

## Sermons On The Passion Of Christ. Introductory Meditations.

**Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Passion of Christ. Introductory Meditations,” Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year. Volume 2. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 42-63.***

**Translation by Prof. E. Smid**

**I**n this season of the year it is customary for the Church, both in her hymns and sermons, to dwell especially upon the passion of Christ. We also will follow this custom. Indeed, we consider it very appropriate that the narrative of the sufferings of our Lord should, at a certain fixed period of the year, be read in the churches to the people, word for word, from beginning to end, and that it be fully explained to them, so that they may understand its use, and derive from it much consolation. It is sadly evident with what effect the devil resists the Gospel, though it be preached daily, and how the hearts grow cold towards it, so that they do not amend, but rather grow worse from year to year. This distressing fact ought surely to prompt us to continue in the preaching of the Word, and especially of that part of it which tells of the suffering and death of Christ. We must endeavor to have the people know and appreciate this part of the Gospel; nor dare we be derelict in the performance of this duty. If we would neglect to preach on this subject one, two or three years, the people would surely forget it. Even we, who continually busy ourselves with the Word, experience a decrease of interest in it if we neglect the perusal of it for a day or two; how great then would be the injury to the people at large, if they should miss the preaching of these truths for a year or two? They would become as wild as beasts; therefore it is so urgent that we preach and teach the Word in season and out of season. The devil is ever active in resisting the efficacy of the

Word, else there would be many believers, and people would be converted; for surely it is now preached often and clearly.

[For some Christians,] this week is one of torture; they sing and read and preach exceedingly much concerning the passion of Christ. But what does it avail them? It is true, they speak of Christ's sufferings; but in their heart there is no thought of them, or else they would not prize so highly their own self-inflicted penances and their own works. But it is not much better with us, who have the pure Gospel abundantly preached to us; our lives and deeds indicate that we also have disregarded it. The effects of the preaching of the Word are therefore not the same with all, inasmuch as not all are disposed to receive it. If we were to relate to the people some idle tales and stories, they would remember them at once; whereas now, thousands upon thousands hear repeatedly the preaching of the Gospel without retaining it, and without profiting by its instructions. They come back from church just as they went there. They hear the Word, but disregard it as something common and unimportant.

There are some, on the other hand, who hear it gladly when they are told Christ rendered satisfaction for us, and that by our own merits and works we cannot obtain salvation, but that Christ alone has purchased it for us by His sufferings and death; but as soon as they are told that to enjoy the benefits of this atonement they must avoid avarice, worldly-mindedness, gluttony, self-

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esteem, &c., they are displeased and become enraged. They are unwilling to be rebuked on account of their sins, or to be regarded as Gentiles. Here, also, it is the devil who labors to make the Word of no effect, and we cannot expect any thing else but such aversion to the application of the truth. It behooves us so much the more, to continue steadfast in the Word, to the glory of God and to our own souls' salvation, that some may learn to love it, although many are indifferent, and that thus the sacrifice of the Son of God in our behalf may be known and remembered.

The preaching of this truth began in Paradise, when it was said to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman should crush the head of the serpent. The Church has retained the proclamation of this Gospel, and will retain it until the end of time. Nor can we perform any better service than to proclaim everywhere, in the church, from the pulpit and at home, this fact of the sacrifice of God for the redemption of all mankind.

As Israel was heavily burdened with the ceremonial law, and was compelled to sacrifice calves, heifers, &c., thus [some Christians still conduct their] divine worship. If we had to observe all those ceremonies and defray all the expenses incident to them, I fear there would be many complaints of insufferable burdens. But not much is required of us: only this pleasing service, that we should remember His boundless mercy, manifested in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, and that we should preach this and teach it to our children. Let us thank God if we can enjoy such divine service, which surely will not be useless, but will rather bring forth glorious fruits and many blessings unto men.

