

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Numbers: Lessons From Spiritual Casualties And Conquerors
Part XXVII: Resisting The Lure To Usurp God With Self In Ministry
(Numbers 20:1-13)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

For many years at our Church Annual Meetings held the last Friday evening of each January, the subject of "Pew Cushions" would come up under "Old Business." For years, no one did anything about them, to where the subject became a congregation-wide joke, and we'd typically ask each other before the meeting, "Are we going to talk about anything besides the budget and pew cushion fund this year?"

After our last Annual Meeting when I was talking about this matter with one member, another member who overheard us quipped, "I'd like to talk about seat cushions for the folding chairs in the Fellowship Hall where we have our Annual Meetings!"

We laughed about it, and supposed somebody will likely bring that up in the next Annual Meeting or start a "Seat Cushion" fund!

Though we still laugh about these things as we recall them, for a number of years, our Annual Meetings were a source of frustration, anger and thus fear for many members. In one such meeting, the Moderator actually asked my wife and me to leave the sanctuary where the meeting was being conducted when he sensed things were about to get out of control. My wife and I complied with his directive, and we went to Dan McLarty's classroom located next to the Church Library, and even then we could hear shouting in the sanctuary behind both the closed door to the Fellowship Hall and to the closed door of classroom where we were!

Unedifying frustration and anger -- it can become a snare in serving the Lord, and diminish God's blessing in our ministries.

Accordingly, we ask, "It can be so frustrating to deal with people in the discipling process that I am tempted to lose my self-control and do what is unedifying! What is the solution?!"

Need: "At times I can get so frustrated at others in the discipling process, I lose control and do what is wrong. What is the solution?!"

- I. **When God led Israel to the Wilderness of Zin, Moses' and Aaron's sister Miriam died and was buried at Kadesh, and Israel found no water, and said Moses led them into the desert to die, Num . 20:1-5.**
- II. **These and past events sorely tempted Moses and Aaron to focus on personal issues instead of God's calling and thus to sin as leaders:**
 - A. Moses and Aaron initially rightly sought the Lord (Num. 20:6), and He told them to take the rod that had yielded almonds and was kept in the tabernacle (Num. 20:7-8a, 9; 17:6-10), and to go in the view of the people of Israel to a certain rock and *tell* it to give water, Num. 20:8.
 - B. However, Moses and Aaron then disobeyed the Lord, Num. 20:10-11: they voiced frustration and pride at Israel, saying, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num . 20:10 NIV), and Moses **twice struck** the rock with the rod to get water, Num. 20:11.
 - C. This sin arose from these leaders' focus on **self versus God:**

