

Philippians 2:12–18 (NKJV)

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; **13** for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, **15** that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. **17** Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. **18** For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Last week we talked about the many reasons that Paul has given us already to obey Christ. And we are only a little over a **third** of the way through the book. The week before we emphasized how we have a **very powerful reason to keep obeying**. It is because God is working to change our wanter and our doer. So our efforts in sanctification require maximum effort. But it is like that effort is **supercharged** by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Now we arrive at verse 14. This is what it looks like when we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling. And remember, Paul gave that command in the context of a body. He is describing how to carry out life in the body of Christ.

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

He starts with **Do all things**. Note what the assumption is. People are **doing stuff**. They are doing good stuff. They are doing church stuff. They are doing home stuff. They are doing work stuff.

So **while** you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, as you are doing that work, do it **this way**.

Without complaining and disputing.

Have you ever noticed how important definitions are in our study. When we can clearly define a word, we can clearly understand what it is telling us in a sentence. If we use our imaginations to determine what a word means, we will never have clear communication between us. It is only as we all define a word the same that

we can communicate clearly. And it is true of God's communication with us as well.

So what does complaining and disputing mean?

Complaining- Gongusmos What does that sound like? It sounds like a person grumbling. It is one of those words where the word sounds like what it is describing. An onomatopoeia?

Complaining or grumbling is a negative response to something unpleasant, inconvenient, or disappointing arising from the self-centered notion that it is undeserved.

It is used for the **resentful laborers** who grumbled at the land owner for paying them the same as the late comers. Matt 20:11 It was also used for the Pharisees and Scribes **grumbling at Jesus disciples** for eating with sinners. Luke 5:30. Paul uses the word in 1 Cor 10:10 to describe the Israelites in the wilderness who grumbled in the wilderness.

Why do we react badly to many life situations? Is it not usually that we have different expectations and those expectations are not met in our situations. At work I expect that when I am in a hurry my **password program** will work. I can quickly Gongusmos when something that should, in my expectation, take a second and it takes 3 minutes instead. Do I have a right to complain? No. It is stupid. It is irrational. But it is based on life being different than what I expect. Why do we get so easily irritated with others? Is it not based on our expectations of them that differ from their actions? It is difficult to accept that our expectations **might just be too high**. It is easier to believe that the other person's performance is to blame. But it is our **expectations** that cause life events to affect us so deeply and so quickly.

What would happen in our lives if we really trusted God to the degree that we saw even the most minute details in our lives were God's will for us at that moment. Frankly I do not react that way. I must think, in those moments, that God has nothing to do with it. I must assume this software must really have malevolent intent against me. Hence I Gongusmos.

I watched Monica's dad and grandfather putting in a window in Monica and Jeremiah's house and to this day I remember it. Nothing went in the least bit right. And they just accepted it like this is perfectly ok. We just need to try something different. My Gongusmos meter would have been maxing out at that point. But they just took the window back out, made some adjustments, and went about their work.

Mark Twain once said “Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.” And Dennis and Gordon were just that. But in reality they were an inspiration.

I have also watched some of you face life situations where you chose not to grumble and complain. That is so inspiring to me. You show me that this is how it is done in the Christian life.

Now what about disputing.

Disputing is from the word dialogismos. It is the word we get dialogue from. But in the Greek it was more often used for questioning, doubting, or disputing the truth of a matter. Grumbling is more of an emotional response. Disputing is a reasoned response.

It is the kind of thing where we tell God what is wrong with him. Some of Job’s responses would have fallen into this category.

It is also the kind of thing where we build up reasons that we are not going to treat each other with the love we should exhibit. We have our reasons. We have our logic. We have our arguments. And since we believe them, they determine our path. Our **grumbings** tend to **show where we are at**. Our **disputings** tend to **keep us there**. When we grumble at a current circumstance we reveal the shortcomings of our Christian life. When we dispute we show where our lives are likely heading. The things that we believe determine our future action.

What complaint do you have with God? What complaint do you have with the church or with the individuals of the church? That needs to move you to action, either to challenge that which you think is wrong, or to confess your attitude as sin and move on.

MacArthur’s quote is worthy of stating here.

It is extremely challenging and I don’t particularly like what he says but I think he is right.

Every circumstance of life is to be accepted willingly and joyfully, without murmuring, complaint, or disappointment, much less resentment. There is no exception. There should never be either emotional grumbling or intellectual disputing. It is always sinful for believers to complain about anything the Lord calls them to do or about any circumstance which He sovereignly allows. Whether the task is difficult or easy, whether the situation involves a blessing or a trial, negative attitudes are forbidden. As he testifies later in this letter, Paul’s own spiritual growth had led him to enjoy this attitude: “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble

means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Phil. 4:11–12). His example shows that such **righteous behavior is possible.**

I suppose we could stop right there and we would have plenty of application for the week.

OK lets move on in our text. We are given a **what for.** We are to do all things without complaining and disputing. Why? **What for?**

15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

To understand this passage best it is important for us to look at Duet 32 where Paul pulls much of the content of our text this morning.

