

**Message #3****Philippians 1:1-2**

Three to four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, three of the world's so-called greatest philosophers lived in history—Socrates (470 B.C.-399 B.C.), Plato (427 B.C.-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.). Socrates taught for about 40 years; Plato taught for about 50 years and Aristotle taught for about 40 years and was the teacher of Alexander the Great. The greatest Greek philosophers in all of antiquity taught for a combined period of about 130 years.

Now set against all of the philosophy and rhetoric that was taught for 130 years is a three year ministry of Jesus Christ. In just three years, Jesus Christ left His eternal mark on this world in such a way that has never been equaled.

In fact, the Apostle John said that if everything Christ did and said in three years were put into book form, the world could not contain the number of books (John 21:25). The things that Jesus Christ accomplished; the impact He made; the things written about Him and the things that are studied about Him demonstrate that Jesus Christ was the most significant individual in all of history. People still study His words. People still try to imitate His lifestyle. People still feel His impact. Even though His ministry lasted about three years, the effects of it are eternal.

Never is that point more evident than when you take a look at the church of Philippi. The Philippian church was the first European church that God established. When we come to the opening two verses of the book, they appear to be nothing special. However, upon close examination it becomes clear that everything about this church was special and was closely connected to Jesus Christ.

**The church was established by servants of Jesus Christ. The letter was written to saints who were in Jesus Christ, due to the fact that they experienced the grace salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Now the conventional way that a letter was written back in the first century was by starting with the name of the writer and then by giving the name of a recipient and then give some greeting. In this way, one did not have to unravel an entire scroll in order to determine who wrote it.

For example, there is a secular letter that has been preserved in history from the first century in which Pliny, a man who wrote lots of letters as a magistrate under Trajan, wrote a letter to the Emperor of Rome who was Trajan. The letter began “Pliny, to the emperor Trajan, wishes health.” So this was the standard way to write a letter.

However, the letters in Scripture are not just conventional Greek letters; these letters are inspired by God and therefore the very words of the opening of a letter, although appearing to be cultural, are really supernatural. One thing is very clear from these opening words: the focal point for Paul was Jesus Christ. In fact, two times in **verse 1**, Paul mentions “Christ Jesus” and one time in **verse 2** Paul mentions “Lord Jesus Christ.” So the key to him having joy and being so stable and calm in the face of his own potential execution was Jesus Christ.

What we see here is this:

**LIFE FOR A BELIEVER IS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND LIFE IN THE CHURCH IS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST.**

Jesus Christ is the key to every situation, every relationship, every life and every church. Any true church will be focused on Jesus Christ. Any believer who wants joy will be focused on Jesus Christ. Any believer who wants stability will be focused on Jesus Christ.

There are three introductory matters we see in verses 1-2:

**INTRODUCTORY MATTER #1 – We are introduced to the senders of the letter. 1:1a-b**

There are two ways the senders of the letter are introduced:

**Way #1 - They are identified by name. 1:1a**

Paul and Timothy were two men who had been used by God to make a significant impact in Philippi. As we saw last week, according to Acts 16, Paul founded the church, along with Silas, and Timothy was apparently with him when he did (Acts 16:1, 3, 10, 13; 17:14). Timothy did have a powerful ministry in Macedonia (Acts 19:22; 20:1, 4) and Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi in the near future (Phil. 2:19).

According to my calculations, Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the N.T.. To be named in the same sentence with Paul was an eternal honor. Timothy had earned this by his faithful testimony that existed from his youth (II Tim. 3:15) and by his faithful testimony among the churches (Acts 16:2); by his work with Paul (Phil. 2:20-22) and by his faithful friendship of Paul during his imprisonments (Phil. 2:19-22; II Tim. 4:9-11). Timothy was a gifted, faithful worker for God and Paul did not hesitate in naming him right alongside his own name.

Now it was important that Paul mention Timothy because at the time Paul wrote Philippians, he did not know whether he would be executed. So he needed to put his stamp of approval on someone he knew he could trust to continue to keep a church like Philippi on proper course. Timothy was that kind of man.

Paul mentions Timothy by name in the opening of eight of his letters: II Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1; I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 1:2; Philemon 1. Obviously Timothy was a very trusted man by Paul.

The church of God needs faithful men. The church of God needs young, gifted, proven, faithful men who will protect God's church and promote Pauline doctrine because sooner or later, the key man of God, like Paul, would be gone.

So a church needs Timothy-types. Young men who grow up in the church and they learn doctrine and they learn the importance of the Word of God and they faithfully serve alongside other God-gifted leaders so that one day they can take over. Paul had that kind of confidence in Timothy.

**Way #2** - They are identified by position. **1:1b**

Paul classifies both himself and Timothy as “bond-servants” (δουλοι) or “slaves” of Christ Jesus. The word “bond-servant” was the normal word used in the first century for a slave and that was something very well-known to the Macedonian/European/Roman world. This word was not normally used in a context of voluntary service, but of involuntary slavery.

There were three ways one could become a slave: 1) By capture; 2) By birth; 3) By sale. According to Gaius, the Roman jurist whose discussions on Roman law were preserved from very near the time of Paul, all men fell into one of two categories: 1) Free men; 2) Slaves. **A slave was one who was owned by a master and a slave was responsible to obey that master.** According to Francis Lyall, “The slave was required to do his master’s will to the fullest extent of his abilities and wholly serve his master’s interests” (*Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, p. 36).

Now in most Pauline letters, in which he names Timothy, he distinguishes himself from Timothy. As we said, Paul names Timothy in the opening of eight of his letters and in all except the Macedonian letters (Philippians and Thessalonians) Paul points out a difference between him and Timothy. In the Thessalonian letters Paul just names himself and others, including Timothy, without any special titles. But in most letters Paul distinguishes himself from Timothy.

For example, in II Corinthians 1:1 Paul calls himself an apostle and Timothy a brother. He does exactly the same thing in his letter to the Colossians. When he writes I & II Timothy, he calls himself an apostle and Timothy his son. In Philemon he calls himself a prisoner and Timothy a brother.

**So Philippians is the only letter in which Paul classifies himself and Timothy the same way.** Clearly Paul wants the Philippians to view Timothy as a special man of God, but he also wants them to view both of them as humble, lowly slaves of Christ Jesus. So he starts off by introducing to the Philippians that he wants them to view him and Timothy as a lowly slave totally dedicated and obedient to their master Christ Jesus. Beginning in verse 3, Paul will use a singular pronoun “I.”

Paul is going to challenge these Philippians to a Christ-like mindset and a true Christ-like mindset is the mindset of a servant.

Here is where the wisdom of God directly contradicts the wisdom of men. Men say you are at your best when you are achieving, ruling, dominating, leading, succeeding and God says you are at your best when you are serving.

Paul and Timothy were bound to Christ Jesus. What are we bound to? What do we serve? What is the master of our lives? Some are bound to pleasure. Some are bound to a bottle or needle. Some are bound to a dollar. Some are bound to a career. Wise people are bound to Jesus Christ. Paul and Timothy were two who were.

The irony here is that the lowliest of terms in the Roman world, “a slave,” is the most exalted term in God’s world and in this book of Philippians (Philippians 2:7). If the testimony of our lives was they were servants of Christ Jesus, our eternity will be joyous.

**INTRODUCTORY MATTER #2** – We are introduced to the recipients of the letter. **1:1c-d**

Now this letter was written to all believers who comprised the Philippian church. There are three facts we learn about this church:

**Fact #1** - The letter was written to all the saints. **1:1c**

The word “the saints” (τοις αγιοις) refers to all those who had believed on Jesus Christ who were set apart as something holy and sacred in Christ Jesus. **The term “saint” refers here to one’s position, not one’s practice.** When one believes on Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit puts one into Christ and that person becomes classified from that moment on as an “in Christ Jesus saint.” A saint is not someone dead.

Now notice this letter is written to “all the saints in Christ Jesus.” What this would logistically mean is that every believer, whether boy or girl, man or woman was to go to this church to carefully hear and study this book of the Bible.

In other words, this fact lends itself to serious, corporate study and analysis of the written Word of God. If a person is a true believer, regardless of age or gender, they need to be in church hearing the Word of God taught.

This letter was not written to “some of the saints,” but “all of the saints.”

**Fact #2** - The letter was written to the church in Philippi. **1:1c**

Now this particular letter was written to those “who are in Philippi.” The present tense participle “who are” would indicate those who are continually living in Philippi and are part of this Philippian church.

