

## The Letter to the Philippians

### Lesson 14: Stop Complaining

### Philippians 2:14-16

**“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, 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.”**

Do you ever remember Mom saying at the dinner table, “Eat your food, there are starving people around the world who would love to eat at all!” But that is the way kids are, at least in this culture. Although food is available and abundant, kids only want to eat what they want. But this isn't a childish sin problem, this is a human sin problem. While we may grow to eat more diverse foods, our greedy appetites cause us to always want more of everything in life.

We live in a culture where our poorest are richer than two-thirds of the world, and yet we have an upper middle class that has convinced itself that by comparing itself against the super-rich through the media, that they are lacking and in need of more. We are dissatisfied with what we have, regardless of what we have acquired in this life, and just like the child, still want what we want, when we want it. To be sure, the culture that we're brought up in plays a factor in this character trait of greed, dissatisfaction, impatience and entitlement.

Our world was a radically different one-hundred years ago. Teenagers from 1917 had a much harder world to grow up in. At the age of 18, these men were fighting in war. They worked hard to provide, and grew and provided for large families. In 2017, boys grow up spoiled and lazy many times. Oblivious to the hardships of time gone by. They remain locked into self-indulgence sometimes for the rest of their lives. They play like boys sometimes into their 30's, and tend to avoid the commitments of marriage, or fatherhood, those commitments that require them to put others before them. The result of this culture of kids has resulted in the highest divorce rate in history. The influence of modern media has created a generation of kids who need nothing, wait for nothing, work for nothing, and still get a trophy for participation, or should I say, being present.

I would urge the older generation who are quick to judge the youth of today to instead be grateful that they grew up in an era that largely instilled better values and shaped better character in them. Nonetheless, whether you were born in 1940 or 2000, we must remember that we all share the same sin nature. We have a sin problem, we do not need a rude awakening, or an attitude adjustment. Psychology isn't the answer, Christ is. While we may be more prone to be greedy or entitled as a youth today because of our environment, we may have been more prone to be racist for example, growing up in the 40's. We are all to an extent dealt a hand to us. Where and when we are born will influence us, but the influence of our culture and family is never to be blamed. Regardless of our age, we all fight against greed, and impatience and lust, and so forth. What we all need is the correction and instruction of the Word of God. None of us are bound by the dictation of our age, all of us are to be reshaped into the likeness of Christ through His Word in the power of the Spirit.

### **There's Nothing New About Complaining: A Biblical Theology**

From the first man onward, we have complained, and it has always been a terrible sin. Do you recall the account of 'The Fall' in Genesis 3? Adam, guilty of committing the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, chose to deflect the blame when encountered by God. Instead of accepting the punishment, he complained to God about Eve! **“The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave**

**me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”** (Genesis 3:12) Adam’s son, who certainly had no culture to blame, inherited a sin nature from his father, and he complained in scripture too. Cain committed to minor, insignificant sin of the first murder, or at least you’d think it was minor based upon his reaction to God. Instead of repenting of his heinous sin, and accepting punishment, Cain actually complains to God Himself about the punishment he has been given! **“Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”** (Genesis 4:13-14) Moses, losing sight of the goodness and faithfulness and sovereign control of God, complained to God about the speed and efficiency of His deliverance of the people from Pharaoh’s control. **“Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.”** (Exodus 5:22-23) We all know that account, that the Lord indeed delivered the Israelites. In fact, He delivered them in style! Splitting a sea and drowning the Egyptians in it was probably the most ‘drop the mic’ way to deliver anyone. And yet, despite God’s deliverance, despite knowing His power, and plan, and control, the Israelites still complained to God shortly after being delivered. Read [Exodus 16:2-8](#).

The next episode of grumbling is in Exodus 17:1-7, when the people are camped at Rephidim, but they have no water to drink. The people are arguing with Moses and demanding that he provide them with water. Moses seems to be afraid, even at his wits end when he again complains to the Lord in 17:4, **“So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”** You can read similar, and repeated examples of the Israelites complaining in [Numbers 11](#) during your personal study. There are additional incidents of the Israelites complaining in Numbers 14-17. In chapter 14 the spies have returned from spying out the Promised Land and most have no faith in God’s power to continue to in His promise to give them the land. Instead, they complain to Moses in verse 2, **“And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in this wilderness!”**

In Numbers 16, we have the rebellion of Korah and some other Levites who were not of the priestly clans. Korah and his company thought that they were equal with Moses and Aaron. The Lord punishes Korah and the families of the rebellious by opening the ground under their tents and having the earth swallow them (v. 31). Then fire from the Lord comes down and consumes Korah and his 250 men before the tent of meeting (v. 35). Unbelievably, the next day the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron because of the death the day before. A plague broke out and 14,700 more people died before Aaron had made atonement for the congregation (v. 49).

There seems to be a pattern in the OT, although we certainly only covered a small portion of it. The people grumble and complain against Moses, which is really grumbling against the Lord. Then the Lord has mercy and shows kindness to them. He is faithful to His covenant people. The people continue to complain and show their lack of faith and trust in the Lord. Eventually the Lord needs to deal decisively to chastise His people.

As we turn our attention to the NT, we see a few more instances of grumbling and complaining. The first NT example is found in Matthew 20:1-16 in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. In the parable the owner of the vineyard hires different crews of men to work in his vineyard and promises to pay them the appropriate wage. At the end of the day the owner pays the first workers and the last workers the same wage. Those that worked all day grumbled against the owner, **“And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”** The workers grumble or complain against the Lord of the vineyard for His mercy to some. In this parable we do not

see God's punishment or chastisement of the grumbling workers. If anything, we again see the Lord's mercy towards those workers.

Similarly, in John 6:1-14, Jesus had just finished feeding the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish (v. 9). The next day the same crowd awoke and found Jesus on the other side of the sea (v. 25). Jesus spoke to their hearts' intent when He said, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.**" Jesus then gave a lengthy discourse, pointing them to their need of spiritual sustenance over the physical. What they needed to do was eat the Bread of life, which was Christ, and they would never hunger again! (v. 35) And after this verse 41 records, "**So the Jews grumbled about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'**" They said, "**Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'**" Jesus answered them, "**Do not grumble among yourselves.**" (John 6:41-43) Jesus continued in verse 45, "**Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.**" In verse 49, Jesus compared Himself to the manna in the wilderness that their Father's ate and died. He said in verse 50 and 51, "**This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**" What was the response to this teaching? Scripture records that many of the disciples were grumbling about this (v. 61), and "**After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.**" The people, just like the Israelites of the OT, were not satisfied with the deliverance that God had provided, and walked away. The only difference being that the Jews of old had no place to go, so they longed to be back in slavery to the Egyptians.

In reality, every complaint a believer makes is against the Lord and is one of the ugliest of sins. John MacArthur comments, "*Believers' failure to willingly, even joyfully, submit to God's providential will is a deep-seated and serious sin. Discontentment and complaining are attitudes that can become so habitual that they are hardly noticed. But those twin sins demonstrate a lack of trust in His providential will, boundless grace, and infinite wisdom and love.*"<sup>66</sup>

### Back to Our Text

The three verses that make up the backbone of this lesson are rich, and well deserving and profitable to be pulled apart and examined. We must never forget that context is always king. While we could take verses 14-16 out of the book, and create an independent Sunday School lesson that would serve us well, we shouldn't forget that these verses are at the tail end of our last two lessons.

We must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, Paul said in verse 12. And now in verse 14 he gives us a command, "**Do all things without grumbling or disputing.**" The command to 'do all things' tells us that we are to work out our own salvation in everything that we do. It's as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**" Or as Paul commanded in Colossians 3:17, "**And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**" In other words, there are no compartments in the Christians' life. There aren't spiritual times and times for worldly persuasions, but everything ought to be done for the glory of Christ. Every aspect of our lives must be transformed by the salvation that we hold and cherish.

We are to do all things without 'grumbling or disputing'. **Grumbling** is an onomatopoeic word. (Which is a long word that I had never heard of before this study, and I'm not even sure of the pronunciation) 'Onomatopoeic' means that the word is spelled like it sounds. Splash, whoosh, and bang are examples of

---

<sup>66</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 179)

onomatopoeic words. Grumbling, as we've seen throughout our study of scripture, is the negative emotional response to unpleasant, inconvenient, or disappointing moments in life that are deemed undeserved by self-centered individuals. All grumbling is ultimately directed towards God. The Greek word **Disputing** has the basic idea of inner reasoning, it is the intellectual result of grumbling. Disputing carries with it in this verse, the idea of questioning God on an intellectual basis, of questioning your faith, your theology. Paul has chosen these two words carefully, and he has placed them in this order intentionally. First, we grumble and God, and then disputes against Him occur. Conversely, when we have a right attitude of love towards God, we will rest in our faith in Him. Our faith, or lack thereof, is rooted in our emotion.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments, *“These two things go together, of course. If once we begin to doubt God’s love (grumbling), then we begin to doubt everything (disputing). We begin to doubt the facts; we begin to doubt the whole principle; we will be worried about miracles and all sorts of things—that is the order. You love first, then you understand, and if you do not have that fundamental confidence, you cannot hope to have faith—that again is the order. And, of course, that is what is illustrated so perfectly in the case of the Children of Israel. They had seen God’s wonders, they had absolute proof of His power, and while all went well, as the psalm reminds us, they believed. Then something happened and they began to turn against God, and to query his love. When you have lost confidence in God, you cannot believe anything; when you love God you can be afraid of nothing—these things always go together and the murmurings lead to the disputings.”*<sup>67</sup>

Paul gives us this command here, because the reality of life is that as we work out our salvation, we will go through times of trial, where believers will be prone to grumble and dispute. Much unlike the gospel promise that goes forth in personal evangelism, or at church rallies, Jesus doesn't fix everything in your life. You don't become rich, you don't defeat sickness, you don't become popular. Jesus actually promised the opposite to believers, **“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”** (John 15:20) During Jesus' sermon on the mount, He said, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”** (Matthew 5:10-11) So Paul is giving practical commands to believers who were going through difficult times (1:29-30), and need this encouragement to have a right attitude.

We are to “do all things without grumbling or disputing”. Which means that every difficult circumstance that God has promised to lead us through ought to be met without grumbling or disputing. We're promised in James 1:2-3 to, **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** If God has promised to lead us through the difficult trial that we're in, what does it say when we grumble? It says that we don't trust His word. It says that we don't trust His power. And it says that we don't trust His love for us.

Without exception, while we hold to the truths that we know and cherish concerning God's sovereign control, and love for us. Without exception, while we always cherish Romans 8:28, we must go through every element of our lives without grumbling or disputing. It is sin to do otherwise. This is how Paul can say near the end of the letter to the Philippians, **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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.”** We should praise God for men like Paul, who not only preach truth, but give us a life pattern to follow in keeping the word.

---

<sup>67</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *The Life of Joy* Baker, 1989 (p. 192)

### Three Reasons From Our Text To Stop Complaining

**“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.”**

John MacArthur, as he has done many times in the past, has helped me to outline these three reasons from our text. They are: For believers’ sake, for the unbelievers’ sake, and for our Pastor’s sake. Let’s look at the three in order.

#1) For believers’ sake: **“That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish.”** The first reason for us as individuals to abstain from grumbling and disputing is for the purity of the bride of Christ, His Church. When we come together, as we have this morning, or when we meet with each other for dinner, our speech can be either edifying or damning, it can either be Christ exalting, or it can bring shame to His name. Our conduct in conversation, even within the closed circle of believers, is one mark that distinguishes those who are Spirit indwelt, those who are born again, from those who aren’t. Paul gives three adjectives that mark the result of obedience to Christ in our conversation, they are: blameless, innocent, and without blemish.

Hansen writes, *“The three adjectives set a high standard for the character of the children of God: blameless (amemptoi), pure (akeraioi), and without fault (amoma). The first letter in each word, alpha, the first letter in the Greek alphabet, is a prefix that negates the root word: no blame, no flaw, and no fault.”*<sup>68</sup> This is the standard that we are called to attain, and it is not unattainable. Many times we dismiss disobedience in our lives, we admire lofty callings as these but we chalk up our failures with sayings like, “Nobody’s perfect!”

How could anyone be called blameless? What does it mean to be blameless? Zacharias and Elizabeth were called so, **“And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”** (Luke 1:6) Paul even calls himself blameless in 3:6, so being blameless certainly has nothing to do with being sinless. Being blameless is to say that no one, not even another believer, could hear what you are saying and find some fault in it, whether it be through your bickering, or your griping, or even your tone of voice. Our lives out to scream of a transformation, and to be sure, whether you like it or not, every believer and unbeliever you know is looking for and judging your every word, so let your speech honor Christ.

After being blameless, the next adjective that Paul uses is innocent. To be innocent, as to be blameless, certainly has nothing to do with lifelong sinlessness or no one would ever achieve it. The word is defined as ‘the consistent act of being unmixed with the world’. Jesus, fully aware of the shortcomings of His disciples, still urged them to be innocent in their character, **“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”** (Matthew 10:16) Paul was also aware of the sin nature in all believers, and yet he commands the Romans (and all Christians by extension) at the end of his letter, **“For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”** (Romans 16:19) IOW, our lives are to be pure, not mixed with sin and evil.

