



Betty Burton Choate

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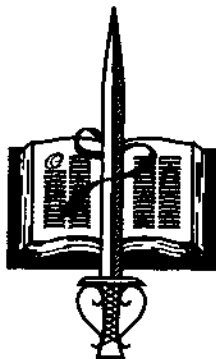
Winona, MS 38967

Phone: 662-283-1192

Fax: 662-283-1191

E-mail: choate@worldevangelism.org

Web Site: www.worldevangelism.org



dedication

To J.C., with whom I have been 'one'
for three-fourths of my years.

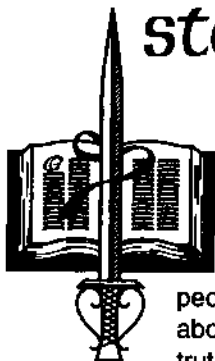
To J.C., whose vision has been my beacon, leading to a life of
wonder of which I could never have dreamed.

To J.C., who invariably said, "You can do it!"
about every new challenge God — and he — brought my way.

To J.C., who always seemed mature beyond his years,
never wavering from the purity of the Gospel,
making it easy for me to stand at his side, secure in the faith.

To J.C., whom I admire, respect, and love
with all my heart.

Betty



statement from the publisher

Working in India and other countries for many years, we have always looked for effective ways to convey the Gospel to

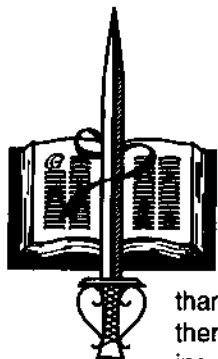
people. Betty came up with the idea of writing about a young couple and their search for the truth. In the beginning of the story they were only

nominally spiritual, until the birth of their first child. Suddenly they realized the seriousness of their responsibility for the eternal welfare of this new life! In their desire for the security of their son, they began to study the Bible, and to ask questions and seek answers. The unfolding of the story is thrilling, because it shows the way the Gospel should affect each one of us.

As Betty continued to develop this couple in their search for the truth, both she and I became excited about the wonderful potential the format offers. And as monthly installments began to appear in our magazines throughout India, others became excited about following the story. Now as we print the entire message in book form, we feel that it will be the means of reaching many souls for Christ. Following this US edition, we expect to print **Search for Truth** in India and other countries, both in English and in local languages. Betty hopes, also, to write sequels in the same format, dealing with other vital studies of truth.

It is our prayer that the experience of this reading will be a blessing to you, and we encourage you to share it with your friends and loved ones, as we strive to send the message around the world.

J.C. Choate
Church of Christ
Winona, MS
December 29, 1999



a word from the author

Writing monthly installments for the magazines we help to make possible in India is no small challenge, feeling as I do that a local Christian woman would be better able than I to deal with the spiritual needs of women there. So it is with much prayer and soul searching that I begin any article, and any new series.

The story of Rachel and Andrew began as one lesson, aimed at showing the need for God in the rearing of a family — an important realization for women in any culture. But the first lesson seemed to call for another, and soon I was exclaiming to J.C. with excited laughter and a catch in my breath, “This is WONDERFUL! I can deal with ANYTHING in this format! And Rachel and Andrew are so perfect for the part because they never argue with the Scriptures, and their attitudes are EXEMPLARY!”

The ideal of Christianity and the Church as given in the Scriptures is perfect. The translation into reality, as we see in the church at Corinth, Galatia, and other individual congregations, is human — less than perfect but striving to grow in the Family image.

Search for Truth is a fictitious ideal. Probably, in few places in the world is there a body of people whose lives are built around their own spiritual development and the spreading of the Gospel, as is portrayed in these pages. Yet, surely in the first century there were congregations and individuals such as these — not simply in doctrine but in day-in and day-out life focus. Else, it would not have been possible for those early Christians to have evangelized the world in one short generation.

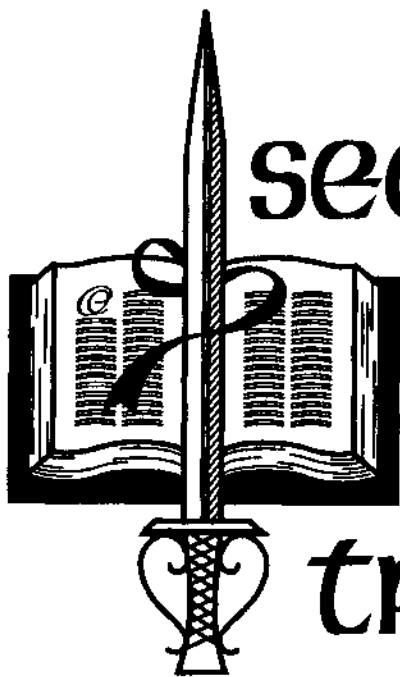
If we, as the Lord's church, would live as the Christians in **Search for Truth**, we would surely be the ideal God wants.



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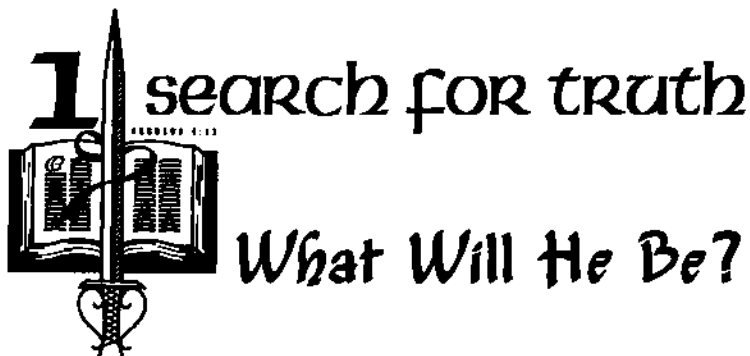
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search

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truth



I search for truth

What Will He Be?

Rachel lay on the bed beside the tiny new form of her baby, looking. . . looking. . . looking, as though her eyes could not get enough of him. Hardly could she believe that this baby actually belonged to her and Andrew, theirs to keep, to care for, to protect, to teach, to guide in all the ways of life! Sleeping so quietly, his helplessness aroused strong feelings of motherly protection in her heart. "I'll take the best care of you, Timothy," Rachel whispered. "Nothing must happen to my baby!"

Her mind drifted to other children, little ones just beginning school, teen-agers facing the challenges of growing to young adulthood with all the pitfalls and decisions before them. She could imagine the day when this sweet baby of hers would grow up and marry, leaving her and Andrew to begin an independent life of his own. "But what will he be?" Rachel wondered. "Not his importance or his occupation, but what will *he* be, *inside*, as a *person*?"

Like an alarm sounding in her head, the question came, "What will he be, *spiritually*?"

She looked again at her baby. "He's not only this little body that I see; he's a soul, and he will live *eternally*. I know," she thought, with a guilty conscience, "Andrew and I haven't been following any religion since we married. We are young and there are

so many things to do, and so little time — we've been acting like we didn't need God. *But we do!* How can we help our baby to be safe eternally if we don't give him spiritual guidance? And how can we ask God to help us to take care of him if we have left God ourselves?"

Rachel was still troubled about their responsibilities toward Timothy when Andrew came home that evening. "All right — tell me about it," Andrew encouraged, as Rachel continued to wear a sad face while they ate. "What's the problem?"

