

## Philippians 2:12-18 — Work Out Our Salvation In Our Attitude

**June 28, 2020**

Good morning CrossWinds! It is good to be back. With the current state of COVID, most of you are watching from home. That is OK. We are grateful for everyone that is able to connect online. The Bible tells us not to give up meeting together. The right thing for us to do is to meet in person, but meeting online is better than not meeting at all.

Know that when you are able to return, we have three well-spaced venues available. We have taken all safety precautions.

This morning, we return to our study in the book of Philippians. When we were last in Philippians, we studied the humility of Jesus. Jesus is the most humble person to ever walk the planet. He went from being the one who enjoyed all the honor and privilege of creating the universe to limiting himself by putting on human flesh. He then became sin for us so he could die for us. There is no greater act of humility nor can there be a greater act of humility than what Jesus has done for you and me.

In previous weeks, Paul taught us two lessons from Christ's humility.

First, it is humility in the church that produces unity in the church.

Whenever you see division between people, if you peel back the layers far enough, you will always find pride as the source of division. Division comes when people do not consider others as more important than themselves. Division and bickering happen when people are not looking out for the interests of others but only their own. If we pursue humility like Jesus in the church, we will have unity in the church.

The second application Paul gave us is that humility leads to reward. As the most humble person to walk the earth, Jesus was richly rewarded by God the Father for his humility. Jesus was given the highest position in the universe and the highest name in the universe. God loves to reward humility. That is not just true of Jesus, but it is also true of us. When we pursue humility, our tendency is to think of humility as a losing position, a position of weakness. Humility in God's eyes is a winning position. It is the position God most loves to reward in our lives because being humble is being like Jesus.

This morning, as we continue in Philippians, Paul talked about two things. 1. He will talk about working out our salvation. That is, how do we mature in Christ? 2. Paul gave us an important area where all of us need to pursue spiritual maturity, that is our attitudes. Spiritually mature Christians avoid a grumbling and arguing attitude. Let's read the text and begin our study.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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 2:12–15 (ESV)

### **We are to work out our salvation.**

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV)

Before we look at the individual parts of these verses, I want to look at the overall flow of the verses. The verses answer practical questions: How do

Christians grow? How do we become spiritually mature? Is spiritual maturity up to me or is it something God does in me?

When we become Christians, the Bible says we are born again. We become new people on the inside. From that point forward, the new people we are on the inside should progressively work their way to the outside of our lives. Our lifestyles should become more like Jesus over time.

First John tells us the one piece of evidence we have that someone is genuinely born again is the change we see in his or her lifestyle. People's lives become more and more like Jesus over time. Someone may claim to be a Christian but if his lifestyle doesn't back up that claim, he should have no assurance of his claim.

This doesn't mean any of us will be perfect. Nobody is perfect this side of heaven. The Bible simply makes the point that when there is genuine new life inside of us, there will be a genuine desire to please Christ on the outside of us.

These verses answer the question, "Where do these changes in the Christian life, that come with spiritual maturity, come from?" Are they choices we make or are these changes God makes in us? Is spiritual maturity something we do or is it something God does? What do you think?

Before we answer this question, let me give a little history. Historically, there are two groups that took opposite ends of the pole when it came to answering the question of where spiritual maturity comes from. The first group I want to introduce to you was known as the quietists.

## Quietists claim Christians are passive in their spiritual growth.

The Quakers were some of the original quietists. They claimed that after becoming a Christian, we did not need to do anything to become more like Jesus. Some quietists even claimed that if we put effort and self-discipline into spiritual growth, we would destroy our spiritual growth. They claimed spiritual maturity didn't come from self-discipline, Bible reading, and renouncing sin but by simply learning to be more surrendered to Christ. They claimed that the more surrendered our lives became to Jesus, the more spiritually mature we became in Jesus.