There is, in a sense, a sense of outward and inward purity when we consider the two words *blameless* and *innocent*. We’re blameless outwardly, since the blame comes from the judgement of our manifested sin. But this word *innocent* marks more of an inward purity. It characterizes our internal, and hidden integrity. With this word, we are forced to look deeper than our Sunday smile that might fool our Pastor,

---

<sup>68</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 181)

but never our God. We are forced to look at how innocent and pure we are at our core. That is why Paul adds this second word which sounds so close to the first. Not content with mere external observance, mere external holiness, Paul wants us to be internally blameless and pure. It's the same pattern and concern for holiness that Jesus had, **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'** (This was the outward blameless that many had since they had taken seriously the marriage vow) **But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** (This is the internal innocence that Christ was after) (Matthew 5:27-28)

Lloyd-Jones comments, *"There should be nothing in the Christian which in any way can mar this perfect specimen. There should be no speck or spot, no indication of disease. That is the standard, or pattern, which is set for the Christian in the New Testament, that is the goal to which we should be striving and the position we should be seeking to attain. And the ultimate reason for all this is that we are the children of God and there is nothing too good for us. We are to be more and more like our Father. Thank God there is a promise there in the New Testament that one day we shall be blameless, spotless and without rebuke. For there is one who 'is able to keep you from falling', and who will 'present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24), and in the meantime our business is to be striving after these things. My goal for myself, my standard for my whole life should be that—to become blameless and harmless and without any blemish whatsoever."*<sup>69</sup>

We are to be children of God without blemish our text says. The terms 'blameless' and 'without blemish' are quite similar and might be challenging to you, if you were asked to separate them by definition. The words are closely related in the Greek: Without blemish (amomos), and blameless (amemptos). The Greek word *amomos* is used quite frequently in the Septuagint in regard to sacrificing animals, which sets the precedent for what God requires of our lives. Numbers 6:14, **"and he shall bring his gift to the LORD, one male lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish as a sin offering, and one ram without blemish as a peace offering."** This ought to be the same blameless character of the Christian. Paul said it a few times in his letter to the Ephesians, **"Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."** (Eph. 1:4, 5:27)

One other important thing to consider about our being blameless, and without blemish, is that we cannot present ourselves as such in our own power. As Lloyd-Jones quoted just a paragraph ago, it is the perfect and spotless Lamb of God who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy! (Jude 24)

#2) For the sake of the Unbeliever. The first reason that we need to stop complaining is for the purity and holiness of the people of God, the bride of Christ. The second reason that we need to stop complaining, is because we ought to remember where we live, and seek to bless those who are watching our lives intently. Verse 15 of our text continues, **"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."** We live in a crooked and twisted generation. Perhaps that has never been more apparent than it is now. The term 'generation' is not limited to only that generation alive when Paul wrote this letter, it simply refers to society at large. Also, while it may have to go unchecked, I must note the word 'world' and mention that this is referring to the evil Satanic system that we see operating all around us, and not simply our planet.

The word *crooked* is the Greek word *skolios*, from which comes the medical condition Scoliosis, which may be familiar to you. Scoliosis is a condition in which the normal curvature of the spine is bent

---

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *The Life of Joy* Baker, 1989 (p. 200-201)

abnormally so the spine is misaligned. But that's where the term originates. *Skolios*, culturally speaking, referred to anything that deviated from the norm, biblically speaking, it referred to the moral and spiritually corruption of humanity in comparison to our perfectly Holy God. The word *twisted* is translated from the word *diastrepho*. It's a very similar word to crooked, only it has a heightened intensity. *Crooked* refers to our sinful bent nature, but *twisted* takes it a step further and intentionally bends the truth. Jesus was accused of being 'twisted' by the crowd when He stood before Pilate in Luke 23:2, **"And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.'**" Paul, before the false prophet Bar-Jesus on the Isle of Paphos, scolded him in Acts 13:10, **"You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"** Paul later warned the Elders at Ephesus that false teachers will come up from within them, that will twist the truth and mislead others, Acts 20:30, **"And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."**

