

Am I A Beacon?
Philippians 2:14-16

Franklin Church of Christ Edwin Crozier July 13, 2008 PM Assembly
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Introduction:

“This little light of mine.” A children’s song. But not a children’s message. We sing many songs that teach the same message, but perhaps not as simply and therefore not as pointedly. This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. Hide it under a bushel? NO! I’m gonna let it shine. Won’t let Satan blow it out; I’m gonna let it shine. All around the neighborhood, I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine ‘til Jesus comes; I’m gonna let it shine. Are you letting it shine?

In **Philippians 2:14-16**, Paul wrote:

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain (ESV).

Like our first century brethren we dwell in a crooked and twisted generation. Paul wants us to stand out as blameless and innocent. We are to be the stars that twinkle and dance in the vast expanse of inky black space. As sailors once chartered their course to safe harbor by using the stars as beacons in the darkness, we must live so others can set their course from us. Our little lights must shine.

Before we move into the heart of this lesson we need to notice why this question is important. Paul said that when the Philippians were lights in the world, his labor was not in vain. What was the goal of his labor? **I Corinthians 9:22** says Paul did all things for all people that he might by all means save some. The goal of his labor was salvation for those whom he served. If the Philippians did not shine as lights, they were not saved and Paul’s labors were in vain. If we do not shine as lights, it doesn’t matter what else we do we will be lost. This is not just a checklist question. This is not just a maybe sometime I’ll look into that question. This is an eternal life or death question. Am I a beacon?

Discussion:

- I. Being a beacon.
 - A. Of course, the light does not originate with us. The true light of the world is Jesus (**John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46**). He is the incarnate Word of Life (**John 1:1-4**). He has the words of life (**John 6:68**). And this life that He embodies is the light of men (**John 1:4**). If we are trying to generate our own light, we will accomplish nothing. We will be as the Pharisees, blind guides leading the blind (cf. **Matthew 15:14**). If we are going to be beacons, we must reflect the light that shines from Jesus. Only then can we guide anyone to heaven.
 - B. At the same time, we cannot forget the message of **Psalms 119:105**. God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. **Philippians 2:16** says we shine our light when we hold fast to the word. We cannot possibly reflect Jesus’ light unless we are reflecting the words Jesus recorded. Our think-sos and preferences do not matter. We can only reflect the light of Jesus into this world if we are walking in the light of His word.
 - C. When are we beacons? When we reflect the light of Jesus to the world by walking in Christ’s Word so the world can follow us to heaven. In **Philippians 3:17**, Paul said, “Join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (ESV). In **Philippians 4:9**, he said, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (ESV). Paul was a beacon folks could follow all the way to heaven. Are you a beacon?
 - D. Obviously, in one sense we determine whether or not we are a beacon by studying the whole Bible. I hope you are doing that. For this lesson, however, consider a series of questions to help you determine with any given choice or action whether or not you are being a beacon. As we examine these questions, we will flip back and forth between two applications. First and foremost, to us as individual Christians and second, to us as a local congregation?
- II. Am I a beacon?
 - A. *Am I doing this in the name of the Lord? A question of Authority—Colossians 3:17* says we must do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father. Thus, if Jesus were right here next to us, could we say, “I’m doing this with Your permission and blessing”?

Can you drink what you are drinking in Jesus' name? Can you eat what you are eating or as much as you are eating in Jesus' name? Can you look at what you are looking at in Jesus' name? Can you touch what you are touching in Jesus' name? Can you go where you are going in Jesus' name? As a congregation, if Jesus were sitting here could we say we are doing what we are doing in Jesus' name? Can we go to the book, chapter and verse to show where He has empowered us to act, worship and work in this way? Or are we following our own authority?

- B. *Am I surrendering to God? A question of Lordship*—**Luke 14:25-33** describes the life of discipleship. It means carrying a cross. It means surrendering our all to Jesus. **Matthew 5:28-29** provides a more detailed look when it says sometimes as disciples we have to cut off our hands and pluck out our eyes. **Galatians 2:20** says we must be crucified with Christ and let Jesus live through us. **Romans 12:1** says we are to be living sacrifices. All of these speak of surrendering our lives, our rights, our actions and our choices to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In my actions, who is actually being Lord? Who is governing this and making this choice? Is it me? Or is it Jesus? This is not about establishing all the lines of minimum required output or maximum permissiveness so we can checklist our way into heaven. Surrendering to God means recognizing that God's way is right and I will surrender my way in order to receive the life that is inherent in His. Thus, who is making the decision to pursue your next career goal? Who is making the decision regarding what you are about to say to your spouse? ...parents? ...children? Whose rights are you defending as you push a little further and a little closer to the "line"? Who is in charge of your life right now? As a church, the application is obvious? Are we surrendering to God? Or are we surrendering to the members who have the biggest families or the biggest contributions? As a congregation, our job is just to do what is right, surrendering to God and letting Him be the Lord. If we find ourselves compromising because we are afraid of who might get upset and who might leave, then we aren't surrendering to God.
- C. *Am I glorifying God? A question of Goals*—**Matthew 5:16** says we must shine our lights so the people around us can see them and glorify God. The contrast is found in **Matthew 6:1**. Jesus claimed the hypocrites did their good works so they might be seen of men and receive praise from them. You notice, of course, this is not about the actions themselves. The actions might be right like the alms giving, praying and fasting examples of **Matthew 6**. But the goal of the action may be wrong. Are we trying to glorify God or receive our own praise. Why are you preaching that sermon? I once heard of a brother who left a congregation because they didn't announce that he had gone to another congregation to fill in and preach. Why are you leading that prayer? Why are you being a song leader? Why are you writing that check? Who are you trying to glorify? Whose reputation are you trying to increase? As churches, what goals are we pursuing? Are we trying to maintain our buildings? Our reputation? Are we trying to attract people to the church because of what we will give them? Or are we pointing them to God so they can glorify Him? What is the goal of our work?
- D. *Am I sowing to the flesh or the Spirit? A question of Guidance*—**Galatians 5:16-25** presents two warring factions trying to pull us on divergent paths—the flesh and the Spirit. As you walk your path, honestly assess whether your words and deeds correspond or follow the lead of the flesh or the Spirit. Which is guiding us? **Galatians 6:7-8** drives home how important this is. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption. If we sow to the Spirit, we will get life. Does what you are about to do with your girlfriend or boyfriend fit more in line with love and self-control or immorality and sensuality? Does that lottery ticket you are about to buy fit more in line with love and patience or with covetousness and jealousy? Does that party you are attending fit more in line with joy and goodness or with drunkenness and orgies? As a church, are our assemblies and classes more in line with feeding the spirit or with entertaining the masses?
- E. *Am I providing for the lusts of the flesh? A question of Honesty*—**Romans 13:14** says we must make no provision for the lust of the flesh. This is an extension of our last question. But this becomes a question of honesty because we so easily make lust based decisions but deceive ourselves. Then we get caught in some issue and wonder how we ended up there. I understand that providing for the lusts of the flesh is not exactly the same as pursuing them. Certainly, going to the beach or the water park and being surrounded by nearly naked members of the opposite gender is not the same as lusting after them. But, and I'm speaking especially to the brothers here, what do you honestly think is going to happen? If we are going on a trip, we must provide

for that trip. We gas up the car, pack our bags and study the map. As Christians we must pack our bags in such a way that we provide for serving the Lord. Too often we don't think through our decisions, we wind up in sin and we say, "I didn't mean to do that." The problem is we didn't mean not to and therefore we provided for sin. We packed the bags for sin, gassed the car up for sin and studied the map of sin and thought some how we would keep from sinning. We play mind tricks on ourselves the whole time and then when we sin we shrug our shoulders and bow our heads saying, "I didn't mean to." If you make lust based decisions, don't be surprised when you end up following through on your lusts. This makes me think of the first car I bought all by myself. I told myself I wasn't going to buy a car. I was just going to look. Guess what, I bought a car. So what exactly do we hope to get out of our trip to the beach, the water park or the pool? What exactly do we hope to get out of the party we are going to? Why are you running that particular search term in your Google Images search? Be rigorously honest and check all your motivations. If there is that little part of you that kind of hopes you might accidentally come across something so you can "kind of claim" it just wasn't your fault, back up and redirect.

