

I. Introduction

- A. *“Do all things without complaining and disputing.”* Philippians 2:14, NKJV.
- B. Welcome to week 2 of our series called “Bite Me, Tame Your Tongue, Heal Your Heart.” We are talking about sins of the tongue. And last week, I laid out the main idea of this whole series: that your words both reveal and shape your heart. Besides your past experiences and traumas—and beside your time with God through the Word and prayer—the most powerful factor in shaping your psychological state today is your own words. What you say with your mouth shapes your soul, your emotional life, and your sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. What you say with your mouth shapes your soul just as surely as a sculptor shapes a block of marble with a hammer and chisel.
- C. The Bible compares your tongue to a rudder that steers a huge ship. It sets the course. Your tongue does that, your speech patterns.
- D. The Sin of the Tongue du jour is complaining. Today, I would like to talk about complaining. God says to do all things without complaining and disputing. There’s a great case study on this sin of the tongue in the Old Testament.

II. Case Study

- A. Numbers 20:2, *“Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.”*
 - 1. Background: Moses and Aaron are the leaders of the Jews. At this time in history, the Jews were wandering in the wilderness. God delivered them from slavery. God personally led them every day with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. God had proven His faithfulness over and over again to them.
 - 2. Now, it was their turn. They had to prove their faithfulness back to God. So God tested them. He allowed some kind of trial or adversity into their lives to test them.
 - 3. In this case, the test was NO WATER. This wasn’t the first time the Jews were in this situation. In fact, there are at least three stories in their wanderings where the Jews had NO WATER. In each case, God miraculously provided.
 - 4. You might start to think that they would pass the test—that they would believe God loved them enough to provide water.
 - 5. Well, here’s test three, and they fail again. As soon as they run out of water, what happens? They come running to their leaders, and...
- B. Numbers 20:3-5, *“And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: ‘If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.’”*
 - 1. This story was written in Hebrew, and there’s one word I want to point out here. The word “contend” means to fight. It means to complain, to whine, to criticize, to attack—whether that attack is verbal or physical. The Hebrew word is RIB (pronounced reev). The people reeved against Moses.
 - 2. The story is beautiful in a disgusting sort of way. Because we want to dissect a complaining spirit, and see what kind of inner craziness causes it.
 - a) First, you rewrite history.
 - (1) “If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord.” What the heck? Do you mean your brethren died when they complained against God, and they were bitten by poisonous snakes, is that what you want? Or the time when they complained against the Lord and crevasses opened up and they dropped into the pit of the earth? Is that what you’re wishing for? When you indulge your inner whiner, what happens? You redefine God’s blessings as cursings. So that thing you prayed for—Lord, deliver me—becomes the very thing you curse God for: How terrible that you delivered me. If only I had died.
 - b) Second, you redefine God.
 - (1) Why have you brought us here that we should die here? What the heck? If you recall, you were dying as slaves, and I brought you here to set in you a place of blessing, but you wouldn’t go, so now you’re stuck in a wilderness **BY YOUR OWN CHOICE, AND I’M STILL LOVING YOU**. But that doesn’t stop us. No matter how good God is to you, your Inner WHINER, will twist God’s goodness, and make God into an ogre.
 - c) Third, you refuse responsibility.
 - (1) Why have you made us come here? What the heck? Nobody made them come there. It was their choice. And how many times have you made your own choices, and regretted it. You get what you want, and a year later you don’t want it. Your Inner Whiner loves to blame God, blame your parents, blame your spouse, and blame your leaders. When really, at every step, it has been your own choices, and you, by being an idiot, are reaping what you sow, instead of reaping what God sows.
 - 3. This is the spirit of complaint. If the devil has a favorite demon, it’s the demon that inspires complaining among God’s people.
 - 4. And the amazing thing is that not one of these complaints is real. They are not grounded in reality. Every complaint is based on fantasy—you rewrite history, redefine God, and refuse to take responsibility for your own choices.
 - 5. We are talking about sins of the tongue, and specifically, the sin of **COMPLAINING**. God says do all things without complaining and disputing.
 - 6. God gave them a test—their third water test—He wanted them to pass the test, so they could enter the Promised Land. But they didn’t. They went wacko and what happened.

