

You Can and Must Resist Temptation Part 4

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1 Corinthians

By Jess Arnds

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Good morning, Providence Church. Hey, I got up five minutes early. Wow, look at that. All right, that means I've got lots of time to get into some kitchens today, right? So I need you to pray for me. I need you to pray for me because this message today is going to hit, you know it's been just a barrage, a heavy hit like each week for the last three weeks, right? And today we're gonna try to tackle the topics of immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. Immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. And I promise you if you are listening, you won't be unscathed and that's good for us. It's for our good that the Lord puts this in the word and so we need to pray, and my prayer for you this morning and for myself as I preach, is that we would not be coming to this thinking, "Oh, So-and-so needs to hear this. Oh, I wish that person would listen. I wish my wife would pay attention. I wish my husband would pay attention. I wish that person on the other side of the room would pay attention." That is arrogance. That is arrogance. We must submit ourselves under the word of God and that does not come naturally to us but that's one of the reasons why God afflicts us, to test us, to show what's in our heart, and if we are willing to see it and accept it and come to him, then there is forgiveness, there is grace toward the humble. But if we proudly resist his word and we proudly reinterpret it to justify ourselves, there is not grace. There is no grace for the proud, only judgment, only discipline, assuming that you belong to him.

We need a greater sense of fear in the Christian life. This is all throughout the Scripture. This is all throughout the New Testament. A greater sense of fear, to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, Paul says in Philippians 2:12. In 1 Peter, he says to conduct yourselves during the time of your exile, during the time of your stay on earth with fear because we serve an impartial God, a God who judges impartially. We need a greater sense of fear.

I realized this earlier this week, I was irritable because something wasn't going exactly the way that I wanted it to, and so because I didn't understand why it was going the way it was, I felt justified in being irritable. Now I didn't blow up, I didn't cuss anybody out, you know, I didn't do any of that, but I was irritable and I had a dishonoring attitude towards another person. I'll give you one guess who that was, it was my wife. Now I'm sure I'm alone in this, but she hadn't done anything wrong but we were talking, it wasn't going how I wanted it to so I was irritated about it and I had an attitude in my heart of dishonor

toward her. Do you know what God's command for me as a husband is? In 1 Peter 3, it's to honor my wife and if I don't, he will not hear my prayers. I was so proud to think that it was okay for me to be irritated about something that didn't go my way. I was so proud and I did not fear to disobey God, I did not fear to dishonor my wife, and so I was proud. You see, that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. If you don't fear God, you haven't even taken the first step of wisdom and you have no humility and no true love. Man. "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner. Be merciful to me."

We have no idea, you know, we talk about the kindness of God and some of these things don't sound so kind. Do you have any idea how kind God is that you're still here and that he has given you time to repent? That is an extreme act of kindness on God, on God's behalf towards us, that you exist any longer to continue to disobey him and dishonor him and disregard him and serve your lusts and your pleasures. He gives you time. That in itself is extreme kindness to you. This kindness is not expressed in, "Hey, partner, it's okay. You know, we're all sinners." That's not his kindness. His kindness is he's giving you time but it will not be forever, and his kindness was in chastising his only Son so that you would not be condemned forever if you believe. I'm just sharing my heart with you. This is, this study has been a humbling experience for me and I hope it has for you, because God gives grace to the humble.

So with that in mind, please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10. We'll read this and then we'll pray together. 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. He says,

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Now read with me verses 12 through 14.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Let's pray.

