

Forde's editors have tampered with this sermon - 1

"For you?" – a sermon by Gerhard O. Forde was printed in *The Lutheran* (April 1996) 12-13.

That sermon was retitled, "Jesus died for you," and reprinted in *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 220-22.

Why did his editors change the title? His title was catchy; but theirs? The bigger problem is that his editors have massively rewritten the whole sermon, not just the title. This is an unacceptable breach of the basic rules of editing and a grave disservice to Forde.

The first and most important rule of editing is that editors **may not change the text**. The sermon is Forde's, not theirs. An editor should correct typographical errors and mark them with square brackets and "sic." That's it. An editor **never may rewrite anything**.

A comparison of the original and rewritten sermon shows the editors extensively rewrote it. About 50% of the sermon has been altered. Forde wrote in conversational English. The rewritten text shows that his editors have changed words needlessly and obscured his crisp style. They have added adverbs and adjectives to sentences, piled on phrases, replaced vivid words with dull words, added theological jargon, and combined paragraphs. None of this should ever have been done.

Below are 1) a marked copy of the changes Forde's editors made to his sermon, 2) Forde's original sermon (1996), 3) the rewritten sermon as it appears in *A More Radical Gospel* (2004). The code for the marked changes is as follows:

- Text in black was in the original and has not been altered in the rewritten text.
- Text in red, ~~crossed out~~, was in Forde's original sermon (1996) and has been deleted.
- Text in blue with double underlining has been added by Forde's editors (2004).

Numbered circles "①" identify places where changes were made. Comments on these changes are found at the end of the marked text.

~~For You?~~/Jesus died for you

Jesus died for you. That is all he really did in the days of his flesh that is truly for you. In the end, that is all he could do ~~in the end~~. He died. He refused to do anything else. "I am the ~~Good Shepherd~~good shepherd," he said. ~~"The Good Shepherd, "and the good shepherd~~ lays down his life for the sheep." So his mission was, finally, to die. And it was for you.

This has to be said so bluntly because too ~~Too~~-often ~~Christians~~we are tempted to think ~~Jesus~~he was really doing something else, something supposedly that might seem more meaningful and profound religiously. We look at him dying Jesus' death on the cross and we puzzle about it: "What does . We ask: "I wonder what it means?" "How ~~can it~~could the death of Jesus be for us? ~~It~~ today? After all, it happened ~~so~~a long time ago."

Usually we ~~Especially~~ when reading the Bible we think we can answer such questions by ~~trying to discover~~ discovering some deep and eternal meaning behind the scenes that will reach through time and touch us today. Perhaps “the meaning” is that Jesus was paying God—, or even Satan. ~~Maybe he was leaving~~ Or, perhaps, it is in the example offer of a an exemplary heroic death for us to admire ~~and imitate~~.

So, through the years we have tried to answer questions about how Jesus’ death could be for us by means of our doctrines of the atonement. ① The most persistent theme, the one that has seemed most natural and logical to us, has been the idea that Jesus was “for you” because he is our substitute. He Jesus does what we ought to do but can’t — due to sin. We don’t have enough capital to pay the debt for sin. So, it is said, our “doctrine of atonement” will say that Jesus came to be becomes our substitute and pay pays a wrathful God what we owe. And since Jesus is not only man ~~human~~ but also the e Eternal Son ~~of God~~, this payment is good for all time.

Such But such doctrinal explanations only seem always to lead to us into other puzzling problems. First Questions arise that we have difficulty answering. In the first place, the idea that God is paid off by the death of Jesus suggests holds us in a false picture of God relation to God. It puts our relation on much too commercial a basis. Is God one who can be bought paid off, even by the death of Jesus? If Furthermore, if God is paid, how can we say that God is merciful? Mercy is mercy, and not payment. If God is paid, our Our relation to God is soured held ② by the idea that God is wrathful and cannot — or will not — forgive without being paid. unless due payment is made.

