

Logan Smith  
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## **Philippians 1:1-2 - An Intro, a Greeting, and an Overview**

### **Intro**

You might be thinking to yourselves right now whether or not I just read the correct sermon text for this morning. We read the first two verses of Philippians which is, as we all just heard, Paul's greeting to the church of Philippi. It is the heading of a letter, announcing who the letter is from, who the letter is to, and a brief, simple greeting, announcing the purpose and intention of the letter.

Today we are setting out on a journey. We are embarking on a trek through the book of Philippians. And like all good journeys, we need to know where we are going and where to begin. But again, you might be thinking to yourselves, "Why start *here*? Why begin with a sermon on the greeting to the letter?"

For a couple of reasons:

1. *To give us an introduction to the book as a whole.* Preaching the greeting of the letter is a great opportunity to introduce us to the background, context, and broader themes of the rest of the letter. Hopefully, this will help us start out on our adventure by showing us a "map," if you will, of where we are heading.
2. But I have another, even more important, reason for preaching the two verses today: *Because it is God's Word to Us* - Even these verses, the greeting of a letter, are God's inspired Word to us. When we preach through a whole book of the Bible consecutively, it forces us to slow down; to see what we might have otherwise missed or glanced over; passages, for example, like the greeting to a letter. We could easily take these verses for granted and skip over them. However, if we slow down and pause, then we can see theological truths here that God intends for our good. We see in these verses a glimpse of who we are in Christ; who God declares us to be and who He calls. We also get a glimpse of God's gracious purpose to us in the book of Philippians. And so I'm preaching this text today so we can unpack some of the beautiful truths of the gospel we see here, even in these opening verses of the greeting.

[Transition]: So we'll begin our journey here, in the greeting, by walking through these two verses and seeing these three points: **1. *We are servants of Christ*; 2. *We are Saints in Christ*; and 3. *We Need Grace and Peace from Christ*.**

### **I. We are Servants of Christ (1:1a)**

Paul starts the letter by telling us who wrote it: Paul himself, and Timothy; but he describes them both as '*servants of Christ Jesus*.' The word for servant here actually carries more weight than that; it is also the same word for "*slave*." As we start to ask why Paul opens the letter this way, we start to see there is a lot going on with this word.

#### **A. Historical Context and background**

For starters, as Paul wrote this letter, he himself was a prisoner, sitting in a jail cell, most likely in Rome, after his recorded missionary journeys and towards the end of his life. He is quite literally a captive, held in chains as a "slave" of sorts, because of his gospel ministry. But this is not new for Paul and Timothy, nor was it the first time the Philippians had seen him in this state. No, this would remind them of how Paul and Timothy suffered in Philippi, as they themselves worked to plant the church.

In Acts 16, Luke tells us the story of how the church in Philippi - the church this letter was written to - was started. Paul is on his second missionary journey, accompanied by Silas and Luke, and Timothy. In Acts 16, Paul receives a vision from the Holy Spirit, showing them where to go for their next missionary journey: this is the "*Macedonian Call*." He sees a vision of a Macedonian man pleading for them to come and share the gospel, where it has not yet been named, so that those who are lost may be saved. And so, they go! And they head straight for the Macedonian city of Philippi. Philippi was a large, significant, very influential city in Macedonia, a region of modern-day Greece. Though Greek, it was also made a Roman colony, meaning they were Roman citizens and had a very Roman identity. And to crown its ties to Rome, the religious scene in Philippi allowed for indigenous pagan beliefs, so long as the people *worshipped the Roman emperor as Lord and Savior*.

And so Paul and his missionary team came into this city preaching a different Lord and Savior: Jesus Christ. Throughout Acts 16, we see some beautiful stories of individual conversions. Lydia, a rich woman known as a God-fearer, hears the gospel and quickly believes, becoming a strong believer in the city. Paul casts a demon out of a slave-girl, but this upsets the city politically, religiously, and economically; the demon made the girl a fortune-teller, making her owners rich. And so they publicly beat Paul and his team, and throw them in prison *unjustly*, without a trial, which is also *unlawful*, since they too are Roman citizens! And even after they are released, even when the city apologizes, they are still kicked out of town, unable to continue their ministry there. Paul's labors to share the gospel, make disciples, and plant the church in Philippi were not easy. He suffered for the sake for the gospel! He suffered for the sake of the church, of those who would believe in that city.

