

GOSPEL GUIDE

UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?
HOW CAN I, EXCEPT SOME MAN SHOULD GUIDE ME? (ACTS 8:30,31)

In This Issue:

The Simplicity of the Great Commission • 1

“Ready for the End” • 3

Seeing God • 4

The Labor God Recommends • 5

Service Without Recognition • 6

Honorable Controversy • 6

What Can We Do? • 8



The Simplicity of the Great Commission

BEFORE JESUS ASCENDED into heaven He gave his disciples a great charge, in which he pointed out to them their duty, and the plan of salvation for sinners. Because of the importance of this commission, it has been recorded by three of the gospel writers.

Matthew shows the power, or authority, with which it was given. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Luke records the language of Christ, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46,47).

Mark also records the great commission, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15,16). Over this commission there has been much controversy, not because of the difficulty of the language, but because men have endeavored to justify doctrines which Christ did not teach.

Notice what Jesus did not say.

1. “He that believeth and is baptized shall not be saved, for there is no God”—*justifying the doctrine of atheism*. Nature, of course, shows that there is a Supreme, All-Powerful, All-Wise Being. “The heavens

After 33 years of publication in printed form, GOSPEL GUIDE now appears in electronic form. It is an eight page publication designed to teach basic principles of the gospel of Christ.

Mail Address:
305 Coffee Avenue NE
Russellville, AL 35653 US

e-mail Address:
Gospel-Guide@MyWay.com

web page:
www.gospel-guide.org

Editor: Billy Norris

GREAT COMMISSION

declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalms 19:1). The Bible, with all of its internal evidence, with its fulfilled prophecies and promises, with its perfect laws, and its tremendous influence for good, shows that there is an Almighty God. “The fool hath said in his heart, “There is no God.” (Psalms 14:1).

2. “All men shall be saved, and may believe and be baptized—”*justifying the doctrine of universal salvation*. If the Bible shows that even one soul shall be lost, this doctrine falls. Actually, the Bible shows that the greater number will be lost. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13/14). The doctrine of universal salvation is dangerous because it encourages loose, undisciplined living, and it discourages carrying out the great commission. If all people

are going to be saved, why go to the trouble of preaching the gospel to every creature?

3. “He that believeth shall be saved and may be baptized”—*justifying the doctrine of salvation by faith only*. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by faith, but specifically shows that it is not by faith only. “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). Faith and works (obedience) are inseparably connected. One’s faith is demonstrated by his obedience. When Moses struck the rock, instead of speaking to it as God commanded, God said to him and Aaron, “Because ye believed me not . . . ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12). Four men brought a paralytic to Christ. They could not reach Him because of the crowd They uncovered the roof, and let him down into the presence of Christ. The scripture says, “When Jesus saw their faith” (Mark 2:5). Their faith was demonstrated by their action. The idea that salvation by faith only is a very wholesome doctrine may be found in the creed books, but not in the word of God.

4. “He that is baptized in infancy and later believes shall be saved”—*justifying the doctrine of infant baptism*. Subjects for baptism are those who have been taught the gospel. “Teach all nations, baptizing them” (Matthew 28:19). Subjects for baptism are those, who, having been taught the gospel, believe and repent of their sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Infants have not the mental faculty for understanding and believing the gospel; nor do they have any sins for which to repent. Of the little ones

Jesus said, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19: 14). The doctrine of infant baptism may be found in the creed books of men, but not in the word of God.

Notice what Jesus did say.

1. “He that believeth.” God has given great evidence in his word that Christ is His Son, the Savior of man. Since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), when the gospel is preached, men accept and believe this unimpeachable evidence.

2. “And is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). This baptism is for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38.) It saves from sin and the terrible consequences of sin. In the blood of Christ we have redemption. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1: 7.) We appropriate his redeeming blood by being baptized into his death. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (Romans 6:3).

3. “But he that believeth not shall be damned.” This statement is conclusive evidence of the inseparable relationship of faith and obedience. One who believes shows his faith in his obedience to the gospel. In this faith he is saved. One who does not believe, consequently does not obey. In this disbelief and disobedience he is damned.

