

Dear Philippians, VII

Stop Your Whining

March 16, 2003

THEATER AT PHILIPPI

Theaters were a distinctive feature of Greco-Roman society. A city wouldn't have been considered "cultured" without one. This Philippian theater seats 8000 and is still used today.

- People would bring cushions and sit in the "Theatron".
- Performers would sing, dance, and act on the "Orchestra".

This theater was 500 years old when Paul visited the city. He would've avoided most of the shows here for two reasons:

1. Most performances were dedicated to deities and included prayers and sacrifices as part of their proceedings.
2. Most of the Roman shows were salted with coarse joking, indecent humor, nudity, and obscene subject matter.

These Roman shows eventually became so vulgar, historians tell us that they were condemned by all decent Romans.

For 3 weeks we've examined what Paul wrote to the Philippians about conducting themselves in a manner worthy of Christ (1:27):

- Standing firm in their faith while advancing the gospel.
- Avoiding selfishness and conceit while assisting others.
- Working out the details of what God was working in them.

Now, he adds one final element to this list:

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out the word of life - in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. - *Philippians 2:14-18 NIV*

HOSTILE ARGUING

- Do everything without complaining or arguing.

We feel threatened by the differences of others; so, we tend to try and control and convince people with (hostile) arguing.

- Hostile arguing can try to pass itself off as witnessing.
- It's just insecurity trying to find approval and respect.

Christ made his case graciously, illustrated it, and then left it to the listener to accept or reject; agree or disagree. It's just as ungodly to quarrel about how to use a copy machine as it is to argue about the Christian faith.

There are four common types of grippers and complainers:

1. WHINERS - "It's not fair!"

The laborers who were hired at different times of the day:

Those people worked only one hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us ... - Matthew 20:12 NLT

2. MARTYRS - "Feel sorry for me!"

Moses often made a show of his suffering to get God's sympathy:

I can't carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! I'd rather you killed me than treat me like this. - Numbers 11:14-15 NLT

3. CYNICS - "This is boring!"

This is the theme of King Solomon's OT book of Ecclesiastes:

"Everything is meaningless," says the teacher, "utterly meaningless!" - Ecclesiastes 1:2 NLT

4. PERFECTIONISTS - "Is that the best you can do?!"

The writer of proverbs understood how exasperating this is:

It is better to live alone in the desert than with a crabby, complaining wife. - Proverbs 21:19 NLT

A man goes to the police, "I think my wife is trying to poison me." The chief says he'll investigate. The man follows up. The chief says, "I met your wife; listened to her for 3 hours." The man says, "What should I do?" The chief says, "Take the poison!"

Q: Which do you tend to be: whiner, martyr, cynic, or perfectionist?

The Payoffs of Complaining can be so irresistible:

a. RETRIBUTION

Someone hurt your feelings, or done you wrong? Criticize 'em behind their back! It teaches 'em a "good lesson" and it brings us a gratifying (albeit misconstrued) sense of justice. And it brings us the second benefit that all griping does, a wonderful sense of:

b. SUPERIORITY

They need to mow their lawn; that dress doesn't look good on her; I guess I just pick up on things that others overlook.

Q: What if I've overlooked something in my own life? The third benefit:

c. BLAME SHIFTING

Complaining is often an attempt to transfer fault. Accusers blame people - "If they weren't so rude I wouldn't ..." Excusers blame circumstances - "The sun is so bright I couldn't ..."

... it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit ... - Genesis 3:12 NIV

But, the biggest benefit by far is:

d. ACCEPTANCE

Q: Why's it hard to strike up a conversation with a stranger?

A: Fear. Fear of rejection, of embarrassment, of awkwardness.

But if we're in a slow-moving line we'll look at a stranger and roll our eyes, or say, "They need to open more registers." If we're in a lobby looking at the pouring rain, we'll say, "Can you believe this weather?"

Q: Why is it easiest to share a complaint with a stranger?

I think we're so intuitively aware of a universal self-centered nature; the risk of rejection or embarrassment is minimized. A complaint guarantees me agreement! Acceptance! Approval!

If I tried to say something helpful or positive, I'd stand out like a sore thumb ... I'd shine like a star in the universe!

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ... - Philippians 2:14-15 NIV

Q: How do we make an impact that the world will take notice of?

1. Refuse to complain, slander, or gossip.
2. Refuse to engage in hostile or arrogant arguing.

It demonstrates a security, confidence, and well-being in Christ that isn't destabilized by those who oppose your viewpoints.

Q: What would happen at your job if your complaining stopped?

Q: What would happen in your family, if you refused to argue?

The payoff of complaining may be irresistible, but the tradeoff is intolerable. Complaining is what kept the children of Israel out of their Promised Land.

And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us ... - 1 Corinthians 10:10-12 NIV

Grumbling is an under-appreciated sin that'll keep us out of our promised land.

Q: When we complain are we showing love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; or self-control?

It's the *anti-fruit-of-the-Spirit* ... it questions God's wisdom; doubts God's care; and forgets God's goodness.

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. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. - Philippians 2:14-18 NIV

Paul reminds them he's facing a death sentence (poured out) and yet he's not accusing or excusing ... he's choosing, to be glad.

It's a challenge to find our well-being in the love, grace, and forgiveness of Christ; not in the approval of people or in our ability to marshal agreement, sympathy, or retribution.