This is the crooked and twisted world that all believers live in. We live in a world where unbelievers seem to invent newer and more base ways to sin against God. And yet, no matter how crooked our world becomes, no sin is worse than the man or woman who take the Word of God and twists it into a lie that leads people into damnation. This is the world where we live. It shouldn't shock us when we see it, nor should it shock us when this world is against us. We are told here, and in numerous other places that this is the world in which we live. God knows about it. God is in perfect control of it, and He is orchestrating history to its intended point and time. He is the One leaving us in this fallen world for our good and His purpose. He is the One allowing the trials and tribulations to come against us within His controlled environment, just as He did with Job. We see this clearly in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:14ff, **"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world...(v. 23) I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one, so that they world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."** It is our command to go through our lives without grumbling or complaining, **"(shining) as lights in the world."**

Do you remember the last time the power was off for a few hours? Suddenly, the quietest sounds can be heard from a far distance. The moonlight and starlight are highlighted when the streetlights are off. And the light from a single candle can fill your dark basement. It's amazing how a soft sound can carry in silence, or how a small flame can fill darkness. It's this idea of light filling darkness that believers are called to be. If the world were filled with the Holiness of God shone through most of its inhabitants, I suppose the small flame that would emanate from your life might hardly be noticed or have a great impact, or it would certainly honor God. But the world is not a blazing inferno of light and holiness, it's described as darkness, and therefore, the candle of your life is intended to bring light into this world in a powerful and effective way. It is important to connect Paul's thought, that living a life devoid of grumbling and disputing, will stand as a light in a dark and perverse world.

Spurgeon has, as he always does, a great point to make concerning being a 'light',

*"You have noticed at night a star. It is only a little spark comparatively, but still it is very bright, and everybody says, 'Do you see that star?' Yes, but there is a moon; why does not everybody say, 'Look what a beautiful moon?' They notice the star first, because it is not usual to see stars so brilliant. By-and-by, on a moonlit night, the daylight people do not say, 'What a lovely sun!' No. 'What a lovely landscape! What a beautiful view! Look at the tints of those trees now the sun is shining!' Just so the little Christian is like a star, bright in his little sphere. Others like the moon; they excite admiration and attention to themselves. But a full-grown Christian, who should be perfectly conformed to the image of*

*Christ, though giving more light than either the moon or the star, would not be half so much looked at, for men would be looking at what he shed light upon rather than upon him. They would look to the doctrine that he taught rather than to how he taught it; they would be looking rather at the lesson of his life than at the life itself. If I should urge you to more and more publicity, it will not be for your sake, but that you may be more and more forgotten, while the truth is the more clearly seen.”*<sup>70</sup>

It is this quote from Spurgeon that cuts to the point of this second reason to stop complaining and grumbling. Our lives are purposed to shine the light of Christ onto a dark world. May God mature us to shine like the Sun, where the light of Christ would so brilliantly shine from our lives, that no one would dare to marvel at us, but marvel at the light of Christ Himself.

### Hold Fast

Paul continues making our second point in verse 16 with, **“holding fast to the word of life.”** I will admit that until I studied this passage, I always read and understood ‘holding fast’ to mean ‘holding on to’ the Word. But that is not what he means. There are times when we read Paul telling us to ‘hold fast’, and he does mean for us to hold on to something. (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13) But in those references, he’s using the word *echo* or *katecho*. In verse 16, he’s using a related word, that has a different application, *epecho*. ‘Epecho’ means to hold something out, as though you were going to give it to them. So while it still implies that you hold the word of life dearly, this prefix adds that you’re sharing it with these unbelievers. With this interpretation in mind, Paul has just beautifully contrasted *grumbling* and *disputing* with evangelism! Instead of being preoccupied with *complaining*, the church should be occupied with *proclaiming* the word of life. Complaining turns off the light of the church in the world; proclaiming the word of life shines the light of the life of Christ into the darkness of the world.

There isn’t much instruction necessary to understand the application of what Paul means when he speaks of *the word of life*. Without question, Paul is referring to Scripture, but more specifically I believe Paul to be referring to the gospel message. At the end of John chapter 6, Jesus is taking an opportunity to teach the disciples about the source and power behind saving faith. He said in verse 63, **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”** He then went on to explain to them that their calling is determined and granted by the Father Himself, which was determined from the beginning (v.64). Verse 66ff, **“After this many disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** The same John who wrote that gospel account, opened his first epistle this way, **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.”** (1 John 1:1-2)

So we see that this word of life that we are to be *holding fast*, literally holding out for the world to grasp and touch and see, is the Christ who has redeemed us. This is the mark of a true believer, this is what the believers ought to be speaking, in order to shine forth the light of Christ in a dark world. In Acts chapter 5, the apostles are imprisoned, and the angel of the Lord has opened the doors during the night and freed them. In what serves as a picture to us who have been called to serve the Lord, being freed from the prison of sin, to speak life! The angel said, **“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of Life.”**

---

<sup>70</sup> Spurgeon, C.H., *Commentary: Philippians* Lexham Press, 2015 (p. 75-76)

#3) There is a third and final reason for believers to stop complaining, to hold fast to the word of life and shine forth as stars, and that is for our Pastors. The second half of verse 16 says, **“So that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”** Paul begins this third point with a personal reason for the obedience of holiness of these Philippian Christians. As an extension, this point is mirrored to every relationship between a Pastor and his flock.

