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Living in the Land of the Loathing

Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Philippians 2:14

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The great American pastime is not baseball, it's complaining. We complain about practically everything. If the sun is shining, someone is going to find a reason why that's not good, and they'll find an audience to agree with them.

Years ago, on Twitter, I put a statement to the effect about how much I love mangoes. Quickly, I received people coming at me (bro!) arguing about how much I must hate bananas and oranges and limes and lemons, etc. So, simply making a positive statement, leaving no room (in my mind) to complain or dispute anything, became an online fight. And let me tell you, some got mad. I'm not kidding.

We live in a land of plenty, but so many thankless people can't seem to see it. Even with two good eyes! Paul warned Timothy about our time — and I don't believe this is only a problem for modern America, it's kind of the way things are with people whose thoughts are not on God.

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, **not loving good**, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1–5)*

I mean, it's almost impossible to read this passage and not think of twenty-first century Western culture. To the Romans, Paul wrote:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:28–31)

In many ways, I believe Western culture loathes everything. Good isn't good enough. Kind isn't kind enough. Beauty isn't beautiful.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Western culture is filled and enamored with evil — consider the most popular TV shows and streaming movies that are filled with violence. Western culture is entertained by violence and evil and darkness. Jesus said,

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. (Mark 7:20–23)

As a kid I did some computer programming — my dad worked for Radio Shack and taught some classes. One of the things he'd remind us of was that bad programming makes for bad programs — *garbage in, garbage out*. And so, as Christians, I would remind us all of this general statement — *garbage in, garbage out*. Just like Jesus teaches us: *what comes out of a person is what defiles him*.

What are we putting into our minds?

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. (Colossians 3:14–16)

If the word of God dwells in us richly (not barely, or some more than a little), then we will be filled with a genuine heart of thanksgiving. And a thankful heart will lead to a thankful life willing to find out what God wants, and zealously doing it (Titus 2:11–14; Ephesians 5:9–10).

We live in this dying world (1 John 2:15–17), but we're supposed to be its light and salt (Matthew 5:13–16). We're supposed to be followers of Jesus, which means our minds are set on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

There's nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1) — people today are just like the people we read about in the book of Judges (talk about an enlightenment) and in the days of Paul's first century Roman Empire; and just like Isaiah's days:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:20–21)

We can be different; and we need to be different than the world around us. “And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:17)

The Renewing of Your Mind

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2

There has always been a pull upon people to fit in and be like everyone else. Sadly, most people just follow the ways and thinking of the world and give little or no thought to the will of God.

A Christian however has to undergo a transformation to be different than the ways of the world. Simply put, Paul says you have to undergo a renovation or a change within your mind. You have to think differently than the norm and desire the perfect will of God to become the person God would have you to be. That person will think, talk, look and act much differently than the world. Doing so will make you good and acceptable, not unto the world, but unto God.

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