

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 Word of God and Light

THERE ARE SEVERAL PASSAGES comparing the word of God to light. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:130). “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Proverbs 6:23). We would like to notice some of the properties of light and see how the word of God possesses these same properties.

I. Light Reveals

The rising of the morning sun reveals a beautiful world that God has provided for man’s welfare. That same light, however, may reveal very ugly scars which man has inflicted upon nature.

God’s word reveals much about man and his life on earth. Without it we would be groping in spiritual darkness. Without it we would not know our origin; but in the Genesis record there is the most logical, reasonable account that has ever been given of the origin of the physical universe and of the human family. It is far more reasonable to believe that man was created by an all wise, and all powerful God than to believe that he evolved from some lifeless particle of matter, the ori-

gin of which has not, and cannot, be explained. Apart from the Genesis record the origin of matter and life cannot be explained, nor can the whole evolutionary process be substantiated by human effort.

The word of God, in its absolute honesty and truthfulness, reveals the fall of man in his transgression in the garden. But as the word of God reveals the fall of man through transgression, it also reveals the outreaching of God’s love in providing for man’s salvation through the sacrifice of God’s own dear Son. As early as Genesis 3:15 God let it be known that the seed of the woman would prevail over the evil one. “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise

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WORD AND LIGHT

thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." In Genesis 12:3 God made a promise to Abraham, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curse thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." In this promise Paul said that God preached the gospel to Abraham (Galatians 3:38). Step by step through the ages the prophets foretold the coming of the Savior of man. When the fulness of time was come John the Baptist introduced the Son of God, "Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Christ, as the pure innocent lamb died on the cross for us, for our redemption through His blood. Concerning this sacrifice Paul said. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness" of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The word of God reveals the right way of life. There are many ways that lead in the wrong direction, even to destruction. Jeremiah

said, "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). Though there may be many ways, there is only one good way, the Lord's revealed way, wherein we can find rest for our souls. It is the way of obedience to God's laws. Therefore it is the way of salvation, of purity, of usefulness, of happiness, of hope. It is the right way for the individual, the family, the church, the nation, the world.

Further, God's word reveals our destiny. All men will hear Christ the judge of all mankind say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," or, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:34,41).

II. Light Purifies

Washed clothes hung out in the warm sunlight are not only dried, they are purified. Spiritually, the word of God has the property of purifying. It is "very pure" (Psalm 119:130). Peter said, "Seeing ye have purified your souls by obeying the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). In obeying the truth people are made free from sin (John 8:32). The heart is turned from the love of sin by faith in Christ Jesus, Concerning the Gentiles Peter said that their hearts were purified by faith (Acts 15:9). Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17) they were led by their faith to obedience and thus to purification from their past sins.

The practice of sin is destroyed

by repentance, by the change of mind brought about by godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10), a sorrow that leads to a reformation of life, a life patterned after the life of Christ (1 Peter 2:21,22).

The guilt of sin is removed by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7). This precious purifying blood was manifest in the death of Christ (John 19:34). God has made possible our reaching this cleansing blood in the act of baptism. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3).

The heart of the Christian is kept pure by keeping it filled with that which is pure "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

III. Light Is Clear

The word of God is clear. Peter did make a statement concerning the writing of his beloved brother Paul: "there are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the scriptures." (2 Peter 3:16). God has made his will to us clear so that there is no reason for misunderstanding. While Jesus was on earth, he set forth the conditions of salvation. He plainly taught that faith in Him is essential to man's salvation: "for if ye believe not that I am

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he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). He plainly taught that men must repent: “I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). He plainly taught that men must confess Him: “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32,33). He plainly taught that men must be baptized, must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). These same conditions were set forth in the great commission as his last words, which he gave to his disciples after His resurrection and before He returned to be with the Father in heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke

24:46,47). All the records of conversion in the book of Acts show that those who obeyed the gospel specifically met these conditions of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for the remission of sins. This way must be plain for in some cases those who obeyed the gospel did so after hearing only one sermon (Acts 2:8;10;16).

