

Salvation leads to Servanthood

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[0 : 0 0] and two. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and the deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. One might imagine how he can get so much in so few words, but let's just read it together again. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Well as we come to look at the book of Philippians, we're going to take a more detailed look than perhaps I did back in 2014, where we sort of took the main themes, and we'll dive into the text just a little bit more. Ten years on, I think we are in the position to do that, because if they were independent sermons not joined together, then we can't really expect any kind of maturity or any kind of growth. But if we consider the messages over the last ten years as a construction site, where one is always building on the previous one, then suddenly we can appreciate that we can look at things at a deeper level, a wider level, than perhaps just an overview level. However, saying that, it's not going to be complicated, because Philippians, probably out of all the letters, is one of the most easiest ones to read, and of course the easiest to understand. There's not too many difficult phrases or verses within it as we come. Now, as we come to the book, you will recognize, at least hopefully, that there is a pattern to faithfulness, and that pattern is best seen in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we notice the pattern of faithfulness firstly in Christ, and then we would expect that same pattern of faithfulness to be spelled out, imitated, into the people of the church. Now, what we notice in the introduction here is that the letter is shaped the introduction, perhaps in the same kind of way, the book of Revelation shapes the prologue. I mean, the prologue would almost have to be written after the revelation, because how could you mention what you're about to see in the revelation if that didn't come first? So you put your introduction after you know what's coming, so that you can introduce those things in your introduction. In the same way, I would argue that the greeting here in Philippians 1 does exactly the same thing, in that Paul knows what he's about to write, he knows what the church is going to hear, and so he sows those seeds within the introduction.

And Philippi is generally speaking a strong church. It is a church that's known for its giving towards Paul, but there are a few issues, as there are in all kinds of churches, where people need teaching, they need correction, they need encouragement, they need reminding, and we know the difference between a reminder and an instruction. An instruction is something you hear for the first time, a reminder is the reminder of the instruction. So if someone says, why do you keep telling me this? Well, I'm not instructing you all over again, I'm reminding you of the instructions that you have heard. Now, given that this introduction includes the content of the letter in terms of servanthood, the key issue within Philippi is whether or not the church can be like-minded. And this is spelled out in particular in chapter 2, where they are to have the mind of Christ, they are to be like-minded. And what type of mind is that? It is to be like Christ, to think like Christ. But not only to have a mind like Christ in humility, be like-minded with one another, but also to have that example of servanthood copying Christ point for point, that we would be a servant like Christ was a servant to us.

[4 : 3 6] And so our servanthood is always going to be shaped by how we understand Jesus, what he did in everything. The type of servant we will be will always be a reflection of what we think of Jesus' servanthood, how much we think about it, how much we devote ourselves and meditate on it and live by his example. Christ is our master, but he is also a servant, and no servant is greater than our master.

And so if Christ, our master, is a servant, what kind of servant must we be? What kind of servanthood must we render if no servant is greater than his master?

The whole point here is to recognize that salvation leads to servanthood. Salvation leads to becoming a servant. And if you want to know what that servanthood looks like, then we are to look at Christ Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. And as Christ gives himself, he's not retaining or holding on to anything, he's not grasping for anything, which is what we read in the book of Philippians.

Now, Paul, knowing what he's going to write, introduces himself to the church in a particular way, different than he does in other letters. And so what we notice is what is absent, not what is present. And when we pay attention to what is missing, then we begin to see just how much focus he's putting on being a servant rather than being an apostle. Because you would have noticed as you read this, Paul does not refer to his apostleship. He refers to himself as being a servant, first seed sown.

[6 : 33] Now, there's a reason why he's decided not to refer to his apostleship, because he wants to be clear that what this letter is going to be about from the outset. So if we're going to appreciate what Paul is doing, let's appreciate how Paul refers to himself at the very beginning. So here's really the summary of these first two verses. Paul decides not to call himself an apostle or refer to himself in that way, but rather a servant. But if you were to read other letters, like the letter to the Colossians, he says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. The question is, why does he assert his apostleship in one letter and leave it out of another? And the reason he asserts his apostleship in Colossae is because of the false teaching, mainly Gnosticism. And in order for his teaching to come across with authority, he decides to state his authority as an apostle so that they would understand that the reliability of his spoken word falls back onto his calling, which is an apostle.

When you look at the book of Galatians, Paul does exactly the same. The Galatian church have fallen for a false gospel, which is no gospel at all. And Paul now has to come and teach them the gospel.

