

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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How to Have a Spirit of Optimism in a World of Sin

In these trying and perilous times there is a great and urgent need for God's children to be infused with a spirit of optimism. Thanks be to God; He has provided the means whereby this need can be abundantly supplied.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article was first published in 1995. Evil in the world has since only increased, and the love of truth in Lord's church has waned. We thus believe the article is more needed now than it was then, both the warnings and the grounds for optimism.

Many things prove this dual need; we call attention to but a few of the increased efforts to remove virtually every vestige of God's influence in our society: 1) The vile sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuality, is being foisted upon society, even to the point of children being taught that such is not evil or wrong. 2) More states, despite some opposition, are going for what is called "marriage" of homosexuals. 3) More innocent children than ever before will be murdered at the hands of evil people, and with government sanction. 4) The practice of lying, and cheating is on the increase. 5) More children are being born out of wedlock than ever before. 6) Man-

made religions are drifting farther and farther from the shores of truth. 7) The Lord's church is suffering from watered down preaching and teaching, with an emphasis on pleasing people rather than God. More could be added to the list, but we stop here.

As the world about us becomes more evil, the greater the number of people fall by the wayside in the spiritual realm. To be victorious over evil, then, the need for optimism is greater than ever. Bear in mind that we are not talking about something of minor importance. There is nothing which can even compare with the importance of our ultimate destiny. The vast majority of people is going to be lost, and that is sad since God has prepared a way for man that can end in victory.

We now commence the original article, where we find the discussion of evils that must be faced by those who serve God acceptably.] →

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THE REALITY OF EVIL MUST BE RECOGNIZED

The New Testament is replete with warnings that children of God will face various obstacles in their life as a christian. Paul reminds us that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Tim. 2:12). Our Lord told the church in Smyrna that the devil would cast some of them “into prison” that they might be “be tried” (Rev. 2:10). In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he tells them to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11). He depicts christians as soldiers instructing them to arm themselves for battle against the devil (vv. 12-17). In First Timothy, Timothy is told to “fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life...” (6:12).

Christ warned of “false prophets” which would come in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15). John wrote, “Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1Jno. 4:1). Peter wrote: “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies” (2Pet. 2:1). Paul says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine,” rather, he said, they will “turn away from the truth (2Tim. 4:3-4). In First Timothy, Paul quotes the Spirit who said, “that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith...” (4:1).

From all the warnings given, — certain persecutions, false teachers of various kinds, a warfare or a fight against the devil and his devices, departure from the faith, rejection of sound doctrine, and others — it should be clear to every christian that the life of the christian will involve many trials. It should also be clear that many of the things, of which we have been warned, are now upon us. It is plain Bible teaching that the christian’s life is one in which divers trials must be faced and overcome if the Crown of Life is to be won. In view of these things, there is a very real danger that one can become weak, even to the point of falling by the wayside and turning back to walk no longer with the Lord. This very thing is indeed happening to many more than a few.

In order for one to overcome these difficulties, to be victorious in the “good fight of faith,” a spirit of optimism is of the utmost importance. We can be sincerely thankful that we can have this optimism if we so desire. It is tragic that so many will never enter the portals of glory simply because they lacked the optimism, which characterizes the faithful, which optimism could have been theirs. It is with the hope that we may encourage some to be infused with a spirit of optimism that we offer some suggestions on *How to Have a Spirit of Optimism*. First, let us lay the groundwork by explaining... †

WHAT WE MEAN BY OPTIMISM

Optimism means: taking the most hopeful or cheerful view of matters; expecting the best outcome of things. In other words, looking on the “bright side” rather than the “dark side.” An optimist is the opposite of a pessimist. A popular analogy shows the difference: The optimist says, “every cloud has a silver lining”; the pessimist says, “Behind every silver lining there is a cloud.” We must not doubt...

THE IMPORTANCE OF OPTIMISM

Optimism is highly important even in the secular realm. A business can hardly succeed without it. The optimistic artist, musician, athlete, et al is much more likely to be successful. Successful people are usually those who think of ways to make things work and reasons why they should, and have a measure of confidence in their ability to achieve success in their endeavor. On the other hand, the world is full of people who are failures, many who thought of reasons why they could not succeed and consequently did not.

Our need to succeed in the area of the spiritual realm is much greater than in the secular realm. The spiritual realm does deal with living hope and assurance in this life, but more importantly with our eternal existence, whereas secular things are only temporary and limited to life here on earth. As with all conditions, so...

OPTIMISM IS NEEDED TO ASSURE SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

Spiritual success is conditionally assured. It is not likely to come to those who constantly think of reasons why they may fail. There are many more reasons for being optimistic in the spiritual realm than in the secular realm.

In the secular realm, despite great optimism, there are many things beyond our control which

can cause failure: sickness, death, weather, the economy, lack of ability, lack of money, and a host of other things.

In the spiritual realm it is far different. The true, living, all-powerful God assures success giving overwhelming reasons for optimism on the part of the faithful christian. With God on their side, faithful christians cannot fail; and, with this divinely assured success in mind, we set forth a number of reasons for optimism on the part of the faithful christians, so that a victorious race can be run and the “crown of righteousness” received. We begin by noting that...

FEAR CAN BE OVERCOME

The world is filled with fear. There is fear of war, terrorism, oppression, atomic destruction, death, disease, hunger, storms, fire, and others. But fear can be overcome by faith, hope and love, the three things which Paul says, “now abideth” (1Cor. 13:13). *Faith* sustains us — “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Tim. 1:12). *Hope* serves as an anchor of the soul — “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast...” (Heb. 6:19). *Love* casts out fear — “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1Jno. 4:18); “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4). Fear can be overcome; and, as well...

MISTAKES CAN BE OVERCOME

We, as christians, must recognize the fact that we will make mistakes. The greatest of men have done so. Noah, Moses and David made their mistakes. Peter made his mistakes. Paul made a tragic mistake in the persecution →

of God's children before he obeyed the gospel. Later, as a christian, he said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1Cor. 9:27). Some have simply failed to do things to avoid making a mistake, but that does not work. Someone has well said, "He made no mistakes, he took no wrong road, he never fumbled the ball. He never went down neath the weight of the load, he simply did nothing at all." Doing nothing can be the greatest mistake of all.

A christian's sins can be forgiven — "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7-9). In view of God's word, as spoken by John, there is no need to allow sin to keep one out of Heaven, the home of the soul. We are not commanded to live a life of perfection. If that were the case, then there would be no hope for any of us. God knew from the very beginning that man, though made in his Creator's image, would abuse his will and sin; thus, there would have to be a provision for the forgiveness of sin, and He has made that abundantly possible. Praise Him for this; and, for...

THE GREAT ASSURANCE BY GOD IN THIS LIFE

Like Paul, we should be encouraged and emboldened at the knowledge that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31). Victory is inevitable if we put our faith and trust in God and submissively live in

accordance with His will, we can know that victory will be ours.

The list of trials Paul faced is breathtaking (cf. 2Cor. 11); yet, he knew by experience that he could overcome those things. This great optimist declared, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Temptation can be resisted. When people offer excuses for their failure to resist temptations they are ignoring Paul's words of assurance when he said, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:13). In view of Paul's statement, christians who take God at His word need not fear that they cannot have the necessary strength to overcome the temptations which are bound to be faced along life's way. We also have grounds for optimism in the knowledge that out...

LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD

While men may labor hard for various objectives in this life, their labor can be, and often is, in vain. This, however, is never so of a faithful christian's labor "in the Lord" — "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1Cor. 15:58).

What greater assurance of victory could one possibly want than that which we have just noted? If we believe God's word when it says: 1) all things work together for good; 2) if God be for us who can be against us; 3) We can do all things through Christ; 4) a way of escape from temptation is provided; and, 5) our labor is not in vain the in the Lord, how can we fail to have a spirit of optimism? But, there is more; ... †

AN ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE IS PROVIDED

In the secular world, and in the world of man-made religions, faulty guidance is continually being given. However, with God's faithful servants such is never the case, when God's guidance is relied upon. Divine guidance comes when we "speak as the oracles of God" (1Pet. 4:11). Paul comprehensively describes this all-sufficient guidance saying, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2Tim. 3:16-17). When following God's instructions, a person is right and cannot be wrong. When the doctrines of men are followed in spiritual matters, one is wrong and cannot be right. Optimism also flows from the fact that...

MAN'S NECESSITIES ARE PROMISED

Upon the most beautiful of all conditions, Jesus promised God's provision of the basic necessities of life — "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). If we believe these words of our Savior, we will put spiritual things first place in our lives and not be drawn away by our pursuit of temporary material things. Only the "things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Both *seen* and *unseen* things are ours for the having. Can we but rejoice and be optimistic? Let us remember, though, that...

MATERIAL SUCCESS IS NOT ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

If a victorious life in Christ were conditioned upon material success, it would make God a respecter of persons, and many would be helpless and beyond the reach of a living hope. To possess and maintain spiritual optimism, we must take seri-

ously the warning given by Jesus about our attitude toward material things — "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lk. 12:15).

Trust in material wealth is one of the great enemies of optimism with regard to the promises of God. Consider the Parable of the Rich Fool (Lk. 12:16-21). This rich man had a problem. What would he do with all his "fruits"? He would solve his problem by building greater barns. With his problem solved, he would (so he thought) tell his soul to "take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But his optimism was based upon the wrong thing. God called him a "fool" informing him that his life would end that very night. Then followed the sobering question: "Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" The bottom line lesson from this probing question is: So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Abiding in "the doctrine of Christ" brings the approval of the Father and the Son (2Jno. 9), not the accumulation of material wealth. Even, then, with relatively few worldly possessions, knowledge of divine approval provides us an unhindered spirit of optimism.

As well as the Godhead's approval, divine love can be ours. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Those who love God have every right to be filled with optimism, since their love for God will assure their obedience to God's will for man. Obedience is the condition on which God's approval is available and can be maintained. Optimism based upon false teaching is a tragedy. Not only is it vain, it may well prevent any further quest for truth, the only basis for true optimism.

