

Is This Letter Addressed to You? (Part 1)

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[0:00] If you've been a Christian very long, and as I look around the room, I'm looking at quite a number of believers who I know have been believers a long time.

Possibly since childhood. And some of you came to faith. God was gracious to save you a little later in life. But even many of you have been believers for a good period of time.

And so if you've been a Christian very long, then you have familiarized yourself with God's Word. And over the course of your journey as a believer, you have kind of added to your repertoire of Scriptures a number of favorite verses.

And some of these verses you would say are my favorites. Life verses.

Some of these verses in the Bible you have put to memory over the years. And though you might be hard-pressed to stand before a group and recite them, you did at one point commit them to memory.

[1:24] And so they're very familiar. Others that are maybe favorite verses in the Bible or familiar verses of the Bible. Maybe you've not memorized them.

You wouldn't call them your favorites. But as soon as you hear them, you're thinking, yeah, that's in the Bible. And I recognize that. Let me quote a few of them for you.

See if some of these are your favorites. Here's one. Now, being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that a great verse? Familiar with that one? By the way, I'm reading these from the King James because many of us in the room, if we've been a Christian very long, we probably familiarized ourselves with these verses according to the King's English, the old King's English.

Here's another one. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Tremendous verse of Scripture.

[2:28] Easy one to memorize as well. And how about this one? And when I quote it here in a minute, you are, for obvious reasons, you're going to say, well, that's not one of my favorites. But it is familiar.

Here it is. For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake. Tremendous verse.

Very familiar, isn't it? And then there's this one. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Amen. Amen. Amen. What a tremendous verse. And of course, this familiar verse. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

And this one. I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. And what about this one? This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

[3:43] Amen. I mean, these verses are so familiar. And the truths in these verses are so familiar to us. They barely need to be preached. You just quote them.

And yes. Or how about this one? Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice. Amen. I knew, you know, it took too long, Wes, for you to finally respond.

And then here's one of my favorites. Be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication. With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

I love that. And everyone knows this one. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. And then one more. But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

These are all very familiar, aren't they? Some of them you've committed to memory over the years. The truths. As soon as we quote them. We connect with them.

[4:56] And we are impacted by these truths. Great verses. Now I think you probably have guessed where I'm going with this. Hopefully you have.

Or maybe they're not as familiar to you as I thought. But all of these favorite verses that I've just quoted for you have one thing in common. These all come from one book in the Bible. It's a small New Testament book. Four chapters long. Just four chapters. All these come from there. In my copy of God's Word, this book takes up four and a half pages in my Bible. Four and a half pages of the 1,678 pages in my copy of God's Word. And it is, of course, the book of Philippians. Had you guessed that?

Philippians. A marvelous book. It is a letter. Of course, one of many of the Apostle Paul's letters to New Testament churches, New Testament believers. In fact, Philippians, I think it's safe to say.

[6:14] Philippians is a love letter. Its theme is joy. Very little debate about that. A theme that reoccurs over and over throughout this, again, small little letter.

But it's really more than just a letter with the theme joy. It's a love letter. It really is a love letter. Which, by the way, makes it unique among Paul's letters.

You read nothing here in the book of Philippians about any rebuke about the way the people are worshiping or any doctrine that they are believing that is wrong.

No words of rebuke. It's a love letter. One theologian put it this way. He said, this is an epistle of the heart. A true love letter full of friendship, gratitude, and confidence.

Now, we're going to spend some time in the weeks to come working our way through this wonderful letter to the church at Philippi. And this morning, this is the way I would like to begin.

[7:22] Maybe an unusual way to begin. But in the brief time that I have this morning, I would like to begin by asking a very serious question.

Sobering question. A very personal question. Is this letter addressed to you?

That's how we need to begin. Before we get to all of the wonderful things that Paul is going to say. The theme joy running throughout the letter.

Before we get to this love letter. And hear what Paul has to write. Ask yourself this question. Is this letter addressed to me? You know, it's never a good idea to read somebody else's mail.

