

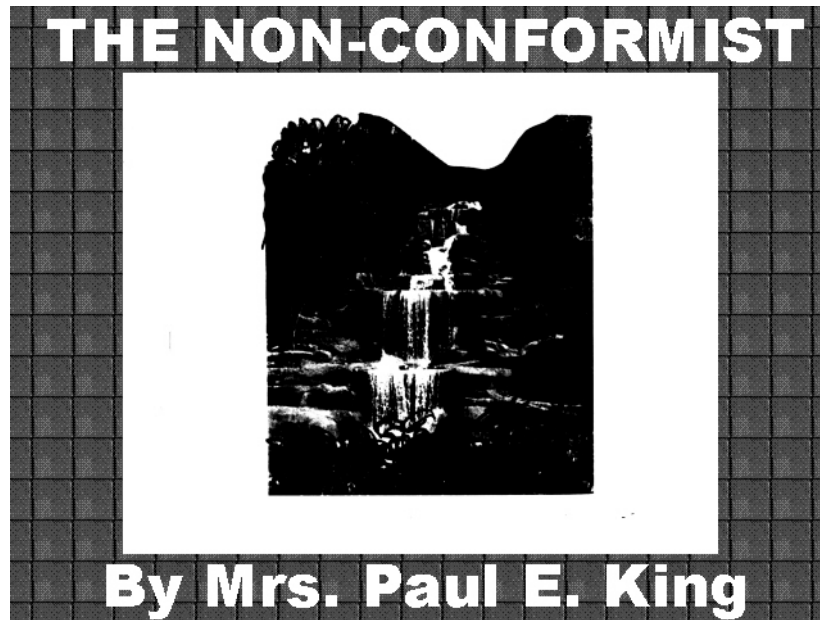
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001  
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon  
August 30, 1998



**THE NON-CONFORMIST**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

I sat spellbound and in awe as I listened to the cascading, tumbling water spilling over the rocks at Buttermilk Falls. Nothing was more soothing and calming than a hike to the woods and the falls. Always, I sat on the same enormous blue-gray rock at the bottom of the falls and a bit off to one side, where I could watch the fast-flowing water as it spilled over the rocks at the highest point of the falls then churned and tumbled downward, spilling its

milky-white foam into the beautiful stream in which the rock upon which I was sitting stood like a giant monolith; a solidly planted sentinel-guard over the waterway.

I felt the spray of the water on my face. It was refreshingly cool. Leaning backwards against the blue-gray monolith, I let the water spray my neck and hands. With the temperature near the 90 degree mark, I knew I had made a wise choice in coming to the falls.

I closed my eyes and let the spray cool me off, relishing every single moment and counting my blessings in having a quiet haven like Buttermilk Falls and the woods so near at hand. I felt deeply blessed of God for such a wealth of beauty by which I was surrounded. Reverently but silently, I thanked Him for it all. And then my thoughts wandered to Bob.

Ordinarily, Bob and I came to the falls together. I mean, we used to. But things didn't seem to be like they once were between Bob and me. I couldn't quite figure out what was happening. Bob was the son of our closest neighbors, the Schadels. Great neighbors, Tom and Carie Schadel and Tom Jr., Bob, Jeanette and Mary Lou. Between all of us Heims working on the Schadels and praying for them, they started coming to church and were soundly converted and, later on, most of them were sanctified wholly.

Bob and I became really good friends and, until less than a month ago, I had no idea that he felt like he did about me. We were discussing the new, far-out trend in music and singing at one of our youth meetings. I took a stand for the God-anointed old hymns, stating that they were Holy Ghost inspired and drew souls toward God and His holiness and righteousness, adding that the new songs and music sounded like the rock music in which the world was steeped and immersed and that God's Holy Army had no place for such.

I was shocked when Bob got to his feet and said that I was a "died in the wool non-conformist" and that it was useless for anyone to try to change me. He declared I was biased and prejudiced and that was that!

It was, and is, a true statement, I admit, where Christian principles and Biblical standards are involved. This I say and admit with no apologies whatever. God wants courageous young people in His army; those who will take a stand for Him and His precepts of righteousness and truth. He has no

place for a coward nor a fence straddler. His soldiers stand for uprightness; nor do they hide their beliefs.

The thing that shocked me most, however, was simply that, by my friend's statements about me being a non-conformist, he was revealing the fact that he was a conformist. The silent, unverbilized message came through loudly and clearly, both in his tone of voice and the title he affixed on to me. I thanked God that in my heart, I knew it was true; where His "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" were concerned and involved specifically and especially.

I tried to talk to Bob after the meeting that night, to ask him how he thought the Lord felt about what was happening and taking place in the churches in our day, but he brushed me aside, saying I took things too seriously for as young as I was and that I needed to make some changes about my "outdated beliefs," his words again.

I saw him at church occasionally. He didn't come as regularly as he used to. I told him we all missed him and that we were counting on him going to Heaven. He slapped me on the shoulder and smiled. His visits to our house became less and less and my visits to his house were futile -- he was never home. The Schadels urged us to pray for him.

"I don't know what's happening to him," Mrs. Schadel told me one day. "He's gone so much of the time and we have no idea where he goes nor what he's doing. He refuses to tell us. He works his part time job then doesn't come home until his eleven o'clock curfew time. Pray for him. Please:" she pleaded tearfully.

And pray we did. And were. It was great, one Sunday, when he accepted Mother's invitation to come home with us for one of his favorite meals -- delicious fried chicken, as only my mother can fry it! -- mashed potatoes, milk gravy with all the goodness and flavor of the pan drippings through it, fruit salad, fresh corn on the cob, Saturday's fresh-baked bread, tossed salad, peas, and freshly-baked apple pie and peach cobbler.

