

How God Shapes His Church

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- [0 : 0 0] we believe God's word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It's inerrant. Man is not more wise than God's word. We don't find mistakes in it.
- It's infallible. The word of God accomplishes what he intends for it every time. And we believe that it's clear that with the Holy Spirit dwelling in every believer, as we hear God's word, we'll understand what he means.
- And that's my prayer as I read this to you. And to give you some context, the book of Philippians is a letter. You'll find out a little bit more about the author in the audience.
- But the city is in Philippi. Philippi is an ancient city. Even before it was part of the Roman Empire, it was refounded by Philip II. You actually know Philip II.
- He's Alexander the Great's dad, the king of Macedon. And the location of Philippi is between Europe and Asia. So it's in northeastern part of Greece.
- [1 : 0 1] As the Romans expanded their kingdom, Philippi became a very strategic trade city to connect the trade from Asia with Europe. And so the Roman Empire invested much in this little city of Philippi.
- They built a theater, a temple with terraces, a great forum, and a basilica. All of these Roman pieces of architecture. And for that reason, it was called Little Rome, a very influential city.
- So our sermon text is verses 1 through 5. Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.
- Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.
- This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you. Father, I ask once again that you will please speak through your word.
- [2 : 4 9] May your truth prevail over unbelief. And may you renew our minds. We pray that your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself, the Good Shepherd, will speak to his people.
- We pray that you'll accomplish your purposes with your law and gospel as it's proclaimed. I pray that you'll guard my lips, that everything I say would be pleasing in your sight with your help.
- I also pray that you will guard the ears of your people. Help anything, Lord, that I say that is falling short of your glory and your standard to be rejected by their minds.
- We pray, Lord, that as we receive your word, that you will work into us your good pleasure, that you will truly shape your church. For your glory we ask. Amen. Amen. There in the living room of a wealthy businesswoman sits a girl that everyone thought was crazy.
- Also in this living room is the porter of the city's jailhouse, along with his family and servants. One of the men, with gray in his beard, opens up the parchment that arrived on a ship that week.

[4 : 14] He reads the first line and then pauses. Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ. The memories of everyone present fly back to the year they first saw that small group of travelers, two of whom they could still picture with blood on their backs.

A dozen eyes in this living room puddle up. The reader is one of them and he swallows hard and then continues to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I want to encourage you today with this example of a small church in Philippi, how God himself shapes his church.

How God himself shapes his church. First, God makes desperate sinners into orderly saints.

God makes desperate sinners into orderly saints. Verse 1, Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus.

[5 : 30] That's how Paul introduces himself as author of this letter to this congregation. To appreciate how drastic this is, you need to hear an example from this same time period.

Here's how another letter began, an official letter to a people in a city called Alexandria. Tiberius, Claudius, Caesar, Augustus, Germanicus, Imperator, Pontifex Maximus, holder of the tribunitian power, consul designate to the city of the Alexandrians.

Well, here Paul calls himself simply a slave, a bondservant of Jesus Christ. In other epistles, he states, I am an apostle. I have this authority. In this letter, he doesn't need to, most likely because the sweet congregation in Philippi, they know this.

They love Paul. They accept his authority. That's not what they need to hear. Paul introduces himself along with Timothy. Timothy, we're told in Acts 16, was a young believer, verse 2, who was well spoken of by the brethren, traveling along with Paul in this small company.

Paul, Silas, young Timothy, most likely to be discipled and an assistant to learn. And then in Acts, we read it in the first person plural. So Luke is most likely there as well as an accompanying doctor.

[6 : 59] So we learn even from this simple introduction, Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus, that ministry is shared. Ministry is shared by those who consider Jesus their Lord.

He introduces themselves with the word slave or bondservant. The Greek, it's *doulos*. It's one who gives himself up for another's will, devoted to another, to the disregard of their own interests.

That's what a bondservant is. Jesus used this word in Matthew 20, 27. He said, Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your slave, your servant.

Jesus Christ himself took the posture of a slave when he washed his disciples' feet. So what a wonderful thing now to claim as your title.

You are one who is now a slave of Christ. One who Christ will use to advance his kingdom in the souls and the lives of believers. Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 08] I mentioned that these saints, he says to all the saints, there's an orderliness in how he views the church. All the saints, the word saint, it means consecrated, set apart, devoted.

In the Old Testament, what was consecrated or set apart were the instruments used in the ceremonial law. These were common utensils, but they were consecrated, set apart, not to be used for lesser purposes.

These belong to the ministry of the Lord. And he says, Now you are all the people of God who are set apart. You are the vessels God will use for his special consecrated purposes.

You're a consecrated body. And with you are the officers. From among you are elders and deacons. The word here is bishop or overseer.

For us, it's a synonymous, well, it's the same office described in several different terms. Under shepherds of Christ, pastors, overseers, elders. That's one office.

[9 : 12] And the other office is deacons. Servants who are with the congregation, but also set apart to hold a special office. Well, who is it that's included in this description of all the saints?

All the saints, they're gathered in this church. One of these saints, we read in Acts 16, verse 16. If you still have your marker there, you want to follow along.

Acts 16, verse 16. In the same city of Philippi, Paul's second missionary journey, the first time that he would meet these beloved believers.

We read this description, starting in Acts, verse 16. A certain slave girl, possessed with a spirit of divination. This means that this young girl was a slave to human masters.

They possessed her. They owned her. And she had to work for them as a slave. But on top of that, she had a double bondage. She was possessed by a spirit of divination or a demon from the fallen angel, from the depths of hell, possessing her body and manipulating the truth and the words in such a way that people were willing to pay her master's money for the words that she would say about their future as if she could foresee the future.

[10 : 43] Well, this slave girl met them. And she brought her masters much profit by fortune telling, we read in verse 16. In verse 17, we read that this girl followed Paul and us, wrote Luke, and she cried out, saying, these men are the servants of the Most High God who proclaim to us the way of salvation.

Verse 18, for many days she continued to do this. Verse 19, we read that Paul became greatly annoyed and he turned and said to the demon that was possessing the slave girl, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

This was a desperate sinner. This young slave girl knew that these men are speaking a message of salvation. The demons speaking through this little girl, they revealed the reality, the spiritual way that the kingdom of God is going to advance into the city of Philippi.

And it's a way of salvation as a demonstration of God's power in his advancing kingdom. This girl herself experienced such salvation.

She was delivered from that bondage of this evil spirit. And Paul says, no matter what your background was, no matter what you were a slave to, in Christ, you are a saint.

[12 : 11] Do you see how God makes desperate sinners into orderly saints within his church? The encouragement for us is that every church can be well-ordered in this way.

We're well-ordered as we remember and we remind ourselves, I'm first of all a slave to Christ. That's who I am. I don't need to hold on to anything else in my identity.

I'm a slave to Jesus Christ because he became a servant to save me. And as a church of those who God has saved from our desperate sin and the bondage that he's brought each one of us out of, as we gather in his name, he guides his church to raise up and set apart church officers through whom he will minister and serve his body.

God makes desperate sinners into orderly saints. How else does God shape his church? Number two, God makes Christians remember the basis of their blessing.

God makes Christians remember the basis of their blessing. Look at verse two. His greeting is grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 29] Grace to you and peace. In the example I read a moment ago, Tiberius Claudius, Caesar Augustus, the next words in this historic document are this, to the city of the Alexandrians, greetings.

And the word he uses for greetings is in Greek. The word is kareem. Kareem is a general salutation, just means greetings. Well, Paul does a play on words.

He uses the word grace. Instead of greetings, he says karees. So it sounds very similar to this common Greek greeting, but he instead uses the specific theological doctrine, grace.

grace and peace. Grace is God's favor to those who are ill-deserving. We deserve ill.

We deserve wrath of God for our sin, but instead we get God's wonderful favor. That's what grace is. It's only through Jesus Christ because he took the ill we deserve in our place and he accomplished for us the blessings that we could never merit for ourselves.

[14 : 39] That's the meeting point for all true Christians. Grace to you, church. And anyone who knows of God's grace meets Paul right there. You don't need to say anything else.

We're on the same footing. Why did Paul know grace? Well, remember, Paul had hunted down Christians himself. He had been the one going into peaceful worship gatherings maybe like this.

dragging Christians out in chains, casting them into the prisons, hauling them away to Jerusalem to be punished. Could you imagine what that would be like?

I'll ask you children, what if someone were to come through those doors and command the soldiers to arrest your mom, your dad, your grandpa, your grandma? Put them in chains and you see them drug away.

Well, Paul was the one standing there ordering the soldiers to do just that. Paul said this himself to the church in Acts 22.4. He said, I persecuted this way, referring to followers of Christ.

[15 : 46] I persecuted them to the death, binding and delivering them into prisons, both men and women, bringing them in chains to Jerusalem to be punished. In 1 Timothy 1.15, he says, but Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the chief.

Paul knew grace. Romans 5.20, where sin abounded and Paul's sin abounded so.

He wrote, their grace abounded much more. So when Paul greets the church with grace, he does it as one who knows God's grace himself. He says, grace to you and peace.

Well, if grace is a reference to the Greek greeting, common greeting among the Greeks, he pulls in Greek and Jew together. The Jews greet one another with shalom.

Shalom. Holistic, relational rest. That's what shalom means. It means you enjoy a settled communion together. You are at home.

[16 : 55] You are comfortable. And he says, this is only possible from God through Jesus Christ. Isn't that true for our fellowship? As part of the membership process, one of the questions is describe some of the best experiences you've had in church.

And many have shared it's been among brothers and sisters who know God's grace, who know this peace. And it's a time of wonderful rest where it truly feels like I'm with family.

And God ministers to me over and over through that. We've also been in different relationships, maybe at work or even with relatives or sadly in the church as well, where there's no peace.

And it's one of the hardest things we can go through as Christians, isn't it? To have no peace. I believe this principle is true that where there is no grace, there can be no peace.

The solution, if you want more peace in those relationships, is God's grace at a heart level. The more church that we understand God's grace, the more peaceful will be our fellowship.

[18 : 02] Amen? See how preaching the gospel and gospeling one another through the hardest things we go through, that is how God shapes us together. It's the most practical thing we can do is to remind ourselves of God's grace toward us.

God is to remind us of God's grace toward us. So, God makes Christians remember the basis of their blessing. Number three, God makes Christians remember one another with thankfulness.

God makes Christians remember one another with thankfulness. That's how he shapes us as well. Verse three, we read, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.

Upon every remembrance of you, I thank my God. every remembrance of this church at Philippi. Look in Acts 16 once again, you still have your marker there.

Starting at verse 13, let's go back and put ourselves in Paul's shoes. What would have been these early remembrances of the church at Philippi? Acts 16, verse 13.

[19 : 08] We read that it was the Sabbath day. There's Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke. They went out of the city to the riverside. where prayer was customarily made.

He says, they sat down and they began to speak. It's through the preaching, through the spoken word of God that God carries the gospel into the ears, the minds, and the hearts of believers.

They preached and as he preached the word, he gave the gift of faith to Lydia. He remembers that. He said, a certain woman named Lydia heard us and she was a seller of purple who worshipped the Lord.

Now look at the next words there in verse 14. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

They had to do their part. They're going into the open air. They're ministering the word of God for whoever has an ear to hear. But it's the Lord who opens the heart and causes you to pay attention and hear and receive the gospel.

[20 : 18] We read in verse 15 that she and her household were baptized and then she hosted them. Well, after Paul commanded the demon to leave that little slave girl alone, he and Silas were accused of disturbing the peace.

We read in Acts 16, 20 that the whole city became exceedingly troubled because her masters saw that their hope of profit was now gone. So they seized Paul and Silas and they dragged them into the marketplace and to the authorities.

We read in Acts 16, 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them. The whole city of Philippi greatly disturbed against Paul and Silas who were the preachers.

The magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods and they laid many stripes on them. That means they whipped them so the skin is torn away of their backs.

