

Philippians 1:1-2 (Part 1)

When Philip II ascended the throne of the Greek empire 350 years before the birth of Christ, he would become one of its greatest administrators and one of the world's greatest conquering kings. Gold currency from those mines would be used by Philip to outfit his armies. The emperor would rename this key city Philippi after himself, in all humility of course. Two hundred years later (168 B.C.) the empire of Rome defeated the Empire of Greece. By that time the gold mines of Philippi had been exhausted and the importance of the city declined.

Julius Caesar was assassinated. Caesar's assassins just outside the city of Philippi. And Philippi had a choice to make and they chose to stand with Augustus in battle. Brutus and Cassius, Caesar's assassins were killed in the battle and Augustus took the throne of a newly formed Roman Empire. He immediately gave the city the status of a Roman "colony" to celebrate his victory. All the people of Philippi were immediately given citizenship in the Roman Empire. This means they could vote, elect and be governed by their own senate. They adopted all of the Roman customs, Roman law, Roman dress, a Roman senate, and were zealous supporters of the Roman Empire and in particular the Emperor.

Within 100 years, the citizens of Rome will turn patriotism into idolatry. Citizens of Philippi will literally worship their emperors as the offspring of deity. Philippi citizens had adopted the practice of declaring their ultimate devotion to their emperor by calling him, *kyrios soter* – our Lord and Savior.

This was the problem created for Paul and Silas 10 years earlier when they were beaten and thrown into jail on their first visit to Philippi? The charge against them was that *"These men are Jews . . . and they are teaching laws and customs which we do not observe – for we are Romans"* (**Acts 16:20**). The crowd descended on them and beat them and even the judges came down from their bench and joined in (**Acts 16**). In other words, we follow Rome . . . not some Jew!

Now in the next few words, Paul is going to effectively and radically change their world view. Which is the foundation for living, their worship, and their mission.

1. Transformation of their sense of loyalty (Vs. 1)

Being "in" Christ is where your life and your heart belongs. Jesus said in **John 15:5** *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* Paul reinforces this new sense of loyalty and belonging to Christ as he writes to the believers in Ephesus, *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (**Ephesians 2:4-7**).

The Greek word Paul uses here for saint, which is used throughout the New Testament directed at Christians, is the word *hagioi* and it simply means "belonging to God – set apart unto God". It comes from the root word "holy". But it means more than just holy, it means holy and separated. We are to be holy – set apart unto God!

A Christian is a holy saint, a holy priest, a member of a holy nation (**1 Peter 2:9**); not because you are sinless, but because we've been redeemed for the special purposes of God.

Jonathan Leeman writes in his book entitled, *Church Membership*, *"The [local] church is an Embassy. What's an embassy? It's an institution that represents one nation although it is located in another nation – a host nation. And every embassy represents its home nation's interests to its host nation."*

Paul is informing the believers in Philippi that they belong to God and His kingdom. And while they serve together and worship together and belong to one another in Christ and strive to reach their community with the gospel, they are actually representing their home nation's interests to its host nation.

2. Transformation of their structure of authority

He refers to the primary spiritual authority in the New Testament church – the elder, bishop, pastor. All three terms are used interchangeably for this one office, occupied by men who meet the qualifications. The Greek word "*episkopos*" which is translated overseer, or superintendent, or most often bishop. Another term for this same office or man in the local church is "*presbuteros*" which is most often translated elder. Every pastor is an elder and every elder is a pastor.

Philippians 1:1-2 (Part 1)

The term pastor comes from the Greek word, “*poimen*”. It appears often in the New Testament but it’s nearly always translated “shepherd”. Here in *Philippians 1:1* and *Ephesians 4:11* are the only two places the term “pastor” is used not meaning shepherd.

The Greek word *poimen* / shepherd it can be translated *feeder*; one who pastors the flock or literally pastures them – they lead the flock to pasture to eat; which is an outstanding reminder that the highest office of authority in the church has as one of its outstanding responsibilities, the feeding and shepherding of the flock.

The New Testament uses four terms to describe the leadership of the church. Each leadership position has responsibilities to Christ as the head of the church, to that particular position of leadership, to the church leadership (pastor(s) and / or elders), and to the church body. These terms are found in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1.

- Elder (*presbuteros*) which places emphasis upon the authority that the leadership has to teach and rule the church
- Bishop (*episkopos*) which emphasizes overseeing spiritual well-being of the church
- Pastor (*poimen* – shepherd) the responsibility of the leadership of the church and to “shepherd” the flock, including the spiritual well-being
- Deacon (*diakonos* – to minister / serve) to minister and serve the church membership

The Apostle Paul is recognizing in his opening comments the spiritual leadership of the church. While the believers would be informed that they should respect the officers of the law and their government leaders. In other words, “*giving honor and custom and tax to whom it was due*” (paraphrased) as Paul admonished in *Romans 1:6-7*.

Paul, in this letter and in other letters, wrote to instruct so the church would fully understand their spiritual direction, directed by their shepherds who in turn, represented the Chief Shepherd of the church, Jesus Christ. Even this idea would have been treasonous by Roman rulers that a body of believers would submit to spiritual leaders.

Paul not only wants to transform their sense of loyalty and transform their structure of authority; he also wants to, transform the significance of humility.

3. Transformation of the significance of humility

Paul has referred to the saints, the shepherds, and now he specifically refers to the servants. This term for this third office in the church is simply a transliteration of the Greek term, “*diakonos*” – deacon.

It literally means table server as it is translated in (*Acts 6:2, (Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40, John 2:5)*). The office of deacon is a servant. Paul uses this term to refer to himself in *1 Corinthians 3:5* – where he writes, “*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? We are servants [diakonos] through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned.*” The Lord Himself in *Romans 15:8* says that, “*Christ became a diakonos – a servant.*” Because these men don’t hold the office of spiritual leadership in the church does not mean they aren’t spiritual. The qualification of the position of deacon in the early church (*Acts 6*); and the qualifications they had to meet (*1 Timothy 3*) are nearly identical to the elders.

These men will model humility as servants of the flock. Paul is inviting the Philippians to follow and imitate those who not only publically lead them, but those who quietly serve them. And he’s ultimately rekindling an appreciation for the significance of being a servant ... showing the church what it means to imitate the most faithful, precious servant of all time – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Saints, shepherds, elders, and deacon servants make up the local church – the embassy of Christ in a foreign land. They are communicating to their kingdom the news of another kingdom. Even if their lives and their news might be interpreted as treason as it was then and will be again in the end times. Yet, this message of good news carried by every believer in every nation, will ultimately lead to everlasting triumph. We look forward to the day, that great award ceremony day, where our Lord will reward every one of His saints with their own unique award.