Philippians 2v14 **Do All things without murmuring**

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"*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world,*"

There should be a stark contrast between those of the Body of Christ, and thereby energised by their head, and the world at large which are without Christ. God resides inside us all, by the power of His implanted word, acting upon the mind and transforming the heart away from its entrenched position in sin, towards the pursuit of righteousness in Him. When we do good it is because He has been working in us and we have adapted to His influences, and when we do wrong, we isolate ourselves from those influences and indulge the old man who remains in us all.

Even approaching the cross and the intensity of the sacrifice Jesus was required to make, his old man remained under, submerged by the employment of the spirit in his life. Surrendering his will to the divine requirement and influences which are always more powerful than the influences of the flesh, Jesus sets the perfect example to follow.

Israel under Moses murmured in the wilderness. Despite a frequent display of divine power in the outworking of miracles, the people remained remote from the way of the spirit. The short memories of the people meant that they could not call to mind, the tremendous things God had done for them, when they should have remembered them. The murmuring against Moses and the conditions in the Sinai are well known examples of how not to behave. Others will see and note how those who claim the name of Christ live their lives and they should be aware that they are on display. They are exhorted to shine with the light of the truth, but all too often other things get in the way of a more faithful

presentation. They are not however acting out a drama but seeking to be genuine in the manner of their conversation imitating Christ as his trusted disciples.

Jude 1v9 details that disputing can be a good thing. "*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring a railing accusation, but said the Lord rebuke thee"*. Surely all can agree that we need to dispute with the old man daily! Upon even a modest reflection, the idea then that disputing is universally condemned is absurd. God disputes with man, as He could just destroy everyone, instead the Eternal seeks to convince, by disputation, His wayward children. This is an act of love and indulgence with some who have not deserved this opportunity to be converted. Mankind often receives from God what he does not deserve. This is universally favourable to them. It is God's prerogative to select whom He works with and those who He has abandoned to their transgressions. We must trust that He knows best and will act with equity and mercy in accordance with His standards.

The Apostle Paul disputed with the Jews in the synagogue about Jesus, Acts 17v17. He was concerned to win people over to the Truth, those of a contrary mind. This cannot be done without some form of dispute. There is an ongoing dispute between truth and error, light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness, Christ and Belial. To deny that there is a war on, is to refuse to fight in the cause of God against the infidel. This battle is not physical but spiritual. It is a war that must be fought by all the faithful.

Was Paul arguing against himself then in this chapter? Was he saying that the believers should never murmur nor dispute? The way to understand this can only be in examining what the Greek words used actually convey in their meaning, and to seek harmony in interpretation not division and contradictions. If we are prepared to look for compatibility between different passages it is not surprising how often we find that! It is there waiting to be

gleaned from the scriptures, whose honour it is for Kings to search out the matter. Proverbs 25v2.

For disputation we have the Greek word dialogismos = reasonings, and the verbs dialogomai and dialogizomai, none of which carry a negative implication.

For murmuring we have the Greek word goggumos = murmuring or grudging. It is only used rarely in the New Testament. Here there is more of an implication of negativity. No one actually likes a murmurer in our company! Accordingly, we should always endeavour not to come across as being one.

One use of this word goggumos is seen in 1 Peter 4v9 "*Use hospitality one to another without grudging (murmuring).*" When we live on top of each other we can very easily rub people up the wrong way. It is so easy to criticise others but is our home faultless? The spirit of fraternal fellowship should pervade among our members. In the domestic sphere our faults are transparent for all to see!

Joshua and Caleb disputed against the other ten spies. They brought back an evil report and had to be resisted. Numbers 13v31-14v2. Avoiding disputes is not about letting the first person to speak have their uninterrupted say without subsequent analysis and criticism. That would only reward those who get to speak first and discourage proper consideration of the issues and underlying principles. A bad idea needs to be countered and this is not to be regarded as negative disputation. Often it is the way that the conversation goes that turns it into something which is unacceptable. We should always be respectful and conscious of how we are coming across to others. A good argument can be spoilt by a bad arguer.

There are many who criticise the work of other brethren, even the pioneers themselves, but without suggesting a better alternative. It is never a good idea to pull something down unless we are ready to rebuild, otherwise all we have is a pile of rubble. A

building that looks odd is better than loose bricks and no construction at all. Some wonky buildings stay up for decades because a better replacement is just not found. We should not be embarrassed about that but instead it should remind us that even in the Truth we do not have all the answers to everything. If we did, we would be another Jesus! Criticism to improve and construct what we have into something better, is what is necessary, and the One Body should actively pursue such disputation.

The concept then appears to be, do not provide limited criticism which only points out the negative and offers no viable alternative to press towards; instead, reason with purpose giving practical criticism with helpful positive suggestions for how to improve.

In context the prohibition against murmuring and disputing is in the context of the will and purpose of God. Surely no one can dispute that! The disciples of Christ should always seek to be blameless and harmless. This means that it is possible for them to be blamed and to cause harm. It is the Truth itself which gets the negative reputation when unfaithful pseudo-brethren run riot. This must not be allowed to be so. Harm can come both to ourselves as we deprave our minds still further by actively indulging the old man. Such actions also harm others, putting off others who look to the example of the Ecclesia and rather than see light shining forth see elements of darkness obscuring the gospel message and distracting them from seeing clearly. If we put forward our own opinions, we should not be surprised if this provokes a degree of disputation and doubt!

The opposite is highlighted in these verses. The crooked and perverse are all those of the world. Yes, we must accept that those who refuse Christ, do so because they fall short of embracing the divine opportunity for all sorts of reasons, always based in the flesh and the sin it contains. It is sad and concerning, but we should not shy away from the implications of this teaching. It was the nation of Israel in the times of the Apostles

that was particularly branded here as crooked and perverse, but the gentiles of that and every subsequent age were not better than they were.

Asking questions is not disputing. The One Body should always be keen on asking and answering questions that are presented, assuming that the motivation is genuine unless proven otherwise. There should be no assumption of trouble making, clear evidence is needed before action is taken to shut down those who ask even awkward questions. If questions are awkward, that often means that the answers are not well thought out, that the elders have been less than diligent in approaching a difficult subject not empathising with those who struggle with certain concepts. Our time in the Truth should mean that most types of questions that can come up, will come up, so we should be used to answering such topics. There should be no reason for the One Body to be rebuked with any degree of fairness or reasonableness. There will always be the crooked and perverse who delight to pour scorn on their efforts to pursue godliness.

The age of the Holy Spirit overruling our answers to silence the critics is no longer present. We have the power of the Word to be used to dispute against error and we should not neglect this gift whose purpose is to reveal the divine mind on every subject of importance that we could possibly confront. God has inspired the Bible in this way. There are no gaps nor missing information which clouds our potential understanding with darkness. We should – "*hold forth the Word of life*", in order to "*work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*".

God is light. We need to be the children of light, as lights to the wider world.

A Voice from the Altar

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