

GOSPEL GUIDE

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

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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 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; the males shall be the Lord's" (Exodus 13:12). To sanctify in the Bible sense is to

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SALVATION

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. But 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 which he is the Savior—in 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

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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 spiritual 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

I Attend Church Services

I ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES. I attend these services regularly. Many do not attend regularly. Many do not attend at all. Does this make any difference? Has God left the matter up to us to decide? Is God just as pleased when we do not attend? These are important questions. Since I attend church services and since I feel that I am obligated to attend, I would like to explain why I attend.

I Do Not Attend For Some Reasons

I do not attend church services in order to please myself. While I am pleased with the services much of the time, that is not why I attend. I do not attend church services to be seen of men. I know that I will be seen and I am concerned about my influence, but I do not attend to be seen of men. People, who have this as their motive for attending, have their reward. (Matthew 6:1-3). I do not attend church services to visit. While I enjoy being with people who attend, visiting is not

my reason for attending. I do not attend church services to be entertained. Is that not the reason some are not happy with church services? They may well have come for the wrong motive to begin with. Is this not the reason for some of the innovations in the services? This is still the best argument | have ever heard for the use of a mechanical instrument in worship. It sounds good. It pleases those who have come to be entertained. I do not attend services to fill my stomach. More and more, I see people who

will confess that they attend because of what they call fellowship but which actually is just the eating of a common meal together. We are told to take care of such matters at some other place and time. (1 Corinthians 11:21,22,34). These are not valid reasons for attending church services.

To Obey Christ

Plainly stated, I attend church services to obey Christ. I strongly believe that I cannot obey Christ in some essentials without attending church services. There are, at least, three commandments which I disobey when I do not attend these services.

When I do not attend these services, I break the commandment to assemble. That is a command: “Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews

GOD'S PEOPLE IN WRONG PLACES

God's people are in wrong places when —

I. *They are with the wrong crowd.* Peter was a faithful disciple of Christ, but when Christ was led out to be tried and crucified, he followed, but "afar off." Then while warming himself at the fire of the enemies of Christ three times he denied that he knew the Lord. When Christ turned and looked at Peter, he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:54-62). Many today are led astray by association with the wrong crowd.

II. *They do not flee temptation.* Joseph fled when his master's wife urged him to lie with her. His answer was, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). God blessed Joseph, and he became a great power in Egypt. David did not flee temptation. He sinned with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah a loyal soldier in David's army. David's sin brought tragedy to his reign and to his family (2 Samuel 11;12). Paul told Timothy to flee youthful lust. "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

I ATTEND

10:25). I cannot obey that command without attending church services.

When I do not attend these services, I break the commandment to break bread—to partake of the Lord's supper. Jesus said to do this. (Luke 22:19). The apostle Paul, in plain language, restated this command (1 Corinthians 11:24,25). The apostle's example teaches us to do this upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

When I do not attend the services of the church, I break the commandment to lay by in store upon the first day of the week. Few commandments are more plainly stated: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:1). Thus I attend church services to obey Christ.

To Grow Spiritually

I attend church services in order to grow spiritually. The necessary ingredients for spiritual growth are to be had at these services. The teaching of God's word takes place at these services (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:19; Hebrews 5:12). God's word is the food for spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2). If someone says: "I can study God's word without attending church services"; then let it be remembered that absence from the things which take place in these services makes one to be weak, sickly, and asleep. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). If you are inter-

ested in being strong and healthy and wide awake spiritually, you will be attending church services, too.

To Set A Good Example

Furthermore, I attend church services in order that I may set a good example. We all know that attending services does not automatically make one a good example. But we also know that observers are quick to see that there is not much to our religion if we do not think enough of it to be a part of the gatherings. The poet put it like this:

*Melissa is a Christian
Wonder how I know?
Every time the church bell rings,
Melissa's got to go.*

This is one of the ways in which Christ's followers show their loyalty to him. He said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We have heard the statement made by children: "Daddy doesn't go. I don't have to go." I attend church services to set a good example.

To Contribute To The Functioning Of The Church

I attend church services to contribute to the functioning of the church. Most everyone wants the church to continue. Most people want the church to be functioning in its mission, or at least in that part of its mission which has to do with the betterment of society. But without the members attending the services, the church cannot continue long to function in the work of benevolence which

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the Lord assigned to it or in the function of saving souls. When the members of the church cease to meet and worship and work together, the church ceases. A coming together is not only necessary for a gathering of the necessary finances and for a planning of work,

it is necessary for a maintenance of the work. In the New Testament the church came together to hear of the work (Acts 14:27). It is also necessary for the church to come together for disciplinary action (1 Corinthians 5:4). It is necessary for the church to come together in order to function. I attend church services for that reason.

How About You?

I have explained why I attend church services. I am persuaded that I have valid reasons to do so. How about you? Can you, from the New Testament, show why it is not important to attend?