Our Lord Jesus, we come to You as the One who walks among Your churches. You are the One who searches the heart and You test the thoughts of men. You know what is there. And so Lord Jesus, we call You, we call upon You for Your glory, for Your will, for Your good pleasure, we ask of You to search our hearts today and make our hearts known to us that we might understand and have a conscience that is informed by Your word so that we can repent of the things that dishonor You and that we would turn to You and bring glory and honor to You, for all things belong to You, everything was made for You, everything comes from You, and we want to acknowledge that with how we live. So Father I pray today that You would bless the preaching of Your word. May the way that it's stated, the way it comes out of my mouth, may You use that by Your Spirit to open blind eyes, to crush the pride of men, to encourage those who are weak, and that we might all together with one voice worship Christ with a united heart and a united body of believers. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, just by way of reminder, the proud Corinthians in this book, the proud Corinthians loved their freedoms and they put themselves in temptation's way by going into idol's temples to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Why? Just because they liked the meat, they liked the social interaction, and in that city of Corinth that was the way that you climbed the ladder in the social whatever you call it, another word for it. That's how you climbed the social ladder in Corinth. So they went there seeking their own desire and they became a stumbling block to the weaker believers and they used their freedoms selfishly and carelessly, rather than being governed by love and fear as they should have been. They were too comfortable with sin and many felt too strong to fall, and perhaps they were even giving into sin in doses, seeing how far they could go before getting into trouble, and still others gave into temptation because they felt they couldn't resist, they couldn't resist such an onslaught and perhaps even blamed the other Christians for leading them into temptation. So Paul, fearing his own disqualification and concerned about their disqualification, calls them to a life of sacrificial love, a life fully devoted to service to Christ, fully, completely, all of their freedoms, their will, their desires should all have been centered on selfless love for Christ which shows up in selfless sacrificial love toward other believers and even toward unbelievers. Your desire is that they would know Christ and walk with him all to the glory of God.

He also called them to fearful self-discipline and both of these themes are common in Scripture. I mentioned them before, Philippians 2, and 1 Peter, I think chapter 1 says to conduct yourself with fear during your stay on earth. Why? Because God's the impartial judge. Our world hates fear. It sees fear as the enemy and often people do manipulate and exploit fear to capitalize on their own selfish gain, but I promise you that I gain nothing from this, and so I'm here to give this to you for your benefit. There are legitimate things to fear, there are legitimate things to fear. You should fear sin. You should fear sin. We talked about this last week. Because of its natural consequences, sin is antisocial, it is self-centered, it is destructive, it leads you and God, part of his wrath, the firstfruits of his wrath it says in Romans 1 is he allows you to have the sin that you desire and it results in

your destruction. You should fear it because of its consequences but also because God actively opposes those who are rebellious.

And Paul feared sin because he knew the examples of the Israelites in the wilderness and he references those examples here in chapter 10, and these examples show us that no one is impervious to temptation, no one is beyond its reach, no one can claim that they can walk in any situation and feel no temptation and never fear temptation. You can't just do whatever you want to do, whenever you want, and expect that it will have no effect on you and that you can never fall. You cannot be careless with temptation.

This also shows us that no one has an excuse for their sin. Those that think they cannot resist temptation, there is no excuse, because though everyone can fall, by God's grace he provides the way of escape so that everyone who takes his way can avoid and resist temptation and endure it. Everyone is in danger of falling but none have to. Let me say that again: everyone is in danger of falling but no one has to fall because God is faithful. God provides the way of escape if you're willing to take it.

This reminds me of James 1 when it says if anyone lacks wisdom, the context of that is trials, right? If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who richly provides it. Well, what kind of wisdom does God provide? I use this often, this illustration often, is that wisdom to know which stock to buy in the stock market? No. Wisdom in the Bible is how to skillfully apply God's righteousness to life. The contrast is between wisdom and foolishness, righteousness and wickedness. Wisdom and righteousness goes together. Foolishness and wickedness goes together. So when you're asking God for wisdom, you're asking him, "Lord, what is the righteous way to handle this situation?" That's his wisdom. When that wisdom conflicts with your own logic and with your own desires, you back off and you go, "Oh no, that's too hard." And James will say, "You will not receive anything from God if you're not willing to apply the wisdom that He richly provides." As Proverbs 1 says, "Wisdom cries loud in the streets. Because you did not turn at My rebuke, I will laugh at you in your calamity." People want the fruit of wisdom without seeking it. They reject wisdom, they reject the diligent hard path that it takes to acquire wisdom, but then they start reaping the thorns and the thistles and then they cry out for wisdom. They want the fruit of wisdom without the work of wisdom and God says, "You're not going to get it. You will reap what you sow."

