

# Whine or Shine

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Date: 23 April 2017

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] to be here and actually good to be back. I'm sure most of you won't remember, but I think the last time I was here was in the year 2000. And I was tempted to preach on the same passage as I preached on in the year 2000 and see if anybody came up to me and said, yeah, I think I heard that from you before, but I doubt if anyone would. But I resisted the temptation to do that. And instead, I want to consider with you what God has to tell us in Philippians 2, verses 14 and 16, a text that I've always found very challenging and simple, practically simple, but also somewhat theologically profound. So let's read what it says there, and we'll take a look at it together.

It says, do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Let's just pray together, first of all. Father, we ask that you would come and be our teacher and our guide, that you would free us from our preconceptions or even our misconceptions about who you are, about who we are, and that you would, through your Holy Spirit would do your work within us today, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

In Paul's letter here to the believers in the prosperous Roman colony of Philippi, probably written about 60 A.D. or so, he reminds them that they live in a crooked and twisted generation, and historians agree. For example, Albert Edesheim, who wrote a kind of a seminal book in the middle of the last century about the first century, says, and I quote, absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited, if possible, even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire sensation of marriage. Abortion and the exposure and murder of newly born children were common and tolerated. Unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practiced, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description.

That was the first century, according to Edesheim, where relativism, where there was no kind of right or wrong. Sexual immorality, the decline of marriage, abortion, the exposure of infants.

[ 3 : 2 0 ] In other words, if they had a child and they didn't want it anymore, they would leave it outside, be exposed to the elements and die. Homosexuality, he relates as well. Some of that will sound familiar to us, I think. But as stars shine brightest when the night is the darkest, the first century Christians were called to shine like lights in the world as they held out the word of life.

And 21st century Christians are called to do likewise. And according to our text, Christians who shine are those who are blameless and innocent. Children of God without blemish, Paul tells us here.

But what would that look like? Well, given the twisted and crooked generation in which they lived, did that mean these believers were sort of known for standing up for absolute truth, perhaps, based on the authority of the inerrant word of God? Or are they known for opposing abortion?

Or maintaining sexual purity? Or proclaiming the sanctity of marriage? Well, all of those things are good, and I recommend them. But according to our text, you become this shining light, this shining light in a dark world, when you're blameless and innocent. But it's not these things that he's pointing out here. And this is what I've always found very challenging about this text. You are blameless and a shining star when you quit grumbling, according to the text. Or questioning, as it says here. Or as I like to paraphrase it, when you quit whining. That's the final frontier, according to the Apostle Paul here. And here's the point I want to make. And you'll hear me say this more than once. Christians who whine will never shine. Christians who whine will never shine.

So I want to do three things in the few minutes that we have. I want to take a little closer look at the text, what the Bible says here. And then I want to sort of anticipate what we might say. In other words, the objections that we might raise about this text. And then finally, kind of an application or some practical ways, what I call, what is the remedy? So first of all, what does the Bible say here? Well, there's really only one imperative verb phrase in this paragraph. And it's do all things without grumbling or questioning. The word for grumbling here, it's one of those onomatopoeic words, kind of those words that sound like what they're describing in Greek, gongoussmos, grumbling. Kind of sounds like that, doesn't it? You know, it's one of those interesting things in English where all those gr words. I don't know why it happens. Linguists don't know really why it happens. But those gr words that are all kind of negative words, you know, grumpy, griping, grouch, grim, grieve, gruesome, all starting with gr. And in John 6, 41, this is where this word says, so the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven.

[ 7 : 02 ] Or in Luke 5, 30, and the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled to his disciples saying, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And so grumbling is all around us. Whining is all around us.

Employers, coaches, teachers, spouses, pastors, politicians, yes, even politicians. We grumble about the weather, the price of everything, taxes, and even how God runs the universe.

I think that's the point of this text. And that second word, questioning, which the NIV translates arguing, an interesting word as well, dialogosmos, where we get the word dialogue. In classical Greek, it's a term, a commercial term, having to do with the settling of accounts, kind of figuring out who owes what. In Luke 24, 37, and 38, the word is used. It says, but they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts? That's the word doubts that's translated here. In Romans 1, 21, it says, for although they, knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking. That's the same word here that's, it's translated thinking. And their foolish hearts were darkened. And in Romans 14, 1, it says, as for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. That's the word here. So in the Greek of the New Testament time, this word sometimes meant arguing with one another, you know, questioning as it's translated in the ESV.

