

The sermon

Intro

Philippians is the story of a church planter's ongoing partnership with a church he planted. The story of a church planter's ongoing concern for the church. Concern over internal conflict and external opposition. So he offers his counsel in the form of a letter.

This morning we'll just cover the greeting. What can we glean from a couple of verses? My answer would be a whole lot. Let's look at how Paul begins Philippians.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

I'll introduce the book of Philippians. Then we'll have two points.

Philippians introduction

Location

Located in Northeastern Greece today. In New Testament times located in eastern corner of Macedonia.

Origin

Paul wanted to go to Asia (16:6), then Bithynia (16:7), but the Spirit prevented him, so he went to Troas (16:8). There Paul had a vision with a Macedonian man saying, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us*" (16:9). So Paul left for Macedonia (16:10) and made his way to Philippi, described as "*a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony*" (16:12).

Philippi was founded in 356 B.C. by Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. In 42 B.C., Philippi became a Roman colony, so residents enjoyed the rights of Roman citizens. Upon becoming a Roman colony, Octavian (became emperor Augustus) supplemented the Greek population with discharged Roman soldiers. The effect was a mixed population dominated by Roman law and culture. Emperor worship dominated religious life. Worshipping a different Lord (Jesus) would create difficulties.

In Philippi, Paul encountered Lydia, "*a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God*" (16:14), meaning she was a Gentile who worshipped Israel's God, but didn't have knowledge of Jesus and the gospel. Paul spoke and "*The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul*" (16:14), resulting in her baptism and the baptism of her household (16:15). Her household meaning possibly children, slaves, and extended family. No mention of her husband likely indicates that she was widowed or divorced. In any event, a number of people had been saved in Philippi.

Next, Paul encountered a demonized "*slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling*" (16:16). Meaning the demons gave her insights from observation, not knowledge of the future (demons can see what we're doing).

Paul cast out the demon (16:18), and her angry owners "*dragged them [Paul and Silas] into the marketplace before the rulers*" (16:19). Paul and Silas were attacked by the crowds, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison (16:22-24).

In prison, God sent an earthquake which loosened their bonds and opened doors (16:25-26). The prisoners could escape. At this point, fearing punishment for escaping prisoners, the Philippian jailer was about to take his life (16:27). So Paul told him that the prisoners hadn't escaped (16:28). Trembling (16:29), the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (16:30). They responded, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*"

(16:31). Paul and Silas traveled to the jailer's home where they proclaimed the gospel and the entire household (wife, children, servants, extended family) believed and were baptized (16:32-34).

Paul and Silas were released from prison the next day (16:35-39). *"So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers they encouraged them and departed"* (16:40).

In Acts 20, Paul traveled through Macedonia giving encouragement (20:1-2) before returning through Macedonia again (20:3-5), including Philippi (20:6). That's two known visits.

Dates?

Church founded around 49 AD. Visited twice around 56 AD. Philippians written around 62 AD.

Paul's relation to the Philippian church

As the founding planter of the Philippian church, these people weren't strangers to Paul. After leaving Paul continued to serve the church in a pastor/elder capacity. Maintaining some level of oversight and counsel from afar. Being blessed by Paul, the Philippian church gave back. At the time of this letter, Paul was also a supported missionary of the church. So Paul is both founding pastor and supported missionary of the church. This explains their partnership and Paul's rich affection for them.

What we have in Philippians is supported missionary that planted the church giving pastoral counsel.

Occasion

Where does the church need counsel? Two main problems. Internal bickering and external opposition. A recipe for ruin. The church needs a unified front to withstand external pressure.

Point 1: Identify as servants and saints (1:1)

Servants

Paul and Timothy identify as *"servants of Christ Jesus."* Paul is the author, not Timothy. Paul talks about himself, his plans for Timothy, and his evaluation of Timothy. But no comments from Timothy. Maybe Paul spoke and Timothy wrote Paul's thoughts?

A servant is owned by another. Submissive. Humbled. Subject to the will of their master. The most vilified picture in today's society (slave) is how we're supposed to see ourselves. *"Servants of Christ Jesus"* means Jesus owns us. Jesus is the master we serve and obey.

While slave was a negative picture then and now, the picture was used positively in the New Testament.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – **Matthew 20:26-28**

Jesus served us when he died for our sins. Slavery will forever be a picture of the gospel.

I'm applying servant to all Christians. Maybe you're asking, isn't servant unique to Paul and Timothy's leadership roles? Good question. Speaking to a Christian church, Paul said:

For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 7:22

Those who were free (not slaves) when converted became Jesus' slave at conversion. That's you. That's me.

Saints

The Christians at Philippi are greeted as *“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.”* “Saint” speaks of holiness. It’s the noun form of sanctified. We could say “holy ones.” Holiness consists of being set apart for God and separated from sin (sanctification). We are “saints” in that we are set apart for God and declared holy because we are in Christ. We’re not saints because of our excellent conduct. We’re saints because Christ’s righteousness has been credited to our account (justification).

Application

How we see ourselves affects our practice. As pastor I need to see myself as Jesus’ servant. Under his authority. Existing to serve him. I can’t be ministering for my name. I must be doing it for him. Servant keeps us in check. Humble.

As saint, I am holy because of Christ’s righteousness, not my own. I don’t make myself holy. Jesus’ holiness makes me right with God. The fact that I am a saint in Christ means I am undeserving. I haven’t earned the right to be called a saint. Jesus earned it for me.

When I need to get my bearings, I ask, who am I? I’m a servant of Christ and a saint in Christ.

