

Slaves of Christ Jesus

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Well, I know I always say that we're really delighted that you're here with us almost every time, a version of that when I step into the pulpit, but I'm sincere when I say this morning that we're really delighted that you're with us and delighted to be able to open the word of God with you.

I invite you to turn to the book of Philippians which we are studying verse by verse, and in some cases word by word as we go through it here. The book of Philippians 1 is going to be our text for this morning, it's where we will find our text. We're addressing this morning a most practical and most important matter that is brought to us by the terminology that we find in the opening greeting of this letter. Chapter 1, verse 1 reads as follows,

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a couple of words in there that I just point out to you as we start here this morning. The word "bond-servants," which as we'll see in a moment literally means slaves, "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus," and ending there in verse 2 with the idea of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Master, the Master and the slave, the one with authority and the one who obeys. We are slaves of Christ Jesus if we are true Christians and that's what we need to consider here this morning and, beloved, what I would have you understand and what I want you to come to grips with this morning is the fact that we need to think rightly about ourselves in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to those of you who are Christians. We need to have a clarity, a clarity of what the nature of that relationship is. As our Elder Chairman said in his opening remarks here, that this is so critical for us to distinguish a right view of our relationship to Christ compared to the view that God is there for us as kind of a genie in a bottle for us to rub and come out and do our bidding when we're in trouble, and then to serve us, and then move back into the shade when we have gotten him to do what we want him to do. Beloved, that general mindset which we are talking about in detail on our Tuesday studies, that general mindset of God being the one who is at our beck and call is a complete reversal of what the reality of the Christian life is and of what true religion is, if I can put it that way. You see, Jesus Christ bought his elect with his shed blood at the cross, and because he bought us, he

owns us. We belong to him. He rescued us from our prior master, the devil. He rescued us from a prior bondage in order to bring us into his service, and we are to think about ourselves as continually positionally in submission to him and under his authority because he is Lord. The word "Lord" means nothing to you if you do not recognize that that means that he has authority over your life, authority over your affections, authority over your actions, authority over your thoughts. Scripture says that we are even to bring every thought into obedience to Christ. So our thoughts, our words, our actions, everything that we love is brought under the authority of Christ when we become Christians, and we need to understand the nature of that relationship and in the context of the book of Philippians, what this does for us is when this becomes clear to us, then and only then do we have a mindset for going through and understanding the rest of the book of Philippians that we're going to be studying over the next several months, but we must get it right from the start, that when we are reading the book of Philippians as believers in Christ, we're not reading a suggestion manual to us for us to take or leave and to take what we like and to discard the rest. No, no, this is the authoritative word of the Master to his servants that is to be received and implemented and obeyed with a glad and willing heart, and you can do that best when you understand the nature of the relationship between the Christian and his Lord, and that's what we want to look at this morning.

We saw last time that the framing verses, the beginning and the end of Philippians gives us a right and proper perspective of how we should think about the nature of things. Look at chapter 1, verse 2 with me again. Philippians 1:2 says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," and then at the end, the very last verse in Philippians says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit," the idea being that this book from beginning to end is an extension of the grace of Christ to his people; that his favor is being mediated through these words. So Paul is commending the grace of Christ to the people of Christ and in between is all of the instruction about Christ and about the proper response to Christ that would allow us to dwell and to live in the light and the flow and the wonder of that undeserved favor that he has given to us. So we come as servants to receive it but we also realize that we're coming to a gracious Master who has given us his word through his servant, the Apostle Paul. So that's kind of giving us a little bit of a reset as we get started here this morning.