Christians are redeemed people. For true servants of God, a precious price has been paid. →

Peter informs us that the price paid for us did not consist of “corruptible” things, “but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pet. 1:18). This redemption has enabled God-fearing people to become “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...” (1Pet. 2:9). How thankful we ought to be as God’s chosen people, christians, heirs of the heavenly home; how sad we ought to be that countless millions have no such hope. Optimism also abounds because...

CHRISTIANS HAVE GREAT EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

Consider the marvelous *Faith Chapter* (Heb. 11), where we find listed a goodly number of “heroes of faith.” These powerful examples of faith can be a great source of encouragement to christians telling them that they, too, can have a faith which can overcome the world and result in eternal victory. We would do well to note briefly some of those great examples:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous...he being dead yet speaketh (v. 4).

By faith Enoch was translated for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (V. 5).

By faith Noah...prepared an ark to the saving of his house...and became heir of righteousness which is by faith (v. 7).

By faith Abraham...went out...sojourning in the land of promise...For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac (vv. 8-18).

By faith Moses [chose] rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward...through faith he kept the passover...by faith [he and the Israelites] passed through the Red Sea... (Heb. 11:23-29).

Then, too, there is the example of Paul:

For I am now ready to be offered...I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2Tim. 4:6-8).

These, and other, great “witnesses” are telling us that we can run the race and win. What grounds for optimism; and yet, there is more...

GOD’S PRECIOUS, ETERNAL PROMISES

Prepared Mansions. As Jesus talked with his apostles concerning his forthcoming separation from them, Peter expressed great concern, saying that he would lay down his life for the Lord’s sake. It was in the midst of this emotional setting that our Lord spoke some of His most comforting words relative the future of his faithful followers. We preachers often recite this passage at funerals, not that it would in any way affect the state of the deceased, but rather that it might in some measure encourage the listeners to so live that they might die with a living hope:

Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Former Things Will Pass Away. The apostle John records a vision he had of “a new heaven and a new earth.” John saw “new Jerusalem” coming down from God out of Heaven; he had also heard a great voice saying, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). †

There is no place on earth where one can be removed from the possibility of death, sorrow, crying and pain. These “former things” are indeed a reality. But the faithful in Christ can one day know what it is like to be removed from all these undesirable things. This is something that wealth cannot buy, nor can it be obtained by force of influence. Yet, this promise is the possession of even the poor and the lowly, if they be faithful christians.

A Place Where Sin Will Not Exist. Where there are people on the earth, there is sin. There is no place one can go to get away from sin. But there is a place, in the world to come, where the faithful in Christ will exist apart from sin. Thus, John wrote: “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

How shall we have a spirit of optimism? To put it in a few words, it is simply a matter of taking God at his word. When we truly believe in God and submit ourselves fully unto Him, we may know that Heaven will one day be ours. Regardless of the pain we may suffer, and the conflicts we may have to endure, Heaven awaits the faithful.

We are facing trying, and discouraging times. Who can deny it? But if God’s people suffered much worse in the early times of the church and remained faithful — and they did — so can we. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4). If our faith never falters, no power can keep us from the home of the soul.—Editor

Radical Islam?

[EDITOR: Brother Robert C. Oliver, preacher for the church in Clinton, NC recently wrote: “Brother Pigg, after reading the article, The Myth of Peaceful Islam, I thought of a little article I wrote for our bulletin recently and decided to send you a copy of it. Keep up the good work.” Robert’s article follows.]

Because of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, much [has been said] about the [Islamic religion followed by the Muslims of the world]. Usually, there is some distinction made between what is called “radical Islam” and the average follower of the Islamic religion. Several of the radio and T.V. talk show personalities have brought to light the difference, pointing out that Americans should not be afraid of, or opposed to, those of the Muslim religion that are not the “radicals.” Even some of our brethren have made such a distinction. But why is it that these Islamic terrorists are considered to be “radical”? The answer is that they take seriously the words of the Koran. Sura 9:5 of the Koran authorizes unbelievers to be put to the sword. The difference between these “radicals” and the run of the mill Muslim is that they believe in strict adherence to the scriptures of Mohammed. It would seem that all others of the Islamic faith would be the equivalent of “liberals.”

The Lord’s church has often been accused of being “radical” as well. Why? Because we believe in a strict adherence to the scriptures, the word of God. It is not unusual for the church to be called a cult. Not long ago, when the murder of a preacher of the church was in all the news, one who was not a member of the church defined the church of Christ for T.V. viewers nation wide. In his description he said the church of Christ was a cult.

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Powell Grove Announces Sponsorship of *Banner of Truth*

One might make the analogy that the rest of the “Christian” realm (those that claim Christianity, but do not follow the Bible) is as those of Islam that no longer hold to the teachings of Mohammed. Just as those Muslims do not hold to the teachings of Mohammed concerning the responsibility to kill unbelievers (those who do not believe in Mohammed as a prophet from God), many in the world of [so-called] Christendom refuse to accept the teachings of the Bible concerning baptism, the one church and other teachings of the Bible. To them, we are “radical Christianity,” since we demand obedience to all of God’s commands.

The fact is, those called “radical Islam” are those that are true Muslims. Those of us who are often called a christian cult, are in fact true christians.

