

GOSPEL GUIDE

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

In This Issue:

Salvation
and the Church • 1

Unity in Christ • 3

Who Will Be Saved? • 4

Fact or Fiction? • 5

Righteous Judgment • 6

What is That
in Your Hand? • 7

Gross Immorality
in the Church • 8



Salvation and the Church

MUST PEOPLE BE MEMBERS of the church in order to be saved? Many say, “No.” Some say, “Yes.” The important thing is, “What does the word of God say?”

1. *Do you need the love of Christ?* If you do, then you need to be a member of the church because Christ loves the church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Ephesians 5:25). We all need the love of others. The husband needs his wife’s love; the wife needs her husband’s love. The children need the parents’ love and they thrive on it when they know that they are loved and wanted. And indeed we all need the love of Christ. Paul said that we are to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor” (Ephesians 5:2). He loved us to the extent that he was willing to die for us, to take our sins upon himself and pay the penalty which we rightly deserved because of our transgression (2 Corinthians 5:21). If we truly want the love of Christ, we

will want to be members of that glorious church which he loved and for which he gave himself.

2. *Do you need to be sanctified?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Christ sanctified the church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it ...” (Ephesians 5:25, 26). Some have in mind that sanctification is “sinless perfection,” but this idea is in conflict with the scriptural meaning of sanctification. “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the first-born whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine” (Exodus 13:1,2). Repeating the command to Moses in the same chapter, God said, “That thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast;

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SALVATION

the males shall be the Lord's" (Exodus 13:12). To sanctify in the Bible sense is to set apart for the Lord's use. Those who are so set apart by their obedience to the gospel are the ones who have a hope of the eternal inheritance. God sent Paul to carry the gospel to the Gentiles that they might "receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). But if we want to be sanctified, we must be members of the church which he set apart for sacred use (Ephesians 5:25, 26).

3. *Do you want to be cleansed spiritually?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Christ washed and cleansed his church. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:25,26). All need to be cleansed from sin, "For all have sinned, and come

short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The wise man said, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Proverbs 30:12). Isaiah said, "But we all are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). We need cleansing; therefore, we need to be members of that which Christ has cleansed "with the washing of water by the word."

4. *Do you need to be nourished spiritually?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Paul said, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Ephesians 5:29). Christ has provided the nourishment in his word, for Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). If one is not a member of the church, he then is not feeding upon the word and is depriving himself of nourishment essential to spiritual growth and eternal salvation.

5. *Do you need the blood of Christ?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Christ gave his blood for the church. Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). With his precious blood Christ redeemed, ransomed, us from the bondage of sin. "In whom

we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). But if we are to be ransomed and redeemed by the blood of Christ, we must be in that which he purchased "with his own blood."

6. *Do you need Christ as your guide, your director, your head?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Paul said that God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23). Jeremiah, recognizing the need of all men for God's guidance, 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). Since Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life," and since "no man cometh unto the Father" but by him (John 14:5), surely we need him to direct our every step through this life. For him to be our head, we must be members of his body.

7. *Do you need to be saved?* Then you need to be a member of the church, for Christ saves his church. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). But the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). All stand in need of salvation, for John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). If Christ is to be our Savior, we must be in that of

SALVATION

which he is the Savior—his body, the church.

But we may ask, since Christ loves the church, sanctifies the church, cleanses the church, nourishes the church, is the head of the church, and saves the church, “What church, which church?” In the Ephesian letter Paul said that there is only one: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4). In the first chapter he had already identified the one body as “his body,” Christ’s spiri-

tual body, the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Christ built one church “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Christ purchased only one (Acts 20:28). Since he built only one, and bought only one with his precious blood we should recognize it as the one which he loves, sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes, saves, and of which he is the head.

Since we want and need Christ’s love, since we want to be set apart for God’s use, since we need salvation, we ask, “How can we become members of the church?” When people obey the

gospel, the Lord adds them to his church. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). On the day of Pentecost the people believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and were baptized for the remission of their sins. These were the people the Lord added to his church. When we, too, do these same things, we have the forgiveness of our sins and the Lord adds us to his church; for the same procedure that brings about our salvation grants to us membership in the glorious, blood-bought church of our Lord. — BN

Unity in Christ

“NEITHER PRAY I FOR THESE ALONE, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23).

