

## St. Slave – Philippians 1:1-2

### I. INTRODUCTION – Read text

#### A. Missionary Letter

1. This is what's called a 'missionary letter.' [elab]
2. That's what Philippians is – a missionary letter.
3. Paul wrote it from prison in Rome to the church in Philippi in northern Greece.
4. His relationship with them was warm & close.
5. It began several years before during his 2<sup>nd</sup> church-planting venture.
  - a. The church at Philippi was the first Paul launched in Europe.
  - b. He knew it was a strategic location for reaching all of northern Greece.
  - c. So he'd sent Timothy there often to encourage them.
6. Though the church was being persecuted, they sent monetary support to Paul as often as they could.
  - a. Their most recent gift had been taken to Paul in Rome by Epaphroditus, one of their elders.
  - b. Paul wrote this letter of thanks for him to take back, updating & encouraging the Philippians to keep growing in Christ.

### II. TEXT

#### A. V. 1

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

1. I've been a Christian for 43 years & a pastor for 28.
2. I love theology & philosophy & digging into the deep things.
3. But the more I **learn**, the more I **realize** the power of the Gospel is in its **simplicity**.
  - a. God puts the most important stuff on the lowest shelves where **anyone** can reach it.
  - b. That's what we should expect from a God of love.
  - c. Salvation doesn't require a certain IQ or whether or not you're educated.
  - d. A God of love would make the essentials something **everyone** could lay hold of, regardless of mental capacity.
4. Think of it – one of the few rituals Christians are called to practice as part of the Faith is **communion**!
  - a. No matter how deep your walk with God, you always end up coming back to the cross.
  - b. No matter how lofty your knowledge of theology, Square One is Jesus & Him crucified.
5. So the seminary professor with all his knowledge stands side by side with the newest believer when they come to the Lord's table. We are all equals **in Christ**.
6. One of the things that's come home **so powerfully** to me **recently** is the need to be reminded of the basics – those majestic, mind-bending, life-altering **first things** that originally captured my heart.
7. 2 of them are found here in v. 1; 2 words Paul uses to describe himself & the Philippians = **Slaves & Saints**.
8. In **some** of Paul's letters written to correct an erring church, he called himself an **apostle** of Jesus Christ, appealing to the authority of his calling.
  - a. But **this** letter carries **no** correction – only **encouragement**.
  - b. His apostleship wasn't being questioned so he has no need to remind them.
9. He refers to himself & his assistant Timothy as **bondservants** of Jesus.
  - a. The word is literally – **slaves**.
  - b. Nearly all modern English translations have **servant**, but the word is '**slave**.'
10. This word had special meaning to the Philippians because they were a **Roman colony**.
  - a. A hundred years before this Marc Antony & Augustus Caesar won a crucial battle against the last of the Roman Senate at Philippi.
  - b. To commemorate the victory, Augustus declared Philippi an Imperial city & gave it all kinds of privileges, including a bunch of tax-breaks.
  - c. He gave retiring army officers large plots of land there.
    - 1) When they moved to take possession of their new home,
    - 2) They arrived with dozens of slaves they'd acquired as spoils of war.
11. As we saw in a recent study, the economy of the Roman Empire **ran** on slavery.
  - a. There were some 60 million of them throughout the Empire.

- b. They did everything from working fields to being the Emperor's scribe.
  - c. Some cleaned sewers, others were doctors.
12. What was common to all regardless of their job, was their **status**; slaves were considered little more than living tools.
- a. They had no legal rights.
  - b. They were the **property** of their owner who could do whatever he liked with them.
  - c. **Being** a slave was dishonorable. So they were usually treated poorly.
  - d. Many Romans considered **kindness** to a slave as weakness because it was wasting good will on an unworthy object.
  - e. That all changed as Christianity took root in the Empire but at the time of Paul this was a slave's lot.
13. Christianity flourished among slaves because it spoke of a God who loved & cared for them. Christians recognized their dignity as men & women created in God's image.
- a. When Christians met to worship, the social & cultural distinctions that marked them in daily life were left behind.
  - b. All were one in Christ. No one was anyone else's better or master.
  - c. On the contrary, everyone was to love & serve everyone else, regardless of status or title.
14. So Paul refers to himself as a **slave** of Jesus Christ.
- a. He wasn't hung up on titles, like some people are.
  - b. He could have referred to himself as . . .
    - 1) Apostle according to the miraculous vision.
    - 2) Master Church-Planter
    - 3) Writer of Scripture
    - 4) Mighty Miracle-Worker
    - 5) Spiritual Father to thousands
  - c. He shucks all those in favor of – "Slave of Jesus"
15. The world is **so in to status**! People **love** their titles!
- a. They **aspire** to the symbols of power & perks of position.
  - b. Whether it's the corner office, a window, a parking spot, or just one of those little desk name plates – they're **ambitious** for the evidences of importance.
  - c. And once they have them, heaven help the fool who fails to give them due honor!
16. A while back I was at a banquet where there were several other people around the table.
- a. We all introduced ourselves, then chatted over the meal.
  - b. One of the men was a doctor. Toward the end of the meal I asked him a question, addressing him by his first name.
  - c. He didn't say anything at first, just looked at his plate, then said, "That's **Dr.** So & so."
  - d. Everyone at the table was surprised by his reaction.
  - e. There'd been no formality up till that point. The use of first names had been the order of the evening.
  - f. But suddenly here was someone who **demanded** to be called by his title.
  - g. I wonder if his wife addressed him that way too?
17. An interesting exercise is to sit down & list all the titles we bear because of the **roles** we play.
- a. How many & what kind of **hats** do you wear?
  - b. How do you want others to **identify** you?
  - c. What **label** do you **aspire** to?
18. While being a slave was considered by the world of Paul's day something **dishonorable** – He gladly embraced the title "Slave of Jesus" because there was no higher calling, no more noble task than to serve the King of kings, & Master of masters.
19. This reminds me of a passage I just read in my devotions last week –
- a. In Joshua 1:1 it says –
- After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant:
- b. Of all the things Moses **could have** been called, the Holy Spirit picked the most sublime – The servant of the Lord.
  - c. Not **Deliverer** of Israel, nor **Waster** of Egypt.

