

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
LIGHTS IN THE WORLD
PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18
10/08/2017



MAIN POINT

We are lights in the world when we offer ourselves fully and sacrificially in the service of others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What daily task is most difficult for you to do without complaining or arguing? Why?

When do you most often find yourself grumbling in your relationship with God?

We all find certain aspects of the Christian life difficult and demanding. We can be tempted to complain about or give up on the things that challenge us. Paul didn't advocate passivity in the Christian life. He taught that God works in believers *and* believers actively work. God doesn't work in us because we have worked. Just the opposite is true. Because God works, we therefore work.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13.

How do we live obediently to God, according to Paul in these verses?

What is the difference between working out your salvation and working for your salvation?

Arrogance and pride are the opposite of "fear and trembling." Why is there no place for arrogance and pride in a believer who is working out his or her salvation?

How would you respond to a friend who said, "I'm not good enough to be an example of Christianity"?

What is God's responsibility and what is yours for achieving God's "good purpose"?

What are some reasons that believers might fail to grow spiritually?

For Paul, sanctification was working out what God was working within. That is, sanctification is a combination of human effort and divine activity. Throughout his writings, but especially in the passage under examination, Paul linked human striving with God's power in the pursuit of spiritual maturity. He called believers to self-activity by virtue of God's powerful working in them. Paul instructed the Philippian church, that in his absence they must diligently work out their own salvation. But their obedience isn't to be understood in the sense of following rules but of being completely devoted to Christ.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18.

Why are complaining and arguing so harmful to the church and its witness to the world?

Having Christ's mind-set and demonstrating it in the church's fellowship would preclude grumbling (expressing indignant complaints, whispering secretly) and arguing (disputing, wrangling). Both terms indicated self-assertiveness, which was the opposite attitude of self-giving that Christ modeled.

In what way do you shine forth as different from the world? Does this fact bring you joy or sorrow? Why?

In what ways should a Christian be different from the world?

What should be our motive in seeking to be shining examples of Christian living? What is your motive?

Holding firmly to the gospel (v. 16) is the key to shining brightly in our world. We shine as believers when our Christian lifestyle stands out as different from those of lost people around us. We not only must believe, but we also must behave in a way that the light of Christ shines brightly and steadily before others.

Read Matthew 5:14-16. In this symbolism, what does the "light" represent?

What's wrong with putting a light under a basket? What's wrong with acting as though faith in Christ is a private matter?

The illustration of the lamp shows the absurdity of someone claiming to be a believer but trying to keep it a secret from others. No true Christian who has the light of Christ covers it. A true believer displays faith not in a self-righteous or self-glorifying way but so others may see the light and come to Christ. Each person bears personal responsibility for sharing the light of the gospel with others. People genuinely committed to Jesus will show it by what they do and how they grow spiritually.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What step can you take this week to make your faith in Christ and the power of the gospel more evident to others?

In what ways are you consistently demonstrating your faith in (commitment to) Christ?

What are some activities that lead to the spiritual growth Paul encouraged?

What active steps are you taking toward spiritual growth in your relationships at work, at home, and so forth?

Similarly, what steps are you taking toward spiritual transformation with the stewardship of your finances and your time? With your church involvement?

PRAY

As you lead in a closing prayer, invite your group members to confess silently to God areas where they fall short in working out their salvation and shining for Him.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

In 2:12 Paul continued his practical exhortation on how the Philippians were to live—whether in his presence or in his absence. Paul had just shown the depth of Jesus' obedience (2:5-11), and it is that same level of obedience that believers are to exhibit. Obedience to Christ is the primary responsibility of the church, and it is a critical component of the Christian life. The humility and obedience we see in Jesus Christ is to be a factor on our own lives. How are we to show obedience? The command is to work out your own salvation. When we work out our salvation, we are taking the salvation God's given us and strengthening it through spiritual growth.

We cannot work out our salvation without God's intervention. There is human responsibility, but there is also divine empowerment. It is a partnership. We work out our salvation with a serious realization that God is working in us. The word for God's working refers to an energizing work that is always effective. When God works, He succeeds and enables us to act. God places the desire within us to be obedient, and then He leads us to do it. When we are obedient, we are true to God's purpose. We carry out His will, and the purpose behind His will is to bring glory to Himself. God enables us to work out our salvation, and the way we work it out is to bring praise and glory to the One who gave it to us.

Paul called the Philippians to do everything—all aspects of working out their own salvation—without grumbling and arguing (v. 14). When we are working for God's purpose and His glory, it's difficult to be self-centered. Yet self-centeredness and pride enter into our spiritual progress leading us away from unity with God.