But more often, I think it's kind of a cerebral thing. You're kind of, what's going on in your head, like you're arguing, you're kind of arguing with God in this case. Second-guessing God. So whining, as I see it described in this text here, is this, an attitude of doubt and distrust in God's handling of the affairs of men and women that's demonstrated by constant grumbling about one's circumstances.

You ever do that? I know I have. So I paraphrase this verse, the camp paraphrase, I call it. Go through life without grumbling and always counting your change to see if you've been shortchanged by God. Go through life without grumbling and always counting your change to see if you've been shortchanged by God. So secondly then, what do we say about this? Like, Paul is telling us that this final frontier that makes you effective and a shining star, you know, as you hold out the word of life, if you want to be that kind of person, you need to quit whining. But what could we say? Well, two things, I think. First one is, but things go wrong, don't they? I mean, things go wrong. And don't I have a right to whine when things go wrong? And it's true. Things do go wrong. That's how come we have

[ 10 : 43 ] Murphy's Law, as you know it. If anything can go wrong, it will. And there's other versions of Murphy's Law as well. Like, if there's a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage is the one that will go wrong. Or if anything just cannot go wrong, it will anyway.

Or, left to themselves, things tend to go from bad to worse. Or if everything seems to be going well, you've obviously overlooked something. That's sort of my approach to life, I have to confess.

Or, finally, the chance of bread falling with the jam side down is directly proportional to the cost of the carpet. Now, look, none of us are denying that things go wrong. They do in our lives.

You know, I recall reading this little story from the Focus on the Family magazine from February of 2002. A true story, and it goes like this. We married in a small country church in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The weather was warm, so we opened all the windows and doors. And while we were repeating our vows, a horsefly landed on my forehead. When he finally flew away, he left a hole and blood dripped from my head onto my shirt. At the same time, I noticed that the preacher was sweating heavily.

He suddenly called for an unscheduled prayer, and while he prayed, my wife-to-be produced a tissue and stopped the bleeding. The preacher also took advantage of the closed eyes to dispatch a wasp which had flown up his trousers and stung him three times. Now, I hate it when that happens.

[ 12 : 34 ] And I read as well about this woman who was giving birth to a baby in an elevator at a hospital, and when she complained about the location, a nurse said, why, this isn't so bad. Last year, a woman delivered her baby out on the front lawn. Yes, said the woman on the floor, that was me too.

So, we live in a world where things go wrong, and you know, sometimes some of them are humorous, but some, of course, are seriously wrong. Our health, our family, our relationships, our employment, things go wrong. It's how we respond when things go wrong.

Second objection. But everybody does it. Everybody whines, right? I mean, yes, everything goes wrong, but everybody does it. But really, that is the point that Paul is making here. If you want to be different, if you want to be known to be different, a different kind of person, even a different kind of Christian, you need to be one that develops the ability to accept what God brings into your life and not to whine.

I mean, my parents used to say, back in the middle of the last century, that this didn't work. If I used to tell them, but everybody's doing it or wearing it or going there, that carried no weight with my parents. In fact, I remember shopping with my mother when I was in my, probably, you know, perhaps 13 or something like that. We would go to this, we lived in Maple Ridge at the time, and we would go to this little department store, and I remember shopping for, hoping my mother would buy me the latest, you know, jeans or something like that.

And I would just, if the salesperson said to my mother, well, everybody's wearing these, I knew that I never would be.

[ 14 : 47 ] Because that's the kind of person she was. Now, we come from a long line of whiners. As you heard last week, I think, after the Israelites were miraculously rescued from the Egyptians through the crossing of the Red Sea, they worshiped the God who triumphed.

Do you remember that, you know, we even have some worship choruses that are based on this, these texts. I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and His rider He has thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him, my Father's God, and I will exalt Him. Well, that was last week.

And here's a spoiler alert, because Dave may not like this, but what's to come reminds us that we come from a long line of whiners.

In Exodus 15, later on in the chapter, for example, it says, Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea. They were heading to Sinai, and they went into the wilderness of Shur.

[ 15 : 56 ] They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. And when they came to Merah, they could not drink the water of Merah, because it was bitter, therefore it was named Merah. And the people rumbled against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

And a little bit later, they set out from Elam, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elam and Sinai. On the fifteenth day of the second month, after they had departed from the land of Egypt.

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

And then even a little later, in Exodus 16, So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord.

For what are we that you grumble against us? And Moses said, When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat, and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling, that you grumble against him, what are we?