And the reliability of his gospel depends on the reliability of his apostleship. And the reason he defends his apostleship in the letter to the Galatians is because this is what will determine the reliability of his gospel. In other words, where do we hear the gospel from?

Well, we hear it from Christ, and then the apostles are the foundations of the church. And so the reliability of the gospel goes back to the apostles. But you'll notice here in Philippians, he doesn't mention his apostleship because he doesn't want to draw attention to an authority status when the letter is going to be about servanthood. In other words, he is setting us an example by not using a title, not using the prominence or position that he has. We know that there is a difference between Paul and Timothy in terms of their calling. We know that Paul is an apostle and Timothy is not. But Paul, along with Timothy, calls himself servants. They are servants of Christ Jesus. And so when Paul writes this letter as a servant, he is sowing the seed, which you will get to hear in the end of chapter one, in chapter two, and throughout the letter, of the importance of servanthood. No one is greater than each other.

We have different callings granted. But the idea of servanthood is sown brilliantly into the introduction by the absence of apostleship. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. And then he does something a little different because he addresses the whole church, but then he decides to address the overseers and the deacons in particular. Why? Because they are the appointed servants of the church. The overseers are like the elders who serve the congregation in spiritual ways. And the deacons are the ones who serve the congregation in practical ways. And what he is doing is he, again, is sowing the seed of servanthood by particularly adding into the greeting overseers and deacons. At the end of which, he has the greeting of grace and grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 37] In other words, these believers who are in Christ have received grace. They have received peace because of the gospel because of Christ Jesus. And they have peace with God because they are in Christ.

And so they have two positions. The one is being in Christ. The other is at Philippi. Two locations. Believers are in Christ and they are somewhere in the world before God. So hopefully you can see from the greeting that Paul, by the absence of apostleship and then by the presence of calling himself and Timothy servants of God, and then by picking up on overseers and deacons who are servants within the church, that he is sowing the seed for what you're about to hear. This letter is going to be about how salvation creates servants. And then the rest of the letter will spell out what type of servanthood or what being a servant actually looks like in the body of Christ, the church. So

firstly, serving the church.

I want us to recognize that the letter alone serves the church at Philippi. That as Paul writes the letter, he is serving the church by teaching the church what they need to hear. The church is to be entirely shaped by who Christ is. And we find out who Christ is if we haven't seen him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands through the word of God. And you'll remember how Jesus, at the end of John, after Thomas touched him, says, blessed are those who have never seen and yet believe.

And what we learn there at the end of John is that when we actually come to believe in Jesus Christ through the written word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the authority and the experience would be, is the equivalent of you putting your hand in the side of Jesus. That's how real Jesus is to you when you actually come to the word of God. That's the power of the word of God over you.

So if you think that Thomas had it good and you don't quite have it as good as Thomas, that's not what the end of John says. It's not what Jesus is saying. What he's saying is that when you believe in the word regarding Jesus, blessed are those. What type of blessing is it? Well, it's to have that same confirmation and assurance that Thomas had when he actually touched Jesus for himself. So we're not shortchanged because we haven't walked with Jesus or touched Jesus in any way. I don't feel shortchanged and I certainly hope you don't. This is the work of the word and the spirit. And so as Paul writes this letter, we need to understand that the letter is how Paul is serving this church. He's teaching them, he's encouraging them, he's correcting them. As an apostle, as a teacher of the church, this is how he is doing it. And so why does Paul write what he does?

[13 : 51] Because he is a servant of Christ Jesus. Jesus knows what his church needs to hear. And Paul, being the messenger, sends that message to the church because he's serving Jesus. And then he serves the church by doing what Jesus asks of him, requires of him. Why does Paul spend the time that he does with the church? Well, again, because he is a servant of Christ Jesus. He's simply imitating Christ down here in regards to his church at Philippi. So God knows what his church needs to hear, what they need to learn, how they need to be encouraged, where they need to be corrected, how, you know, everything, the assurances that they need. And these assurances and convictions and teaching are all found in the person of Christ Jesus. So while we recognize the words of Paul, we recognize the voice of authority is actually from Christ himself.

So this letter is applicable to us today because we are the same church. We are being spoken to by the same God. Paul did not create the church. He was a servant of Christ to the church. And in the same way, we come before God this morning and hear the same words spoken to us in a different generation, in a different setting, with different backgrounds, but we are all in Christ Jesus. And therefore, because we are in Christ Jesus, the letter comes across with its authority and its power and its conviction and its ability to shape the people of God as they consider Christ. Remember, you will be shaped like Christ as you worship him. We become like what we worship. This is crucial, that as we behold the glory of God, we are transformed. We are transformed. And this transformation comes by beholding Jesus.

So having understood where Paul was going and how he is serving the church, we now move on internally to the overseers and the deacons. Now we don't know their names, but we know their qualifications.

And we know their qualifications because their qualifications are spelled out elsewhere in the New Testament. So when Paul addresses the overseers and the deacons, he is addressing, or he is in addition to the entire congregation, he is making a special point to address those who are qualified to lead. The deacons, as we learned from Acts chapter 6, are those who take care of the practical concerns of the church and the practical concerns of the people that they have within the body of Christ.

In Acts 6, it was to do with the distribution of food and making sure everyone was fed. But of course, that then is multiplied in different ways as the church grows and also throughout the years.

[17 : 09] And then we have the overseers. And the overseers qualifications, you can read in Timothy, you can read in Titus 1 and 2. But in both cases, they are servants of Christ. Their callings are entirely different. The overseers are to take care of the spiritual needs of the congregation, even if the congregation decides to believe that most of their needs are practical and therefore fall into the deaconate's realm of authority. No, not when you read the New Testament. Our needs are both practical and they are spiritual. And so Christ gives to the church those who will serve practically and those who will serve and take care of the spiritual needs that need to be addressed in his

church. Different callings, both serving in different capacities, but both serving. They are servants. Now, an overseer has a particular qualification, one which you know I hold myself to. I don't know if the church would hold me to it, but I hold myself to it because I read the Word of God and I don't see any reason why I shouldn't be held to it. And that is that their children must be believers, Titus 1 verse 6. That in order to be an overseer in the church, your children must be believers. Now, many have rejected this qualification or not necessarily rejected it, perhaps neglected it, simply because of the problems that it causes further down the line. I don't think it's any embarrassment to leave the ministry to concentrate on the faithfulness of your children. I don't think that that's an embarrassment at all. I think it's more embarrassing if you don't because you're neglecting the qualification that is there. And so even if you neglect it, you can't get rid of Titus 1 6. It's still there. So you can reject it, you can neglect it, but it's still there every time you read Titus. Now, some will say that since no father can guarantee the salvation of their children, how can God hold them accountable? And yet he does. It's there, Titus 1 6. So I appreciate the question, but it doesn't change the meaning of the verse. I appreciate the question that because no father can guarantee the salvation of their children, how can God hold them accountable? But he does. It's written there in Titus 1 6. So God holds the person accountable to his word by his spirit, and the minister, in particular the overseer, is to respond to that faithfully. So what does that particular qualification mean then? Well, it means that the minister or the overseer must understand that the church is the fulfillment of God's promises, and those promises don't just involve parents, they also involve children. And we see this particularly when we look at the promise of salvation. When Peter got up and preached on the day of Pentecost, he said that this gospel, this promise that God is fulfilling is for you and your children. And there are many other qualifications in the Old and New Testament where the overseer is to be faithful to the promises of God. Of course, it's all in God's hands, but he must believe those promises, walk in faith and not in doubt. And so as the overseer faithfully observes the promises of God, he is honoring God because he is walking by faith in light of those promises, and he is not dishonoring God with his lack of faith in them. Because without faith, it is impossible to please God, and you do not want an overseer in the church who's not pleasing God.

You do not want anyone in the church who is not pleasing God. So though I can appreciate some of the objections to the qualifications, and though I can appreciate some of the logical traps that you get yourself into, it still doesn't remove the qualification. Even if we think it's unfair that God should hold us accountable for something he is in control of, this is how he directs his people. If I can put it in a slightly different way, when you think about doing something for the Lord or going on a mission trip or something like that, you may think in terms of open doors and doors closing as an opportunity.

Well, if God is in control of that, deciding what you can and cannot do, then he's also in control of this, deciding what a minute, an overseer can and cannot do. I don't see the complication, but I can understand why many don't like it. I would be more embarrassed to stay within the ministry knowing that I am neglecting parts of scripture, then I would be leaving it because it would be no embarrassment to me whatsoever if I had to. God forbid that that ever happens, but if I had to, in light of the church. So when we think about qualifications, the next issue that we have within qualifications is what would happen if someone remained in a post unqualified? Would it have a negative impact on the church? Well, we can't answer that question yet, but we will be able to see that principle of that as we go through the letter of Philippians. So we are called to serve, overseers and deacons and others are called to serve in the church, but not in such a way where you avoid the other responsibilities that God expects you to fulfill. Taking on a role as an overseer so as to avoid your responsibilities within the home as a father and as a husband is wrong. If we take on a role within the church to give ourselves a sense of value and worth and prominence and not really to serve, it's wrong.

