

Order of Worship for 5/26/13, title, “Saints and Servants, text, Philippians 1:1-2

Opening Song  
Welcome

Invocation: Isaiah 43:10-13  
Ministry Moment:

Message Theme: We are saved to be holy; we are saved to serve; we are saved to be part of a local assembly of believers

Worship Theme: Praising and thanking God for freeing us from sin and equipping us to serve

**Opening Song:**

“We Bow Down”

Song # 154

**Welcome**

**Invocation:**

Isaiah 43:10-13

**Special Music:** “You Raise Me Up” by Tara Wixom

**Ministry Moment:** Memorial Day, Ruth Bowen

**Offering and Offertory**

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

“10,000 Reasons (bless the Lord)” overhead

“Take Time to Be Holy” Song # 656

“Freely, Freely” Song # 436

**Message:**

“Saints and Servants”  
Philippians 1:1-2 Pastor John Bronson

**Closing Song:**

“Give Thanks”

Song # 170

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:**

5:30 pm, in the EFC Library  
Study in 1 Peter 2:11-26

Sunday Evening in the Word  
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library  
(Study in 1 Peter 2:11-26)



“The Prayer Closet”

May 26, 2013

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*  
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Moore, Oklahoma:** A special prayer request comes today in response to the devastating tornados which have brought destruction to Moore, OK. If the Lord prompts you, please make donations by check or cash to "EFC" with "tornado" in the memo area or on the blue envelope. May Christ's love bring healing and hope to those broken by the terrible storms.

**Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries:** the Lord will open doors of opportunity for EFCA missionaries around the world and especially in places of violence and fear; the Spirit will give wisdom and power to speak the truth in love; the Father will be pleased to draw many to faith in Jesus

**President Obama:** the Spirit will open his mind to the danger of self-righteousness and lead him to review and re-evaluate his basic perceptions as to what is good and true; the Lord will surround him with men and women of true Christian faith

**The Elders:** the Spirit will lead them to a clear consensus on the future direction for additional staffing for the church to strengthen and expand our ministries; the Lord will press home to them the spiritual needs of the congregation and give wisdom for meeting those needs

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** Tim Hammonds, Air Force (son of Tom and Cindy): for strength and endurance; that he use his down time productively.

**Young Adult of the Week:** Joshua and Lina Bronson (son and daughter-in-law of John and Nini): that they find a new 2 room flat close to his new teaching position; that all goes smoothly to finish his doctorate later this year; that his family is able to realize their goal to move to the U.S. after finishing his doctorate.

**Please pray for our homebound family members:** Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly  
(please call the office to request updates)

Today we begin a new series on having finally finished I thought we could plunge on ahead looking at “Saints and Servants”. This is a study in Philippians and we are going to be looking at verses 1 & 2. I am going to see if I can preach as long in Philippians as I did in John! I encourage you to take out of your bulletin the insert of the slides and questions as I think it does help for following along with the message. (The questions are printed at the end of this message.)

I hope that you have had opportunity at one time or another to read through this little letter. It is not long but it is rich in its content. It is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the first church that he planted in Europe. You can look in Acts 16 and get the account of his arrival there and his travel into the province of Macedonia and coming to the town of Philippi. Philippi was technically a Roman Colony. It had been a city before, but the Romans had come in and had established Philippi as a center for their military and political control over that portion of what we today call Greece. It was a significant city for the rule of Rome, but otherwise it was not a particularly significant city. You can understand, however, when you read Acts 16 why the people in Philippi were very sensitive to Roman law. When they realized that they had mistreated Paul and Silas and Paul was a Roman citizen, they were very anxious because they had broken the laws of Rome and they feared a close investigation. I encourage you to go and look at Acts 16 with that background.

Looking at the letter itself, Paul begins the letter in his typical way. He writes, Philippians 1:1-2, *“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* If you go and read all the letters that Paul wrote you would see that that is very similar to how he writes all his letters.

First impressions are important, as I suspect most of us know. But when you have visited a place many, many times and have become familiar with it, or with a person, or in a case like this have become familiar with the letter, those first impressions can fade, covered over by other impressions and thoughts and associations that we gather up over time. So that is why I want to take time to look at verses 1 and 2 and say to ourselves, what does he actually say to us in these first two verses. What is it we meet when we look at even this brief first statement?

