

Captivated by Christ - Philippians 1:1-2

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Philippians 1:1-2 LSB

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus,

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

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

This is admittedly subjective, but it seems to me that the four chapters of Philippians have provided more favorite quotes and sound bites than any other section of Scripture of similar length — certainly it has done that for me. Here are some of my favorites:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (1:21)

“I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (1:23)

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (1:27)

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.” (2:3, 4)

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it

is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (2:12, 13)

“ . . . that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.” (3:8, 9)

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (3:13, 14)

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (3:20)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” (4:4)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (4:6, 7)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable . . .” (4:8)

“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” (4:11)

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (4:13)

Introduction

Introductions are very important and it sets the tone for how people talk to one another. There is a **formal way** to meet people in some Asian countries by swapping

business cards.

In **diplomacy**, ambassadors bring documents from the country they represent to the country that is hosting them.

In the **academic and business world**, a *curriculum vitae* is a **formal resume** that lists the person's most important accomplishments and skills.

Each of these ways does the same thing, which is to tell us the *most important thing we need to know about the person in that situation*.

A more formal way of explaining what a good introduction is:

In the context of introductions, we reveal the most relevant information the other person needs to know, based on the context.

For example:

If I was doing an academic lecture and I started off by introducing myself as Rachel's husband with no reference to my academic credentials, would that be relevant? No it wouldn't be if no one knew who Rachel was. Because those who are attending the lecture would want to know what qualifies me for being able to deliver this particular lecture?

But if I was introducing Rachel to a visitor to a Sunday morning service then within that context, I could introduce myself as Rachel's husband.

By understanding this rule about picking the most relevant credential, we can see how Paul presents himself in his

letters in different ways.

In his letter to the Galatians where Paul's authority as an apostle is under attack, he introduces himself as *"an apostle not from men nor by men but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead"* (leb).

He explains what kind of apostle he is by saying what kind he is *not*. This sets the stage for the issues he tackles later in the letter.

In Philemon the credential Paul chooses is "prisoner of Christ Jesus."

In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul just uses his name; no other credential is provided.

The letter to the Philippians is motivated by **personal matters**: reaffirming Paul's ties to Philippian believers, explaining the unplanned return of Epaphroditus, and weighing in on the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche. There are no matters of doctrine or ministry practice to correct and it is thankfulness, submission, and self-sacrifice that permeates this letter.

1. Background and Historical Setting

Philippi, which means "city of Philip," got its name from Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was first called Krenides, which means "the little fountains," because there were so many springs nearby. Philip took over the area in the fourth century b.c. because of the gold mines in the area. Philippi became part of the

Roman province of Macedonia in the second century B.C. For the next two hundred years, the city was mostly unknown until one of the most famous events in Roman history brought it fame and helped it grow.

At the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., the forces of Antony and Octavian beat those of Brutus and Cassius. This was the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire.

After the battle, Philippi became a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), and many veterans of the Roman army moved there. As a colony, Philippi was independent from the provincial government and had the same rights as cities in Italy.

For example, its people could use Roman law, avoid some taxes, and become Roman citizens (Acts 16:21).

The Philippians were also very proud of being a colony. They used Latin as their official language, took on Roman customs, and modelled their city government after those of Italian towns.

Both the book of Acts and the book of Philippians talk about Philippi as a Roman city.

Paul's description of Christians in Philippians 3:20 as "citizens of heaven" made sense, since the Philippians were proud to be citizens of Rome (Acts 16:21).

The Philippians might have met some of the palace guard (Philippians 1:13) and the people who lived in Caesar's

house (Philippians 4:22).

Paul's second missionary trip (Acts 16:12–40) is when he started the first church in Europe. This church was in Philippi. It looks like there weren't many Jews living in Philippi. Since there weren't enough Jewish men who were heads of households to form a church, some religious women met outside the city at a place to pray by the Gangites River (Acts 16:13).

Lydia, a rich merchant who sold expensive purple-dyed goods (Acts 16:14), became a Christian after Paul told her about Jesus (Acts 16:14–15). Most likely, the Philippian church met for the first time in her large house.

Satanic opposition to the new church immediately arose in the person of a demon-possessed, fortune-telling slave girl (Acts 16:16–17). Not wanting even agreeable testimony from such an evil source, Paul cast the demon out of her (Acts 16:18). The apostle's act enraged the girl's masters, who could no longer sell her services as a fortune-teller (Acts 16:19). They hauled Paul and Silas before the city's magistrates (Acts 16:20) and inflamed the **civic pride** of the Philippians by claiming the two preachers were a threat to **Roman customs** (Acts 16:20–21).

As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:22–24).

We see God's hand upon his servants that are freed from prison because of an earthquake that leads to the jailer

and his family coming to a saving knowledge of Christ and most likely joined the Philippian church.

Paul apparently visited Philippi twice during his third missionary journey, once at the beginning (2 Cor. 8:1–5), and again near the end (Acts 20:6). About four or five years after his last visit to Philippi, while a prisoner at Rome, Paul received a **delegation** from the Philippian church.

The Philippians had **generously supported Paul** in the past (Phil. 4:15–16), and had also contributed abundantly for the needy at Jerusalem(2 Cor. 8:1–4).

Now, hearing of Paul’s imprisonment, they sent another contribution to him (Phil. 4:10), and along with it **Epaphroditus** to minister to Paul’s needs. Unfortunately Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness (Phil 2:26–27), either while en route to Rome, or after he arrived.

Accordingly, Paul decided to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi (Phil 2:25–26) and wrote the letter to the Philippians to send back with him.

2. Why does Paul write this letter?

What was Paul’s purposes in composing this epistle?

First, he wanted to express in writing his thanks for the Philippians’ gift (Phil 4:10–18).

Second, he wanted the Philippians to know why he decided to return Epaphroditus to them, so they would not think his service to Paul had been unsatisfactory (Phil 2:25–26).

Third, he wanted to inform them about his circumstances at Rome (Phil 1:12–26).

Fourth, he wrote to exhort them to unity (Phil 2:1–2; 4:2).

Finally, he wrote to warn them against false teachers (Phil 3:1–4:1).

3. Slaves of Christ

Paul's focus on being a servant can be seen in two small but important changes to the usual way a letter from the first century would start.

First, when it comes to authorship, Paul puts Timothy's name together with his own. He then gives both of them the term servants, or more accurately, slaves.

In other letters, like 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Paul wrote with the names of his coworkers as if they were coauthors.

But when he put titles with names, he gave himself one title and his friends another.

We read about Paul the teacher and Timothy the brother in 2 Corinthians and Colossians. In Philemon, we read about Paul the prisoner and Timothy the brother.

Only in Philippians does Paul start a letter by linking himself and a fellow worker with the title "slaves of Christ Jesus."

Why would he do this here and not somewhere else? And why would he call himself and Timothy slaves?

Paul tells the Christians to follow his example, which is to follow Christ as he does (Phil 3:17).

Something we have to note that is very telling, Paul picks only **ONE** of all the possible credentials he could have used.

Remember what we said about introductions and context earlier. Paul chooses “Slave of Christ” because choosing “slave of Christ” for Philippians fits well with the themes of submission and sacrificial service.

Paul doesn’t choose apostle of Christ Jesus; Prisoner for Christ Jesus; he chooses *a slave of Christ Jesus* because it fits best with his objectives for the context.

Think about how important obedience, humility, and submission are in the life of a slave or a servant.

Proverbs 19:10 highlights the inappropriateness of a servant exercising authority over princes, whereas Proverbs 17:2 affirms the positive consequences of being a wise and faithful servant: ruling over the shameful son.

These proverbs are not contradictory but complementary.

The path to honor, esteem, and authority for a slave or servant is humble, faithful submission.

In the same way, Paul picks "slave" as his title because the traits of a faithful servant match what he tells the Philippians to do.

He has accepted his situation (being in jail) on his own. He thinks that God chose them to help spread the faith, and he tells the Philippians to have the same mindset.

Paul does not feel like he is a victim. Instead, he is content and will continue to be content and rejoice in this situation. Throughout the letter, he will explain what the

key is to this. But in the end, it all starts with willingly and gratefully giving up control to God.

By Paul using the term slave (doulos) he wants his audience to understand something else. He wants to exhibit that *the heart of joy is selflessly serving King Jesus and His church*. You only have a heart like this when everything you do is for the “Glory of the KING.”

That is truly what it means to be a slave for Christ or a servant for Christ.

Paul wants the Philippians to see dramatised in himself and in Timothy the counterintuitive truth that both men bear God’s authority because Christ has captivated them as his slaves. Paul and Timothy are living proof that those whom Jesus saves he enslaves.

In their self-centered preoccupations and competing agendas, Paul’s Philippian friends need to see what joyful slavery looks like, up close and personal.

The claim that Jesus enslaves those he saves may sound harsh and uninviting:

because, what kind of “salvation” is it that deprives us of our cherished autonomy and subjects us to the will of Another?

But consider the link between **being saved** and **being enslaved** by Jesus from this perspective:

Everybody is somebody’s slave.

Despite the inflated claim of **William Ernest Henley’s**

Victorian poem “**Invictus**,” 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.

You also have to face the fact that every master other than Jesus will exploit and disappoint you in the end.

Not all are as obvious as the evil spirit that had seized the Philippian slave girl and forced words out of her mouth.

Not all are as blatant as the slave girl’s owners, who treated her as a moneymaking piece of property. ***But every master other than Jesus will use you and then discard you.***

When we realise that we all serve one master or another and that other masters inevitably abuse and fail us, suddenly we find that there is nothing as liberating as being a slave of King Jesus.

The church father Chrysostom commented: “***One who is a slave of Christ is truly free from sin. If he is truly a slave of Christ, he is not a slave in any other realm . . .***”

Being Jesus’ slave not only frees us from every abusive

master, but also confers delegated authority. Roman society had taught the Philippians to hear nothing but powerless subservience in the term slave. But Paul had introduced them to the Old Testament Scriptures, where the title “**slave**” or “**servant of the LORD**” was applied to leaders such as Moses, Joshua, and David. Those ancient servants were previews of the ultimate Servant of the Lord foretold by Isaiah, who would accomplish God’s will through obedience and suffering. In this letter Paul uses the title “servant [slave]” just one more time, to describe the Christ who was in the form of God and then took “the form of a servant” and offered the ultimate obedience in death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8). The Lord delegates authority to his slaves, to accomplish his will and shepherd his people. More than that, the Lord honors the slave’s role by assuming it himself in his incarnation.

So Paul starts by inviting the Philippians to follow his and Timothy’s lead, tasting the freedom of bowing to Christ’s lordship. Paul is imprisoned, probably in Rome, awaiting the outcome of his appeal to Caesar himself. Paul is going to show them how being a slave of Jesus has set his heart free to accept any outcome to his legal case, as long as Christ gets glory through Paul’s response to his circumstances. He says in:

Philippians 1:20 LSB

according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will

not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul is so captivated by Christ that all he cares about is seeing his Savior exalted.

Conclusion

So this morning, I would like to extend the invitation that Paul gives to the Philippians. Follow the example of the believers in this church in Great Harwood who have tasted the freedom of bowing down to Christ's lordship.

Psalm 34:8 LSB

O taste and see that Yahweh is good;

How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

If you have been waiting for a time to truly surrender yourself to Christ, then today is that day.

2 Corinthians 6:2 LSB

for He says,

“AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,

AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.”

Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION”—

And if you have professed to be a believer but you know that you have lived half heartedly for Christ and you have not lived for the Glory of the KING, then today make that commitment to Christ to grow in your relationship with Him every day by reading His word and speaking to Him daily. That is the ONLY way that you will ever grow in Christ, by living in your relationship with Him.

Serve Christ and serve His church. We are to share in the bond of unity, you are not supposed to live the christian life alone, it is to be lived as part of His local church.

Doxology

Philippians 4:8-9 LSB

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is dignified, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, consider these things.

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.