

In C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce, Lewis tells of a fictional bus trip from hell to the door of heaven. One of those on this journey is a woman who began as a grumbler and ended up in hell as a mere grumble. She began by complaining. Then all she did was complain. Then that was all she was. It was her own fault. She had gotten herself to hell by her own decisions, which became habits, which defined and condemned her.

When you grumble, the sin is your own.

Own it, and repent.

I. The Grumbling never ends.

Numbers 16:41-42

Before we enter into a study on grumbling among God's people...

Let us get in our minds clearly just what they are saying against Moses and Aaron.

This is particularly stupid in light of recent events surrounding Moses and Aaron.

They are saying to Moses, who they know represents God, that "it's all your fault."

"All of our sufferings, our sins, and the results of our sins... You are the ones who have caused it all."

The reader can see that this is stupid. Their misery they have brought upon themselves.

They cannot see it, but it is instructive for us.

1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things happened to them as an example... for our instruction."

About grumbling:

1. When we grumble, there are always things we cannot see and do not understand.

John 6:41-44

I get it. We live in a society, a world, where people mistrust authority, sometimes for good reason.

It doesn't matter. Grumbling always reveals our own arrogance.

2. When we grumble, we never see ourselves at fault. It is always someone else's fault.

Here in Numbers 16, think of all that they have done to invite the wrath and judgment of God.

All their problems are their own fault, but they blame it on Moses.

Moses brought us into the wilderness. Moses is too harsh. Moses is too high and mighty.

Moses thinks only he gets to talk to God. Now, Moses has caused all our problems.

3. When we grumble, we are sure we are right, and we make lame excuses for our behavior.

Grumbling leads us into the kingdom of the "Yes, but..."

"Yes, I know what I'm going is not good, but this situation cannot continue."

"Yes, it is wrong to complain, but do you know what these people are doing?"

"Yes, this isn't the best way, but someone has to do something."

Whenever you "Yes, but" you can be sure that your thinking is in error.

You are putting your own sense of right and wrong above the commands of God.

4. When we grumble, we are disobeying God, even if we are correct on the issues. We are wrong.

Proverbs 19:3

1 Peter 4:7-9

Philippians 2:14-15

5. When we grumble, we are ultimately complaining about God. God is in charge of everything.

Is God in control? Do you really believe this? Live like it.

Romans 8:28

1 Timothy 6:6, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

6. When we grumble, we make God angry. Grumbling is the opposite of faith, contentment, thankfulness.

James 5:7-11

1 Thessalonians 5:18

7. When we grumble, we are never on the way to a solution. We are just adding to the problems.

Psalms 106:19-27

8. When we grumble, we are inviting others to participate in our sin against God.

2 Timothy 2:16-17a

9. When we grumble, we hurt ourselves and those we love. We also hurt others...

It was the grumbling of Israel that caused their children to spend 40 years in the wilderness.

10. When we grumble, we teach ourselves to hate good people and open ourselves up to many other sins.

So, they despised Moses and Aaron... leading to disobedience and idolatry.

II. “He took his stand between the dead and the living.” Numbers 16:43-50

Two important things happen in these verses.

First is the judgment of God.

Second is the solution that Moses provides as a mediator.

The judgment of God is a deadly plague. God is again angry.

He is getting sick of these people, so He makes them sick, and they are dying.

I want to pause and ask you to think about where the disobedience of these people has gotten them.

Early on, their grumbling was met instantly by the provision of God. He did not get angry.

God was teaching them, and they were expected to learn. God is their protector, provider, warrior, leader.

This is Exodus 14-18, before they had seen the glory and holiness of God.

This was before they received His commandments and agreed to keep His covenant.

But then they failed to keep His covenant. They disobeyed the Lord.

Then they made that golden calf for themselves in Exodus 32.

Then they failed to learn and kept grumbling about the same things.

Then they grumbled about the leadership of Moses.

Then they refused to trust God and take the promised land where He had led them.

Then they blamed the results of their disobedience on Moses.

Now they are blaming everything on Moses, and God is sick of it.

Think of what the Lord said to Moses in **Numbers 14:11-12**.

Psalms 78:34-42 This about sums it up. So, after repeated disobedience the Lord gets sick of us.

Then He sends judgment to get our attention. We see this in the Bible over and over.

But that is not the end of it. Judgment is not the last word. God provided a mediator.

In this case the mediator is Moses who sends Aaron with an offering of worship.

Aaron takes his stand between the people who are dying and those who are living.

He stands between the dead and the living and stops the plague. This is a picture of God’s mercy.

This is a picture of what Jesus ultimately does for us.

He takes His stand between death and life and if we trust in His offering to God, He protects us from death.

His perfect offering is His life on the cross, atonement in His blood.

God looks upon Jesus and His wrath comes to an end. This is God’s plan to save us.

He does not minimize sin, as if it is not so bad, nor does He remove all of sin’s consequences.

Jesus pays for our sin, honors God, and stands between us and death.

But you must trust in Jesus as your prophet, Savior, leader, and King.

III. Who is God’s chosen leader?

Numbers 17:1-7

In Numbers 17, Jesus is not yet on the scene. God’s people need to learn to trust Him as represented by Moses.

This is where the Lord goes next. He is establishing, again, the leadership of Moses over His people.

Here is the question that the arrangement of Numbers 17 sets before the people: Who is your leader?

Is it one of these household elders?

Or is it Aaron, the head of the priesthood under Moses?

This is still the big question for every person who thinks that they are part of the people of God today.

In fact, this is the most important question for every person alive today.

This is the great question of your life: Who is your leader? Who are you going to follow?

Now I want to tell you how most Americans answer that question. “I will follow me. I am my leader.”

“I am a free person and will follow my own path. I will follow my heart.”

Well, the Lord says that is idolatry and rebellion.

So then many Christians will say rightly, “I will follow Jesus.”

But then because we have not really submitted to the Lord, we live like the world. We do what we want.

You show who is your master, you or Jesus, by how you actually live, by what you say and do.

Who is your leader? Do you read the instructions of Jesus in the Bible and then do what He says?

IV. “Are we to perish completely?”

Numbers 17:8-13

Back to the question in Numbers 17 and the contest of rods assembled before the Lord...

All the rods are dead wood, except for the rod of Aaron, which comes to life.

There is life only in the priesthood under Aaron and Moses in the covenant that the Lord set up at Sinai.

Just as now there is life only in Jesus and under His leadership.

The people of Israel see all of this and, again, realize their sin and how stupid they have been.

They recall all their disobedience and the terrible cost of their actions, and they wonder if they will make it.

Do you see how they now perceive their relationship with God?

In their distress, they make two points to Moses:

1. Our track record has been a disaster. We are all dying.

2. God in His dwelling among us is holy. Are we all going to die?

And, frankly, their question is a good one. Things do not look good for them.

Moreover, the Lord has already told the entire generation of leaders,

everyone above the age of 20 coming out of Egypt, that they will all die in the wilderness.

But in asking this question in this way they show that they still are not listening to the Lord.

He has told them His plan. Their children will take the promised land.

He has given them, this sinful people, a way to approach Him...

with atoning sacrifices offered by the priests of Aaron in His Tabernacle... chapter 18

Sacrifices and a priesthood and a Tabernacle that will all be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has now come to do for us what the Lord temporarily had these things do for His people.

Jesus has come to show us the right way to live in relationship with the Lord.

Not grumbling, sinning, and suffering. Rather, living according to His New Covenant.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Philippians 4:8

Colossians 3:12-17