

God Provides a Way to Endure

I Corinthians 10:1-13 (NIV)

¹ For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

David Kinnaman is the president and majority owner of Barna Group, a research and resource company that designs and analyzes hundreds of market research projects. In his research, Kinnaman noted specific words and phrases that were most commonly used in describing people generationally. Baby Boomers - people born between the 1940s and the 1960s - described their generation using the words, "World War II and Depression, smarter, honest, work ethic, values and morals." Generation X – people born between the 1960s and the 1980s – used terms like "technology use, work ethic, conservative or traditional, smarter, respectful." Millennials – people born between the 1980s and 2000s – used the phrases "technology use, music and pop culture, liberal or tolerant, smarter, clothes." Now, we could spend a whole lot of time analyzing the difference between these three generations, but did you notice that only one description was used by all three? It was the word, "smarter."

Each generation thinks it is smarter than the previous one. In some respects, the descriptor is true, but if you deem yourself smarter than the previous generation, this may also lead to arrogance, that you don't need to look to the past because you are smarter than they were. This was the problem with the Corinthians Christians, the modern Christian. They thought that they were more spiritually mature than the rest of Christendom, that they really had it all. The Apostle Paul, worried that their arrogance would lead to their downfall, gave them an object lesson from the lives of the believers that had come before them: the Israelites.

The Corinthian Christians, they had baptism, and act from God where a person is washed with water and told that they are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In baptism, God takes you by the hand and saves you through simple water and his holy Word. Baptism causes us to be born again, born anew by the Holy Spirit, forgives us our sins and cleanses us from everything we have ever done wrong and everything we will ever do wrong. Baptism saves us. But the Old Testament believers didn't have this. So, we modern Christians with our baptisms are spiritually better than those who came before us.

But the Old Testament Israelites had spiritual advantages too. Paul says, "I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea." (verse 1) Taking the form of a pillar of cloud, God personally led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and to the Red Sea. The Red Sea, scarily enough, was seemingly a dead end. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place. In front of them was nothing but this sea. Behind them Egypt and Pharaoh's army that was coming to force them back into slavery. For a moment it looks as if their escape was all for naught. But God, as that pillar of cloud, led them out of certain doom. He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites, stacking the water up on each side forming two walls. The Israelites walked on dry land with water on each side of them. God saved them by passing them through water, much like how we modern Christians are saved by baptism. This is why Paul says, "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." (verse 2)

Well, we modern Christians have the Lord's Supper, Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine given and poured out for us for the forgiveness of sins. We have a spiritual food and drink that strengthens us in our faith. This supper builds us up every time that we receive it, causing us to trust in God more and more. We are more mature than those believers in the past because we have the Lord's Supper.

Is that so? Here's another example of how specially blessed the Israelites were. "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink." (verses 3-4) The spiritual food was the miraculously provided manna. Every day God provided food just lying on the ground for them to take and eat. God did this for them for forty years while they were in the desert. The same was true for their water which God provided for them by means of a rock. By God's command, Moses struck the rock and there was enough water for over a million people to drink and be satisfied. God made it clear that the source of the water was his doing. "For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (verse 4)

As far as spiritual advantages are concerned, the modern Christian, you and me, the Corinthian Christian, and the Old Testament believers, all had the grace of God poured out in so many ways. One is not superior to the other. So, if you think that you are standing firm, if you think you are better than those believers in the past and won't make the same mistakes, be careful that you don't fall! (verse 12)

Look at what happened to the Israelites! They became idolaters worshipping other gods, even one in the form of a golden calf while Moses was on top of Mount Sinai receiving commands directly from God! Another time when they were traveling through the desert on their way to the Promised Land, Israelite men hooked up with Moabite women committing acts of sexual immorality. They complained about the manna that they had been receiving and thought that God would not provide water for them as he had already. They complained about their God-given leadership, wanted Moses and Aaron gone, and were preparing to kill them so that they could take charge of the people. Even though the Israelites had so many spiritual advantages and were so blessed, "God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." (verse 5) They died for their sins. The entire generation that was twenty years or older upon leaving Egypt died in the desert. They did not see the Promised Land because they had set their hearts on evil things. They took their blessings for granted. They fell. "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us." (verse 11)

Do we think we are smarter than the previous generation? Are we better than the Israelites that we would not succumb to temptations like they did? Will the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper make us spiritually superior to the Old Testament believers? You know the answer. You know that you have grown impatient with God and sought answers to life elsewhere than with him and his Word. You have committed idolatry by putting other people and other things as a priority in your life over God. You may not have committed the physical act of adultery, but you know the lust in your heart, how your eyes wander and you have to actively force yourself to look away. Even though God has always taken care of you, has blessed you so much, you still have reasons to complain and worry. You have grumbled against the leaders and authorities that God has put over your life: parents, teachers, bosses, government, president. Although we have been so blessed by God, we have still fallen into temptation like the Israelites. "If you think that you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (verse 12)

So, what do we do? We can and do fall into temptation just as easily as the Israelites did. How do we fight from falling from faith? By setting your heart on what God has to say to you about temptations. "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (verse 13) God has given you a promise that he will not put you in a losing situation when it comes to temptation. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. Sometimes we feel like we cannot bear it, that we will not survive. God promises that this will never be reality. No matter how much you struggle with a temptation, no matter how weak or inadequate you feel, God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

He goes a step farther by promising to provide for you a way out in each and every temptation so that you can endure it. He doesn't promise to simply take it away. He knows that temptations are a chance for you to put your faith in action, for you to look to God for that way out, to set your heart on him, to rely on his promise that he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. God is faithful. He made you this promise so that you already know and can be confident of the outcome. God gives you a way to endure any and every temptation.

Look for that way he gives you to endure the temptation. Set your heart on God for help. Pray to him. Continue to pray as you endure, drawing your strength from God, not yourself, because you can fall; God cannot. As Luther once suggested, when you are being tempted, read a psalm, or two or three. Keep reading the Psalms until the temptation passes, until you have endured through it. Confide in a friend or a spouse who you can trust. Let them be someone to help you endure this temptation so that it does not overtake you. Copy this Bible passage down somewhere. It's a post-it note, fridge worthy passage. It's even a tattoo worthy passage – if you are in to that. Keep this promise near to you that God is faithful, that he will not put you in a losing situation when it comes to temptation, but he will and does give you a way to endure it, to stand firm.

And when temptation does overtake you, set your heart on God again. Make use of those great spiritual blessings that God has given you. Drown your sinful nature in the waters of your baptism. Remember that he has claimed you as his own dear child, that he has washed you clean of every transgression. He will lead you through those baptismal waters to the safety of your heavenly destination. Come to the Lord's Table humbled by your sin. Receive that physical food and drink and that spiritual eating and

drinking for the forgiveness of your sins. By his holy meal God will give you the sustenance that brings you closer to him. He will increase your faith by setting your heart back on him through these means of grace.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are not more privileged or more mature than believers who have come before us, but our God is faithful. What he promised believers in the past he continues to make good on for us today. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. When you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can endure it. Look to our faithful God to give that way to endure no matter how strong or how long your temptation lasts. You will overcome because our God is faithful. He will see you through, guide you to your heavenly home saved by your baptismal waters and saved by your spiritual eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper. Amen.

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Pastor Jonathan Klein

pastorklein@lightofthevalley-wels.org