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## SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

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Haven't you found that God's word is so timely? We open His word and our ears to listen to His Spirit's teaching, and we find it almost always applies to us in that moment, fresh and new each time we seek to hear from Him. If you haven't found that, then keep reading! Keep studying! It will come.

In this week's study we've seen that we are to hold fast the word of life, and that as we do that we are laboring for the cause of Christ. That's not always an easy job; of course we realize that God Himself empowers us to accomplish the "labor" part through His Spirit, by Whom we are given all we need to run to win. Sometimes it's the "cooperation" part that is the issue, we find ourselves wandering off trying to do things on our own. That, very frankly, is called sin. I'm guilty of it, too often, and must confess it to the Lord each time. I'm so thankful that because of Christ I am forgiven, and God is faithful to cleanse me when I confess my sin to Him. God is just as faithful to do that for you as He is to me. He is faithful, always!

Our text today is Philippians 2:17-18, and we will be looking at the sacrifice and service that Paul describes. It's a precious concept that he lays out for us, it begins,

"But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering  
upon the sacrifice and service of your faith,  
I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me."

Paul, having instructed these believers in Philippi to walk as lights to the world, holding fast the word of life, he goes on to talk about himself being a drink offering poured out upon their sacrifice.

A couple things to note about this sentence - Paul says he is a drink offering. The interesting thing about a "drink offering" was that it was never itself the sacrifice, but rather the drink offering was to be poured out upon other sacrifices. Usually the drink offering consisted of either wine, milk or oil, and it's purpose was to add a sweet aroma to the sacrifice already being made, so Paul (mind you, this man is the one sitting in prison for his faith at the time, he's the one being persecuted, but you may also remember though that Paul considers the things of this world to be loss in light of his relationship with Christ - what a perspective) Paul commends the Philippian believers for *their* sacrifice, and rejoices over *their* service. The end result of his rejoicing results in praising the Lord. (Praise, by the way, is always a sweet aroma to God.)

Secondly, it's worthy to note that Paul is not the one doing the pouring out. The language shows rather that he is *being poured out*. I mention that because, so often, we find ourselves beginning to think about all that we are doing, all that we are sacrificing, all that we are putting up with, all that we are helping others to do, and when that happens we can know that we have shifted our focus to ourselves doing the pouring out. When our eyes become focused on what we are doing, it leads to burn out. It leads to frustration and big-time, pity-party. Paul is not there. Paul says if he is being poured out, it's God that is doing the pouring, and God will also be the One to pour back in.

Do you need to reread that last sentence? Even in the most wearing circumstances, if God is in it, He will be faithful to fill you up with all that is needed to continue.

So here, Paul has seen, and been the recipient of the sacrifice and service of the Philippians and wants to assure them he is rejoicing not only for that, but for God and His gospel continuing to be shared. He did not labor in vain, and neither are they.

This type of service and sacrifice requires Faith. *Faith is dependency upon someone or something*. In this case, they have placed their faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Their lives become a sacrifice as they lay down their life to follow Him, and it's by that faith that we appropriate His grace. The result of that is we are then able to serve Him as He supplies the direction and the means to accomplish whatever He calls us to do. Remember, GRACE supplies

God's Righteousness, His Riches and His Realm At Christ's Expense. Our faith in that work allows us to tap into everything we need to live a life of service and sacrifice in return.

**Read Galatians 5:22-26, now write out verse 25:**

We also see that Faith without works is dead. **Read James 2:20-26**

The faith mentioned is a "transitive verb" which means that *something does the work*. Our faith is placed in the work that Christ did for us. He is our Justifier, and our Savior. Without His work on the cross our faith would be useless.

So then, our faith must be in an object that produces the work:

- a. In Salvation the object must be Christ for He alone can save.
- b. In Living the Christian life the object must be the Word of God, for it is our instruction manual.

The text also points out that our faith must show itself. We are to not only be hearers of the word, but doers. That means, as a result of the work that Christ did, as we place our faith in Him, we will be living a life of sacrifice and service, but the motivation and lead for that service must be by the Holy Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15 describes works we try to do on our own. What does it say will be done with those works?**

Only those deeds that He calls us to, directs us to, provides the doing; those are the things we should be doing, and let me tell you, those are plenty, for He has purpose for each one of us. The only way to know what those are for each of our lives is to be so closely communing with Him that we sense His leading in the minute by minute living responses of our lives.

It must be said, there are a lot of good things we could be doing, but they may not all be things He is calling us to do at that moment. Abiding with Him lets you know what is pleasing to Him and what He desires you, specifically, to do. Being attentive to Him takes effort on your part, but the rewards are great!

Paul says, the fact they are indeed living that way is something he can truly rejoice about, and then he flips it, and tells them he wants them to be rejoicing as well. But wait, he's in prison! Why would he ask them to rejoice over his suffering? Because Paul KNOWS God is working it to the good. If anyone knew the truth of Romans 8:28, it was Paul, he penned it after all, he believed it, he lived it. Sure, he was in prison, BUT the gospel was being preached, Christ was being shared, plus, he was seeing the sacrifice and service of this church as a direct result of his imprisonment.

So what does this mean for us? The great news is that we, too, can be productive in our walk with Christ, either as a direct sacrifice, or even as a drink offering on the sacrifice of others - and we don't have to be drained and burned out to accomplish it either.

We, too, can live out faith in a way that propels the gospel, and we can live a life of joy as we trust all of our circumstances and our service to Him. Having the joy of the Lord is a peaceful, happy place, and it doesn't matter whether we are being poured out, because God Almighty has promised to fill us up. So rejoice!

**What are some areas that you are being "poured out?"**

**Do you see God "filling you" back up, how?**

**If you have sacrificed and served but find yourself being empty, with nothing left to give, it's time to take inventory of what you are sacrificing and serving in. What caused you to serve there? Have you been serving under your power, or His?**

As church-goers we can find ourselves serving for all the wrong reasons: No one else would do it, someone asked me to and I didn't want to let them down, it seemed like a good idea at the time. You name it, we can get ourselves into all kinds of things that weren't from the Lord.

It's vital to always pause before answering "yes" to any request to serve. Here are some questions I have found helpful before saying "yes": Have I prayed about it? Does the task fit within my spiritual gifting? Do I have a passion or unexplained excitement about it? Have I felt His leading in it? Would it keep me from fulfilling an area I know He has me serving in already (such as needed time away from family, or a conflict with my other area of service)? Asking questions before the Lord helps to sort out what is "man inspired" or "God inspired" tasks.

We must always be attentive to sacrificing and serving for His greater purpose, not the purposes of our self or others. Let's not fall into the trap of serving for the sake of serving. Let Him lead us to the when and where, so that we may be filled to the fullness as we are poured out.

**Is there an area, a ministry, that you feel God's Spirit is directing you to be a part of?**

Praying about that is the first step. One thing I have had to learn is that sometimes He gives the desire way before He provides the timing. I've learned that those are times for preparation and prayer. If it's from Him, He will open the doors when it aligns with His timing.

But what if you're not serving anywhere? You don't know what your spiritual gifting is or how to utilize it in the body of Christ. All the questions are still valid, but perhaps the question of why you aren't serving should be asked as well. Is it fear? Is it selfishness of time? Is it just not knowing where and how to serve? The answer is the same: Pray about it, and let the Holy Spirit direct you. Pay close attention to the needs around you and join God in the work needing to be done. Try different areas of service and see if He strikes a passion in you for something in particular.

Sacrifice and serving, when the Lord is the One pouring you out and filling you up, is one of the most amazing things. It takes laboring for Christ, who loved us and died for us. It takes submitting to our Helper, the Holy Spirit, who is more than able to supply all that we need to accomplish the tasks. And it produces results that we could never take credit for. The only response then is to Rejoice!

God bless and direct you as you seek to serve Him and others.

REVIEW

~ We are called to a life of service and sacrifice, either as a direct sacrifice unto the Lord, or as a drink offering upon the sacrifices of others.

~ Faith is a prerequisite. But be careful of what, or whom, we are placing our faith in. James 2:20-26

~ Grace is appropriated, the resources of heaven are at our disposal, supplying every need to accomplish the service and/or sacrifice. Galatians 5:22-26

~ Rejoicing results, even in trials, because we KNOW God is working all things to our good.