

GOSPEL GUIDE

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

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"The Way of the Transgressor Is Hard"

WE KNOW THAT THE WAY of the transgressor is hard because God's word says it is. "Good understanding giveth favour; but the way of the transgressor is hard." (Proverbs 13:15). Since God's word is truth (John 17:17), we can be sure that the way of the transgressor is indeed hard.

We further know that the way of the transgressor is hard **because history proves it**. Even before they were driven out of their garden of paradise Adam and Eve suffered for their transgression. In their shame they tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God. The man's attitude toward the woman became hostile to the extent that he blamed her for his sin. They had to go forth into a world completely different from the beautiful garden, into a world that brought forth thorns and thistles and where they had to make their living by the sweat of their face, into a world where the woman would have to bring forth her children in pain and her sorrows would be multiplied, into a world where they were under the sentence of

death—that ultimately would return their mortal bodies to the dust from whence it came (Genesis 3).

Cain, their son, also following the course of the transgressor, cried out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." (Genesis 4:13.) When the nation of Israel obeyed and served God, they prospered, but inevitably when they turned from the Lord, they suffered the consequences of their evil doing. David satisfied the lust of the flesh by unlawfully taking unto himself Bathsheba. Though he repented, and his sin was forgiven, he suffered the consequences of his sin throughout the remaining days of his life (2 Samuel 11; 12). Judas Iscariot in his greed for money bargained with the enemies of Christ to betray his Lord for thirty pieces of

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IS HARD

silver. After he had committed the evil deed, something happened within his own conscience. Deciding that he did not want the money after all, he cast it down and went out and hanged himself (Matthew 26:14-16; 27: 3-5).

We know that the way of the transgressor is hard **because observation and experience confirm it.** A gospel preacher knew the joy of going about doing good in preaching Christ and him crucified to a world needing salvation. He knew the joy of a happy home. His brother, having committed a grievous crime, as a prison inmate was separated from his family and from society. One chose the course of right and happiness, the other of transgression and its direful consequences. A woman called to see if we might have seen her husband. He had not come home the night before. He had been out with a drunkard. He had lost his work. Two of the children were sick with a burning fever. Not only is the way of the transgressor hard, but he may make hard the way of those who are associated with him.

The question that arouses our cu-

riosity is, "Why is the way of the transgressor hard?"

It is a difficult way **because it is a way without God.** "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). But we cannot afford to separate ourselves from God, for he is our Creator, our Preserver (Acts 17:28), our Benefactor (James 1:17).

It is a hard way **because it is a way without Christ.** It is a way without light, for he is the "light of the world" (John 8:12); without spiritual nourishment, for he is "the bread of life" (John 6:35), and gives "living water" (John 4:10). It is a way without redemption, for our redemption from sin is in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). It is a way without an Advocate before the throne of God, for Christ is our Advocate (1 John 2:1), our High Priest (Hebrews 8:1), our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5,6). It is a way without one spiritual blessing, for every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

It is a hard way **because those who follow that way are carrying such a heavy load,** not only the heavy burden of their own soul destroying sins, but more than likely through their evil influence they are dragging others to eternal destruction with them. A young man from behind bars said, "My mother was a bad woman." Many children are the spiritual victims of their own parents, but Jesus said that it would be better to have a millstone hanged about the neck, and one be drowned in the depth of the sea, than to offend (cause to stumble) a little one who believes in him (Matthew 18:6).

The way of the transgressor is hard **because it is so deceptive.** It appears to be so smooth and pleasant, but it turns

out to be hard and rugged. The green, fertile valley of the Jordan seemed so inviting to Lot. But pitching his tent toward Sodom cost him dearly (Genesis 13:19). "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). "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).

It is a hard way **because of the characters who chose it.** The filth of the earth walk this way. How would we like to spend even one night on a road with thieves, murderers, and desperadoes of every sort? The way of the transgressor is crowded with the violent, the profane, the vulgar, the lustful. When we transgress the laws of God, though we may not be willing to admit it, we are choosing to walk with the basest of humanity, for this is the very way they too have chosen.

The way of the transgressor is hard **because at its end there is no rest, no relief.** At the end of a long journey it is so pleasant to find a place of rest. There is no such place at the end of the transgressor's way. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." (Matthew 25:46).

There is, however a way that is far better; it is the Lord's way—the way of obedience and full submission to his will. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). — BN

“Do You Look on Things After the Outward Appearance?”

IN SECOND CORINTHIANS 10:7 the Corinthians were ask, “Do you look at things according to the outward appearance” (2Corinthians 10:7). They seemed to be. There were some things at Corinth which surely were not what they seemed to be. Some were glorying in appearance. (2 Corinthians 5:12). Some were not what they seemed to be. Some seemed to be apostles but were false and deceitful workers (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

There are so many things which cannot be judged by their outward appearance. They are not what they seem. Let us consider some of these.

