

# GOSPEL GUIDE

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

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## "A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ"

**BECAUSE ROMAN SOLDIERS** were found in almost every part of the civilized world, both Paul and those to whom he wrote were very familiar with the military. As Christ taught great lessons in the parables by making use of the simple everyday things of life, so Paul set forth basic principles of the gospel by reference to the familiar activities of his time. By inspiration he compared the Christian to a soldier. "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. " (2 Timothy 2:3,4, ASV.)

The idea of a soldier suggests —

1. **Warfare.** Christians are engaged in the greatest struggle the world has ever known, the struggle between right and wrong, truth and error, the forces of evil on the one hand, and the army of righteousness under the royal banner of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the other. Paul calls it a "good fight." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). This struggle goes back to the morning of time when

the serpent entered the garden to do his sinister work, and God said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Genesis 3:15). In his time Moses asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" (Exodus 32:26). The wise will choose to be on the Lord's side, for even though it may seem at times that evil and error will prevail, it will ultimately turn out that the Lord's side is the winning side in this great struggle. The devil and his host will go down. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where

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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

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the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). The triumphant Christ will be acclaimed, “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16).

2. **Hardship.** The soldier may experience cold and hunger, and face danger, and even death. Paul knew what it was to suffer hardship. “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep” (2 Corinthians 11:24, 25). It seems one in the army of the Lord today is hardly willing to suffer inconvenience, much less sacrifice and hardship.

3. **Loyalty.** There must be no conflict of interests, no alliance with the enemy. “No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). The whole world is divided into two camps—those who are serving under Sa-

tan, and those who are serving under Christ. There is no neutral ground. Christ said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30). “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). In this struggle against evil and error, against Satan and the world, if we honestly looked into our own hearts, would we find there divided interests?

4. **An enemy.** In this struggle indeed there is an enemy, an adversary, the devil, who as a “roaring lion” goes about “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He is cunning, vicious, bent on the destruction of the sons and daughters of Adam’s race. Where does he operate? He himself said, “...going to and fro in the earth, and ...walking up and down in it” (Job 1:7). He operates in times and places of happiness as in the beautiful garden of Eden (Genesis 3), and in times and places of sorrow as in the calamity of Job (Job 1; 2). He operates in the wilderness and in the city as we find in the temptations of Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). As he operates in the world, so he endeavors to operate in the church. No one of accountable age has been spared his efforts to destroy. He operates through cunning devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). In his subtlety he may not appear as an enemy at all, but rather as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

5. **Hate.** When soldiers are trained for carnal warfare, they are

trained to hate the enemy. Every soldier loyal to Jesus Christ will hate this vicious enemy of all mankind and his works. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9). If we hate Satan, there will be no serving under his banner. If we abhor sin, there will be no fraternizing with it. If we despise error, there will be no spirit of compromise.

6. **Induction.** A soldier may be drafted, or he may enlist; but a soldier in the Lord’s army is there by choice, by voluntary enlistment. He is persuaded to enlist by the highest motives known to mankind—love for God, for Christ, for truth, for fellowman, for his own soul. He chooses to heed the great invitation of Christ, “Come unto me.” In this process of induction he believes in Christ, the Son of the living God; he repents of his sins; he pledges his allegiance to Christ in the good confession; and when he is baptized, he puts on the uniform. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

7. **Armament.** The Christian is well equipped to engage in victorious battle with the devil. With this armor, properly used, the devil must go down in defeat. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith

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ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

8. **Individual responsibility.** Each soldier is on his own, and is responsible for his individual conduct. If he does his job well, he will receive recognition and perhaps some medal of honor. If he fails to live up to his responsibility, he will be disciplined. In the army of the Lord each one has an individual responsibility. No one else can relieve him of this responsibility. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, accord-

ing to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

9. **Cooperative responsibility.** In physical warfare the air force must work in coordination with the ground forces. Each soldier must work in cooperation with every other soldier, and as a solid phalanx stand against the enemy. In the battle against sin and Satan Christ requires unity among his forces, not unity for the sake of unity, but true unity based upon recognition of his authority and complete submission to his revealed will. “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

10. **A commander.** Soldiers are not left on their own, to do as they please, without proper leadership. The battle must be planned. The commander must show the way. Christians have a “captain of their salvation,” one made “perfect through sufferings.” (Hebrews 2:10). He shows his great leadership by himself defeating the enemy. (Matthew 4:1-10; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21,22). He has the right to command because he has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). In this great struggle against sin and error, against Satan and the forces of wickedness, it is for us to follow faithfully and courageously in the footsteps of the Captain of our salvation to glorious victory and triumphant reception in the heavenly city, that city “which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). — *BN*

