

“Speaking from the Heart”

Lesson 13: Medicine for Murmuring

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🕊️ *“Do all things without complaining or arguments; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding firmly the word of life.” (Philippians 2:14-16).*

“Set a guard, Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3).

While campaigning in Illinois for election, Abraham Lincoln was challenged by a man making vague, noisy, complaints and offering no proof of his criticism. Lincoln, skilled in handling hecklers, quietly remarked, “My good friend here reminds me of a steamboat that used to run the river when I was a lad. It had a four-foot boiler and a seven-foot whistle. Every time it whistled, it stopped running.” Lincoln’s point was well stated—when people spend their time criticizing and complaining, they are not working! You cannot gripe and work at the same time!

Your current living is 🕊️ leaving a legacy that survives your dying. One man inscribed on his wife’s headstone, “Here lies my wife in earthly mould, who when she lived did nought but scold; Good friends go softly in your walking lest she should wake and rise up talking.”

There is a very real problem in society. This problem is fueled by the murmurers and complainers! Try to 🕊️ calculate the wasted manhours, the cost factors, the expended energy consumed by the evil communication of complaining.

There is always a 🕊️ little group that is upset with practically everything, involved in no good works, and busily sowing discord. These are convinced that “everyone” feels as they do about matters. If all is going in a positive way, these are still upset because they have nothing about which to gripe. Consequently, these will invent negatives. Such are rebuked by Nehemiah, “Nothing like these things that you are saying has been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind” (Nehemiah 6:8).

- Ancient 🕊️ Israel displayed this evil action and devilish attitude (Numbers 14:27-37).

Inspiration cautions Christians to recognize and avoid this devilish temptation. “Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction” (1 Corinthians 10:10-11).

- 🕊️ Christ was confronted with this evil attitude.

“So, then the Jews were complaining about Him because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down out of heaven.’ And they were saying, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’” Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Stop complaining among yourselves’” (John 6:41-43).

- 🕊️ Inspiration issues a strict prohibition for the Church regarding this evil attitude.

“Do all things without complaining or arguments; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding firmly the word of life” (Philippians 2:14-16).

The story is told about a member of the Church who was an entire catalogue of miseries. One day the preacher stopped to visit with her. She began her litany of murmuring: “The neighbor kids are too loud...People at Church never come to visit me...My arthritis is worse...The weather is terrible.” On and on she went with one complaint after the other. Finally, she looked at the preacher and said, “But you know, I have had the worst headache all week but suddenly it is gone.” The preacher sighed and said, “Oh no, your headache didn’t disappear. I have it now.”

🕊️ The Scriptures prohibit murmuring and complaining. The constant commands against murmuring and the tragic narratives in biblical history, cautions us to be very careful to avoid guilt by this sin. God expects His

People to have a positive attitude in daily living. Study through Psalm 78 and observe how it provides a history of God's People complaining and God's reaction to those murmuring.

Describing this Evil Communication

The Scriptures offer a checklist of traits of the devilish murmurer.

☞ *First, the murmurer has allowed pride to control his life.*

- Pride has gained the "upper-hand" over humility, submission and cooperation. Since he is controlled by an all-consuming pride, the murmurer complains when his way is not followed.
- Pride controls the person to look only to his interests. He disregards the concerns of others; he looks condescendingly at views opposite his. When Self's words are not catered to, the murmurer begins a chronic complaining campaign—"I will show you how wrong you were not to do it MY way!"
- Pride's arrogance rules the murmuring Christian's communication.
- Pride refuses to acknowledge his lowly position, his lack of wisdom and practical knowledge of the matters he criticizes. I have never known a PFC who didn't think his ideas were better than a Four-Star's commands. The PFC acts like a "Fool"! The murmuring Christian acts like a "Fool"!

"On the contrary, who are you, you foolish person, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does the potter not have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one object for honorable use, and another for common use?" (Romans 9:20-21).

☞ *Second, the Bible identifies the murmurer.*

The Greek term is translated to communicate in English one who "mutters, murmurs, grumbles, or says anything in a low tone to a select group. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines this as one with a "querulous discontent." Another (A.T. Robinson) defines this action as "secret grumblings."

Thus, the murmurer is the Christian who engages in a secret campaign constantly complaining about an issue or person. This is identified as a "whisperer" in Romans 1:29 and 2 Corinthians 12:20.

The ☞ "whisperer" is from the Greek word ψιθυρισμός (psithurismos) and is translated with negative terms (gossip; slander). It communicates whispering that "quietly" spreads malicious communication; "whispering" that launches "secret attacks on a person's character." Or actions that are disagreeable are whispered about in a negative manner. Interestingly its root is "an onomatopoetic word for the sibilant murmur of a snake charmer."