The Turks have lost this kind of worship; they have forgotten Christ and substituted Mahomet in His place. The Jews have also rejected Him. Nor is it much better in Germany, where people have become weary of this worship and neglect it. But we may depend upon it that as soon as this true worship is lost, so soon will pun-

ishment follow. If we refuse to worship God, when we need only to hear a sermon which tells us of the suffering and death of Christ for us, we need look for nothing else but that, as a well merited penalty, another more severe, and withal an ineffective kind of worship will be imposed upon us. Therefore we ought to preach and hear, right willingly, of the passion of our Lord, so that we may never forget its blessings, even though Satan, the old enemy of truth, may busily attempt to resist and crush the Word.

But again, our own wants require that this be done. As long as we live in this world our flesh and blood will burden us, even as would the weight of a millstone. On every side we are subjected to temptations which take possession of our thoughts and time, so that we forget Christ and His sufferings; earthly possessions, worldly honor, food, drink, carnal indulgences, misfortunes, sickness and adversity are all, more or less, apt to have such an effect upon us. Hence it is necessary to set apart an especial season for the service of God. The devil is ever on the alert to insinuate all kinds of wickedness into our hearts, and would fain make them as cold as ice. Where God's Word is not repeatedly proclaimed in sermons, in hymns, in private conversation, so that we may not forget it or become callous towards it, there it is impossible for our hearts, which are burdened with many an earthly pain and sorrow, with wicked purposes and the devil's malicious instigations, not to fail and to fall from Christ. Thus it is an urgent necessity that the preaching of the Gospel continue among us, that we may hear and retain it, otherwise we would soon forget our Lord.

Nor should we overlook the wants of our young people, who need instruction so much; and many mechanics, laborers, and servants, who are Christians by baptism, cannot even read. Much zeal and energy is needed, that these people may be taught that which they know not, but which is so important to their welfare. God cannot be satisfied with us, if we disregard the precious treasure which He has given us; if we, perhaps, hear the

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preaching of the Word and gape at it without learning anything. Nor will the devil desist from his attempts to cause us to do what is evil. If we will not hear, nor learn, nor remember the word of truth, we will be condemned to listen to and heed the falsehoods of the devil, unto our souls' eternal damnation. [Some Christian and non-Christian groups] are examples of this. Let us, therefore, never grow weary of the proper worship of God; let us readily hear and heed the sermons, preached on the passion of Christ.

### **The Benefits Accruing From The Passion Of Christ.**

Of these St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, 6 chap., thus writes: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

To preach the passion of Christ our Lord properly, it is not sufficient to read the narrative to the people, but we must add admonition and instruction, that they may realize and remember why Christ suffered thus, and in what way they are benefited by His passion. [The method pursued by some] in presenting this truth, and which was only calculated to arouse the emotions of the people and to fill them with pity and lamentation, must be rejected as utterly useless. He who could stir up the emotions of people best was considered the most effective passion-preacher. Hence we find in those sermons principally railing against the Jews, descriptions of the lamentation of the Virgin Mary when she saw the death of her Son, and the like. All this, however, is nothing but hypocrisy, as really all [such] worship ... is; the true spirit of devotion is wanting, and there are no

fruits of amendment there. If we attentively consider the preaching of the apostles and prophets, we shall find a totally different method of preaching on the passion of our Lord. They did not waste words on the simple story of the event, but presented it unadorned, pointedly and briefly. But of the meaning of this passion, and how it is effective for us if properly applied, — of this they spake repeatedly and much.

It was indeed a short sermon, if merely the words are counted, when John spake of Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" but if we carefully meditate upon these words, we will discover how much they contain for our edification and comfort, if we but receive them in true faith.

John calls the Lord a "Lamb," because He was to be slain, even as a victim is slain. All the sacrifices of heifers, oxen, calves and lambs, which took place under the Old Testament, were but types of that perfect and only efficient sacrifice, which Christ our Saviour offered to redeem the whole world through His own blood. To this the Evangelist refers in the above words, in which he dwells but incidentally upon the narrative of the passion itself. He calls Christ not merely a lamb, but "the Lamb of God," to express thereby the truth that God Himself had instituted this sacrifice, and would be well pleased with it. This expression, "Lamb of God," is further intended to arouse our faith to accept such a sacrifice, which God in His infinite mercy and love has made for our salvation. Yea, by it we are to be convinced that because God Himself ordained this sacrifice, it is really perfect and all-sufficient to accomplish what these words say, namely, to take away the sin of the world. In this expression, "sin of the world," is included all impiety and injustice which prevail in the world, and which cause the dreadful, but just wrath of God. Now all this wrong God has in mercy taken from the world, and has imposed it upon His Son, who paid our debt for us, that we might be exempt from fear and punishment.

