

February 17th, 2008 “To Love Rather Than To Complain”

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Philippians 2:1-4

1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we discussed the current cultural condition that encourages us to maintain adversarial relationships with our spouses. We maintain these adversarial relationships in our minds by complaining about our spouse. To many, it seems that complaining is more compelling than complementing when it comes to conversation in our concentric circle of contact, and there is no one about whom we find it easier to complain than about our spouse.

Jesus had a special affinity for tax collectors. The tax collectors made their fortunes by collecting tax money from the Jews, siphoning off a percentage, and giving the remainder to the Romans. The tax collectors, although they were themselves Jews, were generally the most despised class of individuals in the culture, especially by the temple leaders. As the tax collectors increased the proportion of the disposable income that went to themselves and the Romans, contributions to the temple decreased, and you can imagine how much the temple leaders appreciated that.

Jesus' ministry, however, was not dependent upon the offerings given to the temple, and so He continued to befriend and minister to this particular segment of the Jewish population despite the criticism of the Jewish religious leaders. In fact, one of Jesus' disciples was a tax collector. **Luke 5:27-29** records:

27 After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.”

28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.

What was the response of the Jewish leaders to Jesus' calling of and fellowship with tax collectors? **Luke 5:30** records:

30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus, never being at a loss for words, had the answer ready. **Luke 5:31-32** says:

31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

In His response to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus makes it clear that in order to be part of His Church you must acknowledge the fact that you are a sinner. The self-righteous, like the scribes and the Pharisees, find it difficult to intellectually participate in Christianity. The Apostle Paul makes it clear, in **Romans 3:23**:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Our acknowledgement of our own sinful nature and the fact that we have fallen short of God's standard is a prerequisite for truly becoming Christian. We should come seeking Jesus Christ weekly in a repentant state, acknowledging our sinfulness and asking Jesus for the power of the Holy Spirit to change our minds and hearts. **Ezekiel 11:19-21** tells us:

19 Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,

20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

21 But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.

So although the Jewish leaders disdained the tax collectors, the tax collectors, being sinners, were actually part of Jesus' target audience. Jesus did not just befriend the tax collectors, but He actually transformed them. **Luke 19:1-6** records:

1 Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

4 So [Zacchaeus] ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, for He was going to pass that way.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

6 So he made haste and came down, and received [Jesus] joyfully.

Another tax collector in Jesus' camp. But listen to the Jewish leaders, in **Luke 19:7**:

7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

Listen to Zacchaeus' response, in **Luke 19:8**:

8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

Jesus pronounced Zacchaeus cleansed of his old ways, in **Luke 19:9-10**:

9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Jesus did not come to die on the Cross for the people who are already perfect; He came to seek and to save that which was lost and to call sinners, rather than the self-righteous, to repentance. The Christian ministry is a ministry of inclusion, unity and restoration to those who are in need of repentance, in need of deliverance from their sins, in need of help.

The Jewish religious leaders thrived on keeping people divided. They classified people into different groups in the name of religion, and then proclaimed some groups as righteous and others as sinful. Jesus came in the name of the same Jewish religion that they were practicing, but Jesus brought a ministry of reconciliation rather than division. Did the Jewish religious leaders embrace Jesus’ wonderful change in perspective? No. Do you know what they did?

Luke 5:30 and Luke 19:7 record:

5:30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

19:7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”

Jesus was saving souls, but they complained. They complained for the simple reason that they could not do anything else except complain about that which Jesus was doing. Jesus was not breaking any Jewish law, but Jesus was calling and causing people to repent and then adding them to the Kingdom of God. That which Jesus was doing was certainly not wrong, but the Jewish leaders were jealous that Jesus’ ministry was having more influence than theirs was having, so they found something about that which Jesus did to complain.

As I said at the beginning of the lesson, it seems that complaining is more compelling than complementing when it comes to conversation to many in our concentric circle of contact.

For many people, being negative, looking for the dark side of things and then complaining about them is a sport, but the Bible says that complaining is a serious sin. **Psalm 106:21-27** tells us:

21 They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,

22 Wondrous works in the land of Ham, Awesome things by the Red Sea.

23 Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.