It is the song of Moses that Moses spoke soon before he died.

Moses starts by giving praise to God.

Then in verse 5 he says this in reference to God’s people:

Deuteronomy 32:5 (NKJV)

5 “They have corrupted themselves; They are not His children, Because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

The Israelites grumbled and complained against God and Moses

In Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3 they complained about having no water, no meat, and no water. Instead of **trustingly** asking Moses to **ask God for help**, they whined and complained and treated God like He did not love them and did not care for them. They say that being back in Egypt would have been preferable to trusting in God. God did not take that lightly. And in the song of Moses he refers to that generation as a perverse and crooked generation.

It is interesting how Paul sets up this text with that as his background.

He tells the Philippians not to complain and dispute. Why? So that they can become exactly the opposite of the Israelites under Moses. So they can get it right. So they can be the **blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.** Moses said that the grumblers and complainers of his day **WERE** a perverse and crooked generation. This is what the Israelites **could have been** and **should have been.** Had they trusted God, had they not resented God and slandered God and fought against God, they **would have been** blameless and harmless children of God. They would not be able to be held to a charge of being complainers.

But the Israelites, who were **supposed to be** the children of God were actually the **crooked and perverse generation**.

But who are the crooked and perverse generation now? Given that Paul continues by saying **among whom you shine as lights in the world**, we may have a clue. The **unfaithful Israelites** are being compared **to the godless world**. At least that is how I understand it.

Paul is saying, do it the way it was **supposed to** have been done. Do it like the Israelites **should have done it**. Those who grumbled and complained were no different than the rest of the godless world. They were living with the same motivations and expectations as the godless tribes around them. Having **proximity with God** and getting to see the miracles and **power of God** made no difference in their lives. At heart they were the same as everyone else.

I think these Philippians, among other things, would have gotten the message that **proximity to** the gospel and the church and the preachers and the power of God will not make the difference in your life if you do not foster **the proper attitude toward God**. It does not matter how good **the church is**. It does not matter how good their **ministers are**. It does not matter how good their **ministries are**. It will not, by proximity, change you.

You must determine individually and as a church to trust the sovereign rule of your Savior. You must trust His character to the place you can accept life circumstances without melting down, and without building a case against God. Certainly, like all things, this is not referring to perfection. But **in substance**, what can people around us expect from us? Will we quickly settle down, confess our failure, and submit gladly to the rule of Christ? Or will we spend **weeks**, or **months**, or **years** casting doubt on God's character and **refusing to rejoice** in the situation He has seen fit in His sovereign love to place us?

The Israelites simply would not trust. And it did not matter how many amazing miracles God did to rescue them, their default position was to maintain the **right to evaluate God**, to **evaluate** what was **fair for God to do**, to evaluate what God **would or wouldn't do** if He really loved them.

Isn't that really at the heart of grumbling and complaining? Is it not that we think we know better than God? That we think we have a right to decide what God **should do** if He **really loves us**? To think we have a right, when we are faced with something we did not expect to somehow **hold court on His decision**? To maybe **accuse Him** that He certainly gave us more than we could have possibly handled? How are we doing in all of this?

Are we grumblers, getting bummed out or angry at situations in our lives. Are we disputers, developing reasons why God cannot be trusted?

We are surely called to **drop all that nonsense**, whether we feel like that is possible for us or not.

OK lets go word for word in verse 15

that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

That you may become First I find it encouraging that Paul is telling the Philippians that they are in the **process of becoming**. Wouldn't it be discouraging if our final judgment would be based **on what we are right now**? Isn't it encouraging that the Lord is giving us time to become that which He has in mind for us. Here is another reason not to give up. He is truly not done with us.

Here is what happens as we adopt a proper view of God and a proper view of our situations. We **become** the people that God commanded the Israelites to become. We **become** the people that actually trust God and give Him praise and thanks in every situation, no matter what temporary pain we may feel. Because we know our Saviors worth. I pray that we are a people who continually are growing in that direction.

Blameless and harmless-

Blameless does not mean perfect. It means living in a way that you could not be legitimately accused of **living** in a **sinful manner**. It does not mean that you never fail and then confess your sin, receive forgiveness, do restitution if it is called for, and move on. It means that things like: no one inside or outside of the church could come to the elders and report you for **living with**, and continually **catering to**, attitudes and actions that are clearly sinful. At least that is my understanding of blameless.

Harmless means **a.** unmixed, pure, as wine, metals.

b. of the mind, without admixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple

There is an element of **purity** and **free from guile**.

Other versions say without reproach. For that to be absolutely true of us definitely requires that we live under the position of justification by Christ where our guilt is totally wiped out. But in **this context** it is talking about behavior.

Here are two verses where the same word is used.

Matthew 10:16 (NKJV)

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Romans 16:19 (NKJV)

19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.

These passages give us the idea that we must not be people who are familiar with evil, nor do we function well in the environment that requires it.