And yet, Paul writes in verse 3 of our sermon text, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Paul thanks God for the memory of the church at Philippi.

[21 : 32] He thanks God for causing Lydia and her household to believe for saving that slave girl and for bringing these most unlikely believers together and planting them as a church.

Does the Lord ever do this for you? Does he bring to mind the remembrance of other believers? When he does that, we should thank the Lord for these memories. Thank you, Lord, for reminding me of that conversation I had with this brother.

Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful memory of that hard time that this family was in, but you were faithful to them. When the Lord brings one another to mind, we pray for one another and we thank the Lord for his grace on all of us because God makes Christians remember one another with thankfulness.

In business and in other dealings, it's mostly hard memories and you're constantly on the defensive, but our thoughts of one another should be grace and peace and thank you, Lord, for this body you've given.

Number four, God makes the afflicted pray with joy. How does God shape his church? He makes the afflicted pray with joy. Look at verse four.

[22 : 52] Paul writes, always in every prayer of mine, making requests for you all with joy. You notice how urgent Paul's language is?

It's personal. It's persistent. He says, in every remembrance of you, always, in every prayer of mine for you, making requests for you all.

You see, each one in the church is on Paul's mind and on his heart. Each one is precious in God's sight and he puts the names of these precious souls forward before God and he asks God, he makes requests of God on their behalf.

He prays. Does the Lord bring fellow believers to your mind? Does he stir you up to specifically name those he wants you to intercede for?

The beautiful thing is this, the Lord Jesus is interceding on our behalf right now and his spirit causes you to know what you're supposed to join your prayers to. He's already praying.

[23 : 59] When he stirs your heart and puts other believers in your mind, he has the name of that believer in his mind. So you're joining your prayers to those of Christ. He's inviting you to participate in his ministry.

What a blessing. Well, let's try to figure out now from scripture, where is Paul as he's praying for all the saints in Philippi with joy?

Where is he? There's this little church far away and Paul's praying with so much fervency. We know that he is in house arrest in Rome being watched by the Praetorian Guard.

Who's the Praetorian Guard? It's an elite unit of the Imperial Roman Army that served as personal bodyguards and intelligence agents for the emperor himself.

Paul is a big deal and he's being watched in Rome by the elite Praetorian Guard. If I could give you a comparison, this would be the best of the FBI, the intelligence agents, who are keeping tabs on every potential threat within the empire, mixed with army rangers, the toughest of the tough.

[25 : 15] That's who's keeping watch on Paul. Well, now we have to ask, how did Paul get there to be writing this prison epistle? We know that he spent two years approximately in jail in Caesarea, another city, without a trial.

And we know that when he arrived at Rome, he was greeted as if he were a celebrity. Picture someone really famous arriving at the Denver International Airport and the church wanting to go out there and greet them with signs and cheering and welcome them.

That's how the church in Rome greeted Paul initially. However, we learn that Paul was then envied, most likely by the elders of this church in Rome. Look in Philippians chapter 1.

Now look at verse 15. He warns them from this seat that he's in now that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry. We can fill in the blanks with some historical, you know, guessing, I guess we can call it.

What happened was this. As Paul arrived in Rome, and this is the church to which maybe the most theological letter, the letter to the Romans, is written. They didn't continue eagerly submitting to his teaching.

[26 : 32] When Paul got arrested, he was considered an embarrassment. They were interested in their own glory. They saw Paul as a rival to their own fame, to their own flesh.

And Paul says in Romans 1.16, I am not ashamed of the gospel. That's his state of mind, thinking of the church in Rome. This was new to me as I studied for today.

Paul had become so neglected in Rome from that celebrity status. While he was under house arrest, another believer came to travel and he had to search to even find Paul.

In other words, you go to the churches, that's where you would expect they'll know exactly where Paul is. They didn't know where Paul had been. That's how badly they neglected him. In 2 Timothy 1.16, Paul wrote, Onesiphorus often refreshed me in prison and was not ashamed of my chain.

But when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. He had to go find him, go on a hunt to see where he is even Paul being kept.

