

## **Stop Complaining, Part 1**

Philippians 2:14

50-22

Let me sort of ease in to our subject a little bit, if I might. We're in Philippians chapter 2 verses 14 through 16. And I titled the message, "Stop Complaining." There's a reason for that, and it's fairly obvious if you look at verse 14 where Paul says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," which are really two ways of saying stop complaining. And as I was thinking about this very pertinent message about living your Christian life without complaining, it became very apparent to me that we live in a very complaining society. And I really believe we are breeding a generation of complainers, and they seem to be getting worse with each passing generation.

And as I've said to you on a number of occasions, it is a curiosity to me that the most indulged society is the most discontent society, that the more people have, the more they seem to be discontent with what they have and the more complaining they seem to be. In thinking about this, and there would be many ways to approach it, I was just inadvertently flipping on the radio this week and I heard a speech by a sociologist that was quite curious to me and quite interesting. The sociologist made a very interesting point. He was talking about the young people in our culture, talking about their discontent, talking about their complaining attitude, their resistance to responsibility, and how that nothing is ever the way they would like it. And they go through life with a kind of sullen discontent, kind of rejection of things the way they are. And he had an interesting thesis. What he basically said was this: that in many ways this discontented generation of young people is a product of small families. His thesis was that where you have families where the average is two or less, of course the average family now in America is 1.7 children, which is kind of strange to think about; as one brother said to his sister, "I'm the one and you're the point seven." But every family seems to come out at about 1.7. We realize that families are getting smaller and smaller and moving toward one child families, if that. Most families in America have either none, one, or two children.

Now, his thesis is that those kinds of small families, in a materialistic society, breed selfish, self-indulgent children. And he gave a very simple illustration, some of you may have heard the broadcast. He said, for example, when you only have one child or two, they get up in the morning and mother says to them, what would you like for lunch? "Oh, I'd like peanut butter, I'd like tuna," or whatever. And so, she goes in the kitchen and she makes that. And then, when they go off to school she says, "Well, what would you like for dinner when you come home?" "Oh, well I'd like this, well, I'd like this." "Okay, well I'll have that for you and this for you." "By the way, what time will you be home? What time should I plan dinner?" And the kids say, "Well, about, we've got to do, we'll be home around 4:00, 5:00, 5:30 will be fine." Okay. If you are raised in a family of four, five, or six children, you get up in the morning and you get handed a bag. And when you leave the house your mother says to you, "Dinner is at 5:30. You're here, you eat." And when you go to a table in a small family and your mother has broken her back to prepare some kind of cuisine that she has taken out of an exotic cookbook and you take one bite of it, the typical one or two child family, the kids say, "I don't

like it. I don't want this." In a family of five or six children, somebody says "I don't like it," the kid next to him says, "Good," and takes it.

And the difference is where you have a small family, the system bends to the child. Where you have a large family, the child bends to the system. And so, what you have, he said, is young people growing up in an environment where the system bends to them. And you have child-centered parenting.

I know as a child myself, one of the reasons I wanted to grow up was I wanted freedom. I lived in a totally conformed society. I ate what they gave me. I don't ever remember going shopping with my mother, ever. I wore whatever she brought home. I never picked out a thing, never. I don't even remember going to a department store clothing section as a young person. My mother brought me what I needed, and I put it on. And I conformed to the system. And I looked forward to adulthood so that I could be free to make my own choices. The reverse is true now; children grow up controlling the family and they don't want to become adults because that means conformity. Then, they have to go to work, and nobody at work says, "Now, how would you like your office decorated? And what time would you like to take a break for lunch?" Nobody says that. They put you on an assembly line or they put you in a place where you are forced to conform, so what you have then is a generation of young people who don't want to grow up.

And this sociologist said on the radio, you ask the average high-school kid, what do you want to do when you get out of school? What's his answer? "I don't know." You ask the average college student, what do you want to do when you're out of college? "I don't know." And the reason he doesn't know is because he is postponing responsibility because responsibility means conformity to a system, whereas childhood for him has been absolute freedom. Eat what you want when you want, wear what you want when you want, and your mother will take you anywhere you want to go whenever you want. And so, you breed a generation of young people who are irresponsible. And when they do get a job, they get a job simply to finance themselves so they can enjoy their indulgences, and then when they're 28 years old their license plate says, "He wins who has the most toys." And the whole idea of adulthood is to collect toys, boats, cars, vacation trips, on and on and on.