*“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Our interest in this ancient letter derives principally from the fact that we understand ourselves to be servants of Christ Jesus as the Philippians were. That is why it is in the Bible and that is why we read the Bible, and that is why we are gathered together here today, unless someone here is inquiring, you’re thinking about what it might mean to be a Christian. But for those of us who are “in Christ”, the interest of this letter is because it is written by a man who was dedicated to Jesus Christ. If that is not the case, then our interest in the letter would be of a very different sort if there is any at all. But just think about this: here is a document written approximately two thousand years ago and it was written by a man who at the time was so obscure as to be virtually invisible to the powers that ruled the world. They would have no idea who Paul was. Eventually Paul was dragged before Caesar at the end of his life, but otherwise they would not have had a clue as to who this man was. At this point there were on the outside there may have been fifty thousand Christians in the world. The Roman Empire numbered upwards of five million people and upwards from that. This was a nobody! He is just a nobody and he is representing a sect, a minor religion new on the scene and there were at this time in the Roman Empire hundreds of religions –

I kid you know – all kinds of gods and goddesses were worshiped: this is a nobody! As I have mentioned, he writes to a small gathering of people, probably numbered maybe thirty, in a town of relatively significance. So why on earth do we read this thing? Well, even if you are not a Christian, there is still something quite remarkable about this letter: that is, the man who writes this letter in less than three hundred years would become one of the most well-known people in the Roman Empire, because the religion about which he writes, which was a “non-presence” at the time, becomes the dominant religion of the entire Roman Empire. You think to yourself, well! Remember, there were no copy machines, no cars, no electronic devices!

The history of Christianity rightfully calls for our attention. What is very interesting, and I saw a wonderful email since I came home, which contrasted the way that Christianity spread across the face of the world, and the way Islam did. How many of you know how Christianity spread around the world? You all know. People walked around and talked. That is what they did. That is why I’m such a great guy, I know how to talk. That is what they did, they talked about Jesus, they talked about what God had done through Jesus Christ; they talked about the grace of God. And of course they demonstrated it. They demonstrated it in constant acts of love, in sacrificial acts of love. They endured tremendous suffering at the hands of others because they were persecuted in many different places at different times. But they persevered. How many know how Islam spread around the world? Do you know? It was by the sword, by slaughter, by the imposition of terror, by conquest, by the shedding of blood. Don’t forget it.

Coming back again to the letter, the letter opens in quite a remarkable way. There is a threefold naming of Jesus right at the beginning of the letter. In addition to that, even in so few words there is the additional words about the Father, who is, by the way, the Father of Jesus Christ. In that opening section Paul designates as servants of Jesus, and he also refers to us as saints in Jesus, and he also says that we receive grace and peace from Jesus. Do get a drift here; do we sense something going on? Absolutely. We realize that Paul is inescapably and even overwhelmingly a man centered, focused on Jesus Christ. That is the proper introduction to this letter, for this letter is a letter that is altogether focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, and asks us to make the same move, to be focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, in the anticipation that like those to whom he wrote, we shall be servants and saints who receive grace and peace through Jesus Christ. We might say to ourselves, well that is what you would expect in a letter written by an apostle of Jesus Christ to a group of people who were committed to Jesus Christ. True. The real question that we should ask ourselves is whether or not we are as focused on Jesus Christ as Paul and the Philippians were. I think the fact of the matter is that for most of us for most of the time not only is Jesus Christ – He sits on the edge – to what concerns and occupies us, but our calling and our responsibility as His servants is even less present to our thoughts. We are busy about worldly things. You might say that is just normal, but of course, Christians are not supposed to be just normal!

This raises a question: How focused are we, how focused am I, on Jesus? What this question really has to do with is the degree to which and how we go about integrating our faith with our life. Whenever you turn on any public form of media – you can look at magazines, but most of “turn things on”, the world starts telling you how to behave. Have you noticed? “Buy this, buy that, go here, go there, wear this, wear that: that is what it does all the time. So what you and I face is the face is the challenge of listening to God, the Holy Spirit, reminding us that God says, “I want you to say this, not say that, wear this, don’t wear that.” Really, would God have an opinion about what I wear? Yes: if you don’t believe me, read First Peter. Here is the challenge: how do we

manage to keep a focus on, or to change the metaphor, to be listening to what God wants to say to us in the midst of a culture that is saturated with message aimed at us, telling us how to live. How do we integrate faith with life? That is what this letter is going to talk about. There are a variety of moves we make internally in order to respond to this challenge. Sometimes we seek a balance: so much religion and so much secularism; so much time doing holy things and so much time attending to necessary things. That is one way of going about it. Maybe we just compartmentalize. There are many who do this; I understand it very well: on Sunday I'm a Christian and the rest of the week I do whatever I need to do to take care of necessary things. Or do we seek to permeate our secular lives with the awareness of the presence of God and the ultimate reality of His Word of truth?

