

## Gratitude (vs. Complaining)

Introductory text: Luke 17:11-19. There is much to be learned about **gratitude** from this account, especially when contrasted with Phil.2:14-16 and the admonition there to “*Do all things without grumbling and complaining...*” I’m not sure that we can properly apply the teachings of either without at least a cursory understanding of the other (*gratitude vs. complaining*), for they are surely polar opposites of the same issue. Simply put, we *complain* when we are *ungrateful*, and when we are truly *grateful* we cease *complaining*.

In our current world, we seem to find much about which to complain:

- Covid, and all the related inconveniences;
- Government/politics, and more so as Tuesday approaches, but I predict there will be as much or more afterwards; and even,
- “Church” (*local* especially), as related to both of the above.

But what if, rather than *complaining*, we looked for and shifted our thoughts and attitudes toward things for which to be *grateful* in these same areas. Such as being:

- Grateful that we have either managed to stay free of the virus, or have survived it. Would that help to curb our complaints regarding it and all the inconveniences it has produced?
- Grateful that we still live in probably the most prosperous and free country in the world, or that we still have a voice in the running of it. Would such likewise change our attitude and actions relative to these matters?
- Grateful for all that our Elders and Deacons have done for us this admittedly VERY difficult year to navigate governmental and biblical mandates to allow us to continue to remain true and faithful?

As with a lot of things, it is easier to spot the *problem* than it is to identify (and implement!) the *solution*. Teddy Roosevelt once quipped, “Complaining about a problem without posing a solution is called ‘whining’.” Perhaps not always, but it usually works that way. What’s the *solution* to the *gratitude vs. complaining* conundrum? Again, as with most things, proposing a *solution* requires correctly identifying the *source*. So, what causes *ingratitude* (and the typical *complaining* that goes with it)? While there may be any number of root causes, these three seem to be fundamental: (and are very much interrelated, and perhaps even sequential)

1. **Affluence.** Perhaps that’s not the best word. One doesn’t have to be considered “wealthy” by US standards to be “affluent” on a world-wide scale. Here’s my point: If we’ve never had to go without food for a day or three, then it’s easy to complain about it being *too hot, cold, bland, spicy, slow, etc.* Let’s face it: Many of the things that we *complain about* rather than *being truly grateful for* are things we’ve probably never, or if so only briefly, been without. People who’ve been homeless don’t complain about shelter. The truly hungry don’t complain about *too little variety*. People who walk everywhere they went for years don’t complain about their car not being the latest model or having the latest gadgets/gismos. People who have been near death from disease don’t tend to complain as much about restrictions intended (whether they actually work or not) to prevent it. Let’s

get real here: Some of us complain about the cost of the latest/greatest cell phone! Reread, slowly and carefully so that it sinks in, 1Tim.6:8; and then think about all that we have for which we should be *grateful*, cf. Acts 14:17 and 1Tim.4:3-4.

2. **Lack of Self-Awareness.** Many don't realize, or just don't care if they do realize, how they look/sound/come off to others. But it DOES matter. In fact, it matters eternally, cf. Matt.5:14-16. The last couple of decades' worth of overdosing with self-esteem, being true to yourself, and doing what makes you happy have created a tremendously *selfish* society that cares little about what others think and feel about "me" and me "just being me." Go figure! Newsflash: "*For not one of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself.*" We are all inter-connected and inter-dependent. Don't believe it? Let one illustration suffice. Where I grew up was timber country, the "Piney Woods" of East Texas. In some locations, there were hundreds of log trucks on the road. They snarled traffic on long or steep hills, beat up the roadways, and scattered bounced off bark on autos behind them. Many people complained about them year in and year out. But although I was not there at the time, I'm betting the complaints lessened dramatically (or should have!) during the great toilet paper shortage of 2020! Folks had a whole new perspective of and attitude toward the lowly log-truck driver, or any truck driver for that matter! The point? Aside from demonstrating our interrelated/interconnected we are, a little dose of "self-awareness" will do much to combat and correct the *complaining* vs. *gratitude* paradigm, Rom.12:16.
3. **Entitlement.** Both the previous two points lead to this one. Because 1) We've likely always had more than we needed; and, 2) We aren't really aware that others don't (or don't care) as long as we do, and either don't realize or don't care how that makes us look to them; then, 3) We feel we *deserve* or are *entitled* to everything we want. Parents take note: Children that are *given* everything they *want*- especially without any effort or sacrifice on their part, become ENTITLED brats. Boom! There we are. No real *gratitude* for what they've been given, just *complaints* about both what they have and what they don't. Go back to 1Tim.6 and note v.7 this time. Now add vv.8-10. One of our upcoming Wednesday night Auditorium Class topics will be "Rights vs. Responsibilities." If the Lord wills that we get there, I look forward to this class because so many today want to talk about "rights" but few consider the associated "responsibilities." How about these "rights vs. responsibilities," Rom.13:8-14? The NT is not like the Constitution- it has A LOT more to say about *responsibilities* than it does *rights*! If we were less concerned with our *rights*, and therefore less *entitled*, and more concerned with our *responsibilities*, then *gratitude* would displace *complaining*.

### Conclusions:

- ◆ In a world full of *complainers*, be *grateful* instead, cf. Col.2:7.
- ◆ Become so by being more aware (by looking for and perceiving) of your *affluence*, others *needs*, and becoming less *entitled*.
- ◆ And regardless of what happens on Election Day, or with Covid, remember Heb.12:28 and be grateful!