

OUR GOAL: VICTORY IN JESUS

By Cecil Burch

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world - our faith.” (1 John 5:3-4.)

On May 13, 1940, Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of England, made his first speech to the House of Commons. Faced with the second World War, people were wondering where he stood. He made it clear when he said, “You ask: ‘What is our aim?’ I can answer in one word: ‘Victory!’ Victory at all costs, victory in spite of terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is not survival.”

Every Christian is in a very serious battle with sin and in that battle it must be “victory at all costs!” Everyone who loses this battle will hear the words, “Depart from Me all you workers of iniquity. There will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth . . .” (Luke 13:27,28.)

The Apostle Paul said it like this, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:56-58.)

Our young people have difficult choices to make; whether to follow the world with all its glitter and enticing, questionable entertainment with promises of fun and worldly approval, or enter the battle against sin. When Timothy was a young man the Apostle Paul wrote to him saying, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6:12.)

Jesus told the troubled church at Laodicea, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne,

as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21.) The Apostle John, writing to a group of persecuted Christians in Asia, comforted them by giving them a message from the Lord saying, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10.) Our victory comes with a crown given to us by our Lord Himself!

Even more important than victory in World Wars is our victory over sin and the world! Our goal is VICTORY IN JESUS!

— Amarillo, TX

Human Suffering And God's Wrath

By Joe Slater

Atheists claim that human suffering proves there is no God. On the other extreme, some who believe in God assert that human suffering is always the result of God's wrath upon the one who is suffering. Truth, as we might expect, lies between the extremes.

Before sin occurred in Eden, there was no sickness, no pain, no hurricanes, no fires, no death. Beyond dispute, God allows such things to be commonplace now because of sin. That is not to say, however, that every episode of suffering is due to divine wrath against the sufferer!

Much of the misunderstanding stems from the false doctrine of inherited sin. I have engaged in discussions with people who believed little babies are born guilty of Adam's sin, and therefore God afflicts them with terrible diseases! But God Himself

told Ezekiel that “the son shall not bear the guilt of the father.” (18:20.) God's own law given to Israel through Moses forbade punishing children for the crimes of parents. (Deuteronomy 24:16.)

Job's friends foolishly assumed his suffering was God's way of punishing him for his sins. The Twelve likewise presumed that a man's blindness from birth might be due to his parents' sin. (John 9:2.) The Lord corrected all of them.

Everyone has known of cases where the innocent suffer due to the sins of the guilty. Drunk drivers kill the innocent and walk away unscathed. Drug-addicted parents spend money on drugs while innocent children go without food and clothes.

Yes, suffering characterizes the world because of sin. But that does not

mean every case of suffering is due to God's wrath against the sufferer.

— Justin, TX

“My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this. Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows. God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all things he made.” (James 1:16-18.)

Old Paths

Vol. 44, No. 1 January 2020

“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

A VERSE WORTH REMEMBERING!

By Mark Lindley

The longest chapter of the Bible is a chapter about the Bible. Psalm 119 contains 176 verses and is the longest chapter of the Bible. The entire chapter, all 176 verses, is designed to show the value and greatness of God's Word.

This chapter has some unique features. It contains 22 sections, and each section is composed of 8 verses. In each of the 22 sections, the 8 verses of that section begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet; therefore, there are 22 sections in this chapter.

This chapter contains many great verses, one of which is verse 11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” This is truly a great and powerful verse. Consider why it is so great:

1. It highlights the greatest thing in the world - God's Word. The verse says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart . . .” There is nothing in the world greater than God's Word. Without the Word, we could not know God's will for our lives, and we cannot go to heaven without doing the will of the Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21.) Therefore, seeing the beauty of heaven one sweet, eternal day would be impossible without God's Word.

2. It reveals the greatest place for God's Word - the heart. The word hid literally means “to lay up.” God's Word, the Bible, cannot do us good if it is simply laid up in our houses, our cars, the church building, or some other place. The Word must be studied (2 Timothy 2:15) and stored up in our hearts that it might influence our minds and our daily conduct.

