

October 25, 2009

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Do All Things Without Grumbling or Questioning*

Philippians 2:12 – 18

**The working out of our own salvation is a work centered in the cross.** *'Work out'* here in verse 12 holds the idea of carrying something all the way to a successful conclusion. That is, the call of the gospel began a good work in you – now work to bring it to completion. We cannot miss the clear indication that though we have been saved – from death and hell and the wrath of God – **there is still work to do and that we must do it.**

**We work with fear and trembling.** What I believe Paul is saying is that in the ongoing work of salvation – a process the Bible calls 'sanctification' – we need to have an attitude composed of both fear and trembling. Fear that is born out of a right knowledge of God and proper respect and worship of who He is; and a trembling that comes from the impact of His word and its implications for our lives. I would phrase it this way: ***'Work out your own salvation with hearts and minds that are staggered by the awesome holiness and grandeur of God and overwhelmed by the massive grace and mercy He has shown us.'*** *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word.* Isaiah 66:2

Paul follows this command to work out our own salvation with the very reason it is possible for us to do so: ***for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*** **The only reason we can even contemplate working out our own salvation is because God is working in us.** The only reason we can even approach the cross is because He died there first. Paul says to work out our salvation with fear and trembling ***precisely*** because it is God who is at work in us first. **His working assures us that ours will not be in vain.** Jesus went to the cross so that we might follow in His steps. *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* 1 Peter 2:21

Furthermore, **our working out our own salvation is evidence that God is at work in us.** Any God-ward impulse, any longing for holiness, any appetite for God's word, any affection and desire for God Himself is the result of His willing and His working firstly in us to produce a like-minded willing and working. It is a great incentive and assurance to us to know that all our efforts to do what is right is the work of the Almighty God within us. It is a massive encouragement to me that any effort I make towards God is a blazing neon sign of His empowering grace in me.

And so if God is working and we are working, Paul can say: ***Do all things without grumbling or questioning,*** Philippians 2:14 I have often wondered why Paul chose this – no grumbling and no questioning, or reasoning – as the evidence that we are truly children of God. That is what he says: ***that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God.*** I think one of the reasons must be because those who are not children of God are not content with anything. **The evidence that we are children of God is that our lives are characterized by contentment.** You don't find contented people grumbling and reasoning. The word for ***grumble*** here is one of those onomatopoeic words that sounds like what it describes. The word means to ***mutter, or murmur or complain.***

This word was used in the Old Testament to describe the grumbling and murmuring of Israel in the wilderness: ***And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*** Exodus 16:2-3 It is also used in the New Testament to describe the complaining that arose because of the food situation: ***Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.*** Acts 6:1

Questioning – or more accurately, ***questionings***, is a word that means ***'inward reasonings or doubt'***. And the idea here is that this is a kind of ***internal questioning leading to disputes or ill-natured controversies*** and grumbling. The word is used in Matthew 15 where Jesus says that ***'out of the heart proceed evil thoughts or reasonings'***. And it shows up also in Luke 5 in the story about the paralytic who was lowered through the roof of the house for Jesus to heal.

And instead of healing him right away, Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven and with that the scribes and the Pharisees began this dialog in their minds: *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, [dispute within themselves] saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?* The fact that this word indicates a thought process is made clear in the next verse: *When Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered them, Why do you question in your hearts?* Luke 5:21-22

So when we put these together – grumbling and complaining, questioning and reasoning – we begin to get the picture. Grumbling and complaining start in our hearts and minds in reaction to our circumstances as a kind of questioning or reasoning. Grumbling and questioning are linked because grumbling happens when we harbor this kind of doubt and questioning in our minds. Things like, 'Who does He think He is to forgive sins?' or 'You brought us out here to die', or 'What she said to me wasn't nice', or 'that isn't fair', or a myriad of other **doubt-inducing disputations**. I say doubt-inducing because **behind our questioning and reasoning lies unbelief in a sovereign and gracious God** who is for us in everything, and who lovingly orchestrates all the events and circumstances of our life for our good and His glory. When we murmur and complain about the way God is dealing with us in our circumstances and situations, we run from the cross, we try to save our soul life instead of losing it. **In the working out of our salvation with fear and trembling, grumbling and reasoning must be put to death because every grumbling and every reasoning is rebellion against God.** Paul uses these terms in the context of the inward application of the cross and I believe he is saying here, **'Apply the cross to all your grumbling and evil thinking and kill it and so prove to be children of God'**.

**Every grumbling and every reasoning is rebellion against God** and I need to speak to that so that it is clear in your mind just how God views this. Turn back to Exodus chapter 16 again and look at what it says: *And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily. So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because He has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us? And Moses said, When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against Him what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your grumbling.* Exodus 16:4-9

Two things are abundantly clear from this text – and from many others like it I might add. First of all, **the Lord hears our grumbling**. If nothing else, that ought to give us pause to reflect. The Lord hears our grumbling – and I don't think that it pleases Him. Secondly, **all our grumbling is at its root, against God** and not the circumstance. Ultimately all our complaining is against God because at the heart of grumbling and reasoning is a heart of unbelief. If we dig deep enough, I think we will find that all sins come from unbelief in the promises of God. **We simply don't believe in God's willingness and ability to work for us in every circumstance of life so that everything turns out for our good.** Anxiety, complaining, grumbling, doubt, evil reasoning, covetousness, envy, lust, bitterness, impatience, pride – all spring from the root of unbelief in the promises of God.