Jesus said, “But he that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18). Christ has made his commission, and the plan of salvation, clear and plain. It becomes controversial only when seen through the doctrines of men. — BN

“Ready For the End”

IN 1 PETER 4:7-11, the apostle told those to whom he wrote that the end of all things was at hand. He then told them what they should be doing in view of this. When a thing is “at hand” it is near. What was Peter talking about when he said that the end of all things was at hand? That he was not talking about the end of the world and the judgment being at hand is evident, for nearly two thousand years have passed since that time, and the end of time has not come. Peter likely was talking about the end of the Jewish economy and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which Peter and the apostles had asked about in Matthew 24:3. But whatever the end was, it was at hand, and certain things were of great importance in view of this. These things are still of great importance for us for, no matter what end Peter had in mind, for there is an end before us, too. Peter’s prescription for readiness is just as effective now as it was then. Let us consider this.

Be Sober

“Be ye therefore sober” is the first thing which Peter commanded (1 Peter 4:7). To be “sober” is to be of a sound mind. This is the mind which qualified elders in the Lord’s church are required to have (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). This is the mind which aged, godly men are to have (Titus 2:2). Aged men know that they are near the line of crossing, if for no reason other than their years. This is the mind which the transformed man has who has proven that which is good and acceptable (Romans 12:1-3). Being sober is the

opposite of being beside oneself (2 Corinthians 5:13). Then and now, whatever the end may be which is at hand, this instruction is timely, indeed.

Watch Unto Prayer

“And watch unto prayer,” is the next thing Peter enjoined (1 Peter 4:7). Newer translations say: “Be sober unto prayer.” One of sound mind recognizes the effectuality of prayer (James 5:16). One of sound mind prays, especially in view of the end. If Christians knew they had but a few days until the end,

of all things, they would remember to pray. Whatever the end may be, this preparation is most timely.

“Watch and pray for the Lord is coming,
Coming in the clouds some day.
Wash your robes in the cleansing fountain.
Watch, oh, watch and pray.”

Have Fervent Charity

The third thing of note is, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves” (1 Peter 4:8). Someone has said that charity (love) is the badge of true discipleship, for Jesus said: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34,35). True Christians love others, even their enemies (Matthew 5:43,44). However, the admonition here is directed to Christians and their love for each other. The reason for this is that love covers a multitude of sins. This is not saying that love removes sins. It takes the blood of Christ to take away sins (1 John 1:6-10). It is that when Christians love one another, they will forgive each other, and thus love covers a multitude of sins. One of the great problems of Christians now seems to be that they do not love each other very much. If we knew the end was at hand, would we not change our attitude toward each other?

Use Hospitality

“Use hospitality one to another without grudging,” is the next re-

SEEING GOD

In the Old Testament we are told that man cannot see God. God said to Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). It is also repeated in the New Testament. "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Yet there is a way God's faithful can see Him. Jesus said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). Jesus said to Philip, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'show us the Father'?" (John 14:9). Through Christ and the perfect life He lived on earth, we can see the perfect God. There is another way we see God. "He who does not love does not know God for God is love (1 John 4:8). When we know the love of God, we know and see God in all His glorious characteristics. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Abiding in love, we see Him who is love.

READY

quirement in view of the end that is at hand (1 Peter 4:9). Christians must be hospitable to all (Hebrews 13:2). However, in our text, the admonition is to practice hospitality among Christians. The Lord's people are supposed to look after the Lord's people (Galatians 6:10). In the end, people will not be able to keep that which is to be used in showing hospitality, anyway. Paul said: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:6,7). Furthermore, this is to be done without grudging, murmuring, or complaining. If we really believed that the end of all things was at hand, would we not practice hospitality? If we really believed that we had but a month to the end of time, would we be so concerned about our needs and not so concerned about the needs of our brethren?

Use What You Have

In 1 Peter 4:10,11 the apostle tells those to whom he wrote to use the gifts which they had, the charismatic gifts of the Spirit which are enumerated and described in 1 Corinthians 12. These came in a miraculous way. Every man who had these gifts was admonished to use them in view of the end being at hand. None today has these gifts. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). But all today have some abilities; some have great abilities. It is just as important for us to use what we have as it was for them to use what they had in view of the end. It would be

good for everyone of us to be living and serving as in view of the end being at hand, for it is at hand in one way or another. If the end of time is not yet near, the end of our lives is. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job. 14:1,2).