Modern quietists still use some of the old quietist cliches. Maybe you have heard them used around the church, such as, "Just let go and let God." If we could just learn greater surrender to Christ, we would mature and achieve greater victory over sin in our lives. Quietists picture Christians like wet spaghetti noodles. Our job is not to try and grow or try and mature. We just flop lifeless into the hands of Jesus, like wet pasta. Spaghetti is a picture of full surrender. Just as a cooked spaghetti noodle is completely flexible and only moves when it is in our hands, quietists believe our job is to be that wet spaghetti noodle in the hands of Jesus. We do nothing but surrender and focus on letting Jesus control everything about our lives.

Quietists say we don't need to do the hard work of memorizing Scripture. They say there is no need for disciplined Bible study or regular Bible reading. There is no need of an accountability partners to help us fight sin. That would be

trying too hard. Just flop like a wet noodle into the hands of Jesus and follow what the Holy Spirit lets you feel.

Let me quote for you the words of a favorite quietist hymn. I am sure you have heard them. "All to Jesus I surrender, make me savior wholly thine. Let me feel the Holy Spirit. Truly know that thou art mine. I surrender all." According to quietists, spiritual maturity is found by us learning greater levels of surrender to Christ. The group that held the opposite conviction was called the pietists.

**Pietists claimed Christians are active in their spiritual growth.**

Pietism originated in 18th century Germany as a reaction to the dead Lutheran churches of their day. Pietists had a strong emphasis on Bible study, holy living, Scripture memory, regular worship, personal accountability, and high levels of self-discipline. Their famous saying was that Christian need to use all of their mind, all of their heart, and all of their effort to pursue godliness in life. The pietists said becoming like Jesus involved hard work and sometimes making tough choices in our fight against sin. They claimed the path to spiritual maturity involved regular Bible study, regular worship, regular prayer and committing God's Word to heart.

I will tell you up front that in the quietist-pietist controversy, the pietists were mostly right. Spiritual growth is hard work. It does involve making sacrifices, turning from sin, and making time to read our Bible.

Unfortunately, some pietists took things too far. I call them the proud pietists. They claimed spiritual maturity was all our work. That left them proud,

because they saw their spiritual maturity as something they did, not something God did in them.

While quietists claimed Christian maturity was a matter of surrender to Christ that didn't involve hard work, pietists claimed the opposite. They said Christian maturity was made of hard work, study and effort. Which one is right? Philippians 2:12-13 tells us the answer. Having this controversy in our minds, let's reread the later part of these verses.

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV)

In the first part, Paul sounds like a pietist. He told the Philippians to work out their salvation. They needed to put effort into becoming more like Jesus. In the second part, Paul sounds like a quietist. It was God who was at work in them to change and mature their lives. **Both quietism and pietism are true.**

For us to grow in Christ, we need to make choices. We need to choose to read our Bible. We need to choose to pray with our spouses. We need to be consistent in prayer and Bible reading. We need to be part of a church family to be encouraged in our faith and to encourage others in their faith. Spiritual maturity involves hard work and choices. But as we make those choices, God is at work in us, maturing us and drawing us to himself. As we work, God is at work in us.

While all analogies break down, the one that came to mind is how spiritual maturity works is pedaling a bicycle. It is as if we have one foot on a pedal and God has his foot on the other pedal. As we make the hard choices to pursue spiritual maturity, God pushes on the other pedal and supernaturally works to

mature us and draw us to himself. Spiritual maturity is our work and God's work acting together to produce spiritual maturity.

While this is found in Philippians, the tension between quietism and pietism is found in many other places in the Bible. Let me show you some of them.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)

Here, Paul went back and forth on quietism and pietism. First, Paul was a quietist. The only reason he was a Christian was by the grace of God. Paul did nothing. After that, Paul was a pietist. He worked harder than anybody else to share the gospel. Then he went back to being a quietist. When he worked hard to share the gospel, it was not him doing it but God working through him.

Look at Colossians.

...Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:28–29 (ESV)

Paul talked to the Colossians about all the effort he put into sharing Christ. He wanted to present everyone mature in Christ. He was speaking like a pietist, working hard and making tough choices. Then he was a quietist. As he did this hard work, it was Jesus who gave him the energy and worked through him.