When we live as Paul described, we are seen as blameless and pure (v. 15). Our lives are to be pure—unadulterated with the things of the world. Our lives are to be of such purity that no one can blame us or find fault with anything in our lives. We already are children of God, but we are to live like children of God. The faultlessness of believers is contrasted with the world of non-believers, which is characterized by Paul as a crooked and perverted generation. This generation is crooked in that it has turned away from the truth. Perverted is an even stronger word and carries the idea that it has twisted and distorted the truth. The contrast is so sharp between the two groups that it can be compared to the difference between light and darkness. In the midst of the moral darkness around us, we shine like stars in the world. Even with our imperfections, we still serve as a light to a world in darkness. We shine—we are seen—and we point to Christ.

Christians always ought to live in such a way as to present a vivid contrast to the world in which they live (v. 16). The word translated hold firmly indicates that Paul desired his readers to be beacons of truth to those pagans among whom they lived. By their lives, the Philippians were to demonstrate that they were holding fast to the gospel.

Paul's words in verse 17 indicate that he was aware of the very real possibility that he would suffer martyrdom for the cause of Christ. He referred to the possibility of such a death in sacrificial terms. Paul then invited his readers to reciprocate by rejoicing with him in light of his possible martyrdom (v. 18). Rather than being sad at the prospect of his death, Paul urged them to rejoice with him.

Max Anders - Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary*

2:12. The Lord Jesus Christ has given Christians an incredible example of selfless humility and service to follow. His example can be followed. Paul did so and called on the Philippian believers to do the same.

Paul conveyed the closeness of his relationship with the Philippians by referring to them as my dear friends. He commended their past obedience and urged them to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. He did not say “work for your salvation.” Observe Ephesians 2:8–9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” They have been saved by grace. Now they are to bring the salvation to completion, to live out the fact that they have been saved.

2:13. This outcome is possible not through human effort but because God indwells you and is working in you. Christians must demonstrate they are saved by allowing God to work through them. Salvation is by grace through faith. Saving faith surrenders all of life to God and his purpose, producing maturity demonstrated in good works. As Christians mature and allow God to work through their lives, they find God is accomplishing his purposes in them even when they are not aware of those purposes.

2:14. When you allow God to work in you, you do everything without complaining or arguing. Unsaved people might be expected to complain and dispute, but Christians are to have changed lives. We do the work God has for us without being negative or rebellious.

2:15. If we are obedient, we may become blameless and pure or “without fault” in contrast to the culture around us. Our life resembles our divine Father rather than our pagan neighbors. People recognize us as God’s children (see Deut. 32:5). Believers are to be so distinct from unbelievers that we stand out as positive models. If God is working in our lives, we are to be unlike the godless society around us. We are to make them curious as to why we are not like them. Christ, himself, said that we are to be “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Paul says we are to be as conspicuous in the world as stars are in the dark nighttime heavens.

2:16. How do we shine like stars in the night? How do we live out this ongoing moral example as children who reflect the perfection of the Father? We grasp hold of the gospel. The marginal note in the NIV reads, “hold on to,” the normal meaning of the Greek *epexontes*. Only God’s Word can give us direction and power to let God do his work in our lives and keep us pure before him.

Paul looks forward to witnessing the progress these Christians will make in their lives. They are the reason for his ministry. He wants the concluding scene of history to show that his life had meaning. As he stands at the final judgment to hear God’s evaluation of his life, he wants to hear that the Philippians have indeed been the stars of the universe. Then his ministry will not be without meaning or empty. He will have run life’s race victoriously. He will have completed his life’s occupation successfully. He exhibits a similar anticipation in 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20: “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

2:17. If anyone had the right to complain, Paul did. Yet he was an example of what he preached. Facing possible death while in prison, he viewed it simply as an act of worship, a sacrifice, a drink offering to God. Such a liquid offering would be poured over the main sacrifice on the altar. Paul did not describe his work and suffering as that main sacrifice. Rather, the ministry of the Philippian church constituted that sacrifice. His ministry merely supplemented and completed theirs. Seeing their faith in action, he maintained his joy. His call to obedience and purity in verses 12–16 are not in vain. They are encouragements to “keep on keeping on” in the Christian race.

2:18. Paul encourages his readers to have his same attitude and rejoice with him. Without doubt, he considers it a privilege to suffer for the cause of Christ. Christ was Paul’s example. He was willing to become obedient to death (Phil. 2:8). We, too, may experience joy under difficult circumstance if our primary purpose is serving God and others.