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We learn from this example how to preach rightly on the passion of Christ. We should not dwell chiefly upon the historical incidents connected with it, such as the betrayal, the scourging, the mockery, and the crucifixion of Christ; all this we ought to know and to preach; but this is not the most important lesson of the passion of Christ. Above all we must know and believe, as John preaches, that Christ suffered on account of our sins, which God cast upon Him, and which He bore in obedience to His Father's will and from love toward us. If we know this; if we understand our sinful condition, which would have plunged us without escape into eternal damnation, had not Christ become our Saviour, we will duly appreciate the importance and value of the suffering of our Lord, and wilt be comforted thereby when fear of God's wrath, on account of our sins, would overcome us. Such a consideration of the passion of Christ will not only move our eyes to tears and our hearts to pity, as is the tendency of [some] sermons on this subject, but will prompt us to feel, deep down in our soul, sorrow at the terrible results of sin, for which no creature, but only the Son of God could make atonement by His sufferings and death; and likewise it will cause us great joy, because we will realize that this sacrifice was made for us, that God will now no longer reject nor condemn us, as we have merited by our sins, but that He is now reconciled to us through the precious and vicarious death of His Son, who gave Himself as a victim in our behalf, so that our sins are now forgiven and we are made heirs of eternal life.

[Some Christians] never preached thus of the passion of Christ. They also used the words "Lamb of God" as applied to Christ who took away the sin of the world, but their whole worship was arranged as if each individual had to bear his own sin and must make atonement for it himself. How else can we understand the stringent regulation in [some churches], especially in this season of the year, in regard to fastings, penances, self-inflicted tortures and other severe and burden-

some works? Why were people so much in terror in regard to the minute, outward confession of their sins? Why did they bury themselves day and night in the churches and chapels, engaging in song and prayers? Was it not because they supposed that by such doings and observances they could and must work out forgiveness of their sins? Such doings mean in reality that we cannot rely, fully and solely, upon the sacrifice of Christ as all-sufficient and effective, and that we must with our own work complete the sacrifice and the atonement.

This contradicts directly the statement of John the Baptist, yea of Christ Himself, when in John 12. He thus speaks of His sufferings: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In these words Christ declares that His sufferings shall abound in much fruit. It would be erroneous to claim that the Christian must first of all bring forth good works, even as the branch and the vine bringeth forth grapes; this would indeed be one of the fruits of union with Christ through faith, but the most important fruit is indicated in the words of the Lord Himself when He says: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me;" that is, through me, through my sacrifice, through my death upon the cross, men must come to the Father and receive eternal life. They who rely on their own works, and desire by means of them to enter heaven, pervert the plan of salvation; they draw Christ down to them, whereas the reverse should take place. Christ must draw us to Him, or everything is lost. He alone has vanquished the devil, paid the penalty of our sins, rescued us from the world and death, and brought us to life through His sufferings and death. To all this we contributed nothing.

Again, John 3. chapter, Christ preaches of His passion in this wise: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth

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in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." This is sufficiently plain. Whosoever desires to have eternal life, must obtain it through faith in Christ and His death upon the cross, wherewith He made payment for our sins and redeemed us from death and hell. In the words just cited, Christ mentions no work of man as efficient unto justification; He says nothing of alms, fastings and the like. The requirement of deeds came already through Moses, and in the ten commandments God laid down the rules of conduct to be observed by us, and whosoever disregards them may expect the wrath of God and His punishments. He, however, who keeps the law, and fulfills its demands as much as he can, does not on that account get to heaven. There was no other remedy for the Jews in the wilderness, when bitten by the fiery serpents, but to look up to the brazen serpent which God had ordered to be made. In like manner, as Christ indicates in this passage, there is no other way unto salvation but faithfully to look unto Him who sacrificed Himself, according to the will of God, for our sins, and through whom we now have pardon and eternal life. Such a glorious result has the death of Christ; our works do not accomplish it; ... they have nothing to do with it.

