

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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PAUL'S WARM FEELINGS FOR THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

Philippians 1:1-18

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Here are my points:

- Paul's identity was that of a servant
- The church's identity bound them with Paul
- Paul identified what made the church unique
- Paul identified adverse circumstances as a plus
- Paul identified that preachers, too, are broken people

INTRODUCTION: The Apostle Paul was in jail and was awaiting trial. Now Paul had done nothing to break the law. He had only been faithful to preach the Gospel. But the Gospel was so new and contrary to the pagan beliefs and even Jewish beliefs, he represented a threat.

Paul was in a Roman jail and his original accusers from Jerusalem would not be there to face him, but their charges would be presented.

Paul decided to write a letter to the church at Philippi. He knew that God would be faithful, and he had hope that despite the difficult days that faced him, he would be able visit people in Philippi again someday.

PAUL'S IDENTITY WAS THAT OF A SERVANT

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:1-2

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

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

EXPLANATION: By now news had spread all over the region about Paul's conversion, about how he quit persecuting Christians and was now fervently a follower of Jesus Christ, and how he was planting churches all over the place.

In his greetings in other letters, Paul identified himself as an apostle. In this case, however, he didn't do that. The people at Philippi already knew that credential so he identified himself as a servant.

He let people know up front that he was called of God and then he identified as a servant. This was very different than Paul's previous life when he was known as the ruthless killer of Christians. I am sure he was a man who wanted people to know he was the boss. He certainly didn't see himself as a servant. He would have scoffed having a moniker that meant he was owned by someone else.

“Servants” is significant. It means owned by someone else. Your translation might say “slaves” or “bond servant.” They were at their Master's command.

Paul said “all” because he wasn't just writing to a select few. He was writing to everyone, regardless of their backgrounds or level of knowledge. “All” was a call to unity. Paul didn't want to show favorites. He did not want to discriminate.

Paul's understudy was Timothy, and he includes Timothy as a cowriter of the letter. He didn't ask Timothy's permission to call him a servant. He had trained Timothy well and Timothy knew he was a servant.

Because of Paul's position in the church, he could have taken on an arrogant, know-it-all persona. “Ok Timothy, I am training you and here's what we are going to do. We are going to set ourselves up as the head of all these churches. We'll let 'em know who's boss.”

APPLICATION: If you are mentoring people in the work of the ministry, make sure you say that you are a servant. The way you model it is the way your followers will do it.

They saw themselves as servants and nothing more. I'll tell our TV audience... we have several thousand viewers, many of whom watch before they attend their own churches. There are many churches struggling because the role of servant has been misunderstood by their deacons. You know, deacon means servant. It is a servant role, but many churches have redefined deacon to mean something else. A new deacon who is excited about learning what deacons do gets poisoned early by some long-tenured deacons who refuse to take on the role of servant as Paul identifies himself here.

THE CHURCH'S INDENTITY BOUND THEM WITH PAUL

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:3-8

I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

EXPLANATION: It's very clear that the relationship between Paul and the Philippian church was warm. They supported Paul's ministry financially.

The churches at Corinth and Galatia were not healthy like the church at Philippi. They had problems that Paul had to address.

You have to wonder why there are churches that are healthy and unhealthy. Why can't they all be healthy? Here's why: Churches are composed of broken people carrying lots of baggage. Some are healthier than others because they are composed of members who "put on Christ" more than others. I don't have the time to really talk about "putting on Christ" but I believe you know what I am talking about.

Paul's warm thoughts about this church carried over into gratitude and prayers for them.

In verse 5, we have the word "partnership" or your translation might say "fellowship". The Greek word here for fellowship was a common word that described the bond in a business partnership and in a marriage as well.

PAUL IDENTIFIED WHAT MADE THE CHURCH UNIQUE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:9-11

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul was a tell-it-like-it-is guy! He didn't use flattery. So, these words are quite incredible for him to say. He had very warm feelings and loved this church with all his heart.

If you want to be a stronger believer and a better church member, start praying verses 9 through 11.

Notice Paul doesn't provide any ministry ideas, nor does he propose an order of worship. Instead, he proposes the foundational requirements on which good ministry is built...love, knowledge and depth of insight, discernment for what's best, pure and blameless in character...filled with the fruit of righteousness.

APPLICATION: Ministry is the outpouring of a solid foundation. Coming up with stuff to do for the sake of staying busy is not ministry. In fact, whatever it is, it'll be short lived.

When we evaluate what we are doing, what ministries we lead or are involved in, we must remember the health of the church at Philippi and Paul's foundational prayer for the church.

PAUL IDENTIFIED ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES AS A PLUS

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:12-14

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Who would come to Christ if a person talked about serving time in jail because of preaching? Who would come to Christ if they were told of all of Paul's trials and challenges? Maybe our message of "come to Jesus Christ" needs to change. Maybe we'd gain more committed believers. We've watered down the Gospel message so much, and of course the result is believers without commitment and with the spiritual depth of half a donut hole.

Verse 12 says that being in jail helped to advance the Gospel. The Greek word for “advance” is the same term used when an Army advanced. Paul let people know that being in jail was actually advancing the Gospel. People became bold and inspired because of what Paul was going through.

Paul talks about the “palace guard” – 10,000 select soldiers who were part of the emperor’s select army. They were the only troops stationed in Rome. This particular group of soldiers were the best of the best. Since we know from history that they traveled out of Rome to provide protection for the emperor’s representative, and since we know that the whole palace guard knew about Paul and his message, we can reason that the message spread through conversations as the soldiers and the emperor’s staff traveled. I want to point out here that Paul led by example. Any good leader will lead by example. I will run into traffic for this church staff, and I expect them to do the same for me. I don’t expect them to do anything I won’t do.

PAUL IDENTIFIED THAT PREACHERS, TOO, ARE BROKEN PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:15-18

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

The message of the Gospel has been preached by a million different people with many different motivations. In verse 17, Paul tells us some stirred up trouble for him while he was in chains. What does that mean? We don’t really know, but I wonder if it was a person who had a message such as, “If Paul had only prayed harder, then he wouldn’t be in jail.” Or, “Had Paul really been in God’s will, he wouldn’t be in jail.” We don’t know what he meant here, but clearly there were some using Paul’s jailtime as illustrations in their preaching.

Paul didn’t hold any grudge against those preachers. He believed the message of Jesus was so strong that it would overcome those who had wrong motives. Let me be clear here...a WHOLE LOT of Paul’s writing was to warn people of false teachers and their false doctrine, so how does that jive with what he said here? I

believe what Paul meant was as long as the genuine Gospel is preached, he would not worry about motive. Let's keep in mind, too, that during this period in the church's earliest history, they didn't have the New Testament. There was no doubt a lot of ignorance floating around. Today, however, preachers have no excuse.

CONCLUSION: If Paul paid us a visit today where would we be? I should hope he'd hold us in the same warm regard as the church at Philippi.

For those who aren't a part of the body of Christ, wouldn't you want to become part of it? I certainly can't say all your problems will go away but your biggest problem will -- that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Repenting of sin and trusting Jesus saves us from the penalty of sin!

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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