

# **Sermon: Temptation**

## **Galatians 6:1-10**

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Is it not strange how we are one community, made up of many nationalities and cultures? We are even one community with the people in Galatia, in Northern Turkey that the apostle Paul was addressing 2000 years ago.

What Paul wrote to those people in Galatia actually has meaning for us. Because We are part and parcel of the people he addresses. One holy catholic apostolic church.

*This makes the words of Paul meaningful for for us, our period of Lent.*

Lent is the period in the life of our community in which we focus, more than at any other time, on ourselves. It is a time of introspection.

This can be scary. Many of us, me included, are by nature not very introspective. That may be our character, but it can also be because we are afraid of what we will find when we look seriously at ourselves.

It is much more soothing to fill our time, our space, our life, with noise, music, TV, friends, internet - all sorts of distractions that create a veil, a great barrier so that we do not see who we truly are, so that we do not hear the quiet voice on the inside.

### **1. God desires our restoration**

It is not pleasant for us as Christians to have to admit that we are not perfect and that we seldom attain to our high moral ideals.

Surely, we know of others that have many shortcomings. So we are not so bad after all?

It is much harder to look at Jesus - when he was tempted he resisted those temptations. He was in this world, loving and serving God his Father single-heartedly.

We know that by loving God and by loving each other, we fulfill the law of Christ. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," Jesus said.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians we see how certain people in the churches of that area were lacking in love. Jewish and non-Jewish believers had strong disagreements about what laws a Christian was to follow, and they were fighting over this.

Those who wanted a strict adherence to all the laws of the Old Testament were condemned by Paul. He paints those people in dark colors - because they were trying to enforce their legalistic morality on the others in church.

The laws of the Old Testament are not bad - they are the Word of God. But they have to be understood in the light of what Jesus clarified - the laws are about love for God and love for others.

A legalistic approach is not a show of love at all, but rather, it keeps others from joining the people of God and it brings troubles into the church.

What should be done if this happens in our community? Punish those people? Be angry? Judge them for destroying the church of God and for their lack of love?

If we respond unlovingly to troublemakers, we are not a shred better than they are. Then we both have a deficit of love.

If we think we are spiritual, Paul says we are to restore a person who has sinned, and we do this in a spirit of gentleness. In a spirit of love.

St Augustine wrote a commentary on the letter of Paul to the Galatians (56). In his commentary he says, "There is no surer test of the spiritual person than his treatment of another's sin."

How we deal with the finest people in our midst is not the test of our character. How we deal with those who create trouble is the test.

If people are caught in any sin, we are to bear their burdens and so fulfill the law of love.

"To bear each other's burden" does not mean to just tolerate him or to be patient. It means that if someone has a burden to carry, put your shoulders under it and carry it together. Help him.

So our focus in how we deal with each other is not on condemnation, but on restoration. On helping people to get up and to move on after they stumbled and fell.

Scary. For bearing the burden of someone else, you have to be close to that person, shoulder to shoulder.

That is really the attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came close enough to us to carry our burdens. He wants to make us whole. He forgives when you stumble he helps you to move on on the road with him. .

If someone is tempted, help him to cope. If someone has sinned, help him to get up and walk on the road with Christ. And do this with the same compassion that you receive from our Lord and that you would hope to receive from another when tomorrow you stumble and fall.

## **2. Watch yourself**

And for us to be the best helpers for others, Paul says, we have to keep a watch on ourselves all the time. We have to assess ourselves to see what really motivates our actions, our moods, our words.

Walking with Christ on the road of love is tough; it is a learning process that never ends. We all walk, we stumble, we fall, we get up again. On and on. I think we all can agree on this.

And that is why examining ourselves honestly can be so painful. We notice this active power at work in us, this yielding to temptation that draws us away from love for God and from showing sincere love for others.

Paul's advice is very suitable for this period of Lent. Let us watch ourselves.

One way to do this, is for instance to give yourself each day 10 minutes of total silence. No telephone, no music, no book, no prayer. Only begin the ten minutes by asking God, 'please Lord, show me who I am in the light of Jesus Christ'.

And then be silent. Stop your mind floating around into every direction. Just listen to your heart beating. 'Lord, help me to know myself...'

If you think you are spiritual, well, it does not protect you from sin. 'You who are spiritual... you keep watch on yourself lest you be tempted', says Paul.

I am not advocating some morbid self-contempt. God created us, he loves us, he carries us. He honours us as He sees us as part of Jesus Christ. Even when you stumble and fall, you still do this as a child of God and on the road with Christ.

A solid dose of honest self-reflection is not scary, if we understand that God's purpose is our restoration. And he always acts out of the same love ... that he wants us to also show to each other. His desire is for us to reflect who He is.

## **3. Let us do good**

Paul does not present the law as the standard of God. He presents God himself as the standard. The one who causes the sun to rise, and the rains to fall down on all his people... the One who blesses sinner and saint.

God desires to see in us the same love and goodness that characterise him. That is why Paul underlines, "Let us not grow weary of doing good...Let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Do not grow weary in doing good. Doing good. That means giving practical expression to love.

Feed hungry people.

Visit prisoners.

Speak up in politics for what is right.

Give a drink to a beggar.

Read your bible, pray, fast.

Give some time to listen to a lonely old woman.

Push that envelop with some money under the door of someone in need.

Do something nice to encourage your pastor.

Defend the persecuted.

Demand good labour laws.

Be good to your husband or wife.

Encourage your children.

We are not so good at all this, are we? We are a community of sinners, and it is so easy to become tired of doing good, of being there for others. It is not our natural inclination.

Paul gives a few reasons why we must press on, and not get weary of helping each other to do good.

First, he speaks of love as the deepest motivator. Love for God, love for each other drives us to be there for the other who needs your support.

And then, he warns that tomorrow you yourself may be in need of help from someone else.

Thirdly, he also writes that God will hold us accountable for what we do with our life.

In a detective novel, *I am Pilgrim*, by Terry Hayes, I was struck this week by a particular sentence. "But every life leaves a trace, every ship a wake..."

We may feel we are just muddling through life, but be careful. Your life is important. You do not go through this world without impact.

All things that we do have impact on ourselves, on others, on God. Both in this life and after this life, we are held accountable. Often in this life we do not see much retribution for the evil that people do, nor do we see much reward for doing good.

But our deeds and words, even words in our mind only, are like seeds sown in the land of our community, and they lead to something. It may take a while for what you did to have its impact. But for sure, the seed will sprout.

Being a person of love and goodness is worth it: seeds of love will create plants of goodness in people. But to be such person needs continued effort, constant hard work.

It helps to begin the day with prayer. It helps to say to God and yourself again and again - my life my every moment my every word is for you.

Our human nature is fond of ease, and lacks sticking power. We are easily discouraged. This is especially true when results are not immediately visible. This is additional reason why we all need the community of other Christians, the community of people who for the love for God, support each other on the road with Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

May this be a holy Lent for us. A time of focus on Jesus Christ - who showed us the character of God - the character of goodness and love.

Let us by all means reflect the character of God our Father - and treat the people we know, the people we meet, with that same love. Do not grow weary in doing good, in practically expressing the love of God in your daily lives, in your attitudes and actions.

We know how often we stumble and fall, again and again. But in our Christians community we continue to hold on to each other, and we encourage one another to move forward on the way with Christ. On the way of love. We stumble, we fall, but we get up again with each other's help.

**Amen**