

conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us as we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. And this working of God is directed to the end [the goal] of enabling us to will and to do that which is pleasing to him.¹

And all of this is to fulfill "His good pleasure!" Consider the love of God and how it transcends our ability to fathom or explain. For He, being in need of nothing, put His love upon those who would, apart from His work of love, deny Him and live a self-centered existence. And He did this "for His good pleasure." This defines the love of God, that He would eternally rejoice over the saving of sinners, for it is a love that is entirely placed upon helpless beings who, when so loved, will forever be in eternal fellowship with Him.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

Vs. 14–16 form the final verses which conclude the lengthy section which began in 1:27. This section of the epistle opens with:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah.... (1:27)

The exhortation of Paul which begins the section in v. 27 is that the believers in Philippi would live in such a manner so as to prove to the surrounding unbelieving community that they were missing something of great value as they observed the love and caring which characterized the believers in Yeshua. Even more, coming to recognize that their own lives and society lacked both the desire and the ability to care for each other in such a life-giving manner, they likewise would come to recognize that it was the very life-giving gift of Yeshua Himself that gave His followers the ability to establish true, self-giving community. Having recognized the life-transforming power of following Yeshua, they would see themselves as doomed to destruction unless they too would acknowledge Him to be the true Messiah and would exercise faith in Him Who alone is the true and omnipotent Savior. Thus Paul exhorts them (and us) to be:

1 Murray, John, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 148-49.

...of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (2:2)

Paul teaches us here that the unity of believers within a given local community offers a powerful testimony to the watching world of God's redeeming grace. For to put the needs and cares of others as a priority, offers a significant expression of God's love for those He has saved, a love that was ultimately demonstrated in the very giving of Himself to purchase their redemption.

Such love is not only expressed in caring for those who are "easy to love," that is, who willingly and joyfully accept the care others give them, but even more it is expressed in the ability to love those who present themselves as antagonistic or unwilling to accept the help they need. In this regard, Yeshua Himself teaches us to express genuine love and caring, even for our enemies!

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Lk 6:27–28, cf. Matt 5:44–45; Lk 6:35)

If we are to love our enemies, how much more should we give ourselves to love those who are our brothers and sisters in Yeshua! Thus, Paul concludes this long section of his epistle (1:27–2:16) by emphasizing the essential things which foster true community within the local assembly of believers in Yeshua.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; – The Greek word translated by the NASB as "grumbling" is γογγυσμός (*gongusmos*). The Greek "gongus" is onomatopoeic (i.e., words formed in imitation of a natural sound) much like our English word "murmur."¹ "Gongus" mimics the sound of a person speaking "under his breath," in sounds that cannot be distinguished or understood from a distance. When someone is sharing an evil report against another individual, they may do so in hushed tones that muddle the words so that others standing at a distance will not be able to hear and understand their sharing *lashon hara* (evil speech).

In all of the Pauline epistles, this is the only time he uses the noun *gongusmos*, "grumbling." He does use the verbal form of this word in 1Cor 10:9–10 when referring to the "grumbling" of the Israelites in the wilderness.

1 An example of onomatopoeic words is our English word "meow" which mimics the sound of a pet cat.

Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble (γογγύζω, *gunguzō*), as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1Cor 10:9–10)¹

Here we gain an insight into Paul's understanding of the "grumbling" of the Israelites, and thus his use of the same term in our current Philippian text. He couples "grumbling" with the phrase "try the Lord." To "try the Lord" (ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν) means to "test whether He has told the truth or not,"² which indicates a lack of faith in believing that God is infinitely "good" and cannot "lie."

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num 23:19)

Thus, Paul couples a lack of faith in accepting what God has clearly stated with the reality that such a lack of faith, not checked and repented of, could ultimately be the same as calling God a liar.

