

In verses 12-13,

Paul urges us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,
for it is God who works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Note: both to will *and* to work.

Thomas Aquinas points out that verse 13 rules out four errors:

- 1) that man can be saved without God’s help
After all, Paul says “it is God who works in us” –
so without God’s help, we are literally *helpless*.
- 2) v13 shows that free will is not destroyed by fate [“work out your salvation”]
you must do that which God calls you to do!!
- 3) v13 rejects the idea that whereas the accomplishing comes from God
the choice (the willing) comes from us
[no, it is *God who works in us both to will and to work*] –
it’s not that “we want to” – but we need a little help to make it happen!!
We only *want to* because God himself is at work in us
both to will and to work
- 4) v13 rejects the idea that God rewards us according to our merits –
[no, it is *his* good pleasure]

As John Murray puts it:

“God’s working in us is not suspended because we work,
nor [is] our working suspended because God works.

Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation
as if God did his part and we did ours
so that the conjunction or coordination of both
produced the required result.

[No,] God works and we also work.

But the relation is that because God works we work.

[“for it is God who works in you...”]

All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us....

We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part
but we also have the incentive to our willing and working....

The more persistently active we are in working,
the more persuaded we may be
that all the energizing grace and power is of God.” (RAA, 148-9)

This strong statement of *both* divine sovereignty *and* human responsibility
sets up Paul’s warning against the perils of grumbling.

Introduction: The Perils of Grumbling

“Do all things without grumbling or questioning.”

What is Paul referring to when he talks about grumbling in verse 14?

The language he uses is drawn from the Greek translation of the Old Testament--
and would draw the attention of his readers
to the story of Israel in the wilderness.

Israel had a long and troubling history of grumbling,
which led Moses to call them a "crooked and perverse generation," --
the very term Paul uses in the next verse,
and Paul elsewhere, in 1 Cor 10 makes reference to the story of Korah in Num 16,
so he is drawing our attention
to the grumbling of Israel in the wilderness.

So just for a moment let us reflect on that story.

I won't read the story, but it might help to turn in your Bible to Num 16
so that you can follow along.

God had brought Israel out of Egypt through his servants, Moses and Aaron.
Yet in the wilderness, Korah and two hundred and fifty other leaders
grumbled against Moses and Aaron.
They alleged that since the entire congregation was holy,
any leader should be allowed to offer incense before the Lord.

Rather than just overrule Korah, Moses challenged Korah to a sort of contest.
Korah and his followers would offer incense,
and Aaron would offer incense,
and they would let God determine who was in the right.

Moses was so secure in his position,
and was so confident in God's call,
that he did not fear an upstart who sought to take away his authority.
Moses recognized that his authority came from God,
and believed that God would vindicate him.
God had promised that he would be with Moses
and would deliver Israel through Moses:
so Moses trusted God.

The next day they gathered before the tabernacle to see what the Lord would do.
But the wrath of God was kindled against Korah and his followers.
These men had seen his mighty acts,
and had received his law from his servant Moses.
They had seen the Red Sea parted;
they had eaten the manna and seen God provide water from a rock.
Yet they still grumbled against God's chosen leaders and rebelled!

So God commanded all those who believed in Him to move away from Korah.
Then he opened the ground and Korah and his followers were destroyed.

But even then the Israelites grumbled
that Moses and Aaron had caused these deaths!
Due to this grumbling, God sent a plague
which killed more than 14,000 Israelites.

And this is only one incident.

There were many times when the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron,
but it was not merely against Moses and Aaron:
God said in Num 14 that when the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron,
they were really grumbling against God,
because they were refusing to follow God's appointed leaders.

In other words, grumbling is actually idolatry,
because it places your selfish wants and desires above others--
not only above others--but also above God,
because it indicates that you think that you know better than God.

Over the years we've seen the importance of distinguishing
between grumbling and complaining.

A complaint brings a problem to someone who is in a position to do something about it.
Grumbling is either when we gossip to one another about others –
or when we put our own interests ahead of others,
and we have such confidence in our own rightness
that we are willing to run over others to achieve our goals!

If you think about it –
it's easy to sympathize with Korah!
After all, the assembly *was* holy.
But in his pride and arrogance, he drew a false conclusion from a true premise!

If you look at the story of the exodus,
God deals with the initial complaints very gently –
teaching Israel, as it were, how to complain *well*.

