

Philippians 7 - The Search for Significance

1. Searching for significance

Phil 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

Philippians 2:14 sets up the next challenge for us in our united effort to serve God. Paul wrote about the problem of murmuring and disputings. The word *disputings* is from a Greek word where we get the word *dialogue* from. I came to first understand the word *dialogue* as referring to the conversation between characters in a novel or a drama. *Dialogue* comes from two words meaning to *reason through* something. You, now, frequently hear it used in the sense as an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue, especially a political or religious issue, with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement. This sounds benign and harmless. But, when someone suggests that "We need to open a dialogue" about an issue, it sounds more suspiciously like they are trying to bait you into a brow-beating session until you give in. This is the sense of *dialoguing* or *disputing* in the New Testament which speaks of people getting hung up, going back and forth about an issue, and ending up getting stuck in a rut, spinning their wheels.

Next, when Paul spoke of *murmuring* he was referring to a grumbling and complaining attitude.

Jas 1:19-20 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

We need to be careful to differentiate between different kinds of complaints. Some complaints can be entirely justified. When you get hurt or are sick,

you have to communicate your pain so you can be treated. There is a kind of pain that is expressed when counseling with each other. There are complaints that we need to raise that serve to provide information to facilitate a project. The kind of complaint that Paul was writing about is more characterized as a bickering that stops God's work from moving forward. Typically, if someone has a responsibility, they need to have the authority and power to carry out that responsibility. Those who are in support need to defer to the one who is carrying the responsibility. It is also sad that this problem is not just limited to a grumbling murmurer affecting others. Someone can also have internal murmuring and disputing on themselves, putting themselves out of service.

Jas 3:1-18 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. **[not being many masters means don't seek to be a teacher or leader if you don't want accountability]**

2For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body...

8But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

9Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?

12Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so *can* no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish.

16For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.

17But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

We need to consider how we easily slip into murmuring and complaining in an unhealthy way that speaks less of our sense of responsibility and more of our desire for significance. It is that kind of complaining that keeps a church from moving on to overcoming obstacles. One of the things that I found interesting about a hurdle race was how a modern runner paces himself between hurdles and approaches the hurdle so that he actually takes it in stride and is almost just stepping over it. The murmurers and disputers are the kind of people who will stop and argue over each hurdle and never get to running the race at all.

Why is it so easy to slip into this problem? The way Paul addressed the problem gives us a clue. It revolves around the problem of being centered on self. Our fleshly nature causes us to overestimate our self significance. When we think of the desire to be significant we might *usually* think of someone who is seeking glory, leaving a "legacy," or looking for popularity. That is more obvious, but the same can be said for the

least of us. We demonstrate this regularly by our complaining. Complaining is a cheap way to bolster our sense of significance.

Such people make the mistake that having a critical disposition comes off as looking smart. It suggests that they must be an expert and a person of taste and refinement who knows better than others. It makes them look astute with a keen sense of observation. When people accommodate them in order to appease them it gives them a sense of power. It also feeds into a sense of moral superiority when they inflate how important the things are that they complain about.

I once read a sermon from Charles Spurgeon who with great imagination found about 40 ways to use a candle to illustrate the spiritual. Michael Faraday wrote about 75 pages for his lectures on observations of a candle which inspired the importance of scientific inquiry. People can be just as imaginative when it comes to complaining and finding fault.

The murmurer and disputer creates an atmosphere of doubt and distrust. Less gets done. With each failure, there is more to complain about. The complainer feels empowered and complains more, which leads to more failure. His self-centeredness then feeds on itself, creating a sense of power that can't be fulfilled because it spirals out of control in a cycle of failure and complaining.

With all the complaining of the Pharisees, the people became afraid to follow Christ. This empowered the Pharisees and the ultimate failure was that the Jews have been set aside until the next dispensation.

2. True significance

Once you get past the petty murmuring and complaining, there *is* a purpose for raising a complaint. God refers to His indignation over sin throughout the Scriptures. If we can avoid treating our petty grievances as

Godly indignation, we can actually be motivated to Godly change. An indicator that we are slipping is if we are willing to wallow in dissatisfaction. Instead, the sin and wickedness of the world is truly worth complaining, about. That kind of complaint will motivate us to Godliness, Christian service, or a renewed zeal and energy.

