

Elizabeth Elliott said, “The surest indication of our trust in God is whether we are perpetual complainers or perpetual praisers.” If you can’t say amen you ought to say ouch. We are so ungrateful. I am so ungrateful. Technological advance has brought good and bad. It has certainly made us impatient complainers. 25 years ago, if I wanted to read a new theology book, I had to receive a paper catalog in the mail, call them on a rotary phone, that I had to stand next to, because it had a cord on it! And it took like 20 seconds to dial. And if the number had two zeros you had to wait 25 seconds because the dial would have to go all the way around. Now I just say “Siri, call crossway books.” Actually, I don’t even do that. I click one button on a little super computer that fits in my pocket and I can have immediate digital access or have the hardcover land on my door steps in two days. And if shipping is not free, I am belly-aching. Are we perpetual grumblers or perpetual praisers?

**Phil 2:14-18** (922 – This is . . .) - Main point: Shine like stars in the midst of a grumbling and ungrateful world. Two points: don’t be a grumbler 2) so that you will stand out.

**I. Do Not Be a Grumbler – 14.** – This verse is a concrete application of v. **12**. And what an interesting first application of working out our salvation! We probably wouldn’t put complaining. What would we put at the top? Stop committing sexual immorality, stop committing idolatry. Paul says no grumbling. Grumbling refers to an utterance made in a low tone of voice. It comes from a frustrated and ungrateful heart. Out of the hard heart, the mouth grumbles. No grumbling and no disputing or arguing. This word for disputing refers to the futile thinking of fallen humanity (Matt 15:19 Mark 7:21, 1 Cor 3:20). It is used in Rom 1:21 when Paul says the fallen world has become futile in its thinking.

This command is super broad in scope. Is this not an incredibly difficult passage? Kind of like **2:3**. Do *all things* without grumbling or disputing. No qualifications. It is improper for the people of God. / This word alludes back to the people of Israel and their wandering in the wilderness. **Exod 16:2-3, 8, 17:1-3, Num 11:1, 14:2-3, 27**. The Jewish documents Sirach and Psalms of Solomon described grumbling as living life in opposition to God (Sir 10:25, 46:7, Ps of Sol5:15, 16:11)

Paul uses Israel as a counter-example. Don’t be like them. They are a negative example. Paul does this in other places. In fact, the only other time he uses this word group he is also talking about Israel in the wilderness - **1 Cor 10:1-13**. The Israelites complained during their journey from slavery to the promised land, so we find ourselves on a similar journey. We have been freed from slavery to Satan, sin and death but we have not yet arrived to the promise land. We are still sojourners and aliens. This is not our home. Our citizenship is not here but in heaven – 3:20.

The temptation is to get frustrated with all the hardship of this life. Don’t be like stiff-necked Israel! Don’t doubt God’s leadership and purposes, even when you don’t see them.

No grumbling. Why is grumbling unfitting for the Christian? For so many reasons! Because God created us. He didn’t have to. We only deserve judgment, but there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us. He saves us by grace through faith. We don’t have to try and work our way to glory. We don’t have to ascend; he has descended. And he promises to be with us on the journey, and even uses the hard stuff to make us more like Christ. Every good gift is from him. We have no reason to complain. The tomb is empty, our sins are forgiven, the future is bright, death is gain. The Puritan Thomas Watson said, “Our murmuring is the devil’s music . . . Better to be mute than to murmur.”

So let’s heed this command – for our good and God’s glory. Let’s crucify complaining. Let me tell you how I fight against my grumbling heart. I have given Alicia a code word: JOGH. When I tend to have an Eeyore

outlook, I need to take a JOGH. I don't go anywhere. I just preach to myself. I renew my mind. I have every reason for joy, for optimism, for gratitude, and for humility.

What is grumbling, really? Is it not saying, "God doesn't know how to run this world?" To grumble is at root always grumbling against God. It is saying you think you can do a better job. We forget whose world this is and who we are in it. Why else should we not grumble or argue. Paul tells us why with a purpose clause:

**II. So you can stand out – 15** - Verses 14-16 is one sentence. No grumbling so that we will become a certain kind of people. Certain kinds of people grumble and argue. Or we could say certain kinds of hearts overflow with it. Certain kinds of people take JOGHs. Christians should be the latter. The church should be starkly different from the world.

Sadly, this has not always been the case. Sometimes rather than shining, we blend in. Nietzsche once said, "Better songs they would have to sing to make me believe in their Redeemer: more redeemed would his disciples have to appear." Rather than being blameless, there has been blemish. The Spirit says, do all things without grumbling so that you will be blameless and innocent. **1:9-11** (Col 1:21-22, Rom 16:19).

There are lots of allusions and echoes of the OT in these verses. Paul weaves our story with Israel's story. This word for blameless (*amomos*) and "crooked and twisted generation" comes from Deut 32<sup>1</sup>. Remember when the NT quotes or alludes to the OT, it usually has more than just one verse in view. Deut 32 is the song of Moses against Israel for the golden calf incident **Deut 31:16-22, 31:28-32:6**. This is so striking. In Deut, the people of OC Israel are no longer God's children, they are blemished, they are a crooked and twisted generation. In Philippians, the church is to be the children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Paul uses language about Israel to refer to the world of Phillipi. Sadly, the OC people of God became like the world. They were not a light to the nations, they were like the nations. That is always a danger for the church. Often in the name of reaching the world, we fall in.<sup>2</sup> / When Peter is preaching at Pentecost, he says save yourselves from this crooked generation (Acts 2:40, Matt 17:17).

The NC Community is to shine like stars. We are to stand out, be a light in a dark place. What did Jesus say in the SOTM? Matt 5:13-16: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." We are to be distinct from the world. If you don't complain and argue, you will stand out! Again, the Spirit uses the language of Israel's calling. Paul re-narrates us into the big story of Scripture. OC Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. Isa 49:6 "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (42:6).

Do all things without grumbling so that you will stand out and so that you'll be children of God. In Deut 32, OC Israel are no longer God's children due to their corruption but the church is to shine as children. All because of the grace of the NC. 1 John 3:1: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

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<sup>1</sup> Prov 4:27 6:14 8:13 10:9 11:20 Out of step with God's way.

<sup>2</sup> So also Ps 2 pagan nations are now Israel in Acts 4:25-26.

“Shine like stars” also has OT background. This comes from Dan 12:3, the end of the book and the point of this last section of Daniel (10:1f) is to give them understanding (10:14). There will be tribulation, but believers will be delivered. They will be raised! Others judged. 12:2-3: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” The wise and understanding will shine. Paul says we are already experiencing what Daniel promised. By refusing to grumble like the Israelites did, the new Israel shows itself to be what Israel should have been. Without blemish, children of God, shining like stars.

**16** Hold fast to the Word. And this is the Word *of life*. This word gives life. Peter told Jesus “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” At the end of that song of Moses in Deut 32, we read: **44-47**. / Here is a further description of what it means to shine. We must hold firm. Not blown about by every wind of new teaching. Holding firm. Every generation there are certain truths that are very unpopular. We must hold firm. Luther put it this way: “If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle-field besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.”

The church is distinct from the world. In our day, we think about pride differently, we do believe in final judgment, the wrath of God, sin, sexual ethics, etc etc. David Wells says worldliness makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange. The church is the opposite. Sin is strange and righteousness is normal. It is by holding fast to the word that we will shine like stars in this fallen world. We keep the dividing line high, which marks us out as distinct. We don’t water it down. People who not interested in Christianity are surely not interested in “almost Christianity.”

Paul has a worry here that his labor might be in vain. **1 Cor 9:24-27** (Gal 4:11, 1 Thess 3:5). / This phrase “labor in vain” comes from Isa 49:4 that is the vision of the Servant who will restore Israel and be a light to the nations (or 65:23). Paul wants to boast, but this boasting is not a look at what we have done, but a look at what God has done.

**17-18** – Paul may be martyred. He uses the image of a drink offering.<sup>3</sup> The symbolism of the drink offering was the complete dedication of something to the Lord. Liquid is poured out and can’t be bottled back up. This is a transformation of OC categories. Yet more echoes. Paul being killed by the Romans is now a drink offering.

The faith of believers is envisioned as a sacrificial offering.<sup>4</sup> This word for offering is the word *leitourgia*, from which we get liturgy – the work of the people. *Leitourgia* was the word used for what the priest did in offering the sacrifice in the temple. They were special cultic words, but in the new covenant, these terms are now used to refer to all of life. Worship is all of life.

This word previously used for priestly religious service in the temple is also used to refer to the meeting of the needs of other Christians. 2 Corinthians 9:12 “For the ministry of this service (*leitourgias*) is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God.” Romans 15:27 “Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister (*leitourgēsai*) to Jews in material needs.” Worship is our calling every day, all the

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim 4:6 only other occurrence. See Exod 29:38-42, Num 28:1-8.

<sup>4</sup> The Philippians are the sacrifice and the priest.

time. **Rom 12:1-2** contains 6 priestly temple words: offer, sacrifice, holy, accept, spiritual, service. The holy place is the market place. The sanctuary has been secularized.

Worship is not just one hour on a Sunday morning. Worship is all of life. D.A. Carson defines worship as “the consistent offering of all of one’s life and time and energy and body and resources to God; it is profound God-centeredness. There is a sense in which true Christians should never *not* be worshipping. . . . Such a view of worship is not designed to depreciate what we do corporately on Sunday morning. It is designed, rather, to ensure that all of life is lived in faithful and delighted obedience to the gospel of God, with the result that what we do corporately when we come together on Sunday morning, or any other time, is the overflow of our experience of God and a place to be refreshed in the joy of the Lord as we think through his Word, express our praise and thanksgiving, and deepen our links of love with him and with one another. But the point to recognize is that under the terms of the new covenant, worship is bound up with all of life.”<sup>5</sup>

But even. Even if he is martyred. Reminds me of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: our God is able to deliver, but but even if he doesn’t, we will finish well. Literally it is “I rejoice and rejoice with you all. And you should rejoice and rejoice with me. He says the word “rejoice” 4 times. He can rejoice because he has lived life well. Calvin said, “This is to teach the gospel from the heart – when we are prepared to confirm with our own blood what we teach.” **1:21-23.**

In later centuries, Christian martyrs would take up this language. 75 years after Paul’s martyrdom, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in Syria) was to be executed for his faith. On his way to Rome, he wrote, “Grant me nothing more than to be poured out as an offering to God while there is still an altar ready, so that in love you may form a chorus and sing to the Father in Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> Our joy is grounded in the sure sufficiency of the work of Christ. This present evil age does not have the last word. Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ is reigning. Rejoice. Sacrifice and joy go together. “Rejoice in the Lord now and always, Tell of the good He has done, Worship the Lord to remember, All of the joy yet to come, The hope that burns within us, The dark cannot destroy, With praise that’s never ending, We say again rejoice, Is your life a sacrificial offering to God?” / Shine like stars in the midst of a grumbling and ungrateful world.

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<sup>5</sup> Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 77, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ign, *Rom 2.2*