Have Fervent Charity

The third thing of note is, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves" (1 Peter 4:8). Someone has said that charity (love) is the badge of true discipleship, for Jesus said: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34,35). True Christians love others, even their enemies (Matthew 5:43,44). However, the admonition here is directed to Christians and their love for each other. The reason for this is that love covers a multitude of sins. This is not saying that love removes sins. It takes the blood of Christ to take away sins (1 John 1:6-10). It is that when Christians love one another, they will forgive each other, and thus love covers a multitude of sins. One of the great problems of Christians now seems to be that they do not love each other very much. If we knew the end was at hand, would we not change our attitude toward each other? Use Hospitality

"Use hospitality one to another without grudging," is the next requirement in view of the end that

READY

is at hand (1 Peter 4:9). Christians must be hospitable to all (Hebrews 13:2). However, in our text, the admonition is to practice hospitality among Christians. The Lord's people are supposed to look after the Lord's people (Galatians 6:10). In the end, people will not be able to keep that which is to be used in showing hospitality, anyway. Paul said: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:6,7). Furthermore, this is to be done without grudging, murmuring, or complaining. If we

really believed that the end of all things was at hand, would we not practice hospitality? If we really believed that we had but a month to the end of time, would we be so concerned about our needs and not so concerned about the needs of our brethren?

Use What You Have

In 1 Peter 4:10,11 the apostle tells those to whom he wrote to use the gifts which they had, the charismatic gifts of the Spirit which are enumerated and described in 1 Corinthians 12. These came in a miraculous way. Every man who had these gifts was admonished to use them in view of the end be-

ing at hand. None today has these gifts. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). But all today have some abilities; some have great abilities. It is just as important for us to use what we have as it was for them to use what they had in view of the end.

It would be good for everyone of us to be living and serving as in view of the end being at hand, for it is at hand in one way or another. If the end of time is not yet near, the end of our lives is. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job. 14:1,2).

— Curtis E. Flatt

The Labor God Recommends

"LET HIM THAT STOLE steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28). Labor is a universal trait of mankind. Wherever man is found upon the earth he engages in some kind of work to support himself and his family. However, there are exceptions to this rule. There are some men who are lazy and will not work. But regardless of what kind of work men engage in, or refrain from, the above verse contains three thoughts about labor that all need to consider.

1. *Dishonest labor is not acceptable with God.* Stealing belongs to those things Christians must "put off" when they "put on" the new man. There are many ways to steal, but the Christian must have no part in any of them. One may steal by robbing a bank, burglariz-

ing a home, or snatching a lady's purse. All would agree that this sort of "labor" is condemned by the Lord. But one may also steal by failing to give his employer an honest day's work for a day's pay. Or an employer may steal from his workers by not paying an honest day's

wage for a day's work. Our labor must be honest in its nature and it must be honestly performed. Otherwise it is sinful and wrong. "Let him that stole steal no more."

2. *Labor should always involve "the thing which is good."* A pickpocket works with his hands, but he does not work that which is good. The labor the Christian engages into to support his family must not only be morally and spiritually right, but it also must not hinder him in serving the Lord. Even an honest work honestly performed that hinders one's service to God must be regarded as not "working the thing which is good." It is not working that which is good because its result is that which is bad. Whatever working with his hands the thing which is good. "

3. *One purpose of honest labor is to help those in need.* The Bible nowhere

SERVICE WITHOUT RECOGNITION

“Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom **they** laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple” (Acts 3:1,2). Who were these people identified only as “they”? Though we are not told who they were, they rendered a service day by day to help this poor man who could not help himself.

They knew not that they were helping him receive far more than alms. The apostles Peter and John came that way that day. Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). In great joy the man walked, leaped, and praised God. The “they,” whoever they were, helped a life-long cripple be healed. In addition they gave Peter and John a great opportunity to tell the people how their sins could be blotted out (Acts 3). We may never know how far humbled service may reach!