Ps 119:71 *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

When we are faced with something that goes wrong or someone who wrongs us, we should see this as an opportunity to go to work. Don't walk away from obnoxious and insulting sinners. It is not *you* they are contrary to.

John 15:18-21 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.

19If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

What they are doing is demonstrating that they need you to minister to them, even though they might be trying to put you off. Paul identified the greatest thing you can do when you get out of the pit that murmuring and disputing digs for you:

Phil 2:14-18 Do all things

without murmurings and disputings:

15That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

16Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

17Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

18For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

When we can get over ourselves, we can become the Gospel light shining the Word of life on the world. We all know that the greatest thing we can do is to share the Gospel. The context of this message is to point out that as long as we are stuck in a self-centered critical attitude, we will rob ourselves of the opportunity to step out on faith.

Paul wrote about the service of their faith and connected it to sacrifice. The sacrifice that needs to be made is the sacrifice of self. *That* is when *true* rejoicing can come. It does not come from a self-congratulating attitude that you can pick anything and everything apart until nothing is good enough for you to join in.

There is plenty that goes on in the world that warrants Godly indignation. The answer is not to become the world's guardian and care giver. It is not to pass new laws. As I talk to other preachers, we are all saying the same thing in one form or another: it is to change people's hearts with the Gospel. The perversity of the world's programs towards our children is being exposed. Instead of pushing them into mutilation, they need to learn the love of Christ. People will insulate themselves in luxury apartments and vacation homes where they virtue

signal. When they are put on the spot to act out their virtue signals, their hypocrisy is found out. That was just such the case of the rich young ruler.

Mark 10:21-24 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.
22And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.
23And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!
24And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

Such people have secured their privacy to the point of eternal separation from God. It is not only the *down-and-outers* who need Jesus, but the *up-and-outers* as well.

When we get over ourselves we will find that we will never get over Jesus.

3. Profiles in significance

Paul next seems to have changed the subject by addressing his concern for the Philippians by sending Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Phil 2:19-23 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.
20For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.
21For all seek their own, not the

things which are Jesus Christ's.
22But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.
23Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

Phil 2:25-30 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

26For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

27For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

28I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

29Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

30Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

By turning to his concern for the Philippians, whoever Paul would send to them would have to be less concerned for self and more concerned for Paul, the Philippians, and the Lord. We have to really wonder if Paul was actually sending them a message to support his challenge to not be murmuring and disputing. By bringing Timothy and Epaphroditus forward, Paul presents a profile of humility. This is especially fitting because it follows the great example of Christ in *His* humility in the previous chapter.

Here are the specific things about them that speak of what it means to be selfless:

- They were companions in labor
- They have a natural care and concern for others
- They seek not their own
- They seek the things of Christ
- They soldier on
- They have genuine compassion for the concern of others that doesn't fade
- They don't regard their own life
- Their own bad health does not become an excuse to permanently knock them out
- Their concern for others is so constant and evident that they develop a reputation for it
- They are active already in ministry and merely move on to the next assignment

People like Timothy and Ephaphroditus were too busy ministering and serving in the Gospel that they didn't have time for murmuring and disputing. That is what made them such excellent help to the apostle Paul. Often people who are not engaged in serving and therefore don't know much about what it *really* takes to serve God are the most uninformed critics. It is the attitude of selflessness that brings about *true* significance.

Matt 23:8-12 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.

9 And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he

that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Mark 9:35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Mark 10:31 But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

If you want to be significant, become insignificant.

For those who are involved, we are renewed by the complaints we have over the world because it signals to us that Jesus is the answer. For those who are hanging back, they are missing the wonderful opportunities that come from serving God. Don't be satisfied with being neutral. Sitting on the sidelines and not joining in is its own way of being centered on self. They insulate themselves from complaining about any discomfort, but they aren't doing anything to help either. For those who are hanging back and are murmuring and disputing, stop getting in the way. Get over yourself and dig in. You are far more valuable when you are being part of the solution than when you are critic.

Have you been content to sit on the sidelines? Are you a complainer getting in the way? Are you a closet complainer taking *yourself* out of service? Or are you ready to move on to true significance in Christ?

1. Searching for significance - Phil 2:14, Jas 1:19-20, Jas 3:1-18
2. True significance - Ps 119:71, John 15:18-21, Phil 2:14-18, Mark 10:21-24
3. Profiles in significance - Phil 2:19-30, Matt 23:8-12, Mark 9:35, Mark 10:31