

Warning to an Overconfident Church Part Two

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1 Cor. 10:1-13

Let's continue in 1 Cor. 10. Last week we saw that Paul is warning the believers at Corinth that they're getting too cocky, deliberately opening their lives to spiritual dangers because they think no problem for them, they are mature enough to handle anything and in a weird way they saw communion as a kind of get out of jail free card - they do whatever they wanted because they took communion. Paul's warning to Corinth was: remember the Jews during the Exodus. They experienced God's supernatural power and still fell under His judgment.

Last week we looked at two spiritual dangers that they are opening themselves to: idolatry and immorality. This morning I want us to look at the third found in verses 9-10:

III. Grumbling

We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. (vv. 9-10)

These could be two points, but there is a common issue of grumbling in both stories. In Numbers 21 the people spoke against God and Moses, accusing them of bringing them into the desert just to die, complaining to Moses that there was "no food and no water and we loathe this worthless food." (vs. 5) God had provided food and water miraculously but they're dissing that provision! It's not good enough for them! They're like the teenager who looks in a refrigerator full of food and complains, "there's nothing to eat." In response to their grumbling, God sent poisonous serpents and many of them died that day.

The second story comes from Numbers 13-14 at a critical time for Israel. Knowing that God had promised to give them the land of Canaan, Moses sent 12 spies into the land to check things out. Ten of them came back saying the land is great but the inhabitants are huge and fierce and if we try to take it, we're going to be killed. Here was their assessment of their ability to take the land: "We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." Only two spies, Caleb and Joshua, saw the land through eyes of faith and said "let's go and take the land for we are well able to overcome it!"

When the people heard these two conflicting reports they believed the faithless report and cried out in despair and once again grumbled that God delivered them out of Egypt just to kill them in Canaan. Their minds envisioned the worst possible future, in spite of God's promises to the contrary, and they began to act on that vision and decided to choose another leader and high tail it back to Egypt.

There's a common theme and attitude: God didn't give them enough, God didn't do them good, God wasn't going to provide, God meant for them to die, God chose the wrong leader for them, and on and on.

Grumbling flows from being convinced that we deserve better than we're getting. We aren't getting something we deserve or we're getting something we don't deserve. It is the language of

the discontented. The word grumbling is a translation of the Greek word *gogguzo*, which means to whisper against, to murmur or mutter. The nature of grumbling isn't usually to manifest itself as an open confrontation but as a below the surface, under the breath, just-loud-enough-to-hear type of complaining.

Don't ever think that grumbling isn't that big a deal. Out of all these sins, idolatry, immorality, and testing the Lord, it was the grumbling - the *gogguzo* - that barred the Jews from entering the promised land. Grumbling is no small issue to God, and it shouldn't be to us either. Let's unpack this sin of grumbling a little more to help us see why it's such a big deal and what we can do to stop.

Grumbling is the overflow of a resentful heart

First of all, we need to remember that grumbling wasn't a one time issue with the Israelites. Grumbling and complaining was really woven into their characters. These two accounts are just examples of the Israelites go-to attitude whenever they encountered something they didn't like. So it's not just that they had a bad day and complained a little and God said, "OK, that's it. You complained once. You'll never enter into the Promised Land now." No, grumbling was always lying just below the surface with the Exodus Jews.

Grumbling isn't a mouth problem, it's a heart problem. Grumbling is the overflow of a resentful heart. Resentment is a complex and multi-layered set of emotions that combines bitterness and irritation and discontentment and rancor and dissatisfaction and acrimony and blame. It's a poisonous stew of attitudes that spills out in destructive and harmful ways. Grumbling is a by-product of a heart that is resentful. Israel resented where God had brought them and the leader He had brought them there with. We see this poisonous stew all around us: that guy that grumbles about management at work? He resents how his supervisors get paid more than he does, or how they treat him, or decisions that they have made, or all three. People can resent authority to the point that if their boss asks them to do the smallest thing it feels like their dignity and personhood has been trampled on. Resentment can also fester in a marriage: The husband who grumbles about his wife resents something she does (or is) or something that she asks him to do (or be) like come home on time for dinner, or be more engaged with the kids, or be more considerate of her feelings, or some other way that she treats him that he feels he doesn't deserve, and he resents her for it. The wife can grow to resent things that her husband does or doesn't do, or just begin to resent the way he is. Grumbling is the overflow of a resentful heart.

Dr. Stephen Stosny makes the observation that resentment isn't an emotion so much as it is a mood. The difference between the two, he writes, is that "emotions occur like waves that rise and fall, usually within a few minutes. Moods are more like a steady current flowing underneath the surface." And then he adds, "moods determine emotions more than emotions influence moods." Moods don't necessarily have a flare up point and they are usually not characterized by high highs or low lows like emotions do. Moods are more of a steady, underlying disposition that affects both our emotions and our outlook on life.

This is why resentful people always find so much to grumble about. It's not really that life is harder for them or they keep getting a bum deal, it's that there is an undercurrent of resentfulness that interprets every new situation and relationship through that filter of resentment and, eventually and inevitably, give them new reasons to be resentful.

Another characteristic of resentment is blame. Resentment blames others for everything. The Israelites blamed God and Moses for getting them into their situation and so they grumbled against God and Moses whenever they encountered a new challenge. A resentful person lives in a place of quiet blame: my life would be better if you hadn't... or, if my boss hadn't fired me for being a poor worker...or, if the popular kids at school didn't make fun of me...or...resentment fixes blame for our problems on someone or something else.

