



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 31st January 2016

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Scripture: Philippians 2:14-16

Subject: Chapter 2, Part 18 - Stop Grumbling

I recent watched a film about submarine warfare and life beneath the waves. It all started out well, everyone was in great form and they knew they were going into battle. Not long out on their journey, they landed themselves into the thick of it. Their nerves became frayed, tensions mounted, and soon tempers were flying. The captain had used up the torpedoes and because they couldn't surface or "make a run for it", they soon became hunted by the enemy. The captain tried to quell the discontent but the bully on board, who got others to do his bidding, wanted to take control. Well it took a few wounded sailors and one or two sent to the brig, as well as near misses by dept. charges before they learnt to zip it and regrouped. In this movie, the real source of the problem was killed.

Praise God the church of Jesus Christ is not quite like that but there are certain parallels that we could draw with this movie. All supposed to be fighting against the same enemy, all in close fellowship together, on the same team but the greatest danger is often from within.

Last week we traced, in a very small way, the terrible history of this symptom of a fallen sinful nature. If left alone, without due attention or control, complaining can figuratively or literally mean death. The reason being that it is directed at God or indirectly at Him.

The bigger picture is that we have to work out our own salvation with a certain attitude. Paul stated that this should be done without grumbling or complaining which is the negative side of the thing, but positively right throughout this epistle the emphasis is on us having an attitude of determination to “rejoice in the Lord always”. It is noted six times in all, please look at the following verses and you will see this Philippians 4:4, 1:4, 18, 25, 18 and 4:1.

The words that Paul used “grumbling” and “disputing” are confrontational terms, which arise from the self-centred notion of what is happening, or being said is undeserved. We see this brought to us also in the account found in Matthew 20 verse 11, which was about the labours that grumble against the landowner. The labours agreed to a contract, which was a fair and just day’s pay but when it came to pay time they believed that they should get more than the others who were going to get paid for a day’s work although they worked much less hours. We also see the same word used in Luke 5 verse 30 in relation to the Pharisees who grumbled at Jesus then in John 6 verse 61 his own disciples “murmured” at what was been said. Remember that Paul uses the same word to describe God’s people in the wilderness 1 Corinthians 10:10.

Disputing is from the Greek word (*dialogismos*), which has the basic meaning of inner reasoning and is the term from which the English word *dialogue* derives. But it soon developed the more specific ideas of questioning, doubting, or **disputing** the truth of a matter. In Romans 14:1, the word is used of passing judgment on another believer’s opinions and in 1 Timothy 2:8 it is rendered "dissension". Whereas **grumbling** is essentially emotional, **disputing** is essentially intellectual. A person who continues to murmur and grumble against God will eventually argue and dispute with Him.

Behind this sin is the reality that although Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), believers live in a fallen world and in unredeemed bodies (Romans 7:18; Romans 8:23). The Lord often leads believers through times of trial and testing (James 1:2-3) and warns that they can expect to be persecuted because of their faithfulness (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:20). It is therefore inevitable that circumstances will not always be favourable or pleasant.

Paul had forsaken the many worldly advantages and privileges he had in his former life, counting them as less than nothing (Philippians 3:4-7). He counted it a great privilege, however, to be imprisoned for the cause of Christ, which circumstance

"turned out for the greater progress of the gospel: 'because 'most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of [his] imprisonment, [had] far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" (Philippians 1:12,14).

The apostle longed to know Christ ever more intimately, to share in

"the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings," even to the point of being "conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10).

All believers have *"been granted for Christ's sake"* the same marvellous privilege,

"not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Do you see what's missing today in many hearts and lives? It is a right attitude, right thoughts, and the right mind-set towards God and the things of God. We might well be terribly upset if someone desecrates a religious place but how about when it is our own heart's and mind's that is desecrated? Yes we believe the Gospel, we try our best to behave like Christians and we hope for heaven but there is something missing, which is the heart after God; the will that is sold out for God and the attitude that one is not just ready to lay down their life for Jesus but count it a privilege to do so as well as to live for Him. It was not only Paul who had it but most of the true believer's then and now. Are you one of them?

It is not a superficial thing like putting on the face but a supernatural occurrence that finds at the centre of hearts and minds the working of the Holy Spirit, which in turn the believers has the desiring of His nearness and anointing.

