

“No Whining!” (Philippians 2:12-18)

Have you ever met an individual who is totally satisfied with the way he or she looks? I haven't. And I've met some downright arrogant persons! Yet, as I've talked with such people it becomes apparent that there are physical features they find less than optimum. Consequently, as a society we are obsessed with fixing these features. Weight loss supplements, ab machines, skin treatments, and plastic surgery are all big business. However, I have yet to see equal time, money, and energy spent on enhancing our less than desirable behaviors.

What is the most unbecoming behavior that you can think of? I would like to suggest it is whining. Most of us are whiners, and it can be a downright ugly characteristic. Nevertheless, whining is everywhere. Famous biblical characters like Jacob, Naomi, and Elijah were even world-class whiners.¹ Job started well in dealing with his sufferings, until he was “comforted” by his wife and friends. It took a rebuke from God to get him back on track (Job 38-41). Asaph was crying his eyes out in the first verses of Ps 73, and it was not until he had encountered God in worship that he began to think and act correctly (73:16-28). The trophy for longest and most sustained whining goes to the nation of Israel. They grumbled their way from Egypt to Mount Sinai and for almost another 40 years in the wilderness.

But before we look down on these saints, we need to admit that there is a great deal of the whiner in us as well. We whine about our marriage, our kids, our church, our work, our lack of time, our finances, our possessions or lack thereof. In one way or another we have found ways to justify our griping and complaining, and sometimes even to “sanctify” it as though it were spiritual. Yet, what we will find in our text is that whining, like every sin, is very serious. The good news is in Phil 2:12-18: Paul gives us some clear instruction regarding whining, and he will also tell us the cure for whining.

From the very outset of his letter to the Philippians (1:1-2), Paul has urged the church to cultivate the virtue of humility with a view toward corporate unity. This emphasis can be seen in his thanksgiving and prayer section (i.e., 1:3-11), the recounting of his own circumstances in prison (1:12-26), his appeal for the Philippians to live lives worthy of the gospel (1:27-2:4), and his beautiful description of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ Himself (2:5-11). Now, in 2:12-18, he urges them again to obey and seek unity.²

1. God works in; we work out (2:12-13). In these two verses, we will discover that the Christian life is not a series of “ups and downs” but an ongoing process of “ins and outs.” That means God works in and we work out.³ Paul writes, **“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling”** (2:12). This passage begins with the conjunction “so then” (*hōste*),⁴ which indicates that Paul is referring back to what he has previously written (1:27-2:11).⁵ Specifically, the term “obeyed” points back to Christ’s “obedience” in 2:8. Thus, Paul wants the Philippians, and us, to obey God in the same way that Jesus obeyed His Father. In 2:6-11, Paul states that Christ was obedient in death; therefore, we must be obedient in life (2:12-18). Christ obeyed completely, without reservation, and so should we.⁶ As we prepare to dig into this passage, I hope you’re ready to “work out.”

As we delve into 2:12, let me make some observations. **First, Paul affirms his readers.** He introduces his instruction with the words “my beloved.”⁷ Paul loved the Philippians and they knew how much he cared for them. If you want to impact a person they need to know how much you love them. As a leader, I must love those God has entrusted to me. As leaders in our church, we must also love our fellow believers. This requires diligence and effort from everyone. We must become students of how people give and receive love. This means recognizing whether people appreciate words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and/or physical touch.⁸

Second, Paul compliments his readers before he exhorts them. He urges his beloved friends to persist in what they are already doing (cf. 1:27).⁹ They are to “keep up their good work.” Paul indicates that the Philippians have a history of obedience.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he wants consistent obedience, not only while he is present but much more when he is absent. The measure of our effectiveness in ministry is greatly determined by how people live in our absence. We have accomplished nothing if our disciples only live for God when we’re around and then go back to disobedience or complacency when we leave. They must learn to feel responsible to God, not to us. Christians should obey the Lord whether other people are watching or not.¹¹

This month I have been out of town for the better part of three work weeks. Yet, the mice do not play while the cat is away...at least as far as I know. We have a tremendous church staff. They serve not because I frighten them but because they love Christ. They serve as well in my absence as they do in my presence.

