

Slaying Envy, Training for Kindness

James 3:5-12

Lent I Midweek

February 25, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

There are only two gods – the one true God, the holy Trinity as manifest to us in the God-man Christ Jesus, and the one false god, Self, and all the little idols Self sets up to assuage his thirst for Self-worship. And, if there are only two gods, then you belong to and are loyal to one of them! You either have already been justified by Christ Jesus and hope in him, or – as John’s gospel says – the faithless “are condemned already because they do not believe in the Son of God.” And, if already belonging to one or the other, then there are only two paths to walk... the Way of having been justified, which leads to eternal life... or the Way of having condemned yourself, which leads to eternal perishing... or, you might say, the Way of Christ (He who *is* the Way) or the way of death. *You* have been justified and redeemed by Christ and thus you belong to him, as do all who are Christians. And, if you all belong to Him who is the Way, then as your daily life walks according to the Way (or, as St Paul says it, “walk by the Spirit”, whom Christ gave you in Holy Baptism)... as your daily life walks according to the Way, that faithfulness should look fairly consistent with one another.

That doesn't mean Christians are monolithic or rigidly restricted in the Way of Christ. Their walk is full of Christian freedom, a beautiful variety of scenery, various gifts to enjoy, various forms of daily bread. But it *does* mean all of this is the justified following the same Good Shepherd along the same path, the same walk. To leave that path is to jump onto the path of death. There is only the way of life and the way of death; there is no neutral median on which to land when you jump. You have been baptized into life and are on the way that leads to life *everlasting*; but Old Adam idolizes the way of death that leads to death everlasting and is easily beckoned to and defensive of its temptations.

If you don't believe me that it is this cut and dry, consider your Old Adam's reaction when you are called to repentance – “What, are you saying I'm not a Christian?” Why would that be your instinctive conclusion unless you know that that's the road you would be on if your Noble Shepherd (or even your fellow sheep) would leave you to keep walking and not turn around ('repent')? By definition, the *impenitent* is on the road of, walks the way of, death and condemnation. To be defensive about others noticing sin, to claim that others are charging you as not being a Christian, is to implicitly admit you know where this sin, unrepented of, will lead... it leads to not being a Christian. It is the way of death.

Thus, as the Way of Life is one road, every Christian following Christ (as sheep follow their shepherd) should look pretty similar...

again, on account of various forms of daily bread, various skillsets and gifts, *not assembly-line monolithic* ...but of one mind in the same Spirit and, thus, orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy in the baptismal life... very similar in Christian conduct in the baptismal life.

In other words, the fruit of the Spirit will look very similar, won't it? No bunch of grapes looks exactly the same as the next, but each is a bunch of *grapes*. Thus, if the Spirit causes us each to produce His fruit – the fruit of *the Spirit* – then we should expect it all can be described similarly.

This is not merely for the sake of looking the same, but it's because Christ and His Spirit know this fruit of faith is the very defense each sheep needs, each Christian needs, in order to wrestle against the sin and temptation by which Old Adam seeks to wander onto the road of death.

It's a very real wrestling. In fact, God Himself acknowledged this struggle in the faithful, way back... early in the Fall... when he warned Cain before Cain killed Abel, “[Cain,] sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, and you must rule over it.”

A book some of us recently read referred to this wrestling, this struggle, as “the battle of the soul.” Not the battle *for* the soul, for Christ has already justified you (this midweek series is on *sanctification*, not justification)... not the battle *for* the soul, but the battle *of* the soul, that New Adam may always be supplied by the Spirit the fruit of faith needed to wrestle against sin and temptation

and continue in your justified status, following your Good Shepherd along His Way.

We might refer to this as slaying the old man, training the new. The Old Man loves to learn all the ways to sin against the Ten Commandments. But the way to slay the Old Man isn't simply to say "Don't break the commandments!" but it's *also* to train up the New Man so that he's not weak and flabby... to train in baptismal conduct that intentionally and specifically counters the sin of Old Adam. Indeed, for every sinful characteristic against the Commandments, there is an opposite godly and virtuous characteristic provided in the fruit of the Spirit to honor and keep the Commandments. Christians must learn these virtues and understand the very sin they counter-attack in the wrestling over God's holy will, so that we learn and know how to employ these virtues and exercise in daily life so as to slay the Old Adam and train up the New Adam.

