

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 7 – Philippians 2:12-18)”

Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-1: *“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.”*

This text talks about how we should live as followers of Jesus – because how we live affects both our unity in the church and our influence on this dark world. This passage teaches us that **God’s people should stand out** like shining stars against the backdrop of the blackness of outer space. We shouldn’t stand out because we want to draw attention to ourselves, but because God lives in us, and God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. But this world, meaning *that which is opposite to God* is total darkness. It’s crooked, depraved, perverted, warped and twisted. We must never let this dark world squeeze us into its mold, because we are God’s different, holy saints. This passage also teaches us that **God’s people should act like we’re saved**. That’s what the Apostle Paul means when he writes at the end of Philippians 2:12, *“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”* We certainly know that he is *not* saying that *we are saved by works*—absolutely not. But what he is saying is, *it’s time to work out what God has worked in us*. Salvation is completely and entirely of God, but what God offers a person must receive.

If Christians are going to *stand out* and *be different* and *act like God’s people who are saved*, then we need to obey the two commands given in Philippians 2:14: 1) Do all things without complaining, and 2) Do all things without disputing. So, let’s take seriously the Scriptural command to **do all things without complaining or murmuring**. We complain, grumble and murmur: a) when we’re discontent (when we’re not happy about something); b) to express dissatisfaction (something is lacking or missing from our lives that we think we need); c) to signify pain (our hearts go out to those in pain, but when we’re in pain we need to be careful *not to complain*). Someone described a *grumbler/complainer* like this: *“You’re satisfied by nothing that befalls you; you complain at everything. You don’t want what you’ve got, you long for what you haven’t got. In winter you wish it were summer, and in summer that it were winter.”* The Israelites grumbled against God and His leaders, and so have His people throughout the ages. But we’re supposed to be different; Christians are supposed to live out our faith by *doing all things without complaining or murmuring*. We also need to take seriously the Scriptural command to **do all things without disputing or arguing**. *Disputing* takes place when our *complaining* moves from our heart to our heads and then vomits out of our mouths. There’s also an aspect to this word translated *disputing* or *arguing* that may also include *questioning God*. We can be honest with

God, but we must never be disrespectful—we must revere our awesome God with fear and trembling. Someone said, “*Every time you complain about your situation, you’re really saying, ‘If I were God, I would do things differently.’*” Well, we’re not God, so we need to stop *complaining* and *questioning God*. Paul is telling the Philippians in this Epistle: *Our goal in all things is to advance the Gospel. So, act like you’re saved and do all things without complaining and disputing because you don’t want to hinder this mission in any way.*

Here’s six action statements on *how we can do all things without complaining or disputing*:

- a) Be the one to back down and humble yourself;
- b) Focus on the blessings you’ve received, not on what hasn’t been given to you yet (contentment is the cure for complaining);
- c) Submit to God’s sovereignty (He is God and you are not; accept that His plan/lot for you is good);
- d) Avail yourself of the necessary empowering that God supplies [2:13] (God won’t do it for you but He does empower you to both *will* and *do*; He gives you the might to do what is right);
- e) Hold firmly to the Word of life [2:16] (hold tightly to God’s unchanging and eternal truth while holding forth the Word to others);
- f) View yourself as expendable / be ready to suffer in life and sacrifice yourself in death [2:17] (give it your all in both your daily progress and spiritual growth and in your ministry to others).

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Have you received the gift of salvation through Christ alone that God has offered to you?
2. Are you living out your faith in every area of your life?
3. Are you making continual progress in becoming more and more like Jesus Christ?
4. Always remember: *to complain is to insult God who gives us all things.*
5. Let the work begin with you: stop arguing so constantly and contentiously about anything and everything.