Third, Paul commands his readers to imitate him and Jesus. The command is for Christians individually¹² and corporately¹³ to “work out” their salvation.¹⁴ The question is: What does the term “salvation” (*soteria*) refer to? It seems clear that the phrase “your salvation” in 2:12 is being compared to “my [Paul’s] salvation” in 1:19. Paul is writing this letter from prison. He wants to persevere in his suffering with joy so that he might hear the words “well done” at the judgment seat of Christ. The term “salvation” then is being used in the sense of a present deliverance.¹⁵ Now, in 2:12, Paul urges his readers to ensure that they too follow his example and that of Jesus (2:6-11), in the midst of their persecution (1:27-30). If they do so, they will hear Jesus’ praise there.¹⁶

When we become ill we go to a doctor. Our doctor diagnoses our ailment and prescribes the proper treatment. He or she hands us a small slip of paper with a prescription. We then take it to the pharmacist who fills the prescription and gives us the medication. So far, everything has been done for us—diagnosis, prescription, medication. It now becomes our responsibility to follow the doctor’s orders, exactly as stated. By working out the process we enjoy the benefits of the physician’s and pharmacist’s contributions to our health. We recover and become healthy.¹⁷

Finally, Paul commands his readers to exercise humility and dependence. This is seen in the phrase “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”¹⁸ This expression is used several times in the New Testament,¹⁹ and can best be summed up by the word “humility.”²⁰ Humility is the basis for sacrificial service and unity. Humility is the attitude Paul has called for (2:3-4) and is illustrated by the example of Jesus (2:5-11).²¹

In 2:13, Paul continues his thought and explains the reason (“for”) that the Philippians can work out their salvation: **“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”**²² God does not work and has not worked because man has worked. The contrary is true: Because God works and has worked, man must and can work. This verse is one of the most comforting in the New Testament. Sometimes we want to do right but seem to lack the energy or ability. At other times, it can seem that we don’t even want to do right. This verse assures us that God will help us. Here, we learn that God can also provide the desire to do His will when we do not have it. If we find that we do not want to do right, we can ask God to work in us to create a desire to do His will. This verse gives us confidence that God desires both to motivate and to enable us.

Today, you may be suffering and encountering hardship. You may feel weak and miserable. If so, call on God. He will hear your cry and respond to you. In our time of need we must recognize that God alone can give us the necessary desire and energy to do what He has called us to do. As Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We need that reminder today.

Before we move on, we need to see an important two-fold work God is carrying on in our lives: to desire His good will and to do His good will. Note the order: desire first, doing second. This is usually how we respond: we do, if we have the desire.²³ A very critical balance is found in 2:12-13 in regards to the sanctification process.²⁴ Verse 12 stresses our responsibility to “work out” while 2:13 stresses God’s role of “working in” and “through” us. The two must ever be kept together or we will depart from God’s ordained process for sanctification.²⁵ If we only concentrate on 2:12 we will become legalistic or ascetic, relying on our own strength for spiritual power. If we dwell on 2:13 only, we will become passive and complacent. We are to live a life of “disciplined dependence”—fully cooperating with the spirit of God to accomplish in and through us all He desires, regardless of the cost to us.²⁶

Always remember: Who I am is more important than what I do. God is more concerned about the workman than He is about the work. This is the prime reason why the Lord chooses to work in us before operating through us. Paul uses two little phrases of two words each to describe what God does: “to will” and “to work.” Both the desire and the deed belong to God, both the prompting and the performing are attributed to Him. Nevertheless, God will not do for us what we should be doing for ourselves. It is only as we cooperate with Him that we see the true potential of our lives realized.²⁷

Adrian Rogers, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, tells about the man who made his sons work in the cornfields while their peers spent the afternoon at the swimming hole. Someone scolded the father saying, “Why do you make those boys work so hard? You don’t need all that corn.” The wise father replied, “Sir, I’m not raising corn. I’m raising boys.”²⁸ Likewise, God has called us to work so that He can make us into the men and women that He wants us to be.

[Now that Paul has dealt with our fellowship to God, he moves to our fellowship with each other. We have seen that God works in; we work out...now we will see that...]

2. God shines down when we shut up (2:14-18). The light always shines brightest where and when it is darkest. Several years ago, the mayor of Toronto launched a campaign called *Light the Night*. The idea was for residents to leave their lights burning overnight in order to discourage crime. Our world is inky black; our society is muddy and murky. As Mark Twain once said, “We are all like the moon. We have a dark side we don’t want anybody to see.”²⁹ Hence, the need of the hour is to give careful heed to Paul’s words in 2:14: “**Do all things³⁰ without grumbling or disputing.**” Paul states that nothing is to be done in a spirit of grumbling or disputing.³¹ Most Christians are able to do some things without grumbling. It is when we are exhorted to do “all things” with a joyful spirit that the difficulty comes.

