

H.E. Phillips: Committed to the Book

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Fultondale, Alabama

When man begins to leave the foundation of faith and adds to what God has revealed, there is no stopping place short of complete apostasy" ("The Spirit of Christmas," Searching the Scriptures, Jan. 1964).

These words, from the pen of H.E. Phillips, aptly express his attitude toward God's complete and authoritative revelation to mankind - the Bible. To brother Phillips, settling religious questions is quite simple. If it is revealed in the Book, then one must believe, teach and practice it in religion. If it is not revealed, then leave it alone. This is the kind of commitment that the beloved H.E. Phillips, whom I have known for over a quarter of a century, has demonstrated in his preaching, writings and personal life. I am glad times that brother Willis and the Guardian of Truth decided to devote the issue to giving due honor to such a man. I am thankful that they asked me to comment on his commitment to the Book.

I first met brother Phillips about the time he and brother James P. Miller were starting Searching the Scriptures. I was a young man needing all the help I could get (and still do) in understanding and applying scriptural principles to the "issues" that were dividing churches and getting preachers fired over the country. Brother Phillips' clear and pointed writings increased my appreciation for the need to have book, chapter and verse for all we do in religion. During the next several years, after our initial meeting, I only knew him through his writings and hearing him once or twice during a gospel meeting at a nearby congregation. However, I have had the privilege to be more closely associated with him in recent years, having the opportunity to work with him in gospel meetings where we each work regularly - staying in each other's home during these efforts. These weeks together have resulted in many long hours of talking about the Bible. All of this has given me opportunity to know first-hand brother Phillips' commitment to the bible. If he is not totally committed to it, then he has to be the greatest con man alive today.

Brother Phillips' commitment to the Bible began in early life, having been taught by godly parents - a fact that he mentions so very often. With this early respect for God's word etched so deeply into his conscience, it would be only a matter of time until he could dedicate his life to preaching and defending the word. Sometime after he and his beloved Polly married, he quit a very good secular job (one that paid him several times what he would get from preaching) so that he could "Give (himself) continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." Having "put his hand to the plow" he never looked back.

Those close to him know that he works beyond the normal limits of most of us, staying up all hours of the night, working on some project related to the Book. It might be working on some sermon that needs preaching, or some article that needs writing, or some issue that needs studying, or some problem with which someone has asked his help. In each case, before he preaches that sermon, or writes that article, or takes his stand on that issue, or gives his advice on that problem; he wants to be sure that he knows what the Bible teaches about is. He will spend whatever time it takes to satisfy his mind that he is on solid scriptural grounds. If that means working on it almost around the clock

until he is completely satisfied that he is taking the scriptural approach, then so be it.

I think that the first time that I became aware of his long working hours was while my wife and I were staying in his home. We had discussed some matters until I had about fallen asleep, so I excused myself and went to bed shortly after midnight. I thought brother Phillips had also gone to bed. About three or so in the morning, I heard him say, "Polly, Polly, would you open the door?" Then he repeated it a little louder with a little more emphasis. I got up to see what was going on. The thought even crossed my mind that I might have to help settle a domestic matter. However, I learned that brother Phillips had decided that he wanted to study some of the things we had discussed, so he had gone back to his study to do it. Polly had accidentally (she says) locked him out of the bedroom. I learned from his family and, later observed on my own, that such late study hours was almost business as usual for him. He firmly believes one should not preach what he does not know assuredly and he cannot know that which he has not personally spent long hours studying.

Brother Phillips' commitment to Bible authority is demonstrated in all of his work as a gospel preacher. His sermons are not little talks better fitted for after dinner talks at a civic club than they are for the pulpit. He teaches the Book, often reading and quoting directly from its ages, impressing upon the hearts of men and women that what the Bible says to be respected as the authority of heaven. One goes away with the sense that he has heard something that this worth carrying home for further mediation and study - something based on the authority of the Scriptures. He often introduces a gospel meeting by saying, "I am not here to entertain you, but to preach the word of God." If one wants entertainment he should be somewhere else. His purpose is to teach the Bible and impress upon hearts the seriousness of explicitly obeying the teaching. Sometimes one goes away feeling good about himself, but sometimes not so good, as he is made to come face to face with the reality of his spiritual condition. Brother Phillips firmly believes that one must come to an understanding of great scriptural principles before he can practice them; so, much of his preaching is devoted to down to earth teaching that enlightens the mind. This is in marked contrast to much of the promotional and emotional hype heard in so much of today's "motivational" preaching.

His writings in periodicals, tracts, and books show devotion to God and his Book. Those who have read his writings in *Searching the Scriptures*, *Guardian of Truth*, and other papers over the years know about this. It does not matter what the title of the article may be, there is the same fundamental theme throughout "What saith the Scriptures?" The subject may be baptism, the church, marriage, divorce, the eldership, church cooperation or whatever - it is still, "What does the Bible say?"

When the issue over institutions arose, it was "What does the Bible say?" It was no accident that his paper was named *Searching the Scriptures*. He was not interested in putting his finger to the wind to see what would be popular with brethren. He was interested in putting his nose to the Book to see what would please the Lord. Even those who might disagree with some of his applications surely would have to agree that his aim was to do just what the Bible teaches.

In recent years, his writings and teaching on "the marriage question," grace-unity, etc. further demonstrates his devotion to teaching just what he believes the Bible teaches - even if it puts him at odds with friends and brethren whom he dearly loves.

His life has been an "example of the believer" as long as this writer has known him. His moral character and spiritual strength reflect his long hours spent with the Book. In recent months, he has often expressed concern for his decreasing physical strength - wondering how much longer he can be useful in preaching the gospel. He may not have the strength of his youth, but the moral, spiritual strength, and wisdom that he has gained in his years with the Book will continue to make him a priceless asset to the Cause. He did some of his best preaching, at least that I have heard, in his most recent gospel meeting with us. Brethren over the country would certainly benefit from using him in such meetings. His writings continue to be excellent. His telephone still stays busy talking with brethren, both locally and over the country, about spiritual matters. All of this continues to help spread the truth. But, the strength of his godly example of one totally committed to giving book, chapter and verse for all that is done in religion will likely affect us all the most for some time to come. Oh, yes, one more word about his declining physical strength. It has made him slow down to about the pace many of us had been going all along - if you don't believe it, try keeping up with him for about a month.

Thanks, brother Phillips, for being there when so many of us needed you. Stay close to the phone because we will probably be calling you again soon. There are still issues among brethren that need scriptural answers. We will likely need your help in sorting things out again and again. Oh, we know, you say you don't have all the answers. But, we are confident that you will continue to point to the Book where the answers are. We need that.

Guardian of Truth XXXIII: 17, pp. 530-531

September 7, 1989

Reproduced in accordance with TruthMagazine.com reprint permissions.