## The Narrowness of Truth

**“AND BECAUSE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, ye believe, me not” (John 8:45). “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16).**

In the first of the quoted passages, Jesus pinpointed the cause for the unbelief of some Jews—unbelief of the truth. The physical descendants of Abraham were the spiritual children of the Devil who believed not Christ because they did not believe the truth which he taught. In the second passage referred to, Paul’s preaching of the

truth is suggested as the reason for possible enmity between him and the Galatians.

### Underlying Quality of Truth

In both of the passages there is evident the underlying quality of truth which often alienates men from God and men from men—its narrowness. The nature of truth

is such that all views, ideas, and positions can never be included in it. Truth encompasses only those ideas, principles, views, and positions which are consistent with other parts of the truth. Truth is narrow in this very respect: it excludes any conflicting point of view or position. All truth is narrow, not just religious truth. It is a matter of geographical truth that Richmond, Virginia, lies on both sides of the James River. Intense zeal and evident sincerity cannot alter this geographical truth. It is

## **QUICK JUDGMENT MAY BE FALSE JUDGMENT**

Elkanah of the tribe of Ephraim had two wives. "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." The one with children tormented Hannah because "the Lord had closed her womb." "Each year Elkanah would take his family to Shiloh for the yearly feast. Each time Peninnah would shame Hannah because she had no children. In her distress she prayed that if the Lord would give her a male child she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. In her prayer her lips moved, but there was no sound. Eli the priest seeing her while she prayed judged her to be drunk. In his hasty, superficial judgment the priest was wrong, far wrong. She was a godly woman praying for a son that she might give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

How many today are like Eli, judging people without knowing the facts? Our Lord has given a warning—"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:1,2).

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a matter of historical truth that George Washington was the first president of the United States. Opposing statements cannot invalidate this historical truth. These statements of truth stand because they convey real or actual situations. We should not, therefore, think it strange that Divine truth is narrow and alienates all who disagree with it, for secular truth has the same effect.

### **Consistency of Truth**

Another quality or feature of truth that we should notice is its consistency with other truth. We do not mean, of course, that truth is consistent with all positions, viewpoints, and ideas which men espouse, regardless of their truthfulness. Whenever a principle of mathematics is established as true beyond doubt, it will harmonize with all other true principles of that discipline. When God's Word sets forth a command or a principle of life, we can be assured that it does not cross any other principle or command of Divine truth. All truth runs in parallel lines. The unit of Divine truth is truth in all its parts and in all kinds of truth presented—biography, geography, history, prophecy, science, and doctrine (John 17:17). Men should be careful to impose no meaning on a passage which conflicts with statements, principles, or commands recorded elsewhere in the Bible. Whenever conflicting meanings are advanced, it is obvious that the meanings or explanations are false.

### **Truth, Our Only Guide**

Let us look to some examples of the narrowness of truth. Truth is narrow in that it claims that it is the only guide in religious matters. In John 6: 68 Simon Peter asked, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Although Peter did not say, "Thou alone hast the words of eternal life," the question that he raised in the verse makes it clear that there is no other to whom men can go for words that lead to eternal life. In John 14:6 Jesus affirmed that he is the only way for men to go to the Father: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me." Jesus promised the apostles in John 16:13 that he would send from heaven the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Jesus' promise does not imply that the apostles would personally record all truth, for some upon whom they laid hands wrote portions of the New Testament; but it does mean that when the administration of the apostles ended, all truth would have been revealed. In 1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul upheld the finality and authority of the Scripture, or "that which is written."

### **Truth, the Only Way**

Another example of the narrowness of truth is the Bible's teaching that there is only one way to please God. This point, of course, would necessarily mean that there is only one way to become a Christian and to remain a Christian. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke of only one way in which men can walk and find eternal life. (Matthew 7:13-14.) Only through genuine faith, repentance, confession, and baptism can

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a person become a Christian (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:10), for the Scripture teaches no other way. Only through faithful and loving devotion to God as a child can one walk in newness of life.

### The One Church

Another example of truth's narrow

position is the Bible's insistence that there is only one church in the Divine economy (Ephesians 4:4; 1:22-23). There is only one body of the saved. Additions to the body are the Lord's responsibility, as are the conditions upon which one can be added. The system of many denominations, each requiring different conditions, is altogether inconsistent with truth.

