

## **FIVE IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS (Philippians 1:1-2)**

Two Sundays ago, I mentioned that I was the top 8<sup>th</sup> grade English student at Herbert Hoover Middle School in OKC. It is only appropriate that my daughter would grow up to be an English teacher.

Drawing upon what little grammar I still remember, I can tell you that there are nine parts of speech. When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I think there were only eight, but things change. For instance, when I was in school there were nine planets in our solar system, but poor, little Pluto has since been demoted, and now there are only eight. I might have difficulty recalling all the names of the eight planets, but I can tell you the nine parts of speech. Science was never my thing.

There are the big hitters—**nouns** and **verbs**. Then nouns have qualifiers such as **pronouns** and **adjectives**. Verbs have their **adverbs**. We are up to five. Then there are the odd parts of speech such as **conjunctions**, **interjections**, and **articles**. Lastly, there is my favorite part of speech—those highly, useful words called **prepositions**.

I am a fan of prepositions because with a finely placed preposition, you can specifically communicate where things are, when they are, and how they are. You can place things in time and space. You can also show movement and even reveal their purpose.

For instance, “Jack and Jill ran.” Where did they run? They ran, “up the hill.” That is a prepositional phrase. But poor, clumsy “Jack fell.” Where did he fall? He fell “down.” As a result, “he broke his crown,” and sweet, supportive Jill, what did she do? “And Jill came tumbling.” In what direction did she tumble? She tumbled “after,” meaning after or in the direction of Jack.

I think Paul was also a fan of prepositions. In today’s passage, which is a short two verses, Paul employs seven prepositions. At least there are seven in the ESV Bible.

A preposition shows relationship, how one thing is related to another. From these seven prepositions, I want to present five important relationships.

It has often been said that Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship. We don’t just believe certain things about Jesus and God. We are Christians because we have entered into a relationship with God through Jesus. And this one relationship has reordered all of our other relationships and introduced us to new ones.

If I was not a believer, it is not likely that I would have ever met anyone of you because if I was not a Christian, I would not be in this church today, and I probably wouldn’t live in Enid.

If you and I have ever spoken on the phone, or if I have ever been in your home or place of business, raise your hand. None of those conversations or visits would have ever taken place or been made were it not for the fact that I have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and you have a relationship with this church.

The Christian faith is not primarily about doctrine and theological positions; it is about relationships. And the New Testament was written, in large part, to govern how we act in those relationships.

Let's turn to Philippians 1:1-2. We are going to look at five important relationships. They are presented to us by way of prepositions.

## **Belonging to Jesus is an Important Relationship**

There are many things Paul could have said about himself as he opened this letter. He could have called himself an apostle, an esteemed leader, the founder of the church in the City of Philippi. He chose none of those things. Instead, he calls himself *a servant of Christ Jesus*, and he joins with his name the name of someone much younger than he, much less experienced, much less accomplished; yet, they both belong to Jesus and are co-servants of Him.

In the span of just two verses, Paul mentions *Christ Jesus* two times, and the third time we find, "the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul makes much of Jesus. Philippians is comprised of just 104 verses; yet, we find the name *Jesus* 21 times, the title *Christ* 33 times, and the title *Lord* 15 times. You can barely read two or three verses without coming across the name of Jesus or one of His titles.

People generally talk about what is important to them, and that's why Paul talked about Jesus. What do you and I talk about most? Sports? The weather? Work? Family? Politics? Since we belong to Jesus, let's start talking about Him.

I mentioned that the word *Lord* is found 21 times in this letter, and one of those times in v. 2. It is the Greek word *kurios*. It was a title that was used of Caesar, the Emperor. Everyone in the Roman Empire was expected to say, "Caesar is *kurios*." Christians, however, refused. Instead, they said, "Jesus is *kurios*. Jesus is Lord." That refusal got them in trouble. It led to persecution and martyrdom.

Who is your Lord?

Who we have in our life goes a long way in determining who we are?

- I have a mom and dad; that means, I'm a son.
- I have siblings; that means, I'm a brother.
- I have nieces/nephews; that means, I'm an uncle.
- I have children; that means, I'm a dad.
- I have a wife; that means, I'm a husband.
- I have a boss; that means, I'm an employee.
- I have church members who pay me to preach each Sunday; that means, I'm a pastor.

What does it mean that you and I have a Lord? The answer to that question is found in v. 1. Paul wrote that he and Timothy were *servants*. The Greek word for *servant* was *doulos*. If you had a *kurios*, by definition, you were a *doulos*.

It is estimated that in the first century, slaves accounted for as much as 30% to 40% of the population of the Roman Empire. Someone became a slave in one of three ways. If you were living in an area that was conquered, you could be taken as a slave. If your parents were slaves when you were born, you automatically became a slave. The other

way you became a slave was being unable to pay a debt, in which case, you would sell yourself or even your children into slavery to pay your debt.

