

Leaving the State of Discontent

Humility, Part 8

Philippians 2:14-16a

This past year, an extensive survey was taken by Gallup to determine how contented people were with where they lived.

In fact, they specifically targeted the attitudes of people relative to the state where they lived and how interested they might be in moving.

The rather shocking results showed that nearly half of the respondents said they wanted to live in another state somewhere in the country.

But then Gallup added another question where they asked them how likely was it that they would actually move – and 73% of them said probably never.

In other words – Gallup summarized and I quote – it appears that many of us would rather complain about where we live than move somewhere else.ⁱ

Obviously the issue here isn't that none of our states are wonderful places to live – the problem is the simple fact that because of our fallen nature, we actually happen to live in the state of discontent – and we like to complain about it.

Sam Gordon wrote tongue in cheek, “The Lord created the world in six days, rested on the seventh and then on the eight, starting taking complaints.”ⁱⁱ

One author wrote that our hearts naturally and easily drift into [discontent] as if by gravitational pull. After all, he writes, complaint seems a reasonable response to disappointing events. You don't ever have to extend an invitation for complaint to show up. It arrives as an uninvited guest, moves into your guest bedroom, unpacks its luggage and starts a load of dirty laundry. Even as you seek to dislodge complaint – you move its bags to the curb and change the locks – it crawls back through the guest room window. Complaint resists eviction.ⁱⁱⁱ

Well said.

Discontent is like an undertow . . . it constantly seeks to pull your joy and hope out to sea – where it tries to drown them. But equally dangerous, a complaining spirit has a way of taking under those around you . . . drowning their joy and hope as well.

The Apostle Paul has just commanded the church in Philippi to work out their salvation – to take it out on the road, so to speak.

He's writing not just to individuals but to a church family. And he happens to know that one of the most discouraging things to work through as you're attempting to work out your salvation – as an individual or as a local church – is to allow the uninvited guest of a complaining spirit to take up residency; to ignore for one moment the dangerous pull of an undertow determined to pull everyone out to sea.

Turn to the *second chapter of Philippians* and to where we left off at *verse 14*.

In this next phrase, Paul issues commands and warnings and a critical reminder of who we need to reach.

Now as we work through these next few verses, I want to give you 4 statements that Paul is effectively communicating to keep this church on track – to keep individual Christians as well from being pulled by the undertow of discontent out into dangerous water.

The first command is this:

1. Don't complain about anything in life

Notice verse 14 as it opens; Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that's his first

challenge – and how’s that for an opening application to demonstrating your salvation?

Obviously, there’s a really critical word in the text that needs to be understood; it’s translated in my Bible “all” – **Do all things without grumbling.**

Literally translated, it needs to read, “Do all things without grumbling.”

My personally revised version which I’m much more comfortable with says, “Do *some* things without grumbling”; I can do that . . . or . . . “Try to do as much as you can to do a lot of things without grumbling.”

Those are loopholes in the revision.

Paul literally writes, **Do all things.**

Steven Runge writes that Paul doesn’t allow us to pick and choose what we will do with a happy, contented heart.^{iv}

Someone might say, “But it’s my nature to complain.” Howard Hendricks used to say, “There are some people who are just born in the accusative case.”

Can Paul actually mean – all things – as in, everything?

Does this mean to cut your lawn without complaining . . . do the laundry . . . or paint the fence . . . do your homework . . . make that road trip, slug through revisions and change orders and ministry assignments; deal with people in your job who want to make you as miserable as they evidently are?

Or is Paul referring to not complaining when you show up for church?

Well, the fact that Paul never clarifies or describes the object of grumbling – it is evidently meant to be understood as comprehensive.

In other words, this command simply leaves no room for any exception or any exclusion.

All means all.

And keep in mind that this kind of comprehensive command would most obviously refer to the undesirable things of life; the mundane things.

Why?

- because we’re not complaining in the middle of vacation;
- we don’t have this problem going down the super slide at a water park;
- or sitting out on a deck at sunset;
- or going to your favorite restaurant;
- or biting into a hot Krispy Kreme doughnut . . . or two . . . you might feel guilty . . . but they’re not chocolate

covered – just glazed . . . you held back . . . with amazing conviction . . . good for you.

Those kinds of circumstances don’t need to come with a warning to not grumble.

The word Paul uses here in **verse 14** for **grumbling** is from the goggusmos (γογγυσμος) which means to mutter and murmur in a low voice – to express dissatisfaction.^v

Just about every New Testament scholar and author I researched in my study on this text pointed out the fact that this was the same word used of the nation Israel in the wilderness.

The Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures – used this word often of the Israelites. In fact Paul will clearly adopt from the biography of Israel descriptive language pointing directly to their bad example.

They grumbled because they were in Egypt and they grumbled after they had been set free; they grumbled because they had nothing to eat and then grumbled that all they had to eat was miraculous manna; they grumbled about their leadership; they grumbled against their faithful God; they grumbled for forty years.^{vi}

God says of them in Numbers 14:26, **“How long will this evil congregation grumble against me?”**

The Psalmist will actually summarize the Israelites biography in the wilderness with this description – **they grumbled in their tents and did not obey the Lord (Psalm 106:25)**

You need to understand, grumbling is more than complaining. It happens to be a theological problem – which is why Paul follows up his comments on God being sovereignly at work in everything related to our lives.

Grumbling is the result of a lack of obedient humility – it’s actually a declaration of pride against God.

It comes from the self-centered notion that we are getting something we don’t deserve, or we’re not getting something we do deserve.^{vii}

Something in life isn’t working out . . . and it’s time I registered some dissatisfaction . . . it’s time to start grumbling.

But, like that uninvited guest . . . their brief stay can turn into a permanent spirit of disgruntlement.

There’s a little song that came to my mind as I prepared for this message – I finally surfed online and found the lyrics. It goes like this:

*They grumble in the city
They grumble on the farm
They grumble at their neighbors
They think it is no harm
They grumble when it's raining
They grumble when it's dry
They grumble all the year round
Yes, They grumble till they die*

*Grumble on Monday
Tuesday Wednesday
Grumble on Thursday too
Grumble on Friday
Saturday Sunday
Grumble the whole week through*

*They grumble at their husbands
They grumble at their wives
They grumble at their children
They grumble at their parents
They grumble at their pastor – Ok I made that one
up
They grumble in their schools
They grumble at their teachers
And they grumble at the rules
Get this – it is their way of life*

Listen, this happens to be the national anthem of fallen humanity.

It began with Adam. In fact, after sinning, the very first human being registered the very first compliant against God; it's that woman you gave me.

Adam was the first complainer in human history.^{viii}

One of the immediate results of original sin.

And the song was picked up by Israel and it has swept into the New Testament church.

And Paul warns the Philippians . . . he closes any and every loophole.

Which again brings the reminder – a complaining spirit doesn't just affect the complainer, but everyone within ear shot will be affected in one way or another.

A complaining spirit loves company.

One author wrote about entering a half-ironman-triathlon – the distances were cut in half; this author was actually a pastor who wanted to accomplish this feat and besides, he needed the exercise. He wrote, after the 1.2 mile swim and the 56 mile bike ride, I didn't have much energy left for the 13.1 mile run.

Neither did the fellow jogging next to me. I asked him how he was doing and I soon regretted posing the question. He said, "Man, this is terrible . . . it stinks . . . in fact, this race is the dumbest decision I've ever made in my life." He had more complaints than taxpayers . . . I knew if I ran beside him and listened to him for very long, I'd start agreeing with him so I sped up. I eventually caught up – I love that – I eventually caught up to a 66-year-old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. "It's hot but at least it's not raining . . . make sure you drink plenty of water and stay hydrated . . . keep it up . . . you'll finish this race," she encouraged. I ran next to her until I couldn't keep up . . . she waved and ran on ahead.^{ix}

What a difference in her spirit.

Now notice, Paul also adds, ***Do all things without grumbling or disputing.***

The word he selects under inspiration for ***disputing*** is a word that refers to arguing . . . or bickering.

It's a word that gives us our English word "dialoging" (διαλογισμος) – but with a negative prefix.

One author defined this word as, ill-natured, useless disputing.^x

Quarreling and divisive arguing.^{xi}

One author made the distinction that ***grumbling*** seems to be emotional and ***disputing*** is essentially intellectual.^{xii}

However, both are emanating from pride and discontent; which makes both of them counterproductive . . . discouraging and divisive.

Could these be a threat to the church in Philippi?

Isn't Paul writing this to one of the most effective, winsome, faithful, fruitful, visionary churches in the first century?

You mean them too? Absolutely . . . because it is our nature – just like Adam – even as believers – to get caught up in the undertow of a complaining and bickering, disputing spirit.