### The Saved

A final instance of the narrowness of truth is that, of all responsible people, only faithful Christians will be saved. In Ephesians 5:23 and 27 Paul indicates that when the Lord saves the body, he will present it without blemish. To present it without blemish, the spots must be removed. Unfaithful members of the body, just as the disobedient, will be lost.

— Bobby Graham

# Religion That is Pure and undefiled

**RELIGION IS** “the service and worship of God... it is commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance.” The word denotes the outward and external expression of religious faith. Religion consists of acts of service and/or acts of worship to God.

A religious person is one who is devout in the performance of some form of service to deity. There are many religions in the world. James said: “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:26,27). Three facts about religion are indicated in these words.

1. **Not all religion is acceptable with God.** Religion can be “vain.” A good conscience is not enough to make a wrong religion

acceptable with God. Paul's religion prior to his conversion to Christ was vain, yet at the time he maintained a good conscience before God (Acts 23:1). Good morality is not enough to make a wrong religion acceptable with God. Cornelius was a good man morally but he still needed to hear and obey the gospel of Christ to be saved (Acts 10:1,2; 11:14). Even religion itself is not enough regardless of how sincere one may be in it. Cornelius and Paul were both religious before becoming disciples of Christ, but they had the wrong kinds of religion. There just is not any way to make a wrong religion right with God. If it is wrong it is “vain” or worthless.

The words “pure” and “undefiled” imply that religion can be impure and defiled. The New Testament teaches that one or more of several things can render one's religion vain, that is, impure and defiled before God. *First*, religion that is of human origin is vain. This is true even when the human element is only partial. (Matthew 15:8,9,13). *Second*, hypocritical worship is unacceptable (Matthew 23:25-28). *Third*, religion that is governed by human wisdom will not do with God (Colossians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:17,18). *Fourth*, when religious acts of service or worship are performed in ignorance of God's revealed will the religion is wrong (Romans 10:2.) *Fifth*, all religious acts, however right they may be otherwise, are rejected by God if they are performed to be seen of men (Matthew 23:5). An impure motive makes them vain.

2. **Only true religion is acceptable with God.** True religion is

## CHRIST SPEAKS TO A PERSECUTOR

From heaven Christ spoke to Saul who was a bitter enemy of His cause. Saul made havoc of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:3) and “breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” was on his way to Damascus to continue his persecution. Before he reached Damascus something far-reaching occurred. “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:3-5).

Saul learned something we need always to hold in our hearts—the close connection between Christ in heaven and His disciples on earth. The attitude we have against a disciple is precisely the attitude we have toward Christ the Son of God. We are without adequate proof that Saul ever saw Christ on earth, and yet Christ said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” No longer “breathing out threats and murder,” Saul humbly asked, “What shall I do, Lord?”

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that which is authorized by Christ (Matthew 28:18). The law of Moses ceased with the death of Christ and is not the standard of religion today. Christians are admonished to do all in the name of Christ (Colossians 3:17). They are limited in religion to what He has authorized (2 John 9). True religion has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Jesus told the apostles the Spirit would guide them into “all truth” (John 16:13). So true religion is a revealed religion. All the acts of service and worship which it requires are clearly set forth in the New Testament which furnishes us completely unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Any religious guide other than the New Testament is unnecessary and defiles true religion. This is so, regardless of the nature of the religious guide: whether it is human philosophy, manmade rules, “latter-day” revelations (so-called), “keys” to the Scriptures, or a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

True religion conforms to the plan revealed in the New Testament. (Hebrews 8:4,5). *First*, its acts of service and worship to God are divinely authorized (1 Peter 4:11). *Second*, it abides in the doctrine of Christ and turns not aside from it—neither to the right hand nor the left (Galatians 1:6-9). *Third*, it operates by faith. Paul said, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5: 7). And, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). One cannot do “by faith” that which he cannot read about in the word of God. *Fourth*, it respects God’s silence. It does not

presume to go beyond that which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). If one goes beyond the teaching of Christ or speaks where God’s word does not speak, then he ceases to abide in the teaching of Christ and is rejected by God (2 John 9,10). True religion, therefore, is the religion of the New Testament.