Brethren, there is no such thing as a radical christian, or fanatic christians. Those are the ones the Bible calls faithful christians. — P.O. Box 193, Clinton, NC 28329

[EDITOR’S NOTE: We would do well to learn more about Islam. This religion has a goal of world domination. They make no bones about it, and they are making great strides toward their goal. Islamic literature, which I have received, says there are now seven million (7,000,000) Muslims in the U. S. There is one thing we cannot know about a Muslim for sure, and that is, “Is he true to the teaching of the Koran?” I recommend that you read two books by Robert Spencer: *The Truth about Muhammad* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and The Crusades)*. Spencer has recently come out with yet another volume on Islam.]

The E-Mail Truth Group

Brother Joe F. Travis of Abilene, Texas has an e-mail group:

<www.groups.yahoo.com\group\e-mailtruth>

The Powell Grove church of Christ is pleased to be the new sponsoring congregation for the publication BANNER OF TRUTH. We have been a long time supporter of Walter Pigg in his work as editor of this excellent publication. It is evident from the many reader responses that this publication is a strength and a blessing to readers at home and abroad. This publication has provided assurance to faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that many have not and will not bow their knees to the modern day Baal. It has also lead many to Christ and His church.

As the preacher for the Powell Grove congregation, I have written numerous articles for sound brotherhood publications including BANNER OF TRUTH. It has been my privilege to speak on the BANNER OF TRUTH lectureship for several years. My wife and I are long time friends of Walter Pigg and his family. We have grown to love them for their faith and labors of love in behalf of the Lord and His church.

The Powell Grove congregation is as sound and faithful a congregation as you are able to find among churches of Christ. We stand ready to answer any questions concerning our faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

May we encourage readers of BANNER OF TRUTH to express your support during this transition period with a contribution be it small or large, so that this good work may continue and grow. Informed Christians see the perils that many congregations and Christians are facing today, so this is no time to be slack, or to abandon the conflict. When many do a little much will be the result.

Powell Grove church of Christ, (signed)
Lloyd Gale, preacher

Evolution and Moral Implications

It is maddening to think about what we pay for under the guise of public education. For some time, the public education system has been used to teach children that the human race, is merely the present result of an ongoing naturalistic process called evolution. Evolution holds that life emerged from non-life; the first human being emerged from that which was not human; conscience from that which had no conscience; mind from that which had no mind; and, morality from that which is amoral.

If evolution is true, then man is nothing more than “matter in motion.” The only thing that separates him from the rest of the organic, or inorganic, world is the fact that he is organized in a slightly different fashion. Yet, the evolutionist does not really want to grant this implication of his view. For example, give an evolutionist the True-False statement: “Value did not exist before the first human being.” Some will answer “true,” and some will answer “false.” You see, if there was no such thing as “value” before the first human being, then “value” started to exist *with* the first human being. This means that “value” is a mere personal function of the human mind. That further entails the notion that there are as many “values” in this world as there are human minds. This means that when Mr. Hitler decided there was “value” in exterminating six million men, women, and children—well, it means that no one was really in any position to, say, “Call him down. We can no more escape and ignore the fact of our moral being than the fact that we are bipeds. As rotten as much of our society is, we still believe people are in some way morally accountable for their actions. Evolution just does not fit this fact of reality. When it comes to the matter of human value, the truth is, “value” did exist before the first human being; it existed and exists with the source of all “value,” the eternal, infinite God who made man in his image.

Evolution, to be true must conform to and explain reality. Man possesses qualities that are not

common to the rest of the world, rather are unique only to him. Such things as the: intellectual, moral, emotional, aesthetic, psychological, spiritual, etc. Each of these qualities is a part of man, and yet all are separate from his physical person. One might dissect a human brain, but he will never locate the mind. He might observe a beating heart, but he will never surgically locate love and compassion. He might explore the entire human body, but he will never locate the conscience that cries out in pain when violated. How does evolution, a completely materialistic philosophy, account for these transcendent and immaterial qualities of man. The answer is, it doesn't and it can't.

Why does a “blob” of matter possess a sense of “oughtness”? Where did matter contrive such? Why does such a “blob” feel the need, in many cases, to sacrifice and give of himself for the benefit of others? What of “right” and “wrong” “beauty” and “justice” and “worship”? Not only must evolution have life coming from non-life, and organic from inorganic, he must also have “...the immaterial from the material, the spiritual from the non-spiritual. And, this doesn't make any sense.”

Evolution is in no sense “science.” It is a philosophy, a view of the world, which seeks, like all philosophies, to explain the world and man's place in it. It is a false philosophy just as surely as that of “the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers” (Acts 17:18) was false. It is false precisely because it contradicts reality. Upon closer examination, evolution, it turns out, is not an honest attempt to “explain” things, rather it is an attempt, on the part of man, to get God and moral responsibility out of the picture. Trying to get away from God is a practice as old as man himself. Of the first couple Scripture says, “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). Some people today are trying to do the same thing “amongst the trees of evolution,” which trees are of their own invention.

—AA

Essentials of Bible Study

A great irony of the day is the fact that we live in a time of booming technological advancement, yet so many are abysmally educated. On many college campuses, a discussion of history and literature that used to be part of a high school education will result in glazed-over eyes. Perusing the old McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader, one finds it full of excerpts from great pieces of classical literature: speeches by Daniel Webster; works of Edmund Burke and Sir William Blackstone; authors like Shakespeare, Poe and Longfellow; and, of course, lengthy sections from the King James Version of the Bible.

