

Without Murmuring and Disputing

Joe Slater

It sounds so simple and straight-forward: “Do all things without murmuring and disputing” (Philippians 2:14). In context, this command caps Paul’s summary of what a Christian’s attitude and behavior ought to be. We are to be of one mind, loving, united, and unselfish (vv. 2-4). We are to be humble, looking to Jesus as our great example (vv. 5-11). And we are to “work out (out) own salvation with fear and trembling” (v. 12). Grumbling and disputing are inconsistent with such attitudes and behaviors.

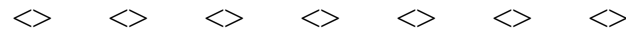
Despite all the abuse He endured, Jesus never resorted to grumbling or disputing. Grumbling pertains to murmuring, muttering, and complaining in low tones. When Jesus had something to say, He said it clearly so people could hear. For instance, when the officer slapped Him as He stood before the High Priest, Jesus didn’t grumble or mutter under His breath. Rather, He said, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:23).

I must admit that I am not always patient and gracious during adversity like Jesus was. I need to work on being more Christ-like. (Would you like to add your confession to mine?)

Jesus certainly did argue against sin and falsehood while affirming and defending righteousness and truth. But He did not “dispute” as in Philippians 2:14). This is the same word found in 1 Timothy 2:8, where prayer is to be offered “without wrath and disputing” (1 Timothy 2:8 ASV). Disputing pertains to arguments over trivial matters where the primary goal is to prove that “I’m right and you’re wrong”! Such a contentious attitude brings reproach upon the Lord. “Indeed, let God be found true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). Never should we sit

by idly as God’s word is being trashed. There definitely are matters worthy of argument! But there are also “disputes and arguments over words” which we ought to avoid (1 Timothy 6:4).

The world is filled with complaining and bickering. As people whom God has called out of the world, let us rise above such self-centered attitudes and behavior. Listen to Paul’s reason why we should not murmur or dispute: “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” (Philippians 2:15). May God help us to be gracious and humble, that we may shine brightly for Him!



Members: of the Club or of the Body?

Ultimately the growth of the kingdom is God's task. But he accomplishes that task by giving each of his children talents which they are to use to his glory (Matt. 25:15-30; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-20). Contrary to what most believe, the work of ministry is the responsibility of the whole church. The task of the evangelists, teachers, and shepherds is not to do the work, but to train the members to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). This process is to go on until we all attain to spiritual maturity.

One can maintain membership in a club simply by paying dues. But one cannot maintain membership in a body on that basis. Our fingers, toes, ears, eyes all of our members must stay connected with our body, or they will soon die. In scripture, the church is never compared to a club. It is compared to a body. To maintain membership in the church, we must be involved. A disconnected church member is no more a real member of the church than an amputated limb is still part of a human body.

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)

An Honorable Discharge

In order to receive an honorable discharge, a service member must meet or exceed high standards, both in his duty requirements and in his conduct. He must also finish his tour of duty unless he is physically or mentally disabled because of his service.

Christians might say that we seek an honorable discharge from this life. Our stay on earth is a time of testing. Will we stay true to our leader, Jesus Christ, or will we desert Him and go AWOL? Do we read God's commandments in the Bible and obey them? Does our conduct give glory to God and a good name to His church? If we fall, can we fix our eyes back on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and follow Him?

A bad conduct discharge is the most severe type of military discharge. Usually a person who gets a bad conduct discharge serves time in prison. He is not eligible for any service benefits such as health insurance. God, too, has a bad conduct discharge. Those who do not obey Him get no benefits. They are unprofitable servants, and are cast out into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30).

Jesus has promised a rich reward to those who faithfully serve Him. May we, like Paul, be able to say, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that have loved his appearing"* (II Timothy 4: 7, 8). Only then will we have an honorable discharge.

--Donna Richmond Wittlif (Denver, CO)