So anyway, back to 1 Corinthians. Paul says here as we've spoken of before, that the thing that you need to fear the most is not external to you, it is your own cravings and no amount of spiritual experience or spiritual background or your profession of faith, or spiritual accomplishments or association with other believers grants you immunity from the temptation, nor immunity from the punishment that is due temptation, nor immunity from the consequences of sin. These things don't grant you immunity and the reason that you must take heed lest you fall is because of the enemy inside you, the cravings of your heart, and that's why you cannot trust yourself. Your heart craves, it lusts, it longs for, and it desires. Your thoughts dwell on things and they calculate ways to get what you desire, and your will decides and your conscience demands justification for yourself. Do you understand what I'm saying? When you seek your desire, your conscience demands a

justification for that, and so you will either allow your conscience to prick you and drive you to repentance, but that's not the case for most people, instead they reject the glory of God and instead create an idol that justifies their desires, or creates a way to be justified for it. Doing the rosary. Penance. Beating yourself up. Religious rituals and services. Your conscience demands a justification. You will develop a justification for your desires. Think of the Nazis, the Jews were subhuman in their eyes and so their conscience, it relieved their conscience. And what was it that was so bad about the Jews? Well, they were wealthy. They were greedy for their possessions and their desire crafted a view of the world to justify those desires and ultimately ended up in their own destruction.

So you reject the true God that stands in the way of your desires, and you craft one according to your liking, and then you manipulate it to get your desire, and you convince others to join you, giving you some assurance in your solidarity. This is why people gather together and they get together because the more people that agree with them, the more it justifies those desires, and they all get together and have a happy time while they drive the bus off a cliff. You must be suspicious of your own strong desires and your self-justifying thoughts. "For man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." God is the one who knows the heart and he's the one that sees reality correctly and you cannot live by your own desires even for food. You live by the word of God.

And as we said, these cravings carve idols, false gods or even take the true God and shape him and domesticate him into something that you can control and something that you're comfortable with. How do you know that what you're worshipping is an idol or a false God? Well, I mean, the first one is, an easy way to tell is that it doesn't line up with Scripture's description of God. So you're worshipping an idol if you're reading the Scripture and it says something about God and you're like, "Eh, I don't like that. Let's throw that out." Right? "Oh, that doesn't fit with my view of God. My God would never do that. My God would never be angry. My God would never judge anybody." That's an idol, okay? Listen, no human wants a God that's going to judge them for their sins, that holds them to this. I mean, this is one of the reasons why, you know, another reason you believe the Scripture is because no human being would come up with this, you know? If this is the story of the Israelites, okay, they were slaves in Egypt, they constantly complained to the one true living God, they always grumbled against, and God laid their bodies waste in the wilderness. This is not the invention of man. This is what actually happened.

So when your view of God does not line up with Scripture, you are worshipping an idol. When you disobey and explain away God's commands, you have an idol, something that you want, something that you worship, something that you serve above God. When you get angry, you are worshipping an idol, as James talks about. These quarrels and fights among you come from your lusts. You desire. You're a spiritual adulterer, adulteress. Righteous anger is extremely rare but self-righteous anger is not.

You can tell you have an idol when you anxiously try to control things or people around you. What is it that you're trying to gain from that? Rather than trusting God and obeying God, you have to run around and control everybody and control everything. You have an idol.

When you get depressed or hopeless when you don't see a way to gain what you want, you forget that God is in control and he's working all things for your good, so you despair. Why? Because you don't want God's will, you want something else.

You know that you have an idol when you avoid something that you should do, someone that needs to be shown their sin. When you're at work and you're willing to avoid addressing an unethical situation, you have an idol. You want something other than the glory of God.

When you complain, when you run to people for comfort and wisdom and direction but avoid prayer and God's word, you have an idol. And when you're greedy and covetous and believe that you have a right to something and you're unwilling to wait for God's provision, you have an idol.

So anybody need a breath real quick? Be merciful to us, Lord.

So now that's all really kind of, that's getting a little bit more specific, right? Cravings and idols but that's still pretty broad. We're going to start narrowing the focus now and these are a little bit more precision strikes that we're taking on now, and what we're doing is something very ambitious, we're tackling three major categories of sin: immorality, testing God and grumbling. So we're just gonna dive into this and see what we can get through here.

