

## CURBING COMPLAINING

(2011 Congreg. Theme: Daily Disciples: Memorization; [Phil 2:12-18](#))

A. [Did you know the average American](#) complains 15 to 30 times every day? That includes us.

1. It IS strange that the most prosperous nation in the world is so full of discontented people.
2. And it seems the more we possess the more discontent we become. However, there is a growing discontentment among people in general (Entitlement Mentality).
3. We're like the teenagers whose mother said, "When my son looks into the refrigerator full of food, he says, "There's *nothing to eat.*" When my daughter opens her closet full of clothes, she complains, "I don't have *anything to wear.*"

4. Complaining is just a habit; we don't even realize we're doing it most of the time.

B. [Paul gave us](#) a command & provided us with the tools for curbing the destructive practice of complaining.

1. We usually think of complaining as a just bad habit, but God calls it "sin".
2. In fact, few sins are as deplorable to Him as the complaining & disputing spirit.
3. Now our world may be characterized by the unhealthy attitudes that lead to complaining, but we should be as lights in the world to counter those attitudes.

[We are to "*do all things without complaining & disputing*" (arguing). Read ([Phil 2:12-18](#)). Let's begin this study by coming to understand the terms.]

## I. UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS

A. What does “all” mean? “Do all things without complaining & disputing” (2:14).

1. The Greek word is SO complicated; it means “ALL!” (Any or Every Thing).
2. When it comes to complaining we tend to look for reasons to excuse some of it.
  - a. We say, “You just don’t know what I have to deal with every day from him.”
  - b. “You just don’t understand my circumstances.”
  - c. “I complain because it’s the only outlet I have for my frustrations.”
3. Okay, but still the apostle commanded us to “do all things without complaining.”

B. What does “complaining” mean? “Do all things without complaining...” (vs. 14).

1. First, Paul is not talking about identifying a sin, or correcting a mistake, or informing someone of a problem.
  - a. These things can be done in a positive & constructive way.
  - b. But sometimes the person on the receiving end just views the person as a complainer & dismisses them.
  - c. That is unwise, because it is foolish to reject the truth or to refuse sound advice when it is offered.
2. So what is “complaining”? It is “an emotional response of displeasure about one’s circumstances or responsibilities.”

- a. The emotional response is usually the out-pouring of words that puts something or someone in the worst possible light.
- b. Most of our complaints are about things we can't change, & which have no moral consequence (weather, restaurants, neighbors)—they just bother us—so negativity fill our hearts & the complaints come spilling out.

C. What does “disputing” mean? “*Do all things without...disputing” (vs. 14).*

1. This word deals less with emotion & more with logic (reasoning).
2. Disputing has to do with quarreling, criticizing & debating.
3. A person who disputes loves to argue the value of his point at any cost.

4. For some people (Christians) arguing is a way of life; their days are filled with quarrels.

- a. They are so opinionated that everywhere they go they complain & give everyone in their path a piece of their mind.

D. Let's compare these two words, “complaining & disputing” – notice the progression.

1. First you complain & then you dispute.
2. Arguing or disputing is often the result of complaining.
  - a. In the church at Philippi, why weren't Euodia & Syntyche “of the same mind”?
    - 1) There was a complaint between them (Phil 2:2; 4:2); both were displeased with something the other one did – so they complained then disputed.

3. So, if we can eliminate the desire to complain, then the reason for disputing (or arguing) will just fade away.

[Now that we understand the terms let's turn back to our main text (Phil 2:12-18).]

## II. COMPLAINING BY US

A. **Complaining Denies** that God is at work in us to do His good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13).

1. Complaining sends a message: “God cannot work in me, & I cannot work for Him until my complaints are addressed & settled in my own mind.”
  - a. (1:28-30) – The Philippians had many reasons to complain, but they knew that God was at work in them.

- b. Their fear of Him & their desire to do His good pleasure strengthened them to overcome the human tendency to complain about their circumstances & duties.

B. **Complaining Disrupts** the unity that God commands of us (1:27, 2:1-12).

1. Nothing can fracture unity any quicker than a few carelessly placed complaints.
  - a. If someone agrees with us, then it has the affect of creating a schism (division).
  - b. If someone does not agree with us, then it puts us at odds with that person.
  - c. If we carry the complaint home to our families, then it discourages our children.
2. A complaining spirit is infectious – AND it is destructive to every kind of unity that God desires: family, church.