- d. Not mighty Miracle-worker, manna-maker, nor water-provider.
  - e. Not law-giver nor civilization-builder.
  - f. He's not referred to as the one who gazed on the refulgent glory of God.
  - g. None of these lofty epithets are attributed to him.
  - h. He's given a title that surpasses them all – ***Servant of God***.
20. Everyone serves something. The question isn't ***if*** you serve; only ***what***.
- a. ***Who or what*** do you serve today?
  - b. Are you a slave to ***fashion*** or ***fun***?
  - c. Are you a slave to ***self***?
  - d. Are you in ***bondage to money***?
  - e. Are you ***shackled to a philosophy***, a ***political cause***, or ***ideology***?
21. All lords are cruel task-masters, save One – Jesus!
22. Slavery to Him is the truest, sweetest liberty there is.
23. No one is so free as he/she who with every breath serves Christ.
24. While Paul refers to himself as a slave, he addresses the Philippians as ***saints***.
25. The word means ***holy ones***.
- a. Don't think of the people who see in stained glass windows in old churches.
  - b. What the NT means by 'saint' isn't some special dead guy.
  - c. It's anyone who's been born again. The saints at Philippi were the Christians.
26. The word 'holy' means set apart from what's common to something special.
- a. In many homes there's a set of dishes you use every day.
  - b. They tend to be made of tough, durable material and didn't cost much.
  - c. They show the wear & tear of regular use.
  - d. But there's another set of dishes that are used only on special occasions.
  - e. They're ornate & expensive; & kept in a protected place.
27. That's the idea behind the word "holy."
- a. If something is holy, it's set apart ***BY GOD*** for something special.
  - b. Christians are saints, not because they're better than others.
  - c. They're saints because faith in Jesus has brought them into a unique relationship with God.
  - d. And that relationship ***will have*** a major impact on ***how*** they live.
28. It's important we latch on to this today: If you're a Christian, if you've been born again – you ***are*** a saint, a holy one.
- a. You've been set apart by God from this fallen world.
  - b. You aren't any longer about what the world's about.
  - c. The world's values & priorities don't apply now.
  - d. God's got a different way of living with a whole different set of priorities for you.
29. I've observed a distressing trend over the last couple years that's seems to be escalating.
- a. It's people who ***once*** had a solid walk with God, ***falling away***.
  - b. As ***troubling*** as it is, it ***isn't surprising*** because Jesus foretold it in Matt. 24:12.
  - c. He said in the last days, because sin would run rampant, the love of many would grow cold.
  - d. There are those who've become chilly toward God & gone back to the world.
  - e. But here's the deal – They discover sin isn't fun anymore.
  - f. They can't find satisfaction in it any longer – though they're trying hard to.
  - g. Have you ever seen one of those Japanese games shows where they put people through humiliating trials?
    - 1) Some of them are downright painful. Others are embarrassing.
    - 2) One was having adults trying to ride itty-bitty tricycles across a narrow beam with a mudpit below it.
    - 3) The contestants were way too big for the tricycle.
  - h. A trike is great fun for a 4 year old – but an adult on one is ridiculous.
  - i. The Christian who goes back to the sins of his/her past is an adult on a tiny tricycle. It doesn't work.
30. ***In light of Jesus' warning*** in Matthew 24:12 about the last days, it's wise for ***all of us*** to ask if our love for God is cooling off or heating up.

- a. Now – if you're **cold or hot** toward God, **you know it**.
- b. The **dangerous** place is to be **lukewarm**.
- c. If you're **hot** toward God, you love Him & know it because you delight in Him.
- d. If you're **cold**, you know that too because it's been a while since you cared.
- e. But if you're lukewarm, you're going thru the motions & think everything is groovy.
- f. The fact is, your heart is given to the world.