Especially if it's a love letter. You're not going to read somebody else's love letter. That's not a good idea. And so is this letter addressed to you.

[8:37] You see, this letter, this love letter, is addressed to a specific group of people. Very specific. The New Testament is full of mail addressed to specific people.

All the letters that Paul wrote and Peter wrote, they're addressed to a specific people. And here is the unique feature of Paul's Bible mail.

B-mail, I guess we could call it. Here's the unique feature of it. Since the day Paul first wrote this letter, the list of addressees has been growing.

It's still growing today. And so my prayer and hope is right now, today, this morning. My prayer and hope is that the list of addressees for this love letter from Paul would grow today.

Grow in number. And so if at the close of my sermon this morning you realize, maybe for the first time, that the book of Philippians is not addressed to you.

[9:52] That is, as you are now. It's not addressed to you. If you come and really God leads you to understand, maybe for the first time, that this letter is a wonderful letter, but it's just not addressed to me.

Not as I am now. If you come to realize that. May God graciously, gloriously change that today.

And then, see, you can study this love letter with me over the next however many weeks it takes or months it takes and have this assurance.

This is all for me. What Paul is writing here. It's all for me. Paul is writing to me. And I tell you, there is not a more wonderful assurance when reading the book of Philippians, really any part of Scripture, than to have that assurance that this is for me.

This is for me. Now, so this morning let's consider to whom this love letter is addressed.

[11:06] So if you have your Bibles there and hopefully you're a step ahead of me and you've turned to the book of Philippians, the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, then find verse 1.

That's a good place to begin. And let me read verses 1 and 2. Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi or in Philippi with the bishops and the deacons or elders and deacons.

Alright? Just the beginning of the letter. Perhaps you've never spent any time just considering what we might learn just in these first two verses.

Now, I ask the question again. Is this letter addressed to you? It is, I assure you, it is if you can answer yes to the following three questions.

[12:12] And these are three questions that I'm going to be asking you, not only this morning, but next Sunday morning. I'd give you all three of them, but time is short. Three questions.

Do you share the same relationship with those to whom Paul originally wrote? That's the question we'll get at this morning.

Number two, do you share the same residence? Let me add a word, eternal residence.

With those to whom Paul originally wrote. And number three, the third question. Do you share the same eternal reward? With those to whom Paul originally wrote.

Do you share the same eternal relationship? The same eternal residence? The same eternal reward? With those to whom Paul originally wrote.

[13:16] Alright, question number one. Do you share the same eternal relationship with those to whom Paul originally wrote? You see, the addressees of Paul's letter possessed a special relationship with Jesus Christ.

There's no denying that. There's no missing that in Paul's introduction to his letter. His salutation.

They shared, they possessed a unique, a special, eternal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Verse 1, Paul said, Paul and Timothy. He introduced Paul and Timothy, his brother in the faith. His son in the faith, really. Because Paul led Timothy to the Lord.

It says, Paul and Timothy bond servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus.

Now there are two words in this opening salutation that describe the relationship of believers to Jesus Christ. These two words describe the relationship Paul's original readers had with the Lord Jesus.

[14:23] And describe all those who have been added to the address list. And the address list including many, maybe even all of us here this morning.

These two words describe it. Slaves and saints. Slaves and saints. And I assure you, though we don't have time to look at all of the passages where Paul mentions this idea of being a slave in Christ.

I assure you that Paul, the Bible, views every true born again believer as slaves. Slaves of Christ. Slaves of Christ.

And this morning, let's not try and soften or minimize what Paul is saying when he uses this word slave. Or in our translation, bond servant.

Or bond slave. Paul means slave. Plain and simple. There's no softening that. There's no explaining that away. He means slave.

[15:26] The Greek word is *doulos*. And it means slave. And long before the Bible was written, in the Greek language, *doulos* meant slave. And when Paul and others used the word in the New Testament, it meant the same thing.

Slave. Slave. Or that is, one who is owned by someone else. Owned to such a degree that that one has no rights of his or her own.

