

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 Empty Tomb

THE DEATH OF CHRIST cannot be denied. “And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.” (Mark 15:42-45).

“Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs” (John 19:32,33). The soldiers who crucified Jesus knew that he was dead. They did not break his legs because he was already dead, and they gave the report to Pilate, the Roman governor, that he was dead.

The enemies of Christ took special precaution to keep the body of Christ in the tomb. “Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver

said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch” (Matthew 27:62-66).

What happened to the body of Christ? When the women came to the tomb early on the first day of the week, the body was not there. “Now upon the first day of the week, very

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.

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early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:1-3). Peter and another disciple went into the empty tomb to investigate and found the linen clothes, and the napkin that was about Christ's head, wrapped together in a place by itself. But the body of Christ was not there (John 20:6, 7).

Three possible dispositions could have been made of the body of Christ: (1) it could have been stolen by the disciples; (2) it could have been removed by the soldiers; (3) it could have been raised from the dead. Let us examine each one of these possibilities.

I. Did the disciples of Christ remove his body from the tomb?

The guards said that they did, but they also said that they were asleep. (Matthew 28:13-15). The disciples absolutely did not remove the body from

the tomb. There are many proofs to show that they did not.

1. They were themselves surprised and shocked to find the tomb empty. The scripture says that they were "much perplexed" about the empty tomb (Luke 24:4).

2. They did not have sufficient courage to remove Christ's dead body from the tomb. If they did not have enough courage to stay with Him when he was still alive, what would cause them to have enough courage to defy the guard in order to steal his body? Matthew's account says, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled" (26:56).

3. It is inconceivable that a whole Roman guard would dare sleep on a watch. They were trained to vigilance, and they knew that if they slept while on duty they would pay with their lives. The Philippian jailor was ready to take his life, for he thought that his prisoners had escaped while he slept (Acts 16:27). Herod had soldiers put to death because he considered that they were not vigilant while on watch (Acts 12:19).

4. Even if the guard had fallen asleep, it is further inconceivable that the disciples could have opened the tomb without waking them. The stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb is called a "great stone" (Matthew 27:60). In fact it was so great the women who came to the tomb on the first day of the week, wondering how the stone could be removed, asked, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?" (Mark 16:3). How then could the disciples move a stone so great without arousing the Roman guard who had been trained to vigilance?

5. Under such circumstances the

disciples surely would not have taken the time to fold Christ's garments, as the account shows in John 20:4-7.

6. The disciples of Christ had no motive for stealing his body. They did not expect it to be raised from the dead. "For they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). They could not give him any better burial than that which he had already received. His body had been prepared for burial with a mixture of expensive myrrh and aloes, brought by Nicodemus (John 19:39). Then the body was honored by being wrapped in linen and by being placed in a new tomb, "wherein never man before was laid" (Luke 23:53).

7. Their earnest preaching of the resurrection showed that they believed it with all their heart. Had they known that the resurrection of Christ was a farce, they could not have had the conviction to stand before the mob a few days later in the city of Jerusalem and tell them that they had crucified the Lord and Christ, and that God had raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:22-32). From the day of Pentecost on, the very heart of their preaching was the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We know that they preached with conviction, and certainly not for money, for after holding a meeting in which 3000 were converted in one day, Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6).

II. Did the soldiers remove the body of Christ from the tomb?

1. They had no motive. The body was already in their keeping. For the body to be gone would cast embarrassing reflections upon their honor as soldiers.

2. They would be faced with the death penalty for breach of the Roman law. They had not the right to

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break the seal that had been placed upon the door of the tomb. "So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (Matthew 27:66).

3. They would have defeated their very purpose for guarding the tomb. They had been placed there to see that the body was not removed (Matthew 27:62-66).

4. They did not produce the body and deny the apostles' claim that Jesus was raised from the dead.

III. Did God raise Christ from the dead?

1. Prophecy said that He would. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10). Peter quoted this prophecy on the day of Pentecost to show that it had been fulfilled in the resurrection of

Christ (Acts 2:26,27).

2. Christ said that He would. "And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day He shall rise again." (Matthew 20:17-19).

3. Christ proved that He did. After his death He showed himself alive unto His disciples by "many infallible proofs," and remained with them for a period of forty days until He ascended into heaven to be with the Father (Acts 1:3-11).

