**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**From Where Do *Grace* and *Peace* Come?**

**Philippians 1:1 - 7**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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Last week was the introduction to the New Testament book of Philippians penned by the Apostle Paul between 61-62 A.D. . . . while he was under house arrest in Rome waiting trial by Caesar, as was his right as a Roman citizen. Based upon the chronology of Paul’s life, we know that he was released from his Roman detention and continued his mission that he was commissioned by the resurrected Jesus Christ. Scholars believe that the Jewish witnesses from Jerusalem, who were to testify against Paul, never came to Rome. Paul was eventually arrested again for his missionary activities. Paul wrote his last letter (2 Timothy) while he was in prison in Roman waiting his execution. Scholars believe that he was beheaded outside of Rome about 68 A.D.

In the introduction to Philippians, we focused on Paul’s initial visit to Philippi ten years before he wrote the letter. This provides a clear context of the letter in that Paul knew the recipients and had suffered with them through hard times. In addition, we considered the term *doulos* (slave) and its implications for the Believer, because Paul refers to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ in verse 1. We also observed many other leading Believers in the New Testament used this same word “doulos” to describe their relationship with God. In all clarity, we can substitute the word “*slave*” with “*servant*” as in “*willing servant*” guided by God’s Holy Spirit in qualifying Paul’s application of the word. We can say a person is “totally sold-out to God” or they’re “all-in” as we describe a Believer’s commitment. Thus, the defining element in a Believer is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ/God that is guiding, urging and directing their actions and statements. There are only Spirit-filled Believers. There is *no-such-thing* as a *non-spirit-filled* Believer.

**Romans 8:9** However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

When this takes place, there is little to no desire to pursue the fallen world’s offerings. . . all Believers are servants of God/Christ.

With this understanding. . . Paul sees the Believers in Philippi to be living a life with God’s Holy Spirit guiding them. Paul presents his servitude in this way to contrast the power of evil’s control over people’s lives. Believers are of God, but the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

God adds clarity to this understanding in the book of Romans.

**Romans 6:14-18**

**14** For sin shall not be master over you,

for you are not under law but under **grace**.

**15** What then?

Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?

May it never be!

**16** Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience,

 **you are slaves of the one whom you obey,**

either of sin resulting in death,

or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

**17** But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin,

you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

**18** and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

**Therefore, God gives Believers more power to overcome evil. . . *grace*. When we surrender to God’s *grace*. . . the avenue to God’s *peace* opens. Then we can have *peace* with God and our neighbor.**

How does this work? God explains that Believers are under the *power of grace*, that is the *Cross of grace*. *Grace* is something freely given that is not earned. Simply said. . . from John 3:16. . . For God loved the world so much. . . that He gave His unique (there is only one) Son that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. Through God’s love, *grace* was freely offered to all and everyone has the opportunity to surrender to God’s *grace*. We can see that *grace* (represented by the Cross) is the power that saves. *Grace* is the Cross of Christ. At the Cross, God as Jesus Christ demonstrated His mastery over sin and death and the power of the Devil. How? By coming back to life after dying a temporal death and walking from the tomb. We call this the Resurrection.

God, as Jesus, also demonstrated Satan’s defeated status chronicled in Matthew 4, when Satan came to “test” Jesus after His forty days and nights in the wilderness.

We need to be clear. The Cross was not the place God defeated the Devil. Satan defeated himself. Satan was already defeated the moment he rebelled against God. This is when Satan acted out sin. Satan and people choose to think about and participate in sin. People do the same thing as Satan. The second a person rebels against God, they are defeated. Adam made this same *free-will-choice* to sin against God. However, God put forth His offering of *grace* through *faith* to all people. . . because all of us have sinned (Romans 3:9-18). God demonstrated His victory over Satan at the Cross. In fact, Jesus demonstrated this victory status over sin and death before He went to the Cross in the Garden of Gethsemane’s prayer when He said . . . “Not as my will but Your will” revealing God’s mastery over sin and death in human form. The perishable puts on the imperishable. This is what Jesus demonstrated for us. . . that it is possible for fallen humanity to join with God in the victorious life over sin and death. God demonstrates His victory over Satan every time a defeated person surrenders to His *grace*. When we surrender to God, we join Him in His victory. God gives us an opportunity to join Him in the victory through the Cross.