With these words Jesus moved from petitions concerning the apostles to requests on behalf of all disciples in that prayer on the night before his betrayal and arrest. The leading thought, and therefore the primary request, involved the oneness of all disciples.

The unity of the people of God has always been highly valued by the Lord himself and by all who were trying to be partakers of the Divine nature. In the words of the one hundred thirty-third Psalm, the unity of the brethren is both good and pleasant. Its value is compared to the

precious ointment of Aaron and the dew that watered the mountains of Zion. All who claim to love the Lord should be as concerned about the kind of unity that the Lord prizes as is He.

Ours is a time when there is fervent concern for the oneness of all believers, but the oneness most often sought is not the kind that the Lord values and that the Bible describes. It is sometimes described as unity in diversity. People calling themselves by the same religious name but believing and practicing differently, however, can be no more united than a herd of wild horses scattering in different directions. At times they might run together, but their inclinations are so divided that they are apart more than they are together. If this

WHO WILL BE SAVED?

In giving His disciples the great commission Christ said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16, NKJV). In all that Christ could have said this is what he did say concerning what people throughout the world must do to be saved.

They must believe in Christ the Son of God: "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24, NKJV).

They must be baptized—immersed in water. (Acts 8:36-39). There are many people who believe that faith is essential to salvation, but deny that baptism is essential. Christ spoke this great commission with all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:16-18). Faith and baptism are connected with the coordinating conjunction "and" both of equal value in the sentence. If His words do not mean what He said, then what words could He use to say that baptism is essential to salvation?

UNITY IN CHRIST

kind of unity is even achieved, it will be done to the later distress and fracture of all involved; for Bible unity requires a true oneness in recognition of the Divine standard so that all human inclinations and ideas inconsistent with that standard or with the unity of saints can be mortified and surrendered to the will of God as expressed in the Word of God. If men are not ready to lay aside their ideas in order to accept God's idea, then they have no idea of what Bible unity is.

The Importance of Unity

In the verses quoted from the prayer of Jesus at the outset of the article, the Son of God made several points concerning His kind of unity. Verse twenty suggests something of the importance of unity. The oneness under consideration in this passage is of the utmost importance, as suggested by its inclusion as a petition in Jesus' prayer. The place of the prayer at the end of the earthly ministry of the Lord also indicates that Jesus' mission had been spent in doing all that He could to make this unity possible and was now approaching the cross for the same purpose. How important this unity must be in view of all of this!

The Key to Unity

All recognize that unless they are willing to use the key, they cannot unlock and open the door. It is likewise impossible for men to be united unless

they use the key provided by the Lord. According to Jesus' prayer in verse twenty, the key to oneness is faith in Him. It is evident that there can be no oneness between the believer and the infidel because the common ground of faith is absent. It is no more possible for the child of God and the member of a human denomination to be united, for the same key is missing—faith in Jesus Christ. Although both consent to the fact of Jesus' sonship, both do not have a faith of the kind that God approves. Faith in Jesus whom God sent necessarily involves faith in the word which Jesus spoke and that which the apostles spoke. Jesus said, in fact, that men believe on Him through the preached word of the apostles. Here is the basis for Bible unity. Men unwilling to stand on all taught by the Lord and His apostles and on that word alone cannot be one, for in some areas there will be invariable division as a result of their acceptance of varying standards.

The Kind of Unity

That Bible unity is not unity in diversity can be seen in verse twenty-one. Here Jesus compared the unity of disciples to that existing between the Father and himself. It is a unity of plan or purpose, heart, and attitude. When all disciples are genuinely committed to the will of God and develop the attitude of faith that will accept unreservedly what the Bible says, they can be as one. Jesus' dedication to the will of God is seen in His prayer

UNITY IN CHRIST

in Gethsemane when He said, "... nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done."

The Purpose of Unity

Jesus said that disciples ought to be united so that the world might believe that He was sent by the Father. (Verses 21 and 23.) The historic division of the world into diverse religious bodies stands as a barrier to belief on the part of many, as does the fracture of those claiming to compose the church of Christ. Complete unity is not affirmed to be the panacea to lead all men to believe, but it would help to persuade some.

Jesus also said in verse twenty-three that the oneness of His

disciples would help the world to know that God loved all, even as He had loved Jesus. In believing that God sent Jesus, the world will also come to believe the purpose of His coming—to display the love of God to the world.

