

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Grumbling*

**SERIES:** *Letter from a Roman Prison*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Philippians 2:12-30*

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*\*Credit to*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church this morning.

We are in the 4<sup>th</sup> week of a series called, “**Letter from a Roman Prison.**” The Book of Philippians in your Bible is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote, from a prison, to the Church in Philippi.

This morning we’ll be taking a look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of chapter 2.

If you were with us two weeks ago we looked at the Greatest Hymn ever written. Jesus who was in the form of God, showed us that Godhood is mostly clearly expressed in self-emptying servant love.

Now that message was kind of theological...intellectual. We were defining some key Greek words. It was about the nature of who God is.

This morning’s message is from the other end of the spectrum...this mornings message is pretty straight forward. Easy to understand, the challenge with today’s message is not so much to understand it...but to put it into practice.

So, if you have a Bible open to Philippians 2:12-30. And just to set us up for where we’re headed today...this mornings message about **grumbling and complaining.**

And I know you're probably thinking, "Why are we doing a message on grumbling and complaining. This isn't my problem. Why can't we talk about something a little more practical? Why do we have to spend the next 30 mins on this topic. What a waste of my time!" And see, if that's how we're thinking...you kind of know why we're hitting this topic. Hopefully that's not what crossed your mind. But I was reading an article, that the average person complains about 15-30 times a day. Which maybe doesn't sound like a lot. But if you think about it, if you're awake for 15-18 hours a day...that's 1-2 complaints every hour.

Why do people drive so slowly? Why can't my kids get ready for school faster? See this is a daily almost hourly problem for most of us.

There are only two ways to eliminate grumbling from your life. One is to **change your external circumstances...**which is impossible!

If you've been grumbling about not being married. You have to get married. If you're married you have to improve your spouse into the kind of person who would never generate grounds for grumbling. If you have children you'll have to raise the kind of kids who daily volunteer to wash the dishes, fold their own laundry and go to bed at 8pm without being asked. You'll have to be surrounded by a family and co-workers that intuitively know when they're getting on your nerves and will just leave you alone. It means you'll have to find one of those jobs where your boss asks you "What hours you'd like to work? And how much you'd like to get paid." You'll have to make sure that route 30 and 997 and 316 and I81 are always traffic free. And you'll have to find a church filled with perfect people. And I'll just warn you...this ain't that church.

And so if you're not able to change your external circumstances into that kind of life, then the only other way eliminate grumbling is to change your internal world.

Paul, is an example of someone who changed his internal world not his external circumstances. When Jesus comes to live inside of you he changes who you are, on the inside, which allows you to respond to your circumstances differently. The fruit of the Spirit in you is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...no grumbling.

If you live with a spirit of grumbling, a good chance you've not allowed the Holy Spirit to take full Lordship over your life.

Here we go...

## **I. Philippians 2:12-30**

**<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.**

There's a lot packed into these few verses...

The word, **therefore** connects what Paul is saying, with what he has just finished saying...the previous passage was about Jesus proclaimed as Lord.

Because Jesus is Lord (kurios), Paul says, therefore...this kind of behavior follows. And one of the first words, that should stand out is...

### **A. "Obeyed"**

This is probably a word that we don't much like to talk about in our world. Because it means, someone has authority over us, to tell us how to live and we don't like that.

The other day I was sitting in my office working on this sermon and Jenny sent me a text with a meme and crying laughing faces...

**“My husband didn’t want to decorate our entire front porch with pumpkins, so we compromised...and decorated our entire front porch with pumpkins”**

I thought that’s good illustration for obedience.

But again it gives us kind of that negative connotation of the word.

But in the Christian faith this is an important word. Understood rightly it signifies that “faith in Jesus” is not just about belief in Jesus, but faith is most properly expressed in obedience to Jesus.”

Dallas Willard writes, **“A disciple is a person who has decided that the most important thing in their life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do.”**

Obedience. It’s not the kind of obedience that is done begrudgingly, it’s the kind of obedience that is “because I love Jesus, I want to do what he wants me to do.”

Jesus said, that two greatest commands are to “love God and love others.”

Jesus said, “do not store up treasures on earth.”

Jesus said, “the greatest among you will be a servant.”

Jesus said, “do not get angry with a brother or sister, do not lust, do not do your good deeds so that others will notice.”

Jesus said, “love your enemies.”

Jesus said, “treat others the way I have treated you.”

Sometimes we like to get picky and choosy with our faith. *“I’ll do some of things Jesus said but I’d rather not do some of other things he said...if I prefer not or if they make me uncomfortable or if it would be hard to.”*

Faith in Jesus is always expressed by obedience to Jesus.

Second, Paul writes...

### **B. Work out your salvation**

Work out your salvation...for it is God who works in you. Do you notice the tension here?

We have a problem sometimes in the way in which we talk about our faith. Are you familiar with this phrase that we often use?