So from the early days of Christianity, churches were formed in specific cities and locations and people regularly gathered at those places and continually worshipped. A key part of the worship was to get together to study the written Word of God.

It is interesting that we do know Paul sang in a jail in Philippi, but what he wrote for the church there was not a series of choruses or songs; he wrote inspired Scripture.

We don't know exactly what he sang, but we do know what he wrote. Nothing in a church must ever replace a focus on inspired Scripture.

**Fact #3** - The church of Philippi had organized leadership. **1:1d**

By the time Paul wrote this letter, the church was 10-12 years old and there were two main offices of leadership that had been established to take care of the church. The offices were "elders" and "deacons." These offices were held by men, not women. But the women were key prayer warriors of the church (Acts 16:13-16).

Now the term "overseer" (επισκοπος) is a synonymous term for elder (Titus 1:5, 7), which emphasizes the managerial responsibility that an elder has in overseeing, superintending and guarding the church of God.

The term "overseer" represents the responsibility of the elder where as the term "elder" represents the maturity of the elder. So there was structured leadership in this church of Philippi. The Philippian church was governed by "elders" plural, not just one elder.

Also the church was governed by another group known as "deacons." The term "deacon" is one that refers to one who attends, serves and ministers particularly in attending to the physical areas of church work (Acts 6:1-3).

So this Philippian church had proper N.T. church leadership structure. Both of the offices of "elders" and "deacons" had plural officers, not singular and both of the offices were fully functioning in this church.

Frankly, I do not know how churches can disregard the N.T. structure of leadership. If a church is to function right, these offices need to be operating.

Now of course one question we would ask is why does Paul bring up this subject of elders and deacons? This is the only letter in the entire Bible where these two offices are mentioned in the opening greeting. Why is that?

In the course of the history of interpretation, there have been several suggestions about this:

- 1) This is mentioned because this is the true structure of a properly organized church.
- 2) This is mentioned because Paul wanted the people in this church to realize this is proper.
- 3) This is mentioned to show the people in the church that there is leadership rank in a properly organized church. Some slight problems need leadership solutions.
- 4) This is mentioned because being the first church in Europe it is important to recognize proper organization that is to exist in a church.

When a man is proven faithful and is selected to serve as an elder or deacon in a local church, he becomes part of something very sacred. These offices and officers have existed since apostolic days.

Now notice how Paul has started this letter. He identifies himself and Timothy as a servant; he upgrades the average believer to being a saint and then he upgrades another group and elevates them to elders and deacons. **As Paul begins this letter to the Philippians, he truly esteems others better than himself.**

**INTRODUCTORY MATTER #3** – We are introduced to the greeting of the letter. **1:2**

Paul gives two of the greetings that are not only positive, but very theological. We may observe that the source of these two greetings is God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The preposition “from” (*απο*) means that the point of departure of these two greetings are two Divine members of the Godhead:

**Greeting #1** - The greeting of grace. **1:2a**

Grace is what Paul preached. Grace was the doctrine specifically revealed to him. Grace is the work of God and Jesus Christ that extends salvation to those who do not deserve it, merit it and cannot possibly earn it. Grace is a system that saves by no obligation. It is, as one theologian said, “the free favor of God with all that follows it.”

Grace is a relationship with God that is unmerited, unearned, non-obligated, undeserved. It is a salvation that is a gift that comes “from” God and “from” Jesus Christ. **That preposition “from” means that God the Father and God the Son are the source of grace** (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 369). God the Father and God the Son offer grace and God the Son paid the price to offer grace.

**Greeting #2** - The greeting of peace. **1:2b**

Peace is the theological work of God in which sinful men are brought into a peaceful relationship with God. The relationship becomes tranquil because the sin issue has been resolved.

Again we see that the preposition “from” means that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are the source of peace. **Without a relationship with God the Father and God the Son, one will never have true, lasting peace in their lives.**

So Paul wants these Philippians to think about the fact that they have been saved by the grace of God and now are at peace with God.

If we look at the first two verses backwards, we have salvation from Christ; we have sainthood in Christ and we have service for Christ. Salvation-sanctification-service is the true formula for joy.