— Curtis E. Flatt

The Coming of the Kingdom

BEFORE JESUS LEFT THE EARTH to go back to heaven, he finished his preparation for the kingdom's coming by instructing the apostles to remain in Jerusalem so that they might receive the promise of the Father, their baptism in the Holy Spirit. He further showed that the work of the apostles after his departure would consist of bearing inspired testimony, given by the Spirit, to the fact of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and reign. In Acts 1:8 Jesus told them of their work of witnessing. They began that work in the second chapter of Acts when they preached to the assembled Jews on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection.

The Testimony Borne

The preaching of Peter recorded in Acts 2:22-36 came in direct fulfillment of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1. On this appointed day (Pentecost), the appointed men (the apostles) began to bear the testimony given them by the Holy Spirit, which was designed of God to glorify Christ. (John 15:26-27). As we read their testimony in this chapter and in other chapters of Acts, we gather that it all speaks of Christ and his

reign over the kingdom. In connection with this observation, read Acts 2:30-36; 3:22-23; 5:30-32; and other similar passages in Acts and the epistles.

The passages cited all bear record to the existence of the kingdom of the Lord among men, whereas it did not exist on the day when Jesus left earth for heaven. (Acts 1:6-7). The specific testimony to the kingdom's presence is seen in the following considerations:

(1) The purpose of Jesus' resurrection was that he might sit upon David's throne; to accomplish the purpose God raised him from the dead, exalted him at His own right hand, and fulfilled the promise of Christ concerning the Holy Spirit on that very day. Christ was on David's throne in heaven—not on earth—made both Lord (Ruler) and Christ (Anointed). If Jesus was a ruler from heaven, then his kingdom must have been established. (Acts 2:30-36).

(2) Jesus was the prophet of whom Moses had spoken in Deuteronomy 18, invested with the authority to speak and to be obeyed. His investiture with these rights and powers amounts to a statement of his rule over his kingdom, for these are the essence of his kingly rule. (Acts 3:22-23).

(3) Jesus had been exalted of God to be a Prince (Ruler) and a Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. His role was a dual one as set forth here; but when viewed as a whole, as it really was, he was a Princely Savior. In his position he requires repen-

GOD INTENDS FOR THE HUMAN BODY TO BE COVERED

When Adam and Eve sinned the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. God prepared for them a more durable covering (Genesis 3:7,21).

Many years ago, old as well as young ladies all wore their dresses in length to their ankles. With the passing of time the length has become subject to the fashion designers' wishes. One would be blind not to see that these people are not concerned about modesty. Under their influence the length is like a yoyo, up and down year by year—for the last number of years more up than down. The gullible apparently feel compelled to go with the fashionable crowd—even if it means stripping to the point of indecency.

The kind of person—man or woman—who qualifies for eternal heavenly abode will not be the one who goes with the world and its ungodly devices but with the one who rather has “the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, *which is very precious in the sight of God*” (1 Peter 3:4).

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tance, thus asserting his ruling power, and grants forgiveness, hereby manifesting his work as Savior. His work of Savior, however, depends upon His powerful and authoritative word being received and obeyed. As a demonstration of this dual role of the Christ, let us recall that the remission of sins depended upon obedience to the Lord's requirement to repent, as given on Pentecost. (Acts 2:38-40).

The force of the testimony of all passages used in this section is that the king was enthroned, the law of the kingdom was being proclaimed, and believers were becoming subjects of the king and citizens in his kingdom. The work and teaching of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the apostles by means of their preaching was having its effect. Believers the more were being added daily to the number of disciples, the church. (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4,5; 5:14; and 6:7).

While we have studied the king, his kingdom, and the citizens composing it, we have not given much notice to his law.

The Law Of The Kingdom

The preaching of Peter and the rest of the apostles on the birthday of the kingdom was the gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15). The early disciples continued in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). The teaching that the apostles did was called the faith (Acts 6:7), for it was the worthy object of the faith of men. Their preaching bore the imprint of the king himself, for they commanded men to obey (Acts 10:47). Though they were empowered to teach the decrees of the king, they could not go beyond His will: there was no room for their own decisions, for they were but ambassadors authorized to act and to teach according to the Ruler's will (Acts 15:24).

The body of apostolic teaching is even today to be received by all citizens in the kingdom, for all authority belongs to the King (Matthew 28:18); and he is still the head of the body (Colossians 1:18). It is a fact that many deny the kingship by their failure to submit to Him. Does it really make a difference of which group one is numbered among? Yes, absolutely!

— Bobby L. Graham

The Roman Catholic Church

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH is the most powerful religious organization in the Western World. It claims a world membership of more than 566 million out of a total “Christian” world population of some 985 million.

The church is a force to be reckoned with in national and world politics. Her aim is to rule through political means; and she possesses

the machinery for exerting political influence even in those nations wherein she is in the minority, as in the United States. Because of her

ROMAN CATHOLIC

great power she is able not only to wield tremendous pressure in advancing her religious views in the political arena but also in holding sway over the millions who are under, her domination. Where did this great organization come from? By what authority does it function? How does it carry out its will upon its adherents and in the nations of the world?