Let me show you one more from 1 Peter.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... 2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

Peter sounded like a quietist. Just know Christ, because God gives us all things we need for life and godliness. Look what happens when we keep reading.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5–8 (ESV)

Now Peter was a pietist. He told us to make every effort to grow in Christ.

My friends, Christian maturity is a choice we make, but it is also a supernatural work God does in us as we make the hard choice to pursue him. Too many people misunderstand how spiritual maturity happens. I don't want you to be one of them. Fight for time to pursue knowing Jesus. Fight for time to read your Bible and be regular in worship. Know that as we do the hard work of pursuing God, God is at work pursuing us.

I told you we would begin by looking at the big message of these verses, then we would look at some of the details in these verses. Let's look at the important grammatical and historical details.

### **We are to work out our salvation.**

We are told to work out our salvation. What does that mean? The Greek word for "work out" is in the present imperative tense. That means Christian growth is to be a continual emphasis throughout our lives, not a temporary one-time emphasis at the beginning of our spiritual lives.

Working something out means to unearth what is buried inside of something.

The ancient term "work out" was used to describe mining in the ancient world. If someone owned land, they already possessed the gold and the precious

gems in the land. They needed to do the hard work of working those precious metals out of the land even though they already possessed them in the land.

That is a good description of Christian maturity. As Christians, the moment we trusted in Christ, we were born again. The spirit of Christ came into us. We were made into new creations. After we were made into new people on the inside, Colossians 3 describes a battle that now takes place in each of us between our old nature and our new nature. We need to do the hard work of starving our old nature and feeding our new nature. Like mining in the ancient world, we need to do the hard work of bringing out of us the new character of Christ God planted in us. Of course, the hard work of mining the character of Christ out of our hearts is not just something we do. Remember the bicycle illustration. It is also something God also does in us at the same time.

The important point I want you to remember is that Christian maturity is not trying to gain something we don't possess. It is bringing out of us the new life in Christ we do possess. That is what it means to work out our salvation.

**Working out salvation begins with a healthy fear of God.**

**...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling... Philippians 2:12 (ESV)**

Paul said we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. What does that mean? All Christian maturity begins with a healthy fear of God. That doesn't mean we are terrified of God but that we have a great respect for God. We are not to treat God like he is our little buddy. We are not to treat God like he is Elmo on Sesame Street. God is not like Barney the purple dinosaur. If we are going to experience any spiritual maturity in our lives, we must begin by seeing God as GOD. All spiritual maturity begins with reverence, fear and awe of God.

I say this because as a pastor most people don't realize I am watching them while I am preaching to them. Over the years, as we study the Word of God I see people texting friends and surfing Facebook during church. Those are not wrong things to do but doing that during our time of worship shows there is little reverence for God. That means there is little spiritual maturity in that person's life. If you do not stand in awe of God, you will have little maturity in God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Proverbs 9:10 (ESV)

Fear of God means when we are considering sin, we should be afraid of disappointing God. If we are considering sin, we should be afraid of being judged by God in the next life. If you are a Christian considering sin, you should be afraid of being disciplined by God in this life. All spiritual maturity begins with a healthy fear of God.

It is no different when it comes to the relationship between parents and their children. If children do not have a healthy fear of their parents so they fear disappointing Mom and Dad and fear the discipline of Mom and Dad, they will not mature well. A child's ability to mature and learn from his or her parents is built on the foundation of having a healthy fear and respect of his or her parents. If children do not respect their parents, they turn out to be brats, not mature men and women.

The same is true of our relationship with God. Our maturity begins with fear and respect of God.

Look how the book of Hebrews says we should worship God.

...thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28–29 (ESV)

Acceptable worship involves reverence and awe of God.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of what it was like when God came down at Mt. Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments. The earth shook. The mountain was consumed with fire and smoke. That is our God. The Israelites begged for God to stop speaking because they were terrified. That is our God. He is a consuming fire. We must worship him with reverence and awe.

