

GOSPEL GUIDE

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

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Take Away the Stone

WHEN JESUS CAME TO THE TOMB of Lazarus with Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, he wept. Some of the Jews remarked about the love which Jesus had for Lazarus. Others said, “Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”

Showing the sorrow which he experienced, Jesus groaning in himself came to the grave, which was a cave, upon which lay a stone. Jesus said, “Take ye away the stone.” Then Martha replied, “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” But Jesus reminded her of something that he had previously said, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone, and Jesus, after praying to the Father, cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” And then the scripture says, “And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:34-44).

The Principle

Here a great principle is set forth, and that is that God does for man what he cannot do for himself, and that He requires man to do all that he can do for himself. Those around the tomb could not call Lazarus from the dead. They could remove the stone. They could remove the graveclothes. This principle is seen throughout Bible history. God could have saved Noah by destroying the wicked, but he required Noah to show his faith by building the ark (Genesis 6). God could have given the city of Jericho to the children of Israel, but he required them to do something that they could—to march around the city a certain number of times in a certain prescribed way. When they had done what they were told to do, the walls of the city fell (Josh-

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TAKE AWAY THE STONE

ua 6). God could have immediately healed Naaman of his leprosy, but he required him to dip seven times in the river Jordan. When he had dipped the seventh time, his flesh became as clean as that of a little child (2 Kings 5). Jesus could have healed the blind man immediately, but he required this blind man to make his way to the pool of Siloam and wash. When the blind man went his way and washed, he came seeing (John 9).

The Plan Of Salvation

In God's wonderful plan of salvation there are some things which we cannot do for ourselves. We cannot formulate a gospel which has power to save. In his coming from heaven, in his teaching, in his death, burial, and resurrection Jesus has done this for us. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved ... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). We can obey this gospel. "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17).

We cannot redeem ourselves from sin, for we are in the bondage of sin without any means of ransom. Jesus said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). In his precious blood Jesus has provided the redemptive price: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation (manner of life) received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19). We can reach out to and appropriate this redeeming, atoning blood by our obedience to the gospel, by obeying from the heart "that form of doctrine." "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4). Christ shed his blood in his death on the cross (John 19:34), and God in his tender mercy has made it possible for us to reach the redeeming blood in our baptism into his death.

We cannot prepare a heaven. Men have tried to have their utopias, but without success. God has

provided a beautiful heavenly home, and Jesus says that he has gone to prepare a place for his own. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). We can by obeying him and following him, "the way, the truth, and the life," come to the Father and the eternal home of bliss.

Obstructing Stones

There are obstructing stones, which, however, we can remove.

1. Skepticism is a stone of stumbling, for "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). We can remove this stone by considering nature, for "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). We can remove this stone by considering all the indisputable evidence which God has given in his word, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

2. Ignorance of God's will is a stone that can be removed by earnest, honest study of the word of God. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

3. Indifference is a heavy stone, but it can be removed by thoughtfully considering the enormous sacrifice made to make possible our salvation. Our hearts must be touched in contemplating the sacrifice which Jesus made in divesting himself of equality with God, in leaving heaven to dwell on

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earth to be mistreated by men, to die the shameful, agonizing death of the cross, to suffer this horrible experience to save us from an eternal hell of endless suffering.

4. Self-satisfaction is an obstructing stone, but it can be removed by comparing our lives with the perfect life of Christ, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” (1 Peter 2:22). When such a comparison is made, self-satisfaction must give way to a recognition of our shortcomings and

a desire to become more and more like him who so pleased his Father (Matthew 17:5).

5. Prejudice is a stone of stumbling, but surely it can be removed by being honest with ourselves and with the word of God. If Saul of Tarsus, as blinded as he was by prejudice, could open his eyes to the truth, surely any today can move that stone of stumbling.

6. Procrastination is a stone that can and must be removed. Since “now is the accepted time; behold *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2), and since

our life is “even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14), there is not “plenty of time.” The only time we have is *now*, and what we do for the Lord, we must do *now, today*, for this is *the day of salvation*.

By our own merit or ability we cannot save ourselves, but we can remove any stone that might stand in our way. When we do our part in removing the stones and obeying the gospel, God does his part in removing our sins and in saving our souls. — BN

That They May Be Sound

IN TITUS 1:13 INSTRUCTIONS were given to Titus to rebuke the Cretians, “That they may be sound in the faith.” The word *sound* is a word which is a health word and refers to being in good health. Of course, as it is used here, it refers to good spiritual health. The word *sound* is used nine times in the King James Version of the New Testament in this sense and only by the apostle Paul. Five of these references are found in the book of Titus. When these five references are all considered in the same study, we learn much about good spiritual health.