3. It promises the greatest results - not sinning against God. God's Word imparts spiritual strength that will enable us to resist the temptations of the devil. When Jesus was tempted of the devil, the Lord responded with the words: “It is written.” (Matthew 4:4,7,10.) Jesus relied on God's powerful Word, and that Word caused Satan to flee. (Matthew 4:11.) When we today are equipped with the powerful sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and we apply it when tempted, Satan cannot bring us down.

In view of these facts, I'm sure we would all agree that Psalm 119:11 is truly a great verse!

— Ripley, MS

YOUR BEST YEAR YET!

By Dalton Key

The new year of 2020 has begun. This one will be a bit longer than the last few, consisting of 12 months, 52 weeks, and 366 days, due to this being a leap year. If you complained last year about not having enough time, just remember the extra day you'll have this year.

The time elapsing from this year's dawn to next year's will amount to approximately 1/80th of the average lifetime. For those in their twilight years, a period of 12 months seems to pass rapidly and bears significant weight, while the same time for younger souls seems to drag along with little thought being given to the matter.

Much can happen in a year's time. Some lives can be forever soiled because of bad decisions, while others may be strengthened and built up over the course of the same year while under the influence of God's word.

You may remember the Psalmist encouraging meditation on the law of the Lord “day and night,” and years later the Bereans being commended for having “searched the Scriptures daily.” (Psalms 1:2; Acts 17:11.) Notice the commonality: 1) Study, meditation, searching are mentioned, along with 2) a daily dose of the same, and in both cases, 3) the object of this daily devotion is the word of God.

As we look forward with faith into the unwritten pages of the year before us, may we resolve to spend regular, daily time with the Bible, the Book of all Books. And further, may we resolve to live our lives doing what we learn. Better decisions come from better instruction. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing himself in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-25.)

With the Lord's help and the Bible's direction this year can be your best yet!

(EDITORIAL NOTE: My father, the author of the article below, passed from this life a little over a year ago at the age of 89. He left behind a rich and extensive body of written work, examples of which I will continue to share with you through upcoming issues of this paper. Like Abel of old, he “is still speaking,” and for that we are both graced and grateful.)

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY!

By Bobby Key

A school superintendent needed a bus driver, so three men applied for the job. In order to help determine which to hire the superintendent took the men out to a place on the route where the road ran alongside a steep drop-off.

“How close to this drop-off do you think you can safely drive the bus?” he asked his applicants. One man said he thought he could safely drive within two feet of the edge. Another said he thought he could safely drive within one foot of the place.

The third applicant answered, “Sir, I would stay as far away from the edge as I possibly could!”

He got the job.

There are some folks who apparently try to see how close to sin they can get without sinning, but such thinking is not based upon the teaching of the Bible! Paul admonished the Thessalonians to “stay away from everything that is evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:22.) That’s another way of saying, “Stay as far from sin as you can.”

If a person is in doubt about whether or not to engage in some activity, if he cannot participate with the full assurance that it is right, he should leave it off. To the Romans Paul wrote, “Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin.” (Romans 14:23.)

There are so many things a person can do that are right and good that there is really no need to get over into the area of the questionable. Don’t see how close, but how far away from sin you can stay.

Remember, it is always better to be safe than sorry!

“When people are tempted, they should not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ Evil can’t tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death.” (James 1:13-15.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

“I’M THE MAIN ONE!”

By Dalton Key

One need not look far these days to recognize humility as an attribute clearly out of fashion. Considered by many as more vice than virtue, more liability than asset, the humble heart seems to be sadly fading into extinction. The poor in spirit are getting harder and harder to find.

While this may be expected from a world in the throes of a love affair with itself, such self-centeredness should never characterize the Lord’s people.

Several years ago I heard a disgruntled elder complain, “No one ever listens to me . . . I never get my way . . . and I’m the main one down there at church!!” Here was a child of God full of himself but woefully empty of the spirit of Christ.

Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve.” (Matthew 20:28.) He displayed no pride, no arrogance, no self-aggrandizement. The Lord of heaven and earth was instead known to be “meek and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11:29.) Though fully and bodily the very Son of God, he preferred referring to himself as the son of man. His desire concerned the Father’s will and not his own.

Those of us who lead within the Lord’s church or take a public role in the church’s work or worship should take care, doing our best as we do our best, that our motives are pure. We are not superstars deserving of adoration; we are unworthy servants hungering and thirsting for Christ’s righteousness. When we lead and work to be seen, appreciated or applauded by others, we may have our reward, just as the Pharisees had theirs, but it won’t be coming from heaven and from the Lord we claim to serve.