And it robs the joy out of everything.

So something's got to give.

I came across this rather funny story of an elderly couple who lived together in a nursing home. They had been married for 60 years and their relationship was filled with grumbling about everything – including each other – constant bickering and even some shouting contests too. It became so bad that the nursing home threatened to throw them out if they didn't change their attitude. But even then, the

couple couldn't agree on who needed to change first, or most. Finally, the wife said to her husband, "Listen, I'll tell you what let's do; let's pray that one of us dies. And after the funeral is over, I'll go live with my sister."^{xiii}

Don't put that on your prayer list . . . no matter how tempting.

The truth is we all play a part in this.

You come to this text and no one gets a free pass.

Paul isn't looking for people to start dying . . . he's looking for people to begin demonstrating humility – and unity – as we follow the incredibly humble and the only Person to ever walk the planet with good reason to complain, but Jesus Christ never did.

Imitating Christ happens to be in Paul's thinking here . . .

Don't complain about anything in life – secondly:

2. Don't forget that you have come to life

Notice; So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach. So that you will give evidence that you are – blameless; this word refers to integrity.

It isn't referring to sinless perfection – it's referring to being who you say you are – children of God.

The word in Paul's day would be used by a **wine merchant** when someone asked him about the quality of his product. He would use this word – it's blameless – literally, it's unmixed. I'm not trying to fake you out – this is the real deal.

The word would be used by a **jeweler** in Paul's day when someone was interested in a gold or silver ornament – he would say, "It's blameless – that is, I haven't coated a piece of metal with silver – it's exactly what it's supposed to be."^{xiv}

Paul isn't saying here, "This is how you become a child of God – he's effectively saying, this is how a child of God should live."

Notice, Paul further describes the children of God with the word *innocent*.

Blameless refers to integrity, innocence refers to purity.

Paul used this same word when he told the Romans to *be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil (Romans 16:19)*

In other words, don't contaminate your life – don't mix your life with evil – don't dilute your rich

and flavorful testimony by watering down your life through compromise with sin.

Will Rogers, the satirist and author who lived in the early days of the 1900's said that we ought to live so that we wouldn't be ashamed or alarmed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.

We are who we say we are.

Notice, Paul adds one more descriptive word here for our conduct – *children of God above reproach*.

The word refers to being unblemished.

All of this immediately relates back to the context of Paul's command to keep our conversations and relationships and perspectives, not only individually, but congregationally without hypocrisy, without mixture and tolerance of sin, without conversations blemished by complaining and bickering.^{xv}

Why? Because you are *children of God* . . . Paul effectively commands them – now act like it.

It's as if Paul wants to remind us that we have been brought to life – we are redeemed children of God. We belong to Him – as if to remind us all that our actions reflect on Him.

One commentator told the story of a girl - a Christian young lady who was out with some unbelieving friends one night – and they decided to go somewhere she knew she didn't belong and that they jibed at her and said, "Are you scared of your dad – if you went in there do you think he'd hurt you?" And after thinkin for a moment or two she said, "Not, he wouldn't . . . but if I went in there, I would hurt him."^{xvi}

It would hurt him.

And that's exactly where Paul takes us next.

**Don't complain about anything in life
Don't forget that you have come to life**

3. Number three: Don't ignore who's watching your life

So that you will prove – or demonstrate yourselves – to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach – now notice – in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation

In other words, you're right in the middle of it.

It's all around you.

And Paul isn't saying, "Look what you need to do is buy some land and build a commune or a monastery and get away from this crooked and perverse generation."

He's actually informing us that our demonstration is intended, not just in here, in the assembly – but out there – right in the middle of our crooked and perverted generation.

And would you notice that something's never change. Paul's generation was *crooked, and perverted*.

The word for crooked comes from skolios (σκολιός). It means to be bent or twisted. In Paul's day it referred to being morally twisted.

We use this term skolios for scoliosis – for the abnormal curvature of the spine.

Paul describes the first century in the same way we can describe the 21st century – morally twisted and abnormally bent.^{xvii}

Everyone's thinking is twisted – and confused.

One news agency reported that not too long ago one major league baseball team was sued for passing out Father's day gifts to men only at a major league home baseball game. They were sued. The same report told of a psychic who was actually awarded \$986,000 dollars when a doctor's CAT scan impaired her psychic abilities. You have to wonder why she won – I mean if she was really a psychic, wouldn't she have known . . . not to have that CAT scan?^{xviii}

Listen, the moral twisting and the defiance of biblical truth is opening the door to all kinds of entitlement and our culture is absolutely unable to render common sense.