C. **Complaining Discredits** us as we carry out our God-given mission (2:15-16a).

1. Who wants to hear the gospel from a habitual complainer?
2. Christians are to be shiners not complainers, holding up the word of life not the imperfections of others or the world around them.
3. If Paul & Silas had complained about their mistreatment as Roman citizens in Philippi they wouldn't have had the opportunity to teach the Jailer & his household (Acts 16:16ff).
4. If they had been complaining in the prison, they wouldn't have been singing, which is what sparked the Jailer's interest in what they had to say.
5. The world (lost) will more likely listen to what we have to say if they perceive in us a spirit of joy rather than quarrelsomeness.

D. **Complaining Discourages** God's workers in their work (2:16-17).

1. What does Paul mean by running & laboring in vain?
  - a. First, he meant that if the Philippians spent their time complaining & disputing then they could not go to heaven.
  - b. Secondly, he meant that if they spent their time complaining & disputing then he would be discouraged for having done all his work for nothing.
2. Satan uses the voice of a complainer to get workers like Paul & us to give up.
3. But since the Philippians were encouragers instead of complainers & arguers, Paul was willing to be "*poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice & service of [their] faith*".

E. **Complaining Dissolves** away our mutual joy in Christ (2:17-18).

1. Again, Paul could have written a lot of complaints into this letter; he was in prison & his future was uncertain.
  - a. He could have complained about the quality of the food, & the conditions of his living quarters, the smell of his cell mates, etc.
  - b. But, no, there's not a complaint to be found in this letter; *that may be one indication of its divine inspiration, because most of us would have wanted to complain a little bit.*
2. Rather, what Paul wrote about was personal gladness (KJV, Joy) & the desire to rejoice with his brothers & sisters in Christ.

3. You see, true Christian Joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, & the desire to share that Joy with other Christians cannot coexist in the heart that is complaining & disputing.
4. If we don't feel a strong sense of gladness & joy in our lives, because of our relationship together in Christ, then we're likely to find many complaints & unsettled disputes.
5. But gladness & rejoicing will replace the complaining & argumentative spirit.

[Tonight we will take notice of the complaining done by the Israelites in the OT. We will draw some lessons from that & then discuss some things we can do to curb complaining & disputing.]

CLOSING (Part 1 – Part 2 below)

The Jews were a complaining & argumentative people. But one day they heard a message that turned them from that attitude & caused them find joy & peace in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36-39).

### III. COMPLAINING BY ISRAEL

A. **Complaining Before Sinai.** Despite all of the impressive miracles God performed to show His love for the nation of Israel (sparing them from the plagues, parting the sea & destroying the Egyptian army), they still found reasons to complain.

[Lesson for us: When we complain, we often overlook the fact that God always uses His power to demonstrate His love for us.]

Even if we, being Christians, were killed in an accident, God would use His power to save us from the torments of the Hadean realm by placing us in Abraham's bosom (in Paradise) awaiting the Judgment Day.]

#### 1. Israel Complained About Food.

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**Exo 16:2-3** – Then *the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained* [KJV, *murmured*] *against Moses & Aaron in the wilderness.* 3 And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the

pots of meat & when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

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a. Did you catch what they said? They made their former slavery sound like a picnic in the park, but it wasn't.

[Lesson for us: When we complain about not being able to do something we used to do before we became Christians, we can make that lifestyle sound better than it truly was.]

Solomon wrote, “*Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions*” (Ecc1 7:10) – that statement is truer for Christians than for anyone else.

The so-called “good ol' days” when we lived in our sins were not good days in any sense.]

b. But the LORD graciously responded to their complaint by sending the manna.

## 2. Israel Complained About Water.

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**Exo 17:1-3** – Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, & camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 *Therefore the people contended [nasv, quarreled (disputed or argued)] with Moses, & said, “Give us water, that we may drink.”* So Moses said to them, “Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?” 3 And the people thirsted there for water, & the people complained against Moses, & said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us & our children & our livestock with thirst?”

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- a. Moses told them that their complaint against him was in reality an argument with the LORD.

**[Lesson for us: When we complain, we put God to the test as if He had imperfections that need to be worked out.**

Solomon wrote, “*I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, & nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him*” (Ecc 3:14).]