Before a person becomes a Christian, he or she is a slave to sin and in each of those three ways. Unbelievers have been conquered by sin. They were born with a sin nature, and they have a sin debt they cannot pay.

Slaves could obtain freedom in one of three ways. Some might earn their freedom. Others might one day buy their freedom. The lucky few were freed by someone who paid the redemption price on their behalf.

When it comes to being freed from sin, we can't earn it. We can't buy it. Our only hope is that someone might purchase it for us, and the only one who is able to do that for us is Jesus. Jesus did just that. He redeemed us at great cost to Himself. He paid for us with His own blood. He bought us, not so that He could work us to death. He bought us so that He could love us as His own, much the way a man pays the bride price to make the woman he loves his wife.

In gratitude, we faithfully love and serve Him.

### **Serving God and Others is an Important Relationship**

Look at the second prepositional phrase in v. 1. Paul wrote, "To all the saints . . ." In Paul's day, there was a standard way to begin a letter. In our day, we write, "Dear So-and-so," and then at the end of the letter, we write "Sincerely," "Cordially," "Affectionately yours," and we sign our name. We have to go to the end of the letter to find out for sure, who the letter is from, but in Paul's day, you knew right away. The introduction to a letter involved three things: the name of the sender, those to whom the letter was sent, and finally a greeting that wished the recipients well.

Paul isn't writing to one specific individual. He is writing to the saints who make up the church at Philippi. By the way, a saint is not a person who has attained some high level of spiritual living that few ever reach. A saint is a Christian. If you have placed your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, you are a saint. You may not always act saintly, but according to the Bible, you are a saint. The word means, "one who has been set apart."

Because Paul was a servant of Jesus, he knew that it was his responsibility to serve those whom Jesus loves. His act of writing a letter to them, was a tangible way to express his love and appreciation to them. Paul had plenty of reason to appreciate the church in Philippi. In part, this letter was a "thank you" letter to the church for the support they had given to him. Look at what he says in that last chapter (4:15-18).

In chapter 2, we learn who it was who brought financial assistance to Paul. The church in Philippi couldn't deposit money into Paul's bank account automatically. There was no online banking. They couldn't mail him a check. There were no post offices. The financial assistance they provided had to be hand-delivered. Look at 2:25. A couple of verses later, we see that Paul sent Epaphroditus back, and most scholars believe that he was the one who hand-delivered Paul's letter to the church at Philippi because Paul couldn't drop it in the mail either. He couldn't overnight it via FedEx or UPS.

What we see in this letter is mutual care for one another. This church served Paul, and

Paul did what he could to serve and encourage this church.

We can do the same kinds of things and more easily. We can put a stamp on a postcard. We can write a letter and drop it in the mail. When was the last time you got a handwritten letter from someone? That will make an impression. You can send a text or an email or actually pick up the phone and call someone to say, “Hi. I was thinking about you. How are you doing?” When you are talking with them, say, “Hey, can I pray for you over the phone?” And then do that. When you send that text or card, include an encouraging verse from Scripture or a Bible promise.

Forty-three years ago, back in 1978, Richard Foster wrote a book that has become a classic. It is entitled, *Celebration of Discipline*. He devotes one chapter each to various spiritual disciplines such as meditation, prayer, fasting, study, and the like. One chapter is on service. In the last five pages of that chapter, he explores various ways we can serve others. He writes:

- There is the service of small things.
- There is the service of guarding the reputation of others.
- There is the service of being served.
- There is the service of common courtesy.
- There is the service of hospitality.
- There is the service of listening.
- There is the service of bearing the burdens of others.
- There is the service of sharing the word of life.

Foster ends the chapter by encouraging us to pray a daily prayer: “Lord Jesus, I would so appreciate it if You would bring me someone today whom I can serve.” Are you willing to pray that prayer? It is a prayer God will certainly answer.

### **Living in the Right Place is an Important Relationship**

In v. 1, Paul mentions two places. He uses the words *in* and *at*. Those words deal with location. When I was in college, I remember filling out various forms. Sometimes, those forms asked for a current or present address and a permanent address. A present address will change. A permanent address will not. Those to whom Paul wrote had a permanent address which was *in Christ Jesus*, and their present address was *at Philippi*.

Likewise, you could say that you have a spiritual address and a physical address, but I like *permanent* and *present*. During my 56 years of life, I had had numerous addresses. I had three different addresses in OKC, six addresses over the four years I was in college in Shawnee, three addresses in Fort Worth, one address at Grand Lake, one address in Hinton, two addresses in Stillwater, and two addresses here in Enid. That is 18 separate addresses.