Now, what you have in this kind of thing, said this sociologist, is breeding moody discontent. And you build young people who cannot conform and cannot be satisfied, over-indulged kids who don't want to be adults, continue to push off responsibility; they grow up in an environment they control. They don't like being controlled. And they become discontent. They don't want to take responsibility. They don't want to work. And their adult years are sad. They become sullen, very often, they become complainers. And I really believe that he's right in many cases. One of the curses of our culture are overindulged childish kind of adults who are really complainers about everything. Nothing is ever enough. That's why we have a whole society with a critical mentality, constantly attacking everything.

Now, I want you to know this has found its way into the church. And the church is full of its own complainers, and what is really sad is many of them are run by their children's discontent. People leaving the church because their children don't like it. Can't imagine such a thing, unless their children control the family. The church has its complainers. And here we are with so much, so much. How in the world could we possibly complain just because every little thing in life isn't exactly the way we want it? Frankly, I would suggest to you that few sins are uglier to me and few sins are uglier to God than the sin of complaining. Frankly, I think the church at large does much to feed this thing by continuing to propagate this self-esteem, self-fulfillment garbage that just feeds the same discontent.

There's little loyalty. There's little thankfulness. There's little gratitude. And there's very little contentment. And sadly, what happens eventually is you're griping, grumbling, murmuring discontent is really blaming God because after all, God is the one who put you where you are. So, just know who you're complaining against.

Now, having said all of that there is a sense in which this complaining is part of our culture. There's another sense in which it's not new at all. Who was the first complainer who ever walked the earth? Who was it? The first complaining human being who ever walked was the first human being whoever walked. And what was Adam's first complaint? "God, the woman You gave me." We are in this mess because of this woman. He didn't blame Eve; he blamed God. Eve had nothing to do with it. God made Eve. Adam wasn't married; he woke up one morning he was married. God could have picked anybody He wanted, He picked her. Why? It's God's fault. She led the whole human race in sin. The woman You gave me, complaining. Cain complained to God about God's work in his life, Genesis 4:13 and 14. Moses complained to God for not doing what he wanted Him to do when he wanted Him to do it, Exodus 5:22 and 23. Aaron and Miriam complained to God against Moses, His chosen leader and their own brother in Numbers chapter 12. Jonah complained to God because he was mad at God for saving the Ninevites, Jonah chapter 4 verses 9 and 10. And it is still a popular pastime to complain at God. And may I say that all of your complaints in one way or another are complaints against the providential purpose and will of God.

There's a new book out called "Disappointment With God," very popular and being promoted very heavily. It seems to me to make complaining against God okay. It's sort of tries to define God as a lonely misunderstood lover who is really trying to work things out, but is really kind of a victim of all of us and we shouldn't complain against Him, we ought to love Him. What a strange view of God. He is not some lonely misunderstood lover; He is the sovereign God who has ordered the circumstances of all of our lives. And to complain against God, to grumble against God is a sin and we must see it as such.

In the ninth chapter of Romans verse 20, "O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" Who in the world are you to answer back to God? What an unthinkable thing to do. And when describing the apostates in Jude 16, it says they are grumblers finding fault following after their own lusts. All they want is what they want when they want it, they don't get it, they grumble and find fault. It's characteristic sin of the proud and it is characteristic sin of the wicked.

Now, the tragedy of this particular sin is that it is so contagious. Let me take a minute to usher you back into the Old Testament, chapter 13 of Numbers. And I want you to follow me and we'll at least get through this little introduction and I think set the stage for what is ahead of us. This is really very, very interesting and very important. We go back to the number one illustration of grumbling, murmuring belly-aching griping people the world has ever known, namely whom? The Israelites. Numbers 13 just gives us a little insight in to the potential power of this attitude to spread. Verse 30 says, "Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, we should by all means go up and take possession of it for we shall surely overcome it." Joshua, you remember, and Caleb came back from spying out the land and they said we can do it; God is on our side, we can take it. "But the men who had gone up with him said, we are not able to go up against the people for they are too strong for us." Which is nothing but doubting God. "So, they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out saying the land through which we have gone in spying it out is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size." And then,

they said this, "Also we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim, and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight and so were we in their sight."

So, they come back with this complaining: we'll never do it, we can't make it, we can't defeat them. It's a bad report. It will fail, it will never make it. Prophets of doom, they are. And they're really complaining against the fact that God has told them to go in.

Now, go over to chapter 14, watch what happens in verse 36, "As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation," what? "Grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land," follow this, "died by a plague before the Lord." You know what the Lord thinks of grumblers? He killed them because they spread a brooding discontent against God. That's the issue. These people complained against God, they complained against God calling them to go into the land, they complained because the odds were against them humanly speaking. And in their disbelief and complaining against God, they caused the whole nation to grumble, and as a result God killed them with a plague. Grumbling really spreads, and your discontent, and your critical spirit, and your grumbling attitude, and your murmuring complaints will infect other people.