**1 Corinthians 15:54-57**

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written,

"DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.

55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?

O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

 57 but thanks be to God,

who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Philippians**

**1:1a** Paul and Timothy, bond-servants (Slaves) of Christ Jesus,

Last Sunday, time did not permit a review of the remainder of verse1 or verse 2 and following.

**Verse 1b** To all the *saints* in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,

including the *overseers* and *deacons*:

It is of note that Paul addresses his letter to the whole congregation, delineating *saints, overseers and deacons*. It is important to recognize this because we can see that the early Church had leadership in place. Paul writes to Timothy and Titus about the qualifications of *overseers/elders* and *deacons* after he writes to the Philippian church (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9/ 64-65 A.D.). From this chronology, we see those years before Paul pens letters to Timothy and Titus encouraging them to place or manage the issue of Elders and Deacons. . . that the church in Philippi already had these leaders in place. Peter wrote his letter we call 1 Peter about the same time as Paul (62-64 A.D.) We see a consistency in the early Church with letters penned by different leaders.

**1 Peter 5:1-4 1** Therefore, I exhort the **elders** (presbuteros) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

Strong’s 4245 πρεσβύτερος presbuteros

**2** shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; **3** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

 So, it is obvious in our time that there has been a failing of those that present themselves as elders. There can be a separate sermon on this topic. God’s called (ordained) leadership (Elders) are to protect the spiritual well-being and growth of the local church. These positions were set in place by God in the beginning era of the New Testament Church. In addition, we see that the Apostles selected *deacons* from within their believing community to carryout the functional needs of the members (Acts 6). This took place before the Jerusalem Council convened, chronicled in Acts 15. Therefore, there was a division of responsibility in ministry leadership from the beginning.

Biblical leadership is vital to the local church. We see that the church in Philippi had both *overseers* and *deacons*. *Overseers* are the same as e*lders* commissioned to teach God’s Word accurately as one of the main qualifications separating them from *deacons*. In addition, e*lders* specifically are called to defend the Church and oversee the spirituality of the congregation.

**Titus 1:5-9** (Paul uses the world *elder* and *overseer* interchangeably.)

**5** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders (presbuteros) in every city as I directed you, **6** namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

 **7** For the overseer (episkopos) must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,

 Strong’s 1985 ἐπίσκοπος episkopos

 **8** but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, **9** holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (See 1 Timothy 1:3 “able to teach”)

*Deacons* assist the Church to do important functional things like oversee the distribution of food to the needy, as they were originally called to do in Acts 6. The word “*deacon*” simply means “*servant*” which applies to both men and women in the New Testament. Phoebe is a *woman-servant/deacon* sent by Paul to serve in Rome (Romans 16:1). It is my view that any service position in the church can be called a “*deacon*” assignment. These categories include music and supporting ministry roles.

Today, *deacons* serve many roles. Here at the Christian Fellowship, we have *elders* in place by title. We have provisions to have deacons by title. However, in practice, within our Fellowship, we have many members serving important duties like “*trustee*” who meet the biblical qualifications to be a *servant/deacon*.

**Grace and Peace**

**Philippians 1:2** Grace to you and peace

From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

 *Grace* and *peace* are God’s assets Paul puts forth as part of his greeting and calling card to those he writes. *Grace* and *peace* are God’s indispensable attributes that are foundational to life and sustaining life. God’s *love* extends *grace* and *peace* to the fallen world. Therefore, consider *grace* and *peace* to be an extension of God’s *love* that life is established and flourishes.

Remember that God incarnated Himself as Jesus the Messiah who was prophesied as the “Prince of Peace” by the prophet Isaiah.