So this first area is immorality. We've been warned about evil cravings and idolatry but now these three areas are the signs, the manifestations of cravings, these evil cravings that we desire. So here it says that we are to not act immorally in verse 8, as some of them did and 23,000 fell in one day. The word here is *porneuo*, it sounds like our word for pornography, right? It refers to immorality and fornication, sexual relations outside of marriage. The Scripture repeatedly condemns this and we need to say this, right, sexual immorality is sexual intimacy of any kind outside the bounds of a man and a woman in marriage at any point before, outside, or after marriage. Teenagers messing around with each other is sexual immorality. This is what this is talking about. And our culture is constantly feeding us all that we want, all that we desire in this realm. With the click of a button you become a connoisseur of sexual immorality, you pick your favorite kind, and it's leading to our destruction as a society. We are not to act immorally and it's a big deal. It's such a big deal that God killed 23,000 Israelites in one day.

Let's turn back to Numbers 25 to get this context. Numbers 25:1, so while Israel, they are still in the wilderness here, this is a long time after the original exodus but they're still in the wilderness, they haven't entered the Promised Land yet and it says this, "While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab."

You know what a harlot is, it's a prostitute. They began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. Who are the Moabites? They were very very distant cousins to the Israelites. They were ungodly idolaters and, first of all, to join themselves with the Moabites was against what God had commanded his people to do. They were not to fellowship, they were not to intermarry.

Okay, verse 2, "For they invited the people," the Moabites did this, "they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor," Baal is their idol, their false God. Peor is a location. "Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. The LORD said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.'" Notice the descriptive word it uses for God's anger, it's fierce anger. Our God is a consuming fire and he is angry with wickedness and here he calls upon the leaders of the people to execute all of the people of Israel that joined with these harlots from Moab.

So verse 5, "So Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.'" This is how evil this is. Who are these men? The leaders of the people, people that they knew. Their neighbors, their camp buddies. They committed this wickedness and God called upon the faithful people in Israel to go and to execute them.

So verse 6, "Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting." So this guy in front of everybody knowing the commands of God, boldly brings a Midianite, one of these women with him in the sight of Moses in front of everybody. It's amazing the boldness that this man has in his sin.

Well, verse 7, "When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000." So Paul says 23,000 died in one day, so 23,000 died that first day and eventually the total number was 24,000 that died from this. 24,000. Do you guys remember 9/11? What was that 3,000 people that died in 9/11? Multiply that times eight. That's how many died because of this.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.'" So we could go on but you see there the intense anger of the Lord towards immorality.

Notice that connection as well between idolatry and immorality. Your heart is always wanting to justify immorality and false religions will make light of immorality and false teachers invent doctrines to do this. It's kind of interesting, do you think that the men of

Israel who did this, do you think they were just so attracted to these idols because, "Wow, I just really wanted to offer sacrifices to this idol." Do you think that's what led them there? You think it was because they were so religious and so devout? No, they wanted sex and so they were willing to commit idolatry in order to get it, even though God had warned them many times and even though God had executed judgment on them many times over the course of their stay in the wilderness. The passions of their flesh were so strong that they ignored all of those warnings.

So what about in the New Testament, how seriously does God take it? That's the Old Testament. How seriously does God take it? Well, first of all, I'll say this: he does not call us to kill one another, okay? I thought I'd put that out there. We're not to kill our brothers and sisters, however, go to 1 Corinthians 5. Okay, remember this is the same book that our passage is in where he is calling them to not commit immorality.

Verse 1. Actually, let's back it up a second. Verse 18 of the previous chapter, chapter 4 Paul says this, "Now some have become arrogant," or puffed up, "as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?" Okay, can I just show you there that a rod is appropriate for the rebellious, and gentleness is appropriate for the humble, for the receptive.

Chapter 5, verse 1, "It is actually reported," Paul's in disbelief right now, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you." He's in disbelief. Can I just step out of this really quick? What kind of a church do you think we are, are we like cream of the crop? Because I'll tell you this, I have dealt with at least five or six situations in three years involving immorality and adultery. We are not immune from this. We are more like the Corinthian church than we are any other church in the New Testament. Can I just tell you this, can we cut that out of the live feed? Folks, this is important. We are often so self-satisfied because we sit under godly preaching from our pastor Ty, because we've made a profession of faith, because we're baptized and we all signed off on this doctrinal statement. This is an urgent matter. This is not just for your information. We need to care for one another. We need to pray for each other because Satan is ravaging the flock. He is ravaging the flock in many ways. And it's not just our church, I mean, this is the evangelical church. We probably are the cream of the crop, which is scary because we are more like the Corinthians than we are the Philippians or the Thessalonians.

So he says, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife." So it's his stepmother and now he's sleeping with her and they're living together.

Verse 2, "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with

you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Now you see that, the desire is not his destruction, the desire is that he would be saved.

Now I need to make another note about our church. Our elders have been so faithful to pursue church discipline such as this when these things come up, and that is something to be thankful for because not every place is willing to do that. We're willing to confront friends and to spend time with them and to call them back, and I will say this as well, some have refused to come back and others have gloriously repented and that's what we aim for, to turn a soul from their sin, to spare them from eternal death.

Okay so he goes on, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one." I don't remember the last time I heard them read that passage on the Fish, you know, the radio station. I might request it. Paul says here in verse 12, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?" Has this made it into your ecclesiology, your understanding of what the church is? "But those who are outside, God judges," so he says in verse 13, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." Why? Because the sin is legitimately destructive and deadly and dangerous, and you are not impervious to temptation. This is to protect the flock and to spare the soul of that sinner, hoping that he will come to repentance. But no one, very very few people come to repentance just because you're nice to them, they must be confronted with their sin.

So in chapter 6, verse 9, he goes on, "do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you." Okay, so we cannot be arrogant. This is not arrogance, this is humility that leads us to this sort of action.

So knowing that, remember last week, what's the only reasonable response to idolatry? It's flee idolatry. Well, here in chapter 6, verse 18 he says, "Flee immorality because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own. You are bought at a price. So glorify God in your body."

Young people, you are growing up in a generation that is the most permissive generation in recent history with regard to sexual issues. Your mind and your conscience need to be

shaped by the word of God and you need a genuine healthy fear of these things, and so you need to put pornography far away from you. It does you no good, it only leads you to destruction. You need to stop messing around with each other and testing the waters. And those of you in here who are involved in immoral things, take heed lest you fall. And those of you who believe that temptations are too strong, God will provide a way of escape because no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man.

Now we could go on, we need to cover other things but I want you to read Revelation 2:12 through 23. I won't read that now but Jesus talks about those who allow immorality and idolatry to remain within the church, he is going to remove that church and remove their lampstand. So this is all the way back in the Pentateuch and the same God, with the same standard, with the same heart toward these things is calling you to the same stuff in Revelation.

Okay, so the second area. So that's immorality. Flee it. Confess it. Forsake it. Number 2 is testing Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10:9 he says, "nor let us try the Lord as some of them did and were destroyed by the serpents." What does this word "to try"? It's to test. It's the same word for "tempt." It is to put God on trial. It's to test the waters. It's to examine. It's to try to see what he's going to do. He's trying to manipulate a response from him. We test God when we deliberately disobey him, testing him to see how much we can get away with, daring him to act in judgment, and when he doesn't immediately punish, we take it as approval rather than realizing that God is giving you a chance to repent. Think of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:9 where they brought in their proceeds and they claimed that it was the whole price for the land that they sold. They didn't have to give it all but they lied about it to make a show and Peter says, "Why have you conspired together to put the Lord to the test? You're testing God by doing what you know you ought not to do. You're seeing how far, how much you can get away with." And what did God do? Well, he killed them. This is how pure and righteous God is and holy.

We also test God when we complain against his plan and question his wisdom and goodness. You see the Israelites do this over and over. God says that, "They were putting Me to the test." What they would do, it's like your kids throwing a temper tantrum. They're trying to produce a response in you. That's what we do when we grumble and complain against the Lord. This is what the Israelites did in the wilderness, they grumbled and complained, "Where's the water? Oh, we should have died in Egypt. Oh, Moses." Then God provides water. Then they're like, "Oh, that worked. Oh, where's all the food and the meat? Oh, you led us out here to die, Moses." Then he provides meat. And then they do it again and again, and finally God goes, "How long am I going to put up with this wicked generation?" And he, they had no excuse at that point to doubt God but they kept pushing him rather than humbly making their request known to him, rather than trusting that he cared for them, they questioned his character and complained and grumbled, and so they put him to the test to see if they could get him to act.

Then a third way that we test the Lord is we try to force his hand through these sort of leaps of faith. You see this where the devil was tempting Jesus in Matthew 4. He says, "Throw yourself off the temple because God's word says, He will give His angels charge

over You, will not allow Your foot to strike against the stone." So Jesus' response to Satan was, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." So when you make a foolish decision and say, "I'm trusting God," you're putting him to the test. Your focus is to obey him. Your focus is to trust him. Your focus is to be faithful to him, not to pursue your desire and then call upon the Lord to, what's the word, not validate but subsidize your foolishness. People do this all the time, "I just feel that God has called me to build a ranch in Alaska because I want to minister to the Inuits out there and I also really like the scenery." Right? So you go trusting God and then you make the church feel bad for not supporting your foolish endeavors. That's putting the Lord to the test.

You see, it turns things upside down because the Lord is the one who tests man. You do not test God. The Lord is the one. He says in Jeremiah 17:9 that, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick; Who can understand it?" Okay, we know that verse. I'll tell you who can understand it, verse 10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." The Lord is the one who tests men. That is his role. It is not your role to test God and when we put God to the test, when we grumble and complain, when we try to force his hand, when we disobey him, we are putting ourselves in the driver's seat to try to test God and we have neglected our rightful place as his subjects.

This comes from Numbers 21:4 through 9, this idea of testing God in the wilderness, and they did it in many different places but let me just read this to you. Numbers 21. Okay, now watch this. The Israelites, they were, this is toward the end of their time in the wilderness and they are beginning to make their way to the eastern side of Israel, they are heading in that direction because they're going to enter the Promised Land across from Jericho. It's actually this way if you're looking at it from the right perspective. That's where they are heading but not quite all of the original generation has died out yet. So as they are moving in that direction in chapter 21, verse 1, it says, "When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negev," which is southern Israel, when he "heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, then he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. So Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, 'If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.' The LORD heard the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites; then they utterly destroyed them and their cities. Thus the name of the place was called Hormah." Okay, so they are heading in that direction, this is kind of one of the few tastes of battle that they get and they have some success and they're thinking, "All right, great, we're good. Let's start heading toward the Promised Land."

But then verse 4 comes and it says, "they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom." So instead of going straight up along the Dead Sea, they had to go around the land of Edom. So first of all, it's a long way and, secondly, where they are coming from is one of the lowest points on earth, right? So along the Dead Sea there is very low in elevation, but to go around Edom, they have to go up this, it's really obvious, these hills, these mountains are much higher on the Edomite side than they are on the Israeli side and it rises really high. I didn't look up how high it is but they have to go uphill probably for the first time in 40 years. They have to go uphill the long

way after they just had some success wiping out this Canaanite kingdom on their way to the Promised Land.

What would you do? What would you say? Okay, your flocks and your herds and your kids and your babies and all the food and the tents and the tabernacle and all the stuff, and now we've got to pack it the long way through this desert mountain around this rocky, uphill hike to get to where we need to go. What would you do? I mean, this wasn't planned. They didn't let them know in advance. "Man, if we could have just a little bit more communication, Moses. It would be really helpful if I knew this was coming in advance and that's why I'm so angry." Right? So look what they say, verse 4, "and the people became impatient because of the journey." They got impatient. Well, of course, understandably, right? Of course they got impatient.

Then it says, this is how they responded, "The people spoke against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.'" And now just as a reminder that God has provided water for them on multiple occasions miraculously, and he provided manna for them every single day for 40 years, it was a miraculous thing that he did in the wilderness. So this food, this miserable food that they loathed is the food that God specifically provided for them every day. They hated it. They despised it. This path didn't make sense to them. It was taking longer than they wanted it to. It was hard. It was hot.