1. The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church. While the Catholic Church claims to be the one true apostolic church of the New Testament, a careful study of the inspired writings of the first century reveal nothing about such an organization in that period. We must look this side of the New Testament to find the beginnings of Catholicism. The first century church in Rome was nothing more than a local congregation of Christians (or perhaps several local congregations existed there) with no claim for oversight of Christians beyond the congregation itself. During the apostasy that followed in the early centuries of the present era, the church at Rome became one of the great patriarchal churches that dominated large segments of the "Christian" world. Due to various circumstances of history (the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the dominance of the Eastern Emperors over the patriarchs of Constantinople, etc.) the patriarchs of Rome came to exert greater power and to claim universal oversight of the whole church. This led to the claim that the Roman patriarch was the head of the church and the vicar of Christ on earth.

Not all people accepted the pope's assumptions of headship. A great struggle for power arose between the pope and the patriarch of Constantinople. This eventually resulted in a permanent rupture between the Eastern and Western churches. But the pope held his power in the West and the Roman Catholic Church emerged into the world organization it is today.

According to Roman Catholic teaching there can be no Roman Catholic Church without a pope. "The (Roman Catholic) Church is the congregation of all baptized persons united in the same true faith, the same sacrifice, and the same sacraments, under the Holy Father, the Pope." (*A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, p. 12.) But the first man in history to actually exert power in anything like universal dominion was Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.). Even this powerful churchman "with shrewd humility" refused to be called Ecumenical Bishop. For nearly 500 years there was no pope. The idea that the Bishop of Rome should have authority over the whole church was a slow growth in the apostasy. It was bitterly fought at every step and was never universally accepted. Since there could be no Roman Catholic Church without a pope and there was no pope prior to 590 A.D., it is obvious that the Roman Catholic Church is the product of apostasy and is not the New Testament church.

2. The Organization of the Roman Catholic Church. The government of the Roman Catholic Church is hierarchal and absolute. A hierarchy is "a ruling body of clergy or-

ganized into orders or ranks each subordinate to the one above it." In the structure of the Roman church the pope stands at the top of the hierarchy. He is believed by Catholics to be "Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ, and 'the visible' Head of the Roman Catholic Church." His authority is supreme in all matters of faith and morals as head of the church. The "College of Cardinals" elects the pope, serve as his advisers, and hold authority over the church between popes. Most of the cardinals reside in Rome. The Roman Curia is the administrative arm of the church, and it is through this bureaucracy the pope governs world-wide Catholicism.

Next in the hierarchy, in descending rank, are archbishops, bishops and priests. The archbishop is spiritual ruler of an archdiocese made up of several dioceses. Bishops rule over dioceses as their territorial jurisdiction. And under the bishops are the parish priests. A parish is the ecclesiastical unit of area committed to one pastor. All members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy are ordained priests. In addition to the regular ranks of the hierarchy, the Roman Catholic clergy includes other priests, monks, deacons, subdeacons, and the whole army of "Orders of Congregations." The latter are of two kinds: monastic orders and the religious congregations of priests and various brotherhoods and sisterhoods, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, etc.

3. The Rode Authority of Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church's faith and doctrine is founded upon "that deposit of faith given to it by Christ and

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

Pilate the Roman governor asked Jesus this question; however he did not wait for Jesus to answer his question (John 18:38).

We can be sure the answer is not the word of Satan: “he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). We are introduced to his lies as early as Genesis 3. God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would surely die. Satan told the woman that they would surely not die. In obeying his word they brought themselves under the sentence of death and the loss of their earthly paradise.

In His prayer to God Christ, the Son of God, answered the question. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth (John 17:17). Christ said “I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37). He further said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Only full obedience to the word of God can free man from the consequences of sin.

PLEASED

through his apostles, sustained by the Bible and by tradition.” While Catholics make use of certain passages in the Bible in an effort to justify their peculiar doctrines, they make no claim to follow the teaching of the Word of God. In addition to the Bible they have added what they call “Divine Tradition.” They say: “Not all truths revealed for us by God are found in the Bible; some are found only in Divine Tradition. By Divine Tradition is meant the revealed truths taught by Christ and His apostles, which were given to the Church only by word of mouth and not through the Bible, though they were put in writing, principally by the Fathers of the Church. Divine Tradition must be believed as firmly as the Bible because it also contains the word of God.” (Ibid., p. 44.)

The Bible teaches that the New Testament is the complete and final revelation of God’s will for all time to come. “All scripture is

given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim. 3:16,17.) We are forbidden to go beyond the revealed will of Christ and are without God if we do. (2 John 9,10.) That which Catholics call “Divine Tradition” is nothing more than the doctrines and commandments of men which Jesus said makes our religion vain. (Matt. 15:8,9.)

The Roman Catholic Church did not begin in the first century; it began in the apostasy that followed the first century. Its organizational structure is completely foreign to what we read about the church of Christ in the first century. It does not even claim to follow the New Testament as its sole authority in religion. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church can in no sense be the church Christ established on Pentecost in A.D. 33.

— Earl Kimbrough

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