The prophets also frequently speak similar words. Thus Isaiah, 53. chapter, says: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." Surely, this is a most charming and comfortable passion-sermon, yea no apostle in the New Testament could preach one to surpass it. The prophet declares that Christ shall be stricken, smitten and afflicted in our behalf, and also that the chastisement of our peace shall be upon Him, and that with His stripes we are to be healed. Isaiah calls the Lord a physician, and directs us to Him to be healed in our distress and sickness, so that we may obtain health and

happiness. The Lord has a remedy for us which is not labeled good works, giving of alms, fastings and rosaries, but consists of the fact that He suffered and died for us, yea, that He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. If therefore the history of the passion tells us how our blessed Lord and Saviour was tortured by the Jews and the Gentiles, we ought to be mindful that all this happened that we, even we, might have a cure, not from bodily infirmities, but from a sickness more dreadful than all the rest, namely, from sin and eternal death. Thus the history of the passion will be applied by us properly and happily. It must, however, be borne in mind that the passion of Christ is in two ways a precious and sure remedy. It exhibits, in the first place, sin in all its ugliness and terror; no human being, not an angel, nor any other created being, had the power to take away sin; the Son of God alone could do it, and He did carry this crushing weight for us. We should therefore carefully and earnestly endeavor to avoid sin, in the fear of God, for it is so very easy to fall into it, and so very difficult to get out of it again. In this endeavor we will be mightily assisted by the consideration of the passion of Christ, which will prompt us, as a precious power against sin, to be pious and to shun evil, since it is such a terrible and dreadful burden, which no created being can remove, and which the Son of God had to carry for us. In the second place, we find in the passion of Christ a rescue from death; for he who fully believes that the Son of God died for his sins and paid his debt before God, can have a peaceful heart and need not fear death, but will trust in the mercy of God and hope for eternal salvation. Of this consolation the prophet prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold ye prisoners of hope," &c. The pit, the prison-house of men, is sin and its punishments, namely, the tyranny of the devil and eternal death. From this pit we could not rescue ourselves unless by the help of God; not through the blood of heifers and similar victims, but only through the blood of the just One, the King of Salvation. He who is not in the covenant of this blood must re-

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main in the pit of sin and eternal death, while he who is enrolled in it through faith shall surely come out from this pit of wrath to the enjoyment of the mercy of God and unto eternal life.

Daniel also preaches of this, in the 9. chapter: "Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness," &c. How this should be fulfilled in the death of Christ, the prophet soon after indicates. This is another clear and definite declaration of the truth, that forgiveness of sins and justification can be obtained only through the death of Jesus Christ; through it, if we accept it in faith, we have this precious treasure, and in no other way can we obtain it. Thus we can learn from John the Baptist, from Christ Himself, and from the prophets, how to preach of the passion of our Lord, namely, to instruct the hearts as to the mercy and grace of God, that they may be comforted thereby. Christ suffered for the payment of our sins, to reconcile us to God, and to save us through faith in Him as our Lord and Saviour.

The holy Apostles preached the same truth concerning the passion of Christ, as we can easily read in their narratives and writings. Of the many passages bearing upon this point we will now, in conclusion, notice but the one taken from Romans 5. chapter, as you, my beloved, have heard it in the beginning of this discourse. This passage is sufficiently plain, so that all can understand it. Nevertheless we will now dwell upon it somewhat, to our instruction, edification and comfort.

We all experience how deeply unbelief is rooted in our hearts, so that we are ever troubled by our sins, and lack all assurance and peace. We are so ready to exclaim: Ah, if we were only more pious, it would be better for us, and we could then hope for the mercy of God. Where the heart thus wavers, there is surely trepidation and uneasiness. But if we firmly believe, and rely on the mercy of God, which He has promised in Christ, our hearts

will be securely stayed in all adversities upon this consolation, and will indeed be happy and of good cheer. ...

[St. Paul] begins with the remark : "God commendeth his love toward us," which is indeed a peculiar and astonishing saying, but nevertheless, as we shall presently hear, a remarkable, precious truth. God, it is true, is the declared enemy of sin, and will punish it, as the law demands and as our daily experience proves. Again, it is true that we are all sinners, and this knowledge causes our unbelief of the mercy and love of God. When told, as in the passage before us, that God loves man, we think immediately of John the Baptist, of Peter, of Paul and others, who were so much more pious than we, and are ready to admit that God may love such as these, but we deny that we are such people as He can love, and therefore continue in fear of His wrath. Against this misconception the Apostle directs his words when he says that God doth not only love us, but that He even commendeth His love toward us; that is, God makes it so manifest, so sure and evident that He loves us, that no man can doubt it. What else but love could prompt Him to send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, to die for us while we were yet sinners? When therefore sin and doubt torment us, and would rob us of confidence in God's mercy and pardon, let us firmly hold to the eternal truth of this word: "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Who is Christ? He is the Son of God. What does He do? He becomes man and dies. Why does He die? On account of sinners. From this it clearly follows that God has not rejected sinners, and that He desires not their destruction, but that He loves them still, even so much that He rescues them from sin and death. For their sake His dear Son goes into death by the will of the Father. What better proof of His love could He have given ? Surely, St. Paul has good authority for exclaiming: "God commendeth His love toward us;" and it behooves us to confess the precious, inexhaustible grace of God in Christ, and to believe that He is no longer

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wroth with us. Indeed, it would be utter madness to say that God will cast us away in anger, when it is evident that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for us wicked and forlorn men, that we might be redeemed, and have salvation evermore.

These words of St. Paul agree fully with the saying of Christ, John 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." How can one, who knows and believes that God loves him, be afraid of Him? For we all know what the character of love is. It is not contentious nor injurious, but trusts in Him, to whom it is directed, convinced that He will bring help and assistance. It is impossible to be otherwise. We should therefore cultivate this love, and fondly cherish it, nor permit any one or any thing to rob us of it. It is the devil's especial aim to persuade or force us from this conviction that God loves us; he would fain have us tear God and regard Him as our deadly enemy. Where he succeeds in this attempt he has won the field. If we have lost our confidence in God, what then can defend or support us? Let us therefore resolutely repel all such insinuations of the devil, of sin and our conscience, as if God did not love us, but let us firmly hold to the eternal truth and consolation that, as an assurance of His love, God sent His Son into this world to die for us sinners—to save us even while we were yet sinners. What else is this but a proof that God has thoughts of mercy toward sinners, that He loves them and would help them from their misery? This consolation we derive, as St. Paul here tells us, from the death and passion of Christ, and we should be comforted thereby. When the knowledge of our sins depresses us, when our heart would question the mercy and favor of God, we should be quick to conclude that He cannot be our enemy, since He gave us His only begotten Son as a Saviour. Hence we dare assuredly depend upon His mercy and help, and have no cause of fear or despair.

But perhaps you will say: we know well enough that God gave His Son into death in our behalf, yet we, on our part, have by many transgressions and sins proved ourselves totally unworthy of this His grace and mercy; from which it follows that God has again become our enemy on account of our crimes, though He may formerly have loved us for His Son's sake. St. Paul tells us that such reasoning is false, and that we should by no means give way to it, for he distinctly declares: "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners." Remember this, and be comforted by it. These words give us the explicit assurance, when our sins accuse us and threaten us with God's wrath and dire punishment, that Christ died for no other purpose than to save sinners, and for no other persons. If, therefore, we commit new sins, if our conscience accuses us, and if we have merited anew the vengeance of God, we ought ever to remember that Christ died for us as sinners, — for just such sinners as we are, and shall remain, though we may constantly exercise penitence and faith and new obedience with a good conscience. Yea, though we be ever so saintly, we will always need this consolation, that Christ died for us sinners, as St. Paul says: "Though I know of no sin, I am therefore not justified;" and the Psalmist, Psalm 143: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." It therefore remains a fixed fact, eternally unalterable, that the passion and death of Christ took place for our sin, no matter when committed, and while we were yet sinners, and that therefore we are freed from the eternal wrath of God, that we have forgiveness, that the atonement is made once for all, and that we can now obtain eternal life.