Now look at verse 1 with me again and just a comment about the opening statement here, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus." Paul joints Timothy with him in his opening greeting because Timothy was with him when he wrote this letter. You'll see in chapter 2 that Paul said he's looking to send Timothy to the Philippians as soon as he sees how things go for him in his prison, but one of the things just kind of in passing that we would note is the fact that Paul joins Timothy in this greeting does not mean that Timothy is a joint author with him of the epistle, as though they were writing it and both of their names would be credited for the content of what is said. Paul, if you look in verse 3 of chapter 1, he immediately shifts to the first person singular, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, in my every prayer for you all." Verse 6, "I am confident of this very thing," and on it goes. He writes in the first person singular indicating that Paul is simply graciously including Timothy because he is geographically present with him, but the content of what is said is mediated through Paul who was an appointed apostle of

Christ in a way that Timothy was not, and even further, you can find that reinforced for you in the second chapter of Philippians, maybe I said this already, but Paul refers to Timothy in the third person in chapter 2. So Paul is not thinking that, "Timothy is writing this letter with me," Paul is exercising his apostolic authority from Christ and communicating what he has to say to the church at Philippi.

So that gives us an orientation for what comes next when he says there in chapter 1, verse 1, look at it with me again, it's always so good to keep your eyes on the text whenever possible, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus." Now beloved, in America it's not easy to say the things that we have to say about this word "bond-servant" because what it really means and communicates is the idea of slavery. To American ears, that is very very offensive because of the history of our country and even within the church, so much of the social justice brouhaha that is going on in different places dealing with the issues of social matters and racial justice and all of that. What I want you to do today so that you can best receive the word of God is to set all of the stuff about American history aside from your mind and let's simply look at what Scripture says about the nature of being a bond-servant, or being a slave of Jesus Christ, and what it is that we are to make of this term that Scripture uses repeatedly.

Now and just by way of preface, for us to be – and I'm going to explain this more and unpack this, this is just kind of a preliminary overview statement – you know, we're conditioned to resist this word, the idea of slavery, of service, of obedience, of ownership. We are conditioned by that in our American mindset, our American culture, our individualistic ways. You know, we have our Bill of Rights and you can be you and you deserve a break today, and everything me, me, me, and everything independent. I mean, you know, spouses don't even want to really be joined to each other in so many instances because we just want to preserve our independence at all costs. So people don't want to get married, they'd rather live together and preserve their options and, beloved, what we have to realize is that all of that stuff that just informs the environment in which we live and move and have our being, all of that stuff is contrary to the nature of what it means to belong to Christ and to serve him, and I want to make a preliminary comment here that should be so evident and so powerful and so persuasive to you as soon as it is pointed out to you. To belong to Christ, to be a slave of Christ, to be owned by someone like that is the greatest privilege and the greatest position that anyone could own. It is far better to be a slave of Christ and to belong to him than to have this mistaken knowledge that you are an independent free-agent actor who can do whatever you want. That's not freedom, that's not even true because you're either a slave of Christ or you're a slave of the devil. There's, you know, we're created and fallen beings and so it's not like we're the master of our own destiny anyway. None of us are the master of our own destiny. We are subject to things that are beyond our control and so for us, what we need to think is that if we are slaves of Christ in the way that I'm going to describe here this morning, if we are, and we are, what we need to see is that that is a place of highest privilege because to belong to the highest one in the universe, to belong to a good Master like the Lord Jesus Christ, a gracious Master who lay down his life for us, to belong to him, to be owned by him, to be under his authority is the greatest position, is the greatest position of privilege and position that anyone could have, and if we take that mindset to it, then we can

separate ourselves from the pollution of our environment in the 21st century and start to have the very idea of what it means to be a Christian. What we're seeing this month in these opening verses is we're seeing things that define for us the very nature of what it means to be a Christian and to be a Christian, my friend, is so much more than simply to have your sins forgiven and to have some vague sense of, "Well, I'm not going to go to hell when I die." That's such a meager conception of the richness of what it means to be redeemed. Christ redeemed you to own you. Scripture says you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your body. The purchase of Christ of your soul with the price of his own blood, has implications now for your relationship to him; the way that you conceive your position in life; the way you conceive your position in the universe; the way you conceive what it is that drives what you do and think and say, and all of this we're going to see is wrapped up in a good understanding of what it means to be a slave of Christ Jesus.

