

# Reflections on Philippians 1.1-2

by Will Groben

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## Day 1

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.1-2. What is the first thing you learn? The authors are Paul and Timothy. We know from Acts that Paul and his team, including Timothy, founded the church in Philippi and later revisited the church to strengthen it. How did they identify themselves in this letter? In nine other letters, Paul identified himself as an apostle, to reinforce his authority, but here he and Timothy identify themselves as slaves [in Romans and Titus, Paul identified himself as an apostle and a slave]. That gives you a hint at an emphasis in the theology in this letter.

Do you notice anything repeated [and thus emphasized] in these two verses? Paul and Timothy mentioned Christ Jesus three times in this opening of their letter. Jesus is the one who is important, not us. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah-savior promised by God the Father through the Jewish prophets. Jesus is the one who defines our identity. As spiritual leaders, Paul and Timothy – as they have grown to be more like Christ – have grown to see themselves as slaves of Christ, that is they have committed to follow and serve Christ, no matter what he asks of them, no matter what the danger or harm to them, no matter what is going on in their lives.

**Reflect:** If you were trying to establish your credibility as a spiritual leader, what would you say about yourself? If you knew someone in your church was totally committed to serving Christ with his/her whole life, no matter what, how and why would that affect your perception of them? Would others think of you as a slave of Christ? why? Pray that your attitude of gratitude would develop into an attitude of servitude. You might not feel it yet, but ask God to grow you spiritually to follow Christ in this way.

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## Day 2

**Learn:** Using two different translations, prayerfully read Philippians 1.1-2 [make sure one is NIV or NLT and the other is not]. What is the second thing you learn, after who wrote the letter? You learn who the original readers were: they were “saints,” they were “in Christ Jesus,” they were in the city of Philippi, and they were with [or included] the overseers and deacons in the church. The Greek word translated as “saint” [in most English Bibles] is ἅγιος [HA-gee-oss], which [when used as a noun] means “holy one.” The Latin translation of this is “sanctus,” from which comes the English word “saint” [the NIV and NLT make this easier to understand by translating “God’s holy people” instead of “saints”]. Why would Paul and Timothy call the believers in Philippi “saints” or “holy people”? They were making a theological statement to reinforce the gospel they had taught the Philippians before!

- † When you are saved by grace through your faith in Christ Jesus, part of that process is that God declares you to be righteous in his sight. We call this *“Justification.”*
- † God does this by accounting [or imputing] to you the righteousness of Christ himself. We call this *“Imputed Righteousness.”*
- † At the same time, the Holy Spirit separates you out from the sinful and pagan world [consecrates you] to be useful for God’s purposes. We call that *“Positional Sanctification.”*
- † Now, by definition, something is holy when it is pure [righteous] and consecrated for God’s purposes, so believers in Christ are indeed holy people, also known as “saints”!

The antagonists [as we learn later in the letter] were pushing a false gospel that said you were saved by *earning* righteousness through *obedience* to the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. Paul and Timothy were reinforcing the true gospel and countering that of the antagonists.

**Reflect:** Are you clear on what is the true gospel of Christ? Could you explain it to someone else? If not, start working on that with the examples provided at church! As we know from the gospel Paul and the other apostles handed down to us in scripture, you cannot earn righteousness in God’s sight: you are corrupted in nature, you have committed sins against God by straying from his will and character, and you are judged guilty along with the rest of the human race. So if you want righteousness, you need to receive it as God’s gift through Christ. Have you fully put your faith in Jesus the Christ, as the only savior, the only way to salvation, the one on whom you fully depend, not relying on your own merits at all? If not, now is the time! If so, prayerfully reassert this truth.

### **Day 3**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.1. Paul and Timothy called the believers in Philippi “saints in Christ Jesus.” The descriptive phrase “in Christ Jesus” has theological meaning in the New Testament. It suggests that believers, by accepting the gospel of Christ and accepting Christ as their savior, have chosen to be eternally identified with Christ. It also suggests that believers have a close personal relationship with Christ, and that Christ is the controlling influence in that relationship. It is through this identification and relationship with Christ that even the new believer is a “holy one” in God’s eyes. It is because this identification and relationship includes Christ’s leadership over us that we grow to not only follow Christ, but to serve him; as we grow to be more like Christ, we grow to see ourselves willingly more and more as his slaves.

**Reflect:** You *cannot* earn righteousness or salvation, but you also *do not have to* earn it. Calling the Philippians “saints in Christ Jesus” was a way of reassuring them that no matter what was happening in their lives, they were safely numbered among God’s people, they were righteous or holy in God’s sight because their status as God’s people depended on *the righteousness and faithfulness of Christ*, not on anything they did. Do you find that reassuring? Have you ever wondered if God had abandoned you or was so angry with you that he no longer would bless you? Prayerfully confess this to God now. How do the truths in these first two verses speak against those lies we hear in our heads? Can you see that knowing more about what Christ offers us would strengthen you spiritually and emotionally? Christ has counteracted everything that plagues us through sin and evil; how can you learn more about this? Pray about what you are learning and thank Christ for his deliverance and provision.

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### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.1-2. “Grace and peace to you” is Paul’s favorite greeting. Ethnic Jews would say שָׁלֹום [shah-LOME (reading right to left!)] as a greeting, which meant “peace” in a holistic way: peace with God, peace with each other, health, wholeness, wellbeing. In Greek letters, an author would send “greetings.” Paul always used literary conventions like this for his theological purposes. His greeting to the Philippians was “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” Grace by definition is unmerited favor. This is another important reminder about salvation: you cannot be righteous enough to deserve salvation, you cannot earn righteousness or salvation, you cannot obtain either, nor buy them. Righteousness and salvation come only as an unmerited gift from God through Christ. And thus, God the Father and the Son of God [who is the Christ-savior] together are the only source for grace and peace.

**Reflect:** For a moment, put aside everything that is good or bad about your life, and just think about how blessed you are to have received grace from God and peace with God as *gifts*. You can have an intimate relationship with God now, free from the power of sin and from the penalty for sin. You have been granted righteousness, citizenship in Heaven, adoption into God’s family, even though you don’t deserve it. Pray your thanks fervently.

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### **Day 5**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.1-2 one more time. What is left that we have not discussed? This is the only letter in the New Testament specifically addressed in part to overseers and deacons. Overseers were the pastor/elders in the church. The original definition of the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος [eh-PISS-koh-pahs] was “guardian,” and in Christian circles this came to mean guarding the apostolic teaching and thereby guarding the flock from danger. Paul and Timothy wanted these guardians to protect the sound doctrine and true gospel they had given to the church originally. Deacons were the lay ministry leaders, the servant leaders who supported the overseers. They are mentioned perhaps because they were influential in the church and exemplified the qualities Paul would exhort the church to have; perhaps because some of the doubt about continuing to align with Paul and his gospel was coming from this level of leadership.

**Reflect:** Unity in the church, especially regarding the true gospel of Christ and sound Christian doctrine and practice, is a strong theme in this letter. Do you feel in unity with your church and its leaders about what the church believes and teaches? Do you feel in unity with your church and its leaders about the vision for Christian life and spiritual growth [like involvement in small groups and on ministry teams; integrating quiet time with God and evangelistic outreach into your daily life; and growing to be a teacher, mentor, and leader]? Pray about this, and then go talk with your pastor or small group leader about any ways you are not in unity right now.