LABOR

approves of men selfishly hoarding up the fruits of their labor. The rich are warned against so doing, but the principle applies also to men of ordinary means. The love of money is the wrong motive for labor, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Certainly one should work to provide for his household, but it is wrong to labor only for one’s household. Christians have a duty before God to share what they have gained by honest labor with those who are in need. The widow, the orphan, or whoever it may be, is subject to our help where the ability and opportunity are present. However, the Scriptures teach that we are under no obligation to help the able-bodied man who can but will

not work. In fact, it would be wrong to help such a man (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But we should keep in mind always the fact that our labor in part is to the end that we may give “to him that needeth.”

Any work that is honest within itself, that is motivated for the right purpose, and that does not hinder our service to God is right regardless of what kind of work it is. The man who honestly labors at some menial task is just as acceptable with God as the man who honestly applies himself at the head of some great corporation. It is not what one does nor how much he earns that counts with God, but it is how and why he labors and how he uses the fruits of his labor.

— Earl Kimbrough

Honorable Controversy

“WHAT FELLOWSHIP hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath the believer with the infidel?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15.)

Some Definitions

As long as the world shall stand there will be no rest for Satan. There will always be righteousness, darkness and unbelief. There will also always be at least a “remnant” who will refuse to “bow the knee to Baal.” These two conditions being present, there will always be controversy. The teaching of error, or falsehood, by one because of ignorance of, or lack of love for, the Truth demands that they who love Truth defend it (Philippians 1:17). Abuse, or mis-

use, of the Word motivates him who respects Truth to “earnestly contend” for it (Jude 3). Mr. Webster defines “contend” thusly: “To strive in opposition or rivalry; to compete. To maintain or assert; argue.” He defines “defend” as: “To repel danger or harm from; to protect; to maintain against force or argument.” As long as men do not come to complete agreement on either Truth or error, there will be controversy.

But, controversy is a rather odd instrument. In one’s efforts to defend

CONTROVERSY

the truth in controversy, he might either HELP or HINDER Truth, depending upon the type, or level, of such contention. Mr. Webster defines "controversy" in this manner: "A discussion of controverted matter, or controversial issue; dispute; sometimes quarrel; strife." When controversy takes on either of these last two characteristics Truth will suffer shame that is, when such is characteristic of the defender of Truth. But otherwise controversy is one of Truth's most powerful tools. This is HONORABLE controversy. It is customary in our time for men proposing to engage in controversy (a public discussion) to agree to be governed by "Hedge's Rules of Debate", which is well. However, we could state a proper agreement much more to the point if the disputants agree to be 'Christian' in deportment. This would insure "Honorable Controversy." It is this kind of controversy that the "Rule Book" for our every action and thought authorizes.

Christ, the Controversialist

Our Christ was the world's greatest controversialist! As those hypocritical Jews over and over tried to trap Him with questions, did He respond with, "You know we shouldn't argue over religious matters"? No; with the truth He exposed their false teachings and hypocrisy. He put those ministers of Satan to silence just as He did their father with "It is written." Now, if our Lord entered into debate with those who opposed Truth, can we hope to please Him short of a willingness to do the same? Yea, that is necessary in order that we might "deliver our souls." The servant of God is not only required to warn those of the

world, but also his brother who might "turn from his righteousness"; otherwise, their blood will God "require at (our) hands"! (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

Disciples to Be Contenders

Jude tells us in verse three that we are to "earnestly contend for the faith..." This obligates every lover of Truth to engage in whatever controversy the forces of Satan make necessary. But that controversy, although "earnest" (fervent), must be governed by the "Golden Rule" book. We are urged to "prove all things; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), but in this "proving" the criterion is to be the Word of God, rather than an appeal to prejudice, emotions, personalities, or traditions of men. John admonishes us to "try the spirits (teachings) whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). We must "try" the teachings by weighing them in the "balances" of God. Paul urged the elders of Ephesus to defend the flock of God against the grievous wolves that would enter in among them (Acts 20:28-29). According to Revelation 2:2 the church at Ephesus did believe in controversy, for they had "tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them to be liars."

