

Shining Like Stars

Philippians 1:27–2:4

Celebrating the Good News of Christmas in Our Lives

KSBC 12/06/09

Intro How is a person saved by Jesus from their sin like a string of Christmas lights? Hard to straighten out? Tempermental? At least they worked last year? Of all the answers you can come up with, think about the fact that both are made to shine brightest only in the darkness.

Of the sights, sounds and smells of the Christmas season, it is probably the sight of a string of lights shining in and against the darkness that best reminds us of our responsibility as partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although the darkness is huge, overwhelming and deep, this little strand of lights twinkle and shine as if to purposefully take a stand against the darkness. In many ways it is true that the lights shine most bright when the darkness is most dark.

The shining of light against the backdrop of darkness is a metaphor often used in the scriptures to teach us how God draws our attention to Jesus Christ and the good news of the Gospel. Remember the prophet Isaiah's announcement that 'the people walking in darkness have seen a great light' pointing to the birth of the Christ. Matthew records that the light of a star was all God used to draw the attention of some philosophers and direct them to find the Christ child. They responded to that light while most around them ignored the truth of the scriptures that pointed to Christ. The brilliant light of the angel's appearance awakened the shepherds to seek and find the truth about Jesus. Shining a light on those living in darkness is a core theme surrounding and explaining the birth of Christ.

Philippians 1:27-2:18 is a section of scripture where we are taught to live like/as citizens of the gospel. The major appeal is to our behavior in the world that we live in. As partakers and participants in the gospel we are to 'shine like stars in the universe' (Phil.2:15). Jesus example is central to our effectiveness of living our lives in humble obedience so that the light influences those in darkness. How we live our lives makes a difference. What we do with things that frighten us, interest us and discourage us have profound impact to shine a light on Christ in the darkness around us.

Because the gospel is the power of God to save and change lives and because the darkness of sin and rebellion against God is so profound, we seek to become the most brilliant light we possibly can be to point others to God's love in Christ. How bright is your light? Let's examine our lives and learn how God wants us to impact the darkness around us for his glory.

Read Philippians 1:27-2:4 – live your life in a worthy manner of the gospel . . .

1:27-30 Stand firm in the face of opposition.

2:1-4 Consider others in the face of selfishness.

Two clear ways we can increase or diminish the wattage of our influence for the gospel are found in our response to opposition and our reaction to selfishness. Both opposition and selfishness are real life issues that affect us year round, but are evidenced in unique ways in this holiday season.

Lighting up the truth about Christ and the gospel requires . . .

1. Standing firm in the face of opposition. 1:27-30

Opposition is very real for the follower of Christ. Note the references to opposition in these verses that help us understand the struggle that the Philippian believers faced. Three characteristics help us identify the opposition that we face today . . .

- It is frightening.
- It comes from outside the church.
- It makes life difficult.

Two admonitions to be steadfast and sharpen our impact in the face of opposition . . .

a. Struggle with and toward other gospel saturated people. 27

contending as one man

- In one Spirit
- With one mind
- Faith that comes from the gospel; based on the gospel

b. Replace intimidation with gospel truth and confidence. 28-30

without being frightened

- Confident of God's deliverance.
- Confident of God's judgment.
- Confident of God's assignment.

Cmp/illus. Phil. 4:1

2. Considering others in the face of selfishness. 2:1-4

Selfishness and self gratification are continual forces to be dealt with in our lives and world. Note the characteristics of selfishness that have become evident in the Philippian church . . .

- Selfish ambition. mercenary spirit
- Vain conceit. vain glory
- Self interests. your own interests

Three disciplines to brighten your light of considering others in the face of self interest . . .

a. Review the personal benefits of the gospel. 2:1

Since the gospel has provided or produced in your life . . .

- Salvation and encouragement in Christ.
- Comfort from Christ's love.
- Benefit from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- Experience of mercy and compassion of God.

Since you are so completely cared for in the gospel . . . Romans 15:4-6

b. Reorient your perspective with and toward other gospel saturated people. 2:2

- Transform thinking in same direction – love for others.
- Transform thinking with others – submit to single objective.

c. Fix your attention on the interests of others. 2:3-4

- Humility – not considering social standing
- Value – considering others better than yourself

Cmp. Jesus Matt.11:29; Timothy – 2:21

1. Standing firm in the face of opposition. 1:27-30

2. Considering others in the face of selfishness. 2:1-4

Take Aways

1. Determine to actively connect with gospel saturated people in your struggle to stand firm.
2. Determine to saturate your mind and heart with gospel truth related to your standing before God.
3. Ask God to give you grace so that your life will shine brightly in the darkness this holiday season.

Study Questions

1. Read Philippians 1:27-2:18 as a group. What is the dominant admonition in 1:27 that is explained and amplified in these paragraphs? What does it mean to 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'?
2. Review the characteristics of opposition the Philippian church faced. What types of opposition to living in a manner worthy of the gospel do you face?
3. Why is it important to be connected/united with other gospel people in your struggle with opposition? Share scripture to support your reasons. What are ways you can connect/unite with others in this effort?
4. Do you find that a large part of battling the opposition to your faith is losing confidence in the gospel? Explain your response. How can you build/rebuild your confidence in the gospel?
5. What aspect of selfishness do you struggle with the most? How does it manifest itself in your life?
6. Review the 3 disciplines from 2:1-4 listed in the notes. What impresses you about these verses/disciplines? What do you find most helpful? What do you find most challenging? Will it work to simply decide to be more attentive to others interests without considering the truths of verses 1-2?
7. Share with the group a story or example of how your life influenced someone toward the gospel as you stood steadfast against opposition or chose others interests over your own.
8. What do you want to do, use or remember from today's study?