The time was that no one was declared educated without having read and learned from such masterpieces. In the absence of such learning today, many cannot think critically, and lack a sense of principle and conviction. Perhaps this is why so many Americans fail to see that lying—yes, even lying about a sexual affair—on the part of a public official is unacceptable. Our society would be more peaceful if people generally believed that things like honor, honesty, and duty were more important than the latest stock market reading. No doubt, there will be a price to pay for all this.

The greatest work of literature in this and all times is the Bible, because (A) the Bible can, from available evidence, be shown to be the product of Almighty God; (B) it discusses in detail the most fundamental topics of human origin, purpose, and destiny; and, (C) no Book has had such worldwide impact as that of the Bible.

Anybody, can have a Bible; most do, yet, very few—even religious, church-going folks—know much about it. Why? Well, at least one reason is knowing the Bible requires determined systematic study, and not that many people are willing to do that. Just as “studying” the Bible is important; knowing how to study the Bible is equally important.

One essential ingredient of good Bible study is respect and reverence. The Bible, though great literature and history, is yet more. It must be approached like Moses before the burning bush. Opening the Scriptures we are standing on “hallowed ground.” The Bible, is either the greatest hoax ever known, or it came, by “the inspiration of God.” “Inspiration” means “God-breathed.” To be serious Bible students, one must realize that the Bible is God speaking to man. Ours must be the view of some Thessalonians who accepted Bible preaching “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1Thessalonians 2:13).

We must also study the Bible determined to put first things first—to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). We should also be anxious to study the Bible daily. What a far better world this would be if more people went to bed at night with the excited anticipation of what they would learn from the Bible tomorrow. We need to study the Bible prayerfully, and with the determination of making a personal and practical application to our lives. We need to understand that though the Bible does contain many special doctrines and principles, yet, there must be a recognition of the proper relationship between doctrine and life.

As we fret over the degradation and decline of our society and the hurt that is all around us, Isaiah reminds us that it is so unnecessary: “Why will ye be still stricken, that ye revolt more and more” (Isaiah 1:5). The evil which daily envelops us, with all its horrible consequences, need not be. We can better ourselves and our society by being diligent students of the Word (2Timothy 2:15).

—AA

Conversion and Modern Religious Experience

It is an uphill battle to convince many that what the Bible calls “conversion” is anything other than a spontaneous, personal religious experience in which the “converttee” is a passive participant. It is however the case that the Bible contains *no such* description of conversion. The Book of Acts is the place to go because it records the conversions of many different kinds and classes of people, yet it bears out the fact that conversion in the First Century followed an exact pattern.

First, the “converttee” had a change of heart which was brought about by the act of faith. And, yes, faith is an act; it’s something you will yourself to do. We learn certain information from the Bible, about what God has done on our behalf, and we choose whether we will trust God and commit ourselves to a course of action, which is to say, we will obey. That’s why the Bible says in Romans 10:17 “belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Then, there is a change of life which is brought about by the act of repentance, which itself is a determination to turn away from one’s past, and redirect his future according to God’s will. It is such a change that Paul describes a penitent person as one who has “died to sin” (Romans 6:2). Then there is a change of allegiance which effected by the converttee’s “confessing with *his* mouth Jesus as Lord” (Romans 10:9). Such a penitent, confessing believer is now ready for the final step which is wrought a change of relationship. He must be born again; he must be made or created anew. He is “baptized into Christ Jesus,” which is to say, “buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.” At this point, conversion is complete.

Every case of conversion recorded in Acts unwaveringly follows this course of action: change of heart; change of life, change of allegiance, and change of life: faith, repentance, and baptism. There is no exception.

A dramatic case of conversion is that of the man called Saul of Tarsus. A complete record of his conversion is found in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. Saul, the record says, was on the way to Damascus with arrest warrants by which he would bind Jewish christians taking them back for trial and punishment. While on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul and convinced him that he—Jesus—was indeed the Christ. Jesus then told Saul that he was to go to Damascus to a certain house on a certain street, and wait for a certain preacher to tell him (Saul) what he “must do.”

The now-convinced-Saul went to Damascus house. The now-penitent-Saul prayed for three days and nights. This indicates his sorrow for his past, coupled with a determination to do differently. Scores of times in his epistles he shows his change of allegiance to “our Lord Jesus Christ” (e.g. Romans 5:1). Now was the time for that final step, and as plainly as can be said, preacher Ananias came and got right to the point, saying “why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). Of course, Saul did just that. It was at this point, and not before that he was “saved” because Jesus had long before said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” It was at this point that he received the remission of sins, because Peter had before said, “repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). It was at this point that Saul converted or turned to the Lord, for Peter had also before said, “repent ye and turn again that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

In the New Testament, no potential converttee was ever told to pray as a condition of pardon, thus Paul did not convert by praying. Nor, is it so, as some claim, that Paul was converted on the Damascus road. If that were true, why have Ananias, days later, saying, “arise, be baptized, and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord? No, Saul was not converted until after he believed, repented, confessed and finally was baptized. This is conversion as described in the Bible.

