

“Captivated by Christ” (Phil. 1:1-11)

1. Greetings (1-2)

a. Slaves of Christ (1a)

- i. Alec Motyer and others point out the perceived irony of Paul’s self-identification as servant and the church at Philippi as saints when an acceptable manner would be reversed.
- ii. Some suggest the reason for such is humility, and others unity and a bit of each reality is certainly present throughout the letter. However, understanding the reason for such identification (often used by Paul) requires us to go back to other letters and the OT as well →
- iii. E.g. Paul’s theological explanation of our salvation is that we’ve been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20) and that one is either a slave of sin or a slave of God (Ro. 6:16-18, 23). →
- iv. In fact, Jesus Himself said as much (Jn. 8:34-36). →
- v. Furthermore, renowned leaders such as the prophet/deliverer Moses, warrior Joshua, and King David were described as the “servant” of the LORD e.g. Neh 10:29; Josh 24:29; Ps 89:20 (LXX 88:21).¹ →
- vi. *And what’s more* – the Lord Jesus Messiah who is pictured in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, bears the moniker “Servant.” See Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. This is not to mention Phil. 2:7. →
- vii. Present also in these mentioned passages is the authority which comes with being a servant of the Almighty. Yes, there is a humility in recognizing that Jesus alone has freed the repentant – regenerating us from slaves of sin to His privileged servants and emissaries. In fact, He has made us a kingdom of royal priests cf. Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:9.
- viii. As seen in chapter two, the greatest Servant is Lord and He said: Read Mat. 20:25-28.
- ix. Liberty is not autonomy but obedience to God. Rebelling against design is kicking against the goads.
- x. Autonomy is an illusion and striving for it ironically enslaves as the desires and intents of the heart are deceitful and desperately wicked. Selfishness, anxiousness, and pride are root sins which are all spiritual adultery i.e. idolatry. And the idols men worship merely promise pleasure fulfillment, peace, and purpose; but they only lord over those who enslave themselves to such leaving them empty, miserable, and loathing. See *John 8 & Romans 6* mentioned above.
- xi. The church father Chrysostom commented: “One who is a slave of Christ is truly free from sin. If he is truly a slave of Christ, he is not a slave in any other realm...”^{4 2}

b. Saints in Christ (1b)

- i. Similar to the paradox of the liberty and authority of being Christ’s bondservant is the humility and duty of the saints.
- ii. The identification as ‘saint’ is not some highly esteemed honor for select servants of God but the position of all who have been called out of the world and to the sanctification of holiness. →

¹ Hansen, G. W. (2009). *The Letter to the Philippians*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴ Chrysostom, Homily on Philippians 2.1.2, in *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, ed. Mark J. Edwards, ACCS NT 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 217.

² Johnson, D. E. (2013). *Philippians* (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.; 1st ed., p. 9). P&R Publishing.

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- iii. Gordon Fee mentioned the misleading connotations of the term saint(s) in our English vernacular: Most often it carries an “elitist” sense, co-opted by the later church to designate its “special” people, as, e.g., “Saint Paul.” This is about as far removed from biblical usage as one can get. The word also carries a more popular sense, referring to anyone who is well known for godliness or good deeds, as in “my uncle Alton was a real saint.”³
 - iv. Alec Motyer points out the nature of one’s identity as a saint, “points in one direction to what Christ has done for them (cf. Rom. 1:7; Col. 1:12–13) and in the other direction to the obligation which now falls upon us to live out the new position God has given to us (cf. Col. 3:12).”⁴
 - v. Civically and socially Philippians had a high social status, but in Christ they are the called out ones who have heavenly status with greater honor than any earthly Roman citizen.
 - vi. Have you been given a new nature and status? Are you rightly representing Christ – the one who purchased you to do good works and glorify your Father in heaven?
 - vii. A bond servant doesn’t set his own agenda and rebel against his master.
 - viii. Therefore, sainthood is not attained by what we do for Christ but what He has done for us. And because He purchased us with His blood our obligations to obey become increasingly joyful and liberating.
 - ix. Ralph Martin summarized the continuity well: “*Saints, hagioi*, is a term which is found only in the plural in the New Testament, except in 4:21 where, however, the word refers to a group. It is applied to all New Testament Christians, not to a select body of spiritual elite. *Hagios* means ‘holy’, equivalent in the Old Testament to a Hebrew word meaning ‘to separate’. The saints are the separated ones in a double sense; negatively, there is separation from evil, and positively, dedication to God and his service. In the Old Testament, Israel is God’s holy people in precisely these two ways. It is a nation separated from the rest of the ancient world (Num. 23:9; Ps. 147:20) by divine election and calling; and its national life is distinctive as a witness to God because it is called to be ‘a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:5–6; Lev. 19:1–2; Deut. 7:6; 14:2). The church is the successor to the sacred community of Israel (see 1 Pet. 2:9–10), and the ancient call of God to his people, ‘Be holy’, is renewed to those who are *in Christ Jesus*, to be his people in the days when God’s eschatological purposes are being fulfilled in the creation of ‘the saints of the Most High’ (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).”⁵
 - x. Therefore, the nature of God’s Covenant (including OT & NT) is separation from and to – from the world and to holiness and Himself. If both are not an increasing reality how can one maintain he is chosen of God?
- c. Superintendents & Servants *with* Saints in Christ (1c)
- i. We read the different prepositions indicating e.g. “of Christ,” “in Christ,” and “from Christ.” Here (1c), we see that “all the saints in Christ” at Philippi are linked “**with**” the bishops and deacons. Why make the distinction?

