

Recommended reading: Encouraging Statements Of The Bible

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Last year the Bellview Church of Christ had as their lectureship theme *Sad Statements of the Bible*. The opposite perspective was presented this year. Just the idea and the list of verses under each heading is probably worth the cost of \$24 (\$12 for each volume, which provides a total of 763 pages of reading material \$2.10 shipping for each book).

Before examining this year's book, it would be appropriate to mention a few features of its predecessor, which began with "What Makes A Verse 'Sad?'" and "What is Truth?" and concluded with "Sad Verses Not in the Bible." In between were discussed the following topics and passages:

Genesis 3—Broken Fellowship
Genesis 6:5—"Only Evil Continually"
Deuteronomy 34:4—The Promised Land Denied
Judges 2:10—They Knew Not Jehovah
Judges 5:23—"Curse Ye Meroz"
Judges 17:6—Doing Right in One's Own Eyes
1 Samuel 4:21-22—"Ichabod"
2 Samuel 18:33; 19:4—David's Grief Over Absalom
1 Kings 14:16—He Made Israel To Sin
2 Chronicles 21:20—"Departing, To No One's Regret"
Psalm 41:9—"Mine Own Familiar Friend"
Psalm 119:136—Crying "Rivers of Waters"
Jeremiah 5:31—False Prophets and Their Popularity
Jeremiah 6:15—"Neither Could They Blush"
Jeremiah 6:16—"We Will Not Walk Therein"
Lamentations 1:12—"Is It Nothing?"
Ezekiel 34:2—Elders Feeding Themselves
Daniel 5:25-27—"Weighed...and Found Wanting"
Matthew 23:37—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem"
Matthew 25:41—"Depart From Me"
Matthew 26:74—"I Know Not the Man"
Matthew 27:46—"Why Have You Forsaken Me?"
John 9:31—"God Heareth Not Sinners"
1 Corinthians 5:2—Unconcerned With Sin
Galatians 1:6-9—"So Soon Removed"
2 Timothy 4:2-3—Not Enduring Sound Doctrine
2 Timothy 4:10—"Demas Hath Forsaken Me"
Revelation 3:1—A Name for Living, But Dead

Just a casual glance at these shows that the history of mankind has caused great affliction to the righteous and to the God who created mankind. But the Scriptures offer many encouraging statements for those still lost in sin but having the desire to depart from it, as well as for Christians who need strength to walk in the light and to overcome temptation. The fact is that we are virtually bombarded with immoral speech, immoral dress, and immoral behavior on a daily basis. Living in the world these days involves a struggle to avoid being influenced by it. Likewise, the church in the past fifty years has been fractured both by doctrines that allow for immorality and some that are just plain erroneous. Once-faithful brethren have given themselves over to teachings that imply things that they would never overtly advocate. One can only imagine what the next hobby horse will be that a respected brother will climb onto and ride so fast and so far that he quickly passes beyond the boundaries of fellowship. How many tears have been shed, how many hearts have been broken by these problems! We need this book on encouragement. The first chapter demonstrates the need for encouragement by first noting some of the causes of discouragement. Then definitions of encouragement are presented in various word studies. Finally, applications are set forth. This introduction provides a sound basis for the consideration of the passages that follow.

Genesis 1:26-27 leads off with a discussion of what it means to be made “in the image of God.” We are living in a generation that in many instances would be just as happy to be made in the image of Darwin, Huxley, Ingersoll, O’Hair, and others who (if they could communicate with us) would tell us not to listen to them. It is time to restore the dignity and worth of man, to recapture what it means to be made in His image.

“Successful Families” is based on Genesis 18:19—God’s knowledge of Abraham’s success as a father. The chapter is divided into three sections: “The Difficulties of Fatherhood,” “The Duties of Fatherhood,” and “The Delights of Fatherhood.” The first of these includes sections on youth crime, drugs, sexual permissiveness, suicide, and falling away. Suggestions on the means of preventing these things follow.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15) has been a source of encouragement for generations, and the writer emphasizes the importance of leadership. Next is 1 Samuel 5:1-4, “God’s Superiority.” This passage deals with the god Dagon falling forward toward the ark of the covenant, as if acknowledging the one True God. The analysis of this passage is well worth reading.

How often, when discussing the subject of providence, have we been reminded of Esther 4:14? This is always an encouraging subject for Christians. Psalm 19 deals with the fact of God’s existence. We know that He is by virtue of the creation itself (1-6) and by means of the Divine revelation He has given us. This Psalm praises God for both what we learn through nature and from His Word; the exposition is thorough and uplifting.

Psalm 23 has inspired and comforted the faithful for centuries. This chapter first focuses on Jesus as the good shepherd. An interesting question posed and answered is: “What makes the good shepherd good?” The next chapter scrutinizes only one verse which teaches us of the wonderful benevolence of God. Psalm 68:19: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.” The joy of worship is examined in “I was glad

when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of Jehovah” (Psa. 122:1). It is a shame that some have lost their enthusiasm for worship. So often various church bulletins run articles exhorting, cajoling, and shaming members into attending worship as they should. Attendance is not the primary problem; it is symptomatic of a lack of love for God and a dearth of appreciation for the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. If there is no joy in worship, the reason does not lie in poor song leading skills or in un-entertaining sermons; the problem is that the worshiper had no enthusiasm to begin with. Instead of being glad when it is time to meet with brethren (who are the house of the Lord), some are not even in the tepid range of happiness. One’s attitude makes all the difference.