The *day of Christ* is not the same as *the day of the Lord*. The day of the Lord is the day of swift and final punishment for every unbelieving and unrepentant sinner. The day of the Lord will come at a time when the wicked will not expect it. Jesus said it would come as a thief in the night. The day of Christ is similarly a day of judgment, but it is only a judgment for believers, and it is the day when all believers will be rewarded for their faithful service. Paul spoke of this day in 2 Cor. 5:9-10, **“So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”**

It is ironic that Paul looks forward to the day of the Lord by talking about his pride in the believers, in light of his extensive writings against pride in the NT, especially in this letter up to this point. In 2:3, he has just told us to do nothing from conceit, and then he advocated humility. He recounted the example of Christ who humbled Himself (2:8), and now eight verses later he’s seemingly talking about being proud in his efforts? Let’s highlight a few passages from Paul against boasting: Boasting about law keeping, Romans 3:27, **“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.”** He later said in 1 Cor. 1:28-29, **“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”** Then Paul writes concerning the sin of boasting about people, even our leaders, 1 Cor. 3:21, **“So let no one boast in men.”** So are we to conclude that Paul is sinning by desiring obedience in order that he may be proud in his efforts? I don’t think we should make that conclusion. There is a pride, or a boasting, that is biblical. Paul tells us what we should boast in, 1 Cor. 1:31, **“So that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”** Paul later in this letter (3:3) writes, **“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”** Paul boasted in the cross, Galatians 6:14, **“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul boasted in his weaknesses, 2 Corinthians 12:9, **“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”** Paul even boasted about his converts, 2 Cor. 7:4, **“I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you.”** 2 Cor. 8:24, **“So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to those men.”** 1 Thess. 2:19, **“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.”** 2 Thess. 1:4, **“Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”** Paul even expected his converts to boast in him, 2 Cor. 1:14, **“That on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.”**

Hansen comments, *“Paul’s theme of boasting turns the whole concept of human boasting upside down. Human boasting takes pride in human power and human accomplishments. But Paul’s boasting gives all the glory to God for God’s demonstration of grace and power through human weakness and tribulation. When Paul speaks of boasting on the day of Christ about his apostolic work in the community of believers (2:16), his boasting is based upon his belief that it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good pleasure (2:13). His boasting is not self-glorying or self-praise, but boasting in the grace of God.”*<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 185-186)

As our third reason has said, we ought to stop complaining, and shine forth the light of Christ for our Pastors sake, so that he, alongside Paul, might be able to say, **“that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”** No Pastor wishes to serve a congregation that is ignoring the message and not growing. No Pastor wants to look back on his ministry and see that many people who were under his care perished. A Pastor, by the title of his position alone, cares for the feeding and nurturing, and safety of his flock. But just as he is responsible for us, we are responsible in our relationship to him. Paul admonishes us in 1 Thess. 5:12ff, **“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. The author of Hebrews tells us, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”** John tells us in his third epistle, verse 4, **“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”**

I'll let Martyn Lloyd-Jones close our lesson with this summary thought from our text within the context of chapter 2. He wrote, “Starting at verse 12 and going on to verse 16, he has been giving this wonderful description of the Christian man. He says: You are children of God, and as children of God you must remember your relationship to him, in all your conduct, in what you are in and of yourself and in your relationship to the world outside; you are to work out this great salvation with fear and trembling. Then in this practical section, it seem to me, he gives a demonstration of all that, as it did actually work out in his life, in that of Timothy and of Epaphroditus, and in the life of the members of the church at Philippi...It is church life like this that really conquers the world, as it did the ancient world. Men and women saw something in the Christian society that they had never seen anywhere else. We get glimpses of it here, but just imagine its effect on any township or village or country district! And this has been repeated many times in history; every revival reproduces this kind of thing, and this, it seems to me, is the thing that is greatly needed in the world at the present time.”

---

<sup>72</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *The Life of Joy* Baker, 1989 (p. 224-225)