Twisted and confused.

Paul adds the word here, *a perverse generation*.

This word, diastrepho (διαστρέφω) is similar – in fact, it simply adds to the idea the idea of abandoning the straight line – the plumb line – the standard – for moral virtue.^{xix}

Listen, the very first sermon preached in the New Testament dispensation of grace in *Acts 2*, Peter ends it by saying repeatedly, *“Be saved from this perverse generation!” (Acts 2:40)*

Be saved from this morally bankrupt and twisted generation. But it wasn't new to Peter either.

Solomon dealt with it centuries earlier – before becoming a part of it by his sinful lust and polygamy and eventual turning a blind eye to idolatry. He writes of those who *leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways (Proverbs 2:13-15)*.

Solomon and Peter and Paul all agree, this describes their generation and we would simply agree that it describes ours.

We are, in fact, watching the Western world defy scripture and effectively decompose –

- through greed and the idolatry of possessions;
- through utter indifference and double talk which defends the murder of millions of unborn children every year;
- through the defiant suppression of the truth of our Creator;
- through the redefining of the God's intention for marriage;
- through the addiction of millions to alcohol and drugs;
- through the proliferation and legal protection of pornography and graphic entertainment;
- through the ultimately idolatrous worship of government as God – bowing down to whatever it says is right and forbidding anything it says is wrong.^{xx}

This isn't just Paul's generation of twisting and bending and departing – it is ours.

And this generation happens to be watching us, Paul implies. God has dropped us right into the middle of this generation.

So what are we going to do about it?

Paul takes us to that next step:

Don't ignore those who are watching your life – but even further – Paul effectively says – fourthly;

4. Don't neglect those who desperately need life

Notice verse 15 again – the latter part and the first part of verse 16 – among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.

Listen, when you think you've got it really bad living in the state of **discontent** – keep in mind that everyone around you is living in the state of **darkness**.

Literally you shine as lights in the world.

The only way to see the light of the Christian shining in the world is for the world to be dark – which is Paul's point of contrast.

Paul is basically telling the church that their light is actually illuminating the way home for a confused and twisted generation that is lost in the darkness of this world.^{xxi}

Keep in mind, the world around you will tell you that you're the misfit . . . you're the one who's lost . . . you're the one with blinders on so you can't see straight. Don't pay attention to that – it's only the darkness talking.^{xxii}

You've actually, *Peter wrote, been brought out of the darkness and into a marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

We used to *belong to the darkness, but now we are light in the Lord and should therefore walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).*^{xxiii}

Jesus Christ said that He was *the light of the world (John 8:12)*, but he also said that the Christian *was the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).*

Light is a challenging illustration for us as well – because light is something that does what it has to do by being what it ought to be.^{xxiv}

Light doesn't exist to just curse the darkness – the very purpose of light to dispel the darkness . . . to show the way home.

And that's the idea here as Paul writes that we hold fast the word of life.

To hold fast is from a verb better rendered, in this context, *to hold out.*^{xxv}

We hold out the remedy – the answer – the hope.

And this was the recognition of the disciples. Jesus Christ asked them if they wanted to go away and leave Him as well, just as many supposed followers were abandoning Jesus. And Peter responded for all of them, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)*

They had heard and believed what Jesus had promised; *“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).*

Hold out the light of this gospel which is the word of life.

One linguist writes that this particular verb is understood as offering something – in this case, *the word of life* – holding it out – as if to offer food and drink to someone who's hungry and thirsty.^{xxvi}

This is the offer of light to a world that is lost in the dark – a world that is hungry and thirsty for life!

But it wanders around in the dark . . . and it is growing darker.

Which is another way of saying, the setting is growing better and better to see the shining of your light . . . shining to show the way home by grace, through faith in Christ alone.

We sang this hymn earlier . . . the words couldn't have been more perfect –

*I once was lost in darkest night
yet thought I knew the way
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave
I had no hope that You would own
A rebel to Your will
And if You had not loved me first
I would refuse You still*

*But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost
You looked upon my helpless state
And led me to the cross
And I beheld God's love displayed
You suffered in my place
You bore the wrath reserved for me
Now all I know is grace*

*Hallelujah all I have is Christ
Hallelujah Jesus is my life
Hallelujah all I have is Christ
Hallelujah Jesus is my life*

*Now Lord I would be Yours alone
And live so all might see
The strength to follow Your commands
Could never come from me
O Father use my ransomed life
In any way You choose
And let my song forever be
My only boast is You*

*Hallelujah all I have is Christ
Hallelujah Jesus is my life.*^{xxvii}

In summary, let me draw three principles from this passage:

- a. First, when you refuse to complain about your life – you choose to submit to the purposes of God.
- b. When you refuse to compromise your light – you choose to demonstrate the character of God.
- c. When you refuse to cover up the light – you are choosing to invite others to the grace of God.

Get rid of the clouds of complaint and compromise and shine; your world is desperately lost and in the dark – we have the life-giving hope of the grace of God.

And how do we start shining as distinctive lights in our world?

Go back to the very beginning of this pointed application – stop grumbling and complaining about life and each other. The world knows how to do that to . . . and they’re watching . . . just how different are you from them?

I close with this simple, yet convicting testimony from Chuck Colson, now with the Lord.

A few years ago, Chuck Colson was standing in a long line in the airport in Jakarta, Indonesia. He and some Prison Fellowship colleagues had been traveling all night. It was now early morning. The terminal was hot and steamy, and they were exhausted.

As Chuck relates it, “My passport was in my sticky hand, I was not only exhausted but exasperated at the long, inefficient line snaking ahead of us. And I was worried we would miss our next flight out of there . . . we had ministry friends waiting for us.

But, Chuck adds, “I was also determined not to let my frustration get the better of me. So I talked with my friends; we spent our time making the best of the situation . . . even laughing together from time to time.”

Two years later, he received a letter from a businessman who lived in Singapore. The man had been a follower of Confucius, but he sent his

children to Sunday school at a Presbyterian church so they could receive some “moral training.” One Sunday, as he picked up his kids, he heard the end of the sermon in that church. A visiting missionary was holding up a copy of Colson’s book, entitled, *Born Again*. On the cover was a picture of Chuck.

A few months later, this businessman was stuck in that same long, inefficient, exasperating line in the steaming Jakarta airport in Indonesia. Glancing over into the next line, he spotted the same face he’d seen on the cover of that book whose title had intrigued him – *Born Again*. He wrote in his letter, “I was so impressed by your demeanor and cheerfulness that when I got back to Singapore, I purchased your book, I read it, and committed my life to Jesus Christ.”^{xxviii}

Listen, if anybody asked you, how you win a devoted follower of Confucius to Christ . . . you would never guess that what God might use is a refusal to live in the state of discontent – even in a long line; but instead, demonstrate a spirit of humility and joy.

Let’s go impact our world – it’s deeply devoted to darkness; but we, the children of God, are devoted to the Light – and we demonstrate that first and foremost by our demeanor . . . and then we deliver the word of life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/19/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/may/7052614.html

ii Sam Gordon, *Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 91

iii Adapted from Jeff Manion, *The Land Between* (Zondervan, 2010)

iv Steven E. Runge, *Philippians: A Visual and Textual Guide* (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 55

v Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 552

vi Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Baker Books, 2000), p. 149

vii Adapted from John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 176

viii MacArthur, p. 176

ix Adapted from Max Lucado, *Facing Your Giants* (W Publishing Group, 2006), p. 65

x William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 43

xi G. Walter Hansen, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians* (Apollos, 2009), p. 179

xii MacArthur, p. 180

xiii www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2006/september/8091106.html

xiv Adapted examples from J. Dwight Pentecost, *Philippians: The Joy of Living* (Lamplighter Books, 1973), p. 95

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- xv Adapted from Hansen, p. 183
- xvi Gordon, p. 92
- xvii Hansen, p. 183
- xviii Citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/november/4111912.html
- xix Adapted from Hansen, p. 183
- xx Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, Philippians (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 162
- xxi Hansen, p. 183
- xxii Johnson, p. 162
- xxiii MacArthur, p. 185
- xxiv J.A. Motyer, The Message of Philippians (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 133
- xxv MacArthur, p. 186
- xxvi Adapted from Rienecker & Rogers, p. 553
- xxvii "*All I Have is Christ*," Words and Music: Jordan Kauflin; © 2008 Sovereign Grace
- xxviii Mark Earley, *BreakPoint with Charles Colson* (5-16-03)