

Philippians IV– Slaves and Saints in Christ (*Phil 1:1-2*)

Introduction – We are slaves. We are saints. And we probably do not think of ourselves as such during much of our days. We are united to Christ and we are united together in Christ. And we probably are not very aware of this in our daily existence either. Paul addresses the church at Philippi and in doing so we learn who we are.

After Acts 16 – We know that on Paul's third missionary journey he travels through Macedonia twice, most likely visiting and instructing the Philippians on both occasions. As he travels, he organizes a collection for the church in Jerusalem which is undergoing a terrible famine. Once in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested, sent to Caesarea, and finally to Rome. Enough time passes for the church in Philippi to hear of his arrest, to send Epaphroditus to Rome, to hear back of Epaphroditus's illness, to send another offering and messengers to Paul requesting an update on Paul and Epaphroditus. This seems to be the setting of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Some scholars believe that this is probably about 10 years after Paul's first trip to Philippi.

The Text – *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Slaves of Jesus Christ – Paul calls himself and Timothy slaves, not simply servants. In a letter that will give prominence to humility, the point of identifying the apostle and the evangelist/pastor as slaves is to focus on our lowly positions, following Christ's example. Because 'slavery' has such a miserable connotation, 'bondservants' is probably a better rendering. But the point is that they have been, and so we have been, bought body and soul by Jesus Christ. In fact, the word 'redemption' is all about being purchased from a slave market to a new Master (Gal 3:13). We are now bound to God, to grace, and to righteousness (Rom 6:20-23). Even free men in human society must understand their redemption-bondage in Christ (1 Cor 7:22f). We are not simply slaves in our spirit, or in heaven, but body and soul are redeemed and now owned by God through Christ (1 Cor 6:19-20). What is completely different in this slavery, however, is that the shackle that constrains us is the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14f). *“One who is a slave of Christ is truly free from sin”* – Chrysostom.

Saints In Christ Jesus – Saints could be translated 'holy people' and keep us from much misunderstanding. The New Testament usage of this word never means super special people from among confessing Christians; that is a Roman lie. In fact, the NT usage is really quite the same as the OT usage ("holy nation" Ex 19:6). In Leviticus, the word is used regularly as an adjective describing how we are to be like God (Lev 11:44, 19:2), and throughout the Psalms as a substantive (Psalm 16:3, 34:9, 74:3). Saints are a people, elect by God, set apart for holy purposes. We are only saints because we are 'in Christ Jesus'. Elders and deacons are only saints because they are 'in Christ Jesus'. Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ, are only saints because they are 'in Christ Jesus'.

With The Bishops and Deacons – The leaders of the church are not separate from the saints, but rather a subset of the saints. The words "bishop" and "elder" are used interchangeably by Paul describing the officers with the responsibility to shepherd a particular flock (Tit 1:5, 7, Acts 20:17, 28). Deacons are ministers of grace to the flock with an emphasis on the physical needs of the body. From the establishment of the NT church we see the practice of an ordered church government. But from the beginning the rulers are with the people and are to hear the Word, submit to it and obey it as well.

Grace and Peace – Paul bestows grace, God's unmerited favor, upon these believers. His message is *“the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24), standing in opposition to any idea of work or merit (Eph 2:8-9). Even though we have received grace, we need grace and mercy afresh every moment. We live by faith in Christ and we are never to set aside this grace (Gal 2:20-21). The peace which God bestows is the antithesis of war, for we have been reconciled to God (Rom 5:1). This peace does not mean a lack of trials and tribulations, however. That's the point of the whole book of Philippians. This peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus in the midst of tribulations.

From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – As Paul links God and Christ together, emphasizing that Jesus is the Lord and Christ, he is exalting the name of Jesus and assaulting the name of any other 'lord'. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are entirely at one in procuring your salvation. That we are saints is the agreed upon work of the whole Trinity.

Sinner, Slave, Saint - How you are addressed says something about who you are.

We Are All Slaves – We were all slaves to sin in Adam. But in Christ, we have been ransomed, redeemed by His blood and made slaves of God. The lowest and the highest in status find the ground level at the cross, shackled in the bonds of Christ's love, and called saints.

We Are All in Christ Jesus – Regardless of the Philippi you live in, your citizenship is truly in heaven and you are truly in Christ.

We Are All in Grace and Peace – It has been given to you and is offered to you every time this Word is preached. It has been given to you again.

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