- C. Numbers 20:6, *“So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.”*
1. So this crowd of complainers becomes a mob, and Moses and Aaron figure this would be an excellent time to head to the place of worship, and the place of biblical instruction. They go to the Tabernacle, and pray. It was either that, or be attacked by an angry, really thirsty, mob.
 2. Moses and Aaron seek God—this is a good thing. Because when you seek God, God shows up. The Bible says the glory of the Lord—capital LORD (Yahweh)—appeared to them.
 3. The Jewish teachers, called rabbis, interpreted this as a cloud, maybe with lightning flashes. The glory of God, the presence of God, appeared in a visible way. And you can bet that the complainers shut their yaps for a while!
- D. Numbers 20:7-8, *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’”*
1. Think about this for a moment. This is the third water test. Every time the Jews needed water, God provided.
 2. Imagine if the story went like this: And the Jews wandered in the wilderness, and there was no water, so the people remembered the other time times God miraculously provided water when they couldn’t find any. So they went to Moses and Aaron and said, “Hey guys, as you know we’re out of water. But **NO PROBLEM!** God, who took care of us yesterday, God who promises, Our God who loves us and has supplied every need. God will supply our water. So, hey Moses and Aaron, how about we get together and have a big worship blow out, thanking God for the water He’s going to supply before He even supplies it?”
 3. Wouldn’t that be awesome if that’s how the story went?
 4. What I’m trying to tell you today is that **YOU GET TO WRITE THAT STORY EVERY TIME YOU FACE ADVERSITY.** What have you run out of? Water? Money? Strength? Patience? What deficit do you face? What is your lack?
 5. The point is that **YOUR WORDS WRITE THE END OF THE STORY.**
 6. And if you complain, **GOD WILL MAKE YOU RELIVE THE STORY TILL YOU GET THE ENDING RIGHT.** You have your own personal groundhog day.
 7. That is why a complaining spirit receives more to complain about—if you feel stuck in a loop, **CHANGE YOUR VERBAL RESPONSE.**
 - a) Don’t rewrite history, acknowledge the many ways that God has provided, and loved, and cared, and blessed—you’re richer than you deserve. That’s the truth.
 - b) Don’t revise God’s heart—He loved you yesterday, He loves you today, and He’ll love you tomorrow.
 - c) And don’t refuse responsibility—you made your choices, now own them, and quit blaming people for your troubles.
 8. And I love this: even though the people are being colossal jerks, God tells Moses, go speak to the rock, and it will gush forth with water.
 9. If you were God, what you have done—be honest. You could **NEVER** find a better God than God, even if you were your own God!
- E. Numbers 20:9-10, *“So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’”*
1. Do you recall this being in the script? Is this what God told Moses and Aaron to do?
 2. What’s happening?
 3. What’s happening is that the same bug that bit the people has now bitten Moses.
 4. They complained about him, and now, he’s complaining about them.
 5. It’s contagious.
 6. A complaining spirit is contagious. It’s like a little virus that slithers from person to person to person until a whole group is infected. James 3:6 says the tongue is a spark that starts up a whole forest fire.
 7. Bite your tongue.
 - a) *“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”* 1 Peter 4:9, NKJV.
 - b) *“These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.”* Jude 1:16, NKJV.
 - c) *“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”* James 5:9, NKJV.
 8. So Moses is angry. He lets the people have it. And check this out: **MOSES COULD HAVE WRITTEN A DIFFERENT END TO THE STORY TOO.** He could have said, “Okay, Society of Complainers, remember this: you do not deserve water from God, neither do I. In fact, we have pushed against God so many times that it would be perfectly righteous if He swatted us with His divine fly swatter. But that’s not what God is going to do. God, in His infinite mercy, is going to do what He did before—He is going to give us water from this rock, and we won’t have to dig a well, or break a sweat—He will give us this blessing just like He gives us all His blessings. All we have to do is ask!” And then Moses could have said, O Rock send forth water!
 9. Wouldn’t that have been a cool ending?
 10. But that’s not what happened. Look at what happened:
- F. Numbers 20:11, *“Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.”*
1. Moses struck the rock twice. Is that what God told him to do? No. What did God tell him to do (v. 8)? **SPEAK** to the rock.

