

The Joy of Living the Jesus-Way

Philippians



PART 5: THE GOSPEL IS A GROUP PROJECT

- SO STOP COMPLAINING AND BICKERING

By Ricky Stephen

Philippians 2:12-30

Group Projects

Most people groan when they hear they have a group project coming, because getting along and working together is one of the hardest things to do. But, it's also one of the most important things to do.

Philippians 2:1-11 calls the church at Philippi to remember the gospel is a group project. Philippians 2:12-30 gives practical steps for how to appropriately engage in the mission God has given us successfully:

We are to quit complaining and bickering.

I. Work Together And Quit Your Complaining And Bickering

The first imperative in Philippians 2 is:

³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves...*

-Philippians 2:3

After laying out the theological implications of a God who 'empties Himself' on our behalf, Paul commands the Philippians:

¹⁴ *Do everything without grumbling or arguing*

-Philippians 2:14

Later in the letter, Paul will remind two women who are church leaders—Euodia and Syntyche—to be of one mind.

It seems the Philippians were great at loving Jesus, but not so great at loving each other.

What a weird problem to have.

NOTES

Philippians

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And if there's one thing that can quietly derail the mission of the church today, it's this. Many of us are constantly formed by streams of online outrage, controversy, and suspicion. Over time, that shapes how we see everyone and everything.

Paul offers a different way.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. - Philippians 4:8

Not passive optimism, but intentional attention. We are called to make the balance of our inputs be what is good.

What is forming your tone—goodness, or suspicion?

II. Teach Us To Care And Not To Care

To help us quit bickering and arguing, Paul opens with a paradoxical posture required for the faithful:

...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

- Philippians 2:12a-13

As an unintentional commentary, T.S. Eliot once paralleled with his own poetic fragment:

*“Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.”³*

a. Teach us to Care—Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling

The first half of the phrase often unsettles readers. Paul is not describing how we earn salvation, but how we live it out. This is not about justification, but about ethics and embodiment—what salvation looks like when it takes shape in real life. As Gordon Fee puts it:

“...‘salvation’ is not only something [we] receive, it is something [we] do.”⁴

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Discussion



Open Up

What's the worst group project you ever had—at work, school, or anywhere else?

Dig In

Re-read Philippians 2:12-18:

1. What stands out to you in the text?

Live it Out

1. What are the markers for you that you've moved into whining and complaining? How can you stop yourself?
2. How do you know the sharing of your negative feelings is healthy?
3. Imagine you were only known by what you watched, listened to, or read online. What kind of person would you be if you were reduced just to what you consume?
4. What is the difference between constructive argumentation and bickering?
5. How do you remind yourself God is at work, in others and yourself? What's the effect of reminding yourself?

Prayer

Take time to pray for unity in the church, both our own and at large. Take time to let people talk about where they struggle focusing on the good and pray for a renewed mind. Pray also for typical requests.

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References

¹ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: Philippians*, pg. 258

² See Ps 13; Ps 22; Ps 42; Ps 51; Job 10; Lam 1-3; Hab 1:2-4; 1 Sam 1:10-16; Jonah 2:1-9; Matt 27:46; Luke 22:42-44; Rom 8:22-26

³ T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday"

⁴ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: Philippians*, Pg. 234

⁵ See Stephen Fowler, *Two Horizons Commentary: Philippians*, pg. 121ff. See also Ephesians 6:5

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pg 30

⁷ Eugene Peterson, "Teach us to Care and Not to Care" in *Subversive Spirituality*, pg 166.