So I want to lay out four aspects of this for you this morning, and that's right, we're basically going to go one word into the text here today, four if you count "Paul and Timothy" which I've already handled, but first of all, I just want to address this, the nature of slavery. The nature of slavery as it's presented to us in Scripture. Now back in February 2016, I did a message that you can look up if you want to explore this topic further titled "Slavery in New Testament Times," and I explained that the first century institution of slavery should not be associated with American history or other violent excesses that have taken place over the course of time in other places, and I'm not even going to begin to review all of that with you, simply to point out that it's out there. What I want to focus on here this morning is this and to clarify this really vital matter for us all: what is the relationship, biblically speaking, between the slave and the master who owns him? What is the nature of that relationship particularly from the perspective of the slave, the bond-servant? It's translated bond-servant in the New American Standard, it's translating a word in the Greek that is "doulos." The Greek term is *doulos* and over and over again as you look at the lexical resources of the Greek language, you will find them saying, making statements along these lines. A *doulos* is, and I quote from one lexical source in particular, a *doulos* is – listen to this, are you ready, are you ready for this, Josh, are you ready? "A *doulos* is owned property that is totally and unquestioningly at the behest of the owner." The point is that the *doulos* is someone that is owned by his master, and the master has complete authority over his slave. That's the point. There is a related verb in the Greek called *douloo*, same cognate term, and *douloo* means "to function in total obedience to a master." So you have a *doulos* which is a slave who is totally owned by his master and subject to the beck and call of what his master wants him to do, and what does a *doulos* do? He *duoloo's*, you could say. He functions in total obedience to a master. The master owns the slave and what the slave does is he functions in complete obedience to his master. A slave owed exclusive and absolute obedience to the one who owned him.

Now right from the start, right from the start we start to realize that this term and this concept is starting to bring a cleavage between biblical reality and the way so many people think about and approach the Christian life, and even if they wouldn't articulate it like this, they live as people who practically pick and choose the commands of Christ

revealed in Scripture that they'll obey. "I'll obey what I want to obey, and the other things I'll compromise on and I'll do what I want, and I'll still claim the mantle of being a Christian." Well, beloved, in that mindset which I described just so very briefly and coarsely even, who is the ultimate master in a situation like that when someone is living like that, when that is their mindset? Christ is not your Lord when, in essence, you're saying, "Christ will be Lord when I say He's Lord," as if you're reserving final authority and a final decision about matters to yourself when it's no longer to your pleasing. This is not the nature of the relationship between a Christian and Christ, nor could it be. Christ is completely sovereign. He is the ruler of the universe and therefore when he saves someone, he saves them and brings them under the realm of that authority that he exercises that is rightfully his as the eternal Son of God and the Creator of the world and all that it contains. So we need to think differently about this and consider the nature of slavery as it's presented in the New Testament.

Look for a moment at Matthew 6, where we see the idea of serving a master laid out for us, and laying out in the words of Christ, the very nature of what it means to have a master over you. He says in Matthew 6:24, he says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth," Christ says. What I want you to see from that is just the nature of obedience to a master. When the nature of being a slave is that you are property that is owned totally by an owner, when the nature of service as a slave is to function in total obedience to a master, Christ says it's obvious, then, that you can't have two. You can't have two masters in conflict and be serving them both because you're going to have to choose between one or the other, and so you can't be a slave to multiple masters, you're a slave to one, and to the one master you owe exclusive and absolute obedience.

Turn over a page in your Bible to Matthew 8. Chapter 8. Jesus was dealing with a Roman centurion, the captain of a contingent of soldiers, and the centurion wanted the Lord to come down and to heal one of his own servants and Jesus said to him in chapter 8, verse 7, he said, "I will come and heal him." And in verse 8, the centurion is making a statement about authority and he says, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." Remember, he's making a statement about authority, I said, and here's where you see that in verse 9. He says, "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." The nature of slavery as a military commander, the nature of slavery as a master was you give your word and it is obeyed by the one under your authority. "I say to my slave, 'Do it,' and he does it," because that's the nature of slavery. There is this complete obedience to the master that is manifested in the slavery relationship, and what he's saying in this context just by way of passing, is he's saying, "Lord, You have authority over disease. If You'll just say the word, then my servant will be healed because I know You have authority to do that, and the disease will respond to Your command, and when You command, the disease goes away and my servant will be healed. You don't need to come to my house, just speak and Your authority is enough to bring to pass what I'm asking You to do." And he says, "I understand that because I have authority and I'm under

authority. My superior tells me to do something, I do it. I tell soldiers under me, I tell my slaves to do this or do that, and they go and do it." That's the way authority works in this context.

Now we can take this a little bit further as we consider the nature of slavery in our first point this morning. Turn to the Gospel of Luke 17 and in Luke 17:7, our Lord says this, he says, "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him," will not the master say to the slave, "'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" Now the point here, beloved, is this as we consider the nature of slavery, I want to keep in mind what we're talking about here, what the nature of slavery is this, is that the slave puts his master's instructions ahead of himself. The slave puts the needs of his master ahead of his own and that's what Jesus is expressing. The slave comes out from the field, he might be tired, he might be hungry, but his first responsibility is to serve what his master wants, to serve what his master commands, and then to care for himself. His master comes ahead of himself, in other words, and that's the nature of being a slave, is that the slave puts his master ahead of himself. We'll come back to this, but beloved, for you as a Christian, what this means is that you put Christ ahead of yourself. You put the demands of Christ ahead of your own needs. You put the glory of Christ ahead of your own. You put the advance of his kingdom ahead of your own personal interests. That's what a slave does. It's the nature of the relationship that the slave owes the master that kind of unquestioning allegiance and service and devotion.

Now conversely, looking at it from the master's perspective, look at Matthew 18. One of the aspects of being the master over a slave in biblical times was that the master – I'll give you a moment as you turn there and we're taking our time. Why are we taking such time on this? Beloved, we're taking our time because this is so very foundational. This informs everything about the way that you consider what it means to be a Christian and how you live your life going forward from this point on, and nothing could be more important than that. So it's worthy of our time to consider this carefully and to think rightly about the nature of our relationship to Christ.

Matthew 18:27. You'll recall that Jesus told the parable to illustrate the point that we are to forgive long and freely and Jesus said, "Forgive seven times 70," in verse 22, "this is how you are to forgive," and he proceeds to tell a parable about the nature of the kingdom of heaven. Verse 23 he says, "the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made." The Lord had authority to sell that slave in order to get the debt paid back that he was owed. Now that was his right. That was the command that he issued. In verse 26, "the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before

him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'" And in verse 27, "the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." The slave had no right to demand the forgiveness of that debt. He pleaded for compassion and his master gave it to him. He could have sold him. He chose instead to forgive the debt illustrating the fact that that master had the full and unqualified and uncompromised ability to do with that slave but he wanted to do. When the slave later went out and was unforgiving toward someone who owed him a lesser debt, you see in verse 34, "his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." So beloved, here is the point: he could command him to be sold, he could freely forgive his debt, he could send him to prison to be punished, all of this indicating and illustrating the fact that a master had full rights to do with that slave what he wanted to do. He could do that and there was no higher authority to question or to contradict that to him and the slave was under the authority of his master in that way. The doulos, that was what the essence of being a slave meant, you were owned by someone else, you owed your master exclusive and absolute obedience, you put your master's needs ahead of your own, and that master has full rights of what to do with you and it is an unlimited right for him to do what he wants.

Now that's the earthly picture of slavery and when we step into the spiritual realm, we see how that's obviously the case with Christ. Christ is the highest authority in all of the universe. Taking it down to a personal level, not only does he have that authority by the very nature of his essence as God, he bought you, he redeemed you, as we saw two weeks ago. He bought you with the price of his own blood, delivered you from another master and brought you into his own care, his own service. So by right of his essence, by right of purchase, Christ owns you if you are a Christian and you are like a slave to him who owes him full obedience, exclusive devotion, that there is no other Master in your life who has competing claims on your affection.