—AA

Fellow-Helpers

August-November 2008

Barbara A. Kist	120.00
Phyllis Mitchell	120.00
Cynthia McIntyre	120.00
Pine Ridge church of Christ	250.00
Mrs. John H. Brown	75.00
Anonymous	200.00
Charles Verkist	150.00
Robert M. Price	800.00
Damon St. church of Christ	200.00
Saks church of Christ	240.00
Anonymous	125.00
Pilot Oak church of Christ	25.00
Mr. & Mrs. Kurt Pfaff	5.00
Deborah K. Dunkerson	20.00
Anonymous	200.00
Clarence L. Whiteman	200.00
Downtown church of Christ	100.00
Joe C. Turbeville	10.00
J. J. Garland	10.00
Harold Gibson	20.00
J. F. Travis	50.00
Cades church of Christ	200.00
Bill G. Proctor	100.00
Zoe Sims	40.00
Philippi church of Christ	200.00
James W. Berry	50.00
Mrs. Marion A Harlow	30.00
Barbara Lowe	15.00
Oak Level church of Christ	1,000.00
Bobby H. Thompson	100.00
Don Manuel	100.00
Marlene Huff	20.00
J. C. Wilder	10.00
Jack Webb	100.00
Hughlin C. Word	50.00
Gene Colley	25.00
Nanie M. Philpot	5.00
William L. Carter	100.00
Orren Babcock	100.00
Total Contribution	<u>5,185.00</u>

Expenses

August-November

Service on press	482.75
Paper	1,586.00
Mailing B.O.T. & returns	3,323.81
Moving Press	272.00
Labels	111.30
Phone	24.35
Strapping material and buckles	<u>136.34</u>
Total Expenses	5,936.55
Total on hand August 1, 2008	6,170.80
Total Contributions	5,185.00
Total funds available	11,355.80
Less Expenses	<u>6,170.80</u>
Balance on hand Nov. 30	5,185.00

Our Sincere Thanks

Every contribution is precious; November's have been especially so. Several gave "extra" allowing us to offset greater than usual expenses. Increased costs, particularly paper and postage, have brought the cost of each issue of BOT to about \$1700.

For years, brethren have supplied finances to keep BOT going; we believe they will continue to do so. Readers regularly express their wish that this work continue for years to come. With the help of generous brethren and God's blessing, we shall proceed. —*Editor*

Please Excuse Our Delay

Sponsor transition and other matters has had us playing catch up with this issue. God willing, the future will be more regular.

A BOT in a reader's hand represents hours and work. I typically write a feature for each issue, gather other material, and do the printing. A number of others also give several hours of time to the finished product. In addition, there are hours and reams of clerical work as well.

This is not to complain, but to explain and beg your patience. —*Editor*

Reader's Response

We are sorry to hear of the rising costs and the bleak future of Banner of Truth. Your work with Banner of Truth is a bright light shining in darkness. I hope and pray that the light continues to shine brightly. My wife and I have discussed your need and have decided to commit to you \$50.00 per month beginning this month and continuing thru next year. I urge you to take this as encouragement to continue believing the Lord will provide a way to continue this good work. I challenge every person and congregation who receives Banner of Truth to come to your financial aide in order to continue. If everyone will do a little, no one will have to do a lot... – **Joe F. Travis, Tx.** (*This indeed is an encouragement to us. Brethren have been so good in the past to support our work, and we have confidence they will continue to do so. – Editor*).

I receive two copies of Banner of Truth at the Vine Grove, KY address. Please check your list. I'm responding to your plea for additional funds. I enjoy reading the original truth. Thanks for your effort. – **J. C. Wilder, KY.** (*Thanks for your help and letting us know you were receiving two copies of BOT. We appreciate greatly our readers who let us know such things. It reduces our expenses. – Editor*).

I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy reading your publication and I appreciate so much that you are sending it to me. I also wish to be left on your mailing list. Thanks again for sending your publication – **Charlie Turner, TN.** (*Thanks for your encouragement. We certainly will keep you on our mailing list. If you know of others who would like to receive BOT, just let us know. – Editor*).

We are praying that the brotherhood will respond liberally to the financial support of 'Banner of Truth.' We cannot afford to lose this fine publication. You are to be commended for your efforts to keep the 'presses rolling.' His servant – **Bill Carter, NC.** (*Your prayers are greatly appreciated, as is your support of our work – Editor*).

Please know that I love to receive & read Banner of Truth. Although my assistance is just a small amount, I'll be trying to send some as often as I can. Keep up the wonderful work. Would it be possible to get on your mailing list? If not, I'll keep trying to get a copy

from the church building. We worship with and are members of the Carterct Road church of Christ in Brunswick, Georgia. God bless you, your family and those who help you prepare and send Banner of Truth – **Jim Hurlbut, GA.** (*We certainly will put your name of our mailing list. If you know of others who would like to receive it, just let us know. Thanks for your help. Brunswick, Georgia brings back memories to me. In World War II, I got on a new Liberty Ship in Brunswick. I was in the Merchant Marine – Editor*).

