

"I Thank My God ..."

"... upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you, making my supplication with joy ..." (Phil. 1:3).

When we pray, especially for individuals, we may think of some special thing that stands out in our memory of them. Paul remembered Timothy's tears: tears which might have been at the prospect of saying "goodbye" to him who was his father in the gospel, with the knowledge there was a distinct possibility it would be his last time to look such a beloved face (2 Tim. 1:4). He remembered the *"work of faith, and labor of love and patience of hope"* of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:3). As to the Philippians, it was with extreme fondness he remember their *"fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now ..."* (1:4).

"Fellowship in furtherance of the gospel." There can be no greater fellowship than to have joint, mutual part in the promoting and advancing together of the gospel of Christ. What joy to be a participant in such a noble work, joining together with others in carrying out the Lord's command, *"Go therefore and teach all nations"* (Mt. 28:18). James wrote, *"Let him know that he that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins"* (James 5:20). And, while this passage has specific reference to the restoration of one who once obeyed, then erred; it is no less true of the one who has never obeyed the gospel. After all, the soul of one who has never obeyed is worth as much as the soul of one who strayed but who returned -- either of them is worth more than the whole world (Mt. 16:26)! Our world is madly rushing into eternal ruin. All God's children should be determined to save as many from destruction as possible! The fellowship which brought joy to Paul was the Philippians' fellowship in advancing that gospel.

"From the first day until now." Different ideas have circulated as to Paul's meaning in these words. To me the most logical answer is seen in the record of the beginning of the church in Philippi. It was on a Sabbath day when Paul and his company first came in contact with those who would become the core of the church in Philippi. Paul and his company had traversed Galatia with the Spirit pressing them westward. At Troas Paul saw in a vision a man from Macedonia standing, saying, *"Come over into Macedonia and help us"* (Acts 16:9). So Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy arrived in Philippi and finding no Jewish synagogue, went out on a Sabbath day to a riverside where they supposed there was a place of prayer (Acts 16:13). Some women were gathered there, one of who was Lydia. She heard Paul and her *"heart was opened to give heed unto the things spoken"* by him (Acts

16:14). When she and her household were baptized, she said to these preachers, *"If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, you must come into my house and abide there"* (Acts 16:17). She would not take "no" for an answer for *"she constrained us."* And, apparently the whole duration of their stay in Philippi was spent in her home. When they left the city, they *"entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed"* (Acts 16:40).

"Until now." The fellowship of Philippi with Paul did not stop when he, Silas, and Timothy departed but followed them to the next city for Paul said, *"... even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my needs"* (Ph. 4:16). And, it is likely that when he went further to Corinth, Philippi still had fellowship with him. To Corinthians he wrote, *"I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you,"* which churches were later identified as from Macedonia (2 Cor. 11:8).

The years passed and now Paul was in Rome, in prison and once more in need. And again Philippi rallied to him and sent a gift which Paul called *"an odor of a sweet smell;"* a gift which allowed Paul to write, *"I have all things and abound: I am filled"* (Phil. 4:18). The faithfulness of the Philippians brought joy to Paul as he remembers their fellowship with him from the very first day!

Jim McDonald