Every circumstance of life is to be accepted willingly and joyfully, without murmuring, complaint, and 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. As he testified 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" (Philippians 4:11-12).

His example shows that such righteous behaviour is possible.

Ok so we see that what is said in the Bible is a command but the apostle does not stop there. He goes onto give them three very good reasons why they should stop complaining and this morning we will examine the first one, which is 'For the Believers own sake'.

FOR THE BELIEVERS OWN SAKE

The first reason is there before us in verse 15. Believers are to stop complaining **so that** they may become the kind of **children of God** He wants them to be; namely, **blameless and innocent**. Christians are **children of God** by faith (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26), by adoption (Romans 8:15, 23; Galatians 4:5), and by spiritual birth (John 1:13; 3:3-6; 1 Peter 1:23). Because they are His **children**, they should "be imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1); every Christian is in the process of becoming more like Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). That process includes becoming more **blameless and innocent**. To forsake grumbling and complaining is an essential part of advancing that process. This is called practical sanctification while the other side is "positional", which is what we are in fact before the Lord by His grace not our grease!

1. Blameless

Blameless is from the Greek word "*amemptos*", which has the root meaning of being without defect or blemish. The believer is to pursue to be without moral or spiritual blemish. Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist,

"were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord" (Luke 1:6).

To the Thessalonians, Paul expressed his deep desire that God would

"establish [their] hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

Later in Philippians he speaks of himself as having been

"found blameless" as far as "the righteousness which is in the Law" was concerned (Philippians 3:6).

The writer of Hebrews comments that,

"if that first covenant had been faultless [amemptos], there would have been no occasion sought for a second" (Hebrews 8:7).

2. Innocent

Innocent is from the Greek word *akeraios*, which has the basic meaning of being unmixed or unadulterated. The term was used to describe pure wine that was unmixed with water and pure metal so that it was not alloyed. Metaphorically, *akeraios* was sometimes used of what was harmless or innocent. Jesus commanded His disciples to

"be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Similarly, Paul admonished the Romans

"to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil" (Romans 16:19).

The believer's life is to be absolutely pure, unmixed with sin and evil. Concerned for the spiritual welfare of the immature Corinthians, Paul wrote:

"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

3. Children of God

As **children of God**, Christians also are to be **above reproach**. *Amemos (above reproach)* is closely related in meaning to *amemptos (blameless)*; both words describe what is without blemish or imperfection. *Amomos* is used numerous times in the Septuagint in regard to sacrificial animals. Moses prescribed that a Nazirite

"shall present his offering to the Lord: one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering and one ram without defect for a peace offering, "and that all "the sons of Israel [should] bring ... an unblemished red heifer in which is no defect and on which a yoke has never been placed" (Numbers 6:14; Numbers 19:2).

Metaphorically, *amomos* was used of being without blame or guilt. The character of the **children of God** should be above any legitimate blame, criticism, or censure. Paul uses the word twice in Ephesians, admonishing believers to

"be holy and blameless before [Christ] ... that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27; cross reference with Colossians 1:22).

The writer of Hebrews uses *amomos* of the Lord Jesus Christ, saying,

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14),

as also does Peter, who speaks of Him as *"a lamb unblemished and spotless"* (1 Peter 1:19).

Like every other spiritual virtue, being **above reproach** is impossible in a believer's own power. It is only the unblemished and spotless Christ Himself who

"is able to keep [believers] from stumbling, and to make [them] stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24).

Believers are in position blameless in His perfect righteousness and need to pursue that holy standard in their practice.

Writing to Titus, Paul gives the supreme motive for pure, blameless living:

"Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (Titus 2:10-14)

After briefly describing the

"day of the Lord [which] will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up:"

Peter asks rhetorically,

"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness;" and then makes the same point in the form of an admonition: "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2 Peter 3:10-11,14).

I'm sure you will agree that this is a very important and good reason why we ought to obey the command to stop our complaining and disputing both with the Lord and God's people. Surely in the light of this we have been shown that we are imperfect and have a lot to do personally in our own lives and to help others who are making the journey with us.

Next week we are going to look at the second point so plan to be with us and come along.

Amen.