Granted, we may not consider our grumbling to be that serious. But stop to think a moment: if God has promised to supply all of our needs and to strengthen us as we rely upon Him, then to grumble when we come into difficulties is an indication that we have failed to trust that what He has promised He will surely do. When within our local communities of faith we allow grumbling to persist, we are engaging in that which is the fruit of the sinful flesh and thereby weakens our ability to give God the glory and praise He deserves. What God calls us to is a life of prayer and faith in Him, that He

... causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

In our immediate text Paul couples "grumbling" (γογγυσμός, *gon-gusmos*) with "disputing" (διαλογισμός, *dialogismos*). The word itself can have a positive sense of "the process of reasoning, content of reason-

1 The word group γογγυσμός, γόγγυσις, and γογγύζω are found 11 times in the Lxx of the Torah, all relating to the "murmuring" or "grumbling" of the Israelites in their wilderness journey: Ex. 16:7–9, 12; 17:3; Num. 11:1; 14:27, 29; 16:41; 17:5, 10.

2 BDAG, ἐκπειράζω, "to subject to test or proof," p. 307.

ing or conclusion reached through use of reason.”¹ However, when coupled with the previous word, “disputing,” it surely carries the sense of “verbal exchange that takes place when conflicting ideas are expressed, dispute, argument.”² The point Paul is making here is, that while “grumbling” can be something that is done within one’s own thought processes without necessarily making it public, to add “disputing” means that the “grumbling” is openly being shared with others.

Thus, Paul’s admonition in this verse is first to check our inward thoughts of discontent which produce inner grumbling, for if we allow a “grumbling spirit” to remain, it will inevitably result in telling others of our discontent and thus engaging in “disputing.” And it is such sharing of one’s discontent that causes division and may cause spiritual hardship and even spiritual damage to those who are struggling in their faith.

So what is the antidote to “grumbling and disputing” as we seek to live in accordance with God’s inspired word and the clear admonition of Paul in our text? It is to consistently grow strong in our faith through affirming that the Scriptures are telling us the truth and committing ourselves to live in accordance with the truth of God’s word. We are helped in this endeavor through consistent study of God’s word, daily engaging in prayer, and putting a high priority upon fellowship with other believers as together we feed upon God’s word, engage in corporate worship, and practice caring for each other as brothers and sisters in Yeshua.

15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

The primary reason that all who are believers in Yeshua should strive to “do all things without grumbling or disputing” is so that we glorify God our Savior Who has given us a new life in Him, a life that is characterized by becoming more and more like Yeshua by a life that is more and more aligned with His righteousness. Such a growth in true spiritual maturity will inevitably be characterized by a willingness to care for others in a way that likewise honors Yeshua.

The opening line of our verse, “that you will prove yourselves” is

1 BDAG, “διαλογισμός,” p. 232.

2 Ibid.

actually in the Greek *ἵνα γένησθε* (*hina genēsthe*) from the verb *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*), “to be, to become, to be born.” The NASB is correct in adding the word “prove,” for if we were to translate this woodenly, it would offer the sense of “so that you will become *who you truly are, i.e., blameless and innocent.*”

In other words, Paul is emphasizing a very important aspect of our current “walk of faith” in light of the inevitable goal to which we are proceeding, namely, the promise of God that all who in Yeshua will finally “put on immortality” and will dwell “forever with the Lord.” As Paul teaches in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN victory. (1Cor 15:54)

Note also Paul’s words in his first epistle to the Thessalonians:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess 4:16–18)

The Scriptures are clear that all who, by faith, are “in Messiah,” are already reckoned by God as “blameless and innocent.” Believers in Yeshua are not seeking to gain their salvation, for it has already been won for us through the full payment made for our sins which Yeshua accomplished on the cross.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Rom 8:1-2)

Thus, in our text, Paul is admonishing the Philippian believers to be who they profess to be, namely, “in Messiah Yeshua,” and therefore declared to be righteous in the heavenly “courtroom” of God. Put simply, “justification” is God’s unchangeable declaration that the person who is “in Yeshua” is “not guilty.” Sanctification is proving who we are in Yeshua by becoming more and more like Him in thought, word, and

actions.

When Paul writes that the Philippian believers were to “prove themselves to be blameless and innocent,” it is clear that “blameless and innocent” defines what they already are in the courtroom of God, for He has declared them “not guilty” on the basis that all of their sins have been paid for by Yeshua’s redeeming sacrifice. And since this is true, then it is an inevitability that a true believer in Yeshua will prove himself or herself to be a redeemed child of God by having a life that is increasingly characterized by righteousness as God defines it.

... *children of God above reproach* – Here, again, Paul chooses words that emphasize the reality of a changed life and one that is maturing in conformity with the One Who has made them His children. For children have a family connection through physical birth, and the same metaphor is used of those who have been adopted into the family of God through faith in Yeshua (Eph 1:4–6).

The word translated “above reproach” by the NASB is ἄμωμος (*amōmos*), which carries the sense of

being without defect or blemish; to being without fault and therefore morally blameless.¹

If the first two words Paul uses in this phrase, “blameless and innocent,” primarily emphasize the declaration of God regarding all who have been redeemed unto Him, then it is likely that this word, *amōmos*, here translated “above reproach,” is used by Paul to describe the inevitable goal in life for which every true believer in Yeshua will strive. This does not negate that there will be difficulties, struggles, failings, etc., but what it does mean is that the overall and final characteristic of a believer’s life will be one of growing in faith and in spiritual strength and ability to honor the Lord Who is one’s Savior.

...*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*, – Paul’s emphasis in our context is that of the corporate life of the believing community, made up of believers at all stages of their spiritual journey, yet all striving to grow in their ability to honor the One Who has redeemed them. This includes coming alongside of those who may be weak or who are in need of spiritual strengthening and encouragement, including loving confrontation. It is when the body of Messiah, represented by the local community of believers, strives for this goal, that the watching world is given a true testimony and message of the gospel and the real-

¹ BDAG, “ἄμωμος,” p. 56.

ity of a life of faith in Yeshua.

Paul characterizes the fallen world and the society in his time as “a crooked and perverse generation.” These two adjectives, “crooked and perverse” (σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης, *skolias kai diestrammenēs*) express something that is deformed or twisted and thus pictures that which is contrary to God’s standards and righteousness. All of this began, of course, at the fall of mankind into sin when Adam and Chavah disobeyed and sin entered the world.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because [and the proof is¹] all sinned. (Rom 5:12)

Throughout earth’s history, every culture, every people group, every individual, has been burdened under the spiritual war that exists in a world tainted by sin and rebellion against God. Only through God’s infinite love and mercy has He made the way to redeem to Himself a host of people beyond number who would, by His sovereign grace and mercy, be given the gift of repentance and faith, and by being adopted into His family, granted eternal life. What a bountiful gift, beyond our ability to fully express, that God would redeem those who come to Him in faith, by paying Himself the penalty of their sin, and adopting them as His own sons and daughters, to live forever with Him in glory.

... *among whom you appear as lights in the world* - Yeshua taught His disciples that they were lights in the world:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:14, 16)

If indeed, we who profess faith in Yeshua have been given such a promise of life now and forever with Him, and if we seek to fathom the glory and the riches given to us in so great a salvation, we surely will do all in our power to be “lights” in this world, darkened by falsehood, lies, and perversions that God hates. For it is by the testimony of our lives, our words, our actions, that we are enabled to live as a testimony of the Gospel and the glory of our Savior to the unbelieving world, as well as

1 For substantial proof that the Greek ἐφ’ ὧ, “because” means in this verse “the proof is,” see Fitzmyer, Joseph. *To Advance the Gospel* (Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 349ff.

to encourage other believers and believing communities to stand firm for the truth, to raise families that honor the Lord, and to strive to have our local assembly of faith to be itself a shining light for Him and the good news of the Gospel in Yeshua.

One writer, focusing on the community aspect of these verses, writes that Paul

... calls the Christian community to fulfill its mission in the world by cleaning up the conversation in the community. When Christian conversation is laced with complaints and personal attacks, Christians have lost their distinctive quality as the children of God in a world characterized by that same kind of negative tone.¹

1 Hansen, G. Walter, *Philippians in Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 181.