

AN ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #102 (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe, 7/31/20)

“Do everything without complaining or arguing”

How many of you enjoy being around people who constantly complain or argue? I realize that some people struggle to pass up a good argument, but for the most part, I think most of us don't like to be around people who constantly complain or argue. I know I don't.

Many years ago while in graduate school, I regularly sat with a group of friends at meal time. We laughed and enjoyed each other's company... until some of them started complaining. At first, they only complained about a few things, but then they complained about many things... all the time. I got tired of it and didn't like to be surrounded by so much complaining and negativity; therefore, I started sitting at another table. When my friends realized I was no longer sitting with them, they asked why, and I respectfully told them. When I explained, they acknowledged and apologized for their constant complaining, said they would quit, and asked me to join them again. I did and they did, and life was much more pleasant again.

I realize that all situations don't work out that well or easily, but my point is that most of us don't like to be around people who complain or argue all the time. Therefore, we might want to ask ourselves, “How often do I complain or argue?” In our messy world today, it's really easy to complain or argue about wearing masks, what schools are planning to do (or not), not being able to go places, wanting life to be like it was before the pandemic, corrupt politicians and political ideas, and nearly anything else. However, Paul offers us a good reminder,

“Do everything without complaining or arguing.” (Philippians 2:14, NLT)

Everything? Certainly, Paul didn't know what he was talking about; he can't understand what we're going through today! Paul didn't know what we would be experiencing in our world today, but he understood. Paul wrote his letter to the church in Philippi while he was in prison. He couldn't go where he wanted; he had to do things he didn't want to do; he couldn't do things he wanted to do; he lived in the midst of a very corrupt government; and life was not as he would have liked it. And yet, Paul encourages Christians in Philippi then and in our world today, “Do everything without complaining or arguing.” Why would we do that? Paul continued, “...so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people” (Philippians 2:15, NLT). Why should we not complain or argue? Because people are watching! They are watching to see if we, who call ourselves Christians, are just like everyone else—complaining and arguing. However, if we ask God to help us live as his children, children of the light, then we become a helpful, encouraging light in our dark world—and we can point them to the One who is the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. May I ask you a question? Do you want to spend the rest of your life griping and complaining about things over which (at least for the most part) you have no control? If so, not only will no one want to be around you, but you'll miss out on the joy of trusting and following Jesus. So, how can we learn to do everything without complaining or arguing? We, like Paul, need to learn contentment. (See Phil. 2 and 3.) How did Paul learn to be content? He explained: “I can do all this through [Christ Jesus] who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13, NIV). Christ will help us if we let him, if we seek him, if we trust him, and if we allow him to help us live for him. Therefore, instead of complaining or arguing, let's rejoice that God loves us and forgives us! Let's rejoice that this world is not all there is; there will be a time when death, dying, disease, and suffering will be no more! Let us rejoice that God can work through us to shine his light and bring hope in our dark and hurting world.

PRAYER:

All-powerful and all-knowing God, forgive me for the times I complain and argue... Help me to trust you and, like Paul, learn to be content in all circumstances. Come and live in me so that your light and love may shine through me and be a wonderful, loving, and encouraging witness to everyone around me—so people are attracted to you living in me! Amen.

LIVE IT!

Read and study Philippians chapters 2 and 3. Ask God to help you learn to be content and to be his loving witness in all you are and say and do!