Now this may be different than what being a Christian has been described in other places, but this is where Scripture points us and with that background in mind, return to Philippians 1 now so that we can have a greater sense of appreciation for the significance of what Paul says in his opening comments here. He says in Philippians 1, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants," slaves, "of Christ Jesus." Do you realize suddenly how the opening words of that verse explode in significance upon your mind and upon your heart? Paul is writing as one who is under authority to his Master. He is writing and declaring that, "I owe complete allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ," and it's in that capacity as a servant, as a slave that he wrote this letter.

Let's go to a second point here. This is really kind of a weird point because I'm making a statement to refute it in some ways as you'll see in a moment, but let's consider Paul as a slave and remember, if you will, remember, if you will, when he was confronted on the road to Damascus and the Lord appeared to him and he fell before him and he said, "Lord, what will You have me do? What would You have me do, Lord?" Right from the very beginning he is expressing submission. He is expressing a recognition that whoever it is that possesses this blinding light that has driven him to the ground, has complete authority over him, and the question of authority was settled in his life right from the very

beginning when Christ appeared to him, when Christ saved him. Paul from that moment going forward was under Christ's authority and what that means as a slave, beloved, is this: is that Paul had no independent rights that were separate and apart from Christ that he could assert over against his Master, as if he was endowed with a spiritual Bill of Rights that protected him from things that the Master would have him to do that maybe Paul didn't want to do. It wasn't like that. That's not the nature of slavery. You are under that master's possession, his control, his ownership. So Paul had no independent rights and he's expressing that as he writes to the Philippians in a way that will become significant a little bit later on. That's the nature of slavery.

Now you may not realize this, you can read some resources from some good men who will say that Paul was not expressing at this point when he called himself a slave of Christ, he was not expressing a posture of humble obedience. They say rather what Paul was doing was he was referring to the way that the prophets of God and the leading men of God were named in the Old Testament, and so because, and the reason for this is in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the word "doulos" is used sometimes to describe the great spokesmen of God. Now follow with me here, this doesn't get any more technical than this. So in the Greek Old Testament which was translated about 200 years before the time of the New Testament was written and therefore it helps inform how words are used and how we're to understand words that are used in the Greek New Testament, you'll see Moses described as a doulos of God in Nehemiah 10:29. Joshua is described as a doulos of God in Joshua 24:29. David is described as a doulos of God in Psalm 89:20. And the term as used in the Old Testament, was describing them as those who were serving God by being his great spokesmen and his great leaders and had had this aspect of authority and position that was used. So the idea among some commentators, some men who I really love the work that they've done, they'll say here that Paul when he calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus in Philippians 1:1, they'll say Paul was not expressing submission, that wasn't his point, what they say instead and this is all going to come together in just a little bit and just fit together and you're gonna say, "Wow, now I understand why he did this, because it seemed like such an irrelevant tangent." This is not a tangent. They'll say Paul was not expressing submission but asserting privilege, and so just as Moses and David and Joshua were privileged authoritative spokesmen of God, the idea is that Paul here is saying, "I have an honored position among God's people and I write to you and therefore you need to listen and obey." Okay, now look that's not a bad irrational position, if it was, some of these men who hold it wouldn't hold it but, beloved, this is really critical for you to understand, the idea that Paul was asserting privilege, asserting privilege when he calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus in Philippians 1:1, that can't possibly be correct. It is, in fact, I'll go so far as to say it is precisely the opposite of what Paul is intending to express as he opens this letter.

What does it mean that Paul was a slave? He says he's under Christ's authority but he's not saying, "I'm a great spokesman of God." That's the last thing that he would be saying at the start of a letter like this, as you will see as we move into our third point for this morning and that is: Christ as a slave. Christ as a slave. And one of the majestic realities about our Lord Jesus Christ is that though he is Lord over all, Scripture describes him as

