

## Bondmen

Phil. 1: 1; 2: 5-8, 19-23.

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In the Psalms which have been before us we have considered some of the marks of the perfect, sinless Manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen very clearly that He came into Manhood to serve God, both in the display of the nature and attributes of God in His *life*, and in dealing with the question of sin with all its consequences in His *death* upon the cross. Every moment of His public service, from the banks of the Jordan until His death upon the cross, was lived out in the service of God, and that service was gloriously completed when He became "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is the character of that service I wish to call attention to, first in Philippians 2, and then we may notice how those who served our Lord Jesus Christ were marked by the same character in their service for him as that which had so perfectly marked Him in His service in this world.

Various words are used to describe the distinctive services in which the Lord is served by His people, but the word before us in the three passages we have read is an intense word indicating the service of "a bonds slave." In the New Translation, Philippians 2: 7, reads "taking a bondman's form." A bonds slave is one who is entirely subject to the will of his master, and has but to carry out the dictates of the person whose bonds slave he is.

It should affect us as we consider the Lord Jesus as brought before us in these verses! We learn that it was with a view to such service that He came into Manhood. Passing by angels (who are often referred to as "bondmen") He, in Manhood, took "a bondman's form." It is not in mind to pursue this touching passage, which so often has charmed our hearts, but rather to call attention to the fact that it was this particular kind of service which characterized our Lord as coming into Manhood. The apostle was inspired of the Holy Spirit to pen these words to the assembly at Philippi, indicating to them that this was the character of service which should mark them, so he begins his exhortation with, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," (v. 5).

In the first verse of this epistle we learn that Paul describes his own service as being of this same character. According to the New Translation it reads, "Paul and Timotheus, *bondmen* of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers." The apostle does not refer to his apostolicity in this verse, but to the character of his service for Jesus Christ. Moreover, he includes Timothy in this description, which he could not have done had he commenced as he does in other epistles "Paul, *apostle* of Jesus Christ." In Philippians he is writing to them of true bonds slave service, a service seen in perfection in the Lord Jesus. Can we doubt that it was in view of this that he begins by describing himself as a bonds slave of Jesus Christ? Never was there a truer and more willing "bonds slave of Jesus Christ" in this world than this great apostle Paul! But what of Timotheus and the "overseers and ministers"? Does it not seem that Paul would exercise all who seek to serve in any capacity to be of this same character? The overseers and ministers we may leave for the moment, and we may be helped to see in Timotheus one whose character of service we should all do well to imitate.

In Philippians 2: 19-23, we see why the apostle can so readily associate Timotheus with himself as "bondmen of Jesus Christ."

We all surely agree that our Lord stands in solitary dignity as the one Man in the whole universe who at all times, and in every way, perfectly served God during His lifetime in this world. We may also

conclude that the apostle Paul, in the particular service for which he was called, occupied a place which is beyond us today, but in Timotheus we have an example which we do well to follow. Thus there would be reproduced in us the same features which came to light so perfectly in our Lord, and which so manifestly marked His bondslave Paul.

Timotheus is one whom we may well emulate, especially as we read Paul's commendation in Philippians 2, "But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child a father, he has served with me in the work of the glad tidings," verse 22 (New Translation). This word "served" is a cognate of the word "bondmen" in chapter 1, verse 1. The service which Timotheus was rendering was not the outcome of compulsion, nor merely the outcome of a sense of responsibility; it was born of devotion to the Lord whom he served. It produced in him "genuine feeling" for the saints, whilst others were seeking "their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ," verse 21. Seeking "their own things" would suggest that they were putting their own things first, whilst this willing bondslave made the things of his Lord the first charge of his life. The interests of his Master having first place in his affections produced in him genuine love for the saints, because they belonged to his Master. Nor had he laboured merely as an *underbondslave*, for the apostle says concerning him, "as a child a father, he has served." Brethren, this is the character which ought to mark us all. We too should serve in true devotion to our Lord, whilst being marked by love towards those with whom we serve, for if our service lacks the element of love it will never reach the supreme character which is brought before us here. True love to the One whom we serve is bound to produce love towards those we are called upon to serve.

How plainly we see this exemplified, first in relation to our Lord, and then in His servant Paul. "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence," John 14: 31. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," John 15: 13. Love to the Father, and love to His own shine out wondrously in these two passages. The apostle Paul, who so devotedly served the Lord, could say to the Corinthians, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved," 2 Cor. 12: 15. finally we see in Timotheus that love for the Lord had produced in him "genuine feeling" for the saints.

May the Lord grant to each of us the grace we need to follow these examples, and thus be found in the spirit of loving, devoted service to our Lord and towards His saints as true "bondmen of Jesus Christ."