
§1 *Prescript (Phil. 1:1-2)*

The prescript, or introductory salutation, of an ancient letter regularly contained three elements: (a) the name of the sender or senders; (b) the name of the recipient or recipients, and (c) a word of greeting or good wishes. Examples abound from letters of the New Testament period, in Greek and in Latin, both literary and nonliterary; earlier examples are the extracts from the official correspondence of the Persian court quoted in the book of Ezra; compare Ezra 7:12, "Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of Heaven: Greetings." This pattern is followed here, as in all the NT letters: Paul and Timothy are named as the senders and "all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi" as the recipients, and the word of good wishes is "grace and peace."

1:1 / **Paul** is the sole author of the letter, even if Timothy's name is conjoined with his in the prescript. Immediately after the prescript he says, "I thank my God" (not, as in Col. 1:3, in a letter where Timothy's name similarly appears along with Paul's in the prescript, "we . . . thank God"). Later in this letter Timothy is referred to by name in the third person (2:19).

Timothy is associated with Paul in the prescript as a gesture of friendship. He was with Paul at the time of writing and may even have taken down the letter at Paul's dictation. He was well known to the Philippian Christians, having been a member of the missionary team that first brought the gospel to their city (his presence is implied, though not expressly asserted, in the narrative of Acts 16:11-40).

Timothy was a native of Lystra in Lycaonia, the son of a mixed marriage, since his mother was Jewish and his father Greek. He was brought up in the Jewish faith but was not circumcised in infancy. During Barnabas and Paul's first visit to his home town (Acts 14:8-20) he was converted to Christianity. When

Paul passed that way again a year or two later he was impressed by Timothy's spiritual development, which was attested to by senior Christians in Lystra and Iconium. He decided to enlist Timothy as a junior associate in his apostolic ministry but circumcised him first to regularize his anomalous religious status: as the son of a Jewish mother he was no Gentile Christian but a Jew in everything but circumcision. Both Paul and he knew that his circumcision made no difference to his status in the sight of God, but it was intended to remove what would have been an absolute barrier to any relations on Paul's part with synagogue authorities (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy willingly joined Paul and served him devotedly as his aide-de-camp—how devotedly can be gathered from Paul's appreciative words in 2:20-22.

Paul and Timothy are described as **servants** (lit., "slaves") **of Christ Jesus**. In Romans 1:1 Paul introduces himself as "a servant [lit., 'slave'] of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God." In addressing the Philippians Paul had no need to stress his apostolic authority as he did in addressing the churches of Galatia and Corinth: there was no disinclination to recognize his authority in Philippi, as there was in those other churches.

It has been argued that the term "servants" here does not bear the common sense of "slaves" because the Greek word (*doulos*) is used in LXX (the Greek version of the Old Testament) of someone whom God uses for a special ministry or through whom he speaks, like Moses (Neh. 10:29), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), David (Ps. 89:20 [LXX: 88:21]), Jonah (2 Kings [LXX: 4 Kingdoms] 14:25), each of whom is called "the servant (Gk. *doulos*) of the LORD." The readers of Paul's letters, however, would more readily have taken him to mean that he was the "slave" of Christ in the humble sense that the word normally had among them. No doubt Paul did esteem it a high honor to be the servant of Christ, but he implied by his choice of the word meaning "slave" that he was totally at the disposal of his Master. Yet for that very reason his words and actions carried his Master's authority, and in his bondservice to that Master he realized perfect freedom.

The recipients of the letter are called **saints** or "holy people" (those whom God has set apart for himself)—a very common designation for Christians in Paul's letters (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2;

2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). The designation (Gk. *hagios*) goes back to OT times: when God made a covenant with the Israelites after delivering them from Egypt, he called them “a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6) and charged them, “be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). This charge is carried over into the NT and laid upon the people of the new covenant. The Christian usage may also have been influenced in some degree by Daniel’s description of the elect remnant of the end time as “the saints of the Most High” (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27). It is Daniel’s description that Paul probably has in mind when he says that “the saints will judge the world” (1 Cor. 6:2).

He writes, then, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi**—that is, to the whole church in that city. His earlier letters are explicitly addressed to churches in various places (cf. Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1); he varies his wording in his later letters to churches (cf. Rom. 1:7; Col. 1:2; Eph. 1:1). He describes them as being **in Christ Jesus**. This indicates that those who believe in Christ are united to him: the new corporate life into which they have entered is their share in his resurrection life. The idea is much the same as that which Paul elsewhere expresses by speaking of believers as members of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12f., 27; Rom. 12:4f.).