4. The apostles preached that He did, and their claim was not denied even by the enemies of Christ (Acts 2:22-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Can God raise the dead? It is said

that a king ordered his burial to be in a tomb of tremendous granite slabs, so that he would not have to come out to face the judgment. As the years passed, dust settled in a little crevice of the tomb. Into this dust a tiny seed chanced to fall. The seed took root, and as time passed a tree developed. Gradually the roots expanded the crevice until finally the tomb burst asunder. If God can use the simple agencies of nature to open a grave, He certainly can open them all at the last day (John 5:28,29).

When the two disciples on the road to Emmaus knew that Christ was raised from the dead, they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others of the good news (Luke 24:13-34). A doctor is happy to tell the family that a loved one will recover. A lawyer is happy to tell certain ones that they have become heirs of wealth. Let us then hurry, hurry, hurry to tell people the good news of the empty tomb. —BN

I Shall Not Want

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM is one of the very best known sections in the Bible. It is so often read or quoted at funerals or when death or calamity seems near. It ought to be quoted in view of living, for it is a psalm of life rather than a psalm of death.

The literal background of the Psalm is that of a shepherd caring for his sheep, leading them to and from pasture and fold through wood and valley and ravine where dangers may lurk in each hidden place. This psalm is a metaphor depicting a spiritual application. These

six verses show how Jehovah looks over his people even as the shepherd looks over his sheep. In this Christian dispensation in which we live, Christ is our shepherd (John 10:11). The Lord's people are his sheep. Through the years, many articles have been published in this paper

showing how we may become his followers—his sheep. At this point in this study, let each reader make sure that he is really a follower of the Lord. If we are truly the Lord's people, then there are certain necessary things which we can rest assured the Lord will provide. We shall not want for any of these.

I Shall Not Want For Food

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2). The idea is that of a shepherd taking his sheep to a good range which suffices so

PETER'S CONCERN

Speaking for himself and the other apostles, Peter asked Christ a question: "See, we have left all and followed You.' So He said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.'" (Matthew 19:27-29).

There is no need then for faithful Christians to worry about rewards for their service and sacrifices for God's cause in this earthly life, for there is more to come. This mortal body shall return to the dust from which it came for a glorious spiritual body like the glorious body of Christ, not subject to pain or death, but prepared for eternal life in a setting far superior to that of the earthly Eden. He (or she) will be in the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Host, and the redeemed of all dispensations of earthly time. Satan will not be there. He will be in the lake of fire—tormented forever (Revelation 20:10).

I SHALL NOT WANT

that the sheep then lie down in contentment. The Lord provides food for his people. This is literally so. In Psalm 37:25 we read: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). If the Lord's people will do as the Lord directs, they will be provided for. More important than this is the fact that the Lord provides spiritual food. He has given the sincere milk of the word and the strong meat of the gospel to satisfy our hunger for spiritual things (1 Peter 2:1,2; Hebrews. 5:12). He has promised fulfillment: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). The Lord's people will not want for food.

I Shall Not Want For A Leader

I shall not want for a leader, for the psalmist said: "He leadeth me beside the still waters ... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:2,3). Our shepherd, Jesus, leads us. We are to look unto him as the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We are told that Jesus left us an example and that we should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21). The faithful baptized believer can sing with much feeling: "He leadeth me! O blessed thought! "

I Shall Not Want For Renewal

"He restoreth my soul" is the claim of Psalm 23:3. Followers of Jesus have a great restorer. Through his word we

are renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). When I have sinned and seek to be made new again, I have one who pleads my case before God in heaven (1 John 2:1,2). Only my own impenitence will prevent this renewal. (Hebrews 6:6).

I Shall Not Want For A Safe Path

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). If I follow the good shepherd, I shall not want for a safe path. Followers of God have long been assured of a safe path. "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:104,105). Christ, my shepherd, has given unto me everything which pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It is to the law and to the testimonies of God we must go. They will safely guide us through the valley. The save way is the gospel way (Romans 1:16).

I Shall Not Want For Protection

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4). Christians have the grand promise of protection. We need not fear evil though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. "... For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Hebrews 13:5,6). We have no reason to be afraid unless we provoke our protector, and then we have great reason to be afraid.