**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**

I love this verse. Discipline and chastisement are different. The word discipline means to train. Think of this in reference to sports and athletic conditioning. If you are a coach, you discipline your team in practice with hard work so the players are prepared to compete and win in tough competition. God is the same way with us. He is a good coach. Sometimes he puts us through tough times of training in life. That is not because he hates us but because he loves us. He disciplines us to train us and improve us so we are more spiritually mature and useful for him. Sometimes God puts us through hard training like a good coach trains his or her team.

It also says God chastises every son he loves. Chastisement is different. It doesn't mean to improve someone. It means to correct someone. When we drift into sin and we don't experience remorse, repentance, and self correction, God will wait and give us an opportunity to repent and self-correct. If we don't repent of sin, he will step into our lives and correct us of sin. He will break us from sin, like a father spans his child not because he hates his child but because he loves his child.

Isn't this the way God treated ancient Israel? The Israelites drifted into sin. God was patient. He sent prophet after prophet calling his people to repentance. When they didn't repent, he chastised them. He sent them into Babylon for 70 years.

Sometimes Christians ask me how I know God is involved in everyday life. I like to point them to this verse. Wander into sin and don't repent of sin but enjoy sin. You tell me if God doesn't do something about it. You tell me if God fails to order your circumstances to break you of sin and correct you of sin. The Bible promises he will. Remember God corrects us not because he hates us but because he loves us.

All spiritual maturity begins with a healthy fear of God and fear of disappointing him.

Let's move from the pietist portion of these verses to the quietist portion.

**As we work out our salvation, God shapes our will and gives us the energy to accomplish his desires for our lives.**

...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

As we make the tough choices to pursue spiritual maturity, it is God who is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Paul gave us two ways God works in us.

**God works in us by changing our will (our desires.)** One of the ways God works in us is he supernaturally changes the desires in our hearts so our desires become the desires God wants for us. As we make the hard choices to

turn away from sinful things, God supernaturally works in us to change the desires of our hearts away from those sinful things.

An example of this was the music I used to listen to in college. Like most college kids, music was a big part of life in the dorm. My stereo was my pride and joy. I listened to loud music and lots of it. Most of it was Christian music. Some of it was secular music my roommates shared with me. I remember one secular album I really liked. I played it all the time on my stereo. While I liked the music, God kept his hand heavy on my heart because I knew the words were raunchy. Jesus was not honored when I sang those words on my lips or hummed those words in my heart. One afternoon, after listening to that album and the Holy Spirit being heavy on my heart, I knew I needed to make a choice. I needed to stop listening to that music. I got off the couch in my dorm and turned off the music. I took the CD out of the player and stuffed it in the back of the stereo cabinet so I wouldn't see it any more. I remember asking God in prayer under my breath, "God please take away my desire to listen to this music." Then I went to dinner.

A week later, it hit me out of the blue. I hadn't listened to that album in a week. I hadn't even thought about that album when I had played it every day the week before. I no longer had a desire to listen to that music. The desires of my heart were changed. That was a supernatural work of God. God convicted my heart. Then I needed to take a step of obedience to get rid of the music. When I took that step, God supernaturally worked in my heart by changing the desires of my heart. He moved me away from sinful desires and replaced it with more godly desires.

Isn't this the way spiritual maturity works? Do you remember the pedals of the bicycle? We take a step for obedience and God puts his foot on the other pedal and changes the desires of our hearts to give us the strength we need for obedience.

You could say God was at work even before I took a step of obedience. He was at work in my heart convicting me about the words of the music I listened to and prompting me to take a step of obedience. It is us working and God working in us at the same time. The pedals of spiritual maturity go around, giving us spiritual maturity and progress.

This verse teaches us on how we handle all of our spiritual battles. Maybe you are struggling with alcohol. Maybe you are struggle with pornography. How do we break free from those sins and spiritually mature? Take the example of alcohol. God convicts you that alcohol is beginning to control your life. He convicts you that alcohol is becoming the wrong thing for your life and marriage. Now you need to do the hard work of making choices. You need to stop going to the bar. You need to stop hanging out with people that party. You need to get the alcohol out of your house. You need to attend Alcoholics Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery. You need to do the hard work of making choices. As you make those choices, God is at work in you, enabling you to make those choices. He is at work deep inside of you, even changing your desire for sin. At one time you were so in love with the bottle, you were controlled by the bottle. God changes your desire so you no longer want the bottle.