So they spoke against God and Moses. Well, what did God do? He's like, "Do you know what, guys? It's just really understandable what you're going through and I've made an error. You know what, let's turn around. We'll stop at McDonald's and we'll go the short way." Is that what he says? No. He says, "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us. And Moses interceded for the people.'" Now here's one interesting point, Moses, what a guy Moses is, that he constantly intercedes for these people. He constantly goes to the Lord and says, "Lord, can You help because these people that are making my life miserable are dying and will You not have compassion for the sake of Your glory?" He does that many times and God answers him and he gives them the antidote, he says, "Here make a serpent out of copper, put it on a pole, hold it up so that everyone who looks to it in faith will be healed." And so they did.

There's obviously more observations we could make but do you see how their impatience grew from their desire for things to be easy and for things to taste good and to be fun and to go according to what made sense to them? And so they grumbled against Moses and they put the Lord to the test, seeing if they could try and change his mind, I guess, through their complaining. They tested the Lord, they questioned his right to rule over them, to question his wisdom, and they forgot that it is the Lord who is testing them, it was the Lord that was testing them to see whether they would obey him, to see whether their hearts were loyal to him. That's what he was doing in the wilderness, he was testing them in order to humble them.

Psalm 11:4, "The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men." Deuteronomy 8:16 is where he says that he gave them manna every day in order to humble them, for their good.

Do you know that you are being tested by God? How are you responding in this test? What is this test? It's a diagnostic test. What's the diagnosis? What is coming out of you in this test, in this time of trial? Is it bitterness and anger and jealousy and complaining and putting God to the test? Are you humbled? Or are you trying to get away with your sin? Or do you doubt his goodness and wisdom? Do you think you would make a better God is the question? Do you think you would make a better God?

Well, one of the ways as I mentioned that we test God is through grumbling. So this is the third item on our list today: immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. 1 Corinthians 10:10, "nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer." What is this word for grumbling? It's murmuring, griping, groaning, whining, whispering, complaining, especially with the idea of kind of under your hand. Why do you speak like this, why would you talk with your hand over your mouth? It's because you're conspiring. You're obviously saying something that's not going to be accepted. Or in Southern Baptist terms, we're having a conversation.

You know, I think this is probably the one sin that we tolerate and even justify. I mean, we know that we're embarrassed about immorality. We get that to a degree. We even, you know, disobedience to the obvious commands of the Lord, we get that. Stealing, covetous and idolatry, we understand that, but grumbling, I think, is the one that gets us all. The Israelites were masters of what we might call honesty, this grumbling. I mean, isn't that funny? "I'm just being honest." I mean, you're grumbling. "Oh, I'm just being honest." Well, thank you for your honesty and thank you for revealing the state of your heart. Now let's deal with it.

Okay, turn to Exodus 15, okay? This is my last time in the pulpit probably forever, so I'm going to take my time a little bit here. Exodus 15:18. Now I want you to notice this, they had just been saved from the Egyptians, God had just drowned them, right? And so they sang this song on the banks of the Red Sea watching the corpses of the Egyptians wash up on the sea, and they say in verse 18, "'The LORD shall reign forever.' For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea. Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Miriam answered them, 'Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.'" Wonderful time, amazing, they believed God and then verse 22, "Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" Well, that's the first time that

it was really obvious that they grumbled, okay, they complained. So Moses cried out and God provided water for them. He didn't judge them.

If you go down to chapter 16, six weeks later, six weeks later, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" Do you see this? This is more than just saying, "Hey, Moses, we're hungry. Do you have any ideas?" No, they're questioning God's goodness, they're questioning God's motives, and they're saying that it would have been better to stay in Egypt.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.'" That's why he sent manna. Okay so he did that, he provided for them again but he did not destroy them that time. You know, just a quick note, when we grumble we demonstrate a proud, self-centered, entitled, self-righteous heart that is willing to question the goodness, righteousness, provision, plan, timing, process and the people of God to make God and man miserable if you don't get what you want. That's what it is, right? "I'm gonna make you miserable until I get what I want." So you grieve God and you grieve your leaders and you grieve each other.