Here were the children of God. They had been led out of Egypt. God had parted the Red Sea for them. They had seen ten plagues, miraculous plagues at the point of their deliverance. And as soon as they got out of the land of Egypt they started to complain, and it never really ended. Can I take you through a little trek? Go back to Exodus and let's go back to where it started in the Exodus. Verse 11 of chapter 14, "Then, they said to Moses," and they're out in the wilderness now. "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" They said, "What do you bring us out here for, because there weren't any graves in Egypt?" Which is a mocking statement. I mean, wasn't there a place to bury us there? You're going to have to take us to the desert to bury us? "Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?" Here's the complaint, it's not like they want it. They've left Egypt, it's not the way they want it. Pharaoh is moving after them, and they begin to complain. Of course, God did a marvelous thing, He opened the Red Sea, drowned Pharaoh's entire army and saved them.

Go to chapter 15, they come through the Red Sea, they've been delivered, and in that great 15th chapter, the song of Moses sings of God's great deliverance. And it's no sooner than they've done that, verse 22, then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur, and they went three days and they didn't have any water, three days. And they came to Marah, they couldn't drink the waters of Marah, they were bitter therefore it was named Marah, so the people what? Grumbled at Moses saying, "What shall we drink?" Again, the same attitude. Chapter 16, by the way, God provided water for them. You remember it. Verse 27 of chapter 15, 12 springs of water and they camped there and 70 date palms and they had a feast. "Then, they set out from Elim and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin which is between Elim and Sinai, on the 15th day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt, and the whole congregation of Israel grumbled against Moses." Nothing is ever enough. Part the Red Sea, provide the water, more grumbling. "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, we would have been better off there when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full." Boy, this is a crass crowd, right? They don't care about anything but food. "We're all going to die of hunger." Boy, they're real deep, aren't they? Real deep people. "And the Lord provides again." It's absolutely incredible. God sends quail, God sends manna down.

Then, you come to chapter 17. “Then, all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin according to the command of the Lord and camped at Rephidim and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, give us water that we may drink.” See, here’s more complaining, griping, grumbling, quarreling, disputing. “Moses said to them, why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord? He is the one who has ordained the circumstances. But the people thirsted there for water and they grumbled against Moses and they said, why now have you brought us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

Well, Moses is getting to the end of his rope. So, Moses cried to the Lord, and I’m sure it was loud, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they’ll stone me.” Some group, huh? So, the Lord said, “Pass before the people, take with you some of the elders of Israel, take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I’ll stand before you there on the rock at Horeb and you’ll strike the rock and water will come out of it the people may drink. Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel, he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord saying, is the Lord among us or not?” It doesn’t take very long for people to forget the provision of God.

Now, go over to Numbers for just a moment or two because I want you to see this pattern. Now, they’re at the other end of the 40 years. They’re ready. Time is ready to go into the land. And it’s not much different. Verse 1 of chapter 11 of Numbers, “Now, the people became like those who complain.” You ought to underline that. “They became like those who complain of adversity. Complaining of adversity in the hearing of the Lord.” That’s where their complaint really was directed. “And when the Lord heard it His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. The people therefore cried out to Moses and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out. So, the name of the place was called Taberah because the fire of the Lord burned among them.” 40 years later, and they have been complaining the whole time about everything.

Verse 4 says, “The rabble who were among them had greedy desires, and the sons of Israel wept again and said, who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish and the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, and we’ve got nothing but manna, crummy manna.” Day after day, this is typical complaining. Chapter 14, God keeps on providing. God sends the spies into the land. And what happens? They come out, they give this evil report, we can’t do it. Verse 27 of chapter 14, “How long,” the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, “shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel which they are making against Me. Say to them as I live, says the Lord, just as you have spoken in my hearing, so I will surely do to you. Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men according to your complete number from 20 years old and upward who have grumbled against Me.” God says I’ll kill the whole lot of you, you’ll never enter the promise land, and He did it. He did it.

Chapter 16 verse 41, “On the next day,” what next day? The next day after God had just punished some people for invading the priesthood. The next day after God’s object lesson about serious treatment of His law, “All the congregation of the sons of Israel,” verse 41, “grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and they’re saying you are the ones who caused the death of the Lord’s people.” And the Lord was furious. Verse 45, He says, “Get away from among this congregation that I may consume them instantly. Then, they fell on their faces.” And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put in a fire from the altar and take incense in and bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement

for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord, the plague has begun. Then, Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold the plague had begun among the people so he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he took his stand between the dead and the living and the plague was checked, but those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah,” where the ground swallowed them all up. God just starts slaughtering thousands of them because of their grumbling, complaining, discontent.