A Stimulus to Unity

Jesus said that He had given to the disciples the glory that He had been given by the heavenly Father. Verse twenty-four shows that He is speaking of the offer of eternal glory. Verse twenty-two says that Jesus made this offer of glory so that disciples might be united. A consideration of the glory belonging to the faithful on the other side should move us to fulfill the will of the Lord in this matter.

A Necessity for Unity

In the seventeenth verse Jesus prayed for the sanctification of His apostles by means of the Word of truth. He set the example of sanctification for the benefit of His chosen ones (Verse 19). If there was a need for the apostles to be sanctified (devoted) by means of the Word so that they might enter upon their Divine mission of preaching and fulfill it, is there not also the same need for all, because belief comes about as a result of the Word that these preached? We all must be devoted to God's Word as revealed, devoted to it as adequate to supply us unto all that is good (2 Timothy 3:17), and devoted to it as the basis for Bible unity.

— Bobby Graham

Fact or Fiction?

MOSES WROTE: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). He then tells what God did on each of the six days of creation and how He rested on the seventh. (Genesis 1:1-2:3). This is recorded as if it really happened. There is no hint in the text that it is just an allegory or a myth as some now propose.

When God gave Israel the sabbath, to be kept on the seventh day, He said: "For in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11). Certainly the day for

such an important observance as the sabbath would not have been predicted on a fictitious day and week. Have you ever considered why we have a week of seven days? A day is "the time it takes the earth to revolve once

on its axis"; a month is "the period of a complete revolution of the moon"; and a year is "the period of time..., spent by the earth in making one complete revolution around the sun" (Webster's Dictionary). *There is no scientific basis for a week.* It is based *solely* upon the *fact* that God created all things in six days and rested on the seventh.

Other Old Testament writers confirm the accuracy of the Genesis account of creation. Job 38:4-7: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast un-

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

This is a reference to God's righteous judgment (2 Thesalonians 1:5). This is the judgment that will determine who will enjoy the heavenly home forever. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34). This is the judgment that will condemn those who will spend eternity suffering the agony of hell. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41).

What is your judgment of yourself? Are you sure it is as accurate as God's righteous judgment? Have you forgotten any sin in your life? You understand that forgetting sin is far from the forgiveness of sin. What you forget God remembers at the judgment. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Read what alien sinners did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-42,47) and what an erring child of God was told to do (Acts 8:22).

FACT OR FICTION?

derstanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hast stretched the lines upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the cornerstone thereof: when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Psalms 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork." Psalms 102:25: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands."

The New Testament writers also confirm the Genesis account. John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Hebrews 3:4: "For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God." Hebrews 11:3: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Likewise, Jesus Himself speaks of the creation as a historical fact: "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be" (Mark 13:19). Also in Mark 10:6, and related references, Jesus said,

"But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female."

The New Testament confirms that God made man in His image: "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Corinthians 11:7-9). Adam is said to be a type of Christ (Romans 5:14,15; 1 Corinthians 15:22,45). He is even in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, and is listed as "the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

If the account of creation is not true, then we cannot depend on any of the rest of the Bible, because its writers not only accepted the creation story as fact, but claimed to speak from the same God whom they declared created all things (Isaiah 45:18-25; Zechariah 12:1; Hebrews 1:1,2). Neither can we accept Jesus as the Christ, as all things are declared to have been made by Him and through Him (Colossians 1:16,17). If the Bible account of creation is fiction, then the whole Bible is a lie, Jesus was an imposter, God is dead, and "we are of all men most pitiable."

— Jimmy Thomas

What is That in Your Hand?

ABOUT A QUARTER OF THE MOTOR CORTEX in the human brain (the part of the brain which controls all movement in the body) is devoted to the muscles of the hands. How powerful must our hands be to require so much of our brain?

Politicians and men of might see the same potential in the hand. During the Gallic wars, Julius Caesar ordered the thumbs of captured warriors amputated so that when they returned to their country, they would serve as examples and be unable to bear arms again. This practice was later used in a number of wars and in the slave trade.

Darwinists/Marxists certainly recognize the wonder of the hand. How often has their assertion been that the greatest difference between humans and animals is the hand with its opposable thumbs? Would that more would see the hand as did Sir Isaac Newton, “In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence.”