24 Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word,

25 But complained in their tents, And did not heed the voice of the LORD.

26 Therefore He raised His hand in an oath against them, To overthrow them in the wilderness,

27 To overthrow their descendants among the nations, And to scatter them in the lands.

Even the Almighty God in Heaven can’t stand complaining.

As we have previously mentioned to you, my wife and I are trying to learn how to dance. I was trained as a concert pianist when I was younger, and I know something about learning a physical skill. I know that the key to learning is developing muscle memory through practice. But my dance lessons are a little different than my piano lessons. You see, when I was learning piano, my teacher would have my parents buy a particular piece of sheet music. I would bring

the music sheet to my lesson, and the teacher would spend thirty minutes with me showing me which finger was supposed to go on what key on the piano keyboard. She wrote the fingering down on the sheet of music, and my job was to take the sheet of music home and practice the fingering correctly for an hour a day. Seven hours of practice per week will allow you to build the muscle memory that you need to remember how to play the piece of music. Seven hours of practice for every thirty minutes of lessons weekly over fourteen years will make you a trained concert pianist.

However, when I go to dance class, they don't have dance sheets like the piano teacher has sheet music. The teacher shows you the steps and then you have to learn the steps and build the muscle memory by practice, but they don't give you anything like sheet music to record the steps. Being trained in music but not in dance, even the basic steps were difficult for me, first to learn, and then to remember. How could I learn to dance without a document to which I could refer to tell me what to practice?

I could easily have complained about my inability to remember that which we learned in dance class without some type of document to which I could refer, but I was blessed to have a wife that developed a solution to my problem. She bought a digital single lens reflex camera that had the interesting feature of being able to record video onto a secure digital flash memory card. When we went to class, we would record the steps on her digital video camera, bring the video home and transfer it to our computers. I could use the video in the way that I used the sheet music when learning the piano to practice the steps.

My point is that complaining to my wife that I couldn't learn how to dance because the dance teaching was inadequate and I couldn't remember the steps without some type of document would have been unproductive, but my complaint would have given me a reason to not learn how to dance. Complaining would have kept me from going through the painful, embarrassing process of messing up in front of a crowd, and it would also have kept me from overcoming my embarrassment, figuring out how to learn the steps, becoming a good dancer, and then enjoying the wonderful times that my wife and I have had travelling together to be with the dance crowd. Working together as husband and wife to figure out a solution to a problem is always better than complaining about it, and brings our relationships closer, rather than driving us farther apart. Marie wanted to take up dancing. My being embarrassed about not knowing how would not have kept her from doing so, but simply encouraged her to do so with someone else rather than with me.

The premise of marriage is analogous to the premise of Christianity. **John 14:26** tells us: **26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.**

Just as Christianity exists so that we can receive help from the Holy Spirit, marriage exists because we need one another for comfort, for support, and for help. In **Genesis 2:18, 24:18** **And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."**

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

God designed marriage so that we could help one another and become as one. Satan introduced complaining so that we could drive one another crazy, change the oneness that God

planned for us to an adversarial relationship, and become separated and divorced. **Proverbs 17:1** tells us:

17:1 Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 21:9 tells us:

9 Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Women, however, do not have a corner on being contentious. The scribes and Pharisees that were complained about Jesus and developed a contentious, adversarial relationship with Him were men. But the point is that complaining, contentiousness, lack of cooperation, and creating an adversarial relationship between husband and wife in the home does not make the home warmer, but leads to our dissatisfaction with one another, our separation from one another, and eventually, our divorce from one another.

Carrie and Eric met with their marriage counselor. They have been married a year, and they have a 4 day old baby. Carrie started the conversation.

Carrie said, "I know I'm going through a little bit of depression. But, yesterday, we were out taking the baby to his first doctor's appointment. After the appointment, I wanted to go to Target to pick up some things for the baby, but my husband wanted to go and drop off some things for one of his clients first, and he wanted to bring us home so that we wouldn't have to stay in the car too long. So, I agreed with him and came home, but when he came home from dropping off the things, he decided that it was too cold and dark to take the baby back out. So, when he said that he didn't think that we should go back out with the baby, I just started crying.