I SHALL NOT WANT

He is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

I Shall Not Want For Companionship

“For thou art with me” is a most comforting statement. (Psalm 23:4). Our shepherd is with his sheep. Christ dwells with his people in a certain sense. (Ephesians 3:17). Christ promised his disciples that where two or three are gathered together in His name there He will be (Matthew 18:20). Again, in giving the great commission, He said: “...Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). I shall not want for compan-

ionship, for Jesus is with me. He is near, to comfort and cheer, just when I need him most.

I Shall Not Want For Comfort

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). As the rod and staff of the shepherd was protection for the sheep and would have been comfort if the sheep had understood, even so our shepherd is armed and protects His sheep. That is a great comfort to us, His sheep. When we conduct ourselves as we ought, there is no one who can take us away. There is no one who can separate us from the protecting love of Jesus (Romans 8:35-39). In the arms of Jesus we are safe no matter what takes place.

I Shall Not Want For Honor

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5). The assurance is given that honor is sure for those who really follow the Lord. That is still true. I shall not want for honor. A banquet is prepared for me. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever if I live as I am instructed (1 Peter 1:7-12; 1 John 3:2).

A Most Gracious Promise

A most gracious promise is given to those who follow the shepherd. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” — *Curtis E. Flatt*

Obligations to the Truth

IN THE SHORT BOOK OF 2 JOHN, the writer sets forth some obligations that are common to all that claim to be the people of God. We must understand, of course, that our obligations are really to the Lord Himself rather than to the truth; but since God used the truth to convey His will to men, then our responses to God can also be referred to as responses to the Word of truth.

These obligations are shared by all men. Whether a man is a Christian or not, he is obligated to the God who made him and continues to provide for him. The non-Christian, as well as the Christian, has a responsibility to know, believe, walk in, confess, abide in, and preach the truth of

God. Let us study these obligations one by one.

Knowing the Truth

In the first verse of this short letter of John, he emphasizes knowing the truth. Correct knowledge must always precede correct action. The religious world generally is evi-

dence that the quality of knowledge determines the quality of one's religious practice. It is absolutely imperative for men to come to know the will of God—the truth—in order for them to practice the truth and please God. In a courtroom the only guarantee that justice will be executed is the truth. If those involved do not have access to all the truth and the truth only, they can give no assurance that justice will prevail. The destiny of souls depends upon knowing what God has made known. How thankful men should be for His revelation!

Accepting the Truth

In the second verse John says that the truth is “in us.” In order for the truth

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God described His people to Ezekiel: "So they come to you as people do; they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a lovely song, as one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument, for they hear your words but they do not do them (Ezekiel:33:31,32).

When one hears the word and is not a doer he is a deceiver—a deceiver of himself. "Be ye doers of the word not hearers only, deceiving yourselves... But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).

We have heard from Ezekiel, from James. Now hear from Christ, the Son of God. "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

OBLIGATIONS

to be in us, we must first accept the truth: we must believe it. Knowing the truth is useful only if we believe what we know to be the truth. There is no virtue in a mere knowledge of the truth. If a parent knows the truth of what his child is involved in but does nothing to help the child with the problem, the truth that he knows has profited no one.

Walking in the Truth

John rejoiced to learn of his children (an affectionate reference to his converts) walking in the truth. In 3 John, verse four, he said that there was to him no greater joy than hearing that his children were walking in the truth. As one earnestly concerned about the spiritual welfare of these, John was delighted that his former converts were continuing to practice what he had taught them. Many who start in the truth fall by the wayside for various reasons. An urgent need is for men to continue to walk according to God's will. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7).

Friend, what is your condition before God? Are you daily striving to walk according to His will, or are you satisfied to know the truth and to depend upon your past performance? What a risk many are taking in failing to keep on in the service of the Lord!

Confessing the Truth

In the seventh verse John spoke of some of his day who would not confess the truth of Jesus' being the Son

of God and the Messiah in the flesh. The same writer said of some Jewish rulers, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42).

The New Testament indicates that men must confess with their mouths the fact that Jesus is the Son of God in order to enjoy the remission of their sins. (Romans 10:9-10). Jesus told the apostles whom He was sending forth to preach that they could either confess or deny Him by their preaching and their lives (Matthew 10:32-33).