IV. Light Makes Beautiful

Without light the world would be in darkness without the beauty of nature. The seed of the flower may not be beautiful, but when it has gone through the possesses of nature and when it has been brought from the moist soil by the warm sunlight, the plant may be seen in all its beauty and glory. There is a “beauty of holiness” brought about by obedience to the word of God. (Psalm 96:9). The gospel is powerful

to save (Romans 1:16), and to turn the ugly sinner into the beautiful saint. Behold the transformation! Once this man was wallowing in the mire of degradation, but now by the gentle rays of the light of God’s word penetrating his heart and changing his life he has become a beautiful character.

V. Light Is Universal

The light of the sun covers the earth. So, the word of “God is universal in its scope. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The light of God’s word has been provided for the salvation of all men, of whatever color and language, in whatever place on the face of the earth. May we through constant effort help it reach, with all of its beneficent properties, into the hearts of all men everywhere. — BN

“Murmur Not”

SOMETIMES TO MURMUR means to complain. However, at times, it is in order to complain. If something is wrong and needs to be corrected, it is not out of order to complain; but do not murmur about it. In Acts 6:1-5 some had a just complaint. Some were being left out of the daily ministrations. It was in order for some to complain. But, to rectify the wrong, they murmured. If there is a just complaint about the song leaders or the preachers or the singing or the temperature of the building, a complaint is in order. But if the thing is not corrected as you would have it, do not murmur. That is sin.

Examples Of Murmuring

There are several examples of murmuring in the New Testament. The laborers in the vineyard as found in Matthew 20:11 murmured. They received their just due. Still they whined and murmured. As we view them, they are despicable in appearance. In Luke 5:30 we find the scribes and Pharisees murmuring against the disciples of Jesus because they ate and drank with publicans and sinners. Of course, they were really striking at Jesus. Their inconsistency is seen in that these people needed Jesus. We cannot admire them. They were murmurers.

JONAH

Jonah was an unusual preacher. Preachers rejoice when their preaching turns people from their evil ways, from eternal condemnation to salvation, but Jonah was not pleased when all the people of Nineveh believed his word—the word God sent him to preach.

“When God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” (Jonah 3:1-10;4:1).

We may not know why Jonah had such an unforgiving spirit toward the Ninevites. His unwillingness for God to forgive could go back to the trouble Israel had had with Nineveh in time past. A quotation from Davis’ “Dictionary of the Bible” may give the reason for Jonah’s attitude: “For it (Nineveh) was a powerful foe of Israel, and if it were not destroyed, the doom of Israel was sealed. (p 405).

Jonah showed more concern for a plant that protected him from the burning sun than for the Ninevites who repented and turned from their evil conduct.

Jonah did learn that no man can escape the all-seeing eye of God.

MURMUR NOT

In John 6:41 we find the Jews murmuring at Jesus because he said that he was the bread of life. Instead of investigating his claims, they murmured. In John 6:61 we find Jesus with his disciples. Some of them found his teaching difficult to bear. They murmured at him, the record says. It is a distasteful scene to see people murmuring because of what the truth is. When the behavior of Jesus was not according to what the people thought it ought to be, they murmured. He went home with a tax collector. The people murmured. (Luke 19:1-7).

None of us appreciate others when they murmur unless we are of the same disposition. We can see its ugly qualities in others. It does not look any better in us.

Murmuring Is Forbidden

Murmuring is worse than ugly. It is sin. Paul told the Corinthians: “Neither murmur ye ... “ (1 Corinthians 10:10). He told the Philippians: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings ...” (Philippians 2:14). Peter said: “Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Peter 4:). The word “grudging” here is more properly translated with the word “murmuring.” Murmuring is sin!