The counselor responded, "Let me understand you. You were going to take a three day old baby into a department store?"

"No", Carrie exclaimed, "My husband and the baby were going to stay in the car while I went into the store to pick up some things."

The counselor asked, "To get what?"

Carrie said, "To get some personal items we needed and to get the baby some socks and things, because his feet are so big that they can't fit into his socks. We needed some bigger socks for him and I wanted to get a couple of other things. But I wasn't crying because I wanted to go that bad, and at that point I understood his logic. It was dark and cold outside..."

The counselor interrupted, "Carrie, why don't you just make a little shopping list and give it to your husband. He can go to the store and you can be home with the baby."

Carrie replied, "It's not that simple. This is an ongoing thing. I get stuck in the house, not just on this particular occasion, because I'm expecting to be stuck in the house for awhile. But even prior to this I have been stuck in the house on a Saturday because he has to run and go take care of some business that ends up taking six hours..."

The counselor replied, "Okay. Carrie, take a breath and just stop talking for a minute. Everything that you are complaining about with Eric has to do with him working. Do you realize that whenever you are talking about being stuck in the house, he is stuck out of the house. You're both stuck doing the things that you have to do because when you get married and have children, it's no longer about yourself any more. Now, it's about the situation that you've created. So, yeah, for awhile, you're stuck in the house, and for awhile, he's stuck delivering things and doing whatever else he has to do to earn the money so that you can be at home with your kid.

Don't measure them against each other as though having to go out to work all the time is so terrific. You had 25 years of being unstuck. Now, it's different for awhile. By the same token, I would not want Eric to come home and complain about the traffic, about how hard he has to work, and about how you don't have the house completely in order.

Eric interjected, "And sometimes, when I come home, the house is not in order. That does happen."

The counselor replied, "Of course it does. But Eric, don't talk. Talking is your problem and talking is Carrie's problem because when the two of you talk, you talk about the complaints that you each have about the other. And when you complain, you are only thinking about yourselves and how you can get the other person to satisfy you. Change that complaining behavior, and your marriage will improve so fast that it will seem like a miracle.

"Here is the key. Stop complaining. The minute you get irritated, the minute that Carrie does something that irritates you, stop and think of how you can make life better for her. Carrie, the minute that Eric does something that irritates you, stop and think of how you can make life better for him. No more complaining. As each of you go through your day, spend it thinking of how you can make life wonderful for your spouse. That is the miracle of a good marriage. That is a marriage that is going to last. That is a marriage in which your child is going to flourish, in which your child is going to feel loved, in which your child is going to grow up secure. That is a marriage in which you will wake up every day happy that you are married to each other. Now, I want each of you to think for a minute, and then tell me what you are going to do to make life better for your spouse today. Eric, it's your turn first. Decide what you are going to do to make Carrie's life better today. Let me know when you have decided."

Eric started to speak, "Okay, I'm going to..."

But the counselor cut him off, saying, "Just a minute. Before you tell me, I want you to think about the last time that Carrie irritated you. Don't tell me about it, just think about the feeling that you had when she did what she did. I want you to feel irritated toward Carrie. Take a minute. Once you feel the feeling that you had that day, tell me what you are going to do to make her life better. Do you feel irritated yet?"

Eric replied, "Yeah. I remember what she did."

The counselor responded, "Okay. What are you going to do?"

Eric said, "Be more sensitive to the different feelings that she is having and the changes that she is going through now that she has the baby."

The counselor said, "That's very good. Is Carrie a good mommy?"

Eric said, "Yes."

The counselor asked, "Have you told her how good she is with the baby?"

Eric confessed, "No, I haven't told her that yet."

The counselor offered, "Well, why don't you tell her that right now? Go ahead, she needs to hear it."

Eric spoke to Carrie, "Carrie, you're really good with the baby, and I appreciate the fact that you have given him a lot of quality time."

Carrie responded, "Thank you."

The counselor asked, "Eric, how does it make you feel to see your woman feeding your baby, holding your baby, taking care of your baby?"

Eric responded, "It makes me feel good."

