

Philippians 1:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-1/philippians-11/>

Paul and Timothy greet the believers in Philippi, including the elders, who tend to the spiritual needs of the believers, and to the deacons, who tend to the material needs.

This letter begins with a salutation: Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus. Paul opens many of his letters focusing on his authority as an apostle. But here, with these believers who support him so faithfully, he calls himself a bond-servant of Christ Jesus. Paul includes Timothy as an author. Paul had sent Timothy to Macedonia to minister to the churches there when he purposed to go to Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 19:22). Perhaps at that time Timothy became well known to the Philippian believers. We will see in 2:19 that Paul intends to send Timothy again, to check on their state and to care for their well-being.

The word translated bond-servant is “doulos” which simply means “servant.” The scripture calls every believer a servant, but makes clear that there are faithful servants as well as unfaithful servants. One of the main themes of scripture is instruction to Jesus’s servants on how to be faithful, as well as providing motivation for their faithfulness (Revelation 1:1-3). A major theme of this letter is for the servants of Christ to adopt the attitude of Christ, which was an attitude of radical obedience, trusting that God’s reward would be more than worth whatever trouble or suffering the obedience would bring.

This letter is addressed To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. The word translated saints means “holy ones.” To be “holy” in the Bible is to be set apart, or sanctified. All believers are set apart in the sense that they are placed in Christ Jesus through faith. That is what is emphasized here, that every believer is holy because they are in Christ Jesus. The Philippian believers receiving this letter are definitely in Christ, which means they had been born again, by grace, through faith (John 3:14-16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

There should be no doubt that being placed into Jesus Christ by the Spirit, through faith, makes any believer holy in their position in Christ. Much of this letter, and much of the Bible, focuses upon teaching His servants how to let the holiness of Jesus flow through their lives and into their experience. Paul will emphasize in this letter that allowing the work of God to flow through us is the path to our greatest fulfillment as humans. It is the path of following Jesus in obedience. In this way, His servants show themselves as faithful.

The particular believers being addressed, who are holy by virtue of being in Christ Jesus, are the believers who live in Philippi. Philippi was a city in what is now northern Greece. Northern Greece was called Macedonia during the New Testament time period. Alexander the Great hailed from Macedonia. Philippi bears the name of Alexander’s father. Alexander died in 323 BC. So this letter is written approximately 375 years after his time. Upon his death, Alexander left his kingdom to his four generals, who split the kingdom among themselves. One of the kingdoms was Macedonia. By this point in history, all four kingdoms had been absorbed into the Roman

Empire. Philippi had been re-established from around 42 BC and onward, and included many retired veterans of the Roman army. It was a well-to-do city, being a port city as well as having nearby gold mines.

At the time of this letter, Philippi was a Roman colony, in the Roman province of Asia, which is now modern Turkey. Philippi had the feel of Rome. Many Latin inscriptions have been discovered through modern archeology. Since its Roman colonization, Philippi had become a popular retirement destination for Roman soldiers. In Acts 16, Paul met some Jews by the river, rather than meeting them at the synagogue, as he often did in other cities. This indicates that there was a small Jewish population, too small to support a synagogue, where Paul often began his ministry when going to a new city.

Paul's salutation makes a particular point to mention that all the saints in Christ Jesus is specifically including the overseers and deacons. The term translated overseers is the Greek word "episkopos." It can mean the overseer of any enterprise. In this instance, the church at Philippi is in view. The term is synonymous with "elders." It is likely that "episkopos" is used when addressing a Greek audience, and "presbyteros" (elders) is used for a Jewish audience. They mean the same thing: overseers. Peter uses "episkopeo" in 1 Peter 5:2 where it is translated "shepherd," likely because it is clear that the "episkopeo" report to a higher authority, the "chief shepherd" which is Jesus.

It is worth noting that the term is plural. The principle of a plurality of leadership is found throughout scripture. When God made His suzerain-vassal style covenant (or treaty) with Israel, it was between Him and the people. In that day, treaties of this style were usually between superior and inferior kings. In God's case, He desired each Israelite to be self-governing, and live as a servant-king under His rule. Each Israelite was commanded to love his neighbor as he loved himself (Leviticus 18:19).

Paul also included the deacons in his salutation. Deacons is a translation of the Greek word "diakonos" which is most often translated "minister." Again, the term is plural. The office of "deacon" was established in order to divide the church workload between spiritual and practical needs for the church, with the overseers focusing on spiritual instruction and guidance, and the deacons focusing on practical needs. This is generally taken from the passage in Acts 6:1-5, even though the term "diakonos" is not used in the Acts 6 passage. It is clear however that "diakonos" later became an "office" of the church (1 Timothy 3:10, 13).

Biblical Text

**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:**