

## Philippians 1:1-2 (NKJV)

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

**2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

I hope you appreciated David Pawson's overviews as much as I did. He is very talented at providing the big picture.

As we enter Philippians I hope you are reading the **whole book** to prepare for our study. It only takes a few minutes to read it.

I would like to challenge you to read it while asking a single question. Given what Paul **tells** the Philippians, what is he intending to **convey** to them? Or in other words, **why did he write** what he wrote to them?

I am going to give you my opinion. But I hope you will study this and respond with yours.

1:1-11 is Paul's greeting. In it we see that Paul is extremely thankful for these Philippians believers.

12-26 Paul tells how Paul's ministry is working out

27-30 What the Philippians ought to be doing

Note here that immediately he mentions that they should **stand fast in one spirit working together**. This is a theme throughout the whole book. And it is undoubtedly because they are **having trouble** doing just this. There are two parts to what he tells them. One, **have the same mind** in ministry. And two, **process your adversity properly**.

**Chapter 2** Paul tells the Philippians how to think about themselves and each other in light of their relationship to God. We don't need to think about this too long before we figure out that they **must not have been doing well** in this regard.

By the time he reaches verse 12 Paul appeals to his readers to do serious business with their relationship with Christ. Work out your salvation he says. With the result of **being people** who **best honor** Christ.

Then in verse 19 Paul tells them that he hopes to send Timothy who is an **exact example** of how they **should** be. He is the kind of person who has this same mind of Christ.

In verse 25 Paul talks about Epaphroditus. He was a wonderful gift that the Philippians sent to Paul while Paul was in jail in Rome. He was to serve as a servant, but probably didn't get to do much before he got deathly ill.

In Chapter 3 Paul tells them to watch out for the Judiazers. Paul lays out how he could **pass** all the tests of the **Judiazers** but he regards all of his efforts in that legalism to be loss.

Paul warns them that there are lots of false teachers who appear spiritual but are driven by selfish motives.

Then in **Chapter 4** Paul lays out some specifics. He first addresses a rift between 2 women. And he urges someone to intervene in the lives of these two Christian ladies to help them see eye to eye and quit allowing their differences to be an obstacle to the gospel.

Then come some of the best counsel at dealing with mental conflict.

From verse 4 to verse 9 is some of the best counsel in the Bible for dealing with anxiety and worry. Obviously this, too, must have been something Paul heard that the Philippians were dealing with.

Then Paul talks about how he faces life in light of the gifts he **has** and **has not** received from the Philippians. He is laying out how a Christian should view financial situations. And he talks about his deep appreciation for their ministry to Paul of **financial gifts** and how those financial gifts **really look** from God's perspective.

Then Paul closes his letter with more thanks.

So in all of this we need to see that Paul wants to deliver some strong medicine for **how believers in a body** are supposed to **think about themselves and each other**. He wants them to quit looking at how people ought to be treating them. And he wants them to look at everyone with the mindset of how Christ treated us. Everyone would like others to **wait on them** and **show great respect for their contributions** and **always be concerned about their needs**. But Paul calls these folks to **put on the mind of Christ**. It is completely opposite to how flesh thinks. It does not look at what **others should be giving to us**. It looks at **how we can give to them**. It gives up all the privilege. It gives up all status. And it says, with this short life I have, how can **I best serve Christ** in my environment?

But along with this we see that Paul is very thankful to these people. They get what Paul is doing. And they are making sacrifices to help Paul carry out his ministry. And they are also sympathetic for what Paul is going through in house arrest. They recognize how important Paul is in the **furthering of the gospel** and they are determined to **help him** however they can. They do not send a letter that says, we really care about you and please let us know how we can help you. They send **money** and **Epaphroditus** to meet his needs. We see how Paul regarded the Philippians here as well.

**2 Cor 8** Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: <sup>2</sup> that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. <sup>3</sup> For I bear witness that according to *their*

**ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, <sup>4</sup> imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. <sup>5</sup> And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God.**

And along with being thankful to these saints, Paul is helping these folks think about how to deal with the suffering they are facing. And that might be why he gives them such good counsel regarding anxiety.

Now why might they be suffering?

Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony. Paul makes a play on those words and spiritualizes it by calling the saints in Philippi a colony for God. The first Roman emperor set Philippi aside as a Roman colony, so as a result, the Roman government expected that Philippi would be firstly devoted to the Roman emperor. By the time Philippians was written, the titles for the emperor were Kyrios and Soter which mean **lord and savior**. Along with this the cult of the emperor, where the emperor was worshipped as a god, was most prominent in the provinces surrounding Philippi. It would be a very normal thing for public events would have begun with an announcement honoring **Nero as lord and savior**. We don't have any trouble imagining how trouble might have brewed in that environment. The Christians could not have bowed to Nero nor **acknowledged** him as lord and savior. This may well have resulted in citizens showing **distain to believers** because of their lack of patriotism. And Roman rulers may have been openly hostile to the believers being only loyal to another God.

Now that, I think, is an overview of what Paul writes about and why. It is interesting to see that Paul is never overly hard on these people. It is the most positive epistle he writes. Some say it fits into a different category of Greek letters than all the others. It fits into a thankful letter. Which had its own category in Greek letter writing.

I did not realize that letter writing in their culture was something you did according to a prescribed formula. That is probably why Paul's letter all have the same components. Certainly the bodies of the letters are very different. But the introductions all look very much alike. It is because that was how they were trained.

Letter writing was the kind of thing that would have been taught in schools in the Roman world. Letters were expected to have certain components. Letters in the Greco-Roman period almost all started with The Writer, to the Addressee, Greetings.

Paul never reverts to his normal style of argumentation in this letter. There are not many “for’s” or “therefore’s” in Philippians. This is because he was not countering opposing thought.

There were issues of ego in the church. Some people had lost the proper mindset. They were thinking fleshly. They were allowing **what they wanted** or **thought they needed** to take first place in their minds. They were regarding what they **perceived** as being proper or necessary or preferable to replace what King Jesus would have done.

We do not see a strong anti-doctrine here. There is no force presenting another gospel. It is more like people have let down their guard and they have started becoming miffed and allowing their hurt feelings or hurt pride to stand in the way of coming together to accomplish the greater mission of Christ.

I think it is addressing much more the kind of thing that might happen in a church like ours. We won’t start standing for a different gospel. We might just stop working together for reasons we think are totally justifiable. That is the kind of thing Paul was addressing.

It is interesting that the word Gospel shows up more times in this letter than any of Paul’s other letters. And that could be because that is what first **brought these people together** and that is the thing that is **suffering** when they choose not to work with each other.

Now why did Paul write the letter when he did?

It is likely written because Epaphroditus was being sent back to Philippi so there was a way to deliver the letter. It is likely that Epaphroditus had told Paul the inside scoop about what was happening in Philippi and Paul felt the need to **express his appreciation** and to deal with the **beginnings of the issues** happening at Philippi.

OK

Now that we have seen all this we are ready to look at the first two verses of greeting.

### **Philippians 1:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:**

The letter begins as all good letters written at the time would have been. It tells who it is from.

This is from Paul and Timothy at Rome where Paul is under house arrest.

Now notice that Paul introduces himself and Timothy as **bondservants** of Jesus Christ. Many of the other epistles begin like Colossians, “Paul, an **apostle** of Jesus Christ”. But many of the other epistles require Paul to step

into a situation where **authority is called for**. This letter to Philippi is different.

At work I often refer to myself as a member of the telephony team. But, if at any time, I sense that there is going to be some kind of push back, I refer to myself as the **Director** of my division. Both explanations are true. But one conveys authority and the other does not. I normally choose that difference very **intentionally**. Normally I want people to understand that I am just doing the same kind of work as my team is doing. We are together in the venture. But there are times I need to single out my authority to either **protect** the team by taking the lions share of the heat, or to **convey** that what I say has merit.

