

Following Orders

So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.

-Deuteronomy 5:32-

When I joined the U.S. Air Force, my first job was in nuclear weapon systems maintenance. Nuclear weapons are pretty dangerous since they can kill millions of people, so you can understand that performing maintenance on these weapon systems requires a very high level of precision. Basically, a missile mechanic must be perfect in his work. Even the smallest error can cause the weapon to malfunction with catastrophic results. There is no room for error.

To ensure that maintenance is performed correctly and completely, the Air Force provides Technical Orders, which are basically step-by-step manuals that explain the procedures. Technical Orders are issued under the authority of the Secretary of the Air Force, the highest authority in the land specific to the Air Force.

A maintenance job for a nuclear weapon system requires the use of the Technical Order from beginning to end. The lead technician always has the book in hand for every task, even the smallest tasks. He studies the procedures before the work begins, he reads each step aloud as he performs the maintenance, and he verifies that the action and result match the instructions. There are no exceptions, for there is no room for error, guesswork, or personal interpretation.

The Technical order uses three methods to give instructions. There are direct orders telling the technician to do something. There are illustrations and examples to help the technician understand the procedure. And of course some things are necessarily implied...when the instruction says to tighten a bolt, the technician infers that he should use the appropriate tools.

A primary principle in maintenance is to do only and exactly what is stated. Never add a step. Never skip a step. Never change a step. Never guess or assume. Just read the instructions and perform the step. This is known as a conservative approach. It is safe and it is sure. If the technician follows this principle, he will never go wrong and can never be accused of error. The mistakes that do occur are the result of technicians trying to take shortcuts or carelessly missing a step. If such precision is necessary when dealing with nuclear weapons, is it any less necessary in dealing with the salvation of souls?

Just as a small error in nuclear maintenance is dangerous, sin is also dangerous...even what men classify as "small" sins can condemn a soul to hell. Surely we should ascribe to a high level of precision in obeying God's Word which can guide our lives away from sin and into heaven. To ensure that man has the opportunity to know how to avoid sin and perform righteousness, we have a guide book as well. We call it the Bible, and it is the Word of God. It contains all the instructions we need to be holy and blameless in God's sight (1 Peter 1:15). This collection of 66 books was authored by God and carries His Divine authority, which is the highest authority there is. But it is not always easy for man to achieve holiness since we often make poor choices.

Mortal life can be hard. King Solomon sought satisfaction through everything the world offers, but in the end he concluded that since mortal happiness is “striving after the wind,” every man should aspire to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Fortunately we can know how to obey God today by reading His instruction manual, the Bible. Under the Law of Moses, Israelites were commanded to bind God’s law in their hearts and on their hands on their foreheads (Deuteronomy 11:18). In other words, keep the book open all time! Never put it down. Never set it aside. Never leave it behind. As was once said of a popular credit card, “don’t leave home without it.”

The Bible contains everything you need to know to overcome temptation and be adequate in God’s sight for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:3). As long as you rely on it for guidance, you will never go wrong. It addresses every aspect of this life: morality, family values, financial advice, ethics, self-control, overcoming addictions, peer pressure, healthy living, and more. It addresses all we need to know about spiritual life: sin and its consequences, the plan of salvation, communicating and communing with God, the spiritual nature of God of man, heaven and hell, and of course how the local church is to work and worship.

The Bible is written much like any other instruction manual you may have used: cookbooks, auto repair guides, TV remote control programming manuals, military technical orders, and so on. It has direct commands telling us specifically what to do and what not to do. It has illustrations and examples, such as the use of unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice in the Lord’s Supper, the baptism of the Ethiopian by immersion, and the kindness of the Good Samaritan. And it has necessary implications: Christians assembled on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7), which implies they met every time the first day came around, and that they had a designated place to assemble.

The Bible has general instructions that leave us a bit of liberty in how we carry them out, such as the command for every Christian to put aside and save some money to support the church, though there is no specification of how much each Christian is to put aside. There are also specific instructions that leave us no wiggle room at all, such as the command to sing, which necessarily excludes the use of other methods of making sound, such as mechanical instruments and clapping. Furthermore, there are instructions that we are not to add to, take away from, change, or ignore anything written in God’s Word (Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Revelation 22:18). Rather, we are to obey every command, mimic every example, and observe every necessary implication, every time, exactly as written to the best of our abilities, without deviation in any way. If we follow this principle of conservatism, if we just *follow orders*, we will never go wrong. This applies to our individual lives and to the work and worship of the local church. It will make you a better Soldier of Christ, empowering you to “overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

**...learn not to exceed what is written...
-1 Corinthians 4:6-**

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