Many Things Are Worse Than They Seem

1. *There is a way which seems right.* This way is worse than it seems for its end is death. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). On the other hand, there are the right ways of the Lord. (Acts 13:10). How a way seems has little or nothing to do with whether or not it is right. Thus the way that seems right, while being wrong, is worse than it seems.

2. *Man’s feelings often seem right.* These feelings may be entirely and completely wrong and yet feel right. Even the way of a fool is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 12:15). Paul felt he was right when he shut saints up in prisons and sentenced them to death. He plainly said that he thought he

was right in this (Acts 26:9,10). It is no wonder that the prophet said: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Surely, our thoughts may be other than what they seem.

3. *The pleasures, treasures, and honors of the world seem so good.* However, these are not what they seem. One might think that people who possess these are the happiest people in the world; but this is not generally true. Please read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 in this connection. The eleventh verse of that chapter concludes with this statement: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” These are things which are not as they seem. Please do not spend your time in this life given over to a search for these things. That is like looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

4. *Opportunities are often not what they seem.* So many people move and shift jobs and justify all of it on the ground that they have to take advantage of their opportunities, and then find they are in worse state than before, for the opportunities were not as they seemed. Lot found what seemed to be a great opportunity. He found a land which seemed as the garden of the Lord (Genesis 13:9-13). However, the place was filled with people who were exceedingly wicked. And this which seemed such a good opportunity actually stripped him of almost everything and everyone he had. Things were not as they seemed.

5. Sin is not what it seems. Who would deny that sin has its glitter and attractions? However, it is not what it seems, for it is deceitful in all of this. We are told in Hebrews 3:13: “But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Sin is deceitful. It is not as it seems.

6. *Religion, too, is not always what it seems* (James 1:26). Prayers may be in pretense (Matthew 23:14). Preaching, even gospel preaching, may be done out of an impure motive (Philippians 1:18). There is pure and true religion. However, all religion which seems to be true and pure is not as it appears. There must be some way to tell whether or not it is pure.

One is very unwise who judges anything by outward appearance. Many things which seem so good are not as

YOU ALMOST PERSUADE ME TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

This is a statement King Agrippa made to Paul a prisoner when he was permitted to speak before the king and Festus, the Roman governor. Here was an opportunity for Paul to prove his innocence and gain his freedom. Instead, he was more concerned about the souls of those who were hearing him. Paul replied to Agrippa: "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:58,29).

Why would Paul want everyone to be a Christian? Because a Christian is a child of God and a joint heir with Christ. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16,17). If a Christian is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, we can see why Paul in his love for lost souls would have Agrippa and all others qualify for eternal glory rather than eternal punishment.

APPEARANCE?

they appear. So many of them are so much worse than they appear to be.

Some Things Are Better Than They Seem

As strange as it may sound to some, many things are actually much better than they seem. We have long learned that such is true with people. It is also true with many things.

1. *Truth is sometimes better than it seems.* Truth often seems good. At other times it is good when it may not seem that way. Some times truth seems illogical, unreal, and too demanding. When Lot warned his sons-in-law that the city was going to be destroyed and that they ought to make ready to leave, he told them the truth. But the truth did not seem very good to them. The Bible says in Genesis 19:14 this: "He seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." However, the truth was much better than it seemed to them.

When Naaman was told that he could be clean of his leprosy if he would go wash seven times in the Jordan, he was told the truth. But the truth did not seem so good to him. He thought something else would be better. And yet he learned that the truth was much better than anything he had ever heard even though it had not seemed so good at first (2 Kings 5).

When Mary Magdalene and the women told the eleven that Jesus had risen, their words seemed to the eleven as idle tales. Yet the truth was much better than it seemed (Luke 24:11).

When the truth declares that people must believe and be baptized to have remission of sins (Mark 16:16),

it seems to many to be unbelievable. The truth on this subject, however, is better than it seems; for this is God's will in the matter regardless of how it seems.

When Christians are told to put the kingdom first, it is illogical and difficult to many. When the truth declares that the Old Testament has been fulfilled and taken out of the way, it sounds terrible to many. Yet, that is the truth (Galatians 3:19-24; Ephesians 2:12-16; Colossians 2:14; Romans 7:1-4). It is the truth, and it is better than it seems; for it has been replaced by a new and better law (Hebrews 8:6-9).

2. *Sonship is better than it may seem.* Sonship, or being an heir of God, sounds good to many. But to others it seems such a great burden to be a child of God. Such a person is said to miss so much of this life and is required to sacrifice so much. However, sonship is so much better than it may seem, for we read in 1 John 3:2 this statement: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

3. *Chastening is better than it seems* (Hebrews 12:11). Whether it has to do with the fleshly family or with the spiritual family, chastisement usually seems to be so hard to take; but afterwards we can see that it was better than we thought.