Friend, if your motivation for service in the Lord’s body centers on being noticed, appreciated, or constantly “patted on the back,” your pride is showing! Remember the song, “All of Self and None of Thee?” You may need to remind yourself that it has more than just one verse.

Can you imagine Jesus pouting because his name was accidentally left out of the bulletin? Can you picture him whining because the Sunday morning announcements failed to recognize his efforts?

The Bible’s words concerning pride and humility are neither infrequent nor are they written in vain. “Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility.” (Proverbs 18:12.) Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18.) “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14.) “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3.)

If we must boast, let us boast as did Paul, who declared, “God forbid I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14.)



GIVING PLACE TO THE DEVIL BY OUR WORDS

By Danny Tunnell

Jesus said, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36,37.) Instead of “idle words” it could read “empty words” “careless words,” or “unprofitable words.”

The power of discouraging words may spark dismay or depression. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21.) The power of encouraging words gives hope and joy.

Idle words are a big deal to God. They are vicious tools that Satan uses.

Many people say whatever they feel, whatever thought comes into their minds without any consideration as to how it effects the hearers. Our words carry weight, and with them we can do

good, or we can do a lot of damage.

Jesus said, “Whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ Shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matthew 5:22.)

The word “Raca” means “empty one/ worthless one.” And the word “fool” can be defined as “morally worthless.” In both cases, Jesus is clearly saying that when we speak words meant to demean and belittle, we put ourselves in grave danger.

If we demean and belittle those Jesus gave His life for, it only brings into question the quality of our character and jeopardizes our own salvation.

Paul said that we are not to give place to the devil. We are to let no corrupt communication proceed from our mouths. Rather we are to edify or

build up others. We are to put away evil speaking and all malice. We are to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving. (Ephesians 4:27, 29-32.)

God is love, and love is kind. We are to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15.)

The words we speak can be filled with life, or they can be filled with death. They can be filled with peace, or they can be filled with fear. They can be filled with kindness or they can be filled with hate.

Don’t allow idle words to come out of your mouth. Don’t give place to the devil.

— Miami, OK

OF MEEKNESS AND BOLDNESS

By Milton Smith

We often emphasize the need to display love and gentleness anytime we are attempting to teach another soul. Peter writes in his first epistle, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:15.) Here Peter strongly emphasizes the need to teach with “meekness.” This word carries the idea of gentleness and kindness. Paul writes of “speaking the truth in love” in Ephesians 4:15.

But there are other times when a teacher might need to display a degree of boldness; perhaps even a spirit of rebuke. We clearly recall that Paul rebuked Peter on one occasion. (Galatians 2:11-14.)

Our best examples of the occasional need for strong rebuke comes from none other than the “Prince of Peace” Himself. Jesus often displayed the nature of one of his titles: “the Lion of Judah.” One of these occasions was when Jesus drove the money-changers out of the

temple area when he recognized their sinful racketeering. Jesus became so angry on this occasion he fashioned a whip, poured out the changer’s corrupt money, and overturned their tables. (John 2:13-17.) Many will also recall that Matthew’s 23rd chapter contains some of the strongest rebukes ever uttered by Jesus, and his rage was directed towards the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus labeled as “hypocrites.”

While we generally do not like to display anything but gentleness when we teach others, we must recognize the fact that boldness often has a proper place in teaching.

Blatant false teachers should never be pampered. Paul wrote some of his sternest rebukes towards false and dangerous teachers. Let us not forget that it is often necessary for a parent to be very stern towards a child whom they dearly love. When we attempt to teach others, boldness can certainly have its proper place. We should never be timid in presenting the truth, and often teaching the truth involves

exposing error. If Jesus occasionally became “the Lion of Judah,” we know that we need to sometimes show this same type courage and fortitude. But the child of God should always do so with genuine love for human souls.

— Tulsa, OK

Old Paths

829 S. Rockford Ave.,
Tulsa, OK. 74120

On a nonprofit basis.
Published monthly and
supported by Churches of Christ
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor
“Subscription Free;
Prayers Requested;
Contributions Appreciated.”