The counselor said, "Carrie needs to know that. You have to let her know that she's making you feel good by taking care of your baby. She needs that. She needs the feedback, because if you look at her situation, she's drained. This baby came out of her and took a lot with it. You need to fill her back up again. Not with sandwiches, but with love. The baby is wonderful, but he can't do the job like you can. She needs your emotional strength and your approval to rely on, because although the baby is adorable, the baby can't tell her how grateful he is for her care. You have to do that. When you look at her and think how cute and how adorable that the two of them are together, how sweet she is to the baby, you have to let her know how wonderful it is for you to have her taking care of your baby and how much you love her for doing it. And you need to say it out loud. That's what Carrie needs to hear, rather than complaints and arguments."

Eric responded, "Okay. I will."

The counselor moved on to Carrie, saying, "Okay, Carrie. I want you to get real annoyed with Eric, which should not be much of a problem for you because you are still hormonal. Don't tell me why you are annoyed, but tell me when you are really feeling upset. You don't have to tell me why, because I want you to understand that you don't have to talk about every feeling you have. Feelings aren't facts, and you can have feelings that you should not act on or speak about. Both of you need to understand that every time that you're annoyed about something, you don't have to move your lips about it, and you can move on without the complaining. Okay. Now that you're annoyed, what are you going to do to make Eric's life more wonderful today?"

Carrie responded, "I can praise him a little more or praise him period when he does stuff to help around the house, and when he brings me dinner, or just things to help relieve me..."

The counselor said, "That's right. Very good."

Eric interjected, "Did you hear her? I bring her dinner."

The counselor laughed. "I like that. That's sweet."

Carrie said, "But, I still have a question about..."

The counselor cut her off again, saying, "No, Carrie, you don't have a question. The problem that you thought that you had a question about really doesn't matter. That is the point that I am making.

"You can always complain to and about one another about something. You can be real good at complaining, but it makes you real bad at lovemaking. A marriage is about a lot of lovemaking. Some of it takes place in bed, and some of it takes place during the day, as you show your spouse your love whenever you interact with him or her. So you didn't get to Target, and you didn't get out of the house. He didn't get to spend all day in the nice warm house playing with a cute baby. But when he came home, he brought you dinner. Come on. The point of this whole exercise is for you to stop thinking about what this marriage can do for you, but rather think about what you can do for it. If the two of you are more giving, then each of you will be more forgiving of momentary glitches. Love Mark and praise him for what he does, rather than complaining about what you don't have. Do you get it, Carrie?"

Carrie responded, "Yeah. I got it."

The counselor said, "Good woman. Now, no more complaining, either of you, but think about what you can do for each other."

Our text, **Philippians 2:1-4**, tells us:

- 1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,**
- 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**
- 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**
- 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Every day, when you get up in the morning, you should begin thinking about how you can make your spouses' life worth living. Not what you want or what you feel, but what you can do for them to make them feel differently than the people that live in a house full of feasting, but with strife. Husbands and wives don't participate in marital relations with one another because one or the other doesn't feel like it, but just think about the analogy that I gave earlier of ballroom dancing. Just because I don't want to go through the embarrassment of learning a new skill does not mean that my wife won't participate, it just means that she will participate with someone other than me. I have to ask myself, is that what I really want?

I have learned that marriage is a wonderful, fulfilling relationship if I can put aside selfish ambition and conceit, and look out for my wife's interests, which may not be the same as mine, as well as my own.

God designed each spouse differently, to have different interests, different desires and different needs so that we can give ourselves to one another, so that we can fulfill one another emotionally, so that we can have an exclusive soul mate with whom we can share life, so that we would never experience the feeling of being lonely, being isolated, being disconnected.

I believe that it is only through our marital relationships that we can experience the true glory that God has for us, the glory that Jesus felt when He gave Himself for us completely, even to the point of death on the Cross, and then, early on that Sunday morning, rose from the dead physically with all power in Heaven and in earth in His hand. Let us change our thinking, and let us use our marriages as a sacrificial relationship, not to complain about one another, but to give ourselves fully for one another, so that we can experience the ecstasy that Jesus has in store for us, as Paul tells us, in **Philippians 2:5-11**:

- 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,**
- 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,**
- 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.**
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**
- 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,**
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,**
- 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

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