1. Israel's criticism of Moses' leadership given at the death of his sister left Moses and Aaron tempted to be infuriated at the people.
2. Then, recent events lured Moses and Aaron to view themselves as being so important, being criticized by the people was intolerable:
 - a. God had judged Korah's group and made Aaron's rod produce to support Moses' and Aarons' roles before Israel, Num. 16-17.
 - b. God then countered the Osiris cult behind Korah's rebellion by instituting the Numbers 19 sacrifice to back Moses and Aaron.
3. Also, Moses' shepherding experience in this wilderness (Exodus 2:21-22; 3:1) made him realize water was **possibly naturally** there were he *himself* to break a mineral cap to release a spring there:
 - a. The Wilderness of Zin gets 4" of rain a year at its highest levels. (gordon.edu, John A. Beck, "Why Did Moses Strike Out? The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of Moses' Disqualification in Numbers 20:1-13," West. The. Jour., 65 (2003):135-41)
 - b. Yet, the land has porous limestone layers above impermeable ones, so what rain falls seeps through the upper limestone strata to the impermeable limestone strata and runs laterally along it to come out at the side of a hill or a cliff as a spring, Ibid.
 - c. At times, evaporation of a spring's water flow forms a mineral cap, and water backs up behind it with increased pressure so that, to this day, Bedouins in the area still remove mineral caps to open closed springs, a fact Moses would have known in being familiar with the region since his days as a shepherd there, Ibid.
 - d. The word "rock" in Numbers 20:8 is *selá'*, a "crag, cliff", a side of a cliff or an escarpment where a mineral cap would be found. This contrasts with the word for "rock" (*sur*) God told Moses to strike in Exodus 17:6, and Deuteronomy 8:15 states that Exodus 17:6 event's "rock" was a *sur halamish*, a "rock of flint" with no mineral cap, Ibid.; Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 227, 105 and 276; B. D. B., A Heb. & Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 700-701, 849 & 321.
 - e. Moses in Numbers 20:8 then **possibly** saw God direct him to a mineral cap that held back a natural spring and tell him to **speak** to it so *God's power* might break the cap and unleash the spring! (cf. Bible Knowledge Commentary, O. T., p. 238)
4. Even if no mineral cap with a backed up natural spring were there, the fact that some existed in that area explains why God did **NOT** want Moses to **strike** the rock lest he give the appearance that he and not God had provided the water!
5. God knew the strong temptation Moses faced to strike the rock, so He **emphasized** that Moses *speak* to it: Numbers 20:8a in the Hebrew text has two imperatives followed by a Piel perfect with waw consecutive, putting the **focus** on the Piel perfect we translate as "speak", bible.org/net bible, Num. 20.
6. Yet, yielding to his frustration and pride, Moses disobeyed God, striking the rock with the rod to obtain water, either releasing a natural spring when Moses broke its mineral cap, or God then graciously supplied water in being merciful to Israel! (Num. 20:11)

III. **Tragically (as I saw almonds as a teen harvested by having their branches knocked), not only did Moses' faithless striking the rock with Aaron's rod that budded knock its almonds off, ruining evidence of Moses' and Aaron's divine call, it exalted them and not God, so He kept them from entering Canaan, Num. 20:12-13.**

Application: May we (1) trust in Christ as Savior to be a child of God, John 1:11-12. (2) May we (a) not focus on our frustrations and egos in serving the Lord lest it lead us to usurp the Lord's role, but rather (b) keep focusing on His calling and will (c) for blessing.

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In our recent Annual Meeting of January 27, 2012, I remember sensing that, at one point, we as a body were getting close to a spiritual conflict event. The subject at the time was our Church's cash flow and its related issues,

so I responded by silently praying about it, asking for the Lord's gracious intervention.

Within a few minutes, the discussion had ended, and we were surprisingly headed into the closing prayer that concluded the meeting.

Afterwards as we were all informally milling about in the Fellowship Hall, I was approached by a member, and we got into a discussion on the cash flow issue. In an effort to reflect the Lord's will, and not to be judgmental of anyone, I happened to make the passing remark: "You know, all the problems we discussed tonight about this issue would be solved if we were flush with \$15,000 to \$20,000 cash in the checking account!"

The believer agreed to this statement, and our conversation ended shortly after that.

I later learned from this believer that my statement was used of God to cause him to see a need to improve in an area in his walk with the Lord. By my stating a fact without frustration or annoyance, God made the Annual Meeting issue involved a growth step for him.

In fact, not knowing of the effect of my statement on this other believer, that statement so affected me after the meeting that night when I got home and spoke to my wife about it, gaining her support, I decided to write out a second giving check to the Church for the month of January to put in the offering last Sunday. I felt that if I could tell another member the need of keeping the Church checking account flush with cash, I should at least help toward that solution by giving a second offering check that I knew I could afford to give!

That is what the Lord wants us to do with the frustrations or challenges to our egos that we face while serving Him: He wants us to revere Him and so to do His will, we put His interests ahead of our own personal issues so that He can glorify Himself in and through us.

May we then put aside our pride and frustration and respect the Lord so that we always concentrate on His will in serving Him. That way He can get the glory in every stressful, awkward situation we face in serving the Lord.

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