

First Baptist Church, Granite Falls, MN

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Introduction¹

Once upon a time a young boy and his sister were playing outside. They were having lots of fun that day – it had just snowed, and they were throwing snowballs at each other before building a snow fort. They had really wanted to build a snow fort for a long time. But then they heard their mother calling. They stopped what they were doing and listened to their mother, who asked them to shovel the driveway before they did anything else.

The boy and girl looked at each other unhappily, but they obeyed. As they went to get their shovels, they dragged their feet and sulked. And as they went out to the driveway with their shovels, the girl said, “Why do we have to do this now?”

“Hey,” the boy said, “at least I don’t have to do it all by myself this time. Usually I’m the one who has to do it. I hate it! It’s about time you helped me shovel.” They kept grumbling and arguing like that for the next hour while they shoveled that driveway.

Does that sound like a familiar story? We’ve all done it one way or another. Not just children act like that – adults do, too. It sure happened in the wilderness back when God was leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They grumbled about everything, and they grumbled so much that they even said they wished they could go back into slavery in Egypt. They grumbled until God became so angry at them that he punished them.

Grumbling is a terrible thing – and it can happen anywhere. Grumbling can happen in the home, it can happen in the workplace, and it can happen in the church, too. It sure happened in the church in Corinth. When Paul wrote his first letter to them, that church was being torn apart by grumbling and arguing, jealousy and strife.

That’s why, in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reminded them of how the Israelites grumbled in the wilderness after God had led them out of slavery in Egypt – and then Paul said, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” (1Co 10:6). He said:

1 Corinthians 10:9-12 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

The church in Corinth needed to hear that, and so does the church in Philippi. That’s why Paul says what he says next in his letter to the Philippian Christians.

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Last Sunday in our study of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we heard Paul command them to obey God. This morning, we are going to pick up where we left off, and hear what Paul says about just *how* they are supposed to obey:

Philippians 2:14-16 14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 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, 16 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.

What do you think? If the church in Corinth needed to be warned about grumbling, and the church in Philippi needed to be warned about grumbling, do you think we might need to be warned about grumbling, too? I think so. You and I need to hear this. And if anybody thinks they don't need to hear this, "Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Here, after Paul has just told the Philippian Christians to obey God, he is telling them *how* to obey, *why* they should obey this way, and *how important* this is to Paul.

Exposition

I. How to Obey

Paul says, "Do all things without grumbling or questioning." In other words, obey without grouching about it! Work out your own salvation not grudgingly but willingly!

It sure seems like Paul has the Israelites in mind here, just like he did when he wrote 1 Corinthians 10. He doesn't come right out and say it, but here in vv. 14-15 Paul practically quotes the Old Testament. Years after the "grumbling" of the people of Israel in Numbers 14, Moses said in his song of Deuteronomy 32, "They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (Deu 32:5).

Now, here in our passage this morning, Paul is telling the Philippian Christians not to be like that – not to be like those who aren't God's children, not to be blemished, not to be like the crooked and twisted generation around them, but to "do everything without grumbling . . . children of God without blemish." I wonder if he had ever preached a sermon to the church in Philippi like the one he wrote to the church in Corinth, a sermon in which he told them not to be like those grumbling Israelites. If so, the Philippians know exactly what he's talking about here.

Paul is wise to tell them to do all things without grumbling or arguing. He's wise to say this because it's exactly what might happen after he's told them to obey. He doesn't want them to be like those children I told you about who grumbled while they were shoveling the driveway. It isn't good enough for the Philippian Christians to obey if they're grumbling and arguing while they do it.

And that may already be happening. I've told you before that by the end of this letter, Paul names two ladies in the church who are arguing with each other. Those ladies are probably obeying in many ways. In chapter four, Paul says they "have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers."

They have been hard workers, and they probably still are. But if they're arguing with each other, they're not obeying the way they should.

They probably aren't the only ones. There's probably a pretty good reason that Paul has been saying the things he has been saying, here in chapter two. It's no accident that right after he hears a report about the Philippian Church from Epaphroditus, he writes them a letter and says, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Php 2:3-4).

And here, Paul is bringing them right back to that. Don't grumble. Don't argue with God and don't argue with each other. Be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Php 2:2b). Have the mind of Christ, who humbled himself and became a servant and was obedient to the point of death on a cross – without grumbling about it.

We need to hear this. We need to hear this because we can do so many things right but still get this wrong – and if we do, then it doesn't matter how many things we get right. Think of those children shoveling the driveway. If their mother could hear them grumbling and arguing while they're shoveling the driveway, what would she think? I'll tell you what she'd think. She wouldn't give a lick about what they were doing with those shovels. It wouldn't matter if they shoveled that driveway and every driveway in the whole neighborhood if they kept grumbling and arguing that way. Grumbling and arguing turns obedience – something that could be so good, so beautiful, so pure, so wonderful – into something bad, ugly, impure, and horrible.

