

The Christian's Contentment

Paul's Greeting to the Philippians

Philippians 1:1-2

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January 13, 2019

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Scripture

Several months ago, I gave the elders a list of suggestions for sermon topics. We each chose the ones we thought were important to address for our church, and then we ranked them. Some of the evening sermons this past year were topics that came out of that discussion. One topic suggested, however, was that of "Christian contentment." Paul addressed the issue of contentment in his letter to the Philippians when he wrote in Philippians 4:11, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." So, rather than do just one sermon on contentment, I have decided to preach a series of sermons on Paul's letter to the Philippians that I am calling, "The Christian's Contentment."

So, let's read Paul's greeting to the Philippians in Philippians 1:1-2:

**¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi,
with the overseers and deacons:**

**²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:1-2)**

Introduction

In his commentary on Paul's letter to the Philippians, commentator R. Kent Hughes makes an interesting observation. He writes:

This is admittedly subjective, but it seems to me that the

four chapters of Philippians have provided more favorite quotes and sound bites than any other section of Scripture of similar length—certainly it has done that for me. Here are some of my favorites:

- “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (1:21)
- “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (1:23)
- “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (1:27)
- “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.” (2:3, 4)
- “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (2:5–10)
- “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (2:12, 13)
- “...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.” (3:8, 9)

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- “But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (3:13, 14)
- “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (3:20)
- “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” (4:4)
- “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (4:6, 7)
- “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable...” (4:8)
- “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” (4:11)
- “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (4:13)¹

It is likely that some of these verses are some of your favorite verses too.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is sometimes called “The Epistle of Joy.” In fact, the verb “rejoice” (*chairō*) appears ninety-six times and the noun “joy” (*chara*) appears fifty-nine times in the New Testament. These two words appear thirteen times in Philippians. However, the joy that appears in Philippians is a particular kind of joy—the joy of contentment even in difficult circumstances. Paul’s contentment—and his joy—shines vividly when we recall the background to his letter.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 15–16.

Lesson

Philippians 1:1-2 shows us the background for Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Setting
2. The Servants (1:1a)
3. The Saints (1:1b)
4. The Salutation (1:2)

I. The Setting

First, let's look at the setting of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul planted the Philippian church, and it was the first church he planted in Europe (Acts 16:6-40). The first convert in Philippi was Lydia, a seller of purple goods. The second convert was demon-possessed fortune-telling slave girl. Her conversion upset her owners because her conversion lost them their livelihood, and they had Paul and Silas imprisoned. But God intervened miraculously, and the third convert was the Philippian jailer and his entire family.

Paul probably visited Philippi several times after his first visit, and the Philippian church was perhaps his favorite church.

Most likely Paul wrote to the Philippian church after his third missionary journey and his imprisonment in Rome. He wrote this letter to the Philippians in about 62 AD in response to a financial gift that he had received from them. He wanted to thank them, and also to pass along the news that Epaphroditus (a member of the Philippian church) had recovered from

a serious illness (2:25-30), and that he was sending him back to them so that he could give them news of Paul.

II. The Servants (1:1a)

Second, let's notice the servants in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul's letter to the Philippians follows the typical format of a letter in the first century. The author was listed first, then the recipient, followed by a brief greeting.

Paul identified the authors in verse 1a when he wrote, **“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus....”** Philippians is one of thirteen letters written by **Paul** that have survived and are in the New Testament. **Timothy** is not really a co-author; he is rather a colleague, and most likely the secretary who received Paul's dictation. **Paul** made no mention here of his apostolic authority, but simply mentioned that he and **Timothy** were **servants of Christ Jesus**.

Speaking of his life before becoming a Christian, **Paul** wrote later in this letter in Philippians 3:4–11:

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that

which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul had amazing credentials. And yet, after his conversion to Christ, he counted them as rubbish. What he had viewed as great positives in his life, he now saw as a negative. He had come to receive a righteousness from God that is received by faith alone. And he was wonderfully converted!

Timothy also had received a righteousness from God that is received by faith alone. In fact, he was Paul's son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). He had become a cherished colleague and co-laborer in the gospel. Several years later, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, which survive and are in the New Testament as First and Second Timothy.

Paul said that he and Timothy were **servants of Christ Jesus**. The word “**servants**” (*douloi*) means “one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other.”² Ordinarily, it meant a person who was a slave of someone else. However, when Paul used it in his relationship to **Christ Jesus**, he meant to indicate that his service was one of permanent gratitude and devotion to his Lord and Savior. It reminds one of an Old Testament slave who refused to leave his Master, but would rather continue serving him. The Mosaic Law stated that “if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master

² Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever” (Exodus 21:5–6).

