

First Sunday of Lent

James 1:12-18

We always have excuses, do we not, when we fail to do the right thing, and even when we do outright and obvious wrong. Well, actually we do not, for whatever excuses we may have do not actually excuse us, not before God, who knows all things, and knows our hearts, and to whom we owe it to do no wrong, and to do only right, always, in all things, which means to always honour and obey His Word and will.

Ultimately, when we blame the wrong we did on our circumstances, or blame others, we are actually blaming God. *He* allowed us to be tempted beyond what He could reasonably demand of us, and so He gave us no other option than to sin; which is to say, although most of us know better than to actually say it outright, because we sense that to say so would be blasphemous, that *God* is to blame for our sin, for our wrongdoings as well as our failure to do the right thing. And blasphemous it would be to say that, and to think it. *Let no one say when he is tempted: "I am being tempted by God"*, writes James, servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, as we hear it today; *for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

God is not responsible for your wrongdoings; you are. It is your own ungodliness and unbelief that makes you to want to set the Word and will of God aside to begin with, when those situations arise in which it seems to you that setting the Word and will of God aside is an option at all, and the best option, and the only option, and perhaps even the right thing to do. It is *when he is drawn away by his own desires, and enticed*, as we hear it that James also writes it, that *each one is tempted*, that is: when you give in to the evil ungodliness and unbelief that is in your heart and mind. And all sinners have ungodliness and unbelief in our hearts and minds, for that is what sin is, ungodliness and unbelief. Not only are we not content to trust in God, that He is good, so that whatever He commands cannot but be not only what is good and right, but also what it will do me good to do; we actually have it in us that we *will* not honour and obey His Word and will *because* His Word and will is, well, *His* Word and will. *The intent of the flesh is hostility toward God*, as the Holy Apostle Paul writes it, of sinful human nature, that is, and *it does not submit to the Law of God, indeed, it cannot; because we will not.*

This holds true for all sinners; even for sinners who are also of the faith.

We, also, have *sin* in our hearts and minds, that is: ungodliness and unbelief. Holy Scripture teaches this quite clearly, and also that if we say that we do not, we not only deceive ourselves, but *the Truth* is not in us, which means that *the faith* does not live in us, nor our Lord Jesus, with His Holy Spirit; and as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*, that is: then we are *not* of the faith.

Therefore is it that James, servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, writes to those who are also servants of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, although not quite in the same way as he is himself: *Let no one say when he is tempted: "I am being tempted by God"*, rather, *each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires, and enticed* - because even those who are servants of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, although not quite in the same way as James himself, well, we also all have it in us *not* to be content to trust in God and His goodness.

And so they, and we, have to be reminded, as James reminds them, and us, *not to be deceived*, and that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*. Now, this obviously also means that *only* good and perfect gifts come from Him. And that, again, means that to honour and obey His Word and will is *always* the right thing to do, and what it will do me good to do, and this goes for all situations and circumstances, for with Him *there is no variation or shadow of turning*, as James also writes it. Of this both they and we have to be reminded because we all have it in us *not* to be content to trust in the goodness of God, and because we forget so easily that all good and perfect gifts are from Him, and good and perfect gifts *only*, which means that we are not going to miss out on anything good by submitting to His goodness and obeying His Word and will in all things, for all that on which we might miss out by doing that, well, it would all be no good anyway.

We are without excuse when we fail to do the right thing, and when we do wrong instead. Our excuses do not excuse us; our explanations do not explain anything away. We owe it to God *not* to do wrong, and to do right, always, in all things, that is: to honour and obey His Word and will in the obedience of faith. And there it is, and that is *all* there is, and it is all as simple as that.

It is not even an excuse, either, that you are helpless with regards to not doing evil, and doing only good, no excuse at all. It is not. For it is not really that it is in itself *impossible* only to do good, and do no evil. It is just that you *do not*, because you *will not*, because of the ungodliness you have in you.

The intent of the flesh is hostility toward God so that it does not submit to the Law of God, indeed, it cannot.

As we are reminded today, our Lord Jesus has shown that it is not in itself impossible for a human being to honour and obey the Word and will of God in all things so as not to do evil; it is not impossible not to sin, to rise above your circumstances and resist the temptations raised by your circumstances, and do right. He did exactly that; as we are reminded of it today. So there you have it, and you have no excuse. It *can* be done, and you should, as you owe it to God to do.

Well, He *is* the Son of God, and Himself God from eternity, who *cannot be tempted by evil*, as James writes it. But He had had Himself made Man, and born and baptised into our kind, in order to be tempted by the evil one; therefore is it, as we heard earlier, that *immediately after His Baptism the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness*, where He was for forty days, while being tempted by Satan. For this particular purpose the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness, for such was the will of God, and the Spirit is the Spirit of God, and is also Himself God from eternity, as is our Lord Jesus.

And even tempted by the evil one our Lord Jesus overcame the temptation to do evil, and to become evil Himself, in order to be able to suffer, without sin of His own, His own judgement against sin, against all evil and ungodliness and unbelief of sinners, for us, in our stead and on our behalf, for our salvation.

So there you have it. *Let no one say when he is tempted: "I am tempted by God"*, as James writes it. You have no excuse. It is *not* impossible to honour and obey the Word and will of God in all things. It is just that you *will* not; that something inside of you will not. He has done it, though. And for that you owe it to Him to do so, also, only all the more.

For again, what He did, He did for you, for love of you, for your salvation.

Ultimately, this is what it means when James, servant of God and the Lord Jesus, writes that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of light*. Therefore is it that he immediately goes on to write of the greatest good and perfect gift that comes from God, that of *His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*. With His Word of salvation God has had us baptised and born anew, who are His Christians, and His Church, as the beginning of His heavenly Kingdom of glory in this world.

This He had done, and does, with His Word of how the Son of God has not conquered sin only for Himself, but has by His perfect obedience fulfilled all things for us, and presented to Himself, on our behalf, the obedience we owe to Him, and has suffered Himself His own judgement against our sins and shortcomings and paid the price and penalty for them, so that we are free from guilt and debt before His judgement and shall not perish in His wrath but rather live and be with Him for ever in the glory of His Kingdom. In Him we have what is so much better than any and all excuses and explanations; we have *atonement* for all our sins, and our sinfulness; it is all dealt with and done away with. This is His Word of Truth, the ultimate Truth of God, and by this His Word of Truth He makes us to be right with Him and righteous before His judgement; and so He has us brought forth as the *firstfruits of His creatures*, that is: as the beginning of His Kingdom of glory.

It is with regards to this James writes, as we hear it: *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* What James has in mind, ultimately, is our salvation; nothing less is at stake. For for a Christian in any way to turn away from the ways of God is a path that will ultimately lead him to Hell, if he walks it to the end; as James writes it: *Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires, and enticed; then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

But James does more than merely admonish us to resist the temptation to turn away from the faith; he does not leave us to our own devices. Pointing out that it is *by the Word of Truth* God has had us brought forth as *firstfruits of His creatures*, he prepares a point will make in the very next paragraph, encouraging his readers to *receive with meekness the implanted Word, which has the power to save your souls.*

By His Word of salvation God has had us born into His own heavenly life; by His Word of salvation He keeps His heavenly life alive in us, when we live in His Word of salvation. He who has overcome sin for us will overcome sin *in us*, also, so that we can *endure temptation*, and find ourselves *blessed and approved to receive the crown of life the Lord has promised to those who love Him*, and gives to us, with His Word, by which His own life lives in us.

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