To be sure, Jesus did say said that he came to give his life as a “ransom” for us. But he it was never said that such ransom was to be paid to God. After all, God sent Jesus to begin with. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

The second problem has to do with us. How can someone else be our substitute in matters of such high moral purpose? Nobody likes to be benched for a substitute, especially in the big game! “I’ll make my own way and pay my own debts. None of that cheap grace for me, thank you very much!” So we are likely to say. The claim that Jesus had to die “for you” gets brushed aside. ③

Still, But the New Testament repeatedly says witness is persistent: Jesus died “for us,” “on our behalf.” That is said again and again. Translated into proclamation, this it is the bold announcement that Jesus died for you.

How can this be? Look at it this way. Jesus, the Bible says we are told, came preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sin on God’s authority. In other words, God didn’t have to be paid to forgive, but announced forgiveness through Jesus right from the beginning to begin with. But that’s that is when the trouble starts. For we won’t would not have it.

When Jesus forgave the sins of a the paralytic, who had been let down through the roof, all the people were incensed (Mark 2:1-12). “This man is blaspheming!” they said. “No one can forgive sins but God!” And so it went all through Jesus’ his ministry.

The protests grew increasingly more and more persistent: “You can’t. One cannot run the is world on forgiveness. It goes against the way we think we must operate.” Finally, Jesus he was crucified for forgiving sins it. He died for the right to do so say it. Even from the cross he cried, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

But how can shall we say Jesus’ that this death is of Jesus was for for us? We don’t need elaborate theories or doctrines. All we need to do is to look carefully at what actually happened. We do not need elaborate doctrinal theories. The fact is we killed him. We couldn’t let him speak the word of forgiveness. Not here in this place. Our problem is that we live under the law. That is the way our world runs. We succumb to the temptation to regulate even our relationship to God according to law, which

always says: “Do this” and “Don’t do that or you’re really in trouble.”. In that sense we live under the wrath of God. If we wish to live that way, God will oblige. But that is a terrible fate. It means death. ④

Jesus ~~announces~~, however, comes to announce that God won’t have it ~~that way~~. Jesus in the end. He comes to establish a new reality, a new relationship. So a mighty clash takes place, a “strange and marvelous strife” ~~– Martin,~~ Luther liked to call it. Life, in which life and death are contending.

Jesus comes into “our place.” He is “born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those that are under the law.” ⑤ He comes to rescue us from our determination to live under the law. But that means ~~that~~ he can only die. He can’t not come into our world saying, “Come on now folks, be nice! Stop your sinning!” ~~That~~ For that would only mean ~~that Jesus’ message to us is~~ more law. There would be no end to it. He can’t win this battle that way.

He can’t call a halt on the way up to Golgotha and escape from it all. For then there would be no end. He can only go this way to Jesus went to his death. Onlookers ~~The onlookers~~, we are told, actually taunted him to put a stop to it: “If you are the Son of God,” they said, “come down from the cross.” But he did not come down. Had he done ~~so~~, that, we would ~~mean he was dealing with us by human standards, not by God’s utter forgiveness. We would have been~~ be forever under the law, wrath, and death ~~forever~~. Not even God will stop it. Jesus cries, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

So ~~in the end~~ the only thing he can do in the end is die for us, ~~seemingly forsaken by God~~. He dies at our hands, hands resolved to go the way of the law, hands that will not give up until they ~~get~~ have gotten him out of the way. We don’t need to elaborate theories or doctrines of the atonement to see why his death is for us. We ~~— people who are committed to living by the law —~~ lay hands on him and put him to death. And he does not stop us. He goes his way to death without a word ~~of objection~~. — like a sheep before its shearers is dumb. No one takes his part. No one. [¶] ~~He dies. There is nothing~~ Nothing here to imitate or admire emulate. ⑥ His disciples betray him, deny him, forsake him, and flee. Even they provide no example for us here. In the end nothing remains even of his life to persuade us to call a halt. ⑦ He is despised and rejected, “as one from whom we hide our faces” (Isaiah 53:3). He dies for us. That is all he can do in the end.

But it was not the end. God vindicates the crucified Jesus by raising him from the dead. Had Jesus remained in the tomb, that would have been the ~~end of the~~ sad ending to our story. ~~Our judgment that he was wrong, a blasphemer, would be the last word.~~ We would have been right and he wrong. He would remain in the bonds of death and we – supposedly – in life.

But now the tables are turned. He is raised. ~~The judgment is reversed by God. God has revealed Jesus to be Lord and Christ by raising him from the dead.~~ He is right, and we are wrong; he is alive and we are dead. There is no way now to escape. The only way for us is through the cross — ~~to see that his death is our death. We die to our “rightness” — our insistence on living by the law, on justifying ourselves. Finally, we can give up living by the law and live in freedom by God’s forgiveness and grace.~~ ⑧

So now, he Jesus alone gives us life, life triumphant over the law, sin, and death that always ~~threaten~~ threatens always to consume us. ~~So it has to be proclaimed:~~ Jesus died to give us this gift. ⑨ Jesus died for you.

Comments on a few of the changes:

- ① The editors have inserted heavy phrases like “our doctrines of the atonement” here and elsewhere. Forde seldom did because such jargon acts as a barrier between the preacher and congregation.
- ② The editors replace Forde’s vivid “soured” with the obscure “held.”
- ③ The editors have inserted a whole (five-plus lines!) paragraph. Forde was using the metaphor of ransom. The editors shift to a different metaphor, that of one player substituted for another in a game like football or basketball. But players being substituted for others in a game is not at all like being kidnapped and ransomed, a life and death situation. Thus Forde’s editors break the flow of his argument with their inserted paragraph.
- ④ The editors add “the wrath of God” and “death,” thus shifting the focus away from what is Forde’s concentration on “law,” as if they think they need to up the ante.
- ⑤ The editors add over 20 words. Here and elsewhere they pile on phrases as if they have to explain everything.
- ⑥ The editors replace Forde’s “imitate or admire” (two different categories) with “imitate or emulate” (which are synonyms), and therefore “emulate” is redundant. In addition, “emulate” is not conversational English. When preaching, Forde avoided using words with a pretentious air, like “emulate.”
- ⑦ “In the end nothing remains even of his life to persuade us to call a halt”? This added sentence, like others, is fuzzy profound and only obscures the text.
- ⑧ Most of Forde’s closing gospel paragraph has been deleted. Gone is: “The judgment is reversed by God. God has revealed Jesus to be Lord and Christ by raising him from the dead.” Gone also is the good news that we now “live in freedom by God’s forgiveness and grace.” Why are these great sentences deleted? Perhaps the editors realized that they had added a lot and thus needed to cut some material to keep the length of the sermon similar to the original. Their rewriting ends up short changing the gospel.
- ⑨ “Jesus died to give us this gift.” “This gift” is unclear. How does “this gift” work? This added ending is obscure.

For you?

When Jesus dies, we die, but we also find something quite new

BY GERHARD FORDE

PIETA, MICHELANGELO/SUPERSTOCK

Jesus died for you. That is all he could do in the end. He died. He refused to do anything else. "I am the Good Shepherd," he said. "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." So his mission was, finally, to die. And it was for you.

Too often Christians think Jesus was really doing something else, something supposedly more meaningful and profound. We look at him dying on the cross and puzzle about it: "What does it mean?" "How can it be for us? It happened so long ago."

Usually we answer such questions by trying to discover some deep meaning behind the scenes that will reach through time and touch us. Perhaps "the meaning" is that Jesus was paying God—or Satan. Maybe he was leaving the example of a heroic death for us to admire and imitate.

The most persistent theme has been the idea that Jesus is our substitute. He does what we ought but can't. We don't have enough capital to pay the debt for sin. So, it is said, Jesus came to be our substitute and pay God what we owe. And since Jesus is not only human but also the eternal Son of God, this payment is good for all time.

Such explanations only lead to puzzling problems. First,

the idea that God is paid off by Jesus suggests a false picture of God. Is God one who can be bought, even by the death of Jesus? If God is paid, how can we say that God is merciful? Mercy is mercy, not payment. If God is paid, our relation to God is soured by the idea that God is wrathful and cannot—or will not—forgive without being paid.

Jesus did say that he came to give his life as a "ransom" for us. But he never said that such ransom was to be paid to God. After all, God sent Jesus to begin with. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

Still, the New Testament repeatedly says Jesus died "for us," "on our behalf." Translated into proclamation, this is the bold announcement that Jesus died *for you*.

How can this be? Look at it this way. Jesus, the Bible says, came preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sin on God's authority. God didn't have to be paid to forgive but announced forgiveness through Jesus right from the beginning. But that's when the trouble starts. For we won't have it.

When Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic, people were incensed (Mark 2:1-12). "This man is blaspheming!" they said. "No one can forgive sins but God!" And



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The protests grew increasingly persistent: "You can't run the world on forgiveness. It goes against the way we think we must operate."

Finally, Jesus was crucified for forgiving sins. He died for the right to do so. Even from the cross he cried, "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

But how can we say Jesus' death is for *us*? We don't need elaborate theories or doctrines. All we need is to look carefully at what actually happened. The fact is *we* killed him. We couldn't let him speak the word of forgiveness. Not here in this place. Our problem is that we live under the law. That is the way our world runs. We succumb to the temptation to regulate even our relationship to God ac-

ording to law, which always says: "Do this" and "Don't do that or you're really in trouble."

Jesus announces that God won't have it that way. Jesus comes to establish a new reality, a new relationship. So a mighty clash takes place, a "strange and marvelous strife" Martin Luther liked to call it. Life and death are contending.

Jesus comes to rescue us from our determination to live under the law. But that means that he can only die. He can't come into our world saying, "Come on now folks, be nice! Stop your sinning!" That would only mean that Jesus' message to us is more law. He can't win this battle that way.

Jesus went to his death. Onlookers, we are told, taunted him to put a stop to it. "If you are the Son of God," they said, "come down from the cross." But he did not come down. Had he done

so, that would mean he was dealing with us by human standards, not by God's utter forgiveness. We would have been under the law, wrath and death forever.

So in the end the only thing he can do is die for us, seemingly forsaken by God. He dies at our hands, hands that will not give up until they get him out of the way. We don't need elaborate theories to see why his death is for us. We—people who are committed to living by the law—lay hands on him and put him to death. And he does not stop us. He goes his way to death without a word of objection.

He dies. Nothing here to imitate or admire. His disciples betray him, deny him, forsake him and flee. He is despised and rejected, "as one from whom we hide our faces" (Isaiah 53:3). He dies for us. That is all he can do.

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Forde is professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

A MORE RADICAL GOSPEL

*Essays on Eschatology, Authority,
Atonement, and Ecumenism*

Gerhard O. Forde

Edited by

Mark C. Mattes & Steven D. Paulson

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But such doctrinal explanations seem always to lead us into other puzzling problems. Questions arise that we have difficulty answering. In the first place, the idea that God is paid by the death of Jesus holds us in a false relation to God. It puts our relation on much too commercial a basis. Is God one who can be paid off, even by the death of Jesus? Furthermore, if God is paid, how can we say that God is merciful? Mercy is mercy and not payment. Our relation to God is held by the idea that God is wrathful and cannot forgive unless due payment is made. To be sure, Jesus said that he came to give his life as a "ransom" for us. But it was never said that such ransom was to be paid to God. After all, God sent Jesus to begin with. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.*

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