I have no doubt that Paul was making an **intentional** choice here. He does not emphasize his **authority**. There is no need to. He emphasizes his **servanthood** and his fellowship in this servanthood. He and his friend Timothy are fellow bondservants. They are owned by Jesus Christ and they are his slave by choice. They have determined that there is no better life than being a slave to Christ. They are modeling what the Philippians need to practice.

Now what about this **slavery by choice**? Why would anyone choose to be a slave if they could be free? Doesn't that seem like a natural question to ask? But as Christians we have been given the inside scoop that the world around us can never see. We think when we **live in rebellion to God** we are **free**. We are free to ignore God's commands or go by them. It is all our choice. But that is not what scripture tells us.

#### **Romans 6:16-18 (NKJV)**

**16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading to* death, or of obedience *leading to* righteousness?**

**17 But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

**18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**

This is a quote from Dennis Johnson:

**None of us can honestly say, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." No matter how much you would like to think otherwise, your every plan and action is driven by a desire to avoid pain or achieve gain by pleasing or placating some "lord" or other. The master you serve may be success or money, or what money can buy. Your lord may be affection or romance, or reputation and respect. You may be enslaved by other**

**people's opinions, terrified at the prospect of rejection or ridicule, or perhaps you are haunted by the specter of life alone.**<sup>1</sup>

Bob Dylan put it very succinctly in his song in 1980 while he was considering Christianity.

He said "You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil. Or it may be the Lord. But you gotta serve somebody."

And that about sums it up. No one is free in that sense. Everyone serves a Lord. We just choose **Lord Christ**.

So a Christian rationally chooses to lay his life in the service of the Lord. The devil takes all the rest.

And there is another factor to consider. When a slave does his master's bidding, he does it with the **authority of the master**. So while the position is not haughty, the work he does can carry **great authority** if it is done according to the Master's commands.

Do you see yourself as a slave to Christ? We would probably get into less trouble if we would always regard ourselves that way. Think about it. How would a servant who had chosen to **give his life to his master** regard the situations that the master **assigned to him**? Would he not regard it differently than someone who is free to choose whatever they want and to whom stuff just happens?

While legally Paul was free to open up the **Paul tent shop business** any time he wanted. He could have started a thriving business and expanded it across several cities. He certainly was driven enough to do so. But that was not an option for Paul. He was called by God to an assignment. And as a slave of God He was obligated to carry out that assignment.

We sometimes see ourselves as being free to do things that conflict with the things our master has **called us to**. He has called us to a sanctified life. He has called us to a fellowship with other believers. He has called us to life situations. He has called us to ministry opportunities. And we are not free to abandon those things for other pursuits. We are not free to neglect them and to cause other people to step in and fill our shoes. Slaves do not live that way. We, like Paul and Timothy, are living under a Lordship that requires our full attention. And the more we see our lives that way, the more wisely we will live them.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, [\*Philippians\*](#), ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 8–9.

Another thing about a slave is that they do not expect people to cater to them. They expect that it is **they** who will need to **cater to the needs of others**.

This is always a good attitude for us to have in the church. It keeps us likeminded with Christ who came to serve rather than to be served.

Note too that a servant does not expect his master to do all his work. He cannot boss his master around. He does not become a slave with the idea that now his life will be **free of work**. He is not free to name and claim the next fleshly heart's desire and think the Master is obligated to serve it up. No. That is not how servanthood works.

How much would improve in our lives if we would dedicate our lives daily to being the **best servant to Jesus** that we can be? How many of the things we allow to trouble us deeply would drop away simply by that change of perspective. Instead of thinking what we deserve, we would have always in mind what **Jesus** deserves. What difference would that be?