The great apostle Paul practiced that which he urged upon others, in that he was "set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). We have divine record of many of his encounters in defense of the gospel of Christ. In Acts 24 we have the record of his defense of "the way which they call heresy" before Felix. In the next two chapters he did the same before Festus and Agrippa. He had "reasoned" from the Scriptures in the Jewish synagogues

frequently (Acts 17:2; 18:4,18). In doing this he "spake boldly...disputing and persuading" (Acts 19:8). His defense of the truth had great effect for good, for he "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28). In this he "fought a good fight" (which "fight" he urged upon Timothy, and us, in 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:1-4); and, therefore, there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness. He goes on to say that such is also for US; but it will depend upon our fighting the same good fight, and keeping the same faith! This can be done only by "contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Reasons for Opposing Controversy

Now, there are among those who oppose controversy in religion three basic reasons for such.

1. Convenience. It is a "city of refuge" for him who realizes that his teaching cannot stand the scrutiny of TRUTH. It is therefore convenient for him to be against "arguing in religion."

2. Misunderstanding, by some good people, of such passages as Romans 1:29 and 2 Corinthians 12:20 (King James Version). The term "debate" in these passages seems to them to condemn controversy. However, these passages do not have in consideration "Honorable Controversy." The word "debate" should be translated "strife," as is so in the American Standard Version of the Scriptures. They are derived from a term which means "a disposition to be quarrelsome and contentious, and is an outgrowth of enmity" (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). The bringing of Truth and error into conflict is not under

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Some may consider themselves as “little people,” without great gifts and abilities as others may have. We are taught that the one-talent-man had as much responsibility for his use of his one talent as the five-talent-man had for his five talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

What can “little people” do? They can attend services and worship God. They can study the word, and lay it up in their hearts that they may not sin against God. They can live godly lives, and show it by walking in the footsteps of Christ.

Many years ago there was an elderly man who sold peanuts at ball games and on the streets to eke out a frugal living. He was limited in ability. Yet, he could attend services and did always. This “little man” died. His character, his humility, his quiet, faithful devotion to God made an impression on his town people. The overflowing crowd at the funeral demonstrated their high respect for him.

Are there more “little people” serving the Lord than “big, gifted financially secure people?” We do not know. However, the scripture says, “And the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

CONTROVERSY

consideration in these two passages. If that were forbidden in these, it would put them in conflict with those many other easily understood passages which not only authorize, but enjoin upon us an OBLIGATION to earnestly defend the pure gospel against all error.

3. The repulsiveness of dishonorable controversy in religion which such people have either witnessed or heard about. In this type of controversy, men who hold positions which are weak (known better by themselves than by anyone else), make their appeal, not to Truth but to prejudice and emotions. They are simply trying to line up people on their side. There is often an all-out effort to “whip” their opponents by any means! You will find those people constantly dealing in personalities, most of which are misrepresentations and misapplications. They will deal at length with the inconsistencies (claimed) of their opponents; as if that had anything to do with Truth. Such are not willing to have their teachings laid open to honest and frank investigation by Truth, to stand or fall by such examination. They are often guilty of perverting Scriptures. They have erected their idols and will “wrest” the Scriptures so that they ap-

pear (to the simple) to sustain their doctrines. Such is not Christian behavior. Such is not “honorable controversy.”

Proper Attitude toward Controversy

However, we must not conclude that all controversy is wrong because of this abuse of it. Those who love the truth will be concerned with practicing only that. They will be happy to have their positions laid beside Truth. They will be content to engage in an honest investigation of their practices in the light of WHAT GOD HAS SAID in His Word. They will be happy to defend that which they believe to be Truth. In controversy such persons will conduct their part of the discussion as Christians, regardless of the behavior of their respondents.

The shying away from public controversy in the past came when men saw that their doctrines could not stand before the soldier of the Lord’s army, wielding the sword of the Spirit. Honorable controversy, to a great extent, was the wings upon which the Restoration Movement was borne. May the day never come when “WE” will hesitate to stand in the battle line to defend the gospel of the Christ who died for us!

Truth has nothing to fear in honorable controversy. Yea, upon such it thrives! — *Charles G. Maples, Sr.*

Contact Information: