

Philippians

Dr. Charles “Buddy” Parrish

May 13, 2020



Philippians 1:1-5

Vss. 1-2

- “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus”: 1) notice the difference in this greeting compared to some of Paul’s other letters. In 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians he is “Paul, an apostle...”. To the Romans he is “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle...”. He is constantly having to establish and re-establish his credentials as a legitimate apostle, no less than Peter and John. Even among the churches he founded, like Corinth, and Ephesus, and in Galatia, he is fighting against competing voices who want to attack his message by attacking his credentials. He makes mention of these here in 1:15-17 and 3:2. But to the people of the church in Philippi, Paul does not need defend himself in any way. These are his true friends who love him, honor him, and respect him. 2) bond-servant: Not just “servant” but bond-servant. A servant is free. A servant may work set hours with clearly defined duties, is free to say “that’s not my job” and go home after his work hours are complete. But a bond-servant is a slave, a ***doulos***. He is the complete possession of his master – body, mind, and spirit. He has no will or mind of his own. His sole purpose is to do the will of his master. He goes where his master says to go, speaks what his master says to speak, does what his master says to do. The “bond” means he has been bought for a price. He is then the possession of his master forever. When Paul describes himself this way as he does here and to the Romans and elsewhere, he is saying a) that he is the absolute possession of Christ and can belong to no other. b) that he lives his life in absolute obedience to Christ and knows no other will but the will of Christ, not even his own. c) “servant of God” was a regular Old

Testament title of the prophets, yet it is in all humility that Paul aligns himself with the prophets, knowing how the prophets suffered at the hands of their own people and how by Paul's time the common belief was that all the prophets were put to death for being the bearers of God's truth.

- “to the saints...”: We don't like that word, “saint”. Today it typically carries a tone of insulting sarcasm – “Oh you are SUCH as saint!” – or we whisper it of some sweet older person who has died – “She was truly a saint. I wish I could be more like her.” But Paul does not mean it as either insult or compliment. To his mind he is using the term matter-of-factly. Nor does he speak of the dead, but those who are very much alive. In Greek the word is *hagios*, in Hebrew *kadosh*. Usually the word is translated *holy*. In either language, and in the way Paul means it here, it means “to be set apart”. In the Old Testament, priests were *kadosh* because they were “set apart” for tasks that were different from others. The tithe was *kadosh* because it was set apart from other income. The Jewish people were *kadosh* because God set them apart to be a people for Himself and for His purpose. But when God sent His Son to them and for them, the Jews did not receive Him and crucified Him. So now, as we saw in Revelation, it is the Church, those who are followers of Christ, who are set apart, *kadosh*, *hagios*, *holy*, *saints*.
- But how? Acts tells us that the first members of the Philippian church were a business woman and her family, the sheriff who ran the jail and his family, and a girl who was demon possessed, who in our day would be diagnosed as being mentally ill (have you ever noticed you never hear today of someone with her condition being healed instantly like she was? Are we today trying to evict demons with therapy and medication?). Not a very “holy” sounding group! So how does Paul call them “saints”?
- The letter is addressed to “the saints **in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi”. The phrase means everything to Paul. In his letters, the phrase **in Christ Jesus** occurs 48 times, **in Christ** occurs 34 times, and **in the Lord** occurs

50 times. So altogether, the sentiment appears in Paul's letters 132 times! For Paul, this is the very definition of being a Christian. In Acts 17:28, in his sermon in Athens, he tells his audience that God is whom in which "we live and move and exist". This is it for Paul. This is what makes the difference in us and for us. We live in Jesus as a fish lives in water. What makes us different, kadosh/hagios/saints, is that we have been set apart by God for His purpose and to that end He wraps Himself around us, enveloping us as water to fish, so that we breathe Him in, drink of His water, eat of His flesh, making it impossible to separate our life from His. Through this we become the Body of Christ, interdependent on each other and on Him. "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). So the saints are those who practice God's righteousness and love their brothers and sisters. Ordinary people in whom God is leading to an extraordinary life.

- Overseers and deacons: In Acts 20:17, 28 and Titus 1:5,7 Paul uses "elders" and "overseers" interchangeably. He also uses the word "bishop" for the same office. These are to be pastor/teachers and their qualifications are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Deacons are to offer practical service to the church. Their qualifications can be found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The biggest difference seems to be teaching.
- Grace and Peace: Paul regularly uses these two words in the greeting of his letter. As he does so, even in the opening lines of this letter, he is working towards one of his primary goals – unity in a church of Jews and Gentiles. The common greeting in writing or on the street for a Greek is **charis**, grace. The common greeting in Hebrew is **eirene**, peace. Charis carries with it ideas of beauty, joy, brightness. Eirene carries with it a wish for someone's total well-being, for one's highest good. There is a similar sounding word in Greek, **eirein**, so Paul may be softly using a play on words. This similar sounding word means to join, weave together, which of course is exactly what he is trying to do – weave together two

cultures, two languages, and two traditions all into one effective and growing church. No problem, right?

Vss. 3-5

- “I thank my God...”: In the end, Christianity is all about relationships – our relationship with God and with each other. The care and feeding of any relationship includes the ability to freely say “Thank you”. Otto Spangler, my campus minister when I was a college student, taught us to always “give people their flowers”. “Why wait till someone dies to give them flowers?” he asked. “Give them their flowers while you both can enjoy them.” Paul here is giving the Philippians their flowers. And surely they would say, “No Paul, it is WE who thank YOU!”. It was Paul who had led them to Christ and taught them The Way. And he was PAUL. Unofficially the most important person throughout the Christian church... “and HE is thanking US?”. What does that do to the heart of the Philippians? It only enhances their already strong sense of generosity and deepens their affection for Paul.
- Joy is the underlying quality of all the Christian life. Here is a man in a prison writing to people who are suffering persecution, and JOY is the primary color of the letter. John MacArthur points out that this “joy” is “not a transient emotional feeling that comes and goes depending on circumstances. Because Paul was constantly near to God, he was constantly joyful”. So Paul is alone in his cell, but he is not alone. He is in the cell with God and not afraid... “for Thou art WITH me”. When he says “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you”, he is simply relating a conversation with his cellmate! And joy is the result of that closeness with the Father.
- “...in view of your participation...”: 1) Acts 16 tells us that the first convert in Philippi was a woman named Lydia and the first thing she did was open her home to Paul and Silas, making her home the center of Philippian church. Hospitality and graciousness without thought are vital pieces of “participating in the gospel”. There’s something about being in

someone's home that makes sharing the gospel and leading people to Christ so much easier than in almost any other setting. 2) Their gift Paul has just received is other end of their timeline of participation. Evidently the Philippian church had repeatedly supported Paul financially and in every other way over a period of years. And the word here translated "participation" is *koinonia*, which elsewhere is translated "fellowship". When you mix joy with work you are more than just participating in a project together, you are experiencing fellowship. Listen to the stories of people who are involved in Disaster Relief and you will hear them speak of joy as they removed trees, served meals, and cleaned flooded out houses. The Spirit-filled life brings you so close to God that joy permeates your life in all that you do – your work, your play, your relationships, your whole life!