But I don't just mean to pick on the children. It's even uglier when adults act like this. "As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife" (Pro 26:21). "A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike" (Pro 27:15). "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (Pro 17:1)

God feels the same way when there is strife in his household. He told the Israelites he was sick of their worship while their hearts were far from him: "Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly" (Isa 1:13). What do you think God thinks when a church assembles to worship him on Sunday if that same church is full of grumbling and arguing? It wouldn't matter how solemn our worship is, how outwardly reverent it is, how good the music is, how good the preaching is. If we are grumbling and arguing, we are a stench in his nostrils.

Like I said, we need to hear this. Even if we're not grumbling and arguing right now, we need to hear this. "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." We must not for a moment let grumbling, arguing, rivalry, conceit, selfishness, or pride pollute our obedience. And that is a very hard thing to do. Do you know why?

Have you noticed what part of the body Paul is talking about here in v. 14? He's talking about the tongue. It is with the tongue that we grumble and it is with the tongue that we argue. What Paul is saying here is that while you "do all things" with your hands and

your feet, you guard your tongue. And that is a very, very hard thing to do. In fact, it is utterly *impossible* to do without the Lord's help. That's what James says:

James 3:5-12 5 . . . the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

And neither can a man with a grumbling, arguing tongue bring glory to God by what he does with the rest of his body, no matter how obedient he thinks he is. James also says, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (Jas 1:26).

Are you starting to see how massively important it is that we do all things without grumbling and arguing? It is so important that if we don't get this right – if we do grumble and argue – we will be guilty, sinful, blemished, crooked, twisted.

II. Why We Should Obey This Way

That's why it is so important to Paul that the Philippian Christians get this right. In v. 15, he tells them that the reason they should do all things without grumbling or arguing is so "that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation" (Php 2:15b).

Think about what Paul is saying here. He didn't have to say it this way. He didn't have to put in that part about being "children of God." He could have just said, "that you may be blameless and innocent, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." Why does Paul add that bit about being "children of God?" What does it have to do with all this?

Think about it. Look at any of the children here, and you will begin to understand. Look at any one family, and you'll see that all the children in that family are a lot like each other in many ways – they talk the same way and act the same way. But compare those children with the children of any other family here and you'll see that they are very different. Do you know why?

Because they have different parents. The children are reflections of their own parents, not other parents. And so it is with the children of God.

The children of God are reflections of their Heavenly Father. And God is holy, perfectly holy. You will not find even a trace of blame or guilt in God. He is not even slightly crooked or twisted. He is perfectly blameless and innocent.

If you are God's child, then this is what you should strive for. As Paul says in his letter to the church in Ephesus, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph 5:1). More than anything, *this* is why you should do all things without grumbling or arguing. *This* is why you should "have the mind of Christ." *This* is why you should "look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." *This* is why you should "do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" – simply because you are a child of God, if you have faith in Jesus, *and your Father is holy*.

The Bible says:

1 Peter 1:14-16 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

That's why you should be holy – simply because your Father is holy. He hates sin worse than you will ever hate anything in your entire life. He is more grieved by sin that you will ever be grieved by anything, ever. God is holy. And so you should be holy – blameless and innocent – because you are his child, if you have faith in his Son. You should look like your Heavenly Father.

And when you do, you will stand out. You will look different than the world around you. Paul called his own world "a crooked and twisted generation." Do you think things are better today? No, they are not. Our own generation is just as crooked and twisted. The Roman Empire was no more pagan, no more immoral, no more cruel than our world today – certainly not more than the United States of America. The crooked and twisted generation around you worships at the feet of science and technology, embraces fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, with weapons of war more horrifying than the Roman Emperor ever dreamed of. And since *Roe v. Wade* 38 years ago last Sunday, "perhaps 50,000,000 babies have been murdered in the womb with the full protection of the state and the knowledge of the church."²

And in every dark corner of this crooked and twisted generation, people are quarrelling, gossiping, slandering, snivelling, and sniping at one another contemptuously, from the playground to the presidential campaign trail. We ought to stand out like lights in the darkness. If we are acting like children of God, we will. If we are humbly serving one another in perfect unity, we will. If we are doing all things without grumbling or arguing, we will "shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life," as Paul says in our passage this morning.

If you grumble, if you argue, then you'll just blend into the darkness. You won't stand out like a light in this world. Just ask all the people out there who mock Christians because they've seen so many hypocrites in the church. Some of them grew up in churches, too – for 18 years they watched as people sat in the pews on Sunday mornings but wagged their tongues the rest of the time.