We hope you and Sis. Pigg are well. You do a very good work in making Banner of Truth available to so many people. We always learn a lot from reading it each month. Enclosed is a check to help with some of the expenses. May the Lord continue to bless you and everyone involved in this publication. In christian love – **Bobby & Jackie Thompson, FL.** (*Thanks for your encouraging words and your generous help financially. I'm doing quite well health wise. Naomi is having sciatic nerve problems and will have surgery December 30th at Nashville. The doctor spoke encouraging words about the surgery. – Editor*).

Have enjoyed B.O.T. for several years. It's great. Keep up the good work. Everyone should get it – **Hughlin Word, AR.**

Hello Beloved ones. I write to salute your courage on beautiful writing in this wicked world. Your articles are tantaliz[ing] to the soul. Keep on writing good lessons, for the Lord is at your side. Love and kind regards – **Ade Ajetunmobi, Nigeria.** (*We are so thankful that we are able to get our writings to you, and many others in Africa. – Editor*).

We are glad to get Banner of Truth. We are thankful for all who stand for the truth – **Jim and Jackie Patchell, AR.** (*We surely would like to see you. We are thankful for your stand for the truth, and for the help we receive from you and the brethren. Give them our regards. – Editor*).

I received the material concerning the work of the home and the work of the church. I am very thankful for the material. God bless you and keep the good work you are doing in your writing – **Charles Maxwell, TN.**

Just want to say 'Hi'. I hope everything is going well for you. Thanks for all your work on B.O.T. We really appreciate it and look forward to every issue. – **Jake & Rose Taft, AL.** (*Thanks for all you do →*

to keep our work going. – Editor).

I recently finished reading April-May 2008 *Banner of Truth*. I truly appreciate every copy of this good publication, but must say I ESPECIALLY appreciate this issue. Your response to the reader who tried (poorly, may I add) to defend instrumental music was excellent. I just finished preaching a series on this subject and am truly amazed at those who are so illogical when it comes to this and many other subjects. Thank you for your fellowship in the Gospel of Christ and your firm stand for the truth. You and the publication which you labor with is doing eternal good of which you may not be aware. Godspeed and my you know you and BOT are in my prayers. A fellow preacher and defender of truth – **Rodney Nulph, WV**. (*I agree that some are illogical with regard to many subjects. In matters of biblical authority, can you remember the time when our brethren generally looked for a Thus saith the Lord? So many of the changes in the past several decades have not been for the best – Editor*).

Please send me your bulletin. I've heard good things about it... – **Gary W. Halcomb, GA**.

I appreciate your efforts and the publication very much. I'm sending a small contribution toward *Banner of Truth* – **Barbara Lowe, OH**. (*We sincerely appreciate every contribution, regardless of the amount. Our helpers encourage us. – Editor*).

Walter and Naomi, I hope you will have a good Christmas and a new year 2009. I am still reading the paper that you put out every month. When I get finished with the papers I pass them on. I'm going to put a check in here for the mailings and postage. Use it in any way you see fit – **Nannie Philpot, TN**. (*Thanks for passing BOT on to others to read. Your help is appreciated – Editor*).

Thank you for taking care of this so quickly. Tell brother Hale hello for me and wife Dana. Also David Lemmons and family. I attended where both men preached in Savannah, Tennessee. I loved them very much. They are fine christians. *Banner of Truth* is an outstanding paper, that I hope can continue for a long time. I believe I have influenced a lot of people to start reading it. Thank all of you who work on this and supply it to so many. It is an honor to support this outstanding paper. I only wish I could send more – **Barbara Kist, TN**. (*Thanks for your encouraging*

words and your help. Thanks for the names you sent to be added to our mailing list. We are always glad to add the names of those who find the Banner of Truth worthwhile – Editor).

I recently begin receiving *Banner of Truth*. Thank you so much. I am thankful to receive a publication that speaks the truth. However, I am receiving two copies. Please stop one. Thank you. I am enclosing a check for your use – **Harvey Petty**. (*Thanks for letting us know and also for the check to help with our expenses – Editor*).

I considered myself fortunate to be invited to a ladies day at one of our local churches of Christ in California. What a wonderful day of devotion and praise to our Lord While there, I discovered a newsletter called, *Seek the Old Paths*. What a blessing to find your article about effective preaching. I appreciate your candor in speaking on matters relating to the body of the church. What we hear from the pulpit today is not always the word of God. It is comfortable feel good preaching, made to make allowances for desires of this world. I appreciate your boldness in speaking out on this subject. At the bottom of the article, a notation was made that you are the editor of a publication called *Banner of Truth*. It stated it was a publication well worth reading and I'm writing to be put on your mailing list for future issues. I look forward with excitement in receiving my first issue. Please find enclosed a check to help cover the cost of mailing and help further the cause to bringing souls to Christ. Thanks for your consideration in this matter. – **Carole Smiley, CA**. (*We are thankful that our brother Garland Robinson carried the article in his paper. He has an excellent paper, which many should read. Thank you for the check to help with our expenses. If you know of others who would like to receive Banner of Truth, we would be happy to add them to our mailing list. We would like to have more readers in CA. – Editor*).

