

# Philippians XVII – Stop Your Grumbling; Shine Like Stars (Phil 2:14-16a)

**Introduction** – We are the saints of God (1:1) and Paul sees the church as the Israel of God (Gal 6:16), the true Israel, the New Jerusalem, the children of God. In detailing more for us what it is to work out our salvation, Paul intentionally chooses words and phrases from the stories of the covenant people of God from the Old Testament. Their promises are our promises in Christ, and their warnings are our warnings in Christ.

**The Text** – *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...”*

**No Grumbling** – Paul uses this word also in 1 Cor 10:10 referring back to the grumblers who complained against Moses and God and were destroyed by the plague (Num 14:37). This was characteristic of the children of God in the Old Testament (Ex 16:7-12, 17:3, Num 14:27-29, 16:41). God calls this grumbling by what it leads to – rebellion – in Psalm 95:7-11. In stark contrast, Jesus humbled Himself in the will of God (Phil 2:6-7) fulfilling what Isaiah had foretold (Is 53:7).

**Nor Disputing** – When Israel complained, she would argue within herself as to whether she should continue following God or return to Egypt. Disputing refers to arguing (Luke 9:46ff) but also to doubting (Luke 5:22ff). Complaining and disputing go hand and hand together because our grumbling comes from a lack of faith in the sovereignty and goodness of God in all His providences.

**The Exodus Story** – Our Deliverer has come, and we are no longer slaves, but have been set free from our sin. As we press on to persevere in our salvation, we must not fall into the sins of our fathers who doubted God, disputed among themselves in selfishness, and complained before God in the face of seemingly hard providences.

**Children of God** – This is your title. This is who you are. Again, Paul is hearkening back to the covenant people of God (Deut 32:5). And in this verse we see the reversal that takes place in the New Covenant. Israel had ceased to be the children of God – now, the New Israel is the child of God.

**Blameless and Harmless** – These words have deeper meaning. Blameless comes from the word that meant ‘undiluted’ when describing wine or ‘unalloyed’ when describing metal. Harmless is the word that meant ‘innocent’ as in Rom 16:19, *“be innocent with regard to evil.”* Together, these words mean that no charge or accusation could be brought upon the Philippian congregation with regard to their character or devotion.

**Without Fault** – As God’s children, they are found to be without fault when they cease their internal bickering or shaking their fist at their heavenly Father.

**A Crooked and Perverse Generation** – This phrase also comes from Deut 32:5. Then, it defined rebellious Old Israel. Today, the New Israel is to stand in contrast from the world, distinguished as the crooked and perverse generation – and it is.

**Among Whom You Are** – We are not removed from the world, but stand in contrast to the crookedness and perverseness of the unbelieving world while being among them. They proclaim their allegiance to another lord (in Philippi, so too here in America as well), but we stand among them proclaiming the Lord of lords. Jesus is King, and His name is above every name, in every square, in every parliament, in every home.

**Shine As Lights in the World** – Paul again alludes to the OT, this time to Daniel 12:3. The church is in a vital position in the world. She is the instrument of bringing the Light of the gospel to the darkness of this world. Jesus said we are the light of the world (Matt 5:14). We are lights to the extent that we walk in the Light, walking in the One who is the Light of the world (John 8:12, Is 42:6). Stars were set in the sky with the sun and the moon to be rulers over the world. They are also there as light-givers. Light reveals the darkness, rebukes the darkness, and by the grace of God, shows the way out of the darkness, as Daniel writes, *“bringing many to righteousness.”*

**Holding Fast the Word of Life** – or, *“holding forth the Word of life”*. The church is to find herself in strong contrast to the darkness, the corruptions, and the perversity of the world around her while at the same time holding forth the Light and the Word of Life that Christ has provided through his death and resurrection.

**The Word of Life** – A *koinonia* (fellowship/partnership) of saints (holy ones) is to hold fast together to the Word of life. This Word is what was spoken and created all things from nothing. This Word is what took on flesh and dwelt among us. This Word is what was crucified, and then was resurrected, and now is seated as the Lord of heaven, earth, and hell. This Word is what is called out and summons men to repentance, and what is used by the Spirit of God to awaken dead and dried bones of unbelief. We are to hold fast to this Word, shining as the only beacons available to the lost humanity around us. We must do this together, as a fellowship. And so, we must stop our complaining and disputing. We must stop our grumbling and doubting. The salvation of the world is at stake.