31. In Isaiah 29:13 God says–

These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me.

- a. These people went to the temple/church. They sang the songs, stood & sat at all the right times.
- b. But that was the **end** of their devotion to God.
- c. God got an hour one time a week but the rest of the week was theirs to live as they pleased.

32. Jesus addressed a similar group of people in Revelation 3. They attended church in the city of Laodicea. Here's what he said to them –

<sup>15</sup> "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would have you to be either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

- a. Pretty graphic. Jesus is saying these **pretenders**, these posers **nauseate** Him.
- b. They make Him want to hurl because they are lukewarm.
- c. My first roommate in my first apartment had a habit of leaving the milk out.
- d. I came home one day craving something cold & opened the fridge to see the milk was all there was.
- e. I grabbed it & started chugging. Well, he'd left it out & it had gone bad, then stuck it back in the fridge.
- f. I ran to the sink & got rid of both it & most of what was in my stomach.

33. That's what lukewarm Christians do to Jesus.

34. That 's the worst kind of oxymoron **Lukewarm Christian**.

- a. How can someone come to the cross, see what God did there in love,
- b. Then go off & live a lukewarm, mediocre life?
- c. Worse, how could they ever go back to the stuff Jesus died to free them from?

35. In his book **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan does a brilliant analysis of the lukewarm.

- a. Lukewarm Christians crave acceptance from people more than God.
  - 1) Instead of being set-apart, they want to **fit in**.
  - 2) Having people like them is more important than being loyal to the Lord.
  - 3) Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men think well of you," because He understood that friendship with the world means enmity with God.
- b. Lukewarm Christians rarely share their faith in Christ because they're not sure He's the only way to God – even though He said He was.

- c. The lukewarm Christian does whatever it takes to alleviate his/her **guilt**.
  - 1) Note I said **guilt**, not sin. What troubles the lukewarm isn't sin but the uncomfortable **feeling** of guilt sin causes.
  - 2) For the lukewarm, the Gospel is just a form of therapy.
  - 3) They go to church once a month to get a spiritual injection of 'guilt-gone.'
  - 4) And having done the penance of church attendance, they think they can go another round with the sin that caused the guilt, then they'll come back to church in another month for another shot.
  - 5) Truth be told, it isn't sin they want to quit; it's guilt.
  - 6) That's why the lukewarm are always on the lookout for some new teaching that will tell them their pet sin is okay.

a) Whether it's getting high or sex outside marriage.

- d. Lukewarm Christians they think more about life on earth than eternity in heaven.
  - 1) They define life by their possessions, position, & power.
  - 2) When the economic news is bad, they freak out. When it's good, they're happy.
  - 3) They rarely consider things from God's perspective.
- e. The Lukewarm determine their morality by comparing to others rather than God's Word.

- 1) The problem is because they're always trying to push away guilt,
  - 2) The people they compare themselves to are **worse** than they are.
  - 3) They never compare themselves to Mother Teresa or Billy Graham,
  - 4) It's Hitler or Jeffrey Dahmer.
- f. The Lukewarm Christian isn't much different from the rest of the world.
- 1) He looks the same, talks, cusses, & dresses the same.
  - 2) She's entertained by the same things non-Christians are entertained by & gets divorced as much as anyone else.
  - 3) Because they're simply not that much **different** than anyone else.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Different!

1. Paul called the believers at Philippi, saints, **not only** because God had set them apart to Himself but because they were **living in harmony** with their identity in Christ.
2. They **were** different from the rest of the Philippians.
3. That difference had **cost** them. They were being persecuted.
4. Yet in the midst of that persecution the church was **growing**.
5. People saw in the way the believers lived a life superior to their own & responded to the Gospel.
6. The history of this period is filled with stories of people who began as mockers & persecutors but ended up becoming believers.
7. That was **Paul's** story!
8. Listen, we do not advance the Kingdom of God by being **like** the world.
9. We do the Gospel no service by removing from it the things some deem offensive.
10. We don't need to make Jesus hip & cool in order to appeal to the lost.
11. We need to focus on being faithful to Him & less concerned with being friendly with the world.

#### B. Halos

1. If you take the time to look at just about any piece of Medieval art, you'll notice the saints are nearly always depicted with a **halo** over their head.
2. But if you'd seen the real person the painting represents, there'd be no halo.
3. Halos are just an artistic means of identifying someone as holy.
4. I don't see any halos in this room. And neither do you.
5. There's not ring of light over my head.
6. I don't want one – I want something better.
7. I want my life to be so infused with the love of Christ, so energized by the Spirit of God that people are drawn to the Lord.
8. If I had a halo, someone might say, "Hey, where can I get one of those?"
9. I'd rather they look at the way I live & say "Where can I get that?"