God doesn't always change our desires instantly. Sometimes there is a long battle as we struggle against sin. The good news is that it is not a losing battle. We do not fight the battle alone, on our strength. We fight the battle with God and his strength working deep within us, even changing our desires.

**God works in us by giving us the ability to accomplish his will and work.** The word *work* is the Greek word for energy. God doesn't just supernaturally change our will but he also provides us the strength, energy, and stamina we need to carry out his will.

Take spiritual gifts. When we become Christians, the Bible says God gives each of us one or more spiritual gifts. That simply means each of us is uniquely gifted by God to help others in the church and serve others in Christ's body. This verse reminds us that if God gives us the gift of hospitality, God will also supernaturally provide us the strength and stamina we need to show that hospitality. God doesn't just give us a spiritual gift but he empowers and energizes us to use that gift.

A friend of mine named Charlie is a pastor in North Carolina. He married one of Billy Graham's grandchildren. When he went to extended family gatherings, imagine the thrill of having the elderly Billy Graham in the room. Like most pastors, Billy Graham was one of his heroes. He studied Billy Graham. At one of the family gatherings, he asked Dr. Graham about his 1957 revival in Madison Square Garden. That revival lasted 16 weeks!<sup>1</sup> He asked Dr. Graham, "How did you do it? How could you preach evangelistic messages night after

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/billy-graham/553973/>

night for 16 weeks? How did you come up with the energy and the sermons night after night in front of thousands of people?” Dr. Graham simply said to him, “It was all God.”

Did God give Billy Graham the gift of evangelism? Yes. He certainly did. Did Billy Graham study and prepare for those stressful days? He most certainly did. What happened when the evangelism lasted 16 weeks? How did Billy Graham find the stamina to travel to 157 countries to present the gospel? God provided him not just the gift of evangelism but the energy, strength, and stamina to use that gift in the most difficult circumstances.

The same is true for us. Whatever God has gifted us and called us to do in our lives, he will give us the energy and ability to accomplish it. Is it still take hard work? Yes!

We put in hard work for spiritual maturity, but as we work, God is at work deep within us, changing our will to please him and giving us the strength, energy, and stamina to obey and follow him.

Remember spiritual maturity is like riding a bicycle. It is work we do at the same time God does work in us.

Paul then moved from telling us to work out our salvation to giving us a concrete area of our lives where each of us needs to pursue spiritual maturity — our attitudes.

**Do all things without grumbling or arguing.**

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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 2:14–15 (ESV)

Paul didn't say we should do *some* things without grumbling or disputing. He didn't say we should do *most* things without grumbling or disputing. He said to do *all* things without grumbling or disputing. That is a high calling.

Many of us are shocked at these words. We thought grumbling was our area of giftedness. If we weren't grumbling about life, we wouldn't know what to talk about. If that is how you feel, that just goes to show this is an area of maturity that needs to be pursued. For many of us, a positive attitude instead of a grumbling attitude would be considered unattainable were it not for the fact that God is at work in us, changing our deepest desires and giving us the energy and ability to pursue and obtain godly lives.

What is the difference between grumbling and disputing?

Grumbling is an attitude. It is murmuring under our breath on the inside of our lives.

Disputing is an action. It is speaking our murmuring on the outside of our lives.

Grumbling is what we do in our minds. Disputing is what we do with our mouths. As Christians, one of the ways we are to be different from the world around us is we are to be known as people who do not grumble, whine, and complain. When life is difficult, when times are tough, we keep a positive attitude while other people are cussing and swearing. Is that easy? No. But this is one of the ways we "work out" our salvation. We work on our attitudes.