And yet, the training up the New Adam is not merely for one's self, but for his neighbor. As one theologian says it, "When... the virtues are prized in and of themselves, too often the neighbor in need is forgotten. For a virtue to have value, it must result in serving the neighbor." (Fiebertorn, 60). That is our true wrestling, isn't it? – not loving our neighbor as our self... in fact, not loving even God as our self!

Because all of this wrestling can be traced back to the First Commandment, we'll leave that for last and 'funnel' backwards from

the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment. And because the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments can be seen in light of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, we'll consider those together next week. So, let's begin tonight in the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." There is the command, but what is *the work of the flesh* it defends against, and what is *the fruit of the Spirit* in which God trains New Adam?

Old Adam delights in envy... that's really the *heart* of this commandment, isn't it? Sometimes, we see envy synonymously with greed, but greed is more just about the 'stuff' a person has, whereas envy is more a jealousy of our neighbor's person and status and reputation... that jealousy of the heart that makes its way to the tongue.

*Because* we have Old Adam about our neck, we know instinctively the way in which envy manifests itself: building up one's self by tearing down our neighbor's reputation, puffing up one's self through bragging in a way that minimizes and harms your neighbor. How does Luther say it in the Small Catechism? – "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation." Certainly, that is what Old Adam desires to do to defend the Self and is quite good at doing to defend the Self, so that the apostle James says,

"The tongue is a world of unrighteousness... staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life... a restless evil, full

of deadly poison... [so that] with it we curse people made in the likeness of God!"

And *then*, James appeals to the New Adam in each of us baptized children of God, when he says, "*My brothers...*" That's you, Christian! ... "*My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*"

Every New Adam knows this. Every New Adam looks at those in his household, the fellow Christian in the pew, and says, "It is most certainly not God's goodness, not the Baptismal Life full of the fruit of the Spirit, that I would let my tongue be so careless or even intentionally harmful to my neighbor, especially my fellow Christian."

Every New Adam knows that. We know what *not* to do... We know we are to "drown the Old Adam," in this case by "slaying envy." But, how?

Here's where we need more teaching. We think the totality of Christian instruction is just what *not* to do... that, as long as we don't do *that*, we're free to do whatever else we deem godly... even if that means doing nothing at all... at least it's not "that." No, we must also learn and meditate upon the positive exercise of New Adam, that we may be intentional about training him up to proactively hogtie temptation with true faith in God and Christian love of one another.

Thus, Luther continues in the Small Catechism with what *to do*, "but we should defend him, speak well of him, and explain

everything in the *kindest* possible way.” Notice the fruit of the Spirit included there? Kindness. That may seem a bland and boring word to you, but it truly has divine origins... so that we should learn to love it, exercise ourselves in it. Listen to St Paul speak of it in various epistles.

To the Romans, Paul says, “Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

Again, to the Ephesians, Paul appeals to kindness originating with God Himself: “God has raised us up with [Christ Jesus],... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in *kindness* toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Notice, in both those, how kindness is coupled with the word ‘riches.’ Not the envy that seeks to tear down, conquer, and divide the spoils as ‘my own riches’... instead, the riches of God abundantly poured out in His kindness toward us. Not the envy that seeks to earn riches for the Self (for that has already freely been given by God in Christ Jesus), but the kindness that seeks to share the riches of God’s kindness with my neighbor.

Perhaps most beloved of Paul’s teaching on God as the source of kindness, Paul explains to Titus: “*When the loving kindness of God appeared, He saved us...*” Notice, the source of all kindness – as bland as that word might sound - is God Himself. The world has no true kindness, for the source is God who gives it to His Church... God

speaks kindness to us in the Gospel of Christ Jesus, to share with one another.