This use of the tongue is an abomination to God! It destroys unity and harmony. God bluntly says, "DO NOT murmur; DO NOT mutter; DO NOT grumble; DO NOT become a chronic complainer, whisperer or backbiter!"

If God sees this as an abomination and refuses to listen to it, why should God's People do different? Folly says that "We can stop the grumbling by listening." God says DO NOT listen and give legitimacy to the evil!

God's directive regarding those whose communication discourages, destroys and upsets. "(T)here are many rebellious people, empty talkers and deceivers...who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families" (Titus 1:10-11).

☞ The Greek word translated ☞ "silenced" (ἐπιστομίζειν, epistomizein) literally communicates "fastening a muzzle; stopping up the mouth; to gag." Action must be taken to stop and discipline those who are grumbling and complaining!

Be careful to note that disagreement is not envisioned by "murmuring." One might correctly say, "I disagree with you because I feel this is the better way." But when all is decided, the Christian is bound to support and encourage the decision. To do otherwise is to be guilty of the sin or murmuring!

☞ *Third, murmuring is a sin.*

Psalm 78 contains these points explaining why murmuring is a sin.

- 🕊 It focuses attention upon division instead of unity (Psalm 78:17).

The murmurer is not interested in uniting UNLESS his "way" is accepted.

- 🕊 It forgets God and emphasizes Self (Psalm 78:40-41).

The complainer becomes obsessed with how Self is neglected. The complaint is actually saying that Self is not being served. How tragic it is to see members of Christ's Body acting like this because their true characters are described in Scripture:

"For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness" (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

- 🕊 It leads to unrest rather than peace (Psalm 78:21).

Any possibility for peace and harmony are thrown away. The complainer is a dangerous threat to peace with God and harmony among brethren! "These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts" (Jude 16).

Thus, the Christian's murmuring communication is chronic fault-finding, circulating negative thoughts and feelings. This defeats three critical concerns that God has for man's living: it prevents unity; exalts Self; and, banishes peace! It is understandable why God views it as an "abomination."

🕊 "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not...put the Lord to the test...Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer" (1 Corinthians 10:6-10).

Dangers Resulting from Murmuring Speech

It is easy to be drawn into the spirit of the murmurer. The tongue is hard to control. Culture urges us to mutter, gripe, grumble, carp and criticize. Be watchful because these are damnable sins and abominations to our God!

🕊 *There is the danger of discouraging others* so they turn away from God.

"Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each one at the entrance of his tent; and the anger of the Lord became very hot, and Moses was displeased. So, Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have put the burden of all this people on me?" (Numbers 11:10-11).

Christians ought to be the most optimistic people in the world. Their faith in God should cause them to smile in anticipation of receiving God's help in their distress. Their fellowship should strengthen and provoke and comfort one another.

"We urge you, brothers and sisters...encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

"(R)ejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer" (Romans 12:12).

🕊 *There is danger of becoming the one destroying peace and unity* in the congregation.

Have you ever been in a meeting where criticism was the dominant attitude? How beneficial was that? What advantage was there in allowing the murmurer to feel vindicated in his criticisms by giving him attention? Tragically such meetings offer more sympathy to the malicious murmurer than solidity with the Almighty's commands!

Philippians 2 has peace and unity as its theme. Inspiration carefully shows how peace and unity will be disrupted and destroyed by the critic's constant murmuring.

The murmurer's tongue-wagging sows strife, fuels discord and commends ill-will by constantly complaining and talking about things that do not suit them. They are fueled by selfish pride. They have no biblical justification in what they say. They cannot admit they are an "abomination" to God!

"A hot-tempered person stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute" (Proverbs 15:18).

"A perverse person spreads strife, and a slanderer separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him...A heart that devises wicked plans...A false witness who declares lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers" (Proverbs 6:19-20).

☞ *There is the danger because harm is inflicted upon the one murmuring.*

The chronic complainer is never happy. You cannot "make" him happy. You cannot appease his bitterness. His communication sacrifices the joy and harmony he has with others and with God. His pride will never allow him to admit wrong.

"Yet they still continued to sin against Him, to rebel against the Most High in the desert...Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath; and a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also mounted against Israel" (Psalm 78:17,21).

"These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (Jude 16).

The heart that harbors murmuring will suffer far more than those to whom the vicious complaints are directed. Tragically, they CANNOT be happy because they are serving Selfish Pride instead of humbling self and serving God!

Satan's temptations have placed them in a rut. Sadly, many choose NOT to get out of that rut!