**Jesus was not a grumbler. We are not just to model our lives after the humility of Jesus but the attitude of Jesus.**

Think of it this way. We are supposed to model our lives not just after the humility of Jesus but the attitude of Jesus. In the Bible, do we see Jesus

grumbling about circumstances and complaining about the weather? No, we don't. There were times Jesus was angry, but he was angry about sin. He wasn't complaining about circumstances. Jesus wasn't a whiner and complainer. He had a positive attitude that trusted in his heavenly father.

**Grumbling is a pride-filled attitude, not a humble attitude. It is whining about what we don't have instead of being grateful for what we do have.**

I would also say that grumbling is not a humble attitude. Grumbling is a pride-filled attitude. Grumbling and complaining says, "I deserve better than what I am experiencing." What do we deserve my friends? We deserve the lake of fire. Anything better than eternal suffering for our sin is gravy. It is a bonus from God's goodness. As Christians, we should be filled with gratefulness, because while life may be bumpy now, we look forward to heaven, our eternal home. We are the most blessed beings in the universe. Grumbling is not a humble way to live. It is a prideful way to live.

I realize there are negative things in the news and they need to be reported, but the attitude of many reporters is searching for things they can report that are divisive and hurtful. That creates camps. It creates division. It creates hatred. It creates negativity.

**Christians stay positive in a negative world by keeping their eyes on Jesus.**

As Christians, we are to stay positive in a grumbling, whining, and complaining world. How do we stay positive in tough times? Fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us not forget what God has done for us in the past through Jesus. Let us keep our eyes fixed on what God will do for us in eternity because of Jesus.

We are completely forgiven by Jesus in the past, and we are completely blessed by Jesus in the future. How can we not be people of joy? Grumbling, whining and complaining doesn't fit our identity as Christians. We are a grateful people.

**Grumbling was a serious problem for the ancient Israelites. It kept them out of the Promised Land.**

When Paul talked about grumbling, he made an intentional allusion to ancient Israel and their grumbings in the wilderness. The Exodus generation was a generation in which God was extremely good to them. They were facing the genocide of their nation. They were slaves told to throw their baby boys in the Nile River to drown. God gave them Moses as their deliverer. God put 10 plagues on the nation of Egypt, bringing that ancient superpower to its knees. When God took the Israelites out of Egypt, he made the Egyptians favorably disposed to them so the Egyptians gave them gold and precious jewels as they left, changing them from a slave nation to a rich nation.

When the Israelites were cornered by the Egyptian army next to the Red Sea, God parted the Red Sea and brought the Israelites across the sea on dry ground. When the armies of Pharaoh tried to follow, God drowned all of them, sending them to the bottom of the sea. Wouldn't you agree God was good to the Israelites? Didn't they have many things to celebrate?

Yet, they wouldn't stop grumbling on their way to the Promised Land. They grumbled because they didn't have water. They grumbled because they didn't have food. They grumbled because they always had the same food. They grumbled because they were jealous of Moses. They grumbled all the time and had no gratitude the rest of the time.

As a result, God killed every last one of them. They never made it to the Promised Land. That shows us how God feels about grumbling and how antithetical it is to his people after he has done so much for us.

**Grumbling is contagious and deadly.**

And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land... Numbers 14:36 (ESV)

Remember the 12 spies sent to scout the Promised Land? Two spies, Caleb and Joshua, returned believing they could take the Promised Land even though the people were tall and the cities were fortified. If God took them out of land of Egypt, why wouldn't he continue to be faithful and bring them into the Promised Land? God was faithful in the past. He would be faithful in the future.

The problem was 10 of the 12 spies didn't believe God would care for them. They were convinced they would be destroyed. They grumbled and whined. Those 10 spies infected the entire nation with a negative grumbling attitude. Their grumbling spread faster than COVID. Those 10 spies soured the faith of a nation of at least 1.2 million people, leading all of them to abandon their faith and grumble with discontent. As a result, they never made it into the Promised Land. Grumbling is catchy and very destructive to the faith of God's people. May it never be found among us lest we discourage the faith of others and find ourselves wearing the same shoes as the 10 spies who caved into disbelief instead of faith.

God hates grumbling so much that he struck those 10 spies dead immediately after this happened.