But Israel doesn't learn.
They keep grumbling.
They do not put the interests of others ahead of their own!

Are you a grumbler?
Do you grumble about your spouse?
Your parents?
Your children?
Your work?
Your boss?
Do you question God's wisdom and providence?

There is a *big* difference between grumbling
and pouring out your complaint before God!
A proper complaint says, "God, *I* don't know what you are doing!"
In grumbling, you say "God, *you* don't know what you are doing!"

It is no wonder that just before his death, in Dt. 32, Moses prophesied
that it would be said of Israel,
"They have acted corruptly toward the Lord;
to their shame they are no longer his children,
but a perverse and crooked generation."

The whole history of Israel is a history of grumbling and rebellion.
It kept getting worse and worse until Jesus Christ declared that
Moses prophesy had finally come true, when in Matt. 17
he calls the Jews a perverse and unbelieving generation.

The Jews, in keeping with their infamous ancestors were now grumbling against Jesus!
He was the Son of God, who was not merely a servant in the house like Moses,
but was a son with authority over the house;
yet they grumbled against him and he reminded them
of Israel's experience in the desert,
warning that those who grumble receive God's judgment.

Once again, God's people--who were supposed to be the light of the world,
the pure and blameless children of God,
refused to listen to God's appointed leader--
and became a crooked and perverse generation.

1. Do Not Grumble, but Shine (2:14-15)

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,

So here, in Philippians 2, when Paul commands the Philippians
to do all things without grumbling or disputing,
he recognizes that we have a tendency to grumble and dispute.

I'm not fond of the choice to translate it "questioning" –
because Scripture regularly insists upon the validity of *good questions!*
I prefer the translation, "without grumbling or disputing" –
since the Greek word, *dialogismon*, has the sense of debating –
not just asking questions!

So when he says "do all things without grumbling or disputing"
he is not saying "sit down and shut up" –
he is reminding us to walk the path of humility

that he outlined at the beginning of the chapter!

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus! (v5)

And although Paul is using the Israelites of Moses day as a warning to the Philippians, here we have a different twist:

You would expect Paul to say,

"If you are grumbling, then you are a crooked and perverse generation!"

But instead he calls them to be

"blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish
in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation."

Something has changed.

The Israelites in the wilderness *were* a "crooked and perverse generation";

but Paul does not see the Philippians as a crooked and perverse generation--

despite the fact that they too were grumbling and disputing--

rather they *live in the midst* of a crooked and perverse generation.

What has happened?

For this we need to look back to Pentecost.

In Acts 2, Peter preaches his first sermon and urges the crowd to

"Be saved from this perverse generation!"

The church has been called out of the world

to become the pure and radiant children of God,

shining brilliantly in a fallen and sinful world.

But how can we who are sinful grumblers and disputers--
shine brilliantly?

As Paul has just told us, it is because Christ Jesus has become a man.

In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,

the Eternal Son of God was blameless and pure,

and lived a perfectly righteous life;

obedient to the point of death on a cross.

And through that obedience--and through that death--

we have become children of God.

And because of that perfect obedience

and that atoning death on the cross God has exalted him,

so that every knee should bow and every tongue confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father.

And because we have been united to him,

both in his death and in his resurrection,

we now shine as lights in the world.

Through his ascension to the Father,

and his sending of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus Christ has established his kingdom on the earth.

When Jesus Christ walked this earth he proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

The church is now an outpost – a colony of that kingdom –
and wherever his church goes,
there is his rule established.

And this what Paul says in verse 12-13 when he commands us
to work out our salvation with fear and trembling,
because it is God who is at work both to will and to do
for his good pleasure!

What is God's good pleasure?
“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...!”

And because he *has* established his kingdom in you
you shine as lights in the world.

What does it mean to shine as lights in the world?

Think of this in terms of a dark night,
away from the city,
with not a cloud in the sky.

The blackness of midnight is pierced by thousands of pin pricks of radiant light.
This is what you are!

The kingdom of God has descended into the midst of the darkness and depravity
of our world
and the children of God now blaze as stars in the night sky.

Consider this.

In the midst of the blackness of this crooked and perverse generation--
you, my brothers and sisters,
as the body of Christ,
shine as brilliant lights.

Why does Paul say that you are shining?