³ Fee, G. D. (1995). *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*. Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁴ Motyer, J. A. (1984). *The message of Philippians* (p. 25). InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Martin, R. P. (1987). *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 11, p. 61). InterVarsity Press.

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- ii. Those who hold positions (responsibilities) of overseeing (superintending) and other shepherding duties are to receive due honor cf. 1 Thes. 5:12-13. BTW, thanks again church for the gracious gifts you gave me for Pastor’s appreciation month.
 - iii. Although they are to lead, teach, organize, provide, etc.; they are mentioned “**with**” the saints because they are not above them. Note Mat. 20:25-28 (mentioned above @ 1. a. viii.).
 - iv. Nevertheless, they serve as e.g. head of a local church i.e. body of Christ cf. 1 Cor. 12:12ff.
 - v. Therefore, by uniquely paring the administrative members “with” and indeed after mentioning “all” the saints at Philippi, Paul honors the leadership, emphasizes solidarity, and exhorts accountability for leaders to demonstrate unity w/in leadership e.g. 4:2-3, and throughout the body e.g. 1:27. Paul was likely not only honoring the leadership position but personally acknowledging that church’s leadership in sending Epaphroditus with gifts to Paul (4:18).
- d. Salutations *from* Christ (2)
- i. After considering the slave, saints, and servants of, in, and with Christ, we have in the greeting what is from Christ. In all of these Christ is at the center as all things are from, though, and for Christ and He is above all cf. Col. 1:16-17.
 - ii. So then, those in, from, for, with Christ enjoy the salvific results from Christ which include grace and peace.
 - iii. Paul’s greeting resembles the standard Hellenistic letter greetings of his day but he nuances it with a Gospel emphasis, nature, source, and result.
 - iv. The traditional greeting in the Hellenistic world was *chairein*—the infinitive of the verb “to rejoice,” but in salutations meaning simply “Greetings!” [e.g. goodbye meant God be with you and I use “Godspeed” to mean go as God conducts i.e. go His speed with His aim so to speak] (see Acts 15:23; Jas 1:1). In Paul’s hands this now becomes *charis* (“grace”), to which he adds the traditional Jewish greeting *shalom* (“peace,” in the sense of “wholeness” or “well-being”).⁶
 - v. Furthermore, Paul could have also modified the standard Hebrew greeting of shalom or blessing formula of “mercy and peace” which are only found in Messiah.
 - vi. It’s not that we (I’m) are being technical and clever, trying to impress a few with word plays, knowledge, etc. Paul was simply employing an opportunity to put Christ at the center of the beginning of his letter – which was quite natural as he wrote to a church and the term for what came to be a greeting was very similar to the term of Jewish greeting. It was there for the altering.
 - vii. When we put Christ at the center of our motives, agendas, priorities, values, and attitude; natural opportunities will not be missed. When I read an article, watch a movie, play a game, or casually talk to another; I do so through the lens of Christ. In all things we are to see Him and the opportunities to hallow His name.
 - viii. I even tell non-believers to go “Godspeed” if for no other reason than to get them to think about God in any way at all, including that He sees all.
 - ix. We are gardeners in the garden of life and we till, plant, cultivate, prune, and harvest in the lives of others. Paul had planted the church at Philippi and in his letter to them he sought to further cultivate their growth.