The crossroads of temptation

So how do we combat grumbling and resentment in our lives? In vv. 12-13 Paul boils it all down to the issue of temptation and the choices we make when we are tempted. There is a teaching curriculum called The Healing Journey that pictures temptation as a crossroads of choice where we can either choose to take the pathway of trusting God to provide what we need or the pathway of pride, which is trusting in ourselves to provide what we need. Temptation itself isn't sin. Jesus was tempted and Jesus never sinned. And because Jesus was tempted, he can sympathize and empathize with us when we are tempted.

So at the point of temptation, Paul warns, don't get cocky. Verse 12: Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. That would be to meet temptation head on with pride - thinking that we're strong enough that we don't even have to worry about it. To get cocky about our ability to stand in the face of temptation is to start down the pathway of pride. Instead, he points them to God's trustworthiness, to encourage them at that point of temptation to choose the pathway of trust in God.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (vs. 13)

God is faithful. We can trust Him because He is faithful. He will not let us face more temptation than we are able to handle (though it may feel that way). He will provide a way of escape with that temptation. The way of escape isn't necessarily a way to get out of the temptation, since Paul says that the way of escape enables us to endure the temptation, but God provides us a way to endure and ultimately overcome the temptation.

Turning blame into trust

If you recognize that you are tempted to grumble, the solution isn't just to try and change your vocabulary because grumbling isn't a mouth problem, it's a heart problem. It very well might come from an undercurrent of resentment - maybe directed at one person or maybe directed at a lot of people and situations. Resentment is fueled by blame - you blame that person or that situation for your unhappiness or troubles.

1. We need to recognize that grumbling and resentment never takes us where God wants us

Resentment is destructive to relationships and, like the Israelites, leaves us wandering in the wilderness. Resentment and blame never delivered anyone to the promised land! If you struggle with depression or discouragement or just a moody irritableness, resentment is one possible reason why. Resentment is like an undercurrent of anger and blame that is simmering on a low flame in our heart. So recognize that grumbling and resentment never takes us where God

wants us and be honest with God about it: this is where I'm at, Lord. Jesus was tempted, so he can empathize with your heart struggle but you need to be honest about it.

2. We need to recognize that resentment isn't based on truth or facts alone, but our interpretation of those facts

The Israelites were given two contradicting reports based on the same facts: one report said we can take the land. The other said we will die if we try. Same facts, completely different interpretation. One factored God into the equation, the other crossed God out of the equation. What caused the Israelites to grumble wasn't an objective set of facts, but their interpretation of what those facts meant.

The Israelites saw the challenges in taking the promised land as one big negative and blamed God and Moses for putting them in that place. God and Moses were the problem. They didn't see themselves in the picture at all - didn't see their attitudes, assumptions, or interpretations as a part of the problem at all. Resentment takes us out of the picture, or paints us as victims and blames others as the bad guys.

Here's the sad thing: the resentment that brewed in their hearts caused them to totally misread and misrepresent God's character and intentions. Over and over again they accused God of bringing them out of Egypt so that they would suffer and die in a more horrific way than if they'd been left alone. But God's intentions were to free them from bondage and give them the Promised Land. God meant for it to be an amazing time of trusting God and seeing His hand move on their behalf and they saw it as the worst thing that could have happened to them.

The point is this: we need to recognize that our resentment isn't necessarily based on facts, though facts might be involved, but more so on our interpretation of what those facts mean. Is it the worst thing that ever could have happened or the entrance into the Promised Land that God has hand-picked for us, an amazing time to trust God and see Him do great things? That depends on which path we choose: do we choose the path of trusting God, or the pathway of pride, relying on our own strength and abilities?

The Israelite's whole trajectory in life was changed because of their grumbling. They failed to reach the Promised Land - the good that God had for them - because instead of trusting God, they chose to blame Him. Grumbling and resentment and blame will deliver you to an unhappy place, because it will make you an unhappy person.

3. We need to turn blame into trust

If this is speaking to your heart, if grumbling is a temptation for you, if you live in a mood of resentment and irritability, if you find your heart naturally blaming God or others for things in your life that you don't like, God has a better way for you. Even if resentment and blame and grumbling are deeply engrained in your heart as a lifelong habit.

Years ago someone gave me a picture of a young red-head girl standing with her arms folded and foot tapping impatiently and the caption read, "snap out of it!" When counseling someone, I'd often be tempted to point at that picture and say, that's all you need to do. Well, I know that when we struggle with deep rooted heart patterns like resentment, blame, and grumbling, it's not easy to change. In fact, it's impossible for us to truly change ourselves.

That's why Paul gives this pastoral encouragement in the midst of this warning. He wants to help God's people to live in the goodness of all that God has for them. When we come to the crossroads of temptation: trusting God goes this way, blaming, resentment, and muttering goes that way. We need to choose, but we're not standing at that crossroads alone. Jesus is right there to help us choose to trust him. God has given us a new heart and Jesus is there to help us respond differently than we always did before when we come to temptation crossroads. Jesus not only gives us a new heart, he gives us a new name. In the Bible, names were connected with a person's character and destiny. Jesus changes our names, he changes Jacobs (beguilers) into Israels (prince with God). Maybe our name has been resentful, grumbler. He can change our name to trust-er in God.

With God's help we can turn our blame into trust. We can see the same facts and know that it's inevitable that we overcome because God is faithful. Because Jesus is Lord. Because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. When our hearts are tempted to grumble and resent and blame, we can remember that these are not the only choices available to us. We can choose to trust God and seek to respond to the situation/person out of trust in God rather than blame. God is faithful - that's the truest truth in the universe, and He will be faithful to us.

Temptation always has one goal: to get us off the path of trusting God and to take matters into our own hands, do things our own way, and choose pride rather than trust. So enduring and escaping temptation is all about not taking our own path but choosing to trust God. God is faithful...let that ring in your hearts, but bring it close to home. God is faithful...to you. God is faithful...in your situation. God is faithful...to help you respond differently to that person. God is faithful. Let's pray.