

How Holiness Shines

Philippians 2:14-18

Introduction:

Light has the unique ability to cut through the darkness, and not only gives the ability to see what we could not, but also draws attention to where it shines from. Even the smallest of sources shines brightly in a room void of light. That is why it only takes a small flashlight while camping in a tent or a single candle or light on a phone to brighten the room when the power goes out. But we also light up what is most important, or shine on something valuable. The point is NOT the light itself, but what it illuminates, whatever sign, address or announcement one wants to make.

We looked 2 weeks ago at God's divine enablement that He gives to those who believe to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, the ability and resource to grow in maturity and holiness, in knowledge and wisdom. He gives the ability for our desires and action to change, as both what we **feel and do changes** in conformity with His will and pleasure. God has not caused us to be born again to stay as infants but grow into adulthood, and that adulthood would and should stand out in the world around. So He moves us from **growing to glowing**, shining like lights in the midst of the world.

As the Philippians work out their salvation with fear and trembling they are to avoid dissension within the community, and live as blameless children in order to shine as lights in the middle of a twisted world, which would be cause for rejoicing and glory.

Stop What You Have Been Doing (14)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing...

The Command

"Do everything" is all encompassing. Paul tells the church that in everything they are stay away from grumbling or disputing. The case can be made that he is referring to the community of the church, since he has called for unity chapter 1 and the beginning of two. Is this complaining about others, leaders, or God Himself? While the first is most likely, they are all indicted under Paul's all inclusive statement. Paul also used the **present active imperative**, which means they need to continually do things without complaining.

Remember, this is not the first *all inclusive* type command Paul has given: "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or deceit*" in 2:3. Later he will write "*do not be anxious about anything.*" (4:6). While we obviously will not be perfect in playing this command out, it also leaves out our reasoning or excuses for why we do it. In other words, areas of life that create pressure to be prideful, selfish, anxious, or even complaining are NOT valid reasons to engage in it.

The Content

1. Grumbling – (gongysmos) – used three times in the NT, each time in reference to grumbling or complaining against other people.

John 7:12 - And there was much **muttering** about Him among the people. While some said, 'He is a good man', others said, 'No, he is leading the people astray.'

Acts 6:1 - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a **complaint** arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

1 Peter 4:9 - Be hospitable to one another **without complaint**.

Paul was most likely also referring back to the **history of Israel** in this context, making sure that the church learned from their example.

Numbers 14:2-4 – The people grumbled against Moses after receiving news from the spies; wanted to elect a new leader and return to Egypt

Consequence: Their grumbling was really against God (14:29); God pardoned their sin, but they were unable to go into the promised land for their lack of faith (*Num. 14:22-23*)

Numbers 16:11 – Korah rebels; grumbles against Aaron & Moses

Consequence: Korah and 250 others are killed by God (*Num. 16:31, 32, 35*)

Numbers 16:41 – People grumble after Korah's death against Moses and Aaron

Consequence: 14,700 died until the plague was over (*Num. 16:49*)

Why is grumbling singled out by Paul? Why is grumbling so offensive to God?

- **Grumbling against people/situations is actually complaint directed at God** - When Israel was complaining against the leadership given to them by God, they actually were directing it at God Himself. When it is directed toward God, it basically says that what God has done, given, or produced is not enough for us. It is an ultimate expression of pride and selfishness, pronouncing discontentment with what we have and Who has given it. So complaining in any direction is a declaration of the insufficiency of God and His provision
- **Grumbling reveals a deep void of thankfulness and discontentment** - If you have ever been around kids who are tired and hungry, you've heard complaining about food, the justice of what a sibling received, or the merits of a certain bed time. Or the sensory overload of a child at a birthday party when all the presents are opened, and instead of recognizing the mountain of toys yet to be assembled, they look for more to open. Contentment is NOT based on how much we have or do not have (*Phil. 4:12*), and neither is complaining.
- **Grumbling is the verbiage of unbelief, the default setting of our flesh** - Often our break or lunch rooms at the office could be dubbed "complaint rooms". If you want a quick in with your neighbors or co-workers, simply start complaining about the boss, work conditions, systems, structure, government, president, weather, or traffic. No one has to be taught to do it since complaining comes naturally since the world is broken and perfection is always out of our grasp. It is why Paul made complaining a way to shine, since it would differentiate the church from the world by simply NOT engaging in what comes naturally.