So after a while of this kind of stuff, God, his patience runs out. Listen to Numbers 14:1-11, "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night." What were they crying about? Well, the 12 spies had just come back from visiting the Promised Land and they said, "Wow, it's a great land flowing with milk and honey but there's giants there." So the people freak out. I mean, I think within a couple of years after they left, I mean, however long it took to get from Egypt to the Promised Land, that's about how long it took for them to get 2 million people to the edge of the Promised Land the easy way, and there they are on the cusp of it and then they grumbled, verse 2, against Moses and Aaron "and the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'"

So then it goes on from there and we'll jump down to verse 26. On the way listen to verse 11, "The LORD said to Moses, 'How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?'" Okay, where does grumbling come from? It comes from unbelief. "Why will these people not believe Me?" This is why they are grumbling, they don't believe God. Your grumbling comes from unbelief. God says, "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a great nation. But Moses said to the LORD, 'Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst.'" So he begs God not to do it.

So God relents to a degree but listen to this in verse 26, "The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men,' your soldiers, "according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey--I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness.'"

You know, they did a lot of things along the way but it was at this point where their unbelief led to their grumbling that God sent all of them back into the wilderness. It was at this point, they committed immorality, they committed idolatry, they grumbled at a couple different points but they get on the edge of the Promised Land, they doubt him leading them to grumble against God, leading them to try to get rid of their leader who led them there, and to appoint a new leader to take them where they wanted to go, and it's that sin of grumbling and unbelief that exacted the most harsh punishment from God, the promise that none of them would enter the Promised Land. Grumbling is perhaps the most contagious sin and we so willingly tolerate it in ourselves. These are not mere words for out of the heart the mouth speaks.

What does this grumbling reveal about you? It reveals that you despise God for allowing difficulty into your life. You despise anyone and anything that stands in the way of your desires and you will let them know about it. You believe you have a right to these things and that you've been unjustly deprived, and rather than humbly casting your cares on God and making your requests known, you grumble, you whisper, you seek a following, an ear with whoever will agree with you, you want likes on Facebook, you crave agreement, and you will continue to hunt for kindred spirits who complain about the same things, and like a hurricane feeding off of hot ocean air, so grumblers feed each other and eventually seek to force their way on God. This is a lack of humility, of love, a lack of self-control, and therefore there is no joy, no peace, no patience, no kindness, no gentleness or goodness. It lacks appropriate fear of God and appropriate trust of him, a lack of faith in him, and it destroys leadership. It burdens congregations. It divides close friends, as the proverb says, the whisperer divides close friends. It's a sign of spiritual adultery and heart idolatry. It splits churches. It destroys your testimony in the workplace. It sinks pastors and it brings dishonor on the very Christ who gave himself up for you all for the sake of your craving and your pleasure, your comfort, your control, your praise, your pride.

Brothers and sisters, let us not grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. And all these things were written as an example to us upon whom the end of the ages has come. We have the opportunity of all of history, we have what has happened to the Israelites, the facts of what happened including a divine interpretation of it recorded for us in the pages of Scripture, and all of that has been funneled down to us so that we could take full advantage of their example and learn from it. And not only that,

not only has the diagnosis been provided, you must allow this to crush your pride, you must allow this to crush your self-righteousness so that God can rebuild you in his image, for his glory, through the work and the person of Christ, so that Christ will be glorified, so that every moment we will walk faithfully, carefully, fearfully, but guided and governed and defined by love, only love, so that we will build one another up in the faith rather than tear one another down for the sake of our pleasures. I just want to keep going.

Folks, there is great hope for the humble. There is great hope for the repentant. There is great hope for those who are willing to see themselves this way. But if you continue to resist the word of God and its definition of who you are and what you do, there's only destruction and judgment begins with the household of God. This is a place for those that want Jesus, for those that know that they have no other hope, that they have no way to avoid the wrath of God other than the merits of Christ on their behalf. And the people that recognize this, who is it that loves much? It's the one who has been forgiven much. And if we accept this, we will be the most loving, the most truthful, the most thankful congregation of people, and we will shine brightly for the sake of Christ. Let's encourage one another in these things for his sake. In Jesus' name.

Father, please help us to accept this hard word of Yours that we might be healed. And Father, we are amazed that we are still here in spite of all that we've done, You've given us time and You've given us Your word and You have given us each other. Help us, Father, to be like Your Son. In His name we pray. Amen.