Paul refers to the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ in two instructive ways; he says we are servants and he says we are saints. The first term is what we will concentrate on for a little while. Paul says of himself and Timothy, "We are servants of Christ Jesus." Recently I attended a Shepherd's Conference with our excellent principal Dr. Keene. The Shepherd's Conference is put on by John MacArthur in the Los Angeles area. MacArthur points out that the word translated "servant" is actually the word for "bond-slave". That is the actual word. He says there is a reason why we don't translate it "bond-slave". There are two issues for us when we think of slavery and slaves, but for Paul there was one issue. It is seeing that difference that will help us to understand why we are so reluctant to use this term "bond-slave", and of course by being reluctant we lose some of the meaning and perhaps the weight of the term. The essence of slavery in all instances is the loss of independence. Essentially that is what it means to be a slave: you are no longer your own master, you have lost your independence. By definition a slave has a master and is under the control of that master. So central is this to the concept of slavery that any time a person is under the control of something it can be referred to as "slavery". This is why all addictions are slavery. We have no trouble making that shift. A person can be enslaved to drink, enslaved to money, enslaved to pride. We understand the common use of the term in this way. But the concept of slavery gets tricky at this point. The slave lacks independence, or more precisely the slavery lacks the freedom to choose and do what he or she wants: we've got that, slavery. A slave is constrained by the master's will. But what if the master is actually internal, part of the person? Alcoholics are slaves to their own desires to drink. Workaholics are slaves of their need to work to assert and establish their self-esteem. In cases like that we realize that the loss of freedom or enslavement is really a loss of self-control. I am controlled by my desires rather than controlling my desires. This, by the way, is exactly what Paul describes in Romans 7:18-20. Most of us are familiar with these verses. Let me read them to you so you get them fresh to your mind. This is what Paul says, "...I have the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." What is Paul's condition? He is a slave! "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me." He cries out at the end of that passage, "Who is going to save me from this body of death?" Did you ever feel that way?

This raises a very powerful question, doesn't it? This is the question: What are we to think when a person doesn't want to be free? What are we to say or do when the sinner wants their sin?

I have done this specifically to capture our attention and understand that when deal with the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ, we are not dealing with cosmetic matters, matters that simply pass quickly over the skin and retain no lasting impression. Rather the truth of the gospel is

by the power of the Holy Spirit to be pressed into the deepest levels of our understanding, and it is to work on the transformation of the inner man so that you are altered from the inside out and we do not remain what we were. Long to change! Long, in other words, to put it in our vernacular, long for freedom. Of course, we still have some questions about that, don't we?

The other dimension of slavery – we will walk a little bit further in this issue of slavery – the dimension that Paul did not deal with but we deal with very powerfully, is that we slavery as degrading, dehumanizing. We almost inescapably associate slavery with racial prejudice. This is the sad heritage of our long oppression of the Blacks in particularly in our nation. That association is simply burned into our national consciousness. But in addition to that we view slavery as dehumanizing precisely because it entails the loss of personal freedom. For us in our culture, we consider personal freedom to be the very essence of one's dignity. The right to choose your own direction, the right to make your own choices, to be self-determining; that is the essence of what we understand to be fully and properly human. So the concept of slavery runs directly across and against the grain. Slaves: oh, that is just unacceptable. If you go back, however, into the ancient world, the world in which Paul and Jesus lived and preached, taught and died for our sins, slavery was understood to be less than optimal, less than the best, but it was not seen as incompatible with personal worth or dignity. We hear this, and I am going to ask you to turn in your Bibles to I Corinthians 7:20-24, and the reason I am going to ask you to look to this yourselves is, number one, so that you will look at it yourselves and be able to say, “Look at that” and maybe come back to this and think about this a little later on. Why do I say that? I say that because you and I beloved are on the threshold of a time in history when we may face ourselves becoming slaves. In other words, we are living on the threshold of the loss of those freedoms that are most precious to us. If the Church of Jesus Christ does not awaken to the peril that we are in, it is almost a certainty that those freedoms that today are ours will be lost. Then we will have to learn how to be people who are free though slaves.

