



Growing into Church Discipline Pt 4: Fornication, Tempting Christ, and Murmuring *Learning from the Old Testament Pt 2, July 30, 2023*

Holy Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (Today's focus: verses 8-10)

Last week, we looked at Paul's opening words in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. The focus of this section is given in two verses:

1 Corinthians 10:6 (KJV) *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

1 Corinthians 10:11 (KJV) *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

Paul warned this church, which he founded and which had so many problems, via the Old Testament: "With many of them God was not well pleased." (v.5) There were (and are) consequences for rebellion. Discipline is one way God maintains His reverence and honor among His people:

- **Leviticus 22:31-33** *Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD. 32 Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you, 33 That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.*

Last week, after discussing the context, we looked at the first two examples Paul listed in 1 Cor 10: Israel being overthrown in the wilderness (Num 13-14) and their rebellion at Mt. Sinai (Ex 32).

Today, we will look at three more examples.

The Incident at Peor (Numbers 25:1-9)

1 Corinthians 10:8 (KJV) *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*

This is a reference to one of the most notorious events in Old Testament history. So much so, that it is referenced again and again:

Joshua said of it while warning God's people:

Joshua 22:17 (KJV) *Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD,*

The Psalmist wrote:

Psalms 106:28-29 (KJV) *They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. 29 Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them.*

Hosea said:

Hosea 9:10 (KJV) *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved.*

Jesus referenced it too, to the church at Pergamum:

Revelation 2:14 (KJV) *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

Historical Context:

Israel is encamped in the plains of a place called Moab...at Shittim (in reference to the trees there). Just recently, the king of Moab (Balak, Num 22:4), who was afraid of Israel because of what they did to the Amorites (Num 22:2), conspired with the elders of Midian to get the pagan prophet (Balaam) to curse Israel.

Although Balaam could not do so directly (read Numbers 22-24), we find out via Moses (and Jesus, see above) what Balaam did. After Israel avenged themselves upon the Midianites, we read:

Numbers 31:15-16 (KJV) *And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? 16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.*

Numbers 25 opens after the plot had been hatched.

Congregational Contempt:

Numbers 25:1-3 (KJV) *And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. 2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. 3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.*

Moabite and Midianite women (v.6) were sent to the camp. Apparently, thousands of men began to fornicate or commit whoredom (a very strong word implying God's feelings on the matter) with them. This led to rampant physical (eating food offered to idols and fornication) and spiritual idolatry (bowing down and worshipping the pagan gods of these women, in this case, Baal, a chief deity among the Moabites).

Of note, the Corinthian church was admonished strongly against both sexual immorality and idolatry (1 Cor 5, 8-9). Why? "Religion in the city was dominated for a time by the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of "love", whose priestess-prostitutes at one time numbered 1000, and whose temple was on the highest mountain peak. Prostitution was a driving force of the city's prosperity. It was so bad, to "Corinthianize" became a way of saying "to practice immorality."¹

God's Discipline:

- God was so angry, He had the leaders of the people HANGED. (v.4)
- Moses had those who bowed before Baal killed (v.5)

¹ <https://calvaryreformationchurch.org/sermons/2014/5/8/an-introduction-to-1-corinthians-10-key-passages-6213>

- Nevertheless, people were still haughty! One of the leaders, Zimri, showed off his Midianite woman (Cozbi). A priest named Phinehas, took a javelin, followed them into their tent, and ran them both through. (vv.6-8, 14-15)
- This ended “the plague” from the LORD that had broken out against the people.
- But not before 23,000 (in one day, 24,000 total) died!

Lessons for the Church

1. Enemies of God plot against His people. Beware!
2. Devilish schemes arrive in different ways, often where our flesh is weakest.
3. Fight against sexual immorality, which often leads to further idolatry, if not outright apostasy. This is common today. Many “Christians” are “deconstructing.” But if you look further, they simply want to feel good about their sexual sin. Remember Solomon?

1 Kings 11:1-8 (KJV) *But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; 2 Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. 7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.*

4. God will not be mocked. He will discipline His people for such behavior.

Tempting “Christ” (Numbers 21:4-9)

1 Corinthians 10:9 (KJV) *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.*

“Tempt” in Greek means to “prove, or test thoroughly.” To attempt to test God imposes one’s will upon the Creator. It is to express extreme dissatisfaction with God’s ways. It is to say, in some sense, that God is wrong. Therefore, it is sin:

Matthew 4:7 (KJV) *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

Hebrews 3:8-12 (KJV) *Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. 11 So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) 12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

Note again that Paul says “Christ” was tempted. This idea that Christ was the one being tempted in this narrative (see also 1 Cor 10:4) speaks to His being “pre-incarnate” in the Old Testament and the triune nature of God.