The chapter on sowing in tears and reaping in joy (Psa. 126:5) covers the background of the captivity and also contains several practical lessons. Proverbs 3:6 is another verse that suggests God’s providential care. Sub-topics are “How Does God Guide?” and “God’s Guidance Is Conditional.” Isaiah 55:11 (“God’s Word Shall Not Return Void”) is another verse that is analyzed.

Moving to the New Testament, the book first considers Matthew 1:21, “He Shall Save His People from Their Sins.” Next is an exegesis of what it means to “inherit the kingdom” (Mat. 25:34), followed by perhaps the most significant and inspiring words ever uttered: “He Is Not Here: for He Is Risen” (Mat. 28:6). Subheadings include “The Danger of Denying the Resurrection of Christ,” “Universally Recognized Facts,” and “The Four Essential Facts.” The material presented here is crucial to Christianity and to one’s salvation.

Mark 16:7 contains the Lord’s “Reassuring Message to Peter.” A thorough history of the apostle is presented. Nearly everyone knows John 3:16; the writer presents a marvelous exposition of this great promise. “Be of Good Cheer; I Have Overcome the World” (John 16:33) is another encouraging statement that Jesus made to His apostles, and we too can take heart in knowing that we can overcome through Him.

How often have we heard sermons dealing with Romans 8:31-39 or heard it quoted as part of a lesson that nothing can separate us from the love of God? It would be difficult to find more inspiring verses, and this chapter includes a thorough logical analysis of this precious passage. “Things That Are Not Seen Are Eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-5:1), Paul affirmed. This material emphasizes the results of keeping our attention fixed on unseen realities.

From 2 Corinthians 5:17 arises “All Things Become New,” which demonstrates God’s wondrous ability to cleanse and make fresh. Not too unrelated is the fact that God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). To these encouraging thoughts is added another—the fact that God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). Particularly instructive is the section subtitled “God’s Power in Us.” Other information includes some of the names and attributes of God. There are five chapters that treat verses from the book of Philippians. The first of these is by Ira Rice, and its title just happens to coincide with that of his autobiography: *Pressing Toward the Mark*, (the first two volumes of which are now available). In this book he examines Philippians 3:7-14. The next chapter is from Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice,” followed by Philippians 4:7, which examines the peace that passes understanding.

The fourth text from Philippians is “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (4:13), which is studied in five sections. Some things that brethren could do collectively are suggested (309-11), although there is a misprint on page 310, which mentions a publication that should read *The Gospel Journal*. “God shall supply all your need” (Phi. 4:19) closes out these inspiring texts from this great book of the Bible. The final four chapters review the Christian’s reward (2 Tim. 4:6-8), the great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), God’s promise never to leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5), and the apostolic invitation to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7).

Phantom Verses

There was no chapter in this year’s book entitled “Encouraging Verses That Are Not in the Bible,” but some come to mind. There is no verse, for example, that says, “All anyone needs to do to be saved is just believe,” although many people seem to think it is in there (some erroneously think that John 3:16 proclaims this message). The rest of this theology reads thus: “You do not need to repent of your sins, and you do not need to be baptized for their forgiveness. You do not need to attend even one public worship assembly. You do not need to engage in any good works. You do not need to lead a single soul to heaven. You do not need to be particularly moral. You do not even need to think about God or Jesus very often. As long as you have at some time confessed that Jesus is Lord, that is all that is necessary for salvation.”

Certainly this passage would be encouraging because it requires no commitment and binds no restrictions. This philosophy does not demand studying the Word or living the Christian life. This is just the kind of religion many people are looking for. What an inspirational thought! The only reason it has not found its way into Holy Writ is that it is not true.

A second nonexistent verse is: “Whatsoever thou thinkest is right is right.” Many feel, “These declarations about objective truth are annoying.” This non-Scripture grants people the freedom of making up their own religion, which pleases most folks. Such a precept allows individuals to feel religious when they wish and to express it in whatever way they desire—or not. Most honest souls will say that it is incredibly bothersome to have to discern the difference between truth and error anyway. What an enlightening and uplifting approach!

A third thought is: “Doctrine does not matter.” Who needs theologians spending endless hours thinking and studying, looking up words, checking commentaries, and then at last only offering up an educated guess anyway as to what certain difficult passages mean? Such men are frequently way too dull. With this philosophy they could desert their libraries and devote themselves more to the pursuit of happiness.

A fourth precept comes to us by way of the Beatles: “All you need is love.” Now problems may arise when someone calls for a definition of the word. Love is a much better concept when left to the imagination. Anyway, love evokes all manner of emotions which would be totally ruined if submitted to logical scrutiny. What does it matter if no one knows what is meant by the term?

Finally, there is the soothing (though absent) verse that proclaims: “Everyone is going to heaven, no matter what he (or she) has done; no one is going to hell.” Why, this precept gives us all a reason to celebrate! What a fantastic guarantee! This message, if true, would eliminate the need for much worry and stress, which are needless if there is no punishment. Guilt would become an obsolete remnant of an ignorant past. Even the conscience would become essentially useless and archaic. None of these encouraging verses, however, does exist in the biblical text, a fact which dissuades few from believing them anyway. God has, in fact, created us as free moral agents who are going to be held responsible for what we believe and practice. God does love us and is not willing that any should perish. Sin makes life difficult and uncertain, but the Word of God does encourage us along the way.

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