a slave in obedience to his own Father and nothing, nothing could elevate the privilege and the position of being a slave to Christ than to realize that he went before us in slavery himself. Point 3 and point 2 are kind of mutually interdependent here. Paul is a slave, Christ is a slave. Here's the point, beloved, the point of biblical interpretation of hermeneutics, a principle of interpretation: what you want to do when you see a word that is used in a passage, a unique and important word, you want to see what's the surrounding context about this word to help inform my understanding of it. Here in Philippians 1, there is not a lot of context because he uses it right out of the gate, but another aspect of interpretation is that you ask this question, how is this word used elsewhere in the same four corners of the letter of the book in which it appears. Oh, that matters because now all of a sudden if there's another appearance of the word "doulos" in Philippians and that's going to tell us an awful lot about what Paul is saying and what he intended in chapter 1, verse 1, isn't it? You can agree with me, sure, that's fine. Here's the point as it compares to point 2, that's going to tell us more than the secondary ideas that come from the Old Testament if Paul is not using those in what he says in this letter. Now here's why this matters, and all of a sudden it gets really profoundly clear and profoundly important: Paul uses the word "doulos" one other time in the book of Philippians and he uses it to describe Jesus Christ.

Look at Philippians 2:5. You'll notice if you've been paying attention, that we go to this passage often as we are discussing Philippians, as we are teaching out of Philippians. It's because it's such a crucial crucial passage. Chapter 2, verse 5, just follow along here, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant," the form of a slave, "and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Now beloved, follow me here because the implications of this go everywhere, what we're talking about right here, right now, the implications of this go everywhere, not just in Philippians but in the way that we think about the totality of the Christian life. Paul says that Christ took the form of a doulos. He took the nature of a slave. He took upon himself the nature of a slave and the contrast is this, Christ although he existed in the form of God, even though he was by very nature God himself dwelling in glory in heaven, he emptied himself, he stepped down from that exalted glory that he had without sacrificing or setting aside his deity, which he could never do; what Christ did was he humbled himself and he stepped into a role that he didn't have before. He became a man. Look at verse 7 there, he "emptied Himself," he humbled himself by, "taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men." Beloved, when Christ was dwelling in pre-Incarnate glory, for him to become a man, for him to take on human flesh, for him to go to the manger in Bethlehem, that was a great big step down. That was not Christ asserting his privilege. That was not Christ asserting his glory. This was Christ humbling himself and taking on a spirit of obedience in order to live and to carry out the ministry that the Father had given him to fulfill before the beginning of time. In great glory, he steps down and takes on the form of a slave. In Philippians, doulos is taking the position of humble obedience, not asserting privilege, and so as a doulos what Christ did was he obeyed the divine plan of salvation.

I want to show you a few verses in the Gospel of John. Turn to John 6, and all of these different threads are going to come together in the end. John 6:38. Remember we said that a slave owed total obedience to his master and Christ speaks about yielding his will to the Father. He says in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Christ is on earth as a slave serving the will of another, not asserting his will against the Father, not asserting his human will against the plan of God the Father.

John 8:29, and we can even go to verse 28. Jesus said in John 8:28, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." "I speak what I have been given. I do the things that please My Father. I am in submission to Him."

One final verse in John 14:31. John 14:31. He wants the world to know, he says, "that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me." Christ has taken on the form of obedience, and to whom is he being obedient? He is being obedient to his Father. What did the Father do? The Father established the plan of salvation, the divine plan of salvation before the beginning of time, and Jesus Christ had a role to play in that as co-designer of this eternal plan of salvation. He puts himself under the Father's authority and he comes to earth and what does he do with his Father's will, with this plan of salvation that has been assigned to him to accomplish for his people? What did Christ do? He complied fully. He submitted completely. He followed absolutely even when it meant that it would bring death to him. You'll recall how he prayed in the garden, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me," but in an act, in the greatest act of self-surrender of one's will to another, Christ who was about to personally bear the wrath of God against all of his elect for all of time, Christ going to personally bear that himself and knowing that it comes at great personal cost to him, says, "Father, nevertheless not My will but Thine be done." His will, his human will is submitted to the Father's will. He obeyed like a slave to his Father, obeyed like a slave in the sense that he gave absolute, unconditional, full, complete, glad-hearted, conscious, yielding obedience to the one who had laid it out before him.