2. But Moses strikes the rock twice with his rod. So what's so bad about that? Everything! Moses spoiled the picture that God was painting of His grace! That's what's so bad. God was enacting a living parable. This could have been an enduring picture of God's grace, but Moses smudged it with his own finger-paints.
 - a) *"I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, what happened to our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. God guided all of them by sending a cloud that moved along ahead of them, and He brought them all safely through the waters of the sea on dry ground. As followers of Moses, they were all baptized in the cloud and the sea. And all of them ate the same miraculous food, and all of them drank the same miraculous water. For they all drank from the miraculous rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ."* 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, NLT.
 3. What?
 4. The Bible is the book of God. But God didn't just send down a textbook. When God wanted to reveal Himself, He did so in the stories of His people. He acted in history, and told the story in writing.
 5. I told you that this was the 3rd of three water tests.
 - a) In the first no-water test, God told Moses to strike a rock and the water gushed out.
 - b) In the second no-water test, God told Moses to throw a tree into poisonous waters, and the waters were made pure.
 6. A smitten rock, a tree plunged into the poisonous waters. What's that about?
 7. Those are pictures of Jesus Christ. The Rock Who was struck so we could live. The One Who died on a tree, immersed in the poison of our sins, so we could live.
 8. The mercy of God comes courtesy of the Lord Jesus Christ, because **HE PAID THE PRICE**. He suffered the consequences we deserved. We live because He died. That is what the first two non-water tests teach.
 9. And then the third water test builds a new principle: now that Christ has died, and now that you have drunk from God's waters—whatever you need, **SPEAK TO THE ROCK**. Christ doesn't need to die again. His work is finished. No more sacrifice, no more effort, no more payment, no more blood, no more striking. Just speak. Just ask.
 - a) **EVEN WHEN WE GET THE SYMBOLS WRONG, GOD GETS THE REALITY RIGHT!**
 10. Once you have Jesus, your life is no longer about getting Jesus to pay your price. Now, your life is about **TRUSTING THE PRICE THAT WAS PAID**.
 - a) *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* Mark 11:24, NKJV.
 11. That is the picture God wanted Moses to paint, and that is the picture Moses marred.
 12. And notice how he marred it:
 - a) He complained: "Hear now, you rebels..."
 - b) He took credit: "Must WE bring you water from this rock?"
 - c) He put forth effort: He struck the rock twice. When our work intrudes on God's work, grace is nullified.
 13. **ALL COMPLAINING IS A DENIAL OF GOD'S GRACE IN YOUR LIFE.**
 14. When you complain, you deny grace. You shove God to the sidelines, and you—or your problems—take center stage. And you say that God won't come through.
 - a) **COMPLAINING IS FAITH IN GOD.**
 - (1) No, I didn't say that wrong.
 - b) It is faith in God, but faith in two things about God:
 - (1) Faith in the **IMPOTENCE OF GOD**, plus...
 - (2) Faith in the **NEGLECTFULNESS OF GOD**
 - c) A complaining spirit is definitely a kind of faith; it's just a faith in a god who isn't worthy of faith. **IT IS UNBELIEF. IT IS UNBELIEF, AND THE NEXT VERSE SAYS SO.**
 15. And if God is impotent and neglectful, the next step follows logically.
 16. You think that you have to make happen what only God can make happen.
 - a) So you transgress boundaries.
 - b) And you unleash your bitterness.
 - c) And you speak evil of authorities.
 - d) And you indulge your whining and negativity.
 17. No wonder the Bible says,
 - a) *"Your complaints are not against us, but against the Lord"* Exodus 16:8.
 - (1) **ALL** complaining is ultimately against God and you can complain to your boss, your wife, your husband, your kids, your neighbor, your friends, whoever. Your complaint is ultimately against God Who allowed the no-water situation.
- G. Numbers 20:12, *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"*
1. Ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch.
 2. Forty years of leadership, pressures, miracles, and complaining. And Moses won't get to enter the Promised Land because of one act of unbelief.
 3. Is God unfair?
 4. Only if you've made happiness in this life your god.