- F. *Am I professing godliness? A question of Honor*—**I Timothy 4:7-8** claims we should train ourselves for godliness, that is, piety and reverence for God. In **I Timothy 2:10**, Paul told Timothy to teach women to dress in a way that professes godliness. This is a question of honor. Are we honoring God by what we are doing? Am I showing reverence to God with the movie I am about to watch? What about with the song with which I am singing on the radio? Does the joke I am about to tell show reverence, piety and respect for God? As Christians we wear the name of Christ. Everything we do reflects on Him. Does it honor or dishonor Him? What about as a congregation? Piety doesn't mean crawling around on our knees with heads bowed and groveling. It doesn't mean being somber and emotionless. On the other hand, we must not treat what we do together as a congregation flippantly. We are not here to feed our emotions. We are here to learn about God, build one another up and honor Him.
- G. *Am I set apart for holiness? A question of Usefulness*—**I Thessalonians 4:1-8** says God did not call us for impurity but for holiness. His will for us is sanctification. Sanctification means being set apart for holy use. As certain vessels in the Old Testament were set apart and cleansed to be used in the Temple of God, we are to be cleansed and set apart for God's holy use while in this world. This is a question of usefulness for God as seen in **II Timothy 2:20-22**. Does the way I walk and talk tell people I am set apart for holy use by God? Do my clothes say I am set apart for holy use by God? Do the messages on my clothes say I am set apart for holy use by God? Or do they say I am just like the rest of the world pursuing a course of popularity, prestige and pleasure? What about as a congregation? The world and even many denominations are pressuring us to bring the church down to the mundane. Instead of being God's institution in the world that passes on the gospel so people can be saved, they want us to become a social welfare institution, a recreation institution and personal life help center. They want us to sponsor MOPS so moms can recreate. They want us to have Six Flags trips so teenagers will be interested. They want us to run inner-city soup kitchens so the homeless will be cared for. All of these are great works. They simply aren't the great work God has separated His church out to do. As a congregation, are we demonstrating that we have been set apart for God's use or are we letting the world dictate what this congregation is used for?
- H. *Am I hungering for righteousness? A question of Passion*—**Matthew 5:6** says only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. This is a question of our passion. What passion are we pursuing with the actions we are taking? In **Philippians 3:17-19**, Paul talked about his being a beacon, but then pointed out those who were just the opposite. Some folks were not passionate about the righteousness of God. Their hunger wasn't for righteousness. Rather, their hunger was for their own belly and for earthly things. Is the choice and action you are about to make helping you pursue your passion for righteousness? Or a passion and hunger for power, money, fame, pleasure? Why are you working so hard for that promotion? Promotions in themselves are not wrong, but if the only hunger and passion you are filling is one for prestige and power, you are not being a beacon. Don't misunderstand. This is not saying we cannot have passion in the John Maxwell sense regarding our jobs. As **Ecclesiastes 11:9**, demonstrates we are allowed to pursue the desire of our hearts and the delight of our eyes. But, as it says, all of this must be kept subordinate to our hunger for righteousness because we will

be judged. What about as a congregation? What are we passionate about? Numbers? Big buildings? Lofty reputations? Community accolades? Or are we passionate about God's kingdom and righteousness?

- I. *Am I cheerful about it? A question of Attitude*—**Philippians 2:14**, the passage that served as a springboard to launch us into our study, says we must do all things without grumbling and complaining. The point is that we should be cheerful about being a beacon. If we strive to live by God's word and by the questions it presents, but we are constantly grumbling along the way, we are not being beacons. For instance, when my wife asks me to do something around the house and I do it but only through a great amount of complaining and grumbling as I slam doors and shove drawers, am I being a beacon for my kids to learn how to be servants? What is my attitude as I answer all the other questions? Am I doing these things cheerfully because I know this is where God is and this is where life through God's grace is? Or am I constantly challenging, complaining, whining about it all? What about as a church? Are we happy to follow the pattern God has set in the New Testament? Or do we do things grudgingly because we have to? Do we apologize for the doctrine of Christ, "Boy, I sure hate to tell you that **Matthew 5:32** says your marriage is unlawful, I wish it didn't, but what can I do?" Don't get me wrong. I don't think we should tell people they are lost with a smile. That should not make us happy. The point is merely that we should be glad for the opportunity to share the saving message of Christ with people and not grumble and complain or apologize for what it asks of people.
- J. *Am I standing out? A question of Commitment*—**Romans 12:2** says we must stand out. We should not be formed with the world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We will be different and we should be alright with that. As we ask these questions and pursue their answers, some folks will tell us we have lost our minds. Some will say, "Well, that's just stupid. Nobody acts like that." Or they might say, "No one in their right mind would go through all that." That is just the point. No one will. But God's people who want life through Him, who want to be a beacon for the world around them will. Christ's churches who want to stand out and shine the light on the path to heaven will. Are we willing to stay the course when people begin to ridicule us because we are not like them (cf. **I Peter 4:4**).

Conclusion:

I can't answer these questions for you and I don't intend to. We must each ask these questions of ourselves with God's word in hand. As we direct these questions to very specific actions, you and I might answer differently at times. We have to learn to work together in those areas if we can. But let me assure you the answers to these questions are not always given with a specific verse that draws every line for us. God has challenged us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (**Philippians 2:12-13**). That means we work hard at it but always have a certain part of us that fears we haven't worked hard enough or gone far enough so we push more. But we keep doing that because we can take comfort that when we love and fear God that much, He will be working in us. We are not alone. He is working with us to get us where He wants us to be. If we ever think we have done enough, then we have quit being a beacon. We are surrounded by the lost. They need beacons to shine the way. Are you letting your little light shine?