I think of an illustration that might apply. It deeply impressed me. Years ago I saw Mister Rogers being interviewed by Richard Simmons. Fred Rogers is a sincere, deeply caring individual who did wonderful children's programming. Richard Simmons lived in the environment of frivolous conversation and inuendo and very shallow treatment of relationships. Richard Simmons kept trying to drag Fred Rogers into his world, and Fred kept responding with absolute sincerity and honesty and truth. It revealed that Richard Simmons was a shallow fake buffoon. And Fred was just real. I think this is the kind of thing Paul is talking about. Simple, sincere, honest, truthful, a single agenda in their life and conversation. Harmless.

children of God without fault

All of this is headed to the same end. If a person is blameless and harmless he will be a child of God without fault. Again, does that mean that person has no sin? Of course not. If asked, he will admit all kinds of moral flaws in his thoughts and actions. But as to how he lives, he is the **real deal**. He is what he says he is and he lives largely according to his deeply held beliefs and convictions. His surroundings have little bearing on how he behaves. His actions are driven by conviction.

He lives without fault. No one can legitimately accuse him of being any different than he says he is.

in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

We discussed this earlier. These believers live **together** in the midst of a world that is more similar to the first generation of Gods people coming out of Egypt than the church of Christ.

Crooked means crooked, curved, perverse or wicked.

Perverse means to distort, turn aside, to oppose or plot against the saving purposes and plans of God. It also means to turn aside from the right path. To pervert or corrupt.

This was used to describe the generation of Israelites coming out of Egypt. But it is difficult to imagine a culture that these definitions fit better than our own.

I find it very difficult to listen to the news and not be distracted from the **responsibilities** and **mission** I was given for my own life. I lived through the 70's until now, so I am familiar with what wickedness and hedonism looks like. I am familiar with the outcome of moral relativism. The 60s and 70s ushered in the idea of **following your happiness** and don't worry about this **God thing**. But what I see now looks more like sheer madness. People are being urged to **believe**, and eventually will be required **to say** that that which is impossible is completely acceptable and normal. We live in a world that cannot adequately define what kindergartners in my day knew. When asked, who is a boy? Who is a girl? They would usually get it right.

Caleb used to say that this dark trend is **not all bad**. It makes it easier for **the light to be visible**. And that is exactly true. If I could remove the onslaught of evil that appears to be coming unless there is some kind of revival, I would. But if it is coming, it is just one more opportunity to have these very short lives be counted for the glory of God. We live in a crooked and perverse generation and if we will trust the character of God and not complain or dispute, it will be obvious that we are different than the generation we live in the midst of.

On to verse 16

16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Holding fast the word of life.

While the world around us may be clinging to **craziness**, we are holding onto **what God says** for dear life. We have the truth. This is another **difference** from those who think like this life is **all there is**, and those who are **trusting in**, at every turn, the **goodness of God**. We believe what God says over every perception, or sense, or feeling, or situation, or any earthly evidence. We hold fast to the word of life. Because that word is where our lives come from. If we are to live **now for** Christ and we are to live **forever with** Christ, it is going to be a result of the words in our Bible.

We are very weird in that way.

And what will be the result for Paul?

so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

If the Philippians live faithfully in their relationships to each other and Christ, when Paul meets Christ it will be an even better day. He will see the work that he did and he will see that it **actually WORKED**. Woohoo. All the time and effort he poured into the Philippian church resulted in believers who **lived lives** that were

fundamentally different than the **lives they lived previously**. They lived in a way that did not grumble against God. They did not come up with reasons why they should remain resistant to the will of God. But they accepted what God had in store for them in this **short thing called life** believing that God will make **every price worthwhile**.

That is what every true minister of Christ is looking for.

They are looking for the sheep to be healthy and the Head Shepherd be glorified and enriched.

We do not know in this life if this is being accomplished. We have some clues.

We see trends in people. We see some fruit. But it is very hard to know for sure.

But on **THAT day** everything will be clear. We will all see if the **price we paid** actually produced the **fruit** we hoped for.

That is essentially what Paul was hoping for.

So I think what it comes down to this morning is **do we really trust God in our life situations?** Knowing a bunch of stuff is not really the issue. Do we **trust God** when **life happens to us?** Do we really think He knows what He is doing? Is that what springs out at our first reaction, or our second or our third? How long does it take until we orient to the truth that **Christ loves us** and would not allow this to happen to us **if it were not for both our good and His Kingdom's good?**

I think we have many applications for this week. One application might be to **watch our reactions to life's situations**. When we respond by grumbling or complaining, we should start by confessing it as the sin it is. Then ask God to **help us change** to be more glorifying to Him in this dark world of grumblers and complainers. Then look at the **reasons** for our responses. What do we **believe** that is not true? What do we **expect** that God has not given us the right to expect? And then find a scripture we can use to **replace** those lies. Just that will probably keep us constructively busy for the Kingdom this week. But as always, if the Lord has convicted you of something else that He wants you to focus on, have at it.