If you look at yourself honestly,
you probably feel more like a grumbling Israelite,
than a shining star!

But Paul says that you *are* shining as lights in the world.
You shine, because Jesus shines.

By his perfect obedience, Jesus has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law,
and now he is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

John Calvin says this very nicely:

"Therefore, as we ourselves, when we have been engrafted in Christ,
are righteous in God's sight

because our iniquities are covered by Christ's sinlessness,
so our works are righteous and are thus regarded

because whatever fault is otherwise in them is buried in Christ's purity,
and is not charged to our account.
Accordingly, we can deservedly say that by faith alone
not only we ourselves
but our works as well are justified." (III.xvii.10)

Think about that:

“By faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified.”

Therefore, you shine.

Not *because* of anything that you have done.

You shine –

because Christ has joined you to himself.

His glory now shines through you – because you have been engrafted into him.

But how?

How do you shine?

Certainly – as we have already seen –

we shine with the same mind – the same humility –
that was in Christ Jesus.

But let us beware,

because as the rebellion of Korah warns us,

it is very easy to deceive ourselves through our selfish and grumbling hearts,
so that we allow our minds and hearts to be shaped

by our crooked and perverse generation,
rather than by the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

When this happens,

the church begins to look like the culture,

and she loses her purity until she has nothing to say to the culture,
and can no longer shine.

We live in an age where we are constantly pressured

to focus our desires on our own wants.

We are bombarded with images

that tantalize our eyes with the pleasure and happiness
which can be yours if only you buy our product!

And we have bought into the lie!

We want bigger – we want better – we want more!

So we live as full-blown consumers,

every bit as materialistic as our neighbors--

and we can even convince ourselves that we are doing this
for the glory of God and the advance of his kingdom.

But in fact, the kingdom that really matters to us – is our own.

And that is why we need to pay attention to Paul's exhortation in verse 16.
How can you shine?

2. Holding Fast to the Word of Life (2:16)

16 holding fast to the word of life,

The way that you shine – the way that you are different from the world around you –
is because you hold fast to the word of life.

In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,
in the midst of the darkness that surrounds you,
you shine because your life is characterized by the mind of Christ –
that attitude of humility and holiness that we saw last time.

And the way that you know the content –
the beliefs and practices that should characterize you –
is by knowing the word of God and living accordingly.

And as we have seen throughout Philippians,
and throughout all the scriptures,
this holding fast to the word of life is something that we do together.

If you are struggling, trying to figure out, “how do I do this?”
then you should be involved in Bible studies/shepherding groups with others!
You will *never* figure it out by yourself,
because we were not designed to be Lone Rangers!

The participle here (holding fast) is plural.
The way that we hold fast to the word of God
is by holding fast together.
The way that we live the Christian life is by living the Christian life together –
walking together.

It has been a great joy to have three families living within walking distance downtown.
We join together for morning prayer at the Caylor House every Monday –
and we have Shepherding Group every Thursday –
and then throughout the week we often see each other
and can encourage each other in the little daily things of life!

The church needs to be a place where we build strong community –
but always with a focus on drawing others into that community!

Because if we are committed to studying the word of God together –
if we are committed to putting it into practice together –
then we will have different priorities than others around us.

What would it look like to have different priorities than the world?

It means that the word of life – the scriptures –
will be at the center of our life together.

What scripture teaches is at the heart of the life of our community.

Because the point is that you need to hold fast the word of life.

We need to know the word of God – *and do it!*

And notice the reason for this:

*so that in the day of Christ I may be proud
that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*

What is Paul saying?

Paul is saying that on the day of Christ, his pride – his honor as an apostle –
will be affected by their performance.

Paul wants the Philippians to realize that *their* actions
(how they hold fast to the word of life – or not)
has a bearing on Paul's experience of the final judgment.

Note that we are *not* talking here about whether Paul will be saved or damned.
Rather, we are talking about Paul's honor – his pride on the day of Christ.

When Paul gives an account for his apostleship before Christ,
the fruit of his labor will be on display –
namely, the Philippians (among all the others).

And Paul says that if they turn out well – if they hold fast to the word of Christ –
then he will be proud on that day that he did not run or labor in vain.

There is a very definite flip side to this:
if they do not hold fast to the word of God,
then that will be evidence that – at least in this case –
Paul labored in vain.

