

# **OUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST**

## **Philippians 1:1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

While walking through the forest one day, a farmer found a young eaglet who had fallen out of his nest. He took it home and put it in his barnyard where it soon learned to eat and behave like the chickens. One day, a zoologist passed by the farm and asked why it was that the king of all birds should be confined to live in the barnyard with the chickens. The farmer replied that since he had given it chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it had never learned to fly. Since it now behaved as the chickens, it was no longer an eagle.

“It still has the heart of an eagle,” replied the zoologist, “and can surely be taught to fly.” He lifted the eagle toward the sky and said, “You belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” The eagle, however, was confused. He did not know who he was, and seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again.

The zoologist took the bird to the roof of the house and urged him again, saying, “You are an eagle. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” But the eagle was afraid of his unknown self and world and jumped down once more for the chicken food.

Finally, the zoologist took the eagle out of the barnyard to a high mountain. There he held the king of the birds above him and encouraged him again, saying, “You are an eagle. You belong to the sky. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” The eagle looked around, back towards the barnyard and up to the sky. Then, the zoologist lifted him straight towards the sun and the eagle began to tremble. Slowly, he stretched his wings and, with a cry, soared away into the heavens.

It may be that the eagle still remembers the chickens. It may even be that he occasionally revisits the barnyard. But as far as anyone knows, he has never returned to lead the life of a chicken.

In the same way, we as Christians need to understand our true identity in Christ. We have a new purpose in life. Key to our success, before God, according to the guidelines set forth in Scripture, is understanding this identity.

## **READ Phil 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:”**

Normal form for letters in those days:  
→ Author, Recipient(s), Greeting

**Proposition: 2 Great Christian Truths** fall like ripe fruit from Paul’s pen in the opening verse:

- I. Humble Authority**
- II. Holy Identity**

There is a third truth in the second verse which we will look at subsequently, and the three truths are marked by 3 prepositions in the text:

**“of Christ Jesus,” “in Christ Jesus,” and “from Christ Jesus”**

In these opening two verses, **Christ Jesus** is mentioned three times.

We see him as Master, Brother and Savior.

**So That:** We will understand what it means to be a Christian and our true identity so that we will, figuratively speaking, soar in the sky like eagles and not rummage around in the dust like chickens.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Great Christian Truth ...**

- I. Humble Authority**                      **1:1a**

Point – Authority and Humility

Proof – “<sup>1a</sup>**Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus**”

Their Authority

“**Paul**” – that was the customary beginning of every Pauline epistle. That was the customary format for opening a letter at that time. We are accustomed to letters today with sender’s name at the end.

We know the work of God’s grace in the life of Paul. From the end of Acts 7 to the beginning of Acts 8, we meet him as Saul, a great persecutor of the Church. His conversion in Acts 9 - Saul becomes Paul - and he went leads to him becoming the great emissary of the Church. In Acts 12, we see him as the unique Apostle to the Gentiles. He is the author of 13 books in New Testament. We read about his 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journeys. We get to know a great deal about Paul.

→ **Philippians 3:1-14** is probably best summary of the apostle Paul there is in all of Scripture.

**Acts 9:16** –Christ tells Ananias about Paul “I will show him how much he must suffer for My sake.”

**Paul** writes from Rome during his first Roman imprisonment around A.D. 62/63, where he was under house arrest for 2 years (Acts 28:30-31).

- Phil 1:7, 13, 17

→ Prison Epistles–Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians

“**and Timothy** “

- first met **Paul** in Lystra on Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:1).
- He had an important role in preaching the gospel in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 16-18).

- He was also with **Paul** in Ephesus (Acts 19:22) during his third missionary journey – **Paul** urged **Timothy** to stay on in Ephesus
- now, at the writing of this letter, 5-6 years later, **Timothy** is again with **Paul** in Rome

Timothy ministers faithfully to **Paul** during his imprisonment (2:19-22).

**Timothy** is one of the two men, along with **Titus**, to whom **Paul** writes his Pastoral Epistles.

There is no man closer to the **Apostle Paul** in his ministries than Timothy. **Paul** calls him my “true child in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2)

**Paul** alone writes this letter (singular “I” and “me” throughout). But his faithful brother **Timothy** is with him.

### Their Humility

“**bond-servants of Christ Jesus**” – literally “slaves of Christ Jesus”

Paul doesn’t begin, “Saint Paul to the church in Philippi”  
→ Slave Paul to the saints at Philippi is essentially how he starts the letter

In the culture of antiquity, there were three ways a person could become a slave:

- 1) By conquest
- 2) By birth
- 3) By debt

Against this background, the Bible teaches all men are slaves to sin

- 1) Psa 19:13; Prov 5:22 - “he will be held with the cords of his sin”
- 2) Psa 51:5 - “in sin my mother conceived me.”
- 3) Rom 6:23 - “wages of sin”

Rom 6 → From slaves to sin to slaves of Christ!

“**bond-servants**” – this Greek word literally means a bond-slave – a voluntary relationship

- willing, determined, devoted service
- Exod 21:5-6; Deut 15:12, 16-17

This is a bondage of love and gratitude, a relationship that we could compare to marriage.

**Illustration** - If you are married, you know that, in some ways, you are not a free man → you are not free to marry someone else, you are not free to leave your home, you are not free to abandon your spouse.

→ But you are free—free to serve, free to give, free to love your wife and children.

→ Exclusively “**of Jesus Christ**” - He is our Master

Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not appeal to his authority as an “apostle” (the other church letter same is 1 Thess ☺). He instead emphasizes their union in Christ. The same playing field. This ties into Philippians being the most positive epistle.