What exactly is “grumbling?”³² It is not loud, boisterous, grousing, but rather low-toned, discontented muttering. It is negative, muted comments, complaining, and whining. “Disputing,”³³ however, is vocal, ill-natured argumentation...verbal expressions of disagreement that stir up suspicions and distrust, doubt, and other disturbing feelings in others. Beware of the poison of pessimism.³⁴

May I challenge you to consider your own life? Do you have real joy, even in the midst of adversity? Or do you whimper, complain, and grumble? How is your commitment to worship? Today, we need to be reminded of the fact that joyful obedience is a command, and that whimpering and grumbling is a sin. There is nothing good to say about either. Whimpering, whining, grumbling Christians are sinning, because they are being disobedient to God’s clear command to be joyful and not to grumble. They are unhappy, and their discontent is contagious. They often cause division and strife. They are “bad advertising” for the Christian faith. Who wants what they have? Discontent is also the first step toward rebellion against God. Think of it: Before Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they had to become discontent with all the blessings God had given them (Gen 3:1-7). Grumpy Christians are just one small step away from active rebellion against God. As whiners, we must beware! We must learn self-control and the art of keeping quiet.

I like the motto of the British Foreign Service: “Never excuse. Never explain. Never complain.”³⁵ We should strive to live out this motto in our personal and corporate lives. Parents should not tolerate whining in their children, and children should be expected to obey joyfully, and not grudgingly. Churchgoers should not be permitted to whine. Instead, they should be challenged to be a part of a solution. Those who complain first, in most churches, are typically those who have the least to do. Therefore, we must encourage those who have the gift of grumbling to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

If grumbling or complaining is a habitual sin in your life, then take steps now to move away from the mindset in which it fosters. Learn to replace it with thanksgiving to God and the encouragement of others (Col 3:16). Tell a friend whom you trust and with whom you can pray. Continually ask God for strength to obey and forgiveness when you fail. He is faithful (Isa 41:10). What do you have to be thankful for today? If we pause to think we will have cause to thank.

In 2:15-16, Paul provides the purpose behind not grumbling or disputing: **“so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless³⁶ and innocent,³⁷ children of God above reproach³⁸ in the midst of a crooked³⁹ and perverse⁴⁰ generation,⁴¹ among whom you appear as lights in the world,⁴² holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”** Whenever he preached this passage, the late, great Ray Stedman used to say, “Ours is a world of crooks and perverts.” How aptly put...and how correct the apostle Paul was! In these verses, Paul says that we can light up this crooked and perverse world by refusing to grumble and dispute. Paul goes even further as he identifies four startling differences between those who know Christ and those who don’t. These four descriptive words make all the difference in the world. Unlike our unbelieving friends, we are to be “blameless,” “innocent,” “above reproach,” and “lights.”

“Blameless” appears to emphasize external purity while “innocent” emphasizes internal purity. “Above reproach” is a description used of sacrificial lambs offered on the altar and means “free of blemish,” which connotes both internal and external purity. What a tremendous effect not grumbling or complaining can have on our lives—an internal transformation which will result in external purity.⁴³

Lastly, Paul says that when we do not grumble or dispute, we are “lights in the world holding fast the word of life.” The phrase “holding fast” (*epechontes*) is better translated “holding out” or “holding forth.” By their behavior and words, believers are also to hold out the word of life, the gospel (John 6:68), as the Statue of Liberty holds out her torch.⁴⁴ While 2:15 emphasizes the servant of God’s character, this verse emphasizes his message. We are to have a visual (2:15) and verbal (2:16) impact on those around us.

In this passage, Paul seems to be using an analogy from Dan 12:3, where Daniel likens the “wise” to stars that shine in the universe.⁴⁵ Other English versions including the NIV agree with this interpretation.⁴⁶ We are not just “lights,” we are “stars!” When we were children many of us sang the tune, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.” Yet, this is inaccurate. We are never called “little lights” in the Bible. We are stars...bold, blazing, light-giving stars! This aching, hurting, confused world of lost humanity exists in dark rooms without light. Let it shine, fellow star! Jesus said as much in Matt 5:16: “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” There’s no need to shout, scream, or make a scene. Just shine! Live a life free of grumbling and disputing. Look for other stars; for Christians shine best not as individual stars but in clusters. Hence, Paul’s overarching emphasis on humility and unity.

In 2:16b, Paul refers to “the day of Christ.” This is another way of speaking of the judgment seat of Christ.⁴⁷ Paul lived his life bearing in mind a day of future accountability. He lived today in light of tomorrow. Today he was with them; tomorrow he may be with Him. And he did not want to be ashamed. He longed for his life’s work to abound to God’s glory.⁴⁸

Such a laudable attitude finds its focus in sacrifice and service. It's tempting to think that these are strange bedfellows, yet for Paul they were not. In 2:17-18, Paul sees himself as a drink offering—one that has been poured out for Jesus and others.⁴⁹ In the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant, the priests would take the animal sacrifices and spread them on the altar to be consumed by fire. Then they would take a drink offering—a liquid offering—and pour it on top of that searing hot flame. Inevitably, the liquid would turn into steam and it would go up in a wisp of smoke.

