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Misunderstandings

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Misunderstandings

Abstract

"As sinful and selfish people, it's easy for us to misunderstand God's warnings and patience."

Posting about God's judgment and His mercy from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/misunderstandings/>

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Misunderstandings

 inallthings.org/misunderstandings/

September 21, 2017

Ed Starkenburg

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 145:1-8](#)

[Nahum 1:1, 14-2:2](#)

[II Corinthians 13:1-4](#)

It's easy to be misunderstood, but it's never much fun. It's likely that all of us have experienced misunderstanding at some point. In some ways, it seems easier to be misunderstood today than it was in the past. We are hasty with judgments that we make about the actions, views, and ideas of others. In fact, we even make judgments about others based on their silence and failure to act or respond. Many of us seem to believe that a quick and harsh response is a sign of strength, whereas a slow or gentle response is evidence of weakness.

We aren't alone in being misunderstood; God is often misunderstood, too. Two of the passages for today address God's judgment, but—because that judgment doesn't immediately follow—people are lulled into misunderstanding God, deciding He either doesn't mean what He said or He can't/won't do what He said. We get the idea that this strong warning from God ends up as a weak threat.

Nahum's prophecy to Nineveh is severe. God will destroy them (because they are vile) and restore Judah, one of their victims. Remember that Nineveh has heard this threat from God before, through Jonah. At that time, they turned from their sin and God relented. Is God serious this time? Or will the Lord again relent? Is God really as strong as He says He is, or will He respond weakly? Nahum 1:3 says "The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." Will Nineveh misunderstand God's message?

The Apostle Paul speaks to the Corinthian church regarding his third trip and issues this warning: "I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return, I will not spare those who sinned earlier, or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you" (II Corinthians 13: 2-3). Will the church misunderstand God's (and Paul's) patience with them? Will they misinterpret God's patience as weakness and go on sinning as they've done in the past?

As sinful and selfish people, it's easy for us to misunderstand God's warnings and patience. We read and hear what God says, but we like to think that our own disobedience isn't as grievous as that of others. We want God to respond strongly to the defiance of others, but somehow think He'll look at *my* rebellion differently. In reality, we need to understand His patience with us; II Peter 3:9 explains, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance."

The warnings in Nahum and II Corinthians remind us we have to be discerning when it comes to appearances. God teaches us not to look only at appearances, but to look deeper and more carefully. Things are not always the way we understand them to be. Psalm 145:8 states "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love." Many around us consider that type of "slowness" to be a sign of weakness. *Truly strong people know what they want and are able to go out and get it now!* Patience is often seen as weakness. But, that is a serious misunderstanding!

A friend of mine, Greg Steggerda, summarized this well in his recent blog: "Because God is patient, I sometimes forget how much my faithlessness hurts him. And I forget that he won't let me wander forever."¹ *This* is a misunderstanding we need to avoid.

Footnotes

1. Steggerda, Greg (2017). <http://gregsgoinghome.blogspot.com/2017/08/how-long.html> . August 17, 2017. ↩