Our dictionaries, like the *American Heritage Dictionary*, speak of the power of the hand in influence and direction. Is it any wonder then, that Scripture places emphasis on the hand — “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**)?

The key question is then, “What is that in your hand?” This is the question God asks of Moses in **Exodus 4:2**. Moses, a leader of sheep, is being asked by God to lead His people from the bondage

of Egypt. A staff or rod is a common tool among shepherds, and this is in Moses’ hand. God uses this staff as a symbol of His power, not only to Moses, but to men of might like the Pharaoh in Egypt and to God’s own people in bondage. The staff is not just a piece of wood — it is a message of might.

Judges 3:31 shows us another man who carries wood in his hand. Shamgar, one of the judges raised up by God uses an oxgoad. This is a pointed staff used to prod or goad oxen, which, quite obviously are very different from sheep on their need for guidance. Shamgar is only mentioned here, but just like with the staff of Moses, the power of God is seen through the oxgoad in his hand.

The “little boy David” uses only a sling with stones in his hand in destroying Goliath of the Philistines (**1 Samuel 17:50**). It is not just a sling in his hand, is it? It is the power of God wielded by a young man of faith. This power delivers a nation.

How many people for how many years are delivered by the well we see in **John 4:6**? Even the weary Saviour stops here. This is Jacob’s well, dug with a simple shovel in a hand, by which the Sav-

our delivers hope to so many of the Samaritan people. It is the work of the shovel in Jacob’s hand that continues to deliver hope to a lost world through the continuing message of the Saviour of “living water.”

Five barley loaves and two fish — what are these among five thousand men? This question of the apostle Andrew (**John 6:9**) might very well be our question. This bread and fish is what the young lad has in his hand, but see the power of God when it is put to the Master’s use! Jesus knows what He is intending to do (**John 6:6**) — to show the power of God and the message of the kingdom. Jesus delivers them from their immediate hunger as well, “He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted” (**John 6:11**). What do men see from the example of the fish and bread in the young lad’s hand? “Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (**John 6:14**).

“Money can’t buy me love” — a well known song lyric, states a valid truth. There are many things that money can’t buy. Simon finds this out first hand in **Acts 8:18-23**. There are a lot of things that money can buy, but no one thinks of two small copper coins as being worth anything. Yet, this is what the poor widow has in her hand (**Mark 12:41-44**). Scripture tells us her coins are worth a cent. Today, these 2,000

GROSS IMMORALITY IN THE CHURCH

The Apostle Paul tells the brethren what they must do concerning sexual immorality in the Corinthian church—an immorality not even named among the Gentiles, that a man has taken his father's wife. They have not mourned that he who has done this deed might be put away from among them. Paul said, "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Paul's instruction to withdraw from the man guilty of fornication was for two purposes: (1) to impress upon him that his sin if not forgiven would result in his eternal punishment; (2) to save the congregation, for sin is like leaven that spreads and "leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:1-8).

From 2 Corinthians chapter 2 we learn that the brethren followed Paul's instruction, and that the fornicator responded to his punishment, that of being withdrawn from. This was inflicted by the majority and was sufficient, so that now they ought to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps he be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Paul said, "Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him."

IN YOUR HAND?

year old coins can be worth still as little as \$3.25. This wonderful lady uses what she has in her hand to assist others, and most importantly, she gives opportunity for a lesson from the blessed Saviour.

Tabitha, or Dorcas, continually holds something in her hand — a needle and thread. At her death, she still speaks through her continual deeds of kindness and charity (**Acts 9:36**). How overwhelmed are all the widows of the day with the kindness of Tabitha shown through the tunics and other garments (**Acts 9:39**). She lives a wonderful lesson of godliness with her life and gives a wonderful lesson of the power of God with her death. "But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." (**Acts 9:40-42**). All of this is possible because she has a needle and thread in her hand and uses it for good.

What is that in your hand? This time, the question is directed to you and me. **Matthew 25:31-46** tells us of the separation that will come as the Son of Man returns. Those who inherit the kingdom are those that use their hands for the service of God, even if it is "just a cup of cold water in His name given."

We have, in our hands, the message of God. We must reflect that with our life. Others must hear the message from our lips and see the message in our actions. "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (**Romans 12:1**). "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (**Colossians 3:17**). "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." (**1 Peter 2:12**).

What is that in your hand? Is it the power of God wielded by one of faith?

—Scott Richardson

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