The sad part of all of this is that murmuring is one of the most prevalent sins among some of the most otherwise faithful people in the Lord’s church. Some who have the highest morals, who adhere most closely to the doctrine, who are the most faithful to attend, and who are the most liberal in their giving are always whining and murmuring and muttering and mouthing about this or that. In some

way, many of us need to have this lesson impressed upon us. Murmuring is not adultery, or liberalism, or idolatry, or even stinginess. But murmuring is sin just the same.

The Problem

The problem of murmuring is two-fold. The real problem is discontent. That is sin, too. Discontent is wrong within itself. This wrong leads to another wrong—murmuring. Christians are taught to be content with what they have and can rightfully obtain. Christians are taught to be content with necessities (1 Timothy 6:7,8; Matt. 6:25-31). Christians are taught to be content with what they have (Hebrews 13:5). Christians are taught to be content with their lot. (Philippians 4:11). Christians are taught to be content with God’s way (Luke 5:5). This includes all of God’s way whether it be the plan of salvation, the worship of the church, the organization and mission of the church, bounds of fellowship, or whatever plan God has given. Our problem in murmuring is the problem of discontent.

There is a second underlying cause of murmuring. That is selfishness. Selfishness is sin. (Philippians 2:4; Romans 15:2; 1 Corinthians 10:33). When we murmur and whine we are saying that we want our way. We have not had our way. We do not like it one bit. We are letting others know that we are not having our way. So being discontent and selfish, we murmur and thereby sin.

With feet to take me where I’d go,
With eyes to see the sunset’s glow,
With ears to hear what I ought to know,
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine;
I’m blessed indeed—the world is mine!

— Curtis E. Flatt

The Mind of Christ

“LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” With these words (Philippians 2:5-8) the apostle Paul urged the saints at Philippi to possess the mind of Christ and explained the exact attribute of His mind that he had in mind—humility.

When we speak of having the mind of Christ, we are not referring to the mental faculty that was Christ’s or His intelligence. We are speaking of the disposition, attitude, or spirit of mind that belonged to Jesus. It is in this respect that the inspired apostle uses the Son of God as our example. Jesus is truly our example in word and in deed; in fact, whatever we attempt to do, we should do it in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). He is likewise our model in thought, in spirit, or in mind. He did no sin (deed), nor was guile found in His mouth (word) (1 Peter 2:22) because His mind was of the right kind. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34).

Surely each of us has known someone whose intellect was so vastly superior that he has said of that one, “I’d like to have his mind.” While it is not possible for us to swap minds in that sense, each one of us can have the mind of Christ

by seeking to imitate him. Paul said that Christians can be transformed by the renewing of their minds and thereby prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

To be more specific concerning the mind of Christ, however, let us examine different passages in which the mind of Christ is portrayed.

A Mind of Humility

In the passage with which the article begins, the attribute of humility is stressed as part of the mind of Christ. Note that Jesus’ humility was emphasized in the passage in that He made Himself of no reputation (emptied Himself), assumed the role of a servant—not a master, was made in the likeness of man, and stooped to obey the demand of God that He die for men. Jesus subjected Himself to the basest humiliation.

The humility of the Lord is also seen in his washing the feet of the

disciples. In John 13, the Lord and Master of men acted the part of a true servant as He girded Himself with a towel, poured water in the bason, and began to wash feet. To explain His actions and to stress the need for His disciples having His mind of humility, He said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).

A Mind of Liberality

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6). “I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

These verses tell us of the wonderfully generous spirit of Jesus. Are you satisfied in your giving—whether of yourself, your money, your time, or your energy—to give a mere token? Are you content to give unto the Lord that which costs you nothing, or little? Should we all not be liberal in our spirit of giving as was Jesus, who gave Himself?

A Mind of Obedience

“Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience through the things which he suffered; and being made

“FROM NOW ON YOU WILL CATCH MEN”

Peter and his brother Andrew with James and John were fishermen. They had toiled all night and had caught nothing. When Jesus told them where to fish they caught enough to overload two boats until they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:4-11).

On the day of Pentecost Peter moved up from a fisher of fish to fisher of men. His great sermon caused the people to ask "what shall we do?" When he told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, about three thousand obeyed the gospel (Acts 2), and the number continued to grow by the thousands (Acts 5:14).

