

Intro Do you like being told to work harder than you are currently working? If there was an area where most of would acknowledge that we do not work as hard as we should, it would be in living out our faith. Work is measured in effort, productivity, time and energy. The Bible makes it clear that our salvation from sin and death is by grace through faith alone. However, saving faith always is recognized by the works it produces. So, those of us saved by grace should respond better to God telling us that we should work harder.

One key component to living out the gospel in our lives is hard work. The gospel of Christ caused us to change our thinking about God, ourselves, and Christ. Now as new creations with new lives we are commanded to exert strenuous effort to conform our thinking and behavior to the work of grace that God has done and is doing.

So our new life vocabulary and values now include embracing obedience even when out of our comfort zones. We are not content to just tell old stories about obedience; we want to see current evidence of reality and vitality. We are not shy about urgency and effort because we know God is at work in our lives and life is dangerous and cold when we wander as our souls are so prone to do. We used to settle for external evidence of religious feelings but now are only satisfied with productive heart transformation. All of these new values require significant effort on our part.

God's work in your life is incredible and comprehensive. He has brought you to faith by his word and Spirit. He also continues to provide you both the determination and the strength to live your life in a way pleasing to him. It is this overwhelming presence of God in our lives that motivates us to give him our best effort in return. We live out our faith with high energy because God is at work, the darkness around us is so great and we know the day of judgment and reward is coming soon.

What is it that you need to work on? Many would say that the list of things to work on in our Christian lives is quite long. As we come to these paragraphs from Philippians 2 one last time in this series on working harder into the New Year, we find our attention drawn to two specific areas that we need to address. The metaphors of lights and sacrifice are used to teach us to work harder in two specific ways so that God's powerful love will be recognized by those around us. Let's explore these areas in our lives that we should work harder.

Read Phil. 2:12-18

This morning we want to reduce your spiritual 'to do' list to two rather simple items:

1. Stop grumbling – shine like lights. 14-16
2. Serve with joy – present yourself like sacrifices. 16-18

What specific areas in my life should I work harder?

14-18

1. Stop grumbling – shine like lights.

14-16

The sentence recorded in 14-16 is definitely a complex sentence. In the ESV it has 6 commas. While every phrase in the sentence is important, the dominant one is the opening command, 'do all things without grumbling or questioning.' The sentence then takes us on a journey that helps us understand the direct and proportionate relationship our grumbling has to the glory of God. Thus the metaphor of shining lights – you are one. A grumbling lack of self denial and contentment is a light dimmer.

One of the greatest hindrances to the advance of the gospel is the inconsistent lives of those who claim to be gospel partners. The Bible connects our lack of self denying contentment to the darkness and perversion of the world we live in. Our power to influence people toward Christ lies in our effectiveness in reflecting the truth about God through our lives. Grumbling and questioning must be addressed if our lights are going to be effective in our world.

Here's what we are told to do or better yet, stop doing . . .

- Grumbling 3x in NT; dissatisfied grumbings against others; illus. Acts 6:1; 1Pet.4:9
- Questioning doubting, disputing, divisive actions, argue 1Tim.2:8
- Contextual themes of unity of spirit, witness to outsiders, others interests over your own
- Ultimate message of grumbling is against God. Ex. 17:1-7; Deut. 32:5

Understand the impact of a trusting contentment that does without grumbling . . .

- 'That you may be' points us to the result, the impact of our efforts
- The result is a certain kind or type of 'child of God.'

Blameless innocent w/out blemish . . .

- The not grumbling, self denying and contented child of God impacts the world.

The objective of sonship is a clear reflection of God's pure love and grace – like light.

Matt. 5:45 Eph.1:4; Col. 1:27

Let your light shine by . . .

- Working harder to understand, love and appreciate the gospel of Jesus Christ. 'Holding fast' /2:1
- Identify your patterns of grumbling and explain how they are against God.
- Ask God and others for help to behave and talk with gratitude and trust.

What specific areas in my life should I work harder?

14-18

1. Stop grumbling – shine like lights. 14-16

2. Serve with joy – present yourself like sacrifices. 16-18

It is difficult to tell where the Apostle begins to shift to the second metaphor of sacrifice, but it probably is when his thoughts turn to the day of Christ and how he will feel about his life and work. The Philippian believers shining brightly in a dark world will mean that Christ was obeyed and God was honored. That can only mean good things at the day of reward and judgment for Paul. The Apostle then develops the concept of sacrifice to describe a second specific area that we need to work harder on in our gospel partnership.

Note the piling up of terms for joy in 16-18. The pride or boasting in the presence of Christ, Paul being glad and rejoicing with the Philippians and then the command to be glad and rejoice with the Apostle. The common reality that both causes and sustains joy is the truth that we are to live our lives as sacrifices to our God.

Understand the ancient concept of sacrifices . . .

- Paul refers to his life/ministry as a drink offering while referring to the Philippians lives/ministry as a sacrifice offering. Theirs is the main one. His is the secondary or accompanying one.
- A sacrifice is something offered to God – it is an offering to express gratitude, worship, love
- You should view life as/present yourself as an offering or sacrifice in worship to God Rom.12:1

Appreciate the sacrifices and offerings of your faith . . .

- The running and labor of the Apostle was his offering to God. Potential of martyrdom. 2Tim. 4:6
- The offerings of the Philippians included their service for others. Their prayer, gifts, sending help.
2:25, 30 sending Epaphro 4:18 financial support
- Your life is an offering to God . . . present yourself completely and joyfully. Heb.13:15-16

Present yourself to God and others with joy . . .

- Work harder at placing yourself at the disposal of God, your church family and outsiders for the advance of the gospel.
- Take next steps to joyfully sacrifice and serve with your church family – participate in a greater way.
- Express/communicate your joy as you observe the sacrificial service of others in the church body.

Conclusion

Shining lights . . . let's ask God to help us replace the light dimming grumbling with selfless contentment in him. Let's work harder to speak and act like those who are completely cared for in the gospel.

Joyful sacrifices . . . place yourself again today at the disposal of the God who loved you and gave himself for you. Determine to work harder to sacrificially serve others with your church family as one combined pleasing offering to our great God.

Study Questions

1. What impressions or decisions did you come to as a result of the teaching of God's Word today?
2. Read Philippians 1:27 – 2:18 as a group. Identify an overall theme for the passage from 1:27. Give paragraph titles/outline headings for 1:27-30; 2:1-4; 2:5-11; 2:12-18. What ideas or truths tie this section together? In no more than two words, preferably one, what is God asking you to do in this section?
3. What is your favorite expression of grumbling and quarreling? What causes it? How do you do it? How do you get over it? What does it communicate to others about God?
4. According to Eph. 1:4-6, what is the purpose of our holiness and blamelessness? How does that compare to common thinking/motivation for living holy lives? Why should the people you are discipling be concerned about holiness?
5. How can your group members/fellows/partners help you shine brighter in your world in the matter of grumbling and arguing? Write down the answers of others in your group and give them help for God's sake!
6. If an unblemished sacrifice being consumed on an altar is a metaphor for the right way of Christian living and serving, what is a metaphor for how you sometimes live your Christian life?
7. How does Hebrews 13:15-16 help you understand the practical outworking of service and sacrifice in your life? What does the word 'present' mean in Romans 12:1? Where else is it found in Romans?
8. Apparently the mixing of Paul's sacrifice (life of service) with the Philippians sacrifice (more significant according to Paul) brought great gladness and joy. What does that mean? What does it look like in your life? Does it say anything about working harder at offering our lives of service to God *together*?