Sound Doctrine

There is such a thing as sound doctrine. (Titus 1:9). Doctrine, as used in our text, refers to the message which was to be taught. It had to be a sound message—the truth of God. In the verse sound doctrine and the faithful word are both

terms referring to the same thing—the truth revealed from God. That is what sound doctrine is!

Sound Speech

Sound doctrine, in the teacher, produces *sound speech* or sound teaching. (Titus 2:7,8). Paul said: “In

all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.” Thus, when sound doctrine is spoken, sound speech is the product. If teaching has anything in it which is contrary to sound doctrine, it is another message and brings a curse to the one who heeds it. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

HONOR YOUR PARENTS

The law of Moses required children to honor their parents. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). This law is repeated in the New Testament. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise" (Ephesians 6:1,2).

While He suffered on the cross, Christ's thoughts were of the welfare of His mother. From the cross He placed her care in the hands of His beloved disciple John. "And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:25-27).

We know a young man who was brought up to be a faithful Christian, but he has not shown care for his mother as Christ did for His mother. He has broken the hearts of his godly parents by forbidding any communication with their grandchildren. Nature shows clearly that a baby thrives on the love of family members. At some point these children will realize they have been brought under a dark cloud and robbed of a God-given blessing.

BE SOUND

Sound Faith

There is such a thing as *sound faith*. (Titus 1:13; 2:1,2). Sound faith comes when sound teaching is done from the sound doctrine. The same apostle expressed this truth in another way: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). One's faith will be just as sound (healthy) as the teaching is sound which produced the faith and no more so. Everyone, who knows that he has faith, ought to make sure that his faith has come only from that which is revealed in sound doctrine.

Other Products

The very nature of *sound doctrine* and *sound speech* is that they not only show that which is right but that they also exhort and convict those who are in error. (Titus 1:9). Sound speech, based solely upon sound doctrine, corrects that which is wrong and persuades those who are wrong to do right. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

Sets The Standard

Sound doctrine also sets the standard for living once one becomes a Christian. "But speak thou the things which become sound

doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience" (Titus 2:1,2). Notice that this text shows that some things are becoming to sound doctrine. Some things are not. Furthermore, when people live by the standard set by sound doctrine, they adorn it (Titus 2:10). This standard will completely furnish the man of God in every spiritual need.

Are You Sound?

Are you sound in the faith? The Cretians were not. They needed to give heed to sound doctrine that they might be sound. It is only when people obey sound doctrine and continue in it that they can be said to be sound. "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:17,18). "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14,15).

— Curtis E. Flatt

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

— Titus 2:1

Jeroboam's Barren Battle

JEROBOAM, A HIGHLY GIFTED YOUNG EPHRAIMITE, comes to the notice of Solomon early in his reign (**1 Kings 11:28; 1 Kings 9:15,24**). Solomon made him overseer of the fortifications and public work at Jerusalem, and placed him over the levy from the “house of Joseph.” The “house of Joseph” may stand for the whole of the ten tribes (**Amos 5:6; 6:6; Obadiah 1:18**). It was an important position; however, Jeroboam used it to plot against the king. No doubt he had the support of many of the people. Long standing animosity (**2 Samuel 19:40 ff**) was worsened when Israelite interests were made subservient to Judah and to the king, and enforced labor with burdensome taxation filled the people with bitterness and jealousy. Jeroboam gives voice to the suffering of the people (His name means, “pleads the people’s cause”).

In addition, he had the message of the prophet Ahijah, who, by tearing his new mantle into twelve pieces and giving ten of them to Jeroboam, informed him that he was to become king of the ten tribes. Josephus says (Ant., VIII, vii, 8) that Jeroboam was roused by the words of Ahijah, “and being a young man of warm temper, and ambitious of greatness, he could not be quiet.” For the time, his plans failed, and Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he was received by Shishak, the Pharaoh who was successor to the father-in-law of Solomon.

As soon as Jeroboam heard that Solomon was dead, he returned from Egypt and took up his resi-

dence in his native town, Zeredah, in the hill country of Ephraim. The northern tribes now turned to the leader, Jeroboam. He was sent for and raised to the throne by the choice and approval of the popular assembly, and of course by God, as foretold through Ahijah.

Despite the success of the revolution politically, Jeroboam feared for the permanency of his kingdom. He dreaded a reaction in favor of the house of David if the people should make repeated religious journeys to Jerusalem and the Temple of God. Jeroboam now made “two calves of gold” as symbols of the strength and power of “the gods who brought you out of

Egypt,” and set them up in sanctuaries at Beth-el and Dan, where altars and other sacred objects already existed.