And one would think that Paul would explain God's loving kindness by pointing Titus right to the cross, but instead he talks about the cross *applied* to the individual sinner: "He saved us ...by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ." So now, in baptism, kindness is linked to the Holy Spirit! Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit. Then, Paul continues: "Insist on these things, so that those believing God (God's Word of kindness) may be devoted to good works" (good works that *flow from kindness*)... "These things are profitable to men." *NOT* profitable for men to justify themselves. Profitable for *other* men, that they may be the recipient of your kindness, of the fruit of the Spirit poured out by the loving kindness of God our Savior, through the Christian as instrument of that kindness.

Poured out by the Spirit... but to be insisted upon by exhortation, for us to be devoted to and exercise. Kindness needs to be practiced, needs to be exercised... because there's a big difference between kindness and politeness. Politeness (according to its original definition, "to appear refined"... the smooth outside to a rough interior) just exercises *outward* niceties – a refined code of conduct able to *show* consideration regardless of what's in the heart. In public, you look the part even if your heart is wicked.

But, as the Spirit produces fruit to flow from the heart, kindness, (not the love of Self, but of the neighbor). Kindness, the fruit of the Spirit, actually *cares* about your neighbor. You don't *need* to think about *yourself* or focus on *selfish* interests – that's Old Adam envy. New Adam has faith that God will provide all you need for both body and soul and reputation, so that you are free to put your energy into loving and speaking well to your neighbor! And so, the fruit of the Spirit that directly combats envy – the tongue's bragging and exalting of *Self* – *that* is directly combatted by kindness – if you will, the tongue's bragging and exalting of *neighbor*.

This needs to be practiced, not only for *the neighbor's* benefit, but for our defense against the envy of Old Adam. How important is it for us to regularly exercise this, to reflect God's kindness? Paul says to the Romans, "Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, *provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*"

That's alarmingly blunt! You have not been redeemed, saved, and set free *unto individualism*, that you might fend for yourself and **envy** as an enemy anyone you believe has done better for himself than you have or who you may use as a pawn to protect and defend your reputation. No, you have been redeemed, saved, and set free unto Christian kindness... to share with one another in word and deed the kindness of God that He has poured out upon you in the

Holy Spirit, that such outpouring of *His* kindness may bear fruit in the outpouring of *Christian* kindness – the taming of the tongue, so that you no longer curse but *bless* your neighbor.

So, what does that *look* like? It doesn't mean we unnaturally gush over our neighbor. It means when we speak, we actually care about *their* reputation, their feelings and heart, how *they* interpret a situation, whether they recognize God at work, loving and providing for and sustaining them through their neighbor. We are interested in their well-being, share in their joy, and encourage them that they are equally children of God, baptized beloved, and – so – worthy of our efforts and the beloved target of our word of kindness.

Thus, we genuinely are kind to our spouse, not just saying to their face what they want to hear, then privately judging what they've done for us lately or whether they've met our standard... but genuinely kind to them as the spouse God Himself has given us. Likewise, we genuinely care for, and do not verbally tear down, our siblings, our parents, our children. And what is true in the family life at home is true in the family life of the Church... looking with kindness upon our fellow Christian. They're not strangers who happen to go to the same church building you do; they're brothers and sisters in Christ! So, we cherish them, speak well of them wherever possible and – when needed (for speaking kindness includes speaking the Law against sin) – not to condemn but to correct, and preserving their reputation as fellow brothers and

sisters in Christ – without envy of sibling rivalry – but with genuine *joy* that they share with us in the love of the Father and with genuine *interest in* and *sacrifice for* their well-being in the family of God.

Likewise, pastors are to look at each member in that family of God as a beloved child of God for whose upbringing in the Faith no expense is spared, but whose training and upbringing is done with words of true kindness; and the church’s “children of all ages” are to look in kindness and speak in kindness to their pastor as their father in the faith, whether he’s been their pastor for two years or 42 years.

In such, there is no room for envy; you’ve suffocated it, and Old Adam gets no victory and no joy. So, New Adam may always rejoice in such training. With a clear conscience in Christ Jesus, we love the law as it instructs, we run to the Sacrament for nourishment and sustenance and strength, and we rejoice in bearing the fruit of the Spirit and, therein, confessing to one another in word and deed the loving kindness of our God.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul  
Calvary Lutheran Church  
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