

Grumble or Shine: Your Choice!

- Philippians 2:14-15
- Last time we were in Philippi together, Paul was instructing us through his letter to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. With the reminder that it is God who works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Perhaps in anticipation of the question, “What does it look like to work out my salvation?” Paul gives further instruction on that theme. Although we know that it means that we are to live more and more like Jesus, Paul focuses on our attitude as we pursue Christ. And he basically says, “You can either grumble or shine: it’s your choice.” Let’s look at these two verses today under those two main points: grumble or shine. Just a heads-up, the first point will be most of the sermon.
- **Grumble**
- It may be surprising that Paul boils down ‘working out your salvation’ to “do not grumble or argue.” But it is an all inclusive imperative, Tony Merida points out, like the positive all inclusive imperative we find in 1 Cor. 10:31 – “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Here Paul says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Interesting that it’s not the thing that’s important. All things, Paul says. Nor is it the proficiency with which we do all things. (He didn’t say, “Do all things well”) Or the speed. (“Do all things quickly) Or even the immediacy. (“Do all things without having to be told twice.”) Certainly those are important considerations, but there’s a more important issue here. What is Paul addressing when he says to do all things without grumbling or disputing? Our heart. Grumbling or disputing comes out of our mouths, but as Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” So, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.
- Where does this command from Paul come from? Well, lots of possibilities come to mind. Paul didn’t have to look far: apparently there was some grumbling and disputing in the church in Philippi, at least between two women. But I suspect Paul was also thinking about some Old Testament examples, events which he said in 1 Corinthians 10, “took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” In that passage, Paul warns about idolatry, and sexual immorality, and putting the Lord to the test, as the children of Israel did over and over, and each time there were dire consequences. But with this list he adds, “nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” Paul says, “Don’t be like those in the Old Testament who grumbled!” There are too many examples to look at, but let’s talk about two. Remember right after God had parted the Red Sea and the whole nation of Israel walked across on dry ground, only to turn and see God destroy Pharaoh’s army by bringing the water back together? What did the people of Israel do? First they worshiped, and Moses and Miriam led them in some worship songs, and they were having church! Then what happened? They went three days into the wilderness and couldn’t find water. “And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” Then they grumbled against Moses and Aaron because of food. And they said they wished they had just died in Egypt: ‘at least THERE we had meat to eat! Why did you bring us out here into the wilderness to kill us with hunger?’ Look at Exodus 16:6-8. I think the point is clear.
- Look now at Numbers 14. This is perhaps the most costly grumbling that ever took place. The scene is Kadesh Barnea, from which Moses had sent twelve spies into the promised land to spy it out and see if they could take the land. And you remember they came back saying the land was amazing, fruit was plentiful, milk and honey were flowing, but, there was one problem. Ten of the spies said there were giants in the land that made the Israelites look like grasshoppers. But two of the spies (names?), Joshua and Caleb said, “No, we can take this land.” What happens next is a clear testimony to the fact that the majority is not always right, in fact they are often wrong. The ten spies convinced the people that it was a lost cause. Look at **Numbers 14:1-4**. We know the penalty for their grumbling, which was evidence of unbelief, was that all the men 20 years old and older, except Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness. And the wilderness, which was

intended to be a ten day pass-through into the Promised Land, became a 40-year wander. What do we see here? What do you notice about the direction of their grumbling? Grumbling and rejection of authority are first cousins. Maybe kissing cousins. Whenever we see the children of Israel grumbling, they are not just rejecting the authority of their leaders, they are rejecting the authority of God.

- Why do we grumble? Because it is SO easy to do when things are not going our way. I have an aunt who has miraculously managed to stay alive longer than all but one of her seven siblings. I say it's a miracle because as long as I have known her, which is my whole life, she's always been on death's door. At least, that's the way she tells it. She's always been a polite grumbler, but a grumbler just the same. Don't tell her your troubles unless you want to hear them matched and more by hers. It's funny that the word in Greek for grumbling is an example of onomatopoeia. That's when a word sounds like what it means. Like "hiss." Grumbling is "goggusmos." Say it with me. Another example is "murmur." Say it with me, low and growling. Our NATURAL response to anything we don't like is to grumble. And when we bring that attitude into the church, we have a mess, because we tend to grumble and complain about leadership. Listen. It is going to happen, over and over. The pastor, the elders, the deacons, the worship leaders, hey even the lady who makes out the nursery schedule! We are all going to do something or say something you don't like. I manage to do that just about every week. The question is, when that happens, what will we do? How will you respond? Worst case scenario, we just take our toys and go home. Or down the street. Kent Hughes said, "Today's McChurch worshippers who leave their church go down the street to find a church more to their liking."
- But grumbling and complaining is not just a favorite pastime in church. It's rampant at work, isn't it? Got a grumble against your boss? You have two choices that I can see, from Scripture. You can go to him or her and present your complaint in a respectful way, and then accept the response you get. Or you can swallow your grumble, thank God that you have a job, and go on with your day, smiling instead. Let's face it: we are all just as happy as we choose to be. That's not self-help nonsense, that's biblical truth: rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice! It is the same in any relationship. With your marriage, your friends, your in-laws. Don't grumble. Peter even mentions grumbling in connection with hospitality. "Show hospitality without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9) One of the reasons people are restless and church-shopping is because they are looking for a place where they will be loved and welcomed. Let's be that place! When Cindy and I were in London, we decided to go to Metropolitan Tabernacle on a Sunday morning for worship. I figured they would serve that kind of ice cream after the service. No, we wanted to go because that's the church made famous by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers in the 1800's. We decided to try the Antioch experiment and show up ten minutes late (actually we miscalculated how long it would take on the subway), but anyway we were ushered up to the balcony and were pointed to a pew. That was the only time during or after the service that anyone acknowledged our presence. They didn't grumble about hospitality there; they just left it out entirely! I know, it's a big church, but every church is big in comparison to other, smaller churches.
- Don't grumble. Then Paul adds, and don't dispute. This word means "doubtful reasoning" or "rationalization." It can also be translated, "royal pain in the neck." No, I made that up. But you know the type, don't you, that if you say, tomorrow there's going to be an eclipse will say, No there's not. Well, you know, the sky is blue. No, it's really not. That's just an optical illusion. Well, this morning, when I saw the sun rise. Uh-uh, the sun doesn't rise. That's fake news. Look, there's a place for asking a question or for pointing people to a fuller understanding of how the universe operates. I understand that. But when we dispute everything we hear just because we don't want to ever be found in agreement with someone else, or because we always want to be the smartest person in the room, that's the definition of being a pain in the neck. And a sad portrait of pride, someone who is wise in his own eyes. Paul said in 1 Cor. 3 that the wisdom of this world is folly with God. And Paul uses this word for disputing here: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." (1 Cor. 3:20) That brings us to point #2.

- **Shine.** Listen, there are two reasons we should put away grumbling and disputing, The first and most important is that they are a sin, and a reproach to God. The second is that we are called to shine, not to grumble. It's a complete thought: Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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." One leads to the other. If we grumble and murmur like the world, we lose our distinctiveness. Our saltiness. But if we rejoice in the Lord, and refuse to complain, we stand out. Paul said "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:18-21) You know I have noticed that when someone is singing or humming a song to himself, he is not grumbling or murmuring at the same time. I have noticed that it is difficult to give thanks to the Lord for something and grumble at the same time. Can we learn to speak a different language than the one the culture speaks around us? I felt dumb in Moldova, as I have everywhere I go in the world where people speak more than one language. One Moldovan said, "Hey, Mark, what do you call a person who speaks three languages?" I said, "Tri-lingual." "Ok, what about two languages?" "Bi-lingual." "OK, what about one language?" I don't know. "American." Hey, I have great news for all of us who are linguistically challenged, You CAN learn a new language that will set you apart no matter where you go in the world. You can put away complaining and replace it with thankfulness. Instead of grumbling and disputing, we can learn to give thanks and rejoice in the Lord? We know we can, because we know that it is God who is working in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure!
- **What's it going to be?** Grumble? Or shine?