[ 17 : 24 ] Your grumbling is not against us, but against the Lord. And we could look at some other chapters as well in the book of Numbers.

I mean, they were just a congregation of grumblers. I hope there aren't any here. But he was clear through his word, that the grumbling, when you complain about things going wrong, you can complain to your wife, or you can complain to your children, you can complain to your employer.

But ultimately, when we grumble when things go wrong, we are grumbling against God. Numbers 14, for example.

At this point, left Sinai. They're on their way to Kadesh. And it says, And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me?

I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel when they grumble against me. Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing, I will do to you.

[ 18 : 33 ] Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness.

And according to the number of days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.

I, the Lord, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me. In this wilderness they shall come to a full end, where they shall die.

And this is what I find somewhat striking when you look throughout the scripture. God takes grumbling very seriously. In fact, an interesting couple of verses in Jude, verses fourteen to sixteen.

[ 19 : 55 ] Kind of an interesting book, and I won't try to explain what it means here this morning, but it refers to some, some kind of false teachers that were in the early church at the time.

And it says, It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his holy ones to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

Are you getting the point? These ungodly men, who are they? These are grumblers. Malcontents, is what the verse says.

These are grumblers. God takes grumbling very seriously. So what's the remedy? How do we deal with whining in our lives?

There's three things, the ABCs I call them. First of all, with A, acknowledge the sovereignty of God. I love Isaiah 45. I don't know if it's one of your passages, favorite passages or not.

[ 21 : 13 ] It says, I am the Lord, and there is no other. Besides me, there is no God. I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none besides me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.

And then later on in verse 9 of Isaiah 45, Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots.

Does the clay say to him who forms it, what are you making? Or, your work has no handles. An interesting verse. So we need to accept that God is in control of the universe and he can't be partially sovereign.

Whining is not primarily a behavioral problem, but in my view, and I think in the scripture's view, a theological one. Stephen Curtis Chapman in a kind of a well-known psalm that he wrote put it this way, reflecting this theology.

[ 22 : 37 ] And the pain falls like a curtain, you know this song, on the things I once called certain, and I have to say the words I fear the most. I just don't know.

And the questions without answers come and paralyze the dancers, so I stand here on the stage afraid to move, afraid to fall. Oh, but fall I must on this truth that my life has been formed from the dust.

God is God and I am not. I can only see a part of the picture he's painting. God is God and I am man, so I'll never understand it all, for only God is God.

And the sky begins to thunder and I'm filled with awe and wonder, till the only burning question that remains is, who am I? Can I form a single mountain, take the stars in hand and count them?

Can I even take a breath without God giving it to me? He is first and last before all that has been, beyond all that will pass. Oh, how great are the riches of his wisdom and knowledge, how unsearchable for to him and through him and from him are all things.

[ 23 : 54 ] So let us worship before the throne of the one who is worthy of worship alone. I just have to, he says, I just have to say the words I fear the most.

I just don't know. And we don't. We don't know why things happen. We don't know the bigger picture. Remember hearing about two little teardrops were floating down the river of life.

One teardrop asked the other, Who are you? I'm a teardrop from a girl who loved a man and lost him. But who are you?

And the first teardrop replied, I'm a teardrop from the girl who got him. So we don't understand what God is doing.

The second, the B, break the whining habit. Because Christians who whine will never shine. Now you can find, interestingly, you can find all kinds of websites on the internet to teach you how to get your dog or even your three-year-old to stop whining.

[ 25 : 08 ] But there isn't much to help adults. So what do we do? I mean, I speak as a fellow traveler who has on occasion enjoyed a pity party or two.

We need to start by committing to make some changes. Well, first of all, I think when you feel like whining, when you don't understand what's going on or why everything is falling apart in your life, you just need to not whine.

The next time you start complaining about your lot in life, you need to quit listening. When you find yourself grumbling and even complaining, learn to say, Lord, I don't understand, but help me to trust.

And look for productive ways to deal with problems rather than standing around and criticizing. And thirdly, and maybe the most important, the C, we need to cultivate contentment.

Remember what Paul, the author here, said about his own life in 2 Corinthians 11? He said, I'm talking like a madman with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.

[ 26 : 25 ] Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes lest one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, dangers from Paul's brothers.

In toil and hardship, though many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. danger. This is Paul's life.

But later in this book, in this letter to the Christians at Philippi, Paul says, I've rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Now that I am speaking of being, not that I am speaking of being in need, for I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

[ 27 : 32 ] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