So listen to what Paul said: *“Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord.”* Now here is the other side: *“Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.”*

You need to have a right perspective on this both for understanding the words of Jesus and Paul and also for anticipating what may be our future. Understand that what Paul is saying is that one's standing with God in Christ is far more important than their standing in the world. Where I am in Christ defines who I am. Where I am in the world is a circumstance: that is what Paul is saying. We don't live that way. We struggle with that reality. But that is what Paul is saying. Personal freedom from a master is desirable but it is relative, it is not an absolute good. More essential was a person's freedom to be obedient to God. That is, more essential is our freedom from the controlling desires and forces of the world, the flesh and the devil. If I am free from these controlling desires, then I am free no matter what man I may be serving. Because what I am called to be is not so much “free” as I am called to be a slave to Christ. Now, beloved, that is the rub, isn't it. We live in a culture that almost, and indeed often does, make an idolatry of personal freedom. But we try to be Christians, but Christianity says we are slaves of Christ, and that is not easy for us to get together. This is one reason why, by the way, we need frequent fellowship,

frequent reading and meditation in the Word of God, and frequently being exhorted by annoying people like me so you don't forget what the Bible actually says and how it is supposed to work.

You have to step all the way back into the Roman context. In the days around when Paul wrote approximately fifty percent of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. In a world, therefore, filled with masters and slaves, everyone knew the practical issue was not personal freedom in the sense of being master rather than a slave, most people knew this was a matter of chance and circumstance in a world where most were poor and those who ruled did so because they had a monopoly of power – consider China. The most practical issue was the kind of master you served. That is the practical issue To be the slave of Christ was to be the slave One perfect in righteousness, perfect in wisdom, great in compassion, constant in goodness. It was to serve a master who had bought you with His blood and promised to give you eternal life. Was that a master worth serving? O yeah! What they understood was this was a slavery better than freedom, for it was a freedom that emptied every slavery of its power to chain the soul. The tragic reality of America today and including many within the body of Christ is that our souls are chained to our desires, and we are not free. I am sure that heaven weeps at our loss of freedom.

That was the first of the two ways that Paul mentions that we relate to Jesus; we relate to Jesus as bond slaves. The other way and related to it, is that we are called to be saints, holy one is what it means, called out of the world and to Him. The essence of the concept of holy is “set aside or set apart for a special use.” That applies in the word here. It doesn't primarily mean with sin or morally perfect. The only person in this room who is morally perfect is Jesus. But the people who are in this room who are called apart to serve the purposes of God are all who name Jesus as Lord and Savior, and all, therefore who are in that state are saints. We understand that these holy ones are consecrated and belong only to the Lord and are for His use. Here is the essence of slavery. That is the background to it. The two terms are interwoven. We cannot be holy and not be slaves of Jesus Christ; it is impossible. If you are a saint, you are a slave of Jesus Christ. The two terms define each other. We need to keep that in mind at all times.

When Paul mentions these two he goes on to mention two specific groups inside the church. Those special groups were deacons and elders. Interestingly this is the only letter in which Paul does this and so I think it is worth taking a moment and see what is going on here. We associate those names with offices in the church, however more fundamental by far than naming officers or officials, is that these names refer to individuals that pursue areas or types of service for others in the local church or assembly of believers. Do we see the difference? It is not so much an office we create and say, ok I want you to be this and you to be that. Rather we recognize that in conversation with the Holy Spirit and in submission and obedience as Lord there are some people who say, I am interested in, I wish to pursue this kind of service in the life of the church, and there are others who say I would like to pursue this kind of service. That is indeed at the heart of the matter. Elders and deacons are those who have responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in specific ways and recognize they have been gifted by the Holy Spirit in specific ways in order to pursue these good ends.