How can this help you? Christian we don’t exist to serve ourselves. We exist to serve Christ. Remembering who we are (servant) keeps us from destructive selfishness. Servant is comprehensive. Husband. Wife. Father. Mother. Son. Daughter. Friend. Employee. Church member. Evangelist. Things go wrong when we forget we exist to serve Jesus, not ourselves, in these callings.

Seeing ourselves as “servants of Christ” produces humility and moves us to do the Master’s will.

Seeing ourselves as saints keeps us from being crushed by failure. We’re holy not by our perfect past. We’re holy not by our perfect conduct today. We’re holy because we’re in Christ. Because Jesus’ righteousness has been credited to us.

If our sainthood is based on our performance, we can go astray in a couple directions. First, pride. We can think we’re saints by our own doing. I earned it. I deserve the title. I’m a really good guy. I’m better than those guys. Who gets the glory here? We do. Not Jesus. We forget we only deserve judgment. We forget that we can’t merit God’s favor. We need to be rescued. We don’t rescue ourselves.

Second, despair. Some of you might see yourselves. Your failure. Maybe past. Maybe present. You think, “there’s no way God would call me a saint.” You see your sin and conclude I’m not worthy. You’re right that you’re not worthy. But God welcomes the undeserving. We have right standing with God not because of ourselves, but because of Jesus. I am not worthy of the blessings I have in Christ. I am not worthy of answered prayer. I am not worthy of opportunity to speak to you. I am not worthy of eternal life. It’s all grace!

But I’ve been made worthy in Christ. In Jesus I *“have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”* (Col 1:13). **Your worthiness isn’t based on you!**

Seeing ourselves as “saints in Christ” protects us from pride and despair.

Overseers and deacons

The word overseer is used interchangeably with elder (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). Elders/overseers are exemplary in character (1 Tim 3:2-7), able to teach (1 Tim 3:2), pastor/watch over the souls of God’s people (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1

Pet 5:2), and exercise rule in the local church (1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17). Your elders rule through teaching and structuring church programming.

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, deacons are exemplary in character, but nothing is said about their actual duties. The word “deacon” means “one who serves.” In Acts 6, the early church selected seven men “to serve tables” (6:2) so the apostles could pray and minister the word (6:4). These seven men were proto-deacons. They carried out deacon functions before deacon was an official church office.

Women deacons?

What about women deacons? Some of you have expressed concerns, reservations about women deacons. Good question. Phoebe is possibly (likely?) a deacon in Romans 16:1.

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant** of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. – **Romans 16:1-2***

The ESV has a footnote that says, “or *deaconess*.” By noting her local church is Paul specifying her office (deacon) there? Is Paul calling attention to her office to stimulate help?

In **1 Timothy 3:11**, women are included in the deacon discussion. The ESV translates the verse, “*Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.*” The ESV has a footnote that says, “Or *Wives likewise, or Women likewise.*”

The possessive pronoun (“their”) isn’t in the Greek indicating women, not wives. There’s one Greek word for women and wives. Generally you translate it woman unless there’s a pronoun or contextual indicators. No pronoun or contextual indicator = women, not wives, are mentioned here. “Likewise” indicates similarity. The women who serve in a deacon capacity need to be sound in character too.

In church history we find women serving as deacons approximately 50 years after Philippians was written. Women ministered to the practical needs of other women.

Point 2: Expect grace and peace (1:2)

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

This is a prayer wish. May the Father and the Son shower you with grace and peace.

Grace

Grace speaks to unmerited favor. Something we don’t earn. Something we don’t deserve. Something God isn’t obligated to give to us.

Unmerited favor is expressed in:

- 1) The gospel message (Col 1:6; Titus 2:11).

In the gospel we learn of undeserved salvation in Christ. Jesus died on the cross as a substitute so that undeserving sinners could be forgiven, saved from hell, and heirs of eternal life.

We receive pardon and acceptance when we turn from sin by trusting in Jesus. His person. His work on the cross.

- 2) Justification (Rom 5:15-21).

Justification is a free gift through Jesus.

3) Election is by grace (Rom 11:5; Eph 1:3-6).

When God chose us for salvation, merit played no part. “*election of grace*” (Rom 11:5) = characterized by grace; gracious election.

4) Spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3-8).

When God distributes spiritual gifts, it’s an act of grace.

5) Empowering grace (1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 12:7-10).

This is the grace Paul has in mind.

So to keep me from being conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Paul was susceptible to pride because of the unique revelations God gave to him. He knew things others didn’t. To prevent pride, God gave him a thorn in the flesh. Likely a physical ailment or demonically inspired opposition. Flesh suggests physical suffering. Insults and persecutions suggests gospel opposition. Whatever the case, in your agony, in your trials, call on God to sustain you!

Paul prayed for relief, but God’s answer was no. Why? So that Paul would experience God’s empowering grace.

When life is hard, God supplies sufficient grace to endure and glorify him.

Peace

Peace could mean a personal well-being, inner rest and harmony (no turmoil, no anxiety). Or peace among a group of people meaning the absence of conflict. Given the concerns of the letter (internal conflict and external threats) both apply. Paul is wishing them inner peace in the face of opposition and communal peace because selfish ambition is present (2:3).

When life and church relationships are hard, God brings peace.

Application

This is what God does for us. Meaning confidence and expectation should abound. Expect divine empowerment. Expect divine peace. Ask for it. Daily.

Conclusion

How we identify matters. Seeing ourselves as servants moves us to do the Master’s will. Seeing ourselves as saints protects us from pride and despair.

Expectation matters. When life is hard, God supplies sufficient grace to endure and glorify him. When life and church relationships are hard, God brings peace.