

The Servant-

BY BOB EVANS

Roman theater at Philippi.
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CHRIST



PAUL came to Philippi in response to the Macedonian call (Acts 16:9,12).¹ A church was established there as a result of his and Silas's ministry. The initial converts were Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), a slave girl (Acts 16:16-18), and a jailer and his household (Acts 16:31-33). It was the first church on the European continent.²

Philippi was located in northeastern Macedonia and was named for Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great.³ Antony made it a Roman colony. After the defeat of Antony, Augustus Caesar reestablished Philippi as a Roman colony.⁴ Reliefs depicting the religious cults popular in the city were prominently displayed on some walls in the city.⁵ Everyone who entered the city was confronted with the images of the gods worshiped there.

The Greeks created their gods in their own images.⁶ Attributes given to their deities were those of humans, usually magnifying weaknesses such as anger, temper, envy, selfishness, and jealousy. "Almost every one of the radiant divinities could

act cruelly or contemptibly."⁷ Their gods were feared rather than revered.⁸

The cardinal sin for the people who worshiped the gods of Philippi was *hubris*, pride, defined as the "envy of the gods." It is described as man usurping or taking the role of the god. When man became too prosperous, he became a threat to the status of the god and became the target of the deity's capricious anger.⁹ Rather than man's being blessed and enjoying good things from the god, the god was to be served and placated.

Zeus, the chief of the Greek gods, who was worshiped at Philippi, was viewed as tyrannical, egotistical, despotic, and whimsical. "One could never tell where Zeus's thunderbolt would strike."¹⁰ The people were to sacrifice that a selfish god might be satisfied.¹¹

Religious thought prevalent in Philippi was that the gods were to be appeased. In contrast, Paul wrote to the church there: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The picture of Jesus that Paul presented was different from

that of the gods of the culture and religion of the Philippians. Jesus gave up everything to meet the needs of mankind (Phil. 2:6,7).

In contrast to the concept of the gods' being worshiped and feared by the Philippians is the picture throughout the New Testament of Jesus being a Giver. On one occasion jealousy erupted among Jesus' disciples (Matt. 20:20-28). The mother of the sons of Zebedee asked for special consideration to be given James and John. She requested that her sons be given the privilege of sitting on the right hand and left hand of Jesus when He came into His kingdom. Jesus' rebuke contained an explanation indicating she did not understand what she was requesting. When Jesus came into His kingdom, sacrifice would be involved.

When the other disciples heard the request, they were indignant and jealous (Matt. 20:24). Jesus explained that their ideas concerning greatness were influenced by the Gentiles and a worldly, secularistic value system (Matt. 20:25). He corrected their thinking by emphasizing "It shall not be so among you."

He emphasized that greatness is achieved, not by favor or position, but by service (Matt. 20:26,27; compare 23:11). He then gave the pattern for greatness: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The phrase "just as" means "in like kind."

The word "ransom" pictures one who is worthy paying the price

Above: Marble statue of Zeus Amon found at Pergamum. Statue is Roman, 2nd century A.D.

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Lesson Reference:
FBS: Philippians 2:1-13

to secure the freedom of a lowly slave. Jesus came as a Servant to enable all who are in bondage to go free (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18). The example of Jesus' sacrificial service was to become the model duplicated ("just as") by His followers. The disciples were to have the mind of Christ, to think and act "just as" He would think and act.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he encouraged them to consider Jesus' example when they made their commitment concerning how much to give to an offering for needy people. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). He called to their attention Christ's servant-spirit. Paul was referring to Jesus' being Lord of everything in glory and giving that up and becoming "poor," having nothing in humanity (Luke 9:58). Jesus, through His poverty, made it possible that the Corinthians might become rich. Jesus gave up the riches of heaven that, through His sacrifice, they might have spiritual

Below: The Agora (marketplace) at Philippi as viewed from its north-east corner toward the colonnaded south shops. The judgment scene (Acts 16:19-22) against Paul and Silas for healing the young girl "possessed with a spirit of divination" occurred somewhere in this area.



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riches. That was to be the example that should be considered in deciding the amount of the benevolent gift.

Christ's servant-spirit is most clearly portrayed in the events in the upper room the last night of His earthly life. As the disciples prepared for the Passover, Jesus girded Himself with a towel, took a basin of water, and washed His disciples' feet. The slave assigned the role of washing the guests' feet had the lowest position of servitude. Jesus humbly assumed that task. Nothing except Jesus' death on the cross revealed the extent of His servant-spirit as clearly as this action. Jesus said, "You call Me . . . Lord . . . so I am" (John 13:13). "If I . . . your Lord . . . have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

Jesus was God and had every right to make that claim (Phil. 2:6). Yet being "in the form of God," He took "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7, KJV). Paul used the same word for "form" in each instance. Just as Jesus was in reality God, He in reality became a Servant. The word "form" signifies "'the outward expression of the inward nature.' Jesus did not pretend to be a Servant. . . . This was the true expression of His innermost nature."¹² Jesus' becoming a man and a servant did not mean He ceased to be divine. His coming into the world was not giving up divinity but the willing acceptance of servanthood.¹³

People become like what they worship. Those who worshiped false gods became like the gods they worshiped. "Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. . . . Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them" (Ps. 115:4,8). Those who worshiped the gods of the Greek and Roman world of Philippi envisioned them as selfish and egotistical. Their followers had many of the same characteristics.

Paul challenged the Philippians to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). To have the mind of Christ means to think and act like Him. Paul emphasized that Jesus is God but He willingly became a Servant. He challenged the people at Philippi to become like the One they worshiped. Since Jesus had an humble servant-spirit, they should willingly humble themselves and have the same servant-spirit (mind).

¹All Scripture references, unless otherwise designated, are from the *New King James Version*.

²Robert J. Dean, "Philippi" in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, Trent Butler, gen. ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 1106.

³Frank Stagg, *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), II:178.

⁴Dean, 1106.

⁵Richard R. Melick, Jr., *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 32:23.

⁶Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: The New American Library, 1942), 16.

⁷*Ibid.*, 18.

⁸*Ibid.*, 17.

⁹William Barclay, *More New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 77; C.M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 51.

¹⁰Hamilton, 18.

¹¹Bowra, 17.

¹²Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1978), 54.

¹³Stagg, 196.

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