You find it again in chapter 20. You find it again in chapter 21. I won't read them to you. I suppose the summary of all of it could be in Psalm 106, just listen to this, verse 25. It says, “They didn't believe in His word but grumbled in their tents. They didn't listen to the voice of the Lord. Therefore, He swore to them that He would cast them down in the wilderness.” And that's exactly what He did.

One New Testament text to which I call your attention, 1 Corinthians 10. In 1 Corinthians 10 verse 8, it says, “Nor let us act immorally, don't let us act immorally, as some of them did,” that is the people in the wilderness with Moses, that's who he's talking about, “and 23,000 fell in one day, nor let us test the Lord as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents, you'll remember, the snakes.” Verse 10 is the key, “nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer.” Now, you say, “John, why did you read all of that?” I'll tell you why, look at verse 11, “These things happened to them as an example and they were written for our instruction.” Now, beloved, I'll put it simply, for me not to go through that little history of Israel would be to be unfaithful to that text. That is the classic illustration of how God feels about people who are discontent and malcontent and complaining. It is a serious sin. It is directed at God who has ordered your circumstances. Complaining, and let me say it to you, and here's the definition I want you to hold on to: complaining is the symptom of a deep-seeded spiritual problem. And what is that problem? Failure to trust God and failure to submit to His providential will. Complaining is a deep-seeded spiritual problem. It is not superficial. And at its roots it is a failure to trust God and that is a serious sin, because if you believe not God you make Him a liar. And it is also a failure or a rejection of His providential will. It is distrust against God, and non-submission to His plan and purpose in your life. It is a serious sin. God hates it, and if you want to know how serious it is, He has killed people for it, and He says that what He did to them, slaughtering them in the wilderness, is an example to you in the end of the age of how God feels about the sin of complaining.

Listen to Lamentations 3:39. Write it down because you'll want to go back to it. Two little lines but, boy, are they profound. “Why should any living mortal or any man offer complaint in view of his sins? Who in the world are you to complain in view of your sins? What do you deserve?” You deserve hell, so do I. What should I complain about? Well, so that ugly theme of complaining is the heart of this passage. And it is one that God absolutely detests, the sin of complaining.

You say, well, now, let's go back to Philippians and see how it all fits. Why does he say in verse 14, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing?” Well, what does “all things” mean? Ah, now we have the key. What does “all things” refer to? Well, we just have to go back to the verse before. In fact, we'll go back to two verses before. You remember these? “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation.” Do you remember our discussions of working out your salvation? That's what he's talking about. Whatever the elements of working out your salvation are, do them all without grumbling or disputing. In other words, in all your Christian living, in all that you do by way of obeying God, in all that God is working in you to will and to work for His good pleasure, be sure you never complain. That's the idea.

So, we now have then a companion to verses 12 and 13. Verse 12 says, "Work out your salvation." Verse 14 tells you the attitude in which to do it. Can you get that? This is the attitude in which you work out your salvation. It is an obedience without complaint. You don't complain about what God calls you to do. You don't complain about what He asks you to do. You don't complain about the circumstances in which He asks you to do it. Who are you to complain in view of your sins? It is grace that you are not consumed, and complaining is in itself a wicked proud sin.

So, here you have a very general "work out your salvation." Why does he come down so narrow and say, "Do all things without grumbling and disputing?" Isn't that very narrow and very limited? No. That's the attitude that fits the general command. Why? Because life isn't going to always serve you up what you'd like. God's going to allow you to go through trials and testings and difficulties not to make you gripe, but to help you to pray, to teach you to trust, to teach you to be grateful and thankful for what you have because you can see the hard things as well. So, this is not a narrow, isolated command, this is a broad general attitude that in all things related to your working out your salvation, you do them without ever grumbling or ever disputing.

Now, those two words are very basic. Grumbings is an onomatopoeic word; that is, it sounds like what it means. The word is *goggusmos*. *Goggusmos*, ruh-ruh-ruh. It's a grouchy, grumbly, onomatopoeic word. It means a murmuring, an expression of discontent, an expression of dissatisfaction, grumbling, actually muttering in a low voice. Ruh-ruh-ruh-ruh, you know. It's, by the way, the very word used in the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus and Numbers where we read about the grumbings of Israel. It is complaint expressed in a negative attitude. It is an emotional rejection of God's will. It is an emotional rejection of God's providence. It is an emotional rejection of your circumstances that comes through in mumbling, grumbling, griping, verbiage. It is an emotional rejection of the circumstances God has chosen for your life and the requirements He has for your conduct.

