

“Abandon All Grumbling” (Philippians 2:12-18)

Philippians: Joyful Unity in the Gospel
Zionsville Fellowship | July 5, 2026 | Danny Strong

Introduction:

Question: A couple weeks ago, Derek asked if you’ve ever experienced disunity.

- I’ll begin with a similar question,
- When you experienced disunity, what did it sound like?

“Therefore” in 2:12

- 2:12 - “Therefore”- so this passage comes as a conclusion of an argument Paul has made.
- 1:27 - Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So there is a value, a worth of the gospel that a believer’s life should reflect.

What does this life look like?

- 1:27 - “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”
- Making strenuous effort together for the sake of the gospel
- And just how much striving this takes, Paul shows us in 2:1-11
- 2:1-12 - do nothing from selfish ambition, count others more significant than yourselves, look to other’s interests.
- And the pattern, Paul says, is Jesus in 2:5-11
- Jesus didn’t say, “Whatever happens, I must survive.” “I’m the key. So let others suffer so I can do what I need to do.”
- No. He, being God, still lowered himself below our interests, counted us more significant than himself, and become obedient to a crucified death.
- “Therefore” — God raised him up, and exalted him above every name.
- Christ’s obedient suffering lead to ultimate glory.
- That’s the “manner of life.” This is what God’s life in the world looks like.

Tip of the Spear — Abandon all grumbling

- “Therefore”... Paul gives two commands.
- One is general, one specific. And they work together.
- So think of this as spear — The general command is “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”
- It captures the overall idea. But the point where it really pierces us, where we feel the full force of Paul’s argument comes in the second command in 2:14
- “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”

- So...What does disunity sound like? It sounds like that.

I. General Command: Make Every Effort to Live Out the Pattern of Obedient Suffering that Leads to Glory (2:12-13)

A. “Work out”

1. The easy part. This isn’t easy. It’s going to take striving.
2. “Not only in my presence, but much more in my absence” — You’ve done so well, and I want it to keep getting better.

B. “Your salvation”

1. Doesn’t mean “work to earn your salvation”
 - You don’t have salvation, but maybe if you work really hard,
 - You can please God and achieve a goodness worthy of salvation.
2. Paul’s pursuit
 - a) 3:12 — Paul says something very similar later about himself
 - 3:12 — “I press on to make it my own.” Make what his own?
 - 3:10-11— Let’s back it up and see what Paul is talking about
3. 3:10-11
 - Resurrection — The ultimate “good life.” A good life made by God. And it’s greater than suffering or death.
 - “May share in his suffering, that I may attain the resurrection” — You don’t get to resurrection without going through the cross.
 - The only way to ultimate life is through dying. The only to find your life is to lay it down. The only way to glory is to pick up your cross and follow him.
 - Salvation in me now — obedient suffering that leads to ultimate glory
4. Why does obedience require suffering?
 - a) Culture — the vast majority of cultures, in the vast majority of places, in the vast majority of history, have a value system different and often directly contrary to God’s. So living according to God’s value system is going to put you at odds with a lot of things in the world.
 - b) Sinners — It’s hard to love sinful people. It’s especially hard when you’re still sinful yourself. So love is painful.
 - c) Death — We’re all suffering and dying. You will have to chose to love people even though you are suffering.

C. Do this “with fear and trembling”

1. This what we would call a cultural idiom — it's a phrase that Paul's readers would immediately understand, but we don't use the phrase anymore.
2. EX: Someone famous. A hero of yours spends the day at your house. (Jordan, Messi, George Washington, etc.).

You would you feel awe and excitement

You would also feel small yet valuable — because now you them

Would also make you very careful and intentional about all you did — you want this person to like and respect you.

Lots of ideas but all stem from one thing — the value and worth of that person.

3. So “work out your salvation before the living presence of Jesus Christ”

D. The Motive

1. Promise of the Present — 2:13 “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

2. EXAMPLE: Moses at the Red Sea

- There is a promise: God is going to deliver Israel from slavery, going to take down the Egyptian empire to do it, going to make them his people, give them a land. But that's future.
- Moses is standing on the banks of the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army ready to slaughter them all behind him. And a Sea before him. And the command is to stretch out his rod over the sea.
- Why? Why ask Moses to do that? There's nothing special about his stick. Why are they here? What's God doing?
- At that moment, Moses has a choice. He can obey. Or he can do what everyone behind him is doing...grumbling. “Why are we here. We could have died in Egypt. What kind of leadership is this? Who made this plan?”
- But instead Moses in faith stretches out his staff.
- At the same time, it is Moses making a real choice, Moses obeying God. But it is God working in him to give him that faith. It's God who splits the Red Sea

3. THE POINT

- Salvation isn't about God working salvation for you. It's about God working salvation THROUGH you FOR others.
- If we pursue obedience as our working salvation for others, and not God, that's crushing.