...the men who brought up a bad report of the land—died by plague before the Lord. Numbers 14:37 (ESV)

**Grumbling about life is ultimately grumbling against God who orders our lives.**

...but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" Exodus 17:1–2 (ESV)

When we grumble about our circumstances, we are ultimately grumbling against God, who orders our circumstances and puts us in those circumstances. God puts us in tough circumstance for a good reason. Remember how much he loves us. Tough circumstances are ordained by God to either show our faith or to grow our faith. We are not to grumble, which shows a lack of faith.

The Israelites complained when they lost sight of the greatness of the salvation God worked for them in the past when they left Egypt. They grumbled when they lost sight of the Promised Land, the glorious home to which they were going. We will also grumble when we forget the salvation God has won for us through Jesus in the past and when we forget to keep our eyes on our glorious inheritance, the Promised Land of heaven, which is our eternal home.

I like the way John Newton spoke about keeping our eyes on what God has done for us in the past and what he will do for us in the future when we face trials in life.

Suppose a man were traveling to New York to take possession of a large estate that was his through inheritance. On the way there, a mile before he arrived his carriage broke down so he had to walk the last mile. How evil it would be if he spent the last mile wringing his hands complaining that he needed to walk when he was almost to his new home. In the same way, we must remember we are almost home with Christ. We are so close to our eternal inheritance. Will we have hard times in life? Of course. We can walk the last mile to our glorious inheritance with a smile on our face. - John Newton

Now Paul gave us more reasons we are to avoid grumbling.

**We are to avoid grumbling so we can be blameless and pure children of God.**

...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation... Philippians 2:15 (ESV)

God's wants us to be blameless and innocent children of God in this world.

Blameless means people have nothing bad to say about us.

Innocent means people cannot find fault in us.

When people accuse us of sin, there should be nothing in our lives that allows those accusations to stick.

We have talked about what it means to not grumble about our circumstances. Let's talk about what it means to not grumble against people.

When I went into ministry, an old pastor told me, never, never, never say anything bad about people in your church, especially to someone else in your church. You may not agree with them, but never ever speak evil about them. Speaking poorly about people behind their backs is the way the world does things. It is not the way the church does things. A pastor speaking poorly about people in the church, especially to other people in the church, will sour your ministry in the church. It will destroy the trust people have in you. Your evil words will be gossiped around the church body. You will not be blameless and innocent.

I have tried to follow that. I know I have not done that perfectly, but when I catch myself, I try to be quick to repent.

If we disagree with someone, we talk to that person, not about that person to other people. Unfortunately, in 27 years of pastoring, I have seen many people speak spiteful words against their Christian brothers and sisters in the church.

That is not blameless living. That is not innocent living. That is the way the world lives. That is not the way we live as Christians.

**Our positive attitude helps us witness for Christ in a negative world.**

**...among whom you shine as lights in the world... Philippians 2:15 (ESV)**

One of the ways Christians earn the opportunity to share the contents of what Christ has done for us is by living out the joy-filled character of Christ in a negative grumbling world. Refusing to grumble and whine in this world but instead keeping our eyes on what Jesus has done for us in the past and what he will do for us in the future helps our attitude stand out as a bright light in a dark room. People will ask us, "Where does your joy come from? I need to know."

If we want to be able to share the contents of the gospel message, may we be people that live with the character of the gospel message.

## **Conclusion**

This morning, we have seen two practical ways we follow Christ.

1. We work out our salvation. We pursue spiritual maturity. It is like pedaling a bicycle. That is something we do, but it is also something God does in us. It is our work, but it is also God's work at the same time. Now that we know where spiritual maturity comes from, I pray we are better able to pursue it.

2. Paul gave us one area where we are to pursue spiritual maturity, and that is our attitude. We are not to be grumbling whiners and complainers. That is improper for God's holy people. We need to mature out of that kind of attitude. Grumbling is deadly to the faith of others. It kills God's people. We are to keep our eyes on what God has done for us in the past and what God will do for us in

the future. As John Newton said, it is not appropriate for us to complain if we only



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