**Isaiah 9:6-7 6** For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, **Prince of Peace.**  **7** There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Peter calls God, the “God of all *grace*” (1 Peter 5:10). Meaning that without God, there would not be *grace* in the world. We access God’s *grace* through *faith*. It is a gift of God that saves (Ephesians 2:8).

Titus proclaims it is the *grace of God* appearing in Jesus Christ that brings salvation to all people (Titus 2:11). So, when Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with *grace* and *peace*, he is declaring the power of God’s love working through faith, accessing salvation and leading to eternal life. Therefore, we too, should be that illumination of God’s *grace* and *peace* to others in our witness. Paul makes this abundantly clear when he states that *grace* and *peace* are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, this phrase represents the triune God.

 *Grace* or *peace* are part of the morality of God that He gifts fallen humanity. . . giving all of us the opportunity to adopt by faith. Therefore, it is impossible for a person to use the fullness of the powers of God’s *grace* and *peace* unless they have surrendered to Him. Non-believers can have gracious acts, but they cannot deliver the message of eternal life which is the number one reason grace was extended by God.

**I Thank God for You All!**

**Philippians 1:3** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

 We continue to see the Holy Spirit lead Paul’s hand as he writes to the saints in Philippi. Remember that ten years prior, Paul had spent time in Philippi suffering with them the persecutions of the fallen world as a price to be a missionary for the Gospel of God.

No doubt, Paul remembers them. Philippi is where he met Lydia at first and then he endured the slave girl’s mocking, from whom he exorcised an evil spirit. . . whose master then complained to the magistrate. Paul and Silas were arrested and received a beating then thrown into prison. Their imprisonment was an opportunity for God to work through them. Always remember that when we are persecuted for God we will be blessed and will have a witness. Jesus told us in Matthew 5 that the kingdom of heaven is for those that humble themselves to God, who mourn for their sins and their neighbor sins, who are gentle and hunger for righteousness. . . being merciful and pure in heart, these will see God. The kingdom of God is for the peacemakers, called sons of God. All of these attributes to which God calls us. . . enable us to be blessed in persecution for the sake of righteousness. For people will insult us and persecute us, falsely saying all kinds of evil against us because of the words of Jesus Christ that we teach. It is at these times, we are to “rejoice and be glad, for our reward in heaven is great”. This is why Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth . . . we are that light on a hill that should not hidden (Matthew 5:3-14).

So, in Paul’s prayer and singing praise to God while imprisoned, many surrendered to God because of the challenging circumstances they witnessed.

So, in Paul’s letter when he writes. . .

**4** always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

**5** in view of your **participation** in the gospel from the first day until now.

. . . he is observing that the faith of the saints in Philippi is not static. These saints just did not agree with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, they were living the Gospel. . . they participated. To them, being a Christian is not just an agreement statement or a static spiritual life. Remember that Philippi was one of the important centers of Greek culture. To be a member of The Way at that time in that city was very challenging. I envision that their neighbors saw them as religious zealots who had lost their way and in need of psychiatric help. Hey, this is similar today.

 If you believe in miracles, the afterlife, the Resurrection or even that God created the universe and all there is. . . you may be considered a bit ‘off’ and not accepted by many, especially by some within the academic community. But God is confident in us and does not give-up working on us.

**6** For I am confident of this very thing,

 that **He** who **began a good work** in you

will **perfect** it until the day of Christ Jesus.

 **7** For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all,

because I have you in my heart,

since both in my imprisonment

and in the defense

and confirmation

of the gospel,

you all are **partakers** **of grace** with me.

 These words are the most revealing of Paul’s feeling for the saints in Philippi. These saints participated with Paul in **defense and confirmation** of the Gospel of God in the face of persecution. Therefore, they are all partakers of God’s grace together.

**And not to end on too serious of a note. . . we see in verse 8,** that Paul uses the phrase “you all” which is proof he was a Texan by faith. I know, he wasn’t born here, or he would have said “Y’all”.

 **8** For God is my witness,

how I long for **you all** with the affection of Christ Jesus.

**AMEN**