**“Faith not works, saves us”**. And that’s an important concept. The idea is that, your good deeds don’t earn you salvation or good standing with God. You are saved by grace, you don’t have to earn it.

But Paul writes to the Philippian church “work out your salvation.” So, what is he talking about.

Dallas Willard has a great phrase that has helped me to express the tension of Paul’s writing about “our salvation.” He says, **“Grace is opposed to earning...NOT effort.”** You don’t earn God’s grace, but to fully experience God’s grace in your life, does require effort...working out on your part!

Think about it like this. Suppose someone were to give you a gift. Say a brand new guitar. You now have a guitar and it’s beautiful. And it was a gift, you didn’t have to earn it. It was given to you by grace.

Now you could take that gift/guitar and put it on a stand in the corner of your room. Look at it every once in a while and think how great it would be to play that guitar. Some people might even see my guitar and say how nice it is that I have one.

But if you truly want to experience the joy, the satisfaction, of the guitar...you'll have to learn how to play it.

You'll have to spend time with the guitar in your hands. And if you've ever tried learning how to play a guitar you'll find that one of the first things that happens is the strings start to cause little bruises on the tips of your fingers. And it's painful. You'll have days you don't feel like playing. You'll have days you'll wonder if you'll ever learn.

But the only way to experience the full satisfaction of the gift is to work it out.

I think Paul is talking about a similar concept with our salvation. It is a gift, freely given. But too many people keep the gift in the corner of the room and it sits unused most days. They wish they had the motivation to pick it up and practice. But it sits there most days and then only in those moments when they really need it, they try to pick it up and use it...but since they haven't been working it out...it isn't very good.

If you want the kind of salvation...that leads to a life of joy, satisfaction, contentment...you had better be in the habit of daily practicing...working out your salvation.

Alright let's keep moving...now we get to the heart of the message for today. One of the ways you'll know you are working out your salvation is as practical and simple as this issue with grumbling.

### **C. Do everything...**

**<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”<sup>[c]</sup> Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of**

**Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup> But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.**

Now to the Jewish listeners of Paul's letter, they would have had something very specific in mind when Paul wrote these words. Because this phrase "**warped and crooked generation**" comes right out of the central story of their faith. "**The Exodus**".

This phrase is almost word for word out of **Deut. 32:5 – <sup>5</sup> They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.**

And so you may ask, what is it that defines **a warped and crooked generation?**

Isn't this fascinating?

All of the things you could think of? All of the egregious sins you might put at or near the top of your list, that would define a generation as warped and crooked. We might think some kind of abuse or sexual perversion or lying or stealing...one of the real bad sin's, you know. But what does Paul say the defining feature is?

### **Grumbling and complaining**

Just turn back to the book of Exodus with me for just a moment and you'll see this...

**Exodus 15 - <sup>22</sup> Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea** (God has just preformed some of the most epic miracles in the history of humanity, the parting the Red Sea and in the process saved the nation...but look at what happens... **and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without**

**finding water...<sup>24</sup> So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”**

A few verses later **16:2 “so the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.”**

Few verses later, no joke, just look at how often that word shows up...

**...in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”**

**<sup>8</sup> Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”**

**<sup>9</sup> Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”**

The sign of a warped and crooked generation is their constant grumbling and complaining. And the worst part is, it happens to God’s people, the church. It’s just so easy to become a community of grumblers. Paul writes to the church in Corinth...

**1 Corinthians 10:10 - “And do not grumble, as some of them did...**

...and it’s a pretty big deal to God. It’s serious enough that look what Paul says,

**—and were killed by the destroying angel.”**

God sent in the destroying angel because of the grumbling.



Grumbling destroys churches, communities, families, individuals...

Have you ever grumbled? How many of you are a little worried that God might be thinking about sending in his destroying angel? How many of you are Googling the reference of that verse right now to see if it's actually in the Bible?

Grumbling always starts small. A few thoughts about how you dislike your boss. You begin to imagine how you would do things differently. Maybe a snide comment here or there. Pretty soon you're telling someone else. They seem to agree. They realize, you agree with them. When you get together you now have someone to commiserate with and they kind of justify your complaining. Soon you find you can post your grumblings on social media and realize there are lots of people just like you. It's in the name of truth or honesty. And pretty soon much of what you say and think is in the form of grumbling or arguing.

Paul says to the Philippians don't be a group of grumblers, complainers, whiners...don't do what they did back then.

Finally, from our passage this morning, before we look at a couple of practical applications...Paul closes chapter 2 by talking about

#### **D. Timothy & Epaphroditus**

Paul's been writing about the self-emptying love of Jesus, about obedience of his followers, about not being a people who grumble and complain and now Paul closes chapter 2 by highlighting two guys that are examples of this character. He's saying to the Philippians if you want to know what this attitude looks like in real life, here are two people that everyone knows that can help you picture this theology being lived out in real life.

**<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who will**

**show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.**

Specifically, look at verse 21, this is kind of interesting how Paul words this verse.

You would expect Paul to say, **“everyone looks out for their own interests and not the interests of others.”** But what does Paul actually say...

**“Everyone looks out for their our own interests and not those of Jesus...”**

See what’s going on here? Paul equates caring for others, with caring for Jesus. This is why self-emptying servanthood is the primary marker of faith in Jesus.

Jesus said something very similar, **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these you did for me?”**

When we look out for the needs of other people, it’s like looking out for the needs of Jesus! If you care for Jesus, you’ll care for others. Timothy is a real-life example of this.

And so is Epaphroditus.

**<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. <sup>29</sup> So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died**

**for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.**

Epaphroditus was sent to help care for Paul. And almost died. He risked his own life in self-emptying love. And what I love here is that Paul says, “Honor people like him...”.

You know it’s interesting we don’t know much about Epaphroditus. He kind of hides in the background of the Biblical stories. I suspect for some in this room you’ve never even heard his name before. You didn’t even know he existed until we decide to walk through the book of Philippians. We might call him an unsung hero.

He’s the person nobody would notice. They do all of the work behind the scenes. Or the dirty work nobody else likes to do. But they do it in self-emptying love, not expecting awards or recognition. And Paul says, “These are the people you should honor in the community of faith.”

He doesn’t say, “Timothy will serve you well cause he’s an amazing teacher and rich theological skill. And Ephroditus he has unmatched leadership skills?”

Nope, rather he honors them, he commends them...for their self-emptying love...for living out the character of Jesus in their lives.

## **II. So What?**

A few practical take-aways from this mornings message...

### **A. How might you work out your salvation?**

Paul encourages the Philippian believers to work out their salvation. Salvation is not opposed to effort. So, what is something specific and intentional you are doing to work out your salvation? If you have a hard time pointing something it could your not being intentional enough about working out your salvation. You’ve gotten lazy with it and you’re gift is sitting in the corner of your life collecting dust.

An easy place to begin is with spiritual disciplines. Simple yet practical exercises that help us to know, love and follow Jesus...to work out our salvation.

Scripture reading/memorization (Bible Project Videos)

Prayer –

Simplicity –

Confession –

Solitude/Silence –

This is a great place to start. Keeping in mind...these things to do not earn your salvation, only the blood of Jesus does that. These practices help you to work it out.

### **B. Have you become a grumbler?**

Paul wrote to Timothy - **2 Timothy 2:24-25**- <sup>24</sup> **And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.**

<sup>25</sup> **Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,**

The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. Grumbling and complaining and arguing should not be part of a church culture, that's what Paul is saying. About worship styles, about décor, about other people within the church behind their backs, what we like and don't like about them.

When grumbling and complaining becomes part of the church culture, churches fail.

And notice, "Opponents...those who are against us...will be gently instructed." See it doesn't mean shove our problems under the rug...but we gently speak and interact and listen to one another, even those with different opinions.

And sometimes church leaders don't help with this. Sometimes we pastors, model from our preaching a tone of argumentation and quarreling...a tone that is not gentle or respectful. Or we speak with superiority and snideness about our positions. And

that becomes the culture we create in churches and is put out to a watching world. But its not right. Gentleness, respect and honor even for our opponents should be our character.

### **C. Who can you encourage or honor this week through self-emptying love?**

You know we live in a world of complaining, arguing, negativity. I think it's neat that Paul takes space in his letter to do just the opposite...to honor and celebrate Timothy and Epaphroditus, two unsung hero's.

I suspect that many of us are surrounded by un-sing hero's. People doing the dirty work that nobody would typically recognize. Mom's or dad's making dinner each evening for their families. Mom's or dad's throwing a baseball with their kids after a long day at work.

And we have these kinds of un-sung hero's all around Five Forks Church. Did you know we have a couple of guys who come every night around 9pm to lock up the church? We have a couple of ladies who come after their work day to clean the gym, wipe down glass doors, vacuum between the seats in the auditorium so that it looks nice when we all gather on Sunday morning. We have Sunday school teachers and youth leaders, who spend hours preparing lessons, hanging out with our kids. There are sound techs and video techs here every week to run our sound board, run our livestream. Many of those folks you may not even know...because they are the Timothy's and Epaphroditus's of our church.

Without them we wouldn't be able to the church. I wouldn't be able to do what I do up here on Sunday morning without them.

So this week, I would just encourage you, think about who those un-sung hero's are in your life...write them a thank you! Encourage them, honor them for the behind the scenes work they do for us.

Communion Script:

We started this morning by recognizing this attitude that is so prevalent in our world to grumble and complain. For Paul, what changes that attitude and what changes us is Jesus coming to live in our lives.

The opposite of grumbling is giving thanks and it is this attitude we learn most from Jesus. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:

**the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for<sup>[b]</sup> you. Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

Let's pray this prayer together:

***"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen"***