

## Handling the Truth(?)

For those of you who know your Scripture, it will come as no surprise when I say that God's Word often tends to get misquoted. Granted, it's almost always done with the very best intentions. I can't say that I've ever known anyone to *purposefully and maliciously* misquote God's Word, as if they're going out of their way to war against God. The misquoting has always been done (as near as I can tell) with *very good and heartfelt intentions*. But...the end result is what it is, good intentions or not: the Word of God is made to say/mean something that God Himself never said or intended for us to hear.

Today's Epistle lesson is a prime example. I can't tell you how often I've heard people attempt to offer up comfort to some poor suffering soul by saying something to the effect of, "*God won't give you anything you can't handle.*" I'm sorry, but that's not at all what Paul (or the Holy Spirit) said! What St. Paul said here was that God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability.

Now, that might sound like splitting hairs to some of you. What's the difference? Tomato/to-mah-to, right? "God won't give me anything I can't handle. God won't let me tempted beyond my ability. What's the difference? The meaning is the same!" **No...it's not. It's not even close.** For starters, God doesn't *give* these temptations and struggles and strifes to you. God is **NOT** the author of evil and sin and sorrow. All the things we struggle with in life—sickness, pain, worry, sorrow, grief, death—*are not given by or sent from God*. All these terrible and terrifying things are symptoms of sin. All these faith-rattling, doubt-inducing things result from and arise out of sin. They come from the devil, this fallen and sinful world, and even from within—from our own sinful flesh. BUT...they don't come from God.

However, God does *permit* these struggles and strifes and temptations to engage us and make war with us. He does permit these things to happen. Remember: He is God. He is all-powerful and almighty. There is **NOTHING** outside of His control, including the devil. This is precisely why Paul says that God won't ever allow/permit you to be tempted; that is, to *struggle in spiritual warfare* beyond your ability. (That's what temptation is—spiritual warfare.) God is always in control. Picture God like He's holding the leash on the barking dog that is the devil. The devil can only go as far as God permits, and no further. The devil is allowed to bend you and beat up on you, but he is not allowed to break you. The devil is **not** in control of your faith. If he were, we'd all be lost.

And that brings us to another very important point: *What exactly can you handle?* As I said (and you well-know) this text is so often misquoted, stating [wrongly] that God won't give/allow anything you can't handle. Well...what exactly can you handle? So God only gives you what you can handle? **That's utterly, arrogantly false!** I don't know about you, but I can tell you that God has permitted MANY things in my life that I simply could not and cannot handle. I'm not in control. I'm not in charge. I can't simply "handle" these terrible, terrifying things. They overwhelm me. They crush me under the weight of worry, sorrow, regret, depression, and despair.

And before anyone quotes some garbage you saw on Pinterest or read on Facebook from some self-professed Christian who thinks that the poem "Footsteps" is in Scripture, save it. Don't go spouting off some lame cliché that "*God doesn't give you what you can handle, but only He gives what He can handle.*" That might sound good, but that, too, is **not true.** As I said earlier, God is all-powerful and almighty. *What can't He handle?* That's not very comforting when you think about it (and you and I both know that when you are in a low, miserable place in life, you tend to do a LOT of thinking). "*God only gives (ALLOWS) what He can handle.*" **That's not comfort!** I know God can handle all these temporary pains and sorrows! He's God! He is the Creator of heaven and earth. A little bit of sickness or worry...or even death is not really an issue for Him. I, on the other hand, am drowning here!

And that, right there, is the whole problem when it comes to properly understanding this text. "*I am drowning. I am suffering. I am struggling. My struggles. My sorrows. My abilities. My faith. Me, me, me.*" All the focus is on "Me." Folks: This whole text (all the texts for today, as a matter of fact) is **not** about you, ***but about God!*** The focus in all these texts is on God and His faithfulness, His love, His grace, His mercy...His unconditional desire to save all men from their sin. "*Who is God, but the LORD? Who is a rock, except our God?*" That's what Jesus was teaching in the Gospel lesson parable today. That shrewd and dishonest manager was commended, not because he was so sly and cunning, but because he had faith in his Master's honor and integrity. He knew that his Master would honor the terms that the disgraced manager had drawn up with all those indebted to the Master. The Master would keep His Word. The debts would be forgiven. That's just who the Master was. ***This guy knew his Master.*** That lesson is really all about the Master's goodness and mercy and righteousness.

What do you know to be true of your Lord and Master, my fellow servant? What do you know? What do you believe about God? (Notice: I didn't ask what you know or believe about yourself and your abilities). ***What do you believe about God?*** Think about this in light of the Epistle lesson. Think about this in light of the fact that temptations and struggles and pains and sorrows do daily assail us.