Even though Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while he was in prison in Rome, and therefore he was a prisoner of the Roman Empire, he did not view himself as a “prisoner of Rome.” No, he always viewed himself as belonging exclusively to Jesus Christ. He might be imprisoned *by* Rome but he belonged *to* Christ.

Do you view yourself as a **servant of Christ Jesus**? Do you see yourself as one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to Jesus, with your will being altogether consumed in the will of Jesus? Is your service one of permanent gratitude and devotion to your Lord and Savior?

III. The Saints (1:1b)

Third, let's observe the saints in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul addressed this letter **“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons”** (1:1b).

The Bible is clear that all Christians are **“saints.”** The Roman Catholic Church has a category for “saints” who are people who have met certain criteria. They are sort of “super Christians.” However, that is not what the Bible teaches. All Christians are **“saints.”** Biblically, a “saint” is simply a person who has been set apart by God for God. It has nothing to do with how good a person is; it has simply to do with the fact that a person now belongs to God.

And the reason Christians are **saints** is because they are ***in* Christ**. It is Christ's perfection, his righteousness that has been imputed (credited) to believers (Romans 4:22-24). I like

what John MacArthur says about this: “A Buddhist does not speak of himself as *in* Buddha, nor does a Muslim speak of himself as *in* Mohammed. A Christian Scientist is not *in* Mary Baker Eddy or a Mormon *in* Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. They may faithfully follow the teaching and example of those religious leaders, but they are not *in* them. Only Christians can claim to be *in* their Lord, because they have been made spiritually one with him (cf. Romans 6:1–11).”³

Paul addressed this letter not only to the saints but also to **“the overseers and deacons.”** The **overseers** are the elders in the church. They have the responsibility of teaching, shepherding, guarding, and protecting the saints. The **deacons** have the responsibility for the practical service in the church. Both **overseers and deacons** are to meet high spiritual qualifications that Paul would later set down in his letter to Timothy (in 1 Timothy 3:1-13). The primary distinction between **overseers and deacons** is that elders must be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).

I notice that Paul expects his letter to be read to the congregation, with all the saints, as well as the overseers and deacons present. Our Session was noticing just this week how many of our own members are absent from worship services each week. Brothers and sisters, overseers and deacons, this must not be so! “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (Hebrews 10:25a, *NIV84*).

IV. The Salutation (1:2)

And fourth, let’s examine the salutation in Paul’s letter to

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 15.

the Philippians.

Paul wrote in verse 2, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This was Paul’s common greeting in his letters to the churches (see Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:2; Colossians 1:2-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:2).

John MacArthur summarizes Paul’s meaning well: “The saving, eternal **grace** that is granted to penitent, believing sinners is the supreme divine gift, and everlasting **peace** is its greatest blessing. The source of both is **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. This salutation expresses Paul’s abiding love and concern for the faithful believers in Philippi and serves as an introduction to the many specific causes for rejoicing that he mentions throughout this tenderest of all his epistles.”⁴

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Philippians 1:1-2, let us rejoice that we are in Christ.

I mentioned earlier that the words “rejoice” and “joy” are found thirteen times in Philippians. However, the word “Christ” is found thirty-seven times in Philippians. No other noun occurs more than the word “Christ” in this letter. Philippians is about Christ. Christ is at the heart and center of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Philippians is about people in Christ (2:29; 3:1; 4:4, 10). Philippians is about people who are in fellowship of the gospel because they are in Christ. Philippians is about people who have found contentment in Christ (4:11).

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, 16.

And undergirding our relationship to Christ in Philippians is joy. See how Paul expresses it in various verses in Philippians:

- 1:4b: “making my prayer with joy”
- 1:18b: “Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice”
- 1:25b: “your progress and joy in the faith”
- 2:2a: “complete my joy”
- 2:17-18: “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me”
- 2:28b: “that you may rejoice”
- 2:29: “So receive him in the Lord with all joy”
- 3:1a: “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord”
- 4:1a: “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown”
- 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice”

Kent Hughes notes, “Philippians evokes a particular joy. It is the joy *of* Christ and joy *from* Christ. It is a joy that effervesces in the dark places of life. It is available for those ‘in Christ,’ who stand together as they partner in the fellowship of the gospel.”⁵

Let us ask God to enhance our experience of this joy in our study of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Amen.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, 21.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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