And then, there's a second word, disputings. *Dialogismos*, dialogue we get from it. It means questionings, criticism. It is now an intellectual debate with God. The first one is an emotional belly-aching. The second is an intellectual debate with God. You want to argue with God about why things are the way they are. Or you want to argue with God about why you have to do what you have to do. Or you want to argue with God about why you're in the circumstance you're in, the marriage, the job, the singleness, the residence, whatever it is. Or even the church, for that matter. Arguing with God out of discontent, debating with God because you've got a better idea. While the first word means to just grumble, gripe complain, murmur, almost an emotional guttural kind of thing.

So, Paul is saying, look, in working out your salvation the basic attitude is an attitude that does not complain. Why? You're living in a very fallen world. You're living in the fallen flesh. It isn't always going to be the way you like it, the people around you aren't always going to be the way you'd like them. The circumstances aren't always going to be euphoric and perfect. It's not going to be an idealistic world. You work out your salvation and in all the things that you do, and in all the circumstances you find yourself, don't ever complain because God hates that, and He has judged it severely as an example to you of how He feels about it.

James even speaks about it, chapter 5, isn't it, verse 9, "Do not complain, brethren, do not complain against one another that you yourselves may not be judged, behold, the judge is standing right at the door." You know what the picture is? It's like a little kid in his room, a little brother talking to his sister,

and he's saying, "Boy, I hate the way Mom handles us, I hate the way Dad does this," and what he doesn't know is Dad is standing at the door. And when you're belly-aching and complaining to God about how it is, and how your life is, and how your kids are, and how your circumstances are, and how this and how that, just know that the Lord who hates complaining is standing at the door. Serious sin, serious sin. Not only for Paul, but obviously James felt compelled to remind us as well. Even Peter did in 1 Peter 4:9, he says, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint." Don't complain against other people either. James alluded to that, as does Peter. And if you complain against God you're going to be miserable to be around cause you're going to complain with everybody else, too. It will show up there at that level.

So, the command is pretty simple. Do all things without complaining or without grumbling or disputing. Now, we're going to stop there. That's the main point. There are three reasons, three absolutely thrilling and wonderful and practical reasons, we'll look at those next time. But I don't want you to tune me out. Listen now, would you do this? Try your best to make it through today without complaining about something. Would you do that? And just make a note every time you complain, and you will find that for many of you it is a way of life. And it is frankly so utterly habitual that you probably don't even realize what a dominant characteristic it is. And then, remember Lamentations, would you please? Just remember Lamentations 3 and 39 and memorize it: why should any living mortal or any man offer complaint in view of his sins? What do you think you deserve? Work on it today, will you? And we'll try to do it even without the motive. We'll get that next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, it's so sad in the society in which we live to realize that the more we have the less we appreciate. And that's true even in our spiritual life. I've seen it at Grace Church. I can remember in the early days, Lord, when You were beginning to do a mighty work here. Everybody was so thankful, everybody was so appreciative, everybody was so thrilled and so blessed. And now, Lord, after years of faithfulness and years of ministry and years of goodness and years of grace, all of a sudden many people begin to complain. How can it be? How can people forget? How can we forget? How can your children be walking through the Red Sea on dry land and three days later complaining to You? How can they receive water out of a rock and a few days later be complaining to You? How can they be given manna from heaven and be complaining that life isn't the way it ought to be? How can they be headed to the promised land and griping because all the circumstances don't fit their particular preference? O Lord, it's the fallenness in us, and our complaining becomes so much a habit that we don't even realize it. Help us to see it, help us to hear with our ears the complaints of our mouth. Help us to understand the disputing in our heart when we question You, and why we must do what we must do and why it is the way it is. And Father, help us to learn the example of Israel and to see that those who grumbled, perished; those who grumbled were judged. And help us to know that You're still standing at the door, and You will still chasten those who sin the sin of complaining. And, Lord, help us to come to grips with maybe the fact that many of the problems in our life are the chastening that You've brought upon us for a complaining spirit. Help us to be grateful, O God, for we deserve nothing, absolutely nothing, and yet You've been so good to us. Help us to do all things in working out our salvation without grumbling, without that emotional discontent, and without that intellectual disputing with You as if we had a better way. But Lord, when things are difficult, may we turn to prayer, turn to Your Word, and may we turn to praising You, and in that context find the purpose for which You bring us the difficulty, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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