

Introduction to the Letter:

- (Make a few comments about Philippians – its “special” nature because of the insights into Paul’s personal spiritual journey and priorities. He is our brother in Christ, and yet he speaks to our minds and hearts with apostolic authority as the Holy Spirit ministers the truth of God’s Word to us.)
- Maps are becoming much less appreciated these days. Electronic helpers like Google Maps and Apple Maps have made it unnecessary to know how to get from Point A to Point B. Mostly we just care about how long it will take to get there. Back in the day when I was growing up, I spent years going on trips in cars, oblivious to the fact that somebody else in the car had to figure out how to get where we were going. But my acquisition of a driver’s license brought with it the shocking realization that I was now the person who had to figure out how to get from Point A to Point B. So, unfolding, studying, and refolding road and street maps became necessary skills for travelling in unfamiliar territory.
- But maps, whether on paper or on a screen, can still be very helpful today if you need to find an alternate route, or if you want to just get a sense of where places are in relation to other places. The Scriptures frequently mention travel between locations in the world of that day, and maps can be very helpful in making those old world situations become more real to us. So let’s get more familiar with the world of Philippians by looking at a map. **(Call for first slide)**
- One of the blessings of the book of Acts is that Luke recorded many specifics about Paul’s missionary journeys. Here we see the part of that world as it was defined in the first century AD. **(Ask about AD, CE, BC, BCE)** We should note the irony that in the world’s effort to make dates not refer to Jesus, the new terminology continues to use the birth of Jesus as the reference point in time for all dates in history. The irony is, of course, is that His birth was, and is the most important event in all of human history.
- So, on to our map. Acts chapter 16 **(turn there now)** is a gift for us in our study of Philippians. It gives us the back story of the events in Philippi about 10 years before Paul wrote the letter we are going to study. I’m asking you to read Acts 16 several times before next Sunday, when we’ll dive into more than just the introduction and first two verses of this important epistle.
- At verse 41 of chapter 15 we find Paul and Silas having come into Asia (modern-day Turkey) to visit and strengthen the churches which were started in the first missionary journey into this land. They were also delivering mail, a letter to the churches from the apostles in Jerusalem. Along the way in

Lystra (16:1), they invite a young Christian named Timothy to join the team. They travel westward with the intention of preaching the gospel and starting more churches in Asia. But the Holy Spirit won't allow them to do anything but push westward, finally reaching the town of Troas on the west coast. Verse 9 tells us it was there that Paul was given a vision of a man from across the Aegean Sea who was beckoning them to come to Macedonia and help the people there. Luke suddenly joins the team and they set sail for unknown ministry opportunities.

- Look at verses 11 and 12. **(READ)**

¹¹ So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a *Roman* colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

- Notice that Luke refers to Philippi as a "Roman colony". That fact, being a Roman colony, will be important in the team's visit. And yes, there are several amazing things that are about to happen there, but right now I want to cover a little pre-Paul history of Philippi. So you'll need to read and reflect on the rest of those events when you read Acts 16 on your own this week.
- Here's a 2-minute history lesson. In the distant past, two major civilizations dominated this part of the world – the Greeks for about 700 years, and the Romans for about 900 years. Toward the end of the Greek era, the ruler of Macedon (northern Greece), Philip the II, liked the small town of "Little Fountains" because of the gold mines nearby, so he renamed the town after himself. Philippi was born. (We Texans like to do that, too – Lewisville, Jacksboro, Fredericksburg, Johnson City, to name a few.) During the first century before Christ, the Roman Empire was expanding eastward while at the same time fighting a civil war over its own form of government. A major battle was fought near Philippi and the result was that many Roman soldiers became residents of Philippi, either as retirees or as a part of the intentionally increasing military presence toward the east. The resulting designation of Philippi as a Roman colony and military outpost meant that the residents who were not slaves became Roman citizens, Latin was the official language, and Roman law was in full effect. That status had thus been in effect for about 90 years when the missionary team arrived in the 50's (AD).
- Now let's talk about the letter itself. There is no legitimate argument that Philippians was written by someone other than Paul. More than one commentator noted that Paul's life history mentioned in Philippians corresponds to details about Paul's life and ministry described in Acts and Galatians. The letter was written in about 61 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome. He had been granted the appeal of his case in Caesarea and was awaiting that trial in Rome. He wrote three other letters