2. Gratitude (3-11)

⁶ Fee, G. D. (1995). [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*](#) (p. 70). Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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- a. Pleasure (3, 8)
 - i. Hard not to say they were Paul’s favs: “upon every remembrance.”
 - ii. No overt corrections (most epistles filled w/ such). Charles Spurgeon stated Paul had “unmingled gratitude” towards them. He could easily recall their trip to the river where Lydia was converted and persuaded them to partake of her hospitality. The church at Philippi demonstrated unity, loyalty, and charity. →
- b. Petition (4, 9-11)
 - i. V. 4. No doubt a highlight of Paul’s missionary journeys, they were a point of thanksgiving and supplication. It was not a burden but a joy to lift them up to the throne of heaven and in thanksgiving for such an encouragement in a challenging ministry. Could you imagine how much more rejection and reception they experienced. And even those who oppose him w/in the churches.
 - ii. The model of biblical prayer is oriented around the Kingdom come on earth as in heaven. Therefore, Paul’s petitioning for the saints includes:
 1. V. 9. Knowledge and discernment indicative of wisdom writing of Proverbs where the fear of the LORD is foundational to wisdom. It has a clear/definite moral nature to such knowledge. Intimacy i.e. “knowing” God is an intimate prospect of which morality is indispensable.
 2. Vv. 10-11. He prayed for increase of charity, purity, surety, and productivity
- c. Partnership (5)
 - i. The fellowship was in partnership of the Gospel.
 - ii. Fellowship is not meant here by enjoying one another’s company or sharing hobbies or opinions on peripheral matters.
 - iii. Their partnership was one of charity, sacrifice, and loyalty for the ministry of Christ – the Gospel’s advancement.
 - iv. We must partner together in unity in the main and plain Gospel inside our local churches and with other churches near and abroad. But unity is never to be achieved at the expense of truth. In Christ’s conquest, we are to teach all things He commanded (Mat. 28:18-20).
 - v. Their partnership w/ Paul proved to be loyal. They persevered in support from beginning to end. There may have been times of doubt or debate but their decision was ultimately to continue support – and it was rewarded in ways unseen. →
 - vi. And such is no doubt why Paul prayed for their increase in such virtues, wisdom, and fruit (vv. 9-11).
- d. Preservation (6)
 - i. One of my favorite and first memorized verses. I love the security in Christ which is conveyed here but it in no way serves as an excuse to neglect our duties and discipline.
 - ii. In fact, the next verse reveals why Paul is confident of their security – He witnessed and partook of their fruit and good fruit cannot come from a bad tree.
 - iii. A quick theological word on this proclamation: If one is in Christ – as has been established regarding the letter’s recipients, there is no condemnation (cf. Ro. 8:1). Furthermore, if one has been born again unto eternal life, how or why would one change the regenerate nature? The question is not can one lose his salvation (standing in Christ), but rather has one truly been regenerated or merely showing faux signs of such for a time e.g. Mat. 13:5-8; 1 Jn. 2:19.

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- iv. One must also note the Scripture does not offer eternal security to those in disobedience for obvious reasons e.g. above scenario and Mat. 13:3ff. re: shallow soil, birds snatching seed, weeds chocking out etc. Or some may be saved yet neglect the necessary discipline for sanctification; thus they need to be unsettled not relaxed by preachers telling them they are good to go as long as they believed, said a prayer, got baptized, etc.

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Knowing your identity is vital to life’s success. And having your identity in Christ is indispensable for life eternal. We’ll consider how the Apostle Paul identified himself, the local church and its leaders in his greetings to the saints at Philippi. Even in considering the greetings from Paul and their context, we can see the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the results from receiving such. We can begin a new calendar year with confidence in our salvation only if we have true confidence in Christ – for it is He alone who secured salvation for all those who repent and become liberated servants of God.