4. Application...

- “Make every effort to obey, which will require suffering, but that suffering will lead to an ultimate glory.”

- So I can say “I’m saved,” give my time mostly to gaining financial security, driving my kids to all their stuff, going on vacations, and rarely worshipping with my church, studying Scripture or prayer, and that’s not the good life.
- That’s a self-made, self-powered good life. And you’ll get exactly what you’re striving for...a self-made, self-powered good life, and then you’ll die. And either you will fall into the everlasting arms of God or you won’t.
- And the question right now isn’t just, “Are you saved?” The question is also, “Is God’s salvation working in you?”

II. Specific Command: Abandon all grumbling (2:14-18)

A. Why Grumbling?

1. Stating the Negative

- Paul says striving for the gospel, stand out as a blameless people in a twisted, bent and broken world, shining like stars in the night sky...and we’re going to do it by not grumbling. Really?
- Paul could have said, “Be joyful.” In fact, he does. All over Philippians. “Rejoice always, again I say, Rejoice!” “I’ve learned in whatever state I am to be content.”
- But there is something important about stating the negative. “Rejoice” — what exactly does that mean? How do I know that I’m doing that?
- Well, you’re not grumbling.

2. Obedient suffering without grumbling

- Two reasons why he brings up grumbling here
- First, because he has just said they need to follow Christ in obedience that will lead them into suffering.

3. Grumbling and Disunity

- Whatever space in a church is taken up by grumbling, there is disunity.
- Wherever space is taken up by joy, contentment, and gratitude, unity is flourishing.

B. Reason 1: It Stands Out (2:15a)

1. “Blameless and innocent” doesn’t mean perfect — Paul uses “blameless” to describe himself before he believed in Christ.
2. He’s talking about reputation — What we’re known for.
3. If we become a people who don’t grumble, that’s what we’ll be known for
4. Grumbling is everywhere — we grumble about
 - How hot it is, or cold it is, or dry or rainy.

- About our bosses, spouses, our kids, parents, friends, other drivers
- About our jobs, homes, church, car, bills
- Our fear about what we don't know about the future, and our worry about what we do know
- We grumble about how much others grumble.
- We grumble in our words, thoughts, gestures, facial expressions, fingers
- Imagine how starkly different a community where there is no grumbling

C. Reason 2: It's Beautiful (2:15b)

1. A non-grumbling people will be like stars glimmering in the night sky.
 - Turning night from something dark, terrifying to something beautiful.
 - So in a world of cynicism, pessimism, anger, outrage, here are people of joyful contentment who don't complain.
2. This is a Compelling Beauty
 - Everywhere there is freedom, energy, excitement, hope, there isn't grumbling there.
 - If you got rid of grumbling in your speech, thoughts, relationships, everywhere, how much energy would you have?

D. Reason 3: It's How We Love the People Who've Invested in us (2:16-17)

1. "So that I may be proud that I did not run or labor in vain" (2:16)
 - Do you know what is so discouraging for pastors, elders, mentors, parents? A bunch of grumbling, bickering, gossiping people.
 - It's exhausting, and Paul says, it will show that the grace of God isn't even working in you.
 - A grumbling church is an ugly church
 - So here is how we love the people who have invested in us — when they look at us, they see people who don't complain.
2. "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering..." (2:17)
 - Let me die. That's ok. Just don't grumble.
 - But Paul says more than that. He says "I am glad and rejoice with you all...Likewise, rejoice with me."
 - If you become a people who enter into obedient suffering in love, striving for the gospel, and you don't grumble. In world full of cynicism, negativity, outrage, pessimism, bickering, and you're a people of contentment and joy, shining like stars in a dark sky....I will gladly die for that.

III. Application

A. Diagnostic question

1. So before you is the path of obedience that will call you to suffer but ultimately lead to a life made by God.
2. And here is a diagnostic question for how much that has seeped into our lives — “How much space does grumbling have in my life?”
3. The opposite of grumbling working in you is faith

B. Faith replacing grumbling

1. The input — “holding fast to the word of life”
 - You can’t fight grumbling without getting more of the gospel into your life
 - Come to church regularly, join a Bible study, small group, growth group, Habits, etc.
 - Memorize Scripture
 - Make time in the Word a non-negotiable of daily life.
 - It’s not just about ceasing to grumble. It’s about replacement.
2. The power - “for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
 - You and I are standing on the edge of the Red Sea. The path before us seems impossible.
 - The way of obedience is not self-powered, self made life.
 - Obedience is not earning salvation from God. Nor is it earning salvation for others. If my obedience is an attempt to produce salvation for others, that’s exhausting. That will crush me.
 - All we are asked to do is trust him in this moment and do all we can to obey, trusting that He will take care of the impossible.