during that particular imprisonment – Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Exact dates of New Testament events can be difficult to determine, but scholars believe that the Acts 16 start of the church in Philippi had occurred somewhere between 5 and 10 years before he wrote this letter to them. It is also believed that the Jewish population of Philippi was quite small compared to other towns in that region. (See if you can discern what evidence there is for that conclusion when you read Acts 16. Remember? Read Acts 16 this week?)

- The writing of the letter seems to have been prompted by the situation with Epaphroditus, a leader in the church at Philippi. He had arrived in Rome bringing a significant financial gift to Paul from the church, and had then experienced a near-fatal illness. Paul's letter would not only enable him to thank the church for their gift, but also give them his perspective on Epaphroditus' sickness and blessed recovery. Several other purposes for the letter as identified by John MacArthur are: 1) to inform them about his situation in the Roman prison, 2) to exhort them to fellowship in unity, and 3) to warn them about false teachers, specifically the Judaizers and the antinomians. **(Ask for descriptions of the two terms – anti=against, nomos=law)** (Two ditches, one on each side of the gospel road – that road is through Scripture alone, through Christ alone, through faith alone, through grace alone, for God's glory alone. Every Christian-ish cult, including those two, creates their own, different set of solas.)
- John MacArthur had a small, but interesting section in his introduction to the letter. It was called "History and Theology", but the only history in the letter was Paul's own story. He included an autobiography which included personal spiritual insights, enlightening the reader about his own walk with the Lord. **Make a note to look at Phil 3: 4-14 and 4:10-13 to see those.** Dr. MacArthur also said that the only direct theology taught in the letter is on Jesus Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Most of you are familiar with the passage he is referring to in chapter 2, verses 5-11. It starts by speaking of how Jesus emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, then finishes by saying that He was highly exalted and that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. That is such an important and concise description of the purpose in His Incarnation that a complete Equip session will be devoted to it as we move through the epistle this fall.
- Now one might contend that the rest of the letter contains plenty of theology on subjects like the qualities of good fellowship and living properly in Christ, but I guess one would need to find MacArthur's definition of "direct theology" to make that argument. In any case, these 7 verses on Jesus present an amazingly concise, yet full, theological statement about Him.

- We are about to begin studying the actual text of the letter by jumping into verses 1 and 2. But first I want to identify several themes which can be found within the entire letter. You will encounter these themes and likely some others as we progress through Philippians this fall.
 - Missionaries and their supporters have a partnership in the gospel. (1:5,7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14-15)
 - The importance of thanksgiving in the life of a believer. (1:3-5; 4:6)
 - Believers are to live a joyful, gospel-worthy life. (1:18,25,27; 2:2,12-18, 29; 3:1; 4:4)
 - Believers are to have unity in spirit, mind, and purpose. (1:27; 2:2)
 - The function of the mind is an essential part of sanctification. (1:27; 2:3; 3:15; 4:2,7-12)
 - Pursuing Christlikeness is the most defining element of spiritual growth. (3:12-14)

The Overarching Theme – Jesus: His impact on the believer, and His impact on the world

Philippians 1:1-2

Theme: Paul confirms identities and expresses desired favor on the recipients **(READ vs 1)**