5. Moses entered the heavenly Promised Land; and yes, it was disappointing to miss out on this one, but it wasn't fatal to his life with God. He wasn't looking to earthly reward, but to heavenly reward (Heb. 11:26).
 - a) And Grace still triumphed! It was grace that gave the complaining people their water. It was grace that brought Moses to the border of the Promised Land. It was grace that brought him to a top of a mountain to view that land he labored 40 years to get to. It was grace that God spent time with him on that mountain. It was better for Moses to view the Promised Land with God than to enter it with the unbelieving people.
 - (1) Even your losses are blessings in disguise. Believe that, and you'll never whine again.
 - b) And it was grace that in heaven, God piled more treasures on Moses simply because He increased his capacities on earth.
 6. You complain because somebody robbed your happiness, and the irony is the more you complain, the less happy you will be.
 7. You complain because you've lost temporal comforts, and the irony is that God is expanding your capacity for eternal comforts.
- H. Numbers 20:13, *"This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them."*
1. See the word Meribah—the middle 3 letters: R-I-B (reev). Fighting God. They called that water the spring of FIGHTING, because the people reeved the Lord. They fought God.
 2. The last line is unexpected: *And He was hallowed among them.*
 3. What is complaining?
 4. Complaining is you, questioning the integrity of God.
 5. And God will prove His own integrity.
 6. One way or another, you'll learn it—the hard way, or the easy way.
 7. Next week, we will start our fast against negativity. I'm giving you a heads up. Not one complaint. Not one word. And I know, it's your job, and you have to review employees, and all that. I'll explain how to do that.

III. Conclusion

- A. But I have one last thought for you: Jesus died on the cross because you complained against somebody. That sin nailed Jesus to the cross.
- B. Jesus died because you whined, murmured, complained, and criticized. Jesus didn't just die for big sins. He died for sins of the tongue.
- C. And here's the cool thing: He died once for all, and finished the job:
 1. *"Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God."*Romans 6:9, 10, NKJV.
 2. *"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."*Hebrews 9:26, NKJV.
 3. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,"*1 Peter 3:18, NKJV.
- D. There can be no repetition of the death of Christ, so Moses was wrong to strike the rock, and, especially to strike it twice. Whatever has to happen to bring you to God, Jesus did it once for all. Once for all, and the work is complete.
- E. Jesus forgave you. Jesus made it right for God to love you, to bless you, and to adopt you. Jesus, dying on the Cross, legitimized the love of God in the face of the justice of God.
- F. Jesus made it right for God to care for you.
- G. And if you can look at the Cross, and think of what Jesus did for you, and really understand how little you deserve from God, you and I would never complain again.
- H. All our complaining attacks the integrity of God.
- I. All our complaining is ingratitude for the sacrifice of Christ.
- J. AND next time you're tempted to open your mouth, to gripe, whine, criticize, and complain, remember YOU'RE NO PRIZE YOURSELF.
- K. The whole world, could find plenty to complain about you, right?
- L. When you're tempted to complain, remember this:
- M. GOD DIDN'T SAVE YOU BECAUSE HE HAS GOOD TASTE. He saved you because He has a soft spot for losers. What do you have to complain about?
- N. Quit your belly-aching.
- O. Lord, teach us to tame our tongues.