Let us remember that many things are better than they seem. Other things are not as good as they seem. In spiritual matters, God knows best. His will is revealed in His word. Do you look on things after their outward appearance? — *Curtis E. Flatt*

The Doctrine of Christ

“JESUS ANSWERED THEM, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16,17).

In this passage Jesus states two facts about His doctrine. It is divine, because God is its source, and it is understandable. Any person who desires to do His will can know the doctrine. The willing subject not only can know the source of the doctrine, but he can also know its contents. How else could he obey it? So if any man rejects the doctrine of Christ, he rejects that which came from God. And surely man is without excuse in not knowing, or in misunderstanding, the doctrine, for the Lord intended that it be understood and obeyed. But let us look a little more closely into the doctrine of Christ.

1. *What is the doctrine of Christ?* Doctrine is simply teaching. Later translations render the word “teaching.” For instance, “The teaching that I give is not my own; it is the teaching of him who sent me.” (NEB) The word, whether translated “doctrine” or “teaching,” is used in two ways in the New Testament. First, it is used with reference to the substance of teaching, i.e., the thing that is taught. “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine” (Matthew 7:28). The people were astonished at the

contents of Christ’s teaching. Second, the word is used to denote the action of teaching, i.e., the act of imparting instruction. “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (teaching)” (1 Timothy 4:13).

The word is frequently used in the sense of the substance of teaching to indicate beliefs peculiar to some religious body. For example, the New Testament speaks of “the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees”; “doctrines of men”; “doctrines of devils”; and “the doctrine of Balaam.” In modern speech we frequently use the term in this way to indicate teaching that is peculiar to some particular religious body or religious theory. Thus, “Mormon doctrine” is used to denote the teaching that is peculiar to the Mormon Church. And “the doctrine of premillennialism” indicates beliefs associated with that theory regarding the second coming of Christ.

However, Christ has but one doctrine. He spoke of “My doctrine,” not of “My doctrines.” This indicates the unity and perfection of His teaching. This unity and perfection is even more obvious when we view the New Testament facts about the doctrine of Christ. As we have already seen, it came

from the Father and was given to us through His Son. The manner in which it was made known was by holy men who were guided by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-5). The doctrine of Christ is thus contained in an inspired book, the New Testament, which is complete and understandable (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12,13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). The doctrine of Christ is the New Testament. There is no other means by which the will of God is communicated to man.

2. *How is the knowledge of Christ’s doctrine acquired?* Since the New Testament is the only source of learning the doctrine of Christ, it is obvious that from it alone may we learn the doctrine of Christ. Jude said “the faith,” the doctrine of Christ, was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This forever precludes any new or latter-day revelations. Peter declared that all things pertaining to life and godliness have been given us through the *knowledge* of Christ (2 Peter 1:3). Paul said the *scriptures* furnish us unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17). What more is there for us to learn? What spiritual knowledge do we need that is not supplied by the doctrine of Christ as revealed in the New Testament?

But knowledge of the doctrine of Christ comes through study. The doctrine is complete, and it is understandable. However, the individual who would know it must apply *himself* to learning the doctrine. Je-

**“AND THE
LORD LISTENED”
(Malachi 3:16,17)**

To whom did the Lord listen? To “those who feared the Lord.” In what way did they show their fear? They “spoke to one another.” They “meditate on His name.” The marginal reading says that they “esteem” His name. Those who fear the LORD are they who have their hearts filled with a reverential awe—with profound respect for GOD and His will.

There are many good things to come from fearing the Lord. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). “By the fear of the LORD one departs from evil” (Proverbs 16:16). “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him” (Malachi 3:17).

The world today does not fear the LORD. It does not hold Him in high esteem. It does not hate evil. Therefore the great majority cannot be His “jewels.” They cannot be spared as a son who serves Him.

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Jesus said, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath *heard*, and hath *learned* of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45). Peter admonished Christians to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). The Lord has not promised us a miraculous knowledge of the doctrine. There are no short cuts to learning the will of God. Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love might “grow ever richer and richer *in knowledge* and *insight* of every kind” and thus bring them “the gift of true discrimination” (Philippians 1:9,10,NEB). But if study brings the desired knowledge, it must be motivated by the right purpose — the desire *to know* and *to obey* God’s will. (John 7:16,17).

3. *Why is it important to know the doctrine of Christ?* Ignorance cannot save! One cannot be subject to the righteousness of God while he is ignorant of the truth (Romans 10:1-3). Only the truth can make men free. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall *know the truth*, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32). “For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:13,14, 17). The truth must be known and obeyed to avail.