No rights whatsoever. That's a slave. That's what the word *doulos* means. It means, speaking of one who is the personal property of a master.

Whose life is totally, utterly, at the disposal of the master.

Whatever the master wants, that's what he gets. Whatever the master says for the slave to do, that's what the slave must do. His life is totally at the disposal.

[16:34] And even in secular life and in Paul's day, even if the master wanted to put his slave to death, that was his right. That's what Paul means.

By the word *doulos*. So let's not soften it with the word servant, though that may appear in a number of translations. And have this idea of just household servants, you know, that aren't really slaves.

They may even be paid for what they're doing. We're talking about slaves. The word *doulos*, though, has an added extra meaning to it.

Or an added extra connotation when it is applied to the context of Christianity. Not a less of a meaning, but more of a meaning.

And so it carries then with it this connotation. One of determination and devotion. That's what *doulos* means in connection with Christ and Christianity.

[17 : 46] And that's why we have some translations rendering it bond slave. Bond servant. And we have some instruction in Scripture on that, by the way. In Exodus chapter 21 and verse 5, in the Mosaic Law, it's spelled out this way.

That if a slave plainly says, that he's not coerced to say, but he plainly says, I love my master, I will not go out as a free man.

If he says that, then his master shall bring him to God. Then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl.

And he shall serve him permanently. See, this is who we are in Christ. Bond slaves.

Which makes us no less slaves. Alright? It doesn't remove all that a slave or the idea of slavery means. But it adds to it and says that we are now willing slaves.

[18 : 51] We are devoted slaves. Listen to what Paul said and how Paul applied it in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 22. He said, For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man.

And going beyond, the implication is actually slaves to sin. That we are now through salvation are free. Amen. Wonderful.

But he doesn't finish there. He goes on to say, Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave. And so, though many Christians in his day were slaves and when they were saved, Paul says, You're free.

Now, you're still slaves. Still subservient to your master. But in reality, you're free. But you are slave. Slave to Christ.

It's very clear. It's very clear. And so, to whom then is this letter addressed? It's addressed to slaves. In Christ.

[20 : 01] Slaves in Christ. He owns them. That is their eternal relationship with God. And listen to me. It's the only good kind of slavery to be in.

Because you see, in this kind of relationship, this relationship of slave to Christ or in Christ, the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, takes care of us.

He takes care of his slaves. In fact, later on, I quoted this first part of it, or all of it, just a moment ago. In Philippians chapter 4, verse 19, Paul says, My God shall supply all your need.

So, the Master, in this kind of slavery, the Master takes care of his slaves. But also, not only does he take care of his slaves, but the Master takes charge of his slaves.

I love this passage in 2 Samuel chapter 15, verse 15. King David's servants come to him. In one of those trying times for David, Absalom has rebelled against him, seeks his life.

[21 : 10] David has to flee. You might know that story. And the servants come to their king, and this is what they say. We are your slaves. Ready to do whatever my Lord the King commands.

That ought to be our motto. That ought to be our life conviction. And so, see, as a slave in Christ, our Master takes care of us.

Our Master takes charge of us. We do his bidding. Whatever he wants, he gets. And whatever he wants us to do, we do. We're slaves.

But not only that, one more. The Master takes credit for his slaves. And this is the only kind of slavery where this works. And that is, he gets all the glory.

All the glory. And all that we do as slaves in his charge. So, is this letter addressed to you?

[22 : 14] Does the word slave not only identify you, but describe you, the way you're living your life? Does it describe your eternal relationship with God?

Do you share that relationship with those to whom Paul wrote this love letter? Paul identifies something else about his first readers.

As I've already said, they were not only slaves of Christ. They were also saints in Christ.

Saints in Christ. Saints. Not New Orleans saints, Tony. I'm sorry. Real saints. Saints.

Saints. And the word here is *hagyas*. And it is generally translated holy in the Bible. Most places in the New Testament where you find the word holy, in there is some form of the word *hagyas*.

[23 : 17] It means holy. It means to be set apart. It means to be consecrated. It has very simple meaning. And so the idea is this.

Believers in Jesus Christ are set apart by God for Himself. We're set apart from sin, from self, from the world and the dictates of this world and the mindset of this world and the affections of this world.

God does this. He sets us apart from sin and self and the world and then dedicates us, makes us His own for Himself.

That's what the word saint means. It's not a reference to some elite group of believers, Christians. It's a reference to everyone who names the name of Christ.

We've been set apart. Set apart by God for Himself. We are consecrated for His special purpose, chiefly to bring Him glory.

[24 : 33] Now, in the Bible, there are two applications of this word in connection to believers. There is positional holiness. We are saints in regard to our position in Christ.

And so there is positional holiness. That's who we are in Christ. And then there is practical holiness. How we live for Christ.

Now, here's what we need to understand. All those who are positionally holy through regeneration, through salvation, all those who are positionally holy are expected by God to be practically holy.

And there is where the major disconnect exists among believers today. That we're positionally holy, but not necessarily practically holy.

We are holy. That is, we're in Christ. That's who we are. But the way we're living our lives speaks something different. And I would say that if it always speaks something different, then you have no warrant to believe that you're positionally holy.

[25 : 54] And you need to be saved. There ought not be that disconnect. Let me show you something. In our text here in Philippians 1.1, Paul's reference is clearly in regard to the reader's positional holiness.

That's what he said. He said, to all the saints in Christ. In. You see, that's a reference to their location. Not geographical, but spiritually.

That's a reference to their position. They are in Christ. And so, by grace through faith, they have been saved. And they have been set apart for God.

And they have been placed in Christ. I say they. That's all of us who are born-again believers.

We've been placed in Christ. This is positional.

And this is Paul's point here in verse 1 of Philippians. And that's a glorious position to be in. It's a position of favor. It's a position of grace.

[26 : 58] It is also a position of security. Eternal security. It's a position of worth. Great worth to God.

That's a great position to be in. And this is the glorious position of every single born-again believer.

Now, let me show you another passage of Scripture or quote one for you. In Romans chapter 1 and verse 7, Paul wrote, To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.

Called to be saints. Now, that is a clear reference to practical holiness. A reference to how we live out our lives.

Now, here's what we need to get when we put these two together. The one must closely follow the other. Or there's no warrant to believe that the position of holiness is intact.

No warrant to believe that you're saved. The one must follow the other. That is, as soon as we are called saints, we are called to be saints. We're to be saints.

[28 : 13] To be what we are. To live out what we are. To live our lives in a way that is, according to Ephesians 5.3, fitting for saints.

Appropriate for saints. Consistent with saints. That's how we're to live. And there's something wrong, tragically wrong, with a professing believer in Jesus Christ who is talking about God but not walking with God.

There's something inherently wrong, seriously wrong, with a professing believer who is wanting things from God but not working for God. There's something wrong, inconsistent about a professing believer who is learning, always learning about God but never living for God.

And so the mind just fills up and fills up with knowledge about God but nothing changes in the life.

There is a dramatic, very serious inconsistency with that.

There's something wrong with professing believers who are not practicing believers. Examine your life.

[29 : 34] See, here's the point. Is this letter addressed to you? Is it? Does the word slave identify or describe your eternal relationship with Christ?

Or are you just living your own life? And when it comes to Jesus Christ, it's just simply dropping the name. Being a name dropper.

So does the word slave identify your eternal relationship with Christ? Does the word saint identify both positionally and practically your eternal relationship with Christ?

Do you share that relationship with those to whom Paul originally wrote this love letter? Only you can answer that.

Now there are two more questions and we'll get to those next week. But what we have considered this morning is sufficient to call each of us to the question.

[30:51] And I hope you're asking the question. And the question is, What is your relationship with Christ? What is it?

Are you one of His redeemed slaves? Or your life is hid in His? Or the activity of your life is dictated by Him?

Are you one of His redeemed saints? In Christ. Living out that reality every single day.

Is it?