Paul was more or less saying: I love people and I am here to serve people and to sacrifice for people so much that, if necessary, I am willing for my life to just go up in steam to the Lord, that I may be a blessing to other people.⁵⁰ Consequently, Paul wants his reader to rejoice with him in the midst of his suffering and theirs. In 2:17b-18 he uses a form of the word “rejoice” four times!⁵¹

Grumbling and whining is sin. We should not practice it. We should most certainly not promote it. We should not tolerate it. What is the cure for grumbling, whining Christians? There are perhaps a number of answers to this question, but I think the cure can be summed up in one word: *worship*. The cure for whining is worship, or what Paul calls “rejoicing.” Will you make a commitment today to rejoice? Will you begin a “no whining” policy?

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Scripture Reading

Philippians 2:12-16

Psalm 73

Psalm 95

Nehemiah 8:9-10

John 15:11; 16:24; 17:13

Romans 14:17-18; 15:13

Study Questions

1. In the introduction of his sermon, Keith suggested that whining is the most unbecoming human behavior. Do I agree with this? Why or why not? Have I minimized the sin of whining? If so, how have I done this? Read Romans 1:18-32 (1:21-22); 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (10:8); and 2 Timothy 3:1-9 (3:2). How do these verses categorize grumbling and ingratitude? What difference does this make in shaping my perspective on whining?
2. Paul informs us that God works in us so that we can “work out” (2:12-13). How have I sensed God working in me? In what ways has He increased my desire and obedience? How have I responded to Him in the past several weeks? In what practical ways have I grown spiritually in the last six months? What dominant truth has the Lord taught me? What step of obedience have I taken?
3. We are commanded to “do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14). Why is this so hard for me to follow? How have I violated this command this week? Have I confessed my sin of whining to God and the person I shared with? What one person can I talk with about my legitimate concerns or issues?
4. Paul exhorts Christians to be “children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (2:15). Billy Graham once said, “Every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear full responsibility for the next one; but we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible as to how well we fulfill our responsibilities to this age and take advantage of our opportunities.” Do I agree with this statement? Why or why not? What can I do to ensure that I am a wise and responsible steward of my generation? How am I currently fulfilling this mandate?
5. As Christians, we are to hold out the word of life (2:16). How is my life functioning as a “light” that brings pleasure to my leaders and my God? In what way has the world noticed my godly behavior? How has this served as a witness? Where can I improve? Who will hold me accountable?

Notes

¹ Jacob (Gen 37:25; 42:36; 43:6, 14; 47:8-9; contrast Gen 41:50-52; 50:20), Naomi (Ruth 1:12-14, 19-21), and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:4, 9-10, 13-14).

² Greg Herrick, "Exhortation to Unity—A Final Word Concerning Obedience" (2:12-18). *Philippians: The Unconquerable Gospel* (www.bible.org, Biblical Studies Press), 60.

³ Sam Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy: The Message of Philippians* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2004), 86.

⁴ Paul uses *hoste* in Phil 1:13 and 4:1.

⁵ Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*: New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 273-274.

⁶ The Greek word translated "obey" (*hupakouein*) contains the ideas of hearing, especially the divine word as proclaimed, and submitting to what is heard. The Philippians had received the word of God from Paul and were encouraged to translate that into action in their everyday lives. So we too are responsible to hear the word of God and put it into practice in our lives (see Matt 7:24-27; 1 Thess 2:13; and Jas 1:22-25).

⁷ This intimate friendship and bond of love permeates the entire letter to the Philippians (see 1:3-11, 12; 2:20; 3:1; 4:1, 10). Paul also referred to the Romans in the same way (Rom 1:7), and despite the Corinthians' carnality, he loved them too (1 Cor 15:58). How different the tone is here from books like Galatians, where Paul is dealing with heresy.

⁸ I have received great help from Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago: Northfield, 1995). Chapman has written subsequent editions to better understand the love languages of men, singles, teenagers, children, and God. Look up "The Five Love Languages" on <http://www.amazon.com>.

⁹ He is not calling for repentance, as we see him doing with the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:9-10; 12:21), or as our Lord does in Revelation (2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19). As far as Paul was concerned, they had "always" obeyed (cf. 2 Cor 7:15; 10:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:4; Phlm 21).

¹⁰ They had obeyed not only in the initial reception of the gospel (Acts 16:14, 32-33), but ever since that time as well (approx. ten years).

¹¹ See Bill Hybels, *Who You Are When No One's Looking* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987).

¹² Notice the emphasis on salvation as "your" or "your own." Various English versions include the word "own" ("your own salvation"). See ESV, HSB, NRSV, NKJV, and KJV. However, this word is not in the Greek text.

¹³ Martin, *Philippians*, 115-116 and Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 98 are typical of those who argue (quite cogently) in favor of the first alternative, namely, *soteria* means the health of the Philippian church community (#1). They point out that (1) Paul has just finished speaking against individualism and urging the Philippians not to look out solely for their own interests; (2) the verb *katergazesthe* means to "work at," or "achieve," a meaning that fits better with the idea of corporate health and unity than one's personal salvation; (3) the verb *katergazesthe* and the reflexive pronoun *eauton* are both plural, not singular; and (4) the term *soteria* can mean "health" or "well-being" (Acts 27:34).

It does not seem likely that given the focus on corporate unity and "togetherness" in the passage that option #2 is likely. On the other hand, Silva, *Philippians*, 138; 135-142 has made an excellent case for the traditional view that what Paul is espousing here is personal renewal and its evidence in the community of believers (#3). Thus, his view is a combination of #1 and #2. We will summarize his arguments here: (1) in light of the view of Martin, Hawthorne, and others, the question arises as to how God works in the midst of people if not through personal renewal. To assume a conceptual dichotomy between the two is both false and lethal. Therefore, Paul is arguing for personal renewal as evidenced in corporate holiness; (2) while the translation of *soteria* as "health" may be possible, it is not probable. In the nearly twenty occurrences of the term in Paul, it invariably carries its technical theological sense. The evidence, therefore, favors the technical theological sense here; (3) the argument that concentration on one's soul is improbable in a context dealing with selfishness, is tantamount to making the false equation between concern for one's soul and selfishness; (4) if the term *soteria* is taken as personal salvation this does not mean that Paul is teaching salvation by works. The term can refer to more than initial or forensic justification, however. It can refer to the process of living out the Christian life and producing the fruit commensurate with being in right relationship with God. Thus, in the particular context of Philippians 2, the outworkings of the believer's *personal* salvation take the form of *corporate* obligations within the Christian community: the duty of seeking the good of others. See Herrick, "Exhortation to Unity," 62.

¹⁴ In justification and glorification, God does all the work (Eph 2:9; Jude 24). We "work out" our salvation (sanctification) by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit who leads us in the will of God (Gal 5:16). In the context the particular aspect of sanctification in view involves achieving unity through humility. Paul is not here concerned with

the eternal welfare of the soul *of the individual*. The individual believer is not now being called to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God...to a personal application of salvation. Rather the context suggests that this command is to be understood in a corporate sense. The entire church, which had grown spiritually ill (2:3-4), is charged now with taking whatever steps are necessary to restore itself to health and wholeness. [Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*: WBC series (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 98.] Perhaps it is best to see *both* the outworking of personal salvation and the corporate salvation or deliverance of the whole assembly from whatever held them back from experiencing God's best. [Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor, 1983), 655.]

¹⁵ The other usages of "salvation" (*soteria*) in Philippians have a temporal, present tense meaning (1:19, 28). This sense is also used in Matt 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; John 12:25; 1 Pet 1:9, etc. Working out our salvation is a life-long process, as can be seen by the present tense of the imperative (*katēgazesthe*). It is something we "keep on doing."

¹⁶ If one prefers another interpretation, it must not be in conflict with salvation by grace through faith. This is not a command to "work *for*" their salvation. We should not even consider this as an option, because we know how dogmatic Paul is about the fact that men are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works (Rom 3:19-30; Gal 2:20-21; 3:1-29; Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7). It is virtually the same thing as "conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel" (Phil 1:27). Paul had in mind the present aspect of our salvation in which we are laborers together with God (1 Cor 3:9; cf. Titus 3:8). See Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Philippians* (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/philippians.pdf>, 2006), 32; Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Miami Springs, FL.: Schoettle, 1992), 114-116; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*: New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 235.

¹⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *Laugh Again* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 97.

¹⁸ "Fear and trembling" are used together in the Greek OT (LXX) in Ps 2:11: "Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling." This Psalm is in clear reference to the millennial kingdom and the King's exaltation in it. Thus, I believe we are being exhorted to emulate the life illustrated by Christ in Phil 2:5-8 in order that we may also be exalted in the same way (though not to the same degree!) as He was.

¹⁹ See 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5. In 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5; and Phil 2:12, the expression is closely associated with "obedience." Notice that Paul has just pointed out that our Lord's humility was demonstrated by His obedience (Phil 2:8).

²⁰ The Greek words *phobos* ("fear") and *tromos* ("trembling") both imply fear in a negative sense. Yet, Paul's use of the terms in other contexts refers to "awe and reverence in the presence of God" [O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 284; see discussion on 282-284]. The translation "awe and reverence" was chosen to portray the attitude the believer should have toward God as they consider their behavior in light of God working through Jesus Christ (2:6-11) and in the believer's life (2:13) to accomplish their salvation. See NET Study Notes.

²¹ Our faith should be worked out with humility, because we know that no good work is truly our work; rather it is God's work. He is the One working in us so prompting us to desire and to carry out His will. How can one be proud of any good thing we do when we know that anything good really has come from God (see 1 Cor 4:7; Jas 1:17)?

²² Herrick writes, "Though he doesn't specifically mention it, the apostle can be thinking of none other than the Holy Spirit who lives in us in fulfillment of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-33; 2 Cor 3:4-18). The Spirit indwells us permanently (2 Cor 1:20-21; Eph 1:13-14), fills us for worship (Eph 5:18), enables us to surrender our lives (Rom 7:6), delivers us out of sin (Gal 1:4; 5:16-24; Rom 8:2-3, 13), and generally enables us to understand Christ (Rom 1:16; Eph 1:18; John 16:13-14). He is a Spirit who is constantly working to glorify Christ and create unity in the body of Christ—undoubtedly one of his primary efforts within the Philippian church (cf. Eph 4:3). Thus the Philippians were to come in 'humility and dependence' upon God as they worked out their salvation. They were to be careful not to become arrogant as if some of them were better than others (cf. Phil 2:3-4; 3:7-11). The Spirit is the One who would work in them to carry out God's will; they were totally bankrupt in and of themselves (cf. Eph 2:1; John 15:6). He not only gave them the desire to do God's will, such as seeking the needs of others ahead of themselves (as Jesus did in 2:6-11), he also gave them the energy or will to do it. God has provided such a complete salvation! One of the primary means that God has established for us to experience such empowerment is prayer. Paul has already mentioned this in connection with his desire to exalt Christ in his body (1:19-20), but he will mention prayer again near the close of the letter (4:6-7)."

²³ It could be that this helps define "salvation" in 2:12. Perhaps this salvation comes as the result of desiring and doing God's will, not our own.

²⁴ Deffinbaugh notes, "All too often Christians try to distinguish between 'our work' and 'God's work,' as though they can be neatly isolated and compartmentalized. In my opinion, this is like trying to distinguish between our

Lord's humanity and His deity. Since the incarnation, He is the God-man, and I don't think we do well to try to distinguish between our Lord's deity and His humanity." Bob Deffinbaugh, "Fleshing Out Your Faith" (Phil 2:12-18). *To Live Is Christ: A Study of the Book of Philippians* (www.bible.org: Biblical Studies Press, 2000).

²⁵ The informed Christian who knows the Lord through His word, and in prayer, will say with the apostle Paul: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor 15:10).

²⁶ Dwight Edwards, *Earthly Conduct of Heavenly Citizens: A Verse-by-Verse Study Through Philippians* (www.bible.org).

²⁷ Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy*, 89.

²⁸ Preaching Today Citation: Quoted by Marvin Hein in *The Christian Leader* (Nov 21, 1989). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 2.

²⁹ Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy*, 90.

³⁰ The first word in this verse in the Greek text is *panta* ("all things" or "everything", which by its position indicates the writer's emphasis

³¹ "Grumbling" looks at the initial activity and "disputing" is what results (2:2; 4:2; cf. 1 Cor 10:10).

³² The term *goggusmos* occurs only three times in the NT outside of Phil 2:14. In John 7:12 the term is used to refer to the whispering or secretive talk engaged in by the people regarding the person of Jesus: "There were many in the crowd "grumbling" about him, some said he was a good man and others said he was a deceiver." In Acts 6:1 the Grecian Jews "grumbled" against the Hebraic Jews (i.e., strife was developing) because widows among the Grecian Jews were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The complaining and divisiveness was quickly cut off, however, when the apostles dealt with the issue. They understood that such attitudes are lethal to church unity and witness. In 1 Pet 4:9 the apostle commands the various Christians in the churches to offer hospitality to one another and to do so without grumbling. One can see from the examples in Acts 6:1 and 1 Pet 4:9 the close connection between this word and selfishness ambition which we saw in 2:3. The verb occurs eight times: Matt 20:11; Luke 5:30; John 6:41, 43, 61; 7:32; 1 Cor 10:10 [2x]. The great warning of what grumbling and disputing can lead to is Israel's ten instances of complaining in the wilderness. That behavior culminated in the Israelites' refusal to enter and occupy the Promised Land from Kadesh-barnea (Num 13-14). We frustrate God's work of producing unity, which He does by reproducing the mind of Christ in us (i.e., humility), when we complain and argue (cf. 1:19, 28).

³³ The term arguing, *dialogismos* occurs 14 times in the NT and is never used in a purely favorable light (cf. Luke 2:35). It appears in conjunction with the antagonistic thinking of the Pharisees as they opposed the ministry of Jesus (Luke 5:22; 6:8) and the self-centered, arrogance of the disciples (Luke 9:47) as they "reasoned" about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (i.e., immediately after Jesus had predicted his death [Luke 9:45])! Further, James refers to those who despise the poor as "judges with evil thoughts." In Luke 24:38-39 the term refers to "doubts" in the minds of the apostles regarding Jesus' resurrection. Further, Paul tells Timothy that men are to lift holy hands in prayer and to do so without "disputes" (1 Tim 2:8). Thus the term signifies contentious behavior probably connected in some way with an arrogant attitude. The Philippians, Paul says, are to do everything without this kind of attitude.

³⁴ Swindoll, *Laugh Again*, 98.

³⁵ Preaching Today Citation from *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 3.

³⁶ "Blameless" (*amemptos*) means "without blame" (cf. 3:6) because we deal with our sins as we should. It does not mean unblemished (*amomos*) nor unblameable (*anegkletos* and *anepileptos*). The term *amemptoi* occurs five times in the NT. In Luke 1:6 Zechariah and Elizabeth's piety is regarded as "blameless" in terms of the manner in which they kept "all the commands and righteous requirements of the Lord." In 1 Thess 2:13 Paul prays that the love the Thessalonians have for each other may overflow so that their hearts will be strong, blameless in holiness before the Lord. In this passage *amemptoi* is inextricably bound up with love for other Christians. The term is also used twice in Philippians. In 3:6 Paul refers to his former Pharisaic way of life under the Law as "faultless" or "without blame." The sense of the term in 2:15 is "to be beyond reproach" (cf. Job 1:1; 4:17). Cf. BAGD, 45, s.v. *amemptos*. If the Philippians continue to grumble and complain they will give occasion for outsiders to find fault with them and their gospel. Instead they are to give no reason for accusation; they are to be blameless.

³⁷ "Innocent" or "pure" (*akeraioi*) means unadulterated, unmixed with anything defiling (cf. Rom 16:19). The term *akeraioi* is related to the verb *kerannumi* which means to "mix" or "mingle." The noun *akeraios* (note the negative prefix *a*) was used to refer to undiluted wine or unalloyed metals. It occurs only three times in NT. In Matt 10:16 Jesus wants the disciples to be as wise as serpents and as "innocent" as doves. In Rom 16:19 Paul says that he wants the Romans to be wise about what is good and "innocent" about what is evil. In Phil 2:15 it refers to the opposite of grumbling or disputing. The "innocence" that Paul has in mind in Philippians is broad and covers every area of their lives, but it specifically has in focus the need to refrain from in-fighting and divisive behavior. Thus, as the

Philippians—and therefore all Christians—grow in blamelessness and purity they will truly reflect their lineage as children of God (*tekna theou*) above reproach (*amoma*; see Eph 5:27; Jude 24). They are to reflect the attitude and values of their Father (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:16; Gal 3:28; 1 John 3:1, 2) without blemish.

³⁸ Paul then added the idea of being unblemished (*amomos*). The children of God are to be free from defilement and so not chargeable with justifiable criticism even though we live in the midst of a twisted and perverted generation (cf. Deut 32:5).

³⁹ The term “crooked” (*skolia*), is used three other times in the NT. In Luke 3:5 it is used metaphorically (i.e., morally) to refer to the straightening of crooked roads, i.e., the crooked state of affairs, so that the coming of the Messiah to Israel would not be hindered. The generation of Jews who rejected the Messiah were regarded as a corrupt (*skolia*) generation of people under the judgment of God (Acts 2:40). In 1 Peter 2:18 Peter refers to certain masters as “corrupt,” meaning that they are unjust and harsh in their treatment of slaves (cf. 2:19). See BAGD, s.v. *skolios*, #2.

⁴⁰ The term “perverse” (*diestrammenes*) occurs in Matt 17:17 where Jesus refers to his generation as “perverse” because of their lack of faith and stubborn unbelief. Paul accused Elymas of perverting the right ways of the Lord because he tried to turn the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, from the Lord (Acts 13:10). He also warned the Ephesian elders about men who would arise in their midst to pervert the truth or teaching about the Lord in order to draw men after themselves (Acts 20:30). The two terms crooked and perverse together in this context are taken directly from Deut 32:5. The difference in Phil 2:15 is that Paul refers to the unsaved world in Philippi as “crooked and perverse” whereas Moses referred to the Israelites (i.e., God’s people) as “crooked and perverse.” Paul probably has in mind the people in Philippi who are trying to oppose the church (1:28) or the legalists of chapter three who are perverting the gospel (3:2ff).

⁴¹ The word “generation” (*geneas*) can refer to a group of people several generations long, not just to one generation of people (e.g., Matt 12:39). Here it probably refers to unbelievers as a whole (cf. Matt 17:17; Acts 2:40).

⁴² Christians are lights in a dark world (Matt 5:14; cf. Dan 12:3). The Light of the World now indwells us (John 8:12). Paul wanted his readers to bear a strong witness rather than having their light shaded by sin or uncleanness (cf. Matt 5:15-16).

⁴³ Some commentators argue that the terms “blameless” and “innocent” refer to the future when Christ returns to judge. This interpretation is ruled out, however, on the grounds that Paul is talking about their present character in light of their role in a crooked and depraved generation. Paul is not referring in this text to some future eschatological period, but instead to the “here and now.”

⁴⁴ Many commentators take the term *epechontes* to mean “holding on,” as we have it in the text of the NET Bible (check the note, however, for the alternate renderings of “holding out” or “holding forth”). This, however, in my judgment, is not the sense of the term here. It is better for several reasons to understand the verb to mean “hold out” and not “hold fast to” the word of life. There are five reasons: (1) the term probably never means “to hold on.” It virtually always means “to hold out or toward” (see Luke 14:7; Acts 3:5; 1 Tim 4:16; Acts 19:22); (2) Paul is discussing their role in the world as reflecting the character of God; they are his children. They are “in the midst” of a crooked generation, and they “shine” as stars in the world/universe. Thus, the context is one which stresses their active role in the world, an idea which lends itself more easily to the notion of witnessing than trying to hold on to something; (3) in the Greek text the expression “holding [out/on to] the word of life” immediately follows the term “world” which indicates that witnessing is in view; (4) the expression “word of life” seems to be better understood in terms of the word which brings salvation to others; and (5) Daniel 12:3 underlies Phil 2:15c-16a. Recall that Philippians 2:15c reads: “in which you shine as lights in the world...” This corresponds to Daniel 12:3a where Daniel says “But the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse.” Phil 2:16a reads: “by holding [out/on to] the word of life.” Daniel 12:3b says: “And those bringing many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.” The emphasis in Daniel 12:3b is on people *bringing others to righteousness* which more easily fits an evangelism emphasis in Phil 2:16a. See Herrick, “Exhortation to Unity,” 66.

⁴⁵ See NET alternative reading in 2:15.

⁴⁶ Various English versions render the Greek word *phosteres* as “stars” (e.g., HSB, NIV, NRSV).

⁴⁷ There are allusions and direct references to the judgment seat of Christ throughout the epistle (e.g., 1:19; 2:12, 15-16; 3:12-14; 4:15-17).

⁴⁸ As Thielman says: “Here and elsewhere, Paul describes his apostolic labor as a race in which he runs and which, if stumbling blocks do not intrude, will result in a prize (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:6-8; cf. Gal 2:2). These stumbling blocks may include Paul’s own faithlessness to his call (1 Cor 9:24-27), hindrances placed before him by other Christians (Gal 2:2), or, as here, the faithlessness of the churches whom God had placed in his care. Paul enriches this metaphor with one drawn from Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:4 the Servant of the Lord expresses dismay that he appears to

‘have labored to no purpose,’ to ‘have spent [his] strength in vain for nothing’; but he also expresses his confidence that his reward is in the Lord’s hands. Later the prophet promises that in the final day, when God creates new heavens and a new earth, his people ‘will not toil in vain’ (Isa. 65:23).” Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 140-141.

⁴⁹ Paul used the same metaphor in 2 Tim 4:6. “The sacrifice and service” employs only one article with the two nouns, and probably is a hendiadys meaning “sacrificial service.” The apostle is thinking of their various Christian ministries performed as a spiritual sacrifice to God (4:18; Heb 13:15) and springing from their faith.

⁵⁰ Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy*, 94.

⁵¹ Paul says that even if he was being poured out as a sacrifice as a result of their faith, he has joy (*chairō*) and rejoice[s] (*sugchairō*) together with [them]. And in the same way, [they] also should be glad (*chairete*) and rejoice together with [him] (*sugchairete*). Thus we return to the example of Paul himself who no matter what the circumstances experiences joy and calls others to rejoice with him.