

YOUR RADICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, together with the elders and deacons; ²grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:1-2)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

After supper one evening you sit down before the T.V. set and tune in your favorite game show. The host is just about to introduce the contestants for tonight's show.

He turns to the first team, consisting of a petite brunette and a well-dressed young man. The host says to the brunette, "Tell us who you are and a little about yourself." She replies, "I'm Wanda Jones. I'm single and I work for a consulting firm in Barrington, IL."

"It's very nice to have you on the show this evening," says the host as he turns to her partner and asks, "Would you tell us your name and something about yourself?"

"I'm Randy Brewer and I come from Bridgeport, CT. I work in the field of advertising."

"Fascinating," responds the game show host, "that must be very interesting work."

Then he comes to the second team of contestants and asks the same questions of them.

The first one responds, "My name is Paul and this is my young friend, Timothy. We are servants of Christ Jesus and saints in Christ Jesus."

The host is stunned for a moment. Then he says something about them being very religious and how he used to go to Sunday School as a kid. Then, feeling rather awkward, he hurriedly gets the focus back on the game.

Following the game show you stay tuned in to the next program: Interviews with Real Life People.

Today they will be interviewing Senator Thomas Strong, the chairman of the most powerful committee in the Federal government, commanding a staff of over one hundred people and exercising a great deal of political control over national policy.

They also will be interviewing Ricky Young, the famous Hollywood movie star, as he tells of his most recent affair following the break up of his second marriage.

As you listen to the interviews, your mind goes back to those two men on the game show: "I'm Paul and this is Timothy; we are servants of Christ Jesus and saints in Christ Jesus."

It strikes you that there is a radical contrast between their identity and that of the two men presently being interviewed on Interviews with Real People. Then you become aware that their identity is radically different from that of **all** the characters you are going to see on T.V. this evening! Then it dawns on you: as a Christian, this is **your** identity, too; and it is radically different from what you see in the world and what is promoted by the world.

Because we have been called to new life in Christ, let us be faithful to live out our radical Christian identity.

I. Live Out Your Radical Identity as a "Servant of Christ Jesus"

The term the Apostle Paul uses (δουλος) translated, "*servant,*" may more accurately be rendered, "bond servant" or "slave." The bond servant was owned by his master and was completely devoted to the service of his master, note Luke 17:7-8, "*Suppose one of you had a servant (δουλος) plowing or tending the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, Come ... and sit down and eat? ⁸Would he not rather say, Prepare my supper ... and serve me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?*"

When it is servitude to the Lord, the identification, "*a servant of Christ Jesus,*" is a sacred and honorable and blessed identity. Consider the opposite as described in Romans 6:20-22,

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become servants of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. (Rom. 6:20-22)

It is important to note that this is the title by which Paul **chooses** to identify himself. Philippians is a highly personal epistle; Paul does not need to defend his apostleship, he does not need to employ his apostolic authority to defend the faith or the life of the church. In Philippians Paul is free to be himself, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to speak from his heart. Thus the title he uses to identify himself, "a servant of Christ Jesus," is most revealing. It shows that first and foremost Paul regarded himself as a bond servant of Christ the Lord; note his testimony given in Romans 1:1, "*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an*

apostle.” Paul recognized himself to be a servant of Christ Jesus who happened to be called to serve his Lord in the capacity of being an apostle.

From the very moment of his conversion, Paul consciously recognized himself to be a servant of Christ. At the time he met Christ, Paul immediately acknowledged His divine lordship and willingly submitted to it: *“I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?’⁸ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting, he replied.’¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’”* (Acts 22:7-8,10.) That consciousness of Christ’s lordship would be the controlling factor in Paul’s life and ministry, as he testifies in Acts 27:23, *“Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me.”*

Paul refused to use his relationship to Christ and the calling he received from Christ as a means of exalting himself and asserting his own will. Referring to the trial in which he presently found himself, Paul declares, *“This is in keeping with my heartfelt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death—because for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil. 1:20-21.)

Note carefully that this title, “servant of Christ Jesus,” does not apply to Paul alone; it occurs in the plural, it is equally applied to Timothy. Timothy, by his lifestyle and ministry, demonstrated that it was a true description of his identity. Consider Paul’s testimony concerning Timothy:

I have no one else with a heart like him; he will have a genuine concern for your welfare.²¹ All the others seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ.²² But you know his proven worth, that he served with me for the gospel as a son serves his father. (Phil. 2:20-22)

Note very carefully that this identity, “servant of Christ Jesus,” belongs not only to Paul and Timothy, but also to each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the titles by which Scripture identifies Christ’s people. Revelation 1:1 announces, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place.”* Then, in Revelation 22:16 there comes the Lord’s own testimony, *“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.”* This identity, “servant of Christ Jesus,” is one of the titles by which Scripture identifies the Christian’s relationship to Christ: *“You do not belong to yourself;²⁰ you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body”* (1 Cor. 6:19b-20.) Note, too, 2 Corinthians 5:15, *“he died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*

Christian, you must recognize your identity as “a servant of Christ Jesus,” and live out that radical identify in your everyday life. As Christians, we are instructed and

commanded to imitate the mind of Christ: *“Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus ... ⁷he emptied himself by **taking the form of a servant**”* (Phil. 2:5-7.) As Christians, we are instructed to exhibit the mind (or, attitude) of Christ towards one another; doing so by caring for one another’s needs: *“Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others”* (Phil. 2:4.) Doing so by promoting the well-being of Christ’s body, the church, the fellowship of believers:

You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature [to express itself]; rather, serve one another with love—¹⁴for the whole law is fulfilled in one commandment, [namely] this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal. 5:13-14)

Doing so by yielding our rights and privileges for the good of our brethren as did our Savior Himself: *“Each one of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up; ³for Christ also did not please himself”* (Rom. 15:2-3a.)

II. Live Out Your Radical Identity as a “Saint in Christ Jesus”

The Apostle Paul addresses the Christians in Philippi as *“saints in Christ Jesus.”* The Greek term (ἅγιος) translated, *“saints,”* can also be rendered, “holy ones,” or, “those who are consecrated.”

When the Bible identifies the Christian as being “a saint,” how are we to understand this? As it is used in Scripture, the term has a two-fold meaning: First, as a Christian, you have been set apart to belong to God, to be His own unique, exclusive, cherished possession:

You also [were allotted] to him—having heard the word of truth, [that is,] the gospel by which you are saved, and having believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. ¹⁴He is a “deposit” guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of [God’s] possession, to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:13-14)

[Christ] gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to himself a people for his own possession, [a people] zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

... you are a people holy to Jehovah your God. Jehovah your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession. (Deut. 7:6)

Second, as a Christian, you have been set apart to be like God, to possess and reflect His holy character:

[Christ] gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to himself a people for his own possession, a people zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

... you are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [appointed to be God’s own] possession, so that you might display the virtues of him who called you” out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

Note that the Christian is identified as a saint *“in Christ Jesus.”* It is by virtue of our relationship to Jesus Christ that we are set apart for God to be His cherished possession and set apart to possess and radiate the glory of His holy character. We have this new relation to God because of our spiritual union with Christ; note Colossians 3:3-4, a passage that reflects upon the Christian’s union with Christ: *“you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

Furthermore, as Christians, we are not only **identified** as being a saint in Christ Jesus, we are also **instructed** to be a saint: *“to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and **called to be saints**”* (1 Cor. 1:2.) Spiritually, our sanctification, (i.e., our being separated unto God and made like God,) is an accomplished fact, note 1 Corinthians 6:11, *“you were washed, ... **you were sanctified**, ... you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* Experientially, our sanctification is an activity presently being accomplished in our lives as we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit: *“let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor. 7:1.) Through faith in Christ we have been made a new creation, we have been given a new heart and a new identity, now this new identity must increasingly become a new reality in our lives, exerting itself and manifesting itself in our behavior, attitudes and thinking. We may say that the Lord Jesus has pulled us out of the mud of sin; now, in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, we must clean off the mud that covers us.

Christian, you must recognize your identity as “a saint in Christ Jesus,” and live out that radical identify in your everyday life. In reliance upon the Holy Spirit, we must seek to bring our lives into conformity with our new Christian identity:

Put to death ... sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry; ⁶because of these things, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator ... ¹²Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these

virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:5-10,12-14)

We must carry out this process of moral change called sanctification by relying upon the Holy Spirit: *"if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you shall live"* (Rom. 8:13.)

Conclusion

Remember the two men who appeared as contestants on the game show mentioned in the Introduction: "My name is Paul and this is my friend, Timothy. We are servants of Christ Jesus and saints in Christ Jesus."

Realize how radically different those two men are from all the other characters you see on T.V. or meet in everyday life. Recognize that as a fellow Christian with them, you share in that same radical new identity; you, too, are a servant of Christ Jesus and a saint in Christ Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit make us ever more consciously aware of our radical Christian identity, and may He help us to live ever more consistently with that identity unto the glory of God our Father and Christ our Savior.