"Maybe it isn't a problem," Rachel answered. "But — oh, Andrew, what if we don't guide our baby in the right ways as he grows? What if he's lost eternally because we didn't help him to learn about God? I love him so much. I couldn't bear the thought that he would be condemned by God in the judgment because of my carelessness as a mother, or yours as a father!"

Andrew's face mirrored Rachel's troubled expression. "You're right, Rachel," he said, "we've been wrong to leave God out of our own lives since our marriage. You know, *we can't even pray for Timothy!* How could God hear our prayers when we have not worshiped or prayed or read the Bible all these months?"

"He couldn't — He wouldn't," Rachel whispered, tears filling her eyes.

"But we can change all of that. We'll go somewhere Sunday!" Andrew declared.

"But where?" Rachel questioned. "To your church — *St. Mary's* — or to mine — *the Baptist church* — or to the one just down the street?"

"Does it make any difference?" Andrew asked. "Isn't one church as good as another? I've always heard that."

"I don't know," Rachel answered, "but since they have dif-

ferent names it must mean that there are differences. You know, in the Baptist church they baptize adults. In the Catholic church they sprinkle water, instead — and on babies. There must be different beliefs and different teachings, or they wouldn't be doing different things."

"You know — now that we're thinking about these things, I realize that I don't know much about the doctrines and practices in my church. And I don't know much about what the Bible says. Do you?"

"I remember the Bible stories in the Old Testament. And of course there were lots of stories about Jesus and His disciples. But I don't remember anything about all of this 'church' business. When did churches start, and why are there so many different kinds?" Rachel wondered.

"I don't know the answers to your questions," Andrew admitted. *"But we want to do only the right things, spiritually, for our children. Whatever we teach them must be exactly what the Bible teaches. It would be useless to blindly follow something, just because it's called 'religion', and then to find at the judgment that it was all wrong."*

"But how can we be sure?" Rachel asked.

"One thing — tomorrow during my lunch break, I'll go over to the Bible bookstore and buy a Bible for each of us. We know, for certain, that we have a lot of studying to do!" Andrew laughed. "So we'll start at the beginning of the New Testament, and we'll read it as if it was the first time, and we'll see what it says."

"And I think we should visit some of the churches, including yours and mine, and try to understand what they're teaching," suggested Rachel. She looked again at Timothy, sleeping quietly. "I never knew that he would make such a difference in our lives!"



2 search for truth

The Search Begins

Andrew opened his package from the bookstore. Rachel reached eagerly for the Bible he had brought for her. Thinking back to her childhood and the Bible stories her mother had told her, Rachel felt a strong pang of regret that she had neglected spiritual things since growing up.

"The shop keeper sold me this, too," Andrew said as he pulled another book from the bag. "It's a concordance, and I think it will help us in finding verses that talk about the same subject. See . . . you look up a word, like 'love' or 'faith' or 'church', and listed under it are all the verses that include that word."

"Oh, yes," Rachel agreed with excitement. "Since we don't know much about the Bible, this will help us connect the verses to each other. Now, what should we look up first?"

"I think, after dinner, we should divide our study time into two parts. We need to read the Scriptures themselves, beginning with Matthew, since our concern is to know what Jesus wants us to do. Then I think we should spend some time with the concordance, looking up words and writing down the major points we learn from the verses containing that word," Andrew suggested.

"That's a good plan. I've almost finished dinner. I'll hurry. Timothy is awake. Do you want to hold him?"

After dinner, Rachel and Andrew sat at the table with Bible,

concordance, notebooks, and pens. Before beginning to read, Andrew prayed, asking God to help them to learn the truth and to understand how He would have them to train their baby. They decided to read silently and independently, exchanging thoughts or questions.

“Since we do believe that Jesus is God’s Son, do you think we should concentrate on things that are written about churches and how to be saved, so we will be able to learn what we need to do?” asked Rachel.

“That sounds good,” Andrew agreed.

Within a few minutes Rachel interrupted her reading. “Here in Matthew 3 it says that John the Baptist came, saying that the *kingdom of heaven* was near. What is ‘the kingdom of heaven?’”

“Let’s write that question, and see what answers we find. Look — here in Matthew 4:17 it says that Jesus began to preach, ‘*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*’”

“The kingdom must be important, if it was the subject of Jesus’ preaching, too,” Rachel observed. “Here in verse 23 it says Jesus was preaching *the gospel of the kingdom*. And all through the sermon He preached on the mountain, He was talking about how things would be in the kingdom! I think I’ll mark the verses where something is said about the kingdom, since it was such an important part of Jesus’ message to people.”

“This is a wonderful promise!” Andrew exclaimed. “After saying that we shouldn’t worry about what we will eat or wear, Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, ‘*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*’”

“I’ll mark that,” Rachel said as she carefully underlined with her pen. “We want to remember where to find directions like that, as we’re shaping our lives.” After a silence she asked, “What does this mean, here in Matthew 7:13 and 14, Andrew? ‘*Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads*

to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

"It sounds like Jesus' way is either not easy to find or not easy to live, and that most people will go on the road to destruction."

"And look; the next verse says, '*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing....*' Would there really be people — religious people — who would lead us in the wrong way?"

"I'm sure Jesus wouldn't have given that warning if it wasn't true. Look at verse 21: '*Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven (there's 'the kingdom' again!), but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"*'"

"How could it be that people who are doing all those things in Jesus' name would be wrong, and that He would say in the judgment that He doesn't even know them?" asked Rachel, puzzled.

"He tells why: even though they were *claiming* to be working in Jesus' name, Jesus said they were not *doing* the will of God, and they were practicing lawlessness. That must mean they weren't following exactly what He teaches in the Bible."

"I've heard people say that all these little doctrines in religion don't matter, as long as a person is honest and sincere," Rachel said. "Are they wrong? Do all the things really matter?"

"Well, to be honest," Andrew responded thoughtfully, "it would seem to me that if something is important enough for God to put it in the Bible, it's too important for humans to think they can ignore it. Who are we to decide what's important and what isn't?"

"I believe you're right, Andrew. I'm so glad we're really studying, trying to understand what God wants us to do."



3 search for truth

The Church and the Kingdom

"Well, this is interesting," Andrew remarked looking at the listing in their new concordance. "In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there's a lot said about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. But from Acts to the end of the New Testament, the church is talked about much more than the kingdom, though there are still many references to the kingdom in those books. Are they the same thing, or different?"

"Let's look up some of the verses and see if we can tell," suggested Rachel.

"The first mention of the church is in Matthew 16:18. Jesus had asked the disciples who they believed He was, and Peter said, '*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*' Then Jesus blessed Peter and said, '*...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*'"

"But look at the next verse!" Rachel exclaimed. "*And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven....*' Does that mean that the kingdom is the church?"

"I'm not sure yet," Andrew answered, "but in this last verse in Matthew 16, Jesus promised that the kingdom would come with power during their lifetime."

"The concordance gives Acts 2:47 as another verse about the church. '*And the Lord added to the church daily those that*

were being saved.' Oh, Andrew, this is really important!" Rachel exclaimed. "Somewhere between the verse in Matthew and this one in Acts, the church that Jesus had promised to build was begun, because God was adding people to it, and He couldn't add them to something that wasn't there!"

"Let's go back to the beginning of Acts and see what happened," suggested Andrew. "In verse 3, before Jesus went back to heaven, He was talking to the apostles about the kingdom. Then in verse 6, Peter asked if Jesus was about to restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus said they should wait in Jerusalem, '*...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....*' That's the same wording He used in Matthew 16, where He promised that the kingdom would come with power during their lifetime! I think that's what was about to happen! The kingdom was about to come!"

