

## Do All Things Without Complaining or Disputing

### Philippians 2:14-16

Philippians 2:14-16: *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, **15** that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.*

### Background Notes

In many ways the church at Philippi was a “model church.” It was founded during Paul’s second missionary journey (see Acts 16). Since that time it had stayed doctrinally sound, and the believers had supported the apostle Paul and the work of the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul urged the Corinthians to give to a collection that he was taking up for the needy Christians in Jerusalem, and he used the churches of Macedonia as an example of generous and sacrificial giving. Philippi was one of those churches.

So in many ways the church at Philippi was a model church - but a problem of disunity was developing there.

Epaphroditus, one of the church members at Philippi, had come to Rome to bring Paul a gift from the church, and he had shared both the good news and the bad news about the spiritual condition of the church at Philippi.

The good news was that the church was growing, and it was a generous and giving church. The bad news was that a rift or division was growing in the church. It seems the problem was not a major doctrinal error, but it was serious because a rift can grow - and even tear a church apart. Disunity can do that. Two factions were already forming, as we see in Philippians 4:2 - *“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”* So it seems that a “Euodia party” and a “Syntyche party” had formed.

If little problems of disunity in a church are not dealt with and eliminated, they can lead to all kinds of hurts - and even church splits. It has happened many times. So Paul wanted to make sure that this rift did not get any bigger. That’s why the book of Philippians is a good book to study if your church or fellowship or ministry is experiencing any kind of disagreement - even if it’s only a small division. A good dose of Philippians can be excellent preventive medicine!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Grumbling and disputing affect the status of a child of God.

Verses 14-15: *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”* Do you ever “murmur” or grumble? Do you ever argue or dispute? Let’s face it! We all grumble about all kinds of things – weather, traffic, flight delays, co-workers, etc. But isn’t it okay to grumble or complain just a little bit? Look at verse 14 once again: *“Do all things without complaining and grumbling.”* **All** things!

Do you remember that the Lord was displeased when the Israelis complained in Numbers 11:1? What were they complaining about? It wasn’t because of a famine or a vicious enemy attack. No. They complained about the hardships of the way – the travel, the food, the manna. The same kind of normal “hardships of the day” that we tend to complain about every day. **But God was displeased** with their complaining!

Now let’s place verse 14 in its context - in Philippians 2. Paul had just told the Philippians to “work out their solution” to the problem that was causing disunity - and they were to do it without grumbling or disputing! That’s what verse 14 means *in the context*. “Without arguing” here has nothing to do with presenting a strong defense of the faith - when we *are*, like an attorney, to put forth a good “argument” for our faith!

In verse 14 the grumbling and disputing referred to arguing and disputing about matters that were causing disunity within the church. So don’t grumble and dispute about the music program! Don’t dispute about the schedule of services! Don’t grumble or dispute about the church leaders! Why not? Because grumbling and disputing affect your *status* as a child of God.

Notice I did *not* say your *standing* as a child of God. When you became a Christian, you immediately became a member in the family of God. You are in Christ. That’s your *standing*. That’s your *position*. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to you. God sees you as righteous in Christ, regardless of your grumbling and disputing. You don’t get kicked out of the family, but grumbling and disputing affects your status as a child of God.

Grumbling is not just “harmless griping.” Grumbling shows we lack gratitude for what God has done for us. Disputing shows that our lack of love for one another in the family. We are *not blameless* when we grumble and dispute. We are *not harmless or innocent* when we grumble and dispute. We are *not without fault* when we grumble and dispute. When we grumble and complain and argue and dispute, we cause disunity in the fellowship – in the family of God. It is wrong, and it affects our status as God’s children. When we grumble, we’re behaving badly – like ungrateful and disobedient children.

So what should we when our fellowships have problems that need to be worked out? That's exactly what we do - we work it out! And we work it out without grumbling and without disputing. With the Lord's help, we can work it out in love!

In verse 16, Paul said that he wanted to "rejoice in the day of Christ," because he had not "run" in vain, or labored in vain. Paul was referring to the judgment seat of Christ, where his life as a believer will be reviewed in a coming day. In fact, every believer will one day stand before the Lord Jesus, and He will review our lives (2 Corinthians 5:10). At that time, when our lives are reviewed and rewards are given out, we'll be ashamed that we ever grumbled or disputed in this life. Grumbling and disputing affect the status of the child of God.

## **2. Grumbling and disputing affect the testimony of the church of God.**

*"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life."* What do unbelievers think when they hear Christians grumbling and disputing? What do unbelievers think when they see churches split because the Christians couldn't get along together? That's not an effective testimony for the Lord!

Recently I was teaching a seminar in Oregon, and in the newspaper I read about a local church that had to call the police to quell a disturbance! At a church business meeting, the grumbling and disputing got so badly out of hand that some church members actually came to blows. A picture showed a 70-year-old man being escorted out of the church by a police officer. These church members were not exactly "shining as lights in the world." Fortunately this was an unusual and extreme case, but many churches do not have an effective testimony in their community because of the disputes that go on in the church.

How's the behavior in your church? Is it possible that grumbling and disputing has affected the testimony of your church in your community?

Notice - that is our mission. We are to be "*without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.*" A case could be built that verse 16 should be translated "holding fast the word of life," but in the context I believe the idea is "*holding forth the word of life.*" That's our mission! We're to be blameless, so we can shine as lights in this world, and hold forth the word of life. This world needs to see the light and hear the word. It was great to hear that through the testimony of this church, the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat received a copy of Josh McDowell's book, [More than a Carpenter](#). That's shining as lights in this world! That's being an effective witness in this crooked and perverse generation.

How are we doing? Grumbling and disputing affect the testimony of the church of God.

## **Practical Application**

### **Let's not turn out the lights.**

The expression "turn out the lights" has come to mean that the end has come. The saying comes from a song, "Turn out the lights; the party's over!" If you watch Monday Night Football, you've heard that expression near the end of the game, when the losing team has no chance of winning.

I trust "turn out the lights" will never be said of your personal testimony or the testimony of your church! Let's guard our testimonies, so that nothing snuffs our lights out. Matthew 5:16 says that we are to let our lights "*shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.*" Our mission is to shine as lights in this world, and hold forth the word of life. If our lights go out, we've failed in our mission.

Recently I was speaking in Southern California, and some folks there told me of seven evangelical churches in that area that had closed down because the Christians could not resolve their differences. Because of grumbling and disputing, their "lights had gone out." In fact, because of disputes, one church literally had to put a padlock on the door.

As individuals, and as brothers and sisters together in the body of Christ, let's shine as lights in this dark world. Let's be blameless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation that surrounds us - and hold forth the word of life.

Let's not turn out the lights!