

## **To the Christians of Augsburg, letter of consolation in adversity for the sake of the Gospel, December 11, 1523**

By Martin Luther

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus, our Savior, to the chosen beloved of God, to all the members of Christ in Augsburg, my dear lords and brothers.

It has come before us, brethren and gentlemen, how that among you there are some who, for the sake of a clergyman's wedding, are innocently brought into disgust, and must also suffer ridicule and shame because of the harm done by those who rejoice when Christ is crucified, and laugh when their father Noah's nakedness is seen. But now by the grace of God we are members of the communion of saints and of one another, we must, as St. Paul says in Romans 12:13, 15, "bear with the needs of the saints and sympathize with those who suffer". For just as St. Paul says again, 1 Cor. 12:26: "If one member suffers, the others all suffer with it; if one is honored, the others all rejoice." Whether therefore there be among you honor or dishonor, peace or adversity, we consider that it is ours also, and that it affects us. Just as we have provided ourselves for your love, let our joy be your joy and our calamity be your calamity, for the sake of the common faith and the word, so that God has counseled us through his great mercy. For this reason I did not want to, nor should I refrain from, exhorting your love "and comforting it with consolation, that we may be comforted by God", 1 Cor. 1:4, that is, by his holy word: so that your love may not only suffer these things patiently, but also become fresh and strong to wait for and overcome even greater things; although I do not think that my poor writing is necessary for your love.

First of all, St. Paul says, Rom. 8:17. 2 Tim. 2:11: "If we would reign with him, we must also suffer with him." For if we delight and rejoice in the gospel and desire to partake of its unspeakable riches and eternal treasure, we must not refuse His cross, Matthew 10:38, and whatever trouble it brings with it, seeing that His riches and treasure are eternal, and His trouble temporal, even momentary. He himself said, John 15:20: "In the world you will have trouble, but in me you will have peace." If we want to have peace in him, then we must have adversity from the world. Nothing will be different. "Remember," he says, "my word that I said to you: The servant is not better than the master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you", John 16:32, 34. That would be a lazy, useless servant to me, who would want to sit on a cushion and live well, while his master hungers outside, works and fights against his enemies. Yes, it would be a foolish merchant who would throw away his gold and silver or would not want it because it was bound in coarse, unclean bags and not in velvet or fine silk, or would be hostile to his treasure because it was heavy and not as light as a feather; when the nature of the treasure is that it is heavy, and the larger the heavier; and the custom is not to carry gold and silver in beautiful bags and pouches, but in black, coarse, unclean cloth, which no one else likes to wear on his body.

So it is and so it is with our treasure, 2 Corinthians 4:7, which is truly great, costly, precious and noble, but we must carry it in hardship and suffering; this is its burden and its unclean bags, in which it lies hidden. Whoever, then, wants to carry this treasure publicly in beautiful sacks, that is, whoever wants to be a Christian and wants to be kept gloriously, to have pleasure and joy, good and honor from it, and does not want to be despised, to have displeasure, shame, harm and enemies from it, what else does he seek but to be robbed of the treasure? Carries it too gloriously and publicly and too apparently; if the treasure is such that it wants to be hidden under shame, damage and suffering, as in a rusty bag or sack, so that the world does not recognize or rob it, which happens when it would honor, love and promote us for it. This

is why Christ also says in Matthew 13:44 that the man who found the treasure in the field buried it again. It is no different; the gospel will not and cannot burst forth and float upward in great honor and glory, or it will not remain; but it must be buried and hidden under adversity and shame, so that it will not burst forth before the world and be pleasing to it; thus it remains safe and free.

Wherefore God also now looketh graciously upon you, and proveeth your treasure, that he will keep it also; for which ye ought to give thanks and praise God with joy, who hath made you worthy to have such treasure, and to lay it up in a proper bag, that it may remain with you. Therefore, be of good cheer, my dear sirs and brethren, all is well with you, and all will be well. Only do not fail from the hand of God, who has now seized you, to make you righteous Christians, who are not to live evangelically with words alone, as I and those like me unfortunately are, but with deeds and the truth.

So it is written, Isaiah 64:8: "We are his clay, he is our potter." The clay does not have to master the art and hand of the potter, but rather be mastered and made. This is also why the Gospel has its rhyme, which St. Paul gives it, 1 Cor. 1:18: *Verbum Crucis* "a word of the cross". Whoever does not want the cross must also lack the word. It is true that there is nothing lovelier in heaven and on earth than the word without the cross. But pleasure would not last long; for nature is not able to bear joy and pleasure for so long; as it is said: man can suffer all things without good days; and there must be strong legs to bear good days.

That is why God has seasoned this sweet, lovely treasure a little and made it tasty with vinegar and myrrh, so that we will not grow weary of it. For it is said that sourness makes you eat; so also the adversity on earth makes our hearts all the more joyful, fresh and thirsty for this treasure. For its power is tasted and explored by how it comforts the heart in God. So Solomon, Proverbs 9:5, also gives it the name: *Vinum mixtum* (mixed wine), since Wisdom says: "Come and drink the wine that I have mixed for you", and Psalm 75, v. 9: *Calix in manu Domini meri vini plenus mixto*: It is a pure wine that makes souls drunk, but mixed with suffering so that it remains tasty.

But what more shall I tell you? Your love itself knows well that in the whole of Scripture God's word is always praised through and through in such a way that it brings adversity, shame and all kinds of affliction with it in time; besides, it also holds out exhortation and consolation, how great a good the treasure is, and how excellently it increases through such affliction. Therefore, you yourselves can comfort one another. But what I am doing must be regarded as presumptuous. But because I see that God has given you equal riches with us through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, I cannot refrain from being a fool and from gossiping with you and exhorting you out of the joy and delight I have in your fellowship, if I myself were in need of both exhortation and teaching.

For this reason, I ask your love to hold this writing, in good opinion, in trust for me and to entrust me, a weak, poor, frail vessel, to God through your prayers. I beg you, let this messenger, Master James, also be entrusted to you. Now may the God of all grace, who has begun to reveal himself to you and to renew his Son's image in you, according to the riches of his glory, accomplish his work abundantly, both in you and in us, until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, for whom we comfortably wait, that he may deliver us from the rest of all the evil in this flesh, Amen.

God's grace be with you all, Amen.

At Wittenberg, Friday after Nicolai, Anno Domini 1523.

Luther - To the Christians of Augsburg, letter of consolation (1523)

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