



Bondservants of Christ

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Philippians 1:1-2](#)

Opening chapter one of Philippians, we are blessed with a very familiar greeting from the Apostle Paul. Paul began all his epistles with a warm welcome to the churches and specific individuals he was addressing. In his customary manner, Paul immediately identifies himself as the author of the letter, and there are no valid arguments against the claim that Paul wrote Philippians. We know from his distinct writing style and outright claims of authorship that Paul wrote 13 of the 27 New Testament epistles.

Out of the gate, Paul makes the claim that he and Timothy are ***bondservants of Christ***. This is a signature of Paul's epistles. As we saw in Ephesians, *bondservant* is the English rendering of the Greek word [doulos](#). It is also frequently translated *slave*. I used to think this was merely Paul's way of expressing humility, especially as a formerly esteemed Jewish Pharisee. But looking carefully at its use in scripture, including in many of Jesus's parables, we learn that Paul was very intentional in referring to himself as a *doulos* of Christ.

There were several offices of leadership within the early Church. We see these outlined in [Ephesians 4:11](#) where Paul wrote, ***"and He [Jesus] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers."*** The apostles were a very exclusive group of individuals, and it was a distinct position that could only be ascribed by Christ. Every apostle was personally chosen by Christ (cf: [Matt 10:1-4](#)). Apostles were tasked with preaching the gospel to the world and speaking on behalf of Christ, much like the prophets of the Old Testament (cf: [Mark 16:15](#), [Acts 9:15](#)).

Paul and other apostles (such as John, Peter, Jude, and James) referred to themselves as either apostles, or bondservants, or both. Through their inspired writings we can begin to see how being an apostle and bondservant (*doulos*), or *slave of Christ*, are closely related.

While I once believed that every Christian was a bondservant of Christ, I now recognize that the way this is used in the New Testament points to it being more specific. It is not something we take on by our own volition. There is another Greek word, [sundoulos](#), which is also rendered bondservant in some translations (like the NASB). This is not the same as *doulos*, and instead speaks of a fellow servant or associate, and is applied to some of Paul's helpers like Tychicus and Epaphras. Based on its use in the N.T., I would argue most of us fall into this category... we are *fellow servants* or workers with others in Christ.



What makes the opening of Philippians slightly unique in scripture is that Paul includes Timothy in the greeting. Paul also added Timothy's name to the opening of Colossians. In [1 Timothy 4](#) we learn that Timothy was young and given the spiritual gift of teaching. While not an apostle himself, he was very active with Paul in ministry, and was a trusted partner, worker, and "son" in the preaching of the gospel (cf: [1 Tim 1:2](#), [1 Thes 3:2](#), [Rom 16:21](#), etc.). Therefore, it is likely that Timothy *transcribed* the letters to the Philippians and Colossians, writing the words Paul spoke. It is improbable that Timothy directly contributed or added to the letters' contents; the context and flow of the letters indicates they had a single author and, again, Timothy was not an apostle. The reason why Paul may have needed help transcribing or writing the letters is not specified in scripture, so we can only assume that some limiting factor prevented him from handwriting these himself.

Barely cracking the first verse of Philippians we can already glean a few fascinating truths about its author and the divine, elective will of God working in a believer's life. Each Christian is here, in this time and place, for a reason. We each have a job to do as fellow workers for Christ. It is worth our time in prayer to seek what God has planned for us to do. We have been given this day for a reason... let's use it for His glory, just like our beloved brothers Paul and Timothy.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece