

Do All Things Without Grumbling or Disputing

(P. Peterson)

14) Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15) that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16) holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17) Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18) Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. (Phil 2:14-18, ESV)

Last year my refrigerator broke, which affected everything: food at home, meals, planning our day, etc. When I replaced it, another problem arose – whenever the refrigerator motor kicked in, it was so loud that literally the food inside shook!

So while the refrigerator was technically fixed, there was this constant background noise that made it hard to focus and relax with the family.

This example helped me understand what the apostle Paul was saying to the church at Philippi. Paul wasn't addressing a church that stopped working; instead, the church was making a lot of noise that distracted them from living out God's intended purpose. This constant background noise needed to stop so, because it inhibited the church!

Through Paul, God was at work reshaping church relations as a Father would lead His family. Today, we are challenged to live out our identity as the children of God by speaking life giving words to build up the church so that the gospel can be proclaimed and bring praise to God.

14) Do all things without grumbling or disputing, (Phil 2:14)

"Do all things" means that this challenge is possible, because it builds on the previous verses on how God is committed to making it possible:

12) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13) for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phil 2:12-13)

Paul sets a high standard and gave no space for any hurtful communication within the church. He focused on two specific and practical issues.

1. Grumbling. This is the quiet noise of constant complaining. Instead of addressing problematic issues, people just wanted to talk and complain about it.

2. Arguing. This is the loud noise of criticizing people. Instead of helping to understand the heart of the issue and resolving it, people speak only to win an argument and who is right.

Paul says, "Stop it!" This kind of talk goes nowhere by keeping everyone focused on the problems without moving towards a solution!

15) that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (Phil 2:15)

Paul's solution starts with a change in identity as "children of God" rooted in the nature of Jesus Christ. God adopted Believers as His children and into a new family.

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This new nature of Believers, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, does not automatically change a person's behavior. Believers have the responsibility of living out their identity as "children of God" with new words, attitudes, and action.

Paul's solution places a focus on their responsibility to change by living out their identity through a responsive obedience to God's word, which results in being "blameless and innocent."

Trusting God's transforming work reshapes them into God's kids who seek to build each other up – not tear down.

Regardless of the problems of the church, which gave them so many reasons to complain and criticize, Paul was telling them to stop seeing each other through the lens of brokenness and start seeing them by what God had done in Jesus Christ. Believe that change is possible through God who was changing them to live out their identity as "children of God" in attitude and action.

When my twin sons were younger, they would squabble about what toys were theirs and whose turn it was to play with them. The arguing wore down the whole family.

My wife and I thought about sitting them down to address their frustrations; but, we knew that focusing on the behavior wasn't the solution, because it didn't address the deeper issue. So we started to challenge them, "you are brothers and best friends. Is this how you want to treat each other as a family?"

The deeper problem was that their behavior didn't line up with their identity, which defined and gave them the reason to change. Stating what was true about them, reshaped how they saw each other.

What God declares to be true about His church must reshape how we see and live with each other as a church family. God's commitment to work this out in us through Jesus Christ gives us the confidence that we can be more like His Son. We can do four things:

1. Don't settle by lowering standards to what is possible for human beings when God promises to make His reality for us.
2. Believe change is possible, because God gave us an identity that he intends to complete in us as long as we act in faith.
3. Respond in obedience to His word and, with faith, trust that God will empower us to live differently.
4. Words matter to God, because they are the lifeblood of every relationship and God's tool for us to build up the church.

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matt 12:36-37, ESV)

For Believers, changing the conversation, changes relationships. The challenge is avoiding the tendency of complaining what is broken rather than addressing the problem. For example:

47% of the population use social media to complain about a business, instead of using personal conversation to make a complaint and addressing a problem. In lieu of personal human interaction, there is a preference for mediocre relationships that require no commitment, accountability, nor belief that people can change for the better.