Abiding in the Truth

"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). The doctrine or teaching of Christ includes all that Jesus Himself taught and all that He authorized the apostles guided by the Spirit to teach. The sum of that teaching is the standard. Its limit is the boundary line beyond which no man can go with God's blessings. Man has always tended to be dissatisfied with Divine revelation and to go beyond it. He must not if he would please God. If he cannot find it in the Scriptures either generally or specifically, he should leave it alone.

Preaching the Truth

Since the preaching that men hear often becomes the basis of their faith, it is essential to preach the truth. "If there come any unto you

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and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed" (2 John 10). In our preaching we must sound forth all the truth without compromise. We must also take care that we include nothing but the truth. Truth mixed with error is more dangerous than

all error, for deception is more likely. The preaching of a gospel preacher is necessarily narrow in that it can consist of only the truth.

Loving in the Truth

In the opening verse of 2 John, the writer spoke of his love in the truth for those to whom he wrote. While children of God are to love all men

and do good unto all men, they bear a special relationship to others who have received the truth and are walking in it. Out of this special relationship, they are to manifest a special love for one another.

May we be more keenly aware of the truth as a revelation from God and our obligations to Him on the basis of truth. — *Bobby Graham*

Sins of the Devil

THE UNREPENTING SINNER has a terrible destiny awaiting him: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Because the devil is a great sinner, he has a terrible destiny awaiting him: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). God created man for happiness, for he placed man in a veritable paradise on earth, in the beautiful garden, but when man associates himself with the devil, he must suffer the same destiny along with the devil: "Then shall He say to them on his left hand, Depart from Me ye cursed into the eternal fire which is *prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41).

The devil is guilty of many sins. He is guilty of the **sin of lying**. Jesus said that he is a liar and the father of liars, that he stands not in the truth, for there is no truth in him (John 8:44). He is the most dangerous type of liar because he mixes some truth

with his lies, which fact is seen in his temptation both of Eve and of Christ. When man misuses his tongue by lying, he is looking to the devil as his father, and stands condemned along with the devil. Concerning the heavenly city it is said, "And

there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie" (Revelation 21:27).

The devil is guilty of the **sin of slander**. The word "devil" means slanderer. In Genesis chapter three he slandered God to man. In Job, chapters one and two, he slandered man to God. To slander means to injure by maliciously uttering a false report, to defame. When man maliciously defames his fellow man, slandering a good name worth more than riches (Proverbs 22:1), he is allowing himself to become an "angel" of the devil, and will suffer the same destiny as the devil.

The devil is guilty of the **sin of lust**. Jesus said concerning the evil one, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (John 8:44). When man satisfies the lusts of the flesh in an unlawful way, he is claiming the devil as his father, and stands equally condemned. "Each man

THE MAN WHO TURNED BACK AN ARMY

The children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand. They also took away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded; and he went out before the army that came to Samaria, and said to them: "Look, because the LORD God of your fathers was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand; but you have killed them in a rage that reaches up to heaven. And now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves; but are you not also guilty before the LORD your God? Now hear me, therefore, and return the captives, whom you have taken captive from your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you." So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the leaders and all the assembly.

Then men rose up and from the spoil they clothed all who were naked, and they let all the feeble ones ride on donkeys. So they brought them to their brethren at Jericho.

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is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14,15).

The devil is guilty of the **sin of hypocrisy**. He is the "deceiver of the whole world." (Revelation 12:9). Hypocrisy is a sin condemned over and again in the word of God — "Woe unto you, hypocrites!" When man seeks to deceive and beguile his fellow man, he shows that he is like his father the devil. The devil is condemned eternally — and so is the hypocrite.

The devil is guilty of the **sin of rebellion**. He rebelled against Almighty God. (Rev-

elation 12:7-13). Rebellion may not always be an overt act; it may be an attitude of mind. One who does not lie, slander, deceive, who lives a morally upright life, is, along with the devil, a rebel against God if he does not obey the gospel of Christ; and God will render vengeance upon them that obey not the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

When either we actively engage in sin, or we passively fail to do the righteous will of God, we are making the terrible mistake of aligning ourselves with the greatest of all sinners — the devil — and are thereby choosing for ourselves torment day and night for ever and ever — and that, my dear friends, is beyond human calculation —*BN*

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