A superficial knowledge of the truth will not do. One must know the fundamentals of the gospel to be saved from alien sins and become a child of God. “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). But the Christian must go on “unto perfection” in the knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1). The Christian life requires a threefold duty toward the truth that necessitates a constantly growing knowledge of Christ’s doctrine. The Lord requires that he know the truth (Ephesians 5:17). The Lord requires that he practice the truth (1 Timothy 4:16). And the Lord requires that he teach the truth to others (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

The doctrine of Christ is God’s will for man today. It has been revealed by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, and it is contained in its fulness in the New Testament. Knowledge of this doctrine comes only by diligent study, And this knowledge is essential to one’s obedience to God so as to be saved from sin, live so as to please God, and have eternal life in the world to come. — Earl Kimbrough

... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

(2 Peter 3:18)

Salvation by Grace Through Faith

THAT WE ARE SAVED “by grace through faith” is a statement that we cannot deny, for that is exactly what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 and 9. We believe that. We have no difficulty believing that because we understand what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

Many people do not understand what it means to be saved by grace through faith, and so they are hopelessly confused. They start out by thinking that one can be saved by what Christ did alone. Since Christ died and thus paid the penalty for our sins, these people imagine that there remains nothing for us to do in order to appropriate the sacrifice of Christ and thus to effect our salvation from sin.

Divine and Human Part

Everything God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit have done and are doing is comprehended in the word “grace,” and unless one understands that, he may never know what to do to be saved. And so he may never be saved. But, everything man must do is comprehended in the word “faith.” If we understand this, we can understand how it is that we are saved “by grace through faith.” If we do not understand this we cannot be saved. Hence the importance of this understanding.

“Do” Passages

God did not intend, nor does the Bible anywhere teach that we can be saved without doing something. How man has come to the decision that he does not have to do anything to be saved is a mystery. Think of the “DO” passages in the New Testament. Matthew 7:21 asserts flatly that to enter into the kingdom we must “do the will of the Father in heaven.” Matthew 7:24 tells us that if we are to “build upon a rock” and have our house to “stand” we must do the sayings of the Son of God. And we are warned in Matthew 7:26 that unless we do the sayings of the Son of God we will build upon the sand and our house will “fall.”

But we are also told in Acts 10:34-35 that to be accepted with Him, we must fear him and work righteousness. We must be doers of the work to be blessed in our deeds according to James 1:25. And James repeatedly tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17,20,26). And James also declares (2:24) that we are justified

by works and not by faith only.

One not fouled up by false teaching has no trouble understanding that we must do the will of God and that we must work righteousness. He thus understands perfectly that while we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1), we must show that faith by works (James 2:18), and that the “doing” and the “working” are evidences of the FAITH which saves.

So, Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that we are saved by grace (what God and Christ and the Holy Spirit have done) through faith (what we do as an indication of our belief in Christ as the Son of God).

The Pentecostians (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Jailor (Acts 16), the Corinthians (Acts 18:8), and others were saved by grace through faith. But they were saved by a faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6). They heard the word, believed it, repented and were baptized. They had faith and were saved by it. Do you have faith? Is your faith dead? (James 2:17,20,26). The grace of God that brought salvation hath appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). Do you have faith enough to make proper use of this grace? Will you believe and be baptized? (Mark 16:16). Will you repent and be baptized? (Acts 2:38.) Will you be saved by grace through faith? (Ephesians 2:8-9).

— A.C. Grider (Deceased)

THE NATION THAT ENDURES

Before our time there have been many nations which have risen to great heights of power. Not one has endured. There may be various reasons for their collapse. Internal moral corruption could be the basic reason for their eventual downfall. The Roman Empire serves as an example. Even as pagans without a knowledge of God, their army was trained to high standards of bravery and devotion to the empire. With the passing of time debauchery became the way of life. The empire was brought to an end by invasions from without, which were made possible by the moral corruption within.

The Bible tells the same story of God's people. As long as they held Him in high esteem and obeyed His laws, they prospered. When they turned to the sensual ways of the heathen, they defied God and were carried into captivity (2 Chronicles 36).

It is evident that our great nation is on the road down. Much of the entertainment is now filthy, and flowing deeper into the gutter. Some occupying high responsible offices encourage that which God plainly identifies as abominable (1 Corinthians 6:9). Danger ahead—the blind leading the blind! (Matthew 15:14).

Rifts in the Family

IT SHOULD NOT, but such an ungodly condition may exist in a family wherein parents are divided from children, children from parents, siblings from one another. The tragedy of it is that all are members of the church and consider themselves the children of God. All live under the same perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). When disobeyed it condemns to eternal separation from God and suffering from which there is no relief.

What is the answer? Get together. Pray together as His children. Lay His word up in your hearts that you may not sin against Him. Let pure unadulterated love guide and govern. When Gods children are in harmony with His word, they will be in harmony with each other. Where there has been an ugly wound. it will be healed — without a scar.

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