Complaining reveals our heart, and our words betray our mind. Complaining demonstrates where our trust stands, whether with the Lord or something else

Why is complaining so pervasive?

Not only because it is our default setting, but because we are indoctrinated every day, bombarded from all sides to be discontent with what we have. We are told we need things bigger, better, newer, faster, and more secure. If we would believe the advertisements around us, it would seem we could never be happy with what we have, we should be afraid of everything, and everyone else has it together, has the products that make them fulfilled, and unless we get those as well, we will always be missing out. We are compelled to believe the universe revolves around us and we are entitled to whatever we want or think we deserve.

What is the antidote for complaining?

When a command is given to **AVOID** a certain sinful activity, there is also an antidote to put on, an attitude or action with which we replace. Complaining is no different:

- **Praise and Thanksgiving** - "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good." (Psalm 118:1) We have a little joke or practice in our house that when we would start to complain, we first need to think out 10 things we are thankful for. Its amazing that when we review all that we are thankful for, what we thought was important enough to complain about was not so big. When we **remember** the goodness of God, His lavish grace, and abounding love, we realize we have far more to give thanks for than to complain about
- **Contentment** - "*for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content*" Without stealing the thunder from our study in a few weeks, Paul learned that contentment's secret was he could do it all, or anything, through Christ who strengthens him. Far from being circumstantially driven, contentment is found in the rock solid, never changing foundation of the person and work of Christ is our lives. This is why Paul talked so much about **joy in the Lord**, since joy cannot be taken away and is the ultimate antidote for complaining.

So Paul reminded the church to stop any kind of complaining, since it is a sin that does not stay boxed in alone but inevitably leads to other kinds of sin. Complaining inevitably leads to **disputing or arguments**.

2. **Disputing** – (dialogismos); to question or argue

This disputing, judgment, and arguing flowed from a complaining spirit. The church should have learned from the lesson that Israel gave them, that complaining and quarrelling lead to destruction. Already this church had a hard time with arguing with each other, and we know about the quarrelling between Eudia and Synteche in 4:2.

Who is it that you are in a dispute with? Is it based on passing judgment or judging someone else's intentions? Are you at odds with a brother/sister because of selfishness in your heart and that has lead to conflict? Are you going to take a step in moving toward unity with each other? Unity is not cheap. It takes hard work to maintain. Paul exhorted both Eudia and Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord. Without this type of unity, the next part would be impossible. This means that we must be quick to **admit our sin, confess it, ask for and offer forgiveness, and turn from what we had been engaged in**. What is at stake in grumbling and disputing is God's glory, our effectiveness, and the unity of our interpersonal relationships.

Shine As a Result of Obedient Living (15-16a)

so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,¹⁶ holding fast the word of life,

Be Clear about the Nature of the world

Crooked – (from the word we get “scoliosis” from); unscrupulous; dishonest

Perverse – corrupted; the people and system itself are corrupt

We should not be surprised by the abject nature of the world we live in.

Jesus Himself told the disciples *“Behold, I send you out, as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matt. 10:16)*

Men love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19)

The world has exchanged the worship of the Creator for the creation, and are on a downward spiral into depravity (Rom. 1:18-32)

Sometimes we are appalled by how bad the world is, what we find on TV and movies, what is spoken about on the radio, how people dress, and how corrupt those in authority are. If we think Biblically, however, we would understand that this is exactly how scripture describes these things, so it should in no way cause us worry or be caught off guard (2 Timothy 3:1-3)

Be Confident about Your Role in the world

The reason we are to put off grumbling and dissension is so that we can be pure as we live in the world. We are to be:

Blameless – free from accusation or blame – from God or man

Innocent – unmixed and pure

Above Reproach – Absence of defects as in a unblemished sheep for sacrifice

We are to presently be free from stain or blame. We are to function like children of God, since we have become God’s children by adoption (Romans 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6). As children, we must reflect our Father’s character. This is a call to general holiness, which means a separation from the world. Not a bodily separation, but one that is NOT TRYING TO BE LIKE THE WORLD in its pleasures and entertainment. We can enjoy the same things, but we do it for different reasons. We are shrewd but innocent, knowing the temptations and calls of the world, but innocent in our engagement in them.

Be Compelled to living this out “in the midst of” and “among” this world

In other words, the goal is to be in a position that the world will see us and be influenced by how we live. Our goal is not to change the culture, but to bring the light to the darkness, and let God do what He will with the culture. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in changing the darkness we forget to bring the light of the gospel. This means that everyday we face the pressure of a tough boss, an unfair system,

tough customers, broken equipment, and lack of recognition, yet we do not participate in the same language of unbelief through complaining that "everyone else" does.

Be Confident to be yourself

John 9:5 – I am the light of the world

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 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.

We must purpose to be obedient and unified so that we can be creative & purposeful at shining among the world. The word is translated 'appear' but it has more of the idea of shining forth. Some have taken this as an imperative, but it is in the *indicative sense*, which means it is a reality to be shown. In other words, the command is not to make yourself shine with effort, it is to live out your condition and *you cannot help but shine*. Often we feel we need to be motivated to reach the lost by programs or speeches, when in reality, if we were living obedient lives that were pure, we would shine everywhere and anywhere, because God was showing through us. This is why obedience to God's Word is such an important issue.

Be Committed to Stand Firm in the world

Hold Fast – keep close eye on; keep watch over - This means consistency and faithfulness is key. The opportunities for influencing our neighbors in this world happen over time, as they observe our life, whether it is consistent or hollow. Some of the best opportunities that I've had in sharing the gospel with my neighbors has come when they have questions about our life or when they are in crisis and they notice something different.

Word of life – this is the entire gospel of God, which is the entire of scripture

James 3:13-18 – The fight between earthly and heavenly wisdom

As we are holding onto the gospel, we are holding it out to others!

Show the Joy that Comes from Sacrifice (16b-18)

...so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸ You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

In order to understand this section, we must understand what Paul's goals and purposes were. Paul understood his task was to preach the gospel and to suffer (Acts 9:15-16). Paul found his joy in pleasing and bringing glory to God by being obedient to the task that God gave him. He viewed those in the church at Philippi as his 'joy and crown' (4:1). Paul's goal was not only to rejoice in the Lord, but also to have others find *their* joy in Christ alone:

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 - But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

Our Motivation:**The Day of Christ**

This is not necessarily synonymous with the “Day of the Lord”, or a day of judgment, but it is an eschatological look at the future when Christ will appear and will take us home and we will stand before His judgment seat as he gives out reward (1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:19)

Vindication of Paul’s Work

Paul uses two metaphors to describe the way he lived:

Run – An athletic term that meant to train, plan, and expend ones energy; it meant knowing and obeying the rules so as not to be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27)

Labor – This word means working to the point of exhaustion. Paul was a tentmaker, and this was an allusion to a skilled weaver who, working on a piece of fabric was able to hand in a large amount of work on payday. The discouragement would come if a piece of cloth was worked on and given back because the weave job was bad and therefore not paid for.

Notice that if the church had continued on its default setting, it would have, in some way, **nullified the work of Paul among them**. There would be no **distinctiveness**, and clearly no joy if they did not walk differently than the world.

Our Ability to share our joy

Paul viewed his life as a drink offering, which was wine or olive oil poured over or beside a burnt or cereal offering, for the purpose of making the offering complete. Whatever it cost Paul in his life, his greatest joy was to run and labor to the point of exhaustion in order that the church would continue to progress in their faith.

Paul’s final command was that the church would rejoice and share their joy with him. We somehow need to have our thinking to change as we see joy in sacrifice and suffering, since God works through those things to refine and change us. Paul wanted to know the church was growing so that his labor was not in vain.

Where is our greatest joy? Is it in growth in obedience, in the gospel, and in working hard to proclaim the gospel to the world? Or do we seek and find joy in other places less lovely?

Conclusion:

Are you growing in your obedience? What does that look like?

Do you have a plan when it comes to growth, or are you thinking it will simply happen over time?

How do you handle complaining? Are you just like everyone else? What are ways that we *sanitize* our complaining (i.e. “I was only *venting*”)

Have you **separated** yourself from this world and from those who need the light?

Are you shining, or are you covering up, blending in with the darkness?