

“Bondservants of Christ”
Philippians 1:1
(Preached at Trinity, May 22, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, seized the throne in Macedonia in 359 B.C. He strengthened his army by giving it longer spears and a powerful cavalry and began to extend his domain. Needing the gold to finance his advance he enlarged the gold mines to the west around a town that he renamed Philippi.
2. Two hundred years later Rome conquered Macedonia and it was divided into four political districts. By this time the gold mines of Philippi had largely been exhausted and Philippi had been reduced to a small settlement. As a Roman colony, however, Philippi prospered. It became a miniature Rome and would eventually be inhabited mostly by Romans who enjoyed all the rights of Roman citizens. Many Roman army veterans settled in Philippi. Paul's appeal to their heavenly citizenship would have had particular meaning to these Roman citizens.
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"
3. With the Roman influence it was a pagan city with religious devotion to the Roman emperors. There was no synagogue, probably because of the small Jewish population and lack of the minimum quorum of 10 males.
4. In the midst of their second missionary journey Paul and Silas with Timothy reached Troas, one of the chief ports in Asia. It was there that Paul received the vision of a man from Macedonia to go to Europe which led them to Philippi.
Acts 16:9-12 NAU - "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a *Roman* colony; and we were staying in this city for some days."
5. One of Paul's first converts in the city happened on his first Sabbath in the city.
Acts 16:13-14 NAU - "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. ¹⁴ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

6. She was probably a woman of means since the dye used in the purple garments was very costly. It came from throat of a shell-fish—each shell-fish producing a single drop. Soon her entire household believed.
Acts 16:15 NAU - "And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us."
7. It was also at this time that Paul cast a demon out of a young slave-girl who had been profitable to her master for her ability of divination. This created a stir in the city and Paul and Silas were flogged and thrown into prison where they were chained in stocks. Such a flogging would have been extremely painful and the stocks placed their legs in an excruciating position. Paul and Silas were singing God's praises at midnight when suddenly an earthquake shook the jail and the doors burst open and the chains fell from their arms and legs.
 The jailer awakened and was filled with terror. In the darkness he was convinced the prisoners had escaped which would have resulted in his own shameful death. Rather than face such shame and death he was prepared to take his own life.
Acts 16:27-28 NAU - "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"
Acts 16:30-31 NAU - "after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."
8. By the time they reenter the house of Lydia the "brethren" rejoiced. There were now a number of converts and the Church of Philippi had been born.
9. Paul's letter to the Philippians was written years later around A.D. 62. Along with Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians, Philippians is one of the four "Prison Epistles." Tradition tells us Paul is writing from his imprisonment in Rome. Epaphroditus arrived at Rome carrying a generous gift from Philippi as well as a report on their condition. Paul's letter to Philippi has several purposes:
- First of all, Paul is writing acknowledging the gift and expressing gratitude for their generosity.
Philippians 4:10 NAU - "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity."
 - Second, Paul is writing to provide guidance to this young church. Although he had care over many churches he had a particular love for this church. You can sense his love for them.
Philippians 2:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."
Philippians 1:27 NAU - "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"

- Third, Paul is writing to calm their thoughts regarding Paul's imprisonment. He wanted them to recognize the excellence of God's providence in his imprisonment **Philippians 1:13-14 NAU** - "so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴ and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."

10. Paul begins with his salutation, typical first century letters and typical of Paul's letters, but as always in Paul's letters, it isn't filled with words lacking in significance. Dennis Johnson aptly writes, "The openings of Paul's letters do sound alike. Their basic components can be found in almost any piece of first-century Greek correspondence: author, recipients, and a greeting (good wishes or a blessing). It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss Paul's handling of this standard template as though it were the thoughtless product of a mechanical "mail-merge" function. As similar as they seem, each of Paul's letter openings actually introduces key themes to be developed in the rest of the epistle."¹

Paul states clearly the recipients of his letter. He writes first of all to the congregation, and then signifies the officers. But first of all, he identifies himself and Timothy. Timothy may have been Paul's amanuensis for this letter.

I. Paul first identifies himself and Timothy as bond-servants.

"Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus"

A. The word for bond-servant is **δοῦλος** – a slave or bond servant

1. Paul might have used many words to describe himself

- Paul, the successful and effective missionary. He traversed across the known world of his day.
- Paul, the planter of dozens of churches including the Church of Philippi
- Paul, the distinguished scholar who studied under Gamaliel
- Often in situations where Paul had to defend his apostleship he identified himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

3. All of these titles would be true, but these things were not what Paul saw as his chief characteristic. What Paul was first and foremost was a servant of Christ.

4. Paul saw himself as one who had been purchased by Christ. He had been conquered and captivated by Christ.

B. The Philippians would have understood this word

1. Remember, this is a Roman colony. Probably half of all the people in the Roman world of Jesus' day were slaves – probably 10-20 million slaves

2. They had no freedom, no rights, no citizenship – total dependence upon the Master for provision and protection

3. The Philippians would have known slavery well, but not from personal experience. Most were masters, not slaves. It would have been difficult for these new Philippian Christian converts to accept that they were now the slaves of Christ.

¹ Johnson, D. E. (2013). *Philippians*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (1st ed., pp. 3–4). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

4. As typical of Paul, he is declaring himself to be what they need to be. He is saying, I'm a slave. Follow my example. We need mature saints in our congregation that can set the pattern for the rest. Paul is saying, Timothy and I are servants, follow us.

Philippians 3:17 - "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us"

C. What is your chief characteristic?

1. You may be outspoken and popular among men
2. You may be a high achiever with many accomplishments
3. You may have advanced in your career to a high degree
4. You may be an excellent parent and maintain a well ordered home
5. As a Christian you may have much of which to boast
 - a. You may be well read and have a good understanding of theology. You may have a library full of theological books.
 - b. You may be a pillar in the church, well respected and admired
6. But what is your relationship with Christ?
 - a. Do you see yourself as a bond-servant of Christ?
 - b. Have you been captivated by Christ. Is your heart inflamed with love for Jesus?
 - c. Is He your Master and Lord? This is Christianity!

D. In essence, Paul is describing himself and Timothy as Christians.

In Christ we have become slaves—but our Master is altogether lovely.

1. When we think of slavery we think of cruelty, harshness, hopelessness
2. With Christ we serve a gracious Lord – a loving, benevolent, Master full of pity and mercy.
3. His yoke is easy and His burden is light
Matt. 11:28-30 NAS - "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."
 A yoke is an image of servitude – yet servitude to Christ is glorious
4. In Christ we have been bought, we have become slaves which has become our freedom. We are delivered from our former cruel masters.
 - a. We are freed from the sin that held us bound to the unceasing satisfying of the flesh.
 - b. We are freed from Satan who held us in blindness
 - c. We are now free to serve Christ
 This is what Paul meant as he wrote to the Corinthians
1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NAU - "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

- II. The chief function of a disciple of Christ is service
 "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus"
- A. Are you a servant of Christ?
1. This isn't a theoretical question that calls for an abstract answer. It is a question of which the answer can be observed objectively.
 2. Most people immediately answer with an absolute Yes. Most Christians consider themselves to be servants of Christ. They declare Jesus as Lord, but they want to serve on their terms. Service is measured by the giving over of self.
 3. How do you know that you are serving Christ?
 Our service to Christ can be measured in two ways
- B. We serve Christ by obeying Him
1. Remember, we have been freed from the burden of the law, from the curse of the law, from the rigor of the law.
 We serve Christ out of a passion for Him, out of pure delight, out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to please Him. Grace has given us a freedom to serve.
 2. The servant of Christ obeys Him out of a sincere desire to be useful to Him. We love Him. We want to honor Him.
 3. Is this your great desire? Does serving Christ bring you the greatest joy?
- C. The second way we serve Christ is by serving others.
1. We are to be in subjection to those in authority. This is most difficult because it infringes on our autonomy. We want to call our own shots, have our own way. We don't like paying our taxes. We don't like submitting to speed-limits. We don't see ourselves as under submission to police officers or teachers or church leaders.
 Servanthood demands submission to others.
 2. Are you serving others?
Ephesians 5:21 NAU - "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."
 3. Do you love one another? Do you truly care for one another?
 Are you sensitive to the feelings of others? Are you concerned for their wellbeing? Or are you simply using others to satisfy your own needs?
 4. Do you labor hard for the well-being of the church, seeking to strengthen the church, to build up one another.
 Christianity is being able to put the wellbeing of others before yourself. This is service. Are you a servant?
 4. This was our Lord's constant teaching
Matthew 23:11-12 NAU - "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."
 5. Jesus demonstrated this by His own life
Matthew 20:28 NAU - "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
 He washed the feet of His disciples – a task normally done by servants.

Conclusion:

1. This is the great question before us as we begin this book is, “Are you a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ?”
 - a. Paul is writing to the saints of Philippi but in essence he is writing to fellow servants of Christ.
Philippians 2:3 NAU - "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;"
 - b. Have you been removed from your throne? Are you dying to self?
 - c. Are you striving to obey His commands?
 - d. Do you see the importance of your brothers and sisters? Do you love them?
2. If you are a servant; if this is your identity you are in excellent company
Romans 1:1 – “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ”
Philippians 1:1 – “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus”
James 1:1 – “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”
2 Peter 1:1 – “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ”
Jude 1:1 – “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ”
3. This is genuine Christianity.
 It is serving others as we seek to become more and more holy.