Proaction to avoid Ruin by this Evil Speech

- ☞ Guard your tongue!

"(T)he tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell...no one among mankind can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:5,6,8).

- ☞ Develop humility, longsuffering and maturity in relationships—accept the truth that your way is not always the best way!

"(W)e all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to rein in the whole body as well...But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy" (James 3:2,17)

- ☞ Remember you are obligated to live as Christ lived!

"With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way. Does a spring send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, bear olives, or a vine bear figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh. Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom" (James 3:9-13).

"Do all things without complaining or arguments; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14-15).

Medicine for Murmuring

What IF the sin of murmuring has infected the Christian? Can anything be done to remedy the impact of the evil communication? Psalm 78 offers Inspiration's "cure" for those whose "besetting sin" is murmuring. Here is Inspiration's cure for the murmurer...

- ☞ Be aware of your pettiness (Psalm 78:8,17, 41).

Often there are no grounds for grumbling. Many are complaining when they ought to be thankful. Many fail to look at the positives because they are focused on the negative. We do not ignore the negatives but we must not become imbalanced.

When you change from the grumbling lifestyle and turn to a positive lifestyle be prepared for some doubters. A wife had a perpetual practice of nagging her family—for years she murmured and complained verbally and scowled non-verbally. They became accustomed to her whining voice and sour expressions. One day she heard a lecture on "The Face with a smile." She was impressed, reviewed her shortcomings and resolved to change. The next morning, she got up early, put on nice clothes and prepared a good family breakfast. As the family members entered, she greeted them with a beaming smile. Her husband came in, looked and collapsed into a chair. He moaned, "Along with everything else she's gone and developed lockjaw!"

- 🕊 Be thankful and acknowledge God's provisions (Psalm 78:7, 11-17, 72).

Complaining reveals an ugly ungrateful and unthoughtful heart. The complainer seldom acknowledges the good things done on a regular basis; they are blind to the blessings filling each day!

How do you demonstrate your appreciation to others for what they do? Are you more concerned that others demonstrate their appreciation for what YOU do than you are to be verbally thankful for what they did? Murmurers need to get "outside" of their selfishness and look at all the blessings they have! Such enjoy "pity-parties" where they wallow thinking, "I've done soooo much for others and no one ever appreciates me!"

If the murmurer begins looking and thanking others for the acts of service that they perform, then they will soon receive reciprocal thanks. The truism says: "You cannot give away a smile because it is always given back to you!" BUT even if such does not develop, be sure that God in heaven sees your work and He will reward! You are serving God and not Self.

- 🕊 Be active (Psalm 78:70-71).

Complainers are usually uninvolved. They establish their gripes on the fact that "no one asks them" to be involved. It is amazing that once the murmurer becomes involved, all grumbling and murmuring ceases! The busy person does not have time for complaining.

If one begins murmuring and complaining, the very first thing to do is look at their involvement. If they are currently not involved, then dismiss their grumbling! Many enjoy murmuring from a purely speculative position—"Well IF you would do this or that it will be better." How do they know? The grumbler always enjoys unfairly criticizing the congregation by comparing it with another congregation. That is totally unfair!

🕊 So...where are YOU in speech communication?

Murmuring's sin is often unchecked. It is never repented. It is a tool of Satan to destroy the local Church by taking vision off mission—it focuses inwardly not outwardly. 🕊 Murmuring is an abominable sin. It should never be tolerated. Its mouth should "be stopped"—stuff a sock in it! Such a practice is 🕊 sinful because...

- It destroys congregational unity.
- It exalts Self over God.
- It provokes trouble instead of peace.

The Psalmist tells us what sort of communication is pleasing to God. Notice 🕊 how the murmurer can NEVER be pleasing to God!

🕊 "Lord, who may reside in Your tent? Who may settle on Your holy hill? One who walks with integrity, practices righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor do evil to his neighbor...One who does these things will never be shaken" (Psalm 15:1-3,5).

There are 🕊 two personal questions that only YOU can answer...

- Is your disposition such that you can “dwell on God’s holy hill”?
- 🙏 Is it possible that you are blind to your “murmuring”?

An 🙏 unforgettable fact and an unforgiveable speech communication is commanded:

“You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door” (James 5:8-9).

🙏 God’s mercy will overlook murmuring and complaining for only a brief period (Psalm 78:37-38). Let us be aware of this and 🙏 make sure we are committed to speak from the heart words that provoke love and good works! (Philippians 2:12-16).

🙏 “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue...A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who declares lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers” (Proverbs 6:19-20).

“Set a guard, Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).