We can't handle them. We can't control them...*not even a little bit*. And your struggles are not unique or new. It's not like NO ONE has ever struggled with a sick or dying loved one or job loss or low checkbook balance or a coup full of bills. You're not the ONLY one to ever know empty cupboards or an empty refrigerator. You're not the ONLY one to ever have disobedient, ungrateful, and/or unfaithful kids. You're not the ONLY one to ever have marital struggles or health problems or loneliness or depression or worry. ***Read the Scriptures!*** ***You're not the only one to ever have a bad day...or even a bad life!*** You're not the only one to ever suffer or struggle. There is NOTHING new under the sun, and no temptation/struggle/strife has overtaken you that is not common to all man.

I want you to think about that for a moment. St. Paul isn't just saying here that these trials, tribulations, and temptations that the Corinthians are having to endure are common to everyone ever borne of Adam. "*Oh that? Everyone goes through that. That's just part of life. That's just part of getting old. Suck it, buttercup!*" That's **NOT** what Paul is saying here. What he does say is that these temptations and spiritual struggles are common *to every man*. ***Folks: That includes Christ Jesus***—full God and full man; full God, begotten from the Father in eternity, and full man, borne of the virgin Mary, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a dirty little wooden manger, only years later to be stripped down to mere cloths and nailed to the foul, blood-soaked wood of the cross. As the writer to the Hebrews states so beautifully, "*We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to His throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*"

Look to this cross. Look at what your God and Lord has ***already*** handled...for you. And—yes—I do use this word very purposefully. Your God and Lord in the flesh as ***thoroughly handled***—and vanquished—all sin for all time. Here is the One who suffered and went through and did all that you cannot do. ***He can relate!*** Here is the One who was tempted, again and again and again...just like you, and yet He remained faithful...***perfectly faithful***. He trusted in His God and Father with a **perfect** trust above all things. He trusted that His Father knew what was best, and was working all things for the good of those who love Him. I confess that I don't always believe this to be true, especially when I'm the one struggling and suffering.

Did Jesus not struggle throughout all this [the crucifix]? He struggled so much that He sweat drops of blood! "*Father, if there is any other way, take this cup of suffering from Me. But...not My will be done, but Thy will be done.*" And it was. Jesus trusted. He had faith in His Father. He went to that cross, not fighting and kicking and screaming, not even arguing or second-guessing. He didn't flee from the cross. He didn't flee from or turn away from the redemptive mission He was sent to fulfill. Not once. Not ever. From conception to Calvary, it was a long,

purposeful, faithful march to do His Father's righteous and holy will; to do that which we cannot do, no matter how hard we try or how good we think we are. It is finished, once and for all!

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ; all of you who have been baptized and adopted into His heavenly household; who are co-heirs with Him of everlasting life and who bear His redemptive Name upon your head and your heart: I know life is tough. We live in a very fallen, fractured, and sinful world. It's been this way since that first terrible day in the Garden, and it only seems to be getting worse every day that goes by. Things are bad everywhere. ***Things close to home are never easy either.*** Sure, we try to put on a happy face when people are around. We smile and nod and falsely assert that "*everything's alright. All is well.*" It's a lie. It's a lie we tell so often and so well that we actually begin to believe it ourselves. And then the bottom absolutely drops out on life. Something tragic happens. All hell breaks loose, revealing the fact that ***all is not well; not even close.*** This is when we turn our eyes to heaven and cry out, "*Why, God?! Why me? Why this? Why now? Why not the other guy? What have I done to deserve this? What can I do to make things better?*"

Folks: The answer is staring you in the face. The answer—God's eternal and unchanging answer—is being held out to you, without fail, without conditions, and without end. Look to and hold fast to your Lord and His faithfulness. Your gracious God and Lord is **ALWAYS** faithful. He keeps His promise. He keeps His Word. His honor and integrity is divine. Trust in Him and His power and ability to save you. ***Trust in what He has already done and continues to do.*** He has already declared, "It is finished," and so it is, once and for all. He has already declared you forgiven, and so you are. He has declared you to be His child and heir, and so you are. Nothing and no one can **EVER** take this away from you. This Gospel Truth is **NEVER** out of reach. It's **NEVER** rendered impotent or null and void. It's **NEVER** beyond your ability. There is **NOTHING** that will ever be so bad that it will cause you to lose your salvation. You may **choose** to give it up. You may let go and turn around and walk away. You may **choose** to stop believing, but your unbelief doesn't make this cruciform fact any less true. It just reveals your arrogant foolishness. No matter how bad things get (or appear to be), your God and Lord keeps His promise. He is with you **ALWAYS**, even to the end of the age. Your God and Lord **WILL ALWAYS** love you, forgive you, and receive you as His own. He **WILL ALWAYS** be right here, just as He is right now, holding out to you His promise of redemption and peace; the promise that is the crucified, resurrected, and victorious Christ. May you ever and always hold fast to this blessed Truth, for this blessed Truth **WILL** ever and always give you the peace of Jesus Christ; the peace that the world does not know and cannot take away; the peace that surpasses all understanding and abides into all eternity.

In Christ's name...AMEN.