- b. But the LORD graciously responded to their complaint by giving them water from the Rock.

**B. Complaining After Sinai.** Up to this point, God had been patient with Israel’s complaining, but when the people arrived at Mount Sinai – God made a covenant with them to be His people – & their relationship with God began to change.

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**Num 11:1** – *when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, & His anger was aroused.* So the fire of the Lord burned among them, & consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

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1. You would think that seeing “*the fire of the Lord*” would be enough to quell any future complaints about their circumstances.
2. But the very next thing they did was to complain about their food (manna), so God sent them a huge number of quail.



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**Num 11:33** – But *while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, & the Lord struck the people with a very great plague*

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**[Lesson for us: When we complain loud & long enough & finally get what we ask for – we will find that it does not truly satisfy us.]**

3. When Korah, Dathan & Abiram complained about Moses' leadership, God opened up the earth & swallowed up their families & possessions, & the fire of the LORD burned up another 250 other men (**Num 16:1-40**).

4. And well, they finally learned their lesson, right? Wrong (**READ – Num 16:41-50**).

[Complaining is a sin, & like all sin it carries extremely serious consequences!

- So from these case studies of Israel, we should learn two things about complaining.

1. God takes our complaining as a personal criticism of Him.
2. He expects His covenant people, who are called by His name, to be finished forever with complaining (**READ – 1 Cor 10:10-11**).

Well now let's look for a way out of this problem.]

## IV. CURBING COMPLAINING

### A. Be Thankful To God First.

1. Rather than looking with a critical eye for imperfections in the world & in others about which you can complain, look for something (in it or in them) for which to be thankful.
  - a. What were you thinking about during the freeze of 2011? “I hate the cold” or “I love & am thankful for my house.”

2. Complaining denies God's goodness, but thankfulness praises His goodness.
3. If we don't go on the offensive & put thoughts in our minds that are *true*, *noble*, *just*, *pure*, *lovely*, & of *good report*, then we will drink up the negativity of this world & spew it out complaints & disputes.
4. But on the other hand the more aware we are of the goodness of God around us & in us, the less likely we will be to complain.
5. Paul had every reason to complain about the church at Corinth, but his opening remarks to that church read like this, "*I thank my God always concerning you*" (1 Cor 1:4).
6. So see the good in every circumstance, & then tell God "thank you."

## B. Be More Positive Than Negative.

1. A study by John Gottman showed that marriages are more likely to end in divorce when the couple had less than a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions.
  - a. In other words, if you make one negative comment you better make at least five positive comments – or you are straining that marriage!
2. Go on a complaining & arguing fast.
  - a. Create a zero tolerance rule to back it up.
3. Change every negative thought (discussion) into a positive one.
  - a. As your thoughts or words head toward criticism or complaining, consider the good points that can be emphasized.

## C. Turn Complaints Into Solutions.

1. There are LEGITIMATE COMPLAINTS, & the TRUTH needs to be expressed.

2. So, when something wrong needs correcting – take those concerns to the right people.

a. That's what Jesus commanded us to do in the spiritual realm (Matt 18:15; Matt 5:24).

b. That's at least one reason the Lord would have us appoint elders in the church (1 Tim 3:5; Tit 1:9; Heb 13:17).

c. Be we never ought to take our legitimate (scriptural) complaints to a third party that has no direct involvement in the matter – that won't turn godly complaints into righteous solutions!

D. Memorize Philippians 2:14-15.

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**Phil 2:14-15** – *Do all things without complaining & disputing*, 15 that you may become blameless & harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked & perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world

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## CLOSING

A. **Complaining & disputing** always end up taking us to a bad place. Yes...

1. They deny God's work in us.
2. They disrupt unity among us.
3. They discredit our spiritual mission.
4. They discourage God's workers.
5. They dissolve our joys.

a. But worse than that, complaining & disputing will prevent us from experiencing God's eternal rest (Psa 95:11; Heb 3:7-4:10).

B. **However**, the bounty of God's grace that He has given us through the cross of Christ should be enough to keep us from complaining for the rest of our lives.

1. Do you want to leave a hopeless life of complaining & disputing behind?
2. Receive God's forgiveness & the eternal spiritual blessings He offers you through obedience to the gospel (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 17:30; Rom 10:9-10).