherwise Paul should lie when he writes "who gave himself for our sins."

I do not bother my head with speculations about the nature of God. I simply attach myself to the human Christ, and I find joy and peace, and the wisdom of God in Him. These are not new truths. I am repeating what the apostles and all teachers of God have taught long ago. Would to God we could impregnate our hearts with these truths.

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