We are introduced to elders way back in the Old Testament. Elders were tribal leaders, men in the villages who were recognized as being trustworthy in character and wise in counsel. That was the essence of an Old Testament elder. They were men who were knowledgeable regarding the Law of God and able to weigh issues and establish or uphold justice. That was their role in the Old



Testament. In the New Testament we first see them clearly in the book of Acts. I have written down some of those references: Acts 15:1, 6, 23. It is especially helpful to go to Acts 15. In Acts 15 we begin to gain a sense of the relationship between apostles and elders as well as between elders and deacons. In Acts 15 the chapter begins this way: *“After Paul and Barnabas had dissention and no small debate, Paul and Barnabas and some of the other were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.”* The question they were going to resolve was how is the church to integrate Gentiles into the body of Christ, which was all Jewish up to that point. The whole issue had to do with the Law and how much of the Law did they have to observe, and did they need to be circumcised, and all of these rules and regulations. Does a person need to become a Jew on the way to being a Christian? Or, does a person need to become a Jew in order to become fully Christian? Those were the issues they wrestled with. They were very serious issues for them. In order to resolve that matter, Paul and Barnabas went up to the church in Jerusalem and the met with the apostles and the elders.

In verse six we read, *“The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.”* Then finally Luke how the debate comes to an end in verses 23 and 28: *“The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.”* *“...it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no great burden than these requirements.”* Who is the “us”? It is the apostles and the elders. I have taken the time and gone to these verses in order for us to gain the appreciation of the continuity between apostles and elders in the life of the church. It is on this basis that what we read in Acts 6 when we first encounter the distinction between apostles and deacons, the distinction regarding deacons, we see how it applies to elders. Turn to Acts 6:1-4. *“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”* This is the point that is important: how would you feel if your mother-in-law who was receiving no food? That was the matter; it was extremely serious. The women were beginning to go hungry. *“And the twelve [Apostles] summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’”* What he means is to take of these material matters. *“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*

There are important matters here for us to appreciate regarding these people who are called by God to serve in specific ways. The first thing is that deacons must be recognized as men who are filled with the Holy Spirit. I am going to be calling a meeting for the Nomination Committee and you all need to be praying, because our deacons need to be men who are recognized by the body as filled with the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they are to be wise. Secondly, we learn that the primary responsibility of the apostles, who indeed are then elders, is to be engaged in the ministry of the Word and to pray. That is what it is about. This is not all that we know of the responsibility of the elders, but it is foundational to all that follows. We see an important third truth I verse seven. Luke wrote in Acts 6:7, *“And the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem...”* I believe that we are being given principle here. When believers follow the pattern laid out for the church by the Lord the church grows.

We learn almost nothing more about the actual work of the deacons in the New Testament: there is just nothing else said. So that is the paradigm or the model for us and so we need to hone to that

if you want to remain faithful to the Word. We are told that the first Christian martyr, Stephen as detailed in Acts 7, was a deacon who took to the streets with the Gospel. Philip, another of the deacons became an evangelist. This is the sort of thing that we would expect from our deacons. Why? Because they are Spirit filled men who love the Lord, who sacrifice their lives in order that they might serve the Body of Christ. They desire that the word of God, the truth of God would flow through them and into their families, and they would see their own children touched by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, calling their children out to be servants of the Living God. Isn't that what the church is about? That is what the church is about if the church remains focused on Jesus Christ as opposed to having Jesus on the outer edge where we pay attention to Him sometimes, and the rest of the time we are busy about “necessary things.”

We are given a lot more instruction about elders. In Acts 20 we learn that the apostle Paul calls the elders of the Ephesian church and gives them both a report and a warning. Turn to Acts 20. Finally Paul gives them a commendation which was in the nature of a commissioning. Paul reports to the elders on how he had conducted his ministry, one which concentrated on the Word of God. Looking specifically at Acts 20:28 Paul says this, “You guys – now I am just talking to the elders in the room and that includes me – You guys – there should be a big mirror right here [in front of me] – pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which He obtained with His own blood.” Beloved if you have not been in the habit of praying for the elders of this church, I hope this will spur any one you on to do so. I know that many of you not only prayed for Nini and me while we travelled, but I know that many of you pray for me on a constant basis, and there is no way I can let you know how much that means to me. But I am not so sure you pray equally for all the other men. You must remember, all I am is an elder; that is all that I am. And in that regard I am an exact equal with the other men who are elders in this congregation. So I am hopeful that you will join John Bronson to Joel Cook in your prayers, and that you will also join Dennis Hurt and Mark Lundberg. These men need to be held up constantly in prayer. Also Rob Rodney and Steve Ross. These are our current elders. They are men who need your prayers, they need them constantly. Do not neglect to pray for them so that they will not neglect to pray for the body. We in addition are blessed to have Kirk Sundahl, listed last and alone! Further we have three men who are inactive, meaning they are not in official positions of leadership: Ken Butler, Richard Frahm and Rex Sundahl. Once you are an elder you are never not an elder unless you mess up your life through moral or doctrinal error.

This does not mean that the actual office of elder or deacon is unimportant. The local church is not simply a gathering of like-minded or like-faithed people. God has given elders and deacons to provide for the internal order or structuring of the church so that necessary things for the well-being of the congregation are done. We have already seen that local church are expected to care for those who part of the community of faith and are in material need. That was the substance of Acts 6. At the same time we have seen that the Lord provides deacons so that elders are not prevented from engaging in prayer and the ministry of the Word. That relationship should never forgotten; it should be of the utmost interest of you , as the congregation, that the elders of the church are not burdened with the continual responsibility to care for the material needs of the congregation so instead they can concentrate their time and their effort on the ministry of the Word and prayer. That is their calling. What is that ministry? It is the ministry of preaching and teaching and counseling. In addition it is the ministry of conducting worship, leading small groups: anything that addresses the spiritual life of the congregation. All of those ministries which primarily focus

on the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of the word and applying it to the life of the congregation, because, beloved, what we are told, without a moment's hesitation, is that everyone of us who are elders will stand in front of Jesus Christ, and He will say, alright, you had a job; lets go over how you did it. Won't that be a moment! You have no idea how excited I am at the concept of grace!

Further as we saw some weeks ago in the message on Christian leadership, Hebrews 13:7 and 17, the leaders of the congregation are to model what they teach regarding the life of faith and they are to keep watch over souls. If you look at Acts 20:28-32, this is what Paul says to those men: *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* Do you think you need to pray for these men? Do you think you need to pray that the Holy Spirit is over them, holding them to account? Do you think you need to pray for these men that they will have an undiminished love for the Word of God, that they will have a ready submission to the Word of God, that they will put nothing ahead of the truth of God, that they will desire in all aspects of their personal lives to represent the truth and the character of God so that they do not become subject to the temptation to twist and turn the word in order to serve their personal purpose, advance their personal agendas, become filled with pride and crush the church beneath the weight of their sin? All I have done is given you a brief history of many churches.

As I said earlier on, we must understand that when we open the letter to the Philippians and we begin to read we are dealing with cosmetic realities that briefly touch the skin and pass away. Rather what God intends is that the truth of His Word will be pressed home to the deepest levels of our hearts and our understanding so that our lives are truly transformed, changed; we are different people. We are people who live and represent the purposes and the character of God. If we do not do this, there will not be a revival of faith in our nation. The church has fiddled around too long and a nation that starves for spiritual truth is wandering.

Next week we will finish the message! Pray with me: Gracious Father in heaven do indeed write Your truth I lines of fire across our souls that we will be men and women who are willing slaves of a perfect Master. In the name of that Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. How do you relate your Christian faith with your life “in the world” as it were: is it in separate “compartment”, is it a set of ideas and practices and beliefs which you “balance” with others, or is it a set of truths and practices you see permeating all of life? 4
  
2. What thoughts and images do you associate with the idea of slavery? Are these compatible or incompatible with being a Christian? What thoughts and image do you associate with the idea of being a saint? Are these compatible or incompatible with being a slave? 6
  
3. What is your definition of addiction? 6
  
4. Why is slavery as addiction so much worse than slavery as a bond servant? (see I Cor. 7:20-24) 7
  
5. Do you think it is important that a local church be organized in any particular way or is this just a matter of practicalities and cultural preference? 12
  
6. Why is it especially necessary to pray for the elders of the church? (See Acts 20:28-30) 13
  
7. What is the role or purpose of elders and deacons in the church? 14
  
8. Does your picture of an elder match that given in the Bible? Do you see the elders of our church as matching the Biblical model? 16
  
9. The message today ended with these two questions; what is your answer?  
Is the Lord working in my life to call me as a servant in His body?

Am I seeking the fullness of the Spirit and wisdom through His Word?