

His Mercy and His Means

VI. What Sins Should We Confess?

And there followed Him a great multitude of the people, and of women, mourning and lamenting for Him. But turning to them He said: *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, rather, weep for yourselves, and for your children.*

We understand them, do we not, the women? Who can not be moved at heart just to *hear* of His sufferings, and imagine the image before our inner eyes? And the women actually saw it all happening right before them! Who could not be moved at heart to see such sufferings being inflicted upon anyone? Being capable of *not* being moved to see severe sufferings inflicted upon another human being is what psychology refers to as being a *psychopath*.

Usually, a such condition will be the result of emotional neglect in childhood. There are cultures, though, in which such callousness and coldness of heart is quite common. The ancient Romans would find amusement in watching other human beings, men, women, and children, being tortured to death, torn apart by animals, or killed fighting each other. Was it this culture that had brought about such brutality of the soldiers as to amuse themselves at infliction agony upon our Lord Jesus? Or did their cruelty come from a career of killing? Or was cruelty perhaps the reason they had chosen a such career to begin with? Either way, excessive exposure to cruelty will eliminate any capacity for compassion in the weakminded, and even more so the deliberate effort of the evil to *condition* them for cruelty. This is how the disciples of the *woke culture* of our day and age have come to find delight in the destruction of other human beings as human beings through psychological torture, mostly only on social media, but also face to face, at events where all are encouraged to come up with accusations to shout into the face of an appointed victim until he breaks down and actually believes himself to be nothing, entirely worthless as a human being. In Maoist China such events were called *struggle sessions*; today, apparently, the term is *community meeting*; that was the term used when it was suggested that our congregations adopt the practice.

Still, most of us have in us not only a *capacity* for compassion, but also an *impulse*, as a reminder of in whose image we were made, a remnant of His goodness in us, when we see severe suffering, even that of our enemies.

Another impulse we also have in us, though, is that of seeing in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus only what *others* did to Him, or do, and overlook what we ourselves have done to Him, and do. This is the impulse of *denial*: to turn our attention to the evil others do to distract us from our own evildoings so that we can feel good about ourselves for being better than others. And the more upset we can be at the evildoings of others, and outraged, the more easily can we convince ourselves of our own goodness and godliness, and feel good about being so much better.

Weep not for me, our Lord Jesus said to the women who wept for Him, rather, *weep for yourselves and for your children*. As we hear this, we should each hear a call ourselves, also, to consider our own sin; not only our general sinfulness, but the specific evildoings and attitudes by which we not only caused Him His sufferings, but still cause Him grief, as we dishonour Him, and blaspheme against Him.

Or as our Catechism says it: *Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything or done any harm? Our Catechism calls Christians to consider these things in answer to the question: What sins should we confess? Well, before that, it gives the answer that before the Pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. So why would I bother, then, to consider exactly how I might have sinned? Why can I not be content with not knowing of anything particular against myself, and leave it at that? If I do not know of having done evil, and being evil, because I do not care enough to remember, why is that not good enough, or because I did not know at the time that it was evil, what I did, because I did not think about it, whether it was or not, because I did not care? Will I be more saved by being aware of what I should not have done, and did, and what I should have done, and did not, and telling my Pastor about it? Will I be less saved if I do not do any of that? Being Christian is all about being saved by faith alone, is it not, and being Lutheran in particular, about my sins being forgiven, all my sins, because Jesus suffered and died for me. So why do I have to worry about exactly when and where and how I might have sinned and done wrong?*

Well, His love demands that you think about what you do to others by the way you behave. For whenever you hurt or harm somebody else, you hurt or harm somebody whom He loves; *a brother for whom Christ died*, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it. And whenever you hurt or harm somebody He loves, you hurt Himself and cause Him grief; for it hurts Him to see those whom He loves being hurt and harmed.

And therefore, His love demands that you think about how you might hurt and harm others with your behaviour, so that you can know how you need to stop behaving. And because it hurts Him to see those whom He loves harmed and hurting, His love demands that you do all that you can to make any and all wrong right that you may have done. If you have stolen something, you must give it back. If you have caused harm to somebody's reputation by saying something about them to others that was not entirely true, only, you thought it might be, for it could be, and it almost was, well, then you need to come up with a way to make those to *not* believe you, whom you may have made to think poorly of someone our Lord Jesus loves, whom you have tried to destroy, even though it means that they will learn that you are a liar.

His love, though, which demands that you think about the things you do, and what they do to others, is not only His love for *others* whom you might hurt and harm by your behaviour; it is also His love for the one you hurt and harm *the most* when you give no thought to sinning, what you should not be doing, and what you should be doing. Now, that would be His love for *you*; for you are the one you hurt and harm the most by having no concern as to how you sin in the way you live and behave, and how much, and will neither amend your ways nor make amends to your victims.

As we heard it tonight, His robe was all in one piece and could not be divided without being destroyed; therefore is it that the soldiers also amused themselves by gambling amongst themselves as to whose it should be. His love is all whole and complete, also, and cannot be divided. His love, that He suffered and died for your salvation, cannot be separated from His love alive in you, which is the very faith by which you are saved - *if* you are that. Nor can the faith be without love for Him, and willingness to do His will. And His will is for you to live in His love, in the Word and worship of His love, and live out His love in your life with others, in accordance with His Word. And if living in ungodly indifference to His Word and will is no concern to you, then His love is not in you, and you are not of the faith, and you will not be saved, unless you repent and return to the faith.

Ungodliness in your life is not to be taken lightly; if you take it lightly, it is likely to cost you your salvation. Writes James, servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ: *Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.* And your eternal fate and future really is not to be gambled with.

Therefore is it that the holy Apostle Paul writes: *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.* Confession is an opportunity to do that, to consider how you live and behave, and what changes you need to make to live with God, in His love, and live out His love in your life with others. Confession gives you an opportunity, also, to think about how you *feel* about the way you live and behave. And if you find, when you examine yourself, that you have no grief whatsoever for sinning, that you are indifferent to ungodliness and evil in your life, then confession gives you the opportunity to repent and return to the faith, to seek mercy before the heavenly Judge, who has Himself borne all judgement for you, and be restored to His mercy.

As our Catechism says it: *Firstly, we confess our sins, and secondly, we receive absolution from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in Heaven.* Yes, for as our Catechism also says it, *when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in Heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.*

Your Pastor has the authority to forgive your sins, for real, on behalf of the heavenly Judge, who has Himself suffered His own judgement against sin so as to make sinners righteous and right before His judgement, so that *there is, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* His salvation is all in one piece, and cannot be divided; you cannot have more or less salvation. Either you are in Him, and there is no condemnation for you, or you are not in Him, and there is nothing but damnation for you. As the Letter to the Hebrews writes it: *If we continue to sin wilfully after having received the knowledge of the Truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but only a fearful expectation of judgement.* Whereas, as the holy Apostle John writes it, *if anyone sins, we have one who speaks in our behalf before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is Himself the atoning sacrifice for our sins; and: if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* And as He Himself says it: *All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will by no means cast out.*

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! Amen.