Among those to whom the letter is sent special mention is made of **the overseers and deacons**. The Greek words so translated came later to have the official sense of “bishops” and “deacons” (these English words are in fact derived from the two Greek words). Paul and his colleagues encouraged the development of qualities of leadership in the churches that they planted. Where the rank and file were slow in giving proper recognition to those members who displayed such qualities, they were urged to do so; the potential leaders might indeed be mentioned by name (as in 1 Cor. 16:15–18). There was no one official designation for church leaders in the Pauline churches. In Thessalonica they are called “those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you” (1 Thess. 5:12). It may have been the Philippian Christians themselves who referred to their church leaders as *episkopoi*, “those who exercise oversight” (the same term is applied to the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20:28 to express their responsibility as spiritual shepherds).

The **deacons** (Gk. *diakonoi*) would be those who performed any service in the church. In the Pastoral Letters their duties are more formalized (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

The reason for the special mention of **the overseers and deacons** is uncertain. Many expositors, from Chrysostom on, have suggested that they were specially responsible for sending Epaphroditus with a gift to Paul. F. W. Beare thinks it probable that Paul wished to bring Epaphroditus's services to the attention of the leaders. E. Best envisages the possibility that Paul had received a letter stately sent *from* "the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons," and took up this form of words in his reply, rather pointedly refraining from giving himself any title but "slave of Christ Jesus."

When, about fifty years later, Polycarp wrote to the Philippian church, it was still administered by a plurality of leaders, to whom he refers as "elders" (*To the Philippians* 6:1; 11:1).

1:2 / At this stage in the prescript of a Greek letter the writer would normally wish the recipients "joy"; in a Latin letter he would wish them "good health." Paul inherited the Hebrew (and general Semitic) usage that wished the recipients "peace" (Heb. *shālôm*), but he regularly amplifies this to "grace and peace." This may have been a form of words current in benedictions in synagogue or church. In a Jewish apocalyptic work from later in the first century, a letter purporting to have been sent by Baruch to the tribes of Israel deported by the Assyrians is superscribed "Mercy and peace" (2 Baruch 78:2). Peace is the sum total of all blessings, temporal and spiritual, and grace is the source from which they come.

The **grace and peace** that Paul invokes on his correspondents is almost always derived from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. The close coupling of Christ with God in such expressions bears witness to the place Christ occupies in Paul's thought. As the risen and exalted one he has been invested by God with the designation "Lord"—"the name that is above every name" (2:9)—and wears a heavenly humanity (1 Cor. 15:45-49). God and Christ are entirely at one in the procuring and bestowal of salvation. The unconditioned good will to human beings that has been manifested in the saving work accomplished on the cross

is indiscriminately called "God's grace" (e.g., Rom. 5:15) and "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., Phil. 4:23). Similarly, the state of life into which that saving work brings believers—peace with God and peace with one another—is indiscriminately called "the peace of God" (4:7) and "the peace of Christ" (Col. 3:15).

Additional Notes §1

1:1 / On Paul's circumcision of Timothy see M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, p. 64.

On the phrase **servants of Christ Jesus** see K. H. Rengstorf, *TDNT*, vol. 2, pp. 261–80, s.v. *doulos*, etc. (especially 276, 277). G. Sass, "Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus," *ZNW* 40 (1941), pp. 24–32, concludes that for Paul this is a title of honor.

On the expression **the saints in Christ Jesus** (cf. 4:21) see O. E. Evans, *Saints in Christ Jesus: A Study of the Christian Life in the New Testament*. See also the chapter "The Corporate Christ" in C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, pp. 47–96.

In the Pastoral Letters the terms *episkopos* and *presbyteros* are still used interchangeably, and there were apparently several officers so designated in one church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:5, 7); their qualifications are set out in detail. The next occurrence in extant Christian literature of *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* coupled together as here is in *Didache* 15:1. Elsewhere in the Pauline letters the people here called *episkopoi* are referred to as *proistamenoï*, exercising "leadership" (Rom. 12:8; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12), which, however, is not a technical title. See J. B. Lightfoot, "The Christian Ministry," in *Philippians*, pp. 181–269; F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 211–13; E. Best, "Bishops and Deacons: Philippians 1,1," *TU 102=SE 4* (1968), pp. 371–76; B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles*, pp. 100, 101, 116, 117.