¹ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

- Paul and his young disciple Timothy were two of the four men on the ministry team on that first visit to Philippi years ago. As a result, the long-time members of the church were already familiar with Timothy's heart and ability in ministry. Paul is about to tell them he will send Timothy to them as his representative, and he is coming with highest commendation. His credentials are that he has the same spirit as Paul and will be genuinely concerned for their spiritual well-being. He is also tasked with bringing news about *their life situations* when he returns to Paul in Rome. (see 2:19-22) Surely the welcome mat would be out in Philippi for this young man!! (I wonder if the Home Depot in Philippi sold welcome mats with both Greek and Latin words of welcome.) Silas and Luke were probably not with Paul in Rome when he wrote this letter, or he likely would have sent greetings from them as well.
- When I read verse 1 in the New American Standard 95 edition, you may have noticed that I read the hyphenated word "bond-servants". The reason you might have noticed was because you may have a different word there. Your version might have the word "servants" or it might have the word "slaves" instead of the word "bond-servants". The Greek word involved in this variation is "doulos". This situation reveals one of the challenges that translators face. In the culture of the New Testament time frame, there were three different types of bonded service.
 1. The first type was to be involuntarily but legally required to serve another person or entity because you were considered the property of that person or entity. This was the most common form of servitude in the Roman Empire. (It is also why first-year cadets at the Air

Force Academy are called “doolies”, derived from the Greek word I just mentioned, “*doulos*”. Those new cadets are required to do whatever a cadet in a higher year tells them to do. This is their introduction to the command structure which is necessary for the military to function properly.) And by the way, this was also the form of bonded service utilized in the American slavery system.

2. The second type was to be obligated to serving a person for a specific period of time. This was described in the Mosaic law as a way for a person to work his way out of financial difficulty. The required term (a bond, or contract), was 6 years, with release to be given in the 7th year. (See Deut 15 and Lev 25 for the specific guidelines.) The Roman Empire also practiced a version of this Mosaic law. This was also the idea behind the indentured servant contracts that were used during the American colonial era. Those who wanted to come to the “New World” but couldn’t afford the passage on a ship could become a servant under contract to a person who would pay their way.
3. The third type of serving relationship was that of the servant. This was voluntary, and could continue for a lifetime if all parties were agreeable. The “bond” in this type of bonded service was the commitment by one or both of the parties involved.

- So here’s our little dilemma. The translation of one Greek word, *doulos*, has resulted in three different English words in three different translations. In the ESV, *doulos* becomes “servant”. In the NAS95, *doulos* becomes “bond-servant”. In the LSB (Legacy Standard Bible), *doulos* becomes “slave”. All other major translations in English choose one of those three words.
- Now the English and Greek languages have this in common – one word can have different meanings. So how can we understand the meaning? We must examine how that word is used in the context. For example, here’s a situation described with words. “I was hammering my nail, and I accidentally hammered my nail.” **(Act out.)** The details of the activity, which I gave you with mime, reveal the two different meanings of the word “nail”. The problem for translators with *doulos* is that the word is used in situations involving people, but the details of those relationships are not necessarily provided. The translator must try to discern which of the three types I have mentioned is in view with a given occurrence of *doulos*, so that the reader can understand what is being described. Now, translators who are spiritually mature and are language-proficient try very hard to create English translations that are faithful to the original Greek and Hebrew. But I hope you can see the difficulty they face with words like *doulos*. The actual situation described in the text which refers to a *doulos* may not have enough detail about the people and their role in the situation for the translator to be sure about which of the three types of “slave” is in view. At that point, since the literal meaning of a word in that context is uncertain, translation philosophy comes into play. Thus, the variations in the resulting English versions.

- I personally think that the LSB translators' selection of "slave" in verse 1 instead of "bond-servant" or "servant" is more accurate because Paul saw himself as the slave of Jesus Christ. He used the word "doulos" in Romans 6. Let's look at Romans 6. We'll read verses 15-19. **(READ)**

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ¹⁶ Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Now let's look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6. We'll read verses 19 and 20. **(READ)**

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- Paul would certainly have seen himself and his relationship with Christ in the light of these truths. Within three days of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he had prayed to receive Christ, been healed of his blindness, been baptized, and been called into a life of ministry. I'm reasonably sure that he knew his life was no longer his own and that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were no longer his masters. He had been purchased by Christ and had become an obedient slave to Jesus and to His righteousness. How do I know that? Acts 9:20 tells us that this famous persecutor of Christians immediately began to proclaim that "Jesus is the Son of God" in the synagogue at Damascus.
- What about you? Do you see yourself as a slave to Jesus Christ and to His righteousness? Those of us who are believers have been called into that kind of relationship with Him. According to 1 Corinthians 6:20, our lives should be glorifying God as we follow Him and serve Him as our Master.
- If you are interested in the translation issues I have mentioned, I suggest that you read the comments on the word "slave" in the Preface section of the ESV and in the Foreword section of the LSB. You will see two different translation philosophies expressed in regard to the word "slave".

- All right. Going back to verse 1. Can you think of a word that is frequently found in Paul's greetings to churches or individuals but is missing from the greeting in verse 1? Hint: Check verse 1 in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians. No presence of the word "apostle" in Phil 1:1, right? Right.
Why do think Paul typically used the word "apostle" in his greeting in other letters?
 - While the New Testament was being formed, the apostles were the only legitimate source of truth about Jesus and the Christian life. He was one of those sources.
 - If a church needed correction or exhortation, acknowledgment of Paul's apostolic authority could help promote an obedient response.
- Why do you think the word "apostle" might have been missing in this letter?
 - The church at Philippi had already demonstrated with their lives that they believed Paul was God's messenger to them, so he didn't need to emphasize it. (See 4:1, 15-16)
 - This letter was not addressing problems that existed in the function of the Philippian church or in the doctrine being taught. Yes, there was a relationship issue between two members that needed some help, and false doctrine was being taught in some churches that could become a problem if the leaders weren't diligent. But the function and fellowship seemed strong. Paul's love for them and joy through them was communicated with warm, loving, pastoral appreciation and encouragement. (See 1:3-11, 25-28; 2:14-18; 4:1)
- So, we move on in verse 1 to the next phrase – "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi". **Saints.** That word describes all people who have been born again, and as a result, as Paul says, are "in Christ Jesus". The word means "holy ones" or "set apart ones". I don't often smile when reading commentaries. But that happened when I saw a comment by Robert Gromacki that revealed his experience as a pastor. He said, "All believers are saints, but not all believers are saintly." He was using the apparent contradiction in his phrases to say that a saint has a permanent, unchangeable position in Christ, even if his or her daily moral behavior doesn't always reflect that truth. But here in verse 1, Paul is focusing on the believers' positional unity in Christ, not on every believer's continuing need for sanctification. (vs 1 – "**to all the saints in Christ Jesus**")
- I also appreciated Matthew Henry's comment pointing out that Paul's letter was directed to **all** the saints at Philippi. To be part of the Body of Christ, no person has to meet subjective standards of economic status, intellectual prowess, or spiritual gifting to be included. **All** are accepted by virtue of being in Christ. (See James 2:1-10) Paul wanted to make sure that the leaders were included in his description of all the saints, so he said "including the overseers and deacons". These words remind me of the saying, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross", That is a truth which the

organized church forgot as the centuries rolled by. As a result, the clergy and the laity came to be seen by man as having higher and lower status and value in the eyes of God. Verse 1 neither teaches nor affirms that corrupted view.

- Let's finish up our time with verse 2. **(READ)**

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- This expression of desire for their well-being seems to be permanently stored in Paul's mind as the way to express his desire. He uses the identical phrase in 8 letters, and uses a very similar expression in the 5 other letters. Vine's Dictionary tells us that grace, *charis* in the Greek, means to receive from God an expression of His loving kindness, His goodwill, and His favor. It is free, is undeserved, and is intended to bring joy to the recipient. The other blessing that Paul wants the Philippians to receive is peace. That Greek word is *eirene*, a condition of tranquility within, harmony in relationships, security, rest, and contentment. So, Paul is asking the Lord to bless these believers through the combination of grace and peace in the midst of a fallen, troubled world. The particular sequence is vitally important. Before a person can have true inner peace, there must be a personal response to God's grace – His unmerited favor, true forgiveness from God for sinful people, revealed through Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary.
- If you are a believer but anxiety is eliminating your inner peace, Paul has the answer for you in Philippians 4. Memorize verses 6 and 7 and then begin to apply the instructions there. The promised peace of God will come. But if you have never trusted Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your many sins, you will never experience the blessings of God's grace and peace. Tell Him that is what you need and what you want today – forgiveness, grace, and peace.

Let's pray.