[23 : 47] So these qualifications matter because they actually relate to the health of the leaders of the church and the church at large. And so for those who actually serve because they want a little bit of power, they want a little bit of authority, are going to be incredibly challenged, seriously challenged, when they actually get to the bit in Philippians where Paul teaches that Christ made himself nothing and became a servant. Christ, God, in Christ, made himself nothing and became a servant.

Now I know my position. Now I know Christ's position. Now I know my position. Well, here's an important principle, one that I have referred to often and one I do not want you to forget. Write it down, memorize it, read it every day this week. The principle is that maturity within the church in terms of serving others well is expressed in Psalm 1. I love Psalm 1 for multiple reasons, but one of the things that you'll find in Psalm 1 is that the man who devotes himself to the Lord, who actually walks with the Lord, who actually whispers the word of the Lord to him day and night, when it talks about him meditating on the word day and night, what it means, and I learned this because Francis is my Hebrew teacher, it literally means that the man is whispering the word of God to himself, to himself, speaking the word of God to himself. And when he does, he is likened to a man who is planted by streams of living water, producing fruit in its season. And trees don't eat their own fruit. What they produce is for others. And so this man is likened to a tree that produces something for others.

This man who devotes himself to the Lord in serious prayerful commitment in word and spirit, meditating on the word day and night, loving the Lord, devoting himself to the Lord, is likened to a tree that produces fruit. And trees don't eat their own fruit. What they produce is for others. That's the servant. And therefore, for the church to hear this, it's incredibly important because now you begin to realize that your individual health and needs to be met within a congregation does not depend on you entirely, but it actually also depends on the people that you sit next to, that you congregate with. The reason we're able to serve others in this way is because we cannot produce everything we need ourselves. We need other people to produce other things. And as we come together and we eat one another's fruit to use that imagery, this is how we become mature. This is how we become strong. This is how we become built up. And so the congregation, the people of God or the assembly, if I can put it in Hebrew terms, in terms that the psalmist would have understood the assembly of God's people, their health and their maturity and the servanthood nature within that assembly depends entirely on each individual's personal devotion to the Lord. And then as they all devote themselves to the Lord, they become like trees planted by living waters, producing fruit in their season. And what they produce is not for themselves, not for themselves, but for others. That's health. That's vitality.

[28 : 00] And you cannot achieve it in any other way other than through that personal close and clean walk with the Lord. And as you come together like that, suddenly the church flourishes because it's doing things God's way. Well, here's the exhortation as we close. There is a pattern to faithfulness.

And the pattern isn't necessarily seen in one particular verse or one particular book. It is seen throughout all of scripture. But if you want to have a smaller section to work on, then just look at the person of Christ and look at how he served people and how he related to God on earth in his prayers and in doing his will. We learn the pattern of faithfulness by looking at the one who is faithful, by looking to Christ and at Christ. We also learn the pattern of faithfulness by listening to his word and praying and being devoted to the Lord. Not necessarily a church activity, but an individual activity. You're personal, but you're not individual. It's private, but it's not necessarily exclusively yours. We are a people of God and God has saved a people. He has saved a church. We are one body in Christ Jesus. And therefore, there is just this final condition to realize, to at least manage with in our own life. And that is that the condition of our walk with the Lord affects others. It has an impact on the people around us. And therefore, as you will read in Philippians, we are warned against not imitating those who are staggering in the faith, but to imitate those who are imitating Christ effectively, or rather to imitate Christ. This is how the church thrives. And so now we begin to see why Paul and Timothy relate to themselves as servants. He doesn't state his apostleship. And why he pulls out the overseers and the deacons in particular to the rest of the congregation. Those called and appointed and qualified to actually serve the church. And we must recognize that the type of servant that Christ wants in his church is like the tree that doesn't eat its own fruit. That what we do, we do for others.

Our devotion to the Lord will not just affect us, it will affect us, but it will also affect the others that we are with in the church. What we learn is that salvation leads to servanthood.

[31 : 06] And servanthood is the fruit of being like Christ. Salvation leads to servanthood, and servanthood is the fruit of being like Christ. Amen.

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