

Diagnosing & Mortifying the Sin of Complaining

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Philippians 2:14 — “Do all things without grumbling or disputing...”

James 5:9 — “Do not complain, brethren, against one another...”

THE CORRUPTION OF COMPLAINING

Everyone does it. It's all around us. In fact, it's so normalized and pervasive that we hardly even recognize when it actually occurs. The sin of complaining is one of those “respectable sins.” That is, it's one that's hardly spoken about, seldom preached against, and still less frequent, a sin with which Christians persistently wage violent war.

Complaining is ugly. Complaining is one of the most commonest and frequent sins that's almost as easy to find and common as the air we breathe.

Complaining isn't, however, the *real* issue. Complaining is the outward manifestation of other heart-sins taking place in that moment. Let's diagnose complaining. When we complain, we manifest three heart-sins that are all taking place together.

First, complaining manifests an attitude of “**deservedness**.” It's like saying: “I'm not getting what I *feel like I deserve!*” Or, to state the opposite: “I *am getting what I don't think I deserve.*” And in that moment of a complaint, we soar to the realms of deservedness, specifically, that we *deserve something good* or better than what we're actually experiencing.

Second, complaining manifests an attitude of “**disbelief**.” In the moment of a complaint, the mumblor's saying something like this: “God, I don't think you're doing what's good, or what's best, or what's right, or what's wisest at this moment.” It's almost as if the complainer is craftily suggesting to the Omniscient God: “Lord, I feel as though you've made a mistake and that you should do things *my way* as that would have a *better outcome*.”

Third, complaining manifests -- or, leads to -- an attitude of “**ingratitude**.” Obviously, in the moment of a pity party or whining, a person isn't thinking about the majesty and dominion of God nor of the overflowing waves of grace that has swept over him. Rather, in complaining-times, we don't thank God because we, frankly, don't think we're getting what we deserve. And this self-centered, self-focused, self-exalted, self-idolatrous mindset never leads one to praise and thank God in that moment.

The corruption of complaining is that it is a very sly assault and it is a frontal attack on the *goodness of God*. Complaining is a sin where the sinful heart of man rises up against God and draws the weapon and aims it at the *goodness of His Person* and at the *wisdom of His plan* and at the *sovereignty of His rule*. O may God deliver us from this monster of complaining!

THE KILLING OF COMPLAINING

Can this monster be killed? Is it possible to slay the dragon? Like all sin, there's no pill to take to ensure a once-for-all removal of this sin -- especially, the heart-rooted, subtle monster -- but the good news is that by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, with the sufficient and heart-transforming power of the Word of God, in the context of the local church, and with diligent effort, by God's enabling grace, *every true child of God can – and must! – constantly be vigilant to kill this monster of complaining.*

We can think of complaining as being synonymous with grumbling, whining, making a fuss, criticizing, happily finding fault with something/someone, griping, moaning, objecting, and even protesting. The Word of God is not silent about this and provides much help to weed out the roots of this sin.

Jude 16 provides a very illustrative and well-rounded portrait of the complainer (who, in this context is a false teacher in the context of professing Christianity). Grumblers are those who “find fault, follow after their own lusts; and they speak arrogantly, flatter people all for the sake of gaining an advantage” (Jude 16).

We must dig far deeper than just pulling the visible leaves off the weed of complaining. We must dig deep, we must excavate far down, we must pull the underground, unseen roots out of this sin of complaining. *But how?*

THE CULTIVATING OF CONTENTMENT

Even in the Psalms when David finds himself in terribly hard and distressing seasons (where he *pours out his soul* to God in fervent, honest, desperate prayer) he finds himself resting, relying, re-focusing, even re-orienting one’s perspective on the *immutable character of God* amidst the uncontrollable and shakeable circumstances of life. Only this gives contentment to one’s soul.

If complaining is the manifestation of heart-mumbings and frustrations at what is happening to me at a certain point, then contentment may be defined as a heart-rooted and solid satisfaction in *God* that does not shift with external circumstances. Jeremiah Burroughs once said: “Christian happiness, or contentment, is the exact opposite of a complaining spirit.”

So in uprooting the monster-sin of complaining and cultivating contentment, what is to be done? How can we, enabled and empowered by God who so mightily and powerfully works *within us*, cultivate this blessed, satisfying, and necessary trait of contentment?

First, let us **study God’s character**. Nothing can so uproot discontentment and complaining than a deep, biblical, thorough, and heart-enthraling study of the majesty, awesomeness, infinite nature of the one, true and Living God.

Second, let us **rely on God’s sovereignty**. Whatever happens in life, or to state it more precisely, whatever God brings into your day-to-day life, actively choose to trust in God’s glorious kingship, His good dominion, and His wise sovereignty. He not only has a *decreed and immutable plan* but He also providentially, powerfully, and lovingly brings that plan to pass through every single instant and event that ever occurs. Rely on Him. Rest in His unfrustrated kingship.

Third, **trust in God’s bigger plan**. Always remember that what God brings into your life (or, what God keeps from you at a certain time) is one part of a much, much bigger plan that God is outworking for His glory and for the good of all of His saints. This helps keep our focus God-centered rather than me-centered.

Fourth, **gladly receive pains and trials from God’s loving hand**. Gladly? Pains? Trials? Loving? Those words go together? For every child of God who is in union with Christ, he can rejoice in remembering that no good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly (Ps 84:11). Whatever God brings into our lives -- even the unplanned and unpleasant experiences -- let us gladly receive them as personally given by God’s fatherly hand of love.

Fifth, make it a point to **thank God** specifically, daily, and worshipfully. In a simple and summarizing word, the way to keep killing the sin of complaining is to keep cultivating the daily habit of thanking God. Praise strangles grumbling. Gratitude starves disputings. Constant thankfulness to God is the best way to constantly mortify complaining. May God help us to specifically, daily, and worshipfully thank Him for *all* that He gives or withholds from us, for His glory.