My first address was on Carlton Way in the Village on the north side of OKC. It was while I was living there that I got my permanent address. On a Sunday afternoon when I was eight-years old, I knelt in the office of my pastor. I asked Jesus to save me. At that

moment, I was in Christ, and I have been in Him ever since.

Once you are in Him, He will equip you to live for Him wherever He places you at. Right now, I am at Jackson St., and I need to live for Him by being a good neighbor, doing the kinds of things Jesus would do if He lived at 1628 S. Jackson Street. The fact is, He does live there because not only am I in Him, but He is in me. That means, wherever I am, Jesus is there, too.

You need to be a good neighbor in your present address, but to do that well, you need a permanent address.

In the letters that Paul wrote which appear in our NT, he uses the prepositional phrase “in Christ” 164 times. One of the great *in Christ* verses is 1 Corinthians 1:30 where Paul writes, “And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Everything that Jesus has for us becomes ours when we are in Him.

Sometimes, athletes take about being in the zone. When they are in the zone, they are able to do everything they want to do. It is all going their way.

When I was 15-years old, I played a round of golf, and for the first 8 holes, I was in the zone. I was hitting the fairway, hitting the greens in regulation, and making putts. After eight holes, I was four under par. Golfers know, however, that at any point, the wheels can fall off. Over the next ten holes, I shot seven over par. I followed up a hot 32 on the first nine with a pedestrian 41 on the second 9. I was in the zone until I wasn’t any longer.

When you are in Christ, however, there never comes a point when you are no longer in Him. Praise God! He is your permanent address.

### **Partnering with Leaders is an Important Relationship**

Paul ends the first verse with another prepositional phrase. That phrase begins with the word *with*. We have seen that Paul was partnering with Timothy, with the believers in Philippi, and now, he is seen to be partnering with the overseers and deacons. These were the leaders of the church.

During my academic studies, I had Greek classes for 5 semesters, 2 ½ years. One semester, I studied Greek one-on-one with Dr. Mack Roark, who at the time was the Vice President of Religious Life at OBU. It just so happens that Mack was the first pastor at Emmanuel here in Enid. He was a Greek scholar. One thing that amazed me is that whenever he preached, he would carry his Greek NT into the pulpit, and he would translate it into English as he read to the people.

I remember Dr. Roark saying that the words *overseers* or *bishops*, *elders*, and *pastors* all referred to the same office, which we normally call *pastor*. In my own study, it occurs to me that these words always appear in the plural. In my view, it is neither biblical nor healthy for just one person to be the pastor of a church. The job is too big, regardless the size of the church, for one person. I believe it is best when a small group of like-minded, God-called, spiritually mature men work together in the oversight, leadership, and teaching of a local church. These pastors are to be assisted by the deacons. According to

the NT, deacons are not the decision-makers of the church. They are those who serve and minister to the sick and needy among God's flock. While they might not be the decision-makers of the church, deacons are certainly leaders. The NT teaches and Jesus exemplified servant leadership. True leaders do not stand above the people barking orders and issuing commands. They come underneath the people to support, encourage, and uplift.

Baseball great Yogi Berra was once asked, "What makes a good manager?" He answered, "A good ball club."

In much the same way, the thing that makes a good pastor is a good church, a church that is supportive, a church that follows, a church that serves alongside its pastors and leaders. Let's be such a church.

### **Receiving God's Blessings is an Important Relationship**

Finally, we get to v. 2. In all 13 of Paul's letters, you will find that Paul wishes his readers both grace and peace. It is interesting that when Greek-speaking people wrote letters, they always began that letter with the word *greetings*. That word in Greek is *cherein*, and it's a verb. Paul changed that word just a bit. Instead of using the verb *cherein*, Paul substituted the noun form *charis*, which means *grace*. In Christian thinking, grace is always associated with God.

Paul did something else in his greeting. He added the word that Jews normally used in their greetings. He wished his readers *peace*. The word Paul used means "harmonious relationships between God and man."

In all 13 letters that are attributed to Paul, *grace* and *peace* are found at or close to the beginning of the letter, and grace always precedes peace. The order is important. We must experience and receive the grace of God before we can enjoy peace with God and the peace of God.

Grace first and peace second. Grace-filled people will always be peace-loving and peace-seeking people. When you find churches that lack peace, that means the people within the church have either forgotten how God has acted with supreme grace towards them or they have never actually received God's grace and they are attempting to earn His favor on the basis of their performance.

That is why legalistic churches are rife with conflict and discord. They also require an authoritarian pastor to keep them in line.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer contrasted what he called cheap grace with costly grace. He said that cheap grace is what we give to ourselves. He wrote:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go

and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “you were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Paul taught and preached costly grace, and it is that grace which brings true and everlasting peace. Do you need peace in your relationships—your relationship with God, your relationship with others, and your relationship with yourself? You can have that peace by receiving the grace God offers through His Son, Jesus. Receive Him today.