

## Doing Everything without Grumbling or Arguing

### Philippians 2:12-18

Online Sermon:

[http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

Is there a right and wrong way to respond to the difficult times of life? The Bible has many warnings that our lives as Christians will be far from easy. While the sun and rain of blessings fall on both the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45), so does the chance that bad things will happen (Ecclesiastes 9:11), especially to believers who are promised to be persecuted for the Lord's name's sake (John 15:18-20)!



While we don't get to choose many of the negative circumstances we go through, we certainly can choose our reaction. Often when people go through bad

times one of their coping mechanisms is to vividly explain their negative feelings about their dire circumstances to other people. While there are many reasons why people do this often it is too illicit either sympathy or to hear stories of worse circumstances that make one's own trials seem trivial! This is called complaining and while it often has great therapeutic value, is it right in God's sight? Is not being truthful about how difficult your life has become better than avoiding answering the

question, how are you, with either platitudes or outright lies? And what is wrong with vividly describing one's tribulations if in doing so it helps others cope with their difficulties? But while comforting one another is certainly not a bad thing is there a point that it cannot only be harmful but sinful? For instance, does not a "complaining spirit" affect one's witness to the world that Christ is sovereign? How is one to convince the world of the unspeakable grace and joy of the Gospel message when one appears to be so miserable? In today's passage Apostle Paul instructed the Philippians to do everything without grumbling or arguing.

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*As you read the reasons why Paul gave such a command, please examine your own life and verse by verse ask yourself, am I satisfied with the blessings I have received from God, especially considering I am but one mile away from going to my eternal home?*

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## Working out One's Salvation

After having just read the beautiful hymn of Christ's humble "obedience to death, even death on a cross" (2:8), Paul did not leave the Philippians "to ponder" what a worthy response

might be<sup>1</sup> but instead boldly commanded his dear friends, “as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12). While this verse is “much debated” among



many scholars,<sup>2</sup> I believe the confusion is due to the phrase “work out your salvation” having two simultaneous dimensions to its interpretation!<sup>3</sup> First, each believer at the foot of the cross has the responsibility to grow in

their spiritual maturity. While the “work of atonement”<sup>4</sup> or “saving work”<sup>5</sup> was done by Christ and is finished, the work of becoming more like Christ is ongoing. When Paul says we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling he is not saying that we are to “grovel before the Lord like a slave before his Master,”<sup>6</sup> nor are we to be terrified of our Father who art in

heaven,<sup>7</sup> but merely that we should live in reverence of Him, fully submissive to His will.<sup>8</sup>

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*While God disciplining those He loves is part of our motivation to seek to be holy as He is holy, I believe Paul is saying the other motivation is live a life worthy of the Gospel so that one does not disappoint the Lord by “failing to live up to the privileges and enjoy the divine benefits”<sup>9</sup> of what Christ purchased for us upon the cross!*

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Second, to “work out one’s salvation” for Paul also has a corporate dimension.<sup>10</sup> Until the day comes when the entire universe bows to the Lord (2:10-11), the church at Philippi are to follow the example of Christ by imitating the others focused humble servanthood and obedience of the Lamb who chose to

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Motyer, [The Message of Philippians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 125.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 65.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 108.

<sup>4</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, [Word Studies in the New Testament](#), vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 437.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Carr, [“The Expectations of the Christian Life \(Philippians 2:12–16\).”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 2999.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 109.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 109.

<sup>9</sup> J. A. Motyer, [The Message of Philippians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 127.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 98.

give His life a ransom for the many.<sup>11</sup> In the presence of the Lord whom they will one day “give an account for their conduct,”<sup>12</sup> they are to “rebuild social harmony”<sup>13</sup> and unity by not only fleeing from selfishness and vain conceit (2:3) but also by valuing others above themselves and looking out for their interests (2:4). While working out one’s salvation is beyond “human” ability, Paul encouraged the Philippians by telling them it is possible to be holy because “God works in you to will and act in order to fulfill His good purpose” (2:13). “The Psalmist says of our dependency on God, “Unless the LORD builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain” (Ps 127:1).<sup>14</sup> God not only places in our hearts the desire to be grow in our own spiritual maturity and seek church unity but also gives us “the spiritual strength to carry it through.”<sup>15</sup> Since God will not override our free-will, our role is to choose to obey His will that He places in our hearts and put the effort into accomplishing what His divine strength has already enabled! The truth is that both God and the believer contribute to working out our salvation with fear and trembling!

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 107.

<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 98.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 108.

<sup>14</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 109.

**Reflection.** “Are you praying and striving for growth in humility, personal holiness, selfless service, and sacrificial mission by the power of God’s enabling grace?”<sup>16</sup> Do you live your life with the realization that one day every believer will be required to give an account for the things done in the body good or bad? When you are overwhelmed with habitual sins do you remind yourself and the Devil who is tempting you that by God’s divine might you can be holy?

## Avoid Grumbling and Arguing

In working out their salvation Paul implored the Philippians to “do everything without grumbling and arguing” (2:14). The Greek language Paul used here “indicates that Paul was taking his instructions for the church from the narrative of Israel”<sup>17</sup> when they grumbled and complained to God in the desert (Exodus 15-17; Numbers 14-17).<sup>18</sup> While Paul’s allusion

<sup>15</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 107.

<sup>17</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 179.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 580.

was not a direct one it does provide us a glimpse into how much God dislikes a complaining heart! While we are not told exactly what the Philippians were grumbling and arguing about there are



several likely topics that Paul had in mind based on the content of his letter. Paul just finished telling the Philippians to live a life worthy of the Gospel meant replacing selfish ambition and vain conceit with a humble desire to put the concerns of others above that of one's own (2:3-4).<sup>19</sup> In this context grumbling likely refers to "whispering complaints, talking in secret against someone, and making negative comments about others behind their backs. *Arguing* in this context means quarreling and debating in ways that are divisive and raise doubts."<sup>20</sup> Like the wilderness episode<sup>21</sup> the complaints by the Philippians were likely towards their church leaders, maybe even against Paul himself!<sup>22</sup> Complaining and arguing were sins against God for

three main reasons. First, it breeds disunity when people complain or argue against one another.<sup>23</sup> Second, by speaking poorly of one's circumstances it shows a lack of trust in "God who is sovereign over all things including those circumstances that they find unpleasant and undesirable."<sup>24</sup> And finally, when unbelievers see God's very own children dissatisfied with their lives under His tender and loving care it often results in them wrongly concluding that "there is nothing to our Christianity!"<sup>25</sup> Living a life worthy of the Gospel is far from easy! When pursuing holiness, giving generously, practicing hospitality, and looking out for the interests of others it is very tempting when things become beyond our ability to handle to complain and murmur<sup>26</sup> that our lives are not as easy as we would like them to be! Though complaining is often the "common language of our

<sup>19</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [Philippians](#), vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 106–107.

<sup>20</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 179.

<sup>21</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 100.

<sup>22</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 179.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [Philippians](#), vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 106.

<sup>24</sup> Roger Ellsworth, [Opening up Philippians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Ellsworth, [Opening up Philippians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 44–45.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 110–111.

culture,”<sup>27</sup> may we not “lose sight of our greater exodus found in the death and resurrection of Jesus!”<sup>28</sup>

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*We only have but a “mile to go”<sup>29</sup> to see our Lord face to face so may we be like Apostle Paul and rejoice, again I say rejoice, in suffering and pain and point to Christ as the one enabling us to keep on running the race to win the prize!*

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**Reflection.** Complaining is speaking and dwelling on our current circumstances in a negative way that does not reflect on the grace and blessings we have received from our Lord. When you face trials and tribulations do you complain vigorously of are you able to see your life in the context of eternity and rejoice? Do you say bad things about people when they are not present?

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 111.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 111–112.

<sup>29</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 112.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 69.

## Results of not Grumbling or Arguing

Paul made three beautiful promises to be received by the Philippians should they chose to avoid grumbling and arguing. First, they would “become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation” (15a). “God liberated them to do His will and energizes them to do so by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> It is God’s will that one avoids grumbling and arguing because such language is “offensive to God”<sup>31</sup> but also due to the poor witness it gives to world. The surrounding culture of Philippi (especially today) prided itself on language that was “morally bent or twisted, unscrupulous, dishonest,” and often attacked and degraded others.<sup>32</sup> When the Philippians mimicked such negative language,<sup>33</sup> they lost their “saltiness” (Matthew 5:13-16)<sup>34</sup> because their words were not the distinct, holy ones they had received from their Father! Second, by not grumbling or arguing the Philippians will “shine like stars in the sky as they hold firmly onto the word of life” (15b). In an allusion to Daniel 12:3, Paul implored the

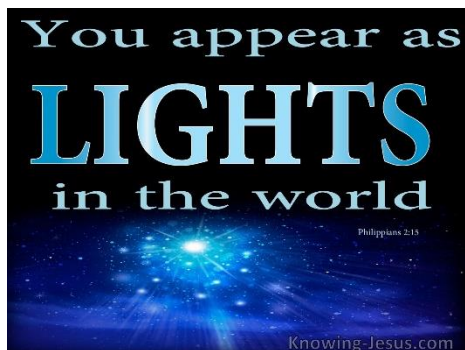
<sup>31</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 112.

<sup>32</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 183.

<sup>33</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 181.

<sup>34</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 112.

Philippians they are in the resurrection age when “those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky above.”<sup>35</sup> The Philippians, however, would only be able to stand firm in the one Spirit, not be frightened by persecution (1:27-28), and shine



like stars amongst their warped and crooked generation by “maintaining a grasp on the word of life.”<sup>36</sup> By living and defending the word of God<sup>37</sup> the Philippians would be known not as the “complaining and grumbling” but “proclaiming church.”<sup>38</sup> Like a star that lights up the dark sky, by showing their very words had been purchased and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb this made the Light of their conversion shine brightly and point the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).<sup>39</sup> And finally, by not complaining or grumbling but instead holding firmly to the world of life not only would the Philippians light shine but also they would be able “to

boast on the day of Christ that they did not run or labor in vain” (2:16).

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*The Philippians could “exert themselves physically, mentally, or spiritually, working hard, toiling, striving, and struggling” with the assurance of pleasing the Lord upon His return because they were promised “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (1:6)!*

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So, Paul told the Philippians to boast not in themselves but in “God’s demonstration of grace and power through their weakness and tribulation.”<sup>40</sup>

**Reflection.** The language that we use when speaking with others matters a great deal when it comes to letting one’s light shine to the world. If you could see Christ standing right beside you all day (which He does) would He say your words were righteous, holy, and worthy of the Gospel message you have received? From what Paul says to the Philippians can you see

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<sup>35</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 100–101.

<sup>36</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 184.

<sup>37</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 184.

<sup>38</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 113.

<sup>39</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 184.

<sup>40</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 185.

how important it is to not complain or argue, even despite our trials and tribulations?

## Rejoicing in the Lord

Though Paul “hopes for a favorable verdict in the imperial court”<sup>41</sup> and be released from prison so that he might again visit the church he so dearly loved (1:24-26, 2:24), Paul told the Philippians, “even if I am being poured out like a drink



offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (2:17). The “sacrificial image”

Paul evoked here likely came from the common practice in many ancient cultures that after the priests offered a sacrifice, he would then either pour on or around the alter wine as a “sacrificial libation to complement it.”<sup>42</sup> If Paul is martyred,<sup>43</sup> he wanted

the Philippians to know, how he saw, and how they were to perceive his death. Though Apostle Paul had five times received from the Jews forty lashes minus one, was three times beaten with rods and shipwrecked, once pelted with stones, constantly in danger from bandits, Gentiles, and the Jews, and was now chained 24/7 to the Praetorian Guard and facing likely execution; he chose to rejoice for “just as Christ emptied Himself, he was glad to pour out himself for the glory of the God.”<sup>44</sup>

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*Should his death occur soon the Philippians were to make his joy complete through their “obedience and steadfastness”<sup>45</sup> to living their lives worthy of the Gospel.*

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This was to be done not only by seeking unity by looking out for the interests of one another but also by firmly holding onto and proclaiming the word of life to their warped and crooked generation! “Despite internal and external hardships” by holding onto, living, and proclaiming the word of God, Paul says his death should not be seen with sorrow and lost hope for he will be with Christ (1:21, 23), his labor will not be in vain, the

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<sup>41</sup> F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 88.

<sup>42</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 101.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 581.

<sup>44</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 114.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 141.

Philippians will be found blameless and pure on the day of Christ (1:10), and above all the glory and praise will be given rightly to God!<sup>46</sup>

**Reflection.** How easy it is to get our eyes focused on the concerns of this world! How much time do you spend seeking to know God's will? Are you willing to set aside your own goals, if God asks, to serve Him? When you feel like you are being poured out like a drink offering are you also rejoicing in the Lord because you are serving Him?

## Conclusion

Yes, there is a right and wrong way to respond to the difficult times of life! While describing one's negative circumstances can be quite therapeutic for both one and others,



there is a point that it becomes complaining and a sin against God. As believers we are called to work out our salvation with both fear and trembling. While

holiness is beyond human abilities, it is not only possible but expected for God wills and empowers those who choose to do

His will. When faced with negative circumstances God does not want us to whisper complaints because it often leads to a critical heart that tends to spread negativity and arguments amongst His people. It also shows a lack of trust in a sovereign God and by showing one is not satisfied with one's life under the tender care of the Lord such negative talk testifies to the world there is nothing distinct about a Christian's life! By mimicking the negative talk of this world, we as believers lose our "saltiness" because our words are not the distinct, holy ones given to us by our Father who art in heaven! As believers we do not want to be known as the "complaining or grumbling" but "proclaiming" children of the most high God. So, in all circumstances, especially in our darkest of ones, let us allow His word to mold our thoughts, actions and words with the glorious message that we are rejoicing for we have but one mile to go to be at our eternal home with our Creator!

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<sup>46</sup> Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 141.