St. Paul continues: If God so loved us that He justified us through His blood, and if we earnestly believe that our sins are forgiven for His sake and that we are now pleasing in His sight, we ought to take comfort and rest assured that God will continue to be merciful unto us, and will save us in the end in heaven. He not only sacri-

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ficed Himself for us, but His life and victory are ours also.

The Apostle, when he spake these words, had in mind this severe tribulation, even of the pious, when they anxiously fear the wrath of God. He would fain give comfort by the assurance that God has averted His anger, and has employed mercy and grace toward us, even while we were yet sinners. If He did this then, how much less will He be wroth with us now after the redemption from sins by the death of His Son! This is surely a most effective sermon, preached against the unbelief which is so prone to nestle in our hearts. But Paul is not content with this assurance; he speaks of a still greater and more precious consolation to be derived from the death of Christ. He says: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Would to God that we might have this comfortable assurance firmly rooted in our hearts. It is indeed an inexpressible deed of mercy that Christ died for sinners; for by His death we are redeemed. If now His death benefits us so much, should we not also enjoy blessings from His life? If He died in our behalf, and if His death is our gain, we can unhesitatingly rely upon it that His life now will also be of benefit unto us: He will keep us by His grace, and will defend us from the devil and the world, so that our faith may increase from day to day. Accordingly we see, to our edification and consolation, the Apostles directing our attention repeatedly to the joyous resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He who thus liveth after He died for us, will surely attend to our wants now, and will protect us in the true faith against all temptation. The Apostle would therefore encourage us in these words against all doubts and weakness of faith; he would tell us to put aside all terror of the wrath of God and of death, since our Father in heaven has so clearly commended His love toward us in giving His Son for us into death while we were yet sinners. If He did not spare this His most precious gift while we were yet in sin,

He will surely bestow all blessings upon us now, since we have been cleansed from sin by the death of Christ.

Through Him and in His life we can have the power necessary to conquer death and hell; therefore we rejoice and trust in God, who loved us so exceedingly while we were yet sinners; yea, we know that for the sake of Christ, His Son, He will support us in our tribulations, and grant unto us in the end eternal life. Such a faith, and such confidence, is the Christian's true worship; we should therefore diligently seek it, pray for it, and retain it in our hearts. The Apostle Paul now concludes his exhortation to be of good cheer with these words: "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

He declares that we have received the atonement through Christ. We, on account of our sins, dared not hope for mercy from God. Now this is changed. Our sins are removed by the death of Christ, and we know that God no longer chides with us; He is our Friend, yea, our beloved Father. What then must be the result of such reconciliation? This, that we rejoice at such a merciful and loving God — a God who is the source of all love, whom we should praise, and upon whom our whole confidence in every need and sorrow should be placed. If we have God for a friend we need fear no injury; nothing can then terrify or harm us. An atonement has been made for sin; God is satisfied with us, and Christ our Mediator sits at the right hand of the Father. What matters it now if death does come and lay low our bodies, since we know that through Christ we shall rise again unto eternal life? Hence the Christians ought ever to rejoice, no matter what their fortunes in life may be; though pain may afflict their bodies, they can be glad in the spirit, and will praise their Father in heaven, upon whose love and mercy they depend, and under whose protection they are secure. Such a happy issue from ills we have through the atonement made by the death of Christ.

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... Let us thank God from the very bottom of our hearts that we have been set free from the bondage of error [of good works], and that we can learn from so many testimonies of the Old and of the New Testament how to regard and apply the passion of Christ, so that we are enabled to say, whenever sin accuses: If we were no sinners, Christ need not have suffered for us, but since He did suffer, we will derive all consolation from His passion. Thus will we honor God and give thanks

unto Christ our Lord. We can make no other return but to accept with heartfelt gratitude the precious gifts obtained by His passion and death.

If we do this, it must follow, as a necessary consequence, that we shun and hate sin, that amid various trials, by constant practice, we increase from day to day in faith, in love, in hope, and in patience. May God bless us in this endeavor, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!