² R. C. Sproul Jr., "Should churches observe Sanctity of Life Sunday?" *Kingdom Notes*, Highlands Study Center, 20 Jan 2012.

We must not blend into the darkness. We must not live like children of Satan. We must live like children of God. We must “shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life” as we obey without grumbling or arguing.

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:14-16 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

There is no way to do that and at the same time to bicker with each other or gossip about each other. If you and I grumble, if you and I argue, then we hide the light that we should be shining. But if you and I are humbly, graciously obedient, then we will shine like beacons in the darkness, shining together in true fellowship, striving together to advance the gospel – the very thing that Paul spent so much time talking about in the first chapter of this letter.

Exactly what Paul is saying there at the beginning of v. 16 isn't quite clear. Your translation might say, “holding forth the word of life,” or it might say, “holding fast the word of life.” It could mean either one, though I tend to think he means “holding *fast* the word of life.” But either way, it is the *word of life* – the gospel of Jesus Christ – that we are holding as we shine like beacons in this dark world. It is the word of life for us, and it is the word of life for those who see the light that is in us and come to it.

What do people think of you? What do your friends at work or school think of you? What about your neighbors? What about the other people in this church – or the people in your own family? Are you shining like a light in this world? Do you humbly obey like this, doing all things without grumbling or complaining? Or does your tongue wag like the people of this world?

Paul is pleading with the Philippian Christians to shine. It is so, so important to Paul – so important that he has devoted himself to it ever since Jesus called him to be his apostle.

III. How Important This Is to Paul

That's what we see next in our passage this morning. In v. 16, Paul says that the reason he wants the Philippian Christians to obey like this – to do all things without grumbling or arguing – is “so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”

Think of how that must have sounded to the Philippian Christians. You have to imagine actually being there, hearing this letter for the first time. It wasn't like sitting here this morning, reading a letter to people you've never met. If you're one of the Philippian Christians, then this letter is to *you*. And Paul has just said that he doesn't want to get to the judgment and find out he wasted his time on you.

I imagine you could have heard a pin drop in the room there in Philippi when they heard this. Paul was their friend, but more than that, they looked up to him tremendously. Think

of someone like that in your life – maybe somebody in this church, maybe a pastor, maybe a seminary professor. What would you think if you heard him say he wants to be sure that when he gets to the judgment, he didn't waste his time on you?

The message is loud and clear. Paul's whole life – the race he is running, the labor he is toiling at – is wrapped up in this. What he cares about isn't just counting decisions or growing the church in numbers. What Paul cares about is that the people he wins to Christ are living like this – living like children of God, blameless and innocent, shining as lights in the world, humbly serving without grumbling or arguing.

This is Paul's life. This is the "fruitful labor" he talked about in 1:22. As he wrote in his letter to the church in Rome, he is "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16b). And that is exactly the way of thinking that we see in v. 17 (which we'll get to next week).

How crushed Paul would be to find out that all he succeeded in doing was getting people to pray a prayer and join a church, only to live selfishly, grumblingly . . . darkly. How crushed he would be to find out that his offering of the Gentiles was a blemished lamb, unfit for offering to God!

Do you see how important this is to Paul? Surely the Philippians did – and so was it important to them. Even so should it be important to us.

Conclusion

It is important to me. I may not be an apostle like Paul, but I too live to offer you up as an acceptable sacrifice to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I long for us all to more and more have the mind of Christ, more and more becoming like him in our humble, obedient service to one another as true partners in advancing the gospel – and doing it all without grumbling or arguing.

We may be tempted to think we're already doing it. We may be tempted to think we've already arrived. After all, we're better than some churches, right? We're not like those churches that have made the headlines because the members were fighting with each other so openly.

But let us examine ourselves. Let each one of us spend some time alone, examining ourselves. Is there anything you should be doing but you aren't, because you don't like it?

Is there anything you know you should do, but you sigh heavily when you do it, or roll your eyes (the people around you see these things!), or even come right out and tell someone that you don't like it for some reason (whether it's attending worship on Sunday, or visiting widows in their affliction in the nursing home, or something else)?

Or do you criticize other people – people who are trying hard to serve in ways you aren't – I say, do you criticize them for not doing things quite right, while you yourself are only doing the bare minimum? (That's easy to do – it lets a person think he's the truly wise one as he sits on his hands and hardly does a thing!).

Or do you ever gossip about a fellow Christian in this church, a person you have taken a vow to serve according to our church-covenant – vowing to encourage him, watch over him in brotherly love, remember him in prayer, and aid him in sickness and distress?

There are a thousand and one ways to blow it, my friends. It is hard to bridle the tongue. That's why we have to take this so seriously. We need to take it as seriously as Paul takes it here. We need to take it as seriously as *God* takes it.

So, Brothers and Sisters:

Philippians 2:14-16 14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 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, 16 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.