3. **The nature of acceptable religion is revealed.** While James does not cover true religion fully in James 1: 26, 28, he does set forth some facts that help us understand its nature, *First*, true religion is pure and undefiled. This indicates that it is from God and not from man. Man’s religion is pure and undefiled only when it is fully governed by the will of God. Every act of service and worship is prompted by a “thus saith the Lord.” *Second*, true religion is “before God.” Whatever man does in his religious practice he does to please God. This is the primary purpose of true religion, (Hebrews 11:5,6.) *Third*, true religion comes from the heart. Vain religion deceives the heart, but the religion revealed in the New Testament flows from a heart that is submissive to the divine will and that is motivated by the desire above all else to please God. *Fourth*, true religion has regard for one’s fellowman. This is evident from the Christian’s concern for those in need. One aspect of true religion is “To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” This is the duty of each disciple of Christ, in keeping with his opportunity and ability, and is a part of his religious expression. *Fifth*, true religion leads to purity of life. One who practices true religion will “keep himself

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unspotted from the world.” This is so because true religion requires one to lay aside the things of the world that are contrary to the will of Christ and to receive with meek-

ness the engrafted word (James 1:21). One who does this will not love the world nor participate in its sinful deeds (1 John 2:15-17).

True religion is pure and undefiled because it has its origin with God. It is a revealed religion and not

a religion of choice. It leads to obedience to God, purity of personal life and regard for one’s fellowman. Its end result is heaven. Therefore, it is worth whatever sacrifices one is called upon to endure in order to practice it. — *Earl Kimbrough*

# God’s Commands

**God’s commands demonstrate authority.** God asked Joshua a rhetorical question, “Have not I commanded thee?” (Joshua 1:9). It is evident from this question that God intended for Joshua to recognize the authority of his command and therefore to obey. A command is a rule imposed by authority, and God has the right to command because of his authority as our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor “for in Him we live and move and have our being”(Acts 17:28). Because of our total dependence upon him, we must recognize his complete authority to tell us what we are to do.

**God’s commands declare that which is right.** When God commands us to do something, we know assuredly that that which he commands is right and is for our good. Knowing all things (Psalm 139), he knows what is best for us; and loving us dearly, he requires of us only that which is for our well-being. *God commands us to believe in his Son* “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave

us commandment” (1 John 3:23). To believe in Christ, the pure and perfect Son of God, is good for us. *God commands us to repent.* “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). It is good for us to repent of our sins, to recognize the goodness of God and to be brought to godly sorrow and to turning away from sinful practice. *God commands that we be baptized.* “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47,48). It is good for us to be baptized, to show by this act our humility before the Father, our faith in him, and our willingness to obey, whatever his command may be.

**God commands his children to worship.** “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” *Prayer* is involved in worship “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”

(Acts 2:42). *Singing* is involved in worship—“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). *Partaking of the Lord’s supper* is involved in worship—“and when He had given thanks, He broke it [the bread] and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes’” (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). *Giving* is involved. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). *Earnestly studying God’s word* is involved in worship. “Be diligent to present yourself ap-

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts bridges the gap between the first four books of the New Testament and the following twenty-one epistles and the book of Revelation. The first four books tell of the birth of Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection and His return to heaven to be seated on His throne at the right hand of His Father in heaven. Without the book of Acts the remaining part of the New Testament would be dangling without meaning.

The book of Acts tells the story of carrying out the Great Commission to go into all the world “and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46-49). It tells of the establishment of the church in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and its phenomenal growth throughout the known world of that day. It is a book of conversions, some of which are described in the following scriptures: “about three thousand” (Acts 2:36-47); the Samaritans (Acts 8:12); Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39); Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48); Lydia (Acts 16:14,15); the jailer (Acts 16:25-34).

proved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). It is good to pray, to offer thanksgiving and praise, and to petition the Father for his care and guidance each day. It is good to sing God’s praises, and to teach and admonish one another in spiritual hymns. It is good to commune with Christ and fellow saints at the Lord’s table, and to give as we have been prospered that the Lord’s work may be accomplished, and to study his word that we may be approved and made “wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).

**God’s commands demand obedience.** God gave a command to Adam and Eve. (Genesis 2:16,17). When they failed to obey, they brought themselves, as he said they would, under the sentence of death. They lost their paradise and filled their lives with woe. Because Moses failed to do exactly what God said at the waters of Meribah, Moses was not permitted to

bring the children of Israel into the promised land. (Numbers 20). And the obedience which God demands must be from the heart, rendered gladly and willingly “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17,18). “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

**God’s commands, when obeyed, result in great success.** God said to Joshua, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8.) — BN

### Contact Information: