

For Christ's Sake

February 26, 2020—Ash Wednesday

Introduction

Ever notice how the world likes to take phrases in the Church and corrupt their usage? The **Kyrie** is a mere exclamation of delight: “Lord, have mercy!” One of the titles for Mary becomes an exclamation of awe or shock: “Holy Mother of God!” And a phrase used in **Absolution** is an exclamation of disgust or frustration: “For Christ’s sake!” The last one is the one we look at today.

Proper Usage

As stated above, this is used in the **Absolution**: *God, in His mercy has sent His Son to die for you; and for His [Christ's] sake, forgives you all your sins.* This phrase also occurs in the **Explanation to the Small Catechism**, in the answer to question 182, concerning the **Apostles' Creed**. *How is it possible for a just and holy God to declare sinners righteous (justification)? God declares sinners righteous for Christ's sake; that is, our own sins have been imputed or charged to Christ, the Savior, and Christ's righteousness has been imputed or credited to us.*

Justification

The question strikes at the heart of the doctrine of Justification by grace through faith. The argument goes like this: 1) God is holy and just. 2) Sin, which goes against everything that God is for must be punished. 3) Man is sinful. Therefore, man must be punished. It's neither **holy** or **just** to declare or treat someone righteous who is **sinful**. We can't be saved by grace; we must earn salvation; we must do something about the sin.

Dying for Us

The thing is, we can't pay the price. There's nothing we **can** do. *The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)*. The only price to pay is for us to die. That's where Christ came in; He died in our place as our **Substitute**. John Robert Osborne was a sergeant in the Canadian army during WWII. In 1941, during the battle for the defense of Hong Kong, he threw himself on a Japanese hand grenade, saving the lives of his fellow-soldiers at the expense of his own. He died in their place. But his death didn't buy their life. In 1945 U.S. Marine PFC Jack Lucas dove on two grenades, saving his comrades in the battle of Iwo Jima. He didn't die. As shown by Lucas, the saving isn't in the death, but in the act of shielding. Jesus' death for us was different. It did pay for our lives, because His death paid the price for our sins. It took His death to shield us from the effects of sin. He **had** to die.

Trading Places

As our Substitute, Jesus traded places with us. We should have been on the cross. Something happened on that cross. His death paid the price for our sins. As He hung on the cross, our sins were **imputed** to Him. In other words, they were **reckoned** to Him, or **counted** as His. He was sinless, yet He took our sins upon Himself. As He did that, He **imputed** His righteousness to us. In other words, His righteousness was **counted** as ours. It was **credited** to us. That's why we say we are *clothed in His*

righteousness. God doesn't pretend we're righteous, we **are** righteous because of Christ's righteousness, or **for Christ's sake**.

For Christ's Sake

So, that's the true meaning of the phrase, "For Christ's sake." Because of Christ's death on the cross, our sins have been given to Him and His righteousness has been given to us. Only **for His sake** are we saved. There is no other way, but *for Christ's sake*. The heart of justification is this: we are forgiven **for Christ's sake**. There is no merit on our part. There is nothing we can do. It's all because of Christ.

This Time of Year

Today, we begin this season of Lent, once again, preparing ourselves to journey with Christ to the cross. We receive the imposition of **ashes** to remind ourselves of our **mortality** and **sinfulness**. But they're put on in the shape of a **cross** to remind us that we have **forgiveness** and **life** because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. **FOR CHRIST'S SAKE**, we are forgiven. **FOR CHRIST'S SAKE**, we are saved. **FOR CHRIST'S SAKE**, we are justified. **FOR CHRIST'S SAKE**, we have eternal life.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