It was like having the old, familiar Bob back again. He ate like he hadn't had a meal in days and he conversed as naturally as if he had never isolated himself from us. My faith soared. I think Mother's and Dad's did too. We all felt it was the beginning of a prodigal's return to the Shepherd's fold.

The Schadels were overjoyed that he had accepted the invitation -- and that he had spent the better part of the afternoon at our house too. But we were all disappointed when he declined our invitation to accompany us to the Young People's meeting and church, declaring that he had other plans for the evening. Still, we felt his coming had been a step in the right direction. He even mentioned about me going for a drive with him sometime, like we did occasionally when our work was all done and we'd have an hour or more free time. I stated that Buttermilk Falls was still as magnificent and beautiful as ever and that a walk over would do us both good. He laughed and said the falls didn't lure him the way they did me.

We parted on a note of friendly camaraderie and that was the last any of our family saw him. He again became the "recluse" -- from our house. But that didn't stop us from praying. Ah no! If anything, it intensified it.

I slid off my perch on the rock now and walked along the laughing, gurgling stream, praying silently for Bob and wondering if, deep in his heart, he ever longed to know and experience the peace of God again; if, maybe, sometimes during the night hours he didn't feel that yearning, longing desire to come back to Father's house and His arms. I didn't see how anyone could ever be happy outside of God's fold; how he could live without the Presence of the Divine Son of God in his heart. Without Christ, what was there to live for? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

I followed the stream for half a mile, then took off through the woods for the road home. Scarcely was I on the black top road when I saw a car coming toward me. I recognized it immediately: it was Bob's. He was speeding. Revving up the motor, he passed me. Then, just as quickly and with brakes squealing and screeching, he backed up and stopped beside me.

"Get in, Mark," he said, telling the fellows in the back seat to make room for me.

"Thanks, Bob," I replied, as one of the young men opened the door for me. I was ready to step in when I saw it -- two cases of beer.

"Thanks, but I pass," I announced as I stepped away and closed the door. Looking at Bob, I said kindly, "Please, Bob, don't do it. For your soul's sake, don't do it."

Laughing uproariously and holding up the beer, a fellow exclaimed, "He's not chicken. He's our kind of man. We don't care to be friends with a sissy." The car roared away, spitting gravel from the side of the road and the fellows jeering and laughing at me, Bob the loudest of all.

My knees felt weak and rubbery with the revelation. I could hardly believe it was true, yet my eyes had seen the evidence. Bob was traveling down the road to perdition and doom -- toward the lake of fire.

Long after the car had disappeared from sight, I stood staring in its direction, numb with shock and filled with a sudden fear for its occupants. How could Bob ever have taken up with such a crowd? I wondered. Where did they meet? Why did he make such a wrong and wicked decision?

Silently but forcefully the answer came: he did it because he wanted to. He didn't care about the facts nor what they proved. He wanted to conform. He didn't care about what he'd been told from his parents and the pastor. He was going to "find out for himself" and "enjoy the ride" while he was finding it out. He didn't care what was right or lawful and good. He was sure he wouldn't suffer any consequences and that he'd "beat the odds."

I nearly trembled now as some of the things came back to me which Bob had said one time in a group of our church young people, each of which gave me that silent but now -- remembered answer to my questioning heart as to the how and why of his spiritual condition. At the same time, the words from James 1:14-15 came to mind:

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

I walked homeward in tears, praying earnestly for Bob and his companions, none of which I knew. My heart felt like a ton of bricks was on it, so burdened was I. It was evident that Bob took lightly the scripture about the wages of sin being death, else how could he be doing the things he was doing and with no apparent compunction of conscience?

I was glad no one was home when I walked into the house. How could I have told Mother the sad facts, had she asked what was wrong with me? The truth would come out eventually, I knew -- it always does. But I was thankful that for the present, at least, I was spared saying anything to anybody.

I picked up the paint brush from the back porch and opened the can of paint, deciding to finish the trim work on the house, which Dad and I both were working on, when the phone startled me with its loud jangling. I hurried inside to answer its persistent ring.

"Hello? Hello?" a voice cried into the receiver and into my ear. "Please, can you come over right away?" It was Mrs. Schadel. She was beside herself, crying hysterically.

"This is Mark," I managed to say. "Mother's gone right now. The girls have their music lessons, and Dad's still at work." I knew she knew that Philip was away, preaching in a youth camp meeting.

"Come over, Mark. Please! I need someone here. Bob's dead!"

"Bob? No! It can't be. I . . . I . . ." But I couldn't tell her that I had seen him only an hour or so ago. I couldn't.

"Mark... are you there? Can you hear me? Bob's dead. Killed in an accident."

"Yes, I hear you, Mrs. Schadel. Shall I call your husband?"

"Will you, please? I've tried, but I can't seem to dial the right number. And please, Mark, come over as soon as you can. I'm alone -- until Tom can get here. Bob's dead, and so are three other young men who were in the car with him. Oh, it's awful! Pray, Mark. Please pray. . . ."

I reached Mr. Schadel in record time and gave him the message, then I hurried away toward our nearest neighbor's house, thinking how different things would have been had Bob not conformed to the world and its pleasures and mold, and, silently, I thanked God that He had given me the grace and courage and stamina to be a non-conformist.

I hastened my footsteps and just as I neared the house I saw our neighbor's car pull up into the driveway. Silently, Tom Schadel and I walked into the house together, weeping.