

## **THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS**

### **III. Philippians: Nurture In Living In Preoccupation With Christ**

#### **A. Nurture In Focusing On Union With Geographically Separated Beloved Believers In God's Program (Philippians 1:1-11)**

##### **I. Introduction**

- A. When Paul wrote the "Prison Epistles" of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon, the fact that he was in prison troubled believers, Philippians 1:12-13; Colossians 2:1-2; 4:7-8 and Philemon 22; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1672, "Introduction to the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians."
- B. To nurture his readers at Philippi, Paul began his epistle to them, writing in Philippians 1:1-11 how their lives that were then being lived apart from each other were nevertheless united in God's blessed, spiritual program:

##### **II. Nurture In Focusing On Union With Geographically Separated Beloved Believers In God's Program.**

- A. In starting his epistle to geographically separated believers, Paul referred to himself and fellow co-worker Timothy as "servants" of Jesus Christ, Philippians 1:1a. Comfort and encouragement in view of their geographical separation from these beloved believers was available only through their mutual spiritual union in the Lord, so Paul focused on his servitude to that great and wonderful, unifying, edifying Lord.
- B. Paul thanked God for every remembrance of his geographically separated Philippian brethren in Christ because in God's united spiritual program, the Lord had led and motivated them to fellowship with him in financial support of his ministry on a consistent basis from the beginning of their ties with Paul, and that in spite of the great distance and the time of separation involved, Phil. 1:3, 5. Paul had not seen these brethren for ten years (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 649), so their consistency of devotion signaled God's work in them.
- C. Thus, Paul reached out to these brethren through intercessory prayer to the Lord that He might make request with joy of God's answering this prayer that his readers might continue in fellowship with him, Phil. 1:4. Though he humanly could not affect their commitment toward him, God in whom Paul and these believers were spiritually united in Christ could do that, so Paul prayed that the Lord continue their faithfulness to him.
- D. Paul's recollection of God's past consistent work in his readers gave him confidence that the Lord would continue to work consistently in them to cause them to continue to fellowship with Paul in supporting his ministry until the day of Christ, the rapture, Philippians 1:6. (Ibid.) Regardless of the geographical distance between them, regardless of the years they had thus been separated from one another, Paul relied on God's mutual work in himself and his readers to continue to preserve their mutual fellowship in Christ.
- E. Paul claimed that the Philippian believers thus even ministered to him in his "court of law" experiences, for the terms "bonds, defense and confirmation were courtroom terms," Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Phil. 1:7. Thus, through their mutual connection in their standing in Christ, Paul and his Philippian believing readers were connected in such a way that God made their support of Paul minister to encourage him even in his difficult courtroom experiences that were related to his harsh Roman imprisonment!
- F. The fellowship of Paul's geographically estranged, beloved readers with him in this way created a great bond with him from Paul's perspective, so Paul greatly longed the more after all the Philippian believers with the affection of Christ Himself, Philippians 1:8.
- G. Accordingly, Paul prayed to God in whom he and his geographically separated, beloved readers were spiritually united that their love might abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that they might approve of things in the Christian life that were excellent, that they might be sincere and without offence until the rapture of the Church, until the day of Jesus Christ, Philippians 1:9-10.
- H. This godliness was to be seen in terms of the fruits of righteousness in living, righteousness available by a life of dependence on Jesus Christ in whom all believers are spiritually positioned, all to the glory and praise of God, Philippians 1:11.

***Lesson:*** *Though geographically separated for many years, and though the challenge of harsh court experiences and Roman imprisonment pressured them, both Paul and his beloved Philippian readers were spiritually united in Christ and His program at work in them both. Thus, Paul relied on this Lord and His program for blessed mutual consistency of the fellowship he enjoyed with his readers along with their growth in love and faith in Christ.*

***Application:*** *May we (1) rest in God's great unifying, edifying program of beloved believers geographically parted from us under even trying circumstances to continue to keep us united in attitude and support. (2) May we turn to God in prayer to build up one another in the faith and love we share in the the Lord though thus separated.*