And so we can ask: "Why would Paul, Timothy, and the other men go to such great lengths, being beaten, unlawfully thrown in jail, publicly humiliated, run out of town - why would they suffer and even *risk their lives* for this task?" Paul gives us the answer here with his opening words: because they are "*servants of Christ.*"

### **B. Servants/Slaves of Christ**

They are not their own, but "servants," "*slaves*" of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! They were living not for themselves, but for CHrist, obeying him and glorifying Him in the mission of the gospel, no matter what the cost. And they did this with joy, lovingly serving others by proclaiming the gospel, even amidst hardships and persecution; they had joy, trusting that Christ would show grace and bear fruit through their mission, because it is ultimately *Christ's mission*; we are but His servants. As the Philippians would have remembered, so we see this played out in Acts 16. Even while they were in prison for the gospel, they sang songs to the Lord. God sent an earthquake, breaking their chains, yet they did not flee; and through their faithfulness, God saved their jailor, the famous conversion of the Philippian jailor and the rest of his family. And even after they have to leave town, God continues this work long after Paul and Timothy are gone, so that the church continues to grow, becoming healthier and reaching others with the gospel!

**First theme: Missions and suffering for the gospel as Servants of Christ**

We see this theme of suffering for the sake of missions and the gospel run throughout the book of Philippians. This theme features prominently in the first chapter: we see it in verses 7-8, then in verses 12-30. It comes up again in 2:15-30, then in 4:15-22. We too, as servants of Christ, are called to live our lives on mission, self-sacrificially serving Jesus by serving others, proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and building up our local church, even through difficulties and persecution.

Indeed, we are to follow Paul's example in this. Which leads us to our second theme:

### **Second theme: Imitating Godly Believers as we all Imitate Christ**

Several times in the book, Paul exhorts us to follow the example of other godly believers. He holds up *Timothy and Epaphroditus for us (2:19-30)*. He even holds up *himself* as an example to follow, imitating him as he himself imitates Christ. And so the point is that we are to grow more and more like Jesus, imitating Him in all we do; and we do so in part by following the godly examples of other solid believers.

### **Third Theme: We are Christ's Servants because He became a Servant for Us**

And so we are servants not ultimately like Paul, but like Christ. We serve Christ and serve others because Christ came to serve us! Jesus, the glorious Lord, took on the form of a servant, a *slave*, for our sake (2:5-11). Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, the eternal God, became a man, took on flesh, and lived as a lowly of all! He did this, even humbling himself to the point of death, for our sake! He served us by living, dying, and being raised in our place, to take away our sins that we might be set free and live! If Christ became a servant to serve others, then how much more so should we, who have been set free from sin in Christ, live as servants - servants of Christ who purchased with his blood! And we serve Christ by serving others. Jesus is our example; we are servants *of* Christ that seek to be servants *like* Christ.

### **Application**

And so Paul reminds us that we, like him, are *servants of Christ*. We are not our own, but belong to God in Christ Jesus, bought by His precious blood. And we are called to live self-sacrificial lives, serving the Lord, the church, and the lost, even when it is costly. And yet, we do so with great joy; for when we die to ourselves, we find our lives in Christ, trusting in and living for He who died for us that we may live. So:

[Transition]: Next, Paul tells us who he is writing to, and in doing so, gives us another profound truth about who we are in Christ...

## II. We are Holy in Christ (1:1b)

After stating who the author is, Paul states who he is writing the letter to: *the local church in Philippi*. And he does this by addressing the three different biblical church offices: the *church members, pastors, and deacons*. However, we might not be as familiar with the words used here to refer to those offices; Paul says “**To all the saints... with the overseers and deacons.**” He uses the word “*saints*” to refer to the believers, the Christians, who gathered together as the church in Philippi; in other words, he uses this word to refer to the church members. And then he mentions two offices within the church; the *overseers* and the *deacons*.

### A. Deacons

As we see in Acts 6 and 1 Tim. 3, *deacons* are solid believers who are sound in doctrine and have godly character, and then are set apart by the church to minister to the needs of the body. And so deacons lead out in serving the church, making sure needs are met, both among individuals and for the church as a whole.

### B. Overseers

But who are the “*overseers*”? We don’t commonly use this term in church today, and so we might not be as familiar with how it is used in the New Testament. To put it simply, they are the *pastors* of a local church. The New Testament uses the word “pastor” to refer to this office, but most often uses the words “elder” or “overseer.” So for example, when Paul gives us the list of pastoral qualifications in 1 Tim. 3:1-7, he calls this “*the office of overseer...*” (3:1). Then when he gives Titus a very similar list for pastoral qualifications, in Titus 1:5-9, he uses both the terms “*elders*” and “*overseer*.” All throughout the New Testament, we see these terms used interchangeably (most notably in *Acts 20*). We also always see these terms in the plural when referring to local churches, as we do here; this simply means each New Testament regularly had multiple pastors, multiple “elders” or “overseers,” And while it might seem strange, maybe even a little offensive, for us to use the word “overseer” to refer to pastors, it basically just means that

the role of a pastor is to “*oversee souls*.” Pastors provide *spiritual oversight* for the congregation; they care for the souls of the church, both as a whole, and for each individual member.

But notice that the overseers and deacons are not “over” the church, they are “*with*” all the saints. They are first and foremost believers in Christ, members of the local church and part of the Holy People of God in Christ. The most important office, or position, in the local church is being a church member, being a *saint in Christ*. *I am honored and privileged to stand before you as a pastor, but most importantly, I am honored and privileged to stand among you and be considered one of you, as a fellow church member, as a fellow saint.*

### C. Saints

Why? Because *being considered a saint is a big deal*. The word for “*saint*” literally means “*holy one*.” The word *holy* is loaded with biblical-theological meaning. All throughout the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament, the point is made emphatically clear that *God alone is Holy*; He is the Holy God, and we are *not holy*. We can think of Isa. 6, where Isaiah stands before the Lord, hears the angels singing, “*Holy, Holy, Holy*,” and as he encounters God’s holiness, he is overwhelmed by the clear fact that he himself is **not** holy; is an unclean sinner. This is one of the main reasons God gave the Law: the Law shows that we are condemned in our sin, deserve God’s wrath, and we need God’s gracious intervention to make us Holy so that we can draw near, worship Him, and dwell with Him as His people. And so there were sacrifices, priests, rules about being ceremonially clean to picture our need for holiness. All of this emphasizes *God’s holiness, our sinfulness, and our need for a perfect sacrifice and great High Priest to clean us, make us holy, and bring us near to God*. And this is exactly what God gives us in Jesus Christ!

And so Paul reminds us of *our identity in Jesus Christ: by being united to Christ by grace through faith, we are made holy!* Christ’s blood is the perfect sacrifice that cleanses us, takes away our sin, and consecrates us as holy before the Lord. We cannot make ourselves holy; but if we are resting and trusting in Christ alone, then God has already declared us holy! We are brought near to our Holy God to live as His Holy People, in Christ! If you are a believer, then you don’t need a “priest” to speak to God in your place; Christ is our great high priest, and in

Christ, we are *all* holy priests! We have all been brought near to God in Christ! And so Paul is reminding us of two realities:

1. ***You are Holy in Christ*** - Our holiness before the Lord is not ultimately based on our efforts; it is based on God's grace. The blood of Jesus is what cleanses us and declares holy. It sets us free from sin!
2. ***Therefore, strive to grow in holiness in the Lord*** - We are *positionally* holy - declared holy in Christ and set free from sin - and yet, we all still sin as Christians. And so God calls us to *live* holy lives, and *grow* in holiness by the grace of the gospel. In other words, He tells us who we already - GOD's Holy People! - and then tells us to live like it! We are holy in Christ. And therefore, God is *making* us holy, progressively, over time, throughout our lives as believers. We call this **sanctification**. The Christian life is a progress in holiness, moving away from sin and toward Christlikeness; and yet, our sanctification *must be rooted in* this glorious reality: our growth in holiness is only possible because we have already been set apart as holy in Christ Jesus.

#### **D. Theme of Sanctification**

We see this theme of "sanctification" - of growing in holiness in Christ - over and over again throughout the book of Philippians. In fact, many commentators consider this the overarching theme of the whole book: *our sanctification, growing in holiness through the gospel of Jesus Christ*. It comes up constantly: in 1: 9-11, 27-30; 2:1-30; 3:12-4:9. He is constantly exhorting the Philippians, and therefore us, to flee sin, pursue holiness, become mature and content in Christ, humbly serve one another, and strive for church unity. And he makes clear throughout that we are to do these things *because of what Christ has done and because of who we are in Him*. And so it is no coincidence that Paul starts the letter here: remind us that we are ***"saints in Christ."***

So let us strive to live holy lives just as God has called us to! But, we can never do this on our own; we desperately need the grace of God. And so this leads us to our third point...

