

**Martin Luther to George Spalatin, August 21, 1544
(WA BR X. No.4021).**

To Doctor George Spalatin

A man to be highly respected in Christ,
Superintendent of the churches in Misnia,
Most faithful pastor to the people of Altenburg,
and one most dear to his own Lord.

Grace and peace in the Lord, and the consolation of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I deeply sympathise with you, my dearest Spalatin, and I pray to the Lord that he may strengthen and cheer you. As I enquire what kind of malady you are suffering from, I am told that some think you are plagued by a depressed spirit because of the unfortunate case of the pastor who has married the step-mother of his deceased wife.

If this is so, I beg you, through Christ our Lord – and with all the prayers I can possibly pray – not to get above yourself by dwelling on your own thoughts and feelings, but rather listen to your brother in Christ who is speaking to you. Otherwise your melancholy will destroy you – that melancholy which Paul ¹ says “works death”, just as I myself have experienced, and as Master Phillip did too, at Weimar in 1540. As a result of the issue of the Landgrave, depression had all but killed him, but Christ brought him back to life through my words to him.

Let us suppose that you have been guilty, having sinned in this particular case – or that you have committed more and even greater sins than Manasseh, whose offences could not be eradicated from the generations that followed him, right down to the time of Jerusalem’s destruction. But in fact your sin is easily remedied and truly only of a temporal nature. So I say again, let us suppose that you are actually to blame. Surely you will not let depression destroy you so that by killing yourself you commit an even greater sin?

It is quite enough that you have sinned. Now let go of it. Don’t let your despondency lead to an even greater offence. The Lord says “I do not wish the death of the sinner, but rather that he repent and live”.² Do you really think that in your case alone the Lord’s hand is shortened?³ Or has the Lord in your case alone ceased to be merciful?⁴ Are you the only man whose sin is such that there is no longer a high priest who is able sympathise with our weaknesses?⁵ Surely you do not believe that it is so remarkably new that a person living in the flesh and surrounded by the fiery darts of so many devils should at some point be wounded or even laid low?

You seem to me to be a man who is not experienced in wrestling against sin, conscience and the law - or perhaps Satan has snatched away from your sight and memory all those verses of scripture by which you were prepared for battle by the work⁶ and benefits of Christ. Yes, he has done the same with all your outstanding sermons about grace by which you taught the church, and encouraged and confronted it with great confidence and a joyful spirit. Or it must be that until now, you have been only a trifling sinner, aware of having committed only the tiniest peccadillos.

Therefore I beg you, join us truly great and hardboiled sinners so that you do not diminish Christ for us, who is not a saviour for imaginary or trivial sins but rather for real sins - not only small ones but great ones – yes even the worst, and for all sins committed by all people.

¹ 2 Cor. 7:10

² Ezek. 33:11

³ Is. 59:1

⁴ Ps. 77:10

⁵ Heb. 4:15

⁶ Here the Latin word *officio* (office) is more loosely translated ‘work’ for the sake of English sense. The phrase refers to Christ’s office as redeemer and saviour and the benefits which flow from it to the believer.

In this way Staupitz used to comfort me in my melancholic periods, saying “You wish to be a ‘painted sinner’ and to have a ‘painted Christ’ as your saviour. You must get used to the fact that Christ is a real saviour and that you are a real sinner. God does not play games or indulge in make-believe. It was no joke that he sent us his Son and gave him up for us”. But it seems that Satan has snatched these and similar truths from your memory so that you cannot now recall them, even for your own sake.

Open your ears and listen to your brother, as I sing to you – your brother who stands outside of your depressions and is strong. Yes, he stands there so that you who are weak and harassed by Satan, may rest on him and be cheered and strengthened so that you can stick it to the devil and sing “I was struck down and overthrown so that I might fall, but the Lord supported me”.⁷ Imagine that I am St Peter who stretches out his hand and says to you “In the name of Jesus Christ, rise and walk”.⁸

In this way, my dear Spalatin, listen and believe everything which Christ is saying to you through me, for I am not mistaken (of this I am certain) and I am not speaking Satan’s lies. Rather Christ is speaking through me and is commanding you to trust this brother of yours, with whom you share the one faith. He himself absolves you from this sin of yours, and all sins. In this way let me be a partaker of your sins so that I may help you carry them. Likewise make sure you are a partaker along with us in our consolation which is sure and true, which the Lord himself has commanded, so that we may give orders even to you, in order that you will accept them. For while we hate to see you being tortured by depression, Christ hates it even more.

Do not reject the one giving this command and providing consolation – the one who both hates and condemns your depressions as the vexations of Satan. Do not submit to the devil by allowing him to fashion some different Christ for you than the real one. Your depression is the work of the devil which Christ wishes to destroy,⁹ if you will let him. You have taken quite enough of a beating. You have grieved quite enough and been sufficiently repentant, in fact excessively so – more than enough.

You can see my dear Spalatin that I am dealing with you and speaking to you from a true heart. I shall consider it the greatest favour that you return to me by accepting my consolation, that is the forgiveness of the Lord himself, his absolution and restoration to life. By accepting this you will appreciate – later on at least – that you have even offered the most pleasing sacrifice to the Lord himself, as it is written, “The Lord is well pleased with those who fear him and hope in his mercy”.¹⁰

Therefore bid the depressions of the devil farewell, for he has caused us no small distress over you, and has indeed sought to ruin our happiness as well. If he could he would swallow us all in one gulp. May Christ rather rebuke him – and he will!

May he strengthen and preserve you through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Comfort your wife with these and even better words. There has been no time to write another letter to her.

At Zeitz, August 21, 1544.

*Translation from the Latin (WA BR X. No.4021) by Elmore Leske, August, 2013.
Edited and revised by Stephen Pietsch, August, 2013.*

⁷ Ps 118:13.

⁸ Acts 3:6.

⁹ 1 John 3:8.

¹⁰ Ps 147:11.