Christ obeyed as a slave like that, beloved, and his obedience, the fullness of his obedience brings salvation to us. His obedience provides the righteousness upon which you and I are justified because his full obedience to the Father is credited to our account when we put our faith in him. You are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by works of your own. We rely on the righteousness of Christ to save us, not our own. His obedience qualified him to be our spotless Lamb who substituted himself, who offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins, the blameless, spotless, unblemished Lamb of God sacrificed for us because he was acting in obedience to the divine plan of salvation. He was an obedient slave to what had been set for him.

With those things in mind, go back to Philippians again with me and we'll kind of retrace our steps, kind of reverse engineer our path. We went from Philippians to John, now we're going to go from John to Philippians 2 and find our way back here to see the nature of the slavery that Christ himself exercised. Look at it with me again. We don't mind reading this a thousand times if it will bring us to a greater understanding of our Lord. Philippians 2:5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped," he was equal with God but he didn't assert that to his own benefit, verse 7, "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant," the form of a slave, "and being made in the likeness of men." Now watch where it goes, it says in verse 8, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." His slavery was a position of humility and his position of humility led him to full obedience even to the point of personal death. That's how complete and absolute his slavery was. That thought of slavery helps us understand what Paul was saying about himself when he said that, "I am a slave of Christ Jesus." He's not asserting privilege here. If he was asserting privilege, it would completely contradict what he later says about Christ. *Doulos* was not an assertion of privilege, it was a place of humility and obedience and submission. "I am writing as in complete submission to the Lord Jesus Christ." You go into chapter 2, Christ gives his life on the cross in full complete submission to the Father, and there is a divine consistency engendered by the work of the Holy Spirit to bring these things into complete conformity and harmony with one another. Paul wouldn't be asserting privilege and then saying Christ didn't assert privilege when he uses the same word to describe himself and to describe what Christ did in obedience to his Father.

So Paul is writing with a conscious recognition that his life was not his own, that he was under the authority of Christ and that he owed Christ complete obedience just as Christ became obedient to the point of death to his Father. That helps us understand what slavery is and how it applies in, you know, the key figures in Philippians, Christ and Paul. That brings us to our fourth point and now it gets really practical, it gets really personal, and now all of this stuff about *doulos* steps right into your kitchen and starts evaluating all of your recipes and all of the cooking that you do in your kitchen; all the way that you live life and the way that you think about yourself and the way that you think about Christ is suddenly brought into play here. You see, beloved, it is not just that Paul and Christ were slaves, that is our status. That's who we are in Christ, we are his slaves.

Look at chapter 2, verse 5 again. I skipped over this at the start but now we come to what Paul's point was as he wrote these things. Chapter 2, verse 5, he says, writing to these Christians at that church in Philippi, he said, "You have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." He's commanding an attitude, a mind disposition toward life and he uses Christ to illustrate it and says Christ humbled himself and took on the form of a slave and became obedient even to the point of death, and he says what Christ did and what Christ's attitude is, that's to be your attitude as a Christian, an attitude predominated by humility, of obedience, a perspective on life that you are not your own but that you belong to another, and what that does, beloved, what that does is it frames the entire way

that you think about life if you are a Christian. It frames your life in a spirit of surrender and obedience.

Look at Romans 12:11. Paul is giving a string of commands here, in seeming passing he says in verse 10, Romans 12:10, he says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit," here it is, "serving the Lord," the verb form of *doulos*. Serving him, the idea, continually live life in total obedience to your Master. In Colossians 3:24 it says, "It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." Same verb, serving in total obedience to your Master. Beloved, beloved, this is expressed even in the way that Christ commands us to pray. Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come," what? "Your will be done." "My will subordinate to Yours. You are the Master, therefore Your will be done."

Now how does he exercise his authority over us, then? Well, we could put it this way, Christ asserts his authority, asserts his ownership over you, first of all, through the word of God, the authoritative word of God so that we come to God's word and we are under its authority. We realize that that is expressing the mind of Christ. Christ affirmed the Old Testament and he authorized the New Testament to be written by his apostles. The word of God, the 66 books of the Bible are an expression of his authority to his people and what the word says is our law, our response to the word of God is to be one of obedience, one of submission, one of subjection. He has declared his will in his word and that's why we spend so much time in the word of God here at Truth Community Church.

It plays out in another way and you say, "Okay, I get that part. How does this play out in my day-to-day life, then?" Well, beloved, remembering that the same Lord who was a slave is the one who says he works all things after the counsel of his will, beloved, where you are at in your life is the place where Christ is now exercising his authority and calling you to respond to him as an obedient servant, an obedient slave, and that means that you love him in the midst of your present circumstances, it means that where the word of God takes bear on things that you're facing in life, you adopt a posture of obedience to the word of God whether or not you feel like it, whether or not it seems to be in your own self personal interest, because you're not here in this life to advance your own interests, you're here to advance the interests of your Master and he has given you this life that you have right now with all of its opportunities and difficulties and everything else, and to take his word and to apply it to your life in those circumstances and to live in a glad obedience to him. You see, beloved, you belong to him. He's in charge of your life. He's orchestrated your circumstances and he owns you and he uses you as he sees fit, and that means that you respond in submission, not resentment; you respond in glad obedience, not defiance or sin; you subordinate your flesh to his Spirit.

We could say it another way. What this means is that for the true Christian, obedience is not an optional addition to the Christian life as if you were upgrading the model of car that you wanted so that you got leather seats rather than fabric. "Oh, I like this. I'll just be the basic model of a Christian, and maybe later on I'll upgrade to obedience." No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. That's not how you respond to your Master. Your Master is entitled to your complete undivided loyalty and obedience and that is intrinsic

to being a Christian. That is the very nature of what it means to belong to the Lord so that our mindset as true Christians is, "I belong to Him. He has complete claim on all of my allegiance and obedience and there is not to be an accepted defiant bone in my body. I am Thine, O Lord, have Your way with me."

This obedience is not for you to earn your salvation but to display it. Look at Philippians 2 here as we're about to close. Philippians 2:12, just after, just after Paul had described Christ as a slave and his obedience to the Father, and he prefaced it and said, "You have this attitude like Christ had." Now he goes into verse 12 and he applies it to his readers, he applies it to us and he says in verse 12, "So then, my beloved," here's the implication of it, "just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." He says just as you've always obeyed, now obey like this. You've seen that Christ was a slave and he obeyed to the point of death, you have that attitude in yourselves, what's the implication of it? Obedience in the life that he has given to you. Beloved, the Master saved you to make you his slave.

Now, the nature of Christ, remember we said this letter is framed in grace, grace to you, grace to you. He's a gracious Master. He loved us and gave himself up for us. This is the most blessed privileged position to belong to one who loves you, who is gracious toward you, but you are not to buck against that for the sake of your own self-will. Your will is surrendered to him. He gave you his life so that the life that you now have would be given to serve him right here.

Beloved, as we study the book of Philippians more in future months, I want you to understand something really important. To the best of my ability, it frames the way that I preach every time I step into a pulpit and it needs to frame the way that you receive God's word in your life. We're not gathering together here simply to dispense information and facts and figures with one another. Knowledge puffs up, love edifies. When we study God's word, God's word is giving us instruction from our Master that we might obey it, that we might respond in glad-hearted, full, loving obedience to him that says, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" Christ was a slave, Paul was a slave, and in the Christian life we follow their noble steps with the way that we think about our Master. Our grateful response will frame our future study.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Throughout this message I have spoken to Christians but there are non-Christians in the room and I would just declare to you that the Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, calls you to himself. He calls you into a loving response where you receive him as your Lord, as your all, as your righteousness, to set aside your autonomy and self-will and to give yourself over completely that you might belong to him by faith. Christ calls you in love. He commands you in grace to come to him, my non-Christian friend. Come to him and be saved. Come to him and belong to him in this way that we have described here today. You'll find that he is the most gracious, loving Master, far more than your wildest

thoughts could ever conceive as you sit here today. Just obey his call, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Father, for the rest of us, we present ourselves as Your slaves, as Your servants, ready, willing to obey. We pray that just as You have bought us, that You would continue to exercise Your ownership over us in a way that displays Your glory whatever the consequences for us personally might be. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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