### **III. We Need Grace and Peace from Christ (1:1c)**

Paul reminds us that we desperately need *grace from God* and *peace with God*; and that we receive grace and peace from God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a common Greek letter, the opening would state the author, the recipients, and then a general greetings, roughly similar to our contemporary, “Hope this letter finds you well.” But Paul takes the common greeting and transforms with with gospel-rich language. He pronounces a blessing on the readers of his letter: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul’s intent for the letter is to be a means of blessing, of grace and peace, for the Phillipians, and for us as well.

This phrase and similar ones are so common in the New Testament letters that we can start to take them for granted, forgetting their meaning as we become overly-familiar with them. But when we reflect on the theologically-loaded meanings of the word, they bring the gospel right to the forefront. **“Grace”** means the unmerited favor of God; God’s favor and acceptance of us in spite of our own unworthiness, sinfulness, and just condemnation. The word **“peace”** carries a lot of meaning and theological force as well; not only peace with other people, but as it is used some much over the Bible, it also refers to peace with God, and therefore, peace in our souls. These speak of gospel realities: sinners have no peace with God, but stand condemned *nothing* we can do to repair our relationship with God; our only hope is that God will have mercy and show us *grace*, by graciously intervening and forgiving us, providing righteousness and salvation for us. And the glorious news of the gospel is this: God has done exactly that in Christ Jesus! God has shown immeasurable grace towards us in Christ! Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died on the cross in the place of sinners, and was raised, for this very reason: so that we, who are sinners, can receive *grace* from God through faith in Christ, being forgiven of our sins, declared righteous in Him, and having eternal *peace* with God. God’s *grace* gives us *peace* in **Christ**; peace with God, peace in our souls, and therefore, peace with each other, as reconciled Christians in the church.

Paul reminds us of the grace we receive in our salvation. But he also reminds us that this is not only grace and peace from God to *become Christians*, but also the blessing of *grace* from God to *live and grow* as Christians. By God’s grace, Jesus became a *servant, a slave*, to set us free from our slavery to sin and death; and by grace, he empowers us to live as *servants of God*. By God’s grace alone we are declared “holy,” saint in Christ; and by the grace of Christ he



changes us, sanctifying us by His own Spirit, to live Holy lives like Jesus. God calls us to live holy lives, serving Christ as Lord, and He promises to give us the grace we need to do so. Just as Paul transformed a normal greeting into a gospel blessing, so we are to live lives wholly transformed by the gospel of God's grace!

### **Themes:**

**God's grace in sanctification** - Just like the theme of sanctification, growing in holiness in Christ, comes up over and over again throughout Philippians, so does Paul's emphatic point that this only comes from God's grace (*i.e. 2:13*).

**Joy and contentment in Christ** - And we also see time and again that growing in maturity in Christ, by grace, leads to *peace* - to true joy and contentment in Christ in all things.

**The gospel of Christ** - But the most pervasive theme, even more than that of sanctification, is Christ. Every passage exalts Christ, points us to the gospel, and unfolds the wonderful implications of the gospel of Christ for our lives. The book of Philippians masterfully unfolds the beauty of the gospel for us, showing us that all of these wonderful blessing - our maturity and growth in Christ, joy and contentment, our identity, our salvation - all flow from the grace we receive in Christ by faith! We see this boldly and strikingly displayed in **3:1-11** - whatever gain we have from the flesh is worthless compared to surpassing worth of Christ; for *righteousness comes not by works but only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!* This is the heart of Philippians! And this is the heart of the gospel!

### **Conclusion/Application**

So church, let us remember who we are in Christ, and let us seek to live like it, by God's grace.

1. Remember that you have been set free from your slavery to sin because Christ served you in his life, death, and resurrection; *therefore*, we are now *servants of God, slaves of righteousness!* And so let us serve God, one another, and the lost, by God's grace.
2. Remember that you are *saints, holy* people in Christ! And this is not because of anything you have or haven't done; this is entirely because of God's grace to you in Jesus! And this means God not only forgives us, but empowers us by His Spirit to live Holy lives in

Christ; so let us strive to grow in Christ, as individuals and as God's holy Church, by His grace!

3. And **if you are not a believer this morning**, then I want to remind you once again: *because of your sin, you do not have peace with God! There is nothing you can do to make yourself right with God.* But there is something God has done for you: he sent Jesus Christ, the all-glorious Son of God, into the world, to become a servant for the sinners, just like you and me. He died in the place of our sins. So turn away from your sins and don't trust in your own works, for you can never be good enough; but if you trust in the grace of God, if you trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then He will forgive you, declare you righteous, and bring you into the Holy People of God! He will give you true *peace.*

Amen.