Notice too that Paul does not get past the first line without mentioning Jesus Christ. If Paul were to have simply spoken of God and Yahweh, he could have avoided a lot of the persecution he faced. But he always made Christ front and center. The gospel was centered on the work of Jesus Christ and nothing could make Paul be quiet about. So that is who **he** and **Timothy** are **bondservants of**. Jesus Christ.

**To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:**

Saints are essentially set apart ones. They are holy ones. They are God's holy people. Since many have been in church for a while we probably know that every born again believer is a saint. We have been set aside by God for His purpose. We have been chosen and elected.

Now we also know there are different ways this word is commonly used. In the catholic church the word is used to refer to **exceptional persons**. It is not commonly used of **all** God's people. So we have St Francis and St Patrick and on and on. And over time these people are often ascribed some attribute of God. This is clearly not how Paul was using the word.

We also sometimes admire what a person is doing. Frequently when they are dealing graciously with a difficult person we tell them they are a **real saint**.

Again, the way Paul uses the word is not to single out one believer from another. He is addressing this letter to all the Christians who live in the city of Philippi. How sweet it would be if all of the saints in Oakland fellowshipped together. But our world is very different from theirs.

**with the bishops and deacons**

Note that the letter was not written primarily **to** the bishops and deacons. This letter is to be read to everyone and everyone in the church was to obey it. They are all to come together as one.

Then the way the bishops and deacons are included, we gather that they are **part and parcel** of everyone else. They are not the popes and fathers of the Catholic church. These are not positions who have authority by their very existence. No. The only authority they have is based on this common word of God. They too must submit to the word of scripture, just like everyone else. There was no attempt to limit the hearing of the word to **just the leadership** and then to have the leadership disseminate it to the congregation. No they were to hear it as a body.

But by mentioning the leadership, Paul also is **endorsing** their position. He is essentially mentioning them in a way that will have people say, I guess Paul thinks we **should have** bishops and deacons. They are rightfully a part of the church.

Bishops is a generic word. They are overseers. The word is often used as a synonym for Elders. It might be that here. Deacon means servant. And it is quite likely that they are the ones who handle the benevolence activities of the church, like making sure everyone has food, clothing and shelter.

Then in verse 2 Paul writes this:

**<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The standard greeting in Paul's world would have been the word *chairein*. It meant basically, "Greetings". It had its root in the word rejoice.

But Paul often went outside of the culture, even in his choice of common greetings. He Christianized everything about his letters while following the accepted format.

Paul uses the word *Charis*. This is the word for **grace**. This is a word at the core of understanding of the Gospel.

Grace is the **cause**. Peace is the **result**.

Here we already have a reference to the Gospel and he has not written more than two verses.

Grace is what God exhibits toward us when He **pursues** us and **catches** us and **calls us to Himself** with an irresistible call. When we come to Him, God counts what His Son did to pay the penalty for our sin as payment in full.

**Colossians 1:13-14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,**



**14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**

As a result of that **Grace** now we are no longer in enmity toward God. We have peace. We can coexist with God without God needing to exhibit His justice toward our sin. That justice was already carried out. Now we can **fellowship with God**. We can come boldly into His presence. We can fellowship with Him. We can have the **relational peace** that leads to the **emotional peace**, the feeling that all is ok as it is.

And the blessings that Paul is wishing upon these fellow believers in his letter's greeting has a **source**. It is not the kind of greeting we have where we wish a person to have a good day, not knowing if it will be a good day or not. No, this is a solid state of grace that leads to a state of peace and it comes from someone. It is delivered to us by someone. It is conveyed to us. And by who? **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Wow. Paul has given us two lines of His letter and we are already absorbed by encouragement.

So this week, maybe we should ask a few simple questions as we go through our week. What would a slave of Christ do here? How would a slave of Christ think here? How is my reaction different than a slave of Christ?

It is those simple thoughts that often lead to the greatest changes over time, as Christ's Lordship is exercised in ever growing circles in our lives.