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Healthy conversation starts with us, is built on who you are, and later on what you do. Matthew 15:15-19 is clear about this. Healthy conversation is based first on allowing God to change our heart. God's warm and sincere love will transform how you talk, when you see people as God does, and treat people as His beloved family.

15) But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." 16) And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? 17) Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (Matt 15:15-19, ESV)

Proverbs 18:1-7 teaches that life giving words help people grow. Through the words of the wise, God is working.

1) Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire he breaks out against all sound judgment. 2) A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. 3) When wickedness comes, contempt comes also, and with dishonor comes disgrace.

4) The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. 5) It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous of justice.

6) A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. 7) A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul. (Prov 18:1-7, ESV)

Hebrews 10:24-25 encourages us to stop complaining and start looking for ways to encourage each other towards a solution to the problem – and with a certain urgency as "the Day draws near."

24) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:24-25, ESV)

15c) among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16) holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17) Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. (Phil 2:15-17, ESV)

Why does Paul challenge the church to change by changing the conversation? What outcome does Paul desire?

Through Jesus Christ, God reshapes the church's identity as children of God in attitude and action, which results in two outcomes:

1) The church shines. With this powerful image, Paul says their church will light up a dark world, which is the purpose of the church to point the unsaved to God and His Son.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:14-16, ESV)

The church exists to point the world to Jesus Christ and find new life. Through the right attitude and action, as the children of God, the church can live out their identity in a dark world who need to see the value of a life giving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, ESV)

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2) In the day of Christ, Paul may be proud. Paul's work in life is with a view towards the future ("in the day of Christ"). Paul anticipates the day when he will give a final account of his life before God as a good and faithful witness. While his work is hard, Paul has no doubt that his sacrifice was worth all the pain ("I did not run in vain or labor in vain"). As the church succeeds in their witness to the world, Paul rejoices knowing that his life was poured out for something that mattered to God even if it means "to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith."

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (Rev 20:11-12, ESV)

Paul's imperative to "do all things without grumbling or disputing" is based on "holding fast to the word of life."

The church is to hold tightly to the "word of life," which is the gospel message of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not just what started their faith; but, it is their ongoing source, unity, and endurance of life.

The church was to follow Paul's example and rejoice with him by living to please Jesus Christ in sacrificial service to Him. A life pleasing to Jesus Christ mattered to God as an offering of praise to Him. A life well lived is one which points the world to Jesus Christ and praises God.

Here's an illustration. Think about a football game with stadium lights. No one comes early to admire the lights or applaud how bright they are. As the lights do their job, you forget they are there until the lights go out; then, everything stops. You can't see the game. The lights don't exist for themselves, but so that people can see what matters.

When the church does what it is meant to do, it shines so that the world can see Jesus Christ.

When the church is full of complaining and arguments, it's like turning out the lights, which doesn't help us or others.

Paul wants the church to see that God just isn't fixing the problems of the church; He is giving us a purpose that gives our life meaning.

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6:28-29, ESV)

God gave the church a purpose that redefines success. As our lives are poured out in the service of God so that the world sees Jesus Christ, God is praised.

Not only does the church exist to shine the light on Jesus Christ into the dark and broken places in our world, it means our ordinary routines in life of working, shopping, school, and home matter.

Wherever each and every Believer does, the light of Jesus Christ goes with us. As we abide, God works through our lives to point others to Jesus Christ.

This way of life is often difficult as we serve without recognition nor reward in a cold and uncaring world. But God is pleased by our obedience and sacrificial love in faithful witness as an offering of praise and worship to God.

You make choices that could be contrary to our culture's definition of success, enjoyment of life, comfort, and security.

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You find contentment in recognizing that life is a gift and not an entitlement.

You find freedom by redefining success in life as faithful service to God and trusting Him with the outcome of our lives.

You enjoy life differently. Receive each moment in life with joy as a gift to us in living with a renewed purpose that matters to God. There is a purpose in life much bigger than your existence.

Change the conversation and how you view others.

Redefine your definition of success and be a blessing to others as a light of Jesus Christ and bring glory to God.