[27 : 42] You see, the church had a very clear command from Jesus to minister to one another when you get arrested. It's going to happen, church. Jesus said in Matthew 25.43, It's as if I were naked, Jesus says, and you did not clothe me to neglect a brother in prison.

It's as if I, Jesus, was sick and in prison and you did not visit me. That's how neglected Paul had become by the church in Rome. So that's where he was.

And from this house arrest, from these chains, Paul says, I make requests to God for you in every prayer of mine, church, with joy.

I make requests for you with joy. How? How can that be? James Montgomery Boyce help point this out to me.

The human mind can really only concentrate on one thing at a time. And in the first chapter of Philippians, the name, Jesus Christ, is mentioned 18 times in 30 verses.

[28 : 54] More than every other verse is Jesus Christ. How can Paul make requests for the church in joy from Rome where he had been abandoned, neglected?

It's because his mind is full of Jesus Christ. That's what he wants to tell them about. You see how God is so gracious to shape his church, to make those who are afflicted pray with joy.

God uses your affliction and Paul's affliction and my affliction to make us meditate more on Jesus Christ.

Doesn't he do that? And as you meditate on Jesus Christ, he fills your mind with joy. And full of the joy, thinking of Jesus, you pray.

Full of his joy in you. Well, the fifth way, final one for today, that I see God shaping his church is that he makes all of his people partners in his mission.

[30 : 02] God makes all of his people partners in his mission. Verse 5, Philippians 1.5, I thank my God with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

Your fellowship in the gospel. fellowship is your joint participation in the gospel. Your fellowship is your communion that you share in Christ's salvation.

It's from the first day, that very first day, Acts 16.25, when Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.

They're declaring Jesus Christ. this is the fellowship we share. Even when our feet are in stocks, we can't stand up and our backs are bleeding and opened.

We pray with joy because we have a communion, a shared participation in the gospel of Jesus. They pray joyfully, singing gospel truths, having taken a public beating with rods.

[31 : 15] They're still bearing witness in the word and the life of these prisoners so that all the other prisoners hear this gospel as they proclaim it.

This isn't normal. People in that shape don't sing with joy like this of Jesus. And there's the jailer. He's hearing this as well. We don't know the lyrics to these songs that they're singing in prison but our songs reflect God's good news.

They reflect the good news that we are created by a loving, good, holy God that he saves sinners who believe in the work of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

That first day when they got to preach the gospel to the jailer, we read in Acts 16 verse 29 that the jailer fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

That's the power of God's gospel and the Holy Spirit applying it to this man. In verse 30 we read that he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

[32 : 23] And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved you and your household. That jailer he must have quite an experience, quite a resume.

How do you get to be the jailer of this little Rome, the great city of Philippi? Position of power and authority. It's also dealing with things that no one else wants to have to deal with.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Jailer falls down trembling, what must I do to be saved? Well now this jailer and his household, they are partners in the fellowship of the gospel, partners in the ministry, even from a great distance now from Rome to Philippi, you're partners with Paul and Timothy.

You see how God shapes his church? There in the living room of the wealthy business woman, that's Lydia, sat a girl that everyone thought was crazy, most likely the keeper of the city's jailhouse along with his family and servants, and that's the beautiful church.

These are sinners that have been set apart and declared by God to be saints. the Philippian church shared a fellowship, a communion, and a common participation in the good news.

[34 : 05] They shared this across the Mediterranean sea with the churches in all of the other cities that God had planted. Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you, if you are in Christ, you share the same fellowship with them.

it's the church in heaven and on earth from the earliest generation to this day. And you who believe in Jesus Christ today, maybe for the first time truly, you too will be declared a saint.

King Jesus will make you willing. You will choose him. You will gladly follow King Jesus, trusting him by faith.

He's good. And you will be filled with joy unspeakable like Paul, full of his glory. Because each one of you whom God calls and draws in and makes part of his body, you are an important partner in his mission.

The mission he carries out through his people, the church. So this is how God shapes you, his beloved church, for his purpose. Jesus.

[35 : 21] Let's pray and ask that God will work this truth into our lives for his glory. Amen.