

"To All The Saints ..."

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:1f). This is one of six epistles written by Paul in which he includes Timothy with him in his greeting to the brethren. All recognize the letter came from Paul's hand (in four of them he quickly reverts to the first person singular, the other two also obviously came from his hand) but because Timothy was his companion, he was included in the initial greeting.

"To all the saints." The word *"saint"* is a designation for one who has been *"set apart."* The word *"saint"* is a designation for God's people -- found in both the Old and New Testament. Christians have been sanctified by the word of Christ and His blood (John 17:17; Heb. 10:29). Saints are sanctified by Christ but they in turn must sanctify themselves. They are to sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts; they are to cleanse themselves from all defilements of the flesh and spirit (1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:1f).

"With the bishops and deacons." Along with the saints at Philippi two special groups are also mentioned: bishops and deacons. The word *"bishop"* is from the Greek *episkopos* and translated means *"overseer."* Sometimes our English translations transliterate the word into *"bishop"* (as found here in Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28, ASV). Sometimes the word is actually translated. For example, in Acts 20:28 some translations have *"overseer"* and others have *"bishop."*

The word *"bishop"* often appears in the writings of our religious neighbors -- although not always with its scriptural usage. Always keep in mind that the words *"bishops," "elders,"* and *"pastors"* in the New Testament are references to the same men. In Acts 20:17 Paul called the elders of Ephesus to him at Miletus. He addressed them as bishops who were to pastor (feed, shepherd) the flock of God (Acts 20:28). This kinship between *"elder and bishop"* is seen elsewhere in Paul's instructions to Titus. Titus had been left in Crete to set in order things wanting in the churches; to appoint elders in every city. Yet, when Paul spelled out the qualifications by which elders were to be measured, he wrote, *"For the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward"* (Tit. 1:5, 7).

Paul's salutation to the church at Philippi with its *"bishops and deacons"* emphasizes what is apparent in other passages. There was a plurality of elders in each church. Luke recorded that Paul and Barnabas *"appointed for them elders in every church"* (Acts 14:23). There were elders in the Ephesian

church (Acts 20:17); elders in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18). One never reads of just one bishop in a local church: nor does one read of one bishop over a number of churches. There was always two or more bishops in each local congregation. Bishops are "*under shepherds*" for Christ is our chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Their duty is to tend "*the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint but willingly, according to the will of God. Nor yet for filthy lucre's sake, but of a ready mind. Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock*" (1 Pet. 5:2f). While bishops are "over a flock" they also are servants of the flock.

Every church needs conscientious, qualified men to serve as bishops. How much better churches function when such men are present to lead and tend the flock. How many problems are avoided when churches heed the Holy Spirit instructions to "appoint elders in every city ..."

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