

gion, was informed that she had never counted her salvation from the point of being “a member of the Church of Christ”; she had been “saved” as an eight-year-old child in a Pentecostal meeting when she “got the Holy Ghost, and was then baptized”.

One common thread in all of these cases is that obviously the individuals had no knowledge of the oneness of the Way, the singularity of the spiritual body of Christ, the exclusiveness of the relationship between Christ and the church, at the time of their baptism. They had not been taught what the Scripture says about the church — the kingdom — as was so strongly and clearly taught by John, Jesus, and the apostles in the first century; they had made no choice concerning that strait and narrow way. Then when they did learn about it, they wanted no part in it. Angrily and vehemently they spoke their rejection of such a doctrine, and they left it to take up fellowship with groups more nearly after their own hearts.

I ask you: Did God (taking advantage of their ignorance) — back there when men first started counting them as “members of the church” — add them spiritually to a group which they rejected as soon as they understood what it was all about? Can we think that God would do such a thing, with His ability to look into hearts and to see the lack of conversion there? If they had died the week before their repudiation of the church, would they have been saved in their ignorance? **Is ignorance a factor in salvation?**

What a responsibility we have, not to shield people from choices based on biblical knowledge, but to

lovingly and carefully help them to see the whole of the message of salvation. Only when one knows the roads set before him can he count the cost and choose salvation.

What do men really think they have accomplished when they shielded a person from possible rejection of truth by not presenting that truth to him? Again, I ask, is salvation based on ignorance? Is God so poverty stricken for souls that He rushes to grab up those who mistakenly get close enough to the truth to get caught in His church? If so, how must He feel when He has to let them go because they found out that His doctrine was a “bigoted” one that they didn’t believe and couldn’t accept?

By purposely shielding people from the clarity of doctrine as God has spelled it out in His word, it is very possible that they will never learn, will never make that choice, and will stand in the judgment as those who hear, “*I never knew you; depart from Me...*” even though they may sincerely cry, “*Lord, Lord...*” (Matthew 7:22,23).

You say the Lord wouldn’t condemn a person who has lived and died while sincerely but erroneously believing he was saved? **Jesus said He will.** May God help us not to be a part of the confusion that would cause such an eternal tragedy.

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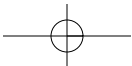
## Did God Add Them Too?

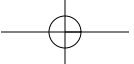
J.C. and Betty Choate

Among us today is the heavily debated question, “Who is a Christian?” Admittedly, since it deals with the state of the soul, it is not possible for us to physically “see” and declare who rests inside that circle of the Lord’s church and who only thinks he does.

There are those who say it is more a matter of commitment than of procedure. If a person has made a personal commitment to Jesus, God recognizes him as His child, whether or not he has learned and gone through the “legalistic steps” of conversion. There are others who say that only those who have been immersed in water for the remission of sins have been added to the body, but that all of those who have been thus “scripturally baptized” were added by God to the church. They may be in the fellowship of other faithful Christians, and may thus be counted as “faithful”. Or they may not even know about the church of Christ; they may be fellowshipping some denominational group and may therefore be counted by God as unfaithful children, but they were certainly added to the church by God at the point of their baptism.

There are others who affirm that scriptural baptism constitutes more than a penitent heart and a burial in water for remission of sins. They would say that





one must know the choices he is making concerning salvation and the body of Christ in order for his baptism to be a true birth into the family of God.

Repeatedly, throughout the pages of the New Testament, the observant reader will see that Christ and His church — the oneness of His way, the oneness of His family — cannot be separated. John the Baptist preached repentance, “...for *the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matthew 3:2) In the next breath he proclaimed the coming of the Lord, as the voice of the prophet crying in the wilderness.

Jesus, in pronouncing Himself as the One from God, preached, “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” (Matthew 4:17) He went throughout the villages, “...preaching *the gospel of the kingdom...*” (Matthew 9:35). He promised the disciples, “...there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see *the kingdom of God present with power*” (Mark 9:1).

On the day of Pentecost, the 3000 who were baptized into Christ knew that they were making the choice of entering into the fellowship of the apostles — the Lord’s church — and they continued in that fellowship, in the doctrine, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, with God adding daily to the church those who were being saved in the blood of Christ Jesus (Acts 2:38,47).

When Philip went down to Samaria, the message he preached was not simply repentance and immersion in water for forgiveness of sins, but “... he preached the things concerning *the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ...*”

Paul, imprisoned in Rome, gathered the Jewish leaders together and “...explained and solemnly testified of *the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets...*” (Acts 28:23).

In each of these cases there were many who rejected what they heard, because the message was not what they wanted. Often their rejection took the form of physical violence done to the speaker, so rejection and enmity are not new responses to God’s laws. We must be compassionate in presenting the Gospel, but the idea that a negative hearing is the fault of the presenter is not borne out in Scripture. In the first century, people died because they taught the oneness of the Savior and the Way.

There are those today who insist that all one must understand is his own lost condition and that there is salvation in Christ. Being convinced of the need for salvation, the learner is taught that baptism is the appropriate response to the Gospel. Little or nothing may be explained, though, about the Lord’s church and the oneness of the family of God. The reasoning behind this approach is that the person might be “turned off” by such seeming bigotry; that there will be time to “ease” him into an understanding of the church after he has been baptized.

This approach to teaching the truths of God’s word explains how there can be many within the fellowship who see the church as only another denomination. What should have been taught before baptism was, in many cases, never taught afterwards, either: at

least, not clearly enough that the person sees the church as it is portrayed in Scripture.

Recently I heard of a case in which definitive truths were presented in a Sunday morning sermon. Afterwards, two families — members of the congregation — spoke angrily to the preacher, saying, “If this is what the church of Christ teaches, we don’t want to be any part of it.”

In another case, a man was teaching the Sunday morning adult Bible class. In the process of weeks of lessons, he questioned the necessity for baptism, suggested that the Lord’s Supper might be taken on Thursday, elevated denominations to equality with the “Church of Christ”, and raised doubts about numerous other doctrinal points. When the men decided that he should no longer serve as a teacher, he and his family began attending the assembly of a denominational group. He explained, “If I ever come across a Church of Christ that teaches what I believe, I might go there again, but I feel more comfortable now in this church.”

A young woman went down the aisle in response to the invitation. She insisted that she had already been properly baptized in a denominational group but that she wanted to be recognized now as a member of the church of Christ. Her story was accepted and she was counted on the roll of membership. After three years as “a member of the Church of Christ”, she became involved with a Hindu “holy mother” and became fully convinced that she, herself, was some special “reincarnation” of godliness. Her friend, trying to help her see the error in such an idolatrous reli-