Jeroboam had been given the chance to serve God. God had promised to bless him if he did, but Jeroboam chose the wrong path. God sent words through his prophets. The words for Jeroboam were not promising. At one point, because of his son’s illness, Jeroboam sent for the prophet Ahijah, but was told that the house of Jeroboam would be cut off and that the people who had followed him to idolatry would also be uprooted from the land and taken as captives. The worst part of the message was that the son would die.

Lessons for You and Me

Man’s way is not the right way.

Jeroboam, from early in life, was zealous to do well for himself and his family. He was determined to “make it” and “do it his way.” There was one problem, in doing things his way, he left out God’s way. He decided to gain power through his own fortifications, through his own system of religion, and through his own popularity. His battle to be “on top” was a barren and fruitless battle because he ended up, in essence, fighting against God and His plan. His heart was certainly not like that of another we read of who fought against God — the apostle Paul; **Acts 26:14,15**. How is our heart? Do we want to do things “our way” or God’s way?

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH — BUT NOT CHRISTIANS

It should not, but such an ungodly condition may exist in a family wherein parents are divided from children, children from parents, siblings from one another. The tragedy of it is that they all are members of the church and consider themselves the children of God. All live under the same *perfect law of liberty*. (James 1:25). When obeyed, it solves every problem. When disobeyed, it condemns to eternal separation from God and suffering from which there is no relief.

What is the answer? The entire family using time together in the daily study of God's word until each can say "Thy word have I laid up in my heart that I may not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). Pray together as His children. Let pure unadulterated love guide and govern. When God's children are in harmony with His word, they are in harmony with each other. Where there has been an ugly wound it is healed—without a scar.

Joshua as the head of his house made a choice that would unite and bless his family: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

JEROBOAM

We can make bad matters worse. Jeroboam made bad matters worse. Many of the priests still in the land were opposed to his image-worship (**2 Chronicles 11:13**). Jeroboam realized he was losing some of his strength in this way, so, he found it necessary to institute a new, non-Levitical priesthood (**1 Kings 13:33**). A new and popular festival on the model of the feasts at Jerusalem was also established. Jeroboam sacrificed the higher interests of religion to politics. This was the "sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin" (**1 Kings 12:30; 16:26**). When we realize that we are in error, do we try to turn to the right path or do we compound the error by useless justifications?

Take the "good" opportunity. Jeroboam had been given the chance to serve God. God had

promised to bless him if he did, but Jeroboam chose the wrong path. We all have the opportunity to serve God and obey His will. God doesn't want anyone to perish, and he gives us fair warning of the consequences of disobedience. The plan for salvation is God's plan. It is up to us to respond to it.

Remember God in all circumstances. Jeroboam only thought of God when times were hard, or he wanted something for himself. When Jeroboam's eldest son had fallen sick, he thought of Ahijah, now old and blind, and sent the queen in disguise to learn the issue of the sickness. While it is true that God cares for us and wants us to think of Him when times are difficult, it is also true that God expects us to think of Him always. We can't live life as we please and then think God approves even though our lives don't reflect His ways.

— S. Scott Richardson Sr.

Why Do People Sin?

WHEN WE CONSIDER the results or fruits of some behavior we are made to wonder WHY people behave in that particular manner. This is certainly true with SIN! The importance of our subject is indicated in that to which SIN will eventually lead.

God, through Ezekiel (18:20) says "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The inspired apostle Paul says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death ..."; and we know that the "death" in each of these passages is not PHYSICAL death; for even the righteous have an appointment

with physical death (Hebrews 9:27); but it must refer to "the second death" of Revelation 21: 8. In view of this, it would seem that every accountable creature would determine NOT to sin. But the apostle says, "... all have sinned ..." (Romans 3:23).

WHY DO PEOPLE SIN?

Then WHY do people sin? I believe there are at least five basic reasons why men sin.

1. Some Sin Because of Ignorance. God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). The apostle Paul said of his people, the Jews, “... they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:1f). You might question the WHY for the Jews’ ignorance; but there is no argument but that ignorance, in some sense, kept them from submitting to the righteous commandments of God (Psalm 119: 172).

The idolatry of the Athenians (Acts 17) was at least to some degree attributed to ignorance (v. 23). But then we see God’s attitude toward such in Paul’s warning, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (v. 30).