Paul does not say that therefore it is *his fault* if they turn out poorly –
after all, they are to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling...*
only that his labor – his running – was in vain.

Why is Paul saying this?

What is Paul *doing* here?

Paul says these things to the Philippians

in order to encourage *them* to submit to their bishops and deacons.

We noted in 1:1 that this is the only epistle where Paul explicitly mentions the leaders
in his greeting,

so he seems to be saying these things about himself

in order to get them to think also about their own bishops and deacons.

This is very much the idea behind Hebrews 13:17

“Obey your leaders and submit to them,
for they are keeping watch over your souls,
as those who will have to give an account.
Let them do this with joy and not with groaning,
for that would be of no advantage to you.”

And so it is appropriate for me (and for all your elders)
to desire that you should hold fast to the word of life,
so that in the day of Christ we may be proud that we did not run in vain
or labor in vain!

How you turn out will not determine our eternal destiny –
but how you turn out will affect our honor on the day of Christ.

We are such individualists in America that we don't like to hear this –
so let me say it more bluntly!

When the Chief Shepherd calls forth the shepherds,
and bids me make an accounting of my ministry,
what will he say when all of you appear before him?

I know he'll have a few things to say to *me*:
“How you spoke to this one was not helpful!”
“Why didn't you go in search of that one?”

But I take comfort in Paul's attitude toward all this!
He does not get all morbid and introspective –
he does not waste time wondering whether he did everything he could.
Rather, he looks forward (v17-18):

3. Living Sacrifice and Rejoicing (2:17-18)

17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Think about the imagery here:

he sees the faith of the Philippians as the “sacrificial offering” –
the “living sacrifice” of Romans 12:1 –
and he sees himself as the “drink offering” that is poured out on the sacrifice.

The faith of the Philippians is a sacrificial offering –
literally, a “sacrifice and service” (the word translated “offering” here is the word
from which we get our word “liturgy”).

You could say it this way:

“even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering
upon the sacrificial liturgy of your faith”

The idea here is that the life of faith
(the practice of holding fast to the word of life)
is a sacrificial liturgy –
a living sacrifice – a life devoted in worship and service to God.

This is part of the reason why I urge you to think of our liturgy as a daily practice –
that our Sunday practice of confessing our sins is to be a daily practice in our lives
that our Sunday practice of hearing the Word should be reflected in our homes
that our Sunday prayers should reecho in our daily practice
that our Sunday communion at the Lord’s Table should be expressed
in our communion with one another throughout the week.

The life of faith is truly a holding fast the word of life
when it becomes a daily practice of the sacrificial liturgy of your faith.

And Paul says that he looks forward to being the drink offering of that liturgy –
Jesus Christ is the *atonement* sacrifice –

he is all the sacrifices of the OT bound into one.

And the life of faith is a life of participation and imitation of Christ,
as we humble ourselves and seek not our own interest,
but the interests of one another.

And Paul is a drink offering.

What was the drink offering for?

What is the purpose of wine, generally?

“wine, which makes glad the heart of man.” (Psalm 104:15)

And that makes sense here in verse 17-18.

His martyrdom should not be conceived of as an atoning sacrifice.

He is not a substitute for someone else.

Rather, his death (in imitation of Christ)

is a drink offering –

an occasion for rejoicing.

“I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”

Why does Paul say that he (and we) should rejoice at his impending death?

Because “to live is Christ; and to die is gain!” (1:21)

When your heart’s cry is “to live is Christ; to die is gain” –

then – and only then – does the humility of Christ take root in your heart.

Conclusion

I must say in conclusion that I am impressed
with how little you seem to grumble as a congregation.

You complain well – you ask good questions –
but you do not seem disposed to grumbling and disputing!

And for that I am grateful.

But we need to be careful – and we need to be watchful.
Is the peace and harmony that we experience the fruit of the Spirit,
or is it the result of a mutual comfortability agreement?!
“I’ll promise to preach interesting, thought-provoking sermons,
and you’ll promise to say nice things about them,
so long as no one really expects anything to happen.”

May it never be!!!

We need to *hold fast* to the word of life – and *hold forth* the word of life!

Are we prepared to say, “to live is Christ; to die is gain”?
Perhaps more importantly, are we prepared to live it?

Are we prepared to shine as lights in the midst of a darkening world?!