**Unbelief is dissatisfaction and discontent with God's presence and provision** and from this dissatisfaction and discontent come the inward reasonings and doubt that lead to grumbling and complaining. Look at what Israel was saying: *Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.* What an amazing statement! 'We would rather have died under the cruel bondage of slavery rather than here in the wilderness of freedom, because at least there, our stomachs were full'. God had not only given them His promise: *'I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey'*. Exodus 3:17 but He had also worked miracles almost daily that all of them saw with their own eyes. God had proved good on His word at least to this point – the Egyptians were dead, they were free, He was sustaining them every day, and they were headed for the good land. But ultimately they didn't believe God and that kept them out of the land God had given them to possess. The writer of Hebrews says this: *For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not mixed with faith in those who heard.* Hebrews 4:2

***If there is grumbling coming from your lips, be sure that there is unbelief in your heart.*** God has given us His precious and magnificent promises so that we will have a sure and certain refuge in bewildering and uncertain circumstances. **And it is the circumstances that test the veracity of those promises and our faith in them.** Remember what the Lord said to Moses: *Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.* The only way to test the truth of the promise that God will provide for us is when there seems to be no food around. **The test is whether we will believe His word or the circumstances.**

**Reasoning comes from looking at the circumstances and drawing wrong conclusions.** Israel looked at the circumstance – no food – and concluded that not only was God not going to feed them – He actually wanted them to die in the wilderness. So they grumbled. It was the manifestation of dissatisfaction and discontent with the way God was leading them. There may have even been the thought that they could do a better job of things and that God was not holding up His end of the bargain. So they began questioning His power, His ability, His very goodness. They were dissatisfied and discontent with God and so they grumbled. That is how it works in our lives as well.

Our joy in God – our contentment in Him in all things – our satisfaction in Him – is meant to stand out as a beacon of light in this world: *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,* Philippians 2:15 The way of the world is the way of grumbling and questioning and Christians ought to stand out precisely because they don't. ***It is natural to grumble and complain – it is supernatural not to.***

So how do we do all things without grumbling or complaining? Paul's word here doesn't leave any wiggle room – say for instance, 'Do most things without grumbling or reasoning'. It is all things. All the big things and all the little things. I don't know about you but this hits me where I live. I am too prone to indulge in evil reasoning and grumbling and complaining and whining. But the command is clear – 'Don't grumble or complain or whine or indulge in self-justifying reasoning – not even a little bit'. And if we understand that at the root of this is a heart of unbelief – **what we need to do is feed our souls from the promises of God and take refuge in His word.**

Paul says, '**Don't grumble against God in your circumstances – don't murmur and question His provision and providence for you because your life is meant to be a beacon of hope in a world that does not trust in God or value Him**'. But instead you need to be *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.* Philippians 2:16 This is how to keep from grumbling and questioning – **hold fast the word of life. Holding fast the word of life** has the meaning here of **retain, apply, give attention to.** Essentially I believe that Paul is saying, '**Apply the cross to your grumbling and questioning as you give your attention to the promises of God in His word**'. If grumbling and complaining arise from souls that are discontented with God's provision and hearts that question His wisdom and goodness – then the way to stop that is to feed our souls on the precious promises of God and hold fast the word of life.

If you are struggling with grumbling about your financial circumstances, let this promise strengthen your soul: *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.* Hebrews 13:5

If you are complaining about the lack of material things you think you need in your life – content yourself with with this: *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Matthew 6:33

If you find yourself reasoning about the impossibility of your circumstances: encourage your heart with this: *With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.* Mark 10:27

If you find yourself whining about how everything in your life seems to work for ill, resist those thoughts with this: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28

If you find yourself doubting God's love and care for you, armor your soul with this: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* Romans 8:32

**What this does is transform our thinking and nourish our souls on the truth and create a contentment in God that knows nothing of grumbling or questioning.** What we don't hear from Paul is grumbling about being in prison or what a shame he was locked up when everyone knows he would be more effective for Christ on the outside. What we don't hear from Paul is whining about his circumstances or complaining about those so-called brothers in Christ who made it a point in their preaching to cause him even more suffering. This is what we hear:

*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. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.* Philippians 2:17-18

Even if this present situation leads to death – Paul's contentment with God is birthing not grumbling but rejoicing – and he tells the Philippians that they need to join him in rejoicing. What Paul is saying, I believe, is this: the Philippians sacrificial living, committing themselves, whatever the cost, to live lives worthy of the gospel – not grumbling and complaining, not being selfish and proud, each one treating one another as more important than himself, living in the shadow of the cross, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling – is what he calls the sacrificial offering of their faith. And on top of that offering is poured the drink offering of his life if necessary, and that thought delights him and should delight their souls as well.

Grumbling and questioning are not only expressions of discontent and unbelief in God, but they dishonor Him and diminish His glory and goodness. Doing all things without grumbling or questioning is, above all, the expression of a life lived delighting in God – a life where Christ is your greatest treasure and your deepest contentment.

*Our good and gracious Father,*

*Grant your children hearts of humility and trust in Your gracious power and goodness. May we embrace the cross as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it is You working in us. Let our unbelief be swallowed up with contentment in Your presence and provision as we feed our souls on Your great and precious promises. Give us the will to battle every temptation to look at our circumstances and draw the wrong conclusions. Oh that we would not be overcome by unbelief and found grumbling and questioning but that all the heartaches and dangers and trials of life instead drive us to You – our joy and rest. Show us the infinite and all-satisfying glory of the risen Christ so that discontent and dissatisfaction are destroyed in the mighty strength of Your all-sufficiency. Grant it Lord, that we would delight our souls in You and spread that joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the all-sufficient name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen.*