Historical Context:

Israel was traveling, via the road to the Red Sea, around the land of Edom (where descendants of Esau dwelled, enemies of Israel). It must have really bothered Israel to be reminded of God’s great deliverance against the Egyptians, only to rebel near Canaan and disciplined to spend another 40 years in the wilderness. As a result, they were “much discouraged because of the way.” (Num 21:4)

Congregational Contempt:

Numbers 21:5 (KJV) *And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.*

- Outright rebellion “against God” Himself, and against His delegated authority, Moses.
- More murmuring and complaining...sadly a near constant reality within the camp.
- Contempt for God’s provision of Manna, which began in the wilderness of Sin, AS A RESULT of more murmuring! (Exodus 16:1-17)

Exodus 16:2-4 (KJV) *And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: 3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. 4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.*

God’s Discipline:

Numbers 21:6 (KJV) *And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.*

- This isn’t a metaphor. God punished the complainers with fiery serpents!
- As a result, the people rightly repented. Moses prayed for them. But in order for the plague of serpents to stop, Moses was instructed to make a brass image of the thing that was killing them, put it on a pole, and those bit would look upon the image and be healed. (Num 21:7-9)
- Jesus mentioned this incident:

John 3:14-15 (KJV) *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

- Ironically, Israel had to look upon the thing they feared and the thing that reminded them of their ungratefulness in order to be healed. They had to face their sin and the consequences thereof.

- Thank God that “Jesus made a surety of a better testament!” (Heb 7:22) We look to the one who was lifted up for our sakes! Who took our sins upon Himself! Who became sin for us that we might become truly healed...the righteousness of God in Him! (2 Cor 5:21)

Lessons for the Church

1. Don't tempt (or test) Christ. Be grateful for God's merciful provision and deliverance!
2. Face our sin. Look it right in the face. Then repent.
3. Be vigilant and sober-minded. We too face a serpent. (Gen 3:1; Rev 20:2) He still walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Pet 5:8)

Murmuring (1 Cor 10:10; Numbers 16)

1 Corinthians 10:10 (KJV) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

To murmur is to grumble or complain. Although there are many, many instances of God's people doing so, this case stands out due to the devastating consequences. The *destroyer* is a likely reference to the angel of death. John MacArthur writes on this verse:

***Destroyer.** This incident is recorded in Num 16:3-41. The same angel had slain the firstborn of the Egyptians (Ex 12:23), the 70,000 men because of David's census (2Sa 24:15-16), and the entire Assyrian army that was besieging Jerusalem (2Ch 32:21).*

Historical Context:

This incident isn't far removed from Israel's believing the bad report and being judged to spend 40 years in the wilderness. (Num 13-14) After God gives a few more laws (Num 15), there is still a group of people in the camp dissatisfied with Moses' leadership: Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and others. (Num 16:1)

Congregational Contempt:

Numbers 16:2-3 (KJV) And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: 3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

- Korah and his band essentially challenged Moses and Aaron's leadership of the congregation.
- So a test of God-appointed leadership ensued.
- After Moses prayed, he and Korah (and company) would both take censers, burn incense before the LORD, and God Himself would choose in some manner before the whole congregation.
- Of note, Korah was a Levite! He already had levitical distinction and was already chosen for special and sanctified duty before the LORD. He wanted MORE!

Numbers 16:8-10 (KJV) And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: 9 Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? 10 And he

hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

God's Discipline:

- Korah and his men (250) put intense in their censors and brought them before the LORD. So did Moses and Aaron. They stood before the door of the tabernacle. (Num 16:17-18) Korah made sure everyone in the congregation was there! (v.18)
- God's glory appeared. (v.18)
- The LORD told Moses to move away from the people that He might destroy them all. (v.21)
- Moses and Aaron interceded! (v.22)
- Then the LORD commanded separation from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. (vv.23-24)
- Moses and the elders commanded the people to move away from these men. God's discipline was severe (vv.25-23):

Numbers 16:31-35 (KJV) *And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: **32** And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. **33** They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. **34** And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. **35** And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.*

Lessons for the Church:

1. Do not murmur! Are you getting the sense that our God hates it when we grumble? Again, why?
 - Because it demonstrates a lack of faith and trust.
 - Because it shows we are not satisfied with God.
 - Because *complaining is contagious*...and therefore sows discord in a group. Rather...

Philippians 2:14-15 (KJV) *Do all things without murmurings and disputings: **15** That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;*

2. Honor God's leadership. This isn't to say that we should not challenge unbiblical teachings or rebuke sinful lifestyles in leaders. We should and we must! But if we are going to come against our elders, we better have sound reasons for doing so:

1 Timothy 5:17-20 (KJV) *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. **18** For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. **19** Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. **20** Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*

May the LORD help us learn from these examples of His discipline, unto the glory of Christ and the good of Christ's flock.

Amen.