

Reprinted from Searching the Scriptures: H.E. Phillips - A Hero of Faith

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Among those men who have touched my life and influenced me in the work of the Lord, H.E. Phillips holds a unique place. His faith in the Lord and untiring devotion to the cause of truth have made him one of the true heroes in my life. This article is written as a tribute to him. Sometimes we wait until people have passed away to say kind things about them. I would like for him to "smell the roses" now.

I first met H.E. and Polly Phillips in 1950 when I preached in Lake City, Florida. I was 20 years old and had just married. There was a family in the congregation there who kept telling us about "Elwood" Phillips and his wife. They had worked in meetings in that area. During a meeting in north Florida, we met for the first time. His knowledge of the Bible and ability to effectively express it made a great impression upon me. Though older and more experienced, he put me at ease and treated me as a fellow-preacher. Polly's outgoing personality and sense of humor made her a delight. Here was a model marriage.

As the years passed and great changes beset the churches of the Lord, the character and conviction of this servant of God were tested again and again. It was his love for his brethren which prompted him and James P. Miller to start the Florida Newsletter which soon became the Southeast Newsletter in the hope that communications could be kept alive while brethren had time to study the issues of sponsoring churches and the relationship of local churches to human institutions.

Searching the Scriptures

It was in January, 1960 when the first issue of Searching the Scriptures went into the mail. H.E. Phillips and James P. Miller had given birth to a periodical which has lasted now for 30 years. While both men wrote, it was H.E. Phillips who handled the editorial work. James P. Miller did much to gather subscriptions and help with the circulation of the paper. As the years passed, the pressure of the work took its toll. Determined not to let his work as a preacher suffer, he would attend to that during the day and then often work until 4 or 5 in the morning, writing, proofreading and handling correspondence. It was a labor of love and it reached the hearts of many people and taught them the truth. But it exacted a price in terms of failing health. When the bills were greater than the income from the paper, he borrowed money, sometimes against his insurance, to keep printing bills paid.

How many people have been influenced for eternity by these monumental efforts, only God knows. Always, the objective was to teach the truth, regardless of what it might cost. Error had to be opposed and that was not popular with some. Through it all, there was a spirit of fairness toward all. There was balance and the exercise of good judgment.

Two major heart attacks forced the decision to make other arrangements about the paper. When the agreement was reached that I should carry on with the publication of the paper, we met in Atlanta, along with two other brethren, to work out the details. We all got down on our knees in a motel room, and prayed for my work, for loyalty to the Lord and the Scriptures, for my good health, for

lengthening of his days and for his faithful companion, Polly, who stood by his side and sacrificed much in order that he might do the work he had undertaken.

In the years since that spring of 1973, he has been a rock of strength for me. There have been many times when I have called on him for advice in dealing with some of the difficult problems an editor has to handle. His concern has always been for truth. He has been open and candid. His writings have appeared on the front page of the paper, except for special issues when there was a sequence to follow. There has been variety in these articles but always there has been an appeal to the Scriptures.

True Friends to Young People

Not only have the Phillipses succeeded in rearing three daughters to serve the Lord, but all of their grandchildren who are old enough to be accountable are faithful Christians. That says a great deal. In addition, they have a large "extended family" of younger people (several of whom are preachers and elders, and their wives) whose lives have been enriched by the love and attention given to them in the home of these good people. When my sons went to Tampa to attend Florida College, I urged them to attend services where brother Phillips was the preacher. I knew they would hear the word of God preached without fear or favor and that they would be blessed by the personal association with the Phillipses. I was right. Our daughters-in-law also attended there and shared in the warmth of this couple as they were often in their home. Among those young people, so blessed, were two young Italian brothers who stayed in the Phillips' home while attending Florida College.

Common Memories

In 1976 we made a trip to Italy to preach. We met at Kennedy Airport in New York. I'll never forget the prayer offered by my good brother, as we walked off to a quiet place before boarding the 747 for Rome. The intense Bible discussions with Italian brethren, the adroit fielding of questions, the courtesy and good humor, the sense of gratitude for all the kindnesses shown us - these and many other like things, were incidental lessons to me. We wept together at our parting from the Italian brethren who came to bid us farewell at the airport.

When the darkest hour of my life came and Bobbie crossed over to the other side, leaving me lonelier than I had ever been, Elwood Phillips caught a plane and came to be at my side. He sat with the family at the funeral. The prayer he offered at the funeral home is forever etched in my memory. His presence at the house the evening after the funeral, along with family and a few good friends, meant a great deal more than words can express.

We were with them in Nashville in December, 1988 to attend what has been called "The Nashville Meeting" where we sadly marvelled at how far from the truth some of the brethren had gone.

In March of this year, during a meeting in which I preached at Palmetto, Florida, Elwood and Polly came down and spent a day with us. We had lunch together and spent several hours discussing the work of the Lord in general and that of the paper in particular. Once more, he lifted my spirits and encouraged me to stand for the truth. How could one not love such a friend?

Still at Work

Besides writing for the paper, H.E. Phillips serves as one of the elders of the Fletcher Avenue church in Tampa and shares some of the preaching with Everett Hardin. He still holds some meetings and probably could work in a few more. While health problems continue, his mind is keen and his interest in the kingdom of God undiminished.

Our readers should know that, had it not been for H.E. Phillips, this paper would not be in your hands now. For whatever good you have received from the columns of this paper, you owe a debt of gratitude to H.E. Phillips. Why not take a few moments and write him a note. It will do you good, and it will lift the spirits of a genuine hero of faith. Thanks, Elwood and Polly, for all you have done for the cause of Christ, for this paper and for me and my family.

You may address them: P.O. Box 1631, Lutz, FL 33549.

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