More teaching, preaching and studying would help to eliminate this source of sin. There are many people in religious error who would not be if they would, as the Bereans (Acts 17:11), “search the Scriptures daily ...”

2. Unbelief Causes Sin. Although the source of FAITH is the Word of God (Romans 10:17), there are many people who know what the Word says (they are not ignorant); but they simply do not BELIEVE it! God said to Moses, “Because ye believed me not to sanctify me in the eyes of the children

of Israel...” (Numbers 20:12). Moses knew God said “Speak” to the rock; but he STRUCK the rock. He, as Cain, Nadab and Abihu, and millions of people today, just did not BELIEVE he had to go “strictly by the Word of God”!

The Jews failed to enter into the land of promise, not because of ignorance of God’s commands, but “because of UNBELIEF” (Hebrews 3:19). Some of Jesus’ own disciples were characterized by “unbelief” (Mark 16:14), and many of His disciples of today evidence the same!

3. Pleasure Promotes Sin. No one who gives fair judgment will conclude that there is no pleasure in sin. Moses, according to the inspired writer (Hebrews 11:25) refused the “pleasures of sin.” Yes, it is but “for a season,” and the price (“wage”—Romans 6:23) certainly makes him a fool who gives himself over to pleasure; but this is, in our time and affluent society, one of the major enticements to sin. In the parable of the sower (Luke 8) our Lord said the “rocky ground” hearer is one who allows “cares, riches and pleasures” to choke out the fruit-bearing that would otherwise result. It is because of this brief “pleasure” that people become fornicators, gamblers, drunkards, “and such like” (Galatians 5:19-21). But Moses compared the “pleasures” with the “recompense of reward” and cast his lot with the people of God! He may have been tempted by the “pleasure” to sin, but he, unlike so many today, knew it was not worth the PRICE he would have to pay.

4. Love for Money. Money, within itself, is not evil, as some

have concluded; but the inspired apostle says, “For the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:19—ASV). We have inspired record of a number of cases where the love for money was the root of evil. Peter says (2 Peter 2:15) that for the “hire of wrongdoing” some “forsake the right way,” as did Balaam. Judas betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen would rather see men continue in idolatry than lose the wealth they obtained from their craft of shrine making, should the people obey the truth preached by Paul (Acts 19).

Surely there are multitudes in our time who for the love of material wealth neglect their eternal souls, as did the rich man of Luke 12. For money they walk in the way of sin, which will end in torments, where all their wealth, even if they could “take it with them,” could not obtain for them one moment’s relief from agony!

5. Deception. The first sin committed by the human race was attributed to deception. Through subtlety the serpent deceived Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3); and ever since that time this has been one of Satan’s most effective devices. We can deceive ourselves. This is the case when we judge ourselves to be better than we really are. The apostle Paul warns, “... not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly ...” (Romans 12:3); and again, “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” (Galatians 6:3). The Laodiceans had deceived themselves into thinking they were “rich, and ...

WHEN MAN KNOWS MORE THAN GOD

Man has no such knowledge or power. God knows man better than man can know himself.

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me ... And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether ... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:1-6).

Today the world is largely void of moral and spiritual values. There is a reason: weak, sinful man has the audacity to exalt himself above God, almighty, all-knowing. Instead of being a humble servant of God, he chooses to be a diabolical tool of Satan.

WHY DO PEOPLE SIN?

have need of nothing,” but the Lord considered them “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). This points up the importance of SELF EXAMINATION!

We can be deceived by others—and especially by FALSE TEACHERS (“ministers” of Satan). “Beware of false prophets...” (Matthew 7:15) was a warning of our Lord. “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4) was another. The Galatians had been deceived by perverters of the gospel, so that, whereas they “did run well,” they had been “hindered,” and had been “removed from him who called (them) into the grace of Christ” (Galatians 1:6ff; 5:7). The apostle Peter warns, “But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you . . .” (2 Peter 2:1). John cautions, “... believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: be-

cause many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

This danger reminds us of the importance of CAREFUL EXAMINATION of “every teaching”! As the Bereans of old (Acts 17:11) we need to “search the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” We need to “watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Be on guard lest Satan entrap us by deception!

Then others are deceived into thinking they can “sow to the flesh,” and yet “reap of the Spirit.” “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”! (Galatians 6:7). We SHALL reap; and we shall reap AS WE HAVE SOWN! If we sow in sin, we shall reap the “wages” of sin!

Here are five reasons why people sin, and you might know of many more; but the one thing we must not forget—“the wages of sin is death,” regardless of WHY we sin! The WHY will not excuse at the JUDGMENT! — Charles G. Maples, Sr.

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