We would like a copy of the tapes of the Lectures of June 23-26, 2008. We continue to enjoy *Banner of Truth*. Thank you very much – **Bill & Joy Gower**.

I read your article on Islam and agree with you. Would you please send me your paper monthly. May God bless you – **Kathleen Dodd, AL**. (*You will be added to our mailing list. – Editor*). †

We really appreciate receiving Banner of Truth. Please find enclosed my check as a small token of my appreciation for receiving for receiving it. Should you have any left over copies of two issues (copies of heading attached) we would appreciate just a few copies – **Jack Malone, TN.** (*We usually have some copies left over, and are happy to send them to anyone desiring them. – Editor*).

Hope this finds you and sis. Pigg doing well. When reading B.O.T. I noticed you needed some help for the lectureship. I really want to see it continue, so I am sending a donation for that (or wherever needed)... I have decided I hear more gospel preached in that four days, than all year in this county. Sad, Sad, Sad. But Paul still said woe unto me if I preach not the gospel – **Gary Price, KY.** (*Your help is greatly appreciated. The true Gospel is more needed than ever. – Editor*).

It's been quite a while since I wrote you expressing my appreciation and the church there for all the good work you are doing. I do hope your health is better and that your good wife is well. A friend called to tell us of the death of his wife... He told me that there was a shortage of preachers in the area where he lives. He told me about your paper and brother Adams & the preaching school. He seemed very interested, so would you put him on the mailing list and send him any back issues you may have. Has the church set up any financial assistance for you? I would like to be a part of it if so. Enclosed is a check to be used however you see fit. We are very proud of the work you are doing and pray God's blessings on you and yours and further spread of the gospel though your efforts – **Lucile Krantz, TN.** (*Thanks for writing. It is very unusual for a preacher to have any retirement set up by the church. We receive some help for the work we do with Banner of Truth, but no other help by our brethren. We trust the Lord will provide. – Editor*).

I have enjoyed receiving your magazine and I thank all who have a part in it. I am the eldest daughter of E. R. Harper, and was sent the magazine by my sister, Mrs. Ann Yource of Nashville. Thank all of you again – **Mary Nell Gilland.** (*I knew bro. Harper for many years, and he was a great example of what a christian should be. He was not shown the respect he deserved by some. He stood solidly for the Truth without any compromise. – Editor*).

Hi brother Walter and sis. Naomi. I have you always in my thought and really ever consider you a part of all the pursuits for the glory of God in ministry. Your soundness and boldness in the faith enhanced my love and appreciation to the simplicity and rationality of the word of God. We are fine with our ministry here in Mindanao with the continued assistance by generous brethren through bro. Ted. Of course, Banner of Truth has been a help to us also updating ourselves of the danger the church is facing these days. Again, you are always considered as a part of all the efforts we been doing in the ministry. May the Lord grant you more health and wisdom always you strive to serve Him the best you can at your age – **Jozel Aguilar, Philippines.** (*It is so good to hear from you. I have fond memories of you and your wife. I wish I could seed all your family now, but don't guess I'll make that trip any more. My health is quite well, but Naomi has had real problems with a sciatic nerve. She will have surgery December 30. We pray that it will improve her condition – Editor*).

Belated Holiday Greetings

[NOTE: Our recent "sponsor change" has delayed the mailing of the Nov.-Dec. BOT; thus, you are receiving our holiday greeting after the fact.]

Not even the hustle and bustle of the holidays could crowd from our hearts thoughts of our readers and supporters.

We hope you had a safe and enjoyable holiday season. It is a blessing to be able to be with our families and friends during this time of year. We pray that the New Year of 2009 will be a good one, and that the Lord will richly bless each of us as we strive to do His will.

With christian Love,

Walter and Naomi

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Sunday Schedule:
Bible Classes 10:00 a.m.
Worship Assemblies 11:00 a.m. 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Schedule:
Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

—NOTICE—

Banner of Truth Has A New Sponsor

We have been blessed to publish the Banner of Truth for many years; for fourteen of those years, the Hickory Grove church has been the indispensable sponsor and a supporter in both facilities and finances. Equally indispensable have been brethren from the Hickory Grove and Dexter churches who have assisted in getting each issue of the paper ready to mail. For eight years during the same period, we have had the Banner of Truth Lectures which the Hickory Grove church, as well as Dexter, has financially supported.

Life brings change; and, with this issue, the BOT has a new sponsor, the Powell Grove church in Lebanon, TN. Brother Lloyd Gale, known to BOT readers, is the preacher for Powell Grove, and will also server as an assistant editor.

God willing we plan to continue the Banner of Truth as long as I am physically and mentally able to do so. We ask for the prayers of our readers and the financial help which is necessary to continue this work. The great amount of positive response we receive from our readers tells us we may look forward to a few more years of continued work. —Editor

PLEASE NOTE: Banner of Truth mail should now be addressed: P.O. Box 100, Almo, KY 42020; or, sent to my personal address which has not changed: Box 164 Coles Campground Rd. Murray, KY 42071.

FOR YOUR ADDRESS BOOK

EDITOR'S EMAIL: <walternaomi@bellsouth.net>
ELECTRONIC BOT: *Via David Lemmons' website:*
<BOT.LemmonsAid.net>