**Illustration** – Teddy Roosevelt would go out in the evening and search the skies for a certain spot of star-like light near the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus. Roosevelt would say, “That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.” Then Roosevelt would say, “Now I think we are small enough. Let’s go to bed.”

**Application** – We need to have a humility and a passion for the praise of God are a pair of characteristics which together indicate growth in grace. The healthy heart is one that bows down in humility and rises in praise and adoration.

“I am the least of the apostles.” 1 Corinthians 15:9 A.D. 59

“I am the very least of all the saints.” Ephesians 3:8 A.D. 61

“I am the foremost of sinners.” 1 Timothy 1:15 A.D. 64

→ As the years pass, Paul grows downward! And as his self-esteem sinks, so his praise and adoration for God rises.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Christian Truth ...

### II. Holy Identity 1:1b

Point – Paul wants the church in Philippi to understand that they have a foot in Heaven AND a foot in the world. He wants them to understand that they are in the world, but not of the world. He wants them to understand that they are in the Savior, AND of the Savior.

Proof – “<sup>1b</sup>**to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:**”

Not of the world

**“to all the saints”**

One little boy said, “*Saints are dead people that you put up on the church wall to keep the light from coming through.*”

The word translated as ‘saints’ literally means “holy ones” – consecrated, sacred, the people of God

→ those who have been set apart

This same word is found only in the plural in the New Testament. In other words, there is no “Saint Paul,” etc.

→ not people that have been canonized by a magisterial council

→ All Christians are saints – from the smallest to the greatest

“Christian” - appears 3 times in the New Testament

“**saint**” – appears twice in Psalms, six times in Daniel, and 61 times in the New Testament.

In the Word of God, you are called a saint about twenty times more often than you are called a Christian.

Boice – *“The one who is a saint in the biblical sense will strive to be holy, but his holiness, however little or however great it may be, does not make him a saint. He is a saint because he has been set apart by God.”*

Not of the world, ... → in the Savior and of the Savior

“**in Christ**” – they phrase appears 89 times in New Testament - once in Acts, 3 times in 1 Peter, and 85 times in the Pauline Corpus, Paul’s writings.

By old nature, we are in Adam. By new nature, we are in Christ. By birth, we are in Adam. By new birth, we are in Christ.

All “**in Adam**” are in Adam by natural generation.  
All who are “**in Christ**” are in Christ by spiritual regeneration.

All “**in Adam**” have been born once.  
All who are “**in Christ**” have been born twice.

→ All “**in Adam**” die. All “**in Christ**” live.

1 Cor 15:22 – “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.”

**Illustration** – You can be a in a garage, and not be a car. You can be in a hospital, and not be a doctor. You can be in a restaurant and starve to death ... BUT ... you cannot be “in Christ” and not be a Christian. You cannot be “in Christ” and not have all the privileges and blessings given to you by your Lord.

Not of the world, in the Savior and of the Savior, ...

→ in the world

“who are in Philippi”

“in Christ Jesus ... in Philippi” → both/and - it is not an either/or

→ In the world, but not of the world.

→ Philippi is a real place ... about 11 miles inland, north of the top of the Aegean Sea, at the strategic pass on the Great Ignatian Highway where the Gospel first sets its feet in the Western world  
→ where God opened the flood gates and took the gospel from Asia to Europe, from the East to the West.

Point – The church in Philippi is a solid, a sanctified church. A missions-minded church. This is Paul’s letter to a good church. It is a diverse church. It is a mature church. It is a gentile church.

In early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, early martyr Ignatius went through Philippi on his way to martyrdom in Rome under military guard. The Philippian believers were not ashamed of his chains, but ministered to him and escorted him some distance away. Polycarp, a friend of Ignatius, wrote to them and thanked them for their kindness.

To understand more how Paul felt about the church in Philippi:

**2 Cor 8:1-5** - “Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, **2** that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. **3** For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, **4** begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, **5** and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

That is a beautiful picture of these believers in Philippi.

**Application** - In the same way, you work, keep house, do business ... BUT you carry with yourself a private biosphere of being in Christ. We are not of Gilbert, AZ, but of heaven (“**in Christ**”).

(Bonus) **Great Christian Truth** here that we can call...

→ **Hierarchical Equality**

Point – In the church, both hierarchy and equality. Ontologically equal with a God-ordained hierarchy ... just like every other entity beginning with God Himself ... and in all His created Universe.

Proof – “<sup>1c</sup>**including the overseers and deacons**”

“**including**” – 4<sup>th</sup> important preposition

→ sun – this little Greek word is translated “with” (ESV) - not “over” or “under”

“**the overseers and deacons**” – ἐπίσκοπος and διάκονος - the servant-leaders

Unique among the Pauline epistles to include in the opening. Mentioned here and then not mentioned again in this letter.

“**overseers**” – New Testament elders are first mentioned in **Acts 11:30** – overseeing the famine relief money sent with Paul and Barnabas by the church at Antioch to the elders in Judea

**Acts 20:28** – “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

The role of a New Testament elder → to lead, feed, care for, and protect.

“**deacons**” – this word is translated as deacon; servant; minister (Eph 3:7) - a little more emphasis on serving.

The blending of elders and deacons → servant-leaders. The primarily leading servant leaders and the primarily servant leaders.

When Paul writes this letter to the Philippians, it's about 10 years after the events of Acts 16.

They have “**elders and deacons.**”

Here at STBC, it only took us 7 years to have both 😊

We have seen two Great Christian Truths - **Humble Authority, Holy Identity, ...**

We will continue next week with the **3<sup>rd</sup> Great Christian Truth ...**

**CONCLUSION**