MIND OF CHRIST

perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9). "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9).

Jesus came to accomplish God's will; he learned obedience in His suffering. If we are to have the mind of Christ, we must be obedient. We must bend our wills to comply with the will of God. Jesus offers salvation to the obedient.

A Mind of Fear

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying

and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Hebrews 5:7). The fear that Jesus had toward His Father in heaven was not the kind that caused literal shaking or trembling, but a wholesome fear or respect. Fearing God will cause us to live sober lives in preparation for an unending eternity.

Because Jesus possessed a mind of humility, he was willing to give Himself in the fear of God and to obey even unto death. In order for us to be useful to the Lord, "fit for the Master's use," we must have in us the mind of Christ—the mind of humility, liberality, obedience, and fear. — *Bobby Graham*

By What Are You Pleased in Religion?

EVERY COMMON RESPONSE on the part of many folks concerning their religious status is, "I'm satisfied." A person should surely be satisfied (happy) in his religion, but do these people ever stop to consider whether or not GOD is satisfied with their behavior or belief? Is God pleased with their religious conduct? After all, do they not know that they must look to Him for the salvation which they claim to be interested in?

Who Is to Be Pleased?

In Acts fifteen we have the record of a meeting of the apostles, along with the elders and membership of the Lord's church at Jerusalem. They had come together to discuss a problem that had arisen when "certain men... of the sect of the Pharisees"

went out from Jerusalem teaching that Gentiles must, in order to be saved, be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. This problem needed to be immediately settled. Should it be settled by a conclusion which would "please" the Gentiles, who quite probably objected to this de-

PLEASED

mand of those Judaizing teachers? Should it be such as would “please” those “certain men” of the sect of the Pharisees? Should it simply be whatever might “please” Paul, Barnabas, Peter or James? We are all more or less prone to want matters settled in a way that will “please” us! But what if throughout all my life EVERYTHING went to please me, and then I should come before the great Judge of all and find that it did not please Him???

How Is the Feat Accomplished?

In verse twenty-two we are told that the conclusion “pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church”! Quite a feat! Just how could such a major problem (a mixing of the laws of Moses and the law of Christ) be solved in such away as to be pleasing to all?? Someone would say, “Impossible!” The key is seen in verse twenty-eight (along with the attitude of those who were trying to settle this problem), where we are told that the solution was dictated by that which “seemed good to the HOLY SPIRIT ...” The work of the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) was REVELATION. Jesus had promised his apostles that “He (the Holy Spirit) will guide you into all truth ...” (John 16:13). The apostle Paul asserts in 2 Timothy 3:16f that He DID “completely furnish the man of God unto every good work.” Among other things, this means that no matter what the problem, it can be settled by “that which seemed good to the Holy Spirit.” Those people who assembled at Jerusalem, approxi-

mately two thousand years ago, had the *direct* guidance of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were INSPIRED MEN; but we now, by appealing to the INSPIRED BOOK, can know just “what” pleases the Holy Spirit.”

Ways in Which Some Are “Pleased”

Some folks today are “pleased” by “just whatever the crowd wants”; after all, that is the popular way; that is the EASY way—drifting with the tide. CONFORMING is much easier than TRANSFORMING (see Romans 12:1f). Others are “pleased” by that which they consider to have been “good enough for Mom and Dad.” Multitudes of religionists are “pleased” only by that which has been handed down to them by parents and grandparents. Maybe some of those “certain men of the sect of the Pharisees” reasoned in this fashion concerning circumcision. It WAS “good enough” for their parents, for THEN it was required of them, since they were under “the law of circumcision.” One of the sad things about those who make that appeal today is that the religion of their parents, although it pleased them, did not please the Lord, and therefore it was not truly “good enough”!

The apostle Paul warned in 2 Timothy 4:1ff that there would be people who, having “itching ears,” would “heap to themselves teachers” who would tickle their ears, or “please” them! That time has certainly come!

But the person who has reverence for God and is genuinely interested in going to heaven is of the attitude of Paul, as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:9 (ASV), “Wherefore also

WE MAKE IT OUR AIM, whether at home or absent (alive or dead—cgm) to be WELL-PLEASING UNTO HIM (the Lord).”

Just what pleases you in religious matters, dear reader? Does it take that which “seems good to the Holy Spirit” (the Inspired Scriptures) to please you?

The Plan of Salvation

Jesus charged his apostles to go “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 16:15f). Under that charge the apostle Paul said, “... the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation ...” (Romans 1:16). Under that same commission the apostle Peter told the murderers of Jesus to “Repent, and be baptized ... unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). We thus conclude that the plan of salvation for the alien sinner which “seemeth good to the Holy Spirit” is that he BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, REPENT of his sins and be BAPTIZED unto the remission of sins. DOES THIS PLEASE YOU?

The Oneness of the Lord’s Church

Jesus promised, “upon this rock I will build my church” (singular). (Matthew 16:18). He assured his disciples that there would be ONE flock and ONE fold (John 10:16). We are told by the inspired apostle Paul that there is “ONE BODY,” and that the “body is the church” (Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18). The ONE HEAD, Christ, can have only ONE BODY, and all members of that body must be

THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF GOD TO SAVE

The apostle Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes ..." (Romans 1:16).

While in Rome in prison Paul became acquainted with a young man named Onesimus who was possibly a servant or a slave of a Christian named Philemon of Colossae. Onesimus was guilty of various wrongs against Philemon. Paul had taught him and led him to a different life in Christ, cleansed from all sin in the blood of Christ.

Now that Onesimus had obeyed the gospel and was a Christian, with a far different attitude toward right and wrong, he was ready to go back to rectify the wrongs of which he was guilty against Philemon. Paul's short letter to Philemon was for assurance that now both men would act as brothers in Christ.

No doubt this sort of thing has occurred many times. A young man slipped away from his hometown owing money. In time he obeyed the gospel, and came back to pay off every debt. With Paul we understand that the gospel when obeyed is the power of God to save.

PLEASED

UNITED. We are likewise told that the church is the "house (family) of God" (1 Timothy 3:15.) This would mean that all of the Lord's children must wear the same name ("Christian" —Acts 11:26), and be otherwise united—not broken up into denominations! This "seemed good to the Holy Spirit." Does it please you?

The Organization of the Church

The Lord saw fit to give His church no earthly organization other than a LOCAL CONGREGATION—made up of "saints" or members, bishops and deacons. (Philippians 1:1). He assigned the church its MISSION, and fitted it to carry out that mission, with nothing larger than a local church, so far as organization through which to function. This "seemed good to the Holy Spirit"; however, "wise men" have never been pleased with that simple arrangement, and so have provided many and varied SUPER arrangements. Does that which "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" please you?

The Work of the Lord's Church

We live in a time when the world looks to "the church" for all kinds

of functions, especially in the field of recreation, entertainment and "social betterment of the community." Churches have become little more than social clubs! Is this what the Lord had in mind for the church which was in His "eternal purpose?" (Ephesians 3:10f) and cost the blood of His precious Son? (Acts 20: 28). In Ephesians 4:12 we are told that the work of the Lord's church is threefold: evangelism, edification, and caring for its needy. It "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to limit the functions of the New Testament church to these three areas. Does this "please" you?

The Final Judgment

According to Hebrews 9:27 (along with 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12, etc.), just as certainly as we have an APPOINTMENT with death, we have an APPOINTMENT to be JUDGED by the Christ. Judgment, or measuring suggests a STANDARD, and the standard by which we shall be judged shall be that which "seemed good to the Holy Spirit," whether it pleases us or not! We should, therefore, pattern our lives in every area by that which "seemed good to the Holy Spirit"—the Inspired Scriptures.

— Charles G. Maples, Sr.

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