"But verse 47 says God added people to **the church**, not *the kingdom!*" objected Rachel.

"The way the words are used, first one and then the other, it sounds like they must be the same thing," Andrew said thoughtfully. "Jesus had promised that the kingdom would come with the power of the Holy Spirit. Here in the first part of Acts 2, it says the Holy Spirit came on the apostles, and they began to preach. Then at the end of their sermon, if God added people to the church, they must be the same thing!"

"But, Andrew, is that church in the world today? Can we be members of it?"

"I don't know. There's not any name given here — it was Jesus' church, but I don't know of one by that name now. We'll ask the preachers here about that."

"Let's pretend we were there on that first day, Andrew. Would we have been convinced by the apostles' words that Jesus is God's Son?" Rachel asked.

"Peter showed that Jesus' life and death fulfilled prophecies that had been written about Him. It was a strong sermon because at the end of it, when he accused the listeners of crucifying the Son of God, and then said that God had brought Him from the dead and had made Him both Lord and Christ, it says, *'Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"'*"

"If we had been in that group and had asked that question, what would we have heard Peter answer?" asked Rachel eagerly, looking ahead to the next verses. *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

"That sounds simple enough," Andrew agreed. "They believed what Peter preached. When they asked what they should do, he said *'repent'* and *'be baptized'*. Then they would be forgiven of their sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We'll have to study more to find out just what that gift was, or what it meant in their lives. But the instructions about what they were to do are very easy to understand."

"They didn't have any problem understanding," Rachel observed. "In verse 41 it says that 3000 were baptized and were added to the group. Then verse 47 tells **how** they were added — by God, Himself.

"I think we've learned some very important truths tonight," Andrew said. "Sunday morning let's go to St. Mary's and maybe we can ask the priest about these things. Then Sunday night we'll go to your Baptist church and see what they say about the church here in Acts 2."

"I think that will help us a lot," Rachel agreed. "**I know!** Just now I'll look in the concordance and see all the different churches that are listed there! Hm-m-m.... Andrew, *the Catholic church is not even in here!*"

"Maybe it's 'Roman Catholic'," suggested Andrew.

"Why, it's not here at all!" Rachel said, puzzled. "Isn't the Catholic Church supposed to be the oldest and biggest church? Why isn't it in the Bible?"

"I don't know," admitted Andrew. "What about the Baptist Church?"

"I see 'baptism', 'baptized', — ah, here is 'baptist', talking about John the Baptist. Was He in the Baptist Church?"


"I don't know," Andrew answered again. "But — yes, I remember. John was killed even before Jesus promised to start His church! Maybe 'the baptist' just means that he baptized people. There wasn't anything said about him starting a church."

"I'm going to look for some of the other churches," Rachel said, turning pages in the concordance. "Why, I'm not finding the Methodist Church, or the Pentecostal Church, or the Nazarene Church, or the Lutheran Church, or the Jehovah's Witnesses! Why aren't they in here, Andrew, if they are teaching only what the Bible says?"

"I don't know that, either," Andrew said. "We'll have to ask some of the preachers."

"But we want to be careful," Rachel remembered. "You know Jesus said that even religious leaders can be wolves in sheep's clothing. If their churches are not even named in the Bible, I'm wondering if there will be other things they teach that aren't there either. I keep remembering how many times I've heard people say, 'The church is not important — join whichever church you like best.' But if Jesus started His church, then surely *His church is important!*"

4 search for truth



Church Doctrine

Andrew and Rachel had never worshiped together. Since their marriage in the large St. Mary's building, they had used Sunday as their day to catch up on washing and cleaning at home. It seemed strange to be going to a place of worship instead.

They reached the building early, finding only the priest there. After introducing themselves, Andrew began, "I am Catholic, and Rachel is Baptist. We want to bring up our son in the right way so we've been reading the Scriptures, and there are some questions we'd like to ask."

"Have you come to have your son christened?" asked the priest.

"Christened?" asked Rachel. "We haven't read about that in the Bible. In Acts 2, when the church was started, people were baptized, and they were adults — people who were old enough to believe in Jesus and to decide what they should do. We want to do the same thing they did."

The priest smiled kindly. "But many things have changed since that simple beginning. There is much church doctrine, spoken by the Popes through the centuries, and these things must be considered as well as the Bible."

"I am puzzled," Rachel said. "We have a concordance, list-

ing the words in the Bible. Why is the Catholic Church not listed there?"

"You must realize that the Holy Mother Church was started in those early days, with Peter being the rock on which it was built. He was the first Pope, the head of the church in Rome."

"You're saying that *Peter* was the rock — not *Jesus*? And Peter was the head of the church?" asked Andrew.

"Oh, yes!" the priest assured them.

"What does a person need to do in order to be saved from his sins?" asked Rachel.

"Salvation has its beginning in christening, as holy water is put on the baby's head, and he is dedicated to God. When he is older he goes through catechism — classes to train him in the doctrines of the church. Then he is confirmed and can partake of the Eucharist. He has become a part of the 'Mother church'. Of course there are many doctrines concerning life and worship and death, penance, purgatory, sainthood, praying to the saints, special masses, confessionals — all of these you will learn in time."

Others began to arrive. "Good morning, Father," they said, greeting the robe-clad priest. It was very strange to Rachel to sit in the auditorium and watch the ritual of people going to the altar underneath the statue of Mary, lighting candles, making 'the sign of the cross', and praying to Mary. The service, too, was ritualistic with a great deal of procession and ceremony. Most interesting was the 'Eucharist', the Catholic version of the last supper Jesus had with His disciples. The priest placed a thin wafer on the tongues of the members, one by one, and blessed them.

Waiting until all others had gone, at the end of the service, Andrew approached the priest again. "Sir," he began —

"You should address me as 'Father', showing the proper respect," the priest interrupted.

"I am sorry, I mean no disrespect. But I don't understand some of the things. Why did the people light candles and pray to an image of Mary? She was not God. Are we really supposed to worship humans?"

"You question the worship of our Mother Mary?" asked the priest incredulously. "We pray, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God' —"

"But, sir, she wasn't *God's mother*," objected Rachel. "She called herself the handmaid of God — His servant for His use!"

"You are not understanding the doctrine of the church," the priest answered.

"Sir, you mentioned 'purgatory'," Andrew said. "What is that?"

"That is the place of the dead — not hell, but a place of torment, to purge the sins of the people. One's friends and relatives can pay money and pray for the soul, and according to the sins to be covered, after these prayers and payments he can be released to go to heaven. There are many doctrines of the church — very important doctrines. You must not question what has been fixed by the Popes and the councils through the ages."

At home again, lunch finished and Timothy settled for his nap, Andrew and Rachel talked about the morning's experiences. "I don't understand," Rachel said, "if the church belongs to Jesus, why would Peter have been the foundation and head of it? Just as it says here in Matthew 16:18, the church stands or falls on whether or not Jesus actually was the Son of God."

"Let's look up some of these key words in the concordance and see what we can find in other places," suggested Andrew. "Maybe 'foundation' would have something.... Yes, look up Ephesians 2:20, Rachel."

"Verse 19 begins the sentence: *'Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself*

being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.' There's a center-column reference in the Bible beside 'foundation' — in 1 Corinthians 3:11: *'For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.'*"

"There are several places in the concordance about Jesus being the head of the church: in Ephesians 1:22 the list says, *'...gave Him to be head over all things...'*; 4:15 says, *'...which is the head, even Christ...'*; 5:23: *'...as Christ is head of the church...'*; Colossians 1:18: *'He is head of the body, the church...'* None of these verses say anything about Peter being the head of the church, and they don't talk about a 'Pope', either," Andrew reasoned. "And if Christ is the foundation and the head of His church, and if He decided what His church was to be and do in the beginning, I don't believe any group of men should have developed 'church doctrines' that are different from the things taught in the New Testament."

"What he said about salvation was not at all what the apostles preached on the day the church was begun," Rachel said. "Did you check to see if 'purgatory' is in the concordance, and what the Bible says about that?"

"It isn't there," Andrew said, "and neither is 'catechism'."

"Another thing bothers me, Andrew. I remember from the Bible stories when I was a child that God said His people were never to worship idols. Some of their biggest problems came because of idolatry. *It can't be right to have statues of Mary and Jesus and the apostles and other people, and to worship them and pray to them!* I know that's idolatry, and God said He is the *only* God and that no images were to be made."

"I just remembered something else," Andrew exclaimed, turning through the concordance and then the Bible. "Last night I read this command that Jesus made to His disciples in Matthew

23:9: *'Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.'*"

"There are so many differences between what we are reading in the Bible and what the priest said today," Rachel commented. "What can we do?"

"We'll continue to study, even about the things he said, because we don't want to judge something wrong out of our lack of understanding. But, already, some points seem clear: if we want to be in the **Catholic church**, we should *be christened as babies, then go through their catechism*. But if we want to be added by God to **Jesus' church**, we have to do what those people did: *believe the message, repent, and be baptized*. Then God will save us, because He said He would do that."



search for truth

"We Don't Even Know How to Worship!"

"Let's have a change of plans," Andrew suggested. "Let's wait until next Sunday to visit your church — in fact, let's go to a different church each Sunday morning so that we can learn what they are teaching — but let's keep Sunday evenings for our own time of worship here at home."

"Yes, I'd like that," agreed Rachel. "But we don't even know how to worship properly. We don't have a piano or a guitar, so how can we sing? And is it right to try to worship in an ordinary home, not in a place especially made for church meetings?"

"On every point, we do have a lot to learn!" laughed Andrew. "Not only do we not have a guitar, I don't know any of the hymns! Tomorrow I'll check at the Bible bookstore. Maybe they'll have song books. They might even have a cassette, to help us learn."

"Since we don't know much, should we check 'worship' in the concordance?" Rachel asked.

"In Matthew 4:10, Jesus said to Satan when He was tempted, *'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve."*' So that answers the question of worshipping Mary or 'saints' or idols, or anything else, doesn't it?"

"When there are plain commands like that in the Scriptures, how can religious teachers ignore them?" asked Rachel.

"Listen to this, from Matthew 15:9: '*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*' Now that's exactly what people have done — made their own commandments — and Jesus knew they would do that, so He warned against it!" Andrew's voice carried his amazement at the audacity of humans, to place their thinking and commandments on par with the word of God. "Jesus said very clearly, '*In vain they worship Me....*' So, it really *does* matter how we worship. We want to check everything we do and be sure it's right, according to the Bible, Rachel."

"But I know I've heard people say it doesn't matter, as long as you're honest and sincere. They shouldn't contradict God like that, because *He* says it **does matter!**" Rachel objected. "I was thinking, just now, Andrew, about us as human beings who are sinners, and God — the awesome One who created all things and who gave Jesus to die for us — you know, we don't belong in His presence. For Him even to *allow* us to be there is a wonderful and precious thing. It ought to be with humility that we even dare to approach Him in worship, not with our pomp and ceremony, and our own rules and rituals."

"You're right, Rachel. So much that's done as worship must actually offend God! I hadn't realized that. The concordance lists John 4:24: '*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*' So what the Bible says is of the **greatest** importance, because that's where spiritual truth is found."

"I was looking in our favorite chapter again," laughed Rachel. "It says something there about worship, I think. In verse 42, after the 3000 had been baptized, it says, '*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*' That verse tells quite a lot about the way they worshiped."

"*The 'apostles' doctrine*' — that would be, for us, studying the Scriptures in a lesson or sermon. '*Fellowship*' — would mean our gathering together with other Christians for the worship. '*Breaking*

of bread' — what would that be?"

"Maybe they ate together, or maybe it was the same as what the priest called the 'Eucharist', the supper Christ had with His disciples before His death," suggested Rachel. "Let's see if we can find that place," she said, turning pages in the Bible. "Here it is, in Matthew 26." She began reading at verse 17 and read through verse 30.

"Look," Andrew said, "in verse 26 it says that Jesus took some of the bread and blessed it and said, *'Take, eat; this is My body.'* Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, *'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'* — And look at this!" Andrew exclaimed, *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."* There's 'the kingdom' again!"

"So this kind of supper must have been what the Christians were doing when they were *'breaking bread'*," concluded Rachel. "As we continue to read in the book of Acts, surely we'll find more about it. Did you see, Andrew, that between the verse in Acts 2, and this 30th verse of Matthew 26, two other worshipful things are mentioned?"

"Yes, Acts says they continued in prayers, and at the close of Jesus' supper with the disciples, it says they sang a hymn."

"I wonder about that — it doesn't say anything about a piano or guitar or anyone playing something in that verse. Maybe they were only singing," suggested Rachel.

"How could we look up something about that in the concordance?" wondered Andrew. "We know they didn't have pianos or guitars or drums, so those wouldn't be there. What about 'harps'?"

"Yes," Rachel answered, "it's here. In 1 Corinthians 14:7..."

Andrew read the verse. "But I think that isn't having reference to worship. It's saying that unless a harp or flute is played

correctly, no one will know what tune is being played. Is there anything else? Since they had musical instruments back then, they must be mentioned somewhere as part of worship. Don't all the churches use them?"

"I think so," answered Rachel. "But the only other mention of harps is in Revelation." After reading those verses she asked, "But this is not talking about worship in this world. This is in heaven, and that world will be so different from this one. I've always heard about '*streets of gold*' being there, but will it be real gold or just something wonderful and beautiful, as we might compare it to gold?"

"I don't know," Andrew said. "But we want to find how people are to worship here, in *this world*. We want to do exactly like those first Christians did, so that we'll know our worship doesn't offend God."

"Since the verse in Matthew says Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn, let's see if 'sing' is listed," suggested Rachel. "Well, there's a long list about singing praises to God in the Old Testament, so singing has evidently always been a part of worship. But not much is in the New Testament. Romans 15:9 says, '*and sing to Your name.*' 1 Corinthians 14:15: '*I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also.*' Hebrews 2:12: '*In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You.*' James 5:13: '*...let him sing psalms.*' And in Colossians 3:16 there's another reference."

Andrew turned and read: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*" There's also a center-column reference to Ephesians 5:19: '*...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the*

Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Why do you think it doesn’t mention any kind of instrument there?” wondered Rachel.

“Maybe Jesus was making it so that anyone, anywhere, anytime — like us, not having a musical instrument and not knowing how to play one — could still worship God. And both of these places talk about teaching one another through the messages of the hymns. You know it’s not easy to hear words when there’s a piano or a guitar or something else. There must be some significance that none of these verses talk of musical instruments, even though they certainly had them back then.”

“We’ll need to study more on this,” Rachel said, “but in the meantime we know we’ll be right if we only sing with sincerity in our worship.”

“Yes — and did you notice that in both Ephesians and Colossians, the following verse talks of giving thanks — prayer — and that our prayers and all we do in worship to God is to be through the name of Jesus?” asked Andrew.

“That’s right,” agreed Rachel.

“Well, we’ve done pretty well, I think,” Andrew observed. “We began by saying that we didn’t know how to worship, but now from these Scriptures we’ve learned that we are to *study the Scriptures*, to *pray through Jesus*, to *sing and teach one another through hymns*, and to *‘break bread’*. There may be more that God would expect, and we can watch for other things as we read the Bible, but one thing is sure — we know that these things were done by the first Christians, and we will be right if we follow their example.”

6 search for truth



What About that Early Church?

After dinner Rachel sat with Timothy, holding him close and kissing his soft black hair. "I'm so thankful for you," she whispered. "You've brought such good things to our lives. I pray that we can be wise parents, loving you and guiding you in only the right way. Why didn't I realize what a responsibility it would be to care for a baby before you came?"

Andrew came in from the garden, laughing as he saw Rachel's frequent kisses. "Don't rub off all his hair," he warned with a grin. "And leave a few kisses for me!"

"I was just telling Timothy how thankful I am for the good things he's brought into our lives, Andrew. Just think of how much spiritual growing we've done since he was born!" she said, giving Timothy to Andrew. After a few minutes of patting and humming, Andrew laid the baby down for the night.

"Let's see what else we can learn from the book of Acts about the kingdom — the church — and about the early Christians," he said as he came back to the dining table with the Bible and concordance.

Turning to Acts and beginning to read, Andrew said, "Chapter 3 is another sermon. Peter and John were telling the people again that the One they had crucified was really the Son of God. In verse 19, Peter said, '*Repent therefore and be converted, that*

your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.' It's interesting to compare this verse with Acts 2:38, *'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit':* 'repent' would equal 'repent'; 'be converted' equals 'be baptized'; 'your sins be blotted out' seems the same as 'for remission of sins'; and 'times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord' would be like 'the gift of the Holy Spirit'."

"And in chapter 4," Rachel said, "it says that many of those who heard the word believed — the number of the men was about 5000. But does that mean that they only believed, or were they baptized?"

"We'll have to study further, to see the pattern as it develops," Andrew answered, "but if baptism was part of the message of salvation, would they have truly believed if they had not obeyed that part too? They seem to go together, and then a person is saved."

"Here in verse 11, it says again that Jesus is the chief cornerstone, and that salvation is only in His name: *'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'* Is it because Jesus died for us that His name is the name in which we are saved?" asked Rachel.

"That makes sense," Andrew answered. "You would think, with Jesus' resurrection from the grave, and the miracles being done by the apostles, that everyone would have listened to them, but already in these first chapters of preaching about Jesus, the religious leaders were dead-set against the church, and they even arrested the apostles! I wonder if the disciples had expected that kind of angry response?"

"Maybe they weren't really surprised," Rachel suggested. "It had been only a short time before their arrest that the rulers had

crucified Jesus, and the apostles were continuing with the same thing He'd begun."

"You're right. But somehow I always expect that religious people will love the truth. Maybe that's part of the problem today," Andrew said. "Maybe some of the religious people we'll talk to in our search for truth won't like what we're doing."

"I guess we have to be prepared for that, and decide now whether the *opinions of people* or *the truth* is more important to us."

"There's one thing for certain," Andrew said, "if we are going to include religion in our lives, it must be *right*, no matter how others feel about us. I don't want to go through all of these things and then get to the end of life and hear Him say, '*I never knew you,*' as we read in Matthew 7:21."

Rachel was continuing to read as Andrew talked. "That was the attitude of the apostles, too. Here in verse 19, they said they had to please God rather than men — even the religious leaders. '*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*' And whatever we learn from the Scriptures, as we study, we'll have to stand by that, even if others don't like it."



search for truth

What Did They Do?

"I'm enjoying our studies so much, Andrew," Rachel said as they settled down at the table with their Bibles.

"So am I," agreed Andrew. "I don't know why I had thought that the Bible and religion were dull, and that people studied only because it was a religious duty. We were missing the best things in life!"

"I was reading this afternoon from Acts, again! You know we were talking last night about the enmity that developed toward the apostles, because the religious leaders didn't want them preaching about Jesus. The first Christian who was killed was Stephen, in chapter seven. But then a man named Saul — who was also a very strong Jewish leader — began to imprison Christians and try to destroy the church. His persecution had the opposite effect, though, because they scattered everywhere to avoid the persecution. The surprising thing was that it says *'they went everywhere preaching the word.'*"

"I see," said Andrew. "That's in Acts 8:4; and then the story begins of Philip preaching in a city called Samaria. Verse 5 says he *'preached Christ'* to them. Then verse 12 tells what happened: *'...when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.'* This verse tells us several important

things: that Philip taught two specific points — the *kingdom of God*, and the *name of Jesus Christ*. So we know that it was important for them to understand about *the kingdom — the church* — and they had to realize, too, that *salvation is in the name of Christ*. But teaching on those two subjects must have included much more; otherwise, why would anyone have been baptized? And since the verse specifies that ‘*men*’ and ‘*women*’ were baptized, we know that no babies were christened!

“Rachel, I have a great idea! As we study about these times of preaching and of people becoming Christians, let’s make a table showing all the facts about each case. That will help us to see more clearly just what happened.”

“What a good way to study!” agreed Rachel. “We can make it here in this notebook, along with the questions we’ve written that we want to continue to study.”

“OK, we’ll begin: First,

The hearers: to the people in Jerusalem

Scripture reference: in Acts 2

What was preached: that Jesus was the Son of God

Response: what the people did: the people were cut to the heart [*they believed*], and they were told to repent and be baptized

What God did in response: for the remission of their sins [*saved them*].

“Second,

The hearers: to the people in Jerusalem at the temple

Scripture reference: in Acts 3 & 4

what was preached: that Jesus was the Son of God

response: what the people did: the people believed and they were told to repent and be converted

what God did in response: for the refreshing from God [*saved them*].”

“This will be so helpful,” Rachel remarked as she wrote. “When we see it outlined on paper, all together, it will be easy to understand just what was preached and what those people did to be saved.”

“Let’s see...” Andrew said, skimming the pages as he turned through the book of Acts, “after the persecution began, a man named Philip went to a place called

The hearers: Samaria

Scripture reference: in Acts 8

What was preached: He taught Christ: things concerning the kingdom and the name of Christ

Response: what the people did: the people believed and they were baptized.”

“One man was named specifically,” Rachel said. “Simon; he also believed what Philip was teaching and was baptized.”

“This is interesting,” Andrew commented as he continued to read. “An angel told Philip to go and teach a man traveling on a desert road. Hm-mm — I wonder why the angel didn’t go himself?”

“Why didn’t Jesus send angels out to teach the world?” Rachel asked, continuing Andrew’s thought. “Maybe He wanted people to teach people.”

“Maybe so. Anyway, Philip left Samaria and went out there to teach

The hearer: the man from Ethiopia

Scripture reference: in Acts 8:26

What was preached: He preached Jesus to him, explained things Isaiah prophesied about the death of Jesus

Response: what the man did: asked what prevented him from being baptized

Requirement stated: *‘If you believe...’*

Response: confession of faith in Christ: *‘I believe that Jesus*

Christ is the Son of God; Philip baptized him; the man went on his way rejoicing.”

“This is similar to the part about Philip teaching the Samaritans. It says he *‘preached Jesus’*, but the eunuch’s response was a question: *‘What hinders me from being baptized?’* How did he know anything about baptism? Is it so connected to the story of Christ that one can’t be really told without explaining the other?”

“Maybe so. We’ll have to study that question more, too. I was wondering, though, since they were in a desert, do you think that man was sprinkled, as some people are today?” Rachel asked.

“No — because verse 38 says, *‘And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.’*”

“Andrew, do you wish we had a Philip here who could baptize us? Or explain to us what we need to do? I remember that I was baptized as a young girl — maybe nine or ten years old. Was that the same as these people did?”

“I don’t know, but we’ll learn the answer. Probably we would learn faster if someone was teaching us, but we can read and think for ourselves. We’re praying, too, as we study, that God will help us to understand what He is saying in the Bible. And He knows that we *want* to do whatever He wants us to do. So surely our questions will be answered in time.”



8 search for truth

What About Baptism and the New Birth?

Andrew's face showed his inner happiness as he sat down at the table, ready for another study session. He reached for Rachel's notebook and looked closely at the chart that was developing. "By the time we finish the book of Acts, we should have a good understanding of just what was taught during that time about how a person is saved from his sins."

"A pattern is definitely developing," Rachel agreed. "The main subject taught each time was Jesus, that He is the Son of God; and in Acts 8 Philip taught the Samaritans about the kingdom. Then in every case except the Ethiopian, it specifically points out that the people believed or were cut to the heart or were told that they must believe."

"Repentance is not mentioned in most of the conversions," Andrew noted, "but since the word means 'to turn from sin and to dedicate one's life to righteousness', according to the dictionary, then it's obvious that they couldn't have obeyed God without going through that change of heart."

"The confession of faith in Christ is mentioned only once, up to now," Rachel said. "See — there in Acts 8 where the eunuch wanted to be baptized."

"There's no doubt about the importance of baptism!" Andrew said, pointing to the chart. "It's mentioned every time! But I wonder why baptism is given such importance? It seems to be only a symbol or a figure — but, of what, exactly?"

Rachel picked up the concordance and turned to 'baptize'. "Skipping the references we'll be reading in Acts, look in Romans 6:3, Andrew."

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

"That explains so much!" exclaimed Andrew. "It was in Jesus' death that He made the way for us to be saved — and so in baptism we die, too, and by dying, as he said, to sin, we become saved! And that's why baptism is a burial, not sprinkling or pouring water on one's head! So, just as Philip and the man from Ethiopia both went down into the water, we go down into the water to be baptized — and buried with Christ — and then we come up out of the water, as He came out of the grave. It's like the old sinner has died with Jesus, and a new saved person has been born!" Andrew exclaimed excitedly.

"That really does make sense," agreed Rachel. "So, is that what the 'new birth' means? I remember hearing people talk about 'being born again', and I always wondered what that was. I'll see if there is anything in the concordance about a spiritual birth." After a long silence she said, "Of course, there are lots of places that talk about 'birth' or 'born' because that's a physical happening. But

I think this verse in John 3:3 is the one I remember hearing."

Andrew read, "*Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'*"

"These words add a lot to our knowledge," Andrew said, as he continued to study the verses open before him. "The new birth is of **water** and of **the Spirit**. Do you remember that we were puzzled when we read in Acts 2 about the '*gift of the Holy Spirit*'? — Here it is: '*...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins: and you shall receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit.***' — We said we'd have to continue to study about '*the gift*', and who or what the '*Holy Spirit*' is, and what happens at the time of baptism. These verses add to that, but leave some questions yet. He does say, though, that just as water is involved in the new birth — that must be the water of baptism —, the Spirit is also involved."

"And there's '*the kingdom*' again!" Rachel remarked. "Jesus said that without the new birth, one cannot enter the kingdom of God. So the birth, baptism, is like being born into a spiritual family — God's family —, which is also called His kingdom."

"And *the kingdom*, according to Jesus, is *the church*! So by believing in Jesus and then being born again, we become a part of His family, or His kingdom, or His church — and in that process our sins are forgiven."

"Here's another reference in the concordance to the Spirit and to baptism," Rachel said. "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or*

free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.’ That’s 1 Corinthians 12:13.”

“Well, isn’t that clear!” remarked Andrew. “Simply, by the Spirit, all are baptized into that family!”

“Check Galatians 3:26,27, too,” Rachel suggested.

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.’ There it is again: the necessity to believe that Jesus is God’s Son, and the fact we become the family of God! ‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’


“These verses are a lot like the place in 1 Corinthians,” Andrew said. “Both talk about Jews and Greeks — all people, really — being united in Jesus. That would be the same as being brought together in ‘one body’. And in both verses, he says that baptism is the way into the family. That fits perfectly with the picture of the new birth!”

“We got off on this tangent about faith and baptism tonight, and didn’t make any progress on our chart!” laughed Rachel.

“But this was good,” Andrew said. “When we study the other conversions in Acts, we’ll understand more about what was actually happening.”

9 search for truth

HEBREWS 4:12



How Were They Saved?

“Now, back to our study about those people in Acts who became Christians,” Andrew said as he pulled a chair up to the table.

Rachel put Timothy to bed and brought her study materials to the table. “We had finished chapter 8,” she said, opening the Bible and the notebook with the chart they had begun.

“Here’s something interesting,” Andrew remarked. “It says that Saul — the one who had been present at the stoning of Stephen — was breathing out threats and murder against ‘the disciples of the Lord’. And he got authorization to go to Damascus to search for any who were of *‘the Way’*. Rachel, let’s make two other lists, to help us learn what the Bible teaches about what churches should be called and what people should be called. We know that many names are used in the world today. Maybe they’re all right, but since we’ve already read that salvation is in the name of Jesus only, and that Philip taught in Samaria about the name of Jesus and the kingdom, then I think we should be noticing as we are reading, just which names the Scriptures use. Don’t you?”

“Yes,” agreed Rachel. “Let me think — first, the church was usually called *‘the kingdom of God’* or the *‘kingdom of heaven’* in the time before it was actually begun; Jesus called it *‘My church’*; and it was most often called *‘the church’* in what we’ve been reading.”

"We did read in some place that the church was called '**the body of Christ**' —"

"That was in Colossians 1:18 and 24," Rachel supplied, turning to 'body' in the concordance. "Andrew, I am so thankful you bought this concordance! How would we find related verses of Scripture without it? Of course, the center-column references in the Bible help, but they aren't complete. A concordance is an *absolute must* for anyone who's searching for the truth and needs guidance in finding verses in the Bible! Without this book to help us, we wouldn't have learned nearly so much in this little time."

"Yes, it's a wonderful book," agreed Andrew. "Now, what else have we read of the church being called? — '**the household of God**', and '**the family of God**'; one place it was called '**congregation**'."

"And here it's called '**the Way**,'" Rachel said.

"And, so far, people have been called, as here in this verse, '**disciples of the Lord**', '**believers**', and '**brethren**'. I wonder," Andrew said with a puzzled look, "when the word '**Christian**' began to be used? And did you notice that none of these 'names' for the church are really names, like the official titles used today? They're more like descriptions. But since there was only the one church then, I guess '**the church**' or '**the Way**' or '**the family**' would have been enough identification for anyone to have known which body of people was being discussed."

"But, Andrew, was there *only the one church then*? — I don't mean one group of people in one city, but one united body of people wherever they existed in the world — was there really only one?" Rachel asked, surprise in her voice.

"All I know is," answered Andrew, "that's what we've read so far — *only one*."

Terms for the Church

the kingdom of God
kingdom of heaven
My church
the church
the body of Christ
the household of God
the family of God
congregation
the Way

Terms for Individuals

disciples of the Lord
believers
brethren
Christian

Rachel sat in silence, thinking of the impact of such a truth on the situation in the religious world.

“OK,” Andrew said, “we’ll begin with the conversion of

The hearer: Saul

Scripture Reference: Acts 9 and 22

What was preached: Jesus asked why Saul was persecuting Him

Response: what Saul did: he immediately acknowledged Jesus as ‘Lord’ [*belief*]; in Damascus, he was fasting and praying, evidence of *penitence*; Ananias came and told him to be *baptized*

What God did in response: washed away his sins [saved].”

“What a change for a man like that to make!” Rachel said. “That would have taken such a lot of courage, to leave all his family and associates, to become a part of what he had been fighting, and to own as his ‘family’ the very people he had hated! Andrew, do you think we would have had that much courage, if we had been in his place?”

“I don’t know, Rachel. But have you realized that we may be facing a similar question for ourselves? We want to obey God, to be saved like those early Christians, and to be a part of that same

church that Jesus started — but the churches around us don't sound much like the one we've been reading about. What will we do if we find that we can't join any of the churches our families and friends are members of?"

"Do you mean we might have to be by ourselves?"

"Yes."

"I hadn't thought that far yet, I guess," admitted Rachel. After a short silence, heavy with thought, she said, "But I want to do whatever is right."

"Then we're together on that," grinned Andrew. "So let's see who's converted next!"

The hearers: a centurion named Cornelius, with his relatives and friends

Scripture reference: Acts 10

What was preached: that Jesus was the resurrected Son of God

Response: what Cornelius and his household did: they believed and were baptized

What God did in response: the remission of sins, verse 43 [saved]."

"From the story around Cornelius' conversion, the fact that he was a Gentile — not a Jew — caused some question as to whether he could even become a Christian," Andrew said.

"Had there been only Jews baptized up to this point?" asked Rachel.

"Evidently," answered Andrew, "because from the wording at the end of the chapter, Peter wouldn't have offered to baptize them if the Holy Spirit hadn't been *'poured out on them'* to show that God was accepting them."

"Over here," said Rachel, reading into the next chapter, "Peter is defending to Christians in Jerusalem what he has done,

and he says in verse 15 that '*...the Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning.*' Would that mean that the way the Holy Spirit came to the apostles and the way He came to Cornelius was the same — but that He hadn't been *'poured out'* that same way on all the converts between the two times?"

"That sounds right," Andrew answered, "but we'll have to study more about that. We're getting a long list of subjects to study in the future!" he laughed.

"Back to our quest about the converts! Saul — now called Paul — went on a missionary journey and came to place called Philippi where he found:

The hearers: Lydia and her household

Scripture reference: Acts 16. It doesn't say what he taught but it says

Response: what the people did: she attended to the things spoken and they were baptized.

"Later Paul and his companion, Silas, were put in prison. Through an earthquake they were freed, but didn't try to escape. The jailer was so surprised (and evidently knew something of what Paul was teaching and why he was in jail), that he asked, '*What must I do to be saved?*'

"Paul spoke to:

The hearers: the jailer and his household

Scripture reference: in Acts 16:25

What was preached: Paul spoke the '*word of the Lord*'

Response: what the people did: the jailer *believed*, and washed the stripes of Paul and Silas [*showing penitence*] and '*they were baptized.*' As a result, 'he rejoiced'."

"Then Paul went to

The hearers: Corinth, particularly to Crispus, ruler of the synagogue

Scripture reference: in Acts 18:8

What was preached: that Jesus is the Christ

Response: what Crispus and the Corinthians did: they heard, believed and were baptized.”

“This is another unique situation in Acts 19,” Rachel said. “The people here had already been baptized *‘into John’s baptism’*. But when Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit, they didn’t know anything about that. After Paul explained that John was only pointing the way to Jesus, they were baptized. So, they *believed* what Paul taught them about Christ, and they responded with *baptism* — the information we need for our chart!” she laughed, writing as she spoke.

“And, really, this helps me with a question I’ve been thinking,” confided Rachel. “You know I told you I was baptized when I was very young. To be honest, I don’t remember a thing about what I might or might not have understood I was doing, or why. So, I’ve been concerned if it would be wrong to be baptized now that I’m an adult and understand what it’s all about.”

“It would seem from this incident that just going through something called ‘baptism’ isn’t enough to make it valid before God. Evidently, *everything* about the baptism must be correct, and *correctly understood*, or it isn’t ‘baptism’ at all,” reasoned Andrew. “It’s no problem for me since I was only christened as a baby. But still, my parents must have thought of it as baptism. Parts of it were not like the Bible teaches, so that made it wrong. And even though you were put under the water, instead of having water sprinkled on your head, still, parts of the ‘baptism’ weren’t right, so it didn’t qualify as true baptism before God.”

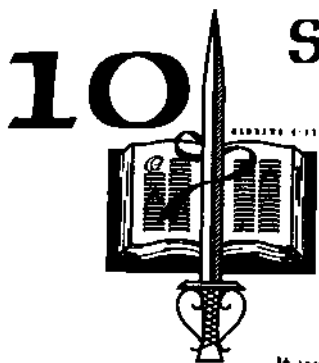
“I’m glad this story was included,” Rachel said. “It is a good safe-guard against confusion. Just think of the people in the world who think they’ve been baptized, yet in God’s sight they weren’t! How important it is for all of us to really know what His word says, so that we can know we’re right in His eyes!”

The Chart

| The Hearers | Scripture Reference | What Was Preached | What the People Did | Result; What God Did |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| People in Jerusalem | Acts 2 | Jesus is the Son of God | They were 'cut to the heart' (believed); told to repent and be baptized | 'Remission of their sins'; saved them and added them to the church |
| People in Jerusalem at the temple | Acts 3,4 | Jesus is the Son of God | They believed and were told to repent and be converted | 'Refreshing from God' – saved them |
| People of Samaria | Acts 8 | Christ; things concerning the kingdom and the name of Christ | They believed and were baptized | |
| Ethiopian man | Acts 8:26 | Jesus; explained things Isaiah prophesied about the death of Christ | He asked what prevented him from being baptized; he confessed his faith in Christ and was immersed in water | |
| Saul of Tarsus | Acts 9 & 22 | Jesus preached Himself | Confessed Christ as Lord, fasted, prayed, was baptized | Washed away Paul's sins |
| Cornelius, household | Acts 10 | Jesus, the resurrected Son of God | Cornelius and household believed and were baptized | Saved them |
| Lydia, household | Acts 16:13ff | Things spoken by Paul | Gave heed and was baptized | |
| Philippian jailer, family | Acts 16:22ff | The word of the Lord | Believed, washed Paul's stripes, baptized; rejoiced | |
| Corinthians/ Crispus | Acts 18:8 | Jesus is the Christ | Heard, believed, were baptized | |
| 12 Ephesian men | Acts 19 | Contrast between John the Baptist and Christ | Had undergone unscriptural baptism; baptized correctly | Received miraculous gifts through laying-on of Paul's hands |

Examples of Conversion
Matthew 28:18,19; Mark 16:15,16

| Preaching | Believed | Repented | Confessed | Baptized | Saved |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pentecost Acts 2:14-41 | | Repent v. 37,38 | | Baptized v. 38-41 | Remission of sins v. 38,41,47 |
| Samarita Acts 8:5-13 | Believed v. 12 | | | Baptized v. 12 | |
| Eunuch Acts 8:35-39 | Believed v. 37 | | Confessed v. 37 | Baptized v. 38 | Rejoiced v. 39 |
| Saul Acts 9:17,18 | | | | Baptized v. 18 | Sins washed away v. 22:16 |
| Cornelius Acts 10:34-48 | Believed v. 43 | | | Baptized v. 48 | Remission of sins v. 43 |
| Lydia Acts 16:14,15 | Attended v. 14 | | | Baptized v. 15 | |
| The Jailer Acts 16:30-34 | Believed v. 31 | | | Baptized v. 33 | |
| Preaching Romans 10:14 | Faith Hebrews 11:6; 5:8,9 | Repentance Luke 13:3 | Confession Matthew 10:32 | Baptism Galatians 3:27 | Salvation Romans 6:3-5 |



search for truth

Comparing with Scriptures

It was Sunday morning, and as they had done the previous week, Andrew and Rachel left home early in order to reach the Baptist church building before the congregation began to arrive. They noticed on the name board that 'Reverend B. Thomas' was the 'Pastor'. The door was open and when they went inside they were greeted warmly by a distinguished looking gentleman dressed in a suit.

"Good morning," he said. "I am The Reverend Thomas. Have you come for our meeting?"

"Good morning. Yes, my wife, Rachel, and I are interested in learning about the Baptist church and what you teach. Actually, Rachel was baptized as a Baptist when she was young. I was christened as a baby in the Catholic church. We haven't been worshipping anywhere since our marriage, but now that we have Timothy, we feel that we must practice Christianity and train him in the right way."

"You've made a wise decision," the pastor said, approvingly. "And I'm sure you'll like our church. We are quite large, with many distinguished families from the area among our membership."

"But we need to learn more about the Baptist church before we decide which church to be a part of," Andrew explained.

"We've been reading from the New Testament, trying to understand what is taught there about salvation. And to be honest with you, we're also trying to understand just what the situation is about the church, since we've read of only one in the Scriptures and yet there are many different churches with different names, even here in our city. Why is that?"

"Oh, you know how different people are!" the preacher joked lightly. "It really doesn't matter so much about the church, since the church doesn't save anyone. You do know that you are saved by your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by being a member of a church, don't you?"

"Well, according to what we've read, certainly we must believe in Jesus as God's Son, but at the church's beginning in Acts 2, the people were forgiven of their sins when the conviction of their faith caused them to be baptized into Christ, and then it said that God added them to the church. So, from that beginning, it seems that *more than faith was required* for salvation; and certainly, it shows that everyone who was saved was added to the church. Can you tell me when the Baptist church started?"

"Some among us would say that it had its actual beginning with John the Baptist, that all of the people who came to him were baptized, which made them the first 'Baptists'. Others would say that, historically, the first organized Baptist church was started by John Smythe in Amsterdam, Holland in 1609. Because of differences in thinking, with the passing of time, more than 30 different types of Baptists can be found in the world today," the preacher explained.

"But I was sure that when we were reading from the gospel of Matthew, John had already been killed before Jesus promised to build His church, in chapter 16. How could Jesus' church have been begun by John the Baptist, or how can any church which was started by some other man in some place in Europe in the 1600's

be the same as the one started by Jesus in Jerusalem a few days after His death?"

"Because we are pointing the way to Jesus! You must understand that the church is not the important thing. You can be saved without being in any church. It is our faith that saves us," affirmed the preacher again.

"But I'm sure that it says clearly in Acts 2 — here in verse 38 — that those people were forgiven only after they repented of the sin of crucifying Jesus and were baptized. And then in verse 47 it says, '*...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*' How could it be made plainer than that, that *both* repentance and baptism come *before* salvation, and that *all* the people who are *saved* are added by God to *Jesus' church*?" asked Andrew in bewilderment.

"The problem is that you are too concerned about little things that aren't important," answered the preacher. "The important thing you have to remember is that Jesus has already paid the price for all sins, and that salvation is the free gift of God. You can't do anything to earn it."

"I was so young when I was baptized," Rachel spoke up. "I don't remember anything about it except the baptism. Could you explain just what is involved?"

"Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"

"Of course, we do!" Andrew quickly answered.

"And you accept Him as your personal Savior?"

"Of course! There is no other Savior," Andrew answered again.

"Then you are saved by your faith."

"That's all there is to it?" asked Andrew. "Just like that, we have forgiveness?"

"Yes, salvation is the free gift of God. In John 3:16 we are assured, *'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'* And in Ephesians 2:8,9 we are told, *'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.'*"

"But what about those people on the day the church was started? Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins," Andrew asked.

"Of course we are baptized, but baptism is the outward sign of the inward grace. In other words, you are saved when you accept Christ as your personal Savior, and then you are baptized as a testimony to the fact that you have already been saved."

"Is a person a member of the Baptist church when he believes in Christ?" Rachel asked. "If so, then all believers would be Baptists."

"No, actually one is saved by his faith, but he is not a member of the church until he has submitted to water baptism," the preacher explained.

"He would go to heaven if he died before he was baptized?" asked Andrew.

"As I showed you, salvation is God's free gift of grace. We are saved by our faith. Baptism is not involved in salvation."

"But the way you are using the verses in Ephesians, they conflict with what people were told to do in the book of Acts. Shouldn't the Bible agree?" Andrew asked.

"If God says He will save me by His grace, that's enough for

me.” the preacher assured him. “I don’t have to look further, and you don’t either.”

“So, just as I am, I can walk out of this building a saved man, and if I died in an accident on the way home, I would go to heaven?”

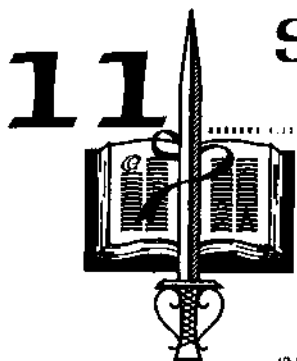
“If you truly believe in Jesus.”

“But you don’t accept me, on faith alone, as a member of the Baptist church?” clarified Andrew.

“No. If Rachel desires to be a member of this church, she would need to bring her letter of good standing from the pastor where she was baptized. And if you want to join our church, Andrew, you would be presented as a candidate for baptism to the congregation. The members, seeing your sincerity, would approve your membership with us upon your baptism.”

“Thank you for discussing these things with us,” Andrew said. “We want to continue to study and to be very sure that we are doing just what the Bible teaches. We also wanted to see what your meetings are like, because we’re trying to understand how God wants us to worship. Last Sunday we went to the Catholic church. In outside appearance there is much difference between your church and that one.”

“Oh, yes. There are no robes or statues or prayers to the saints here. You are most welcomed to our meetings.”



search for truth

“What
Must We Do?”

“Well, what do you think?” asked Andrew, looking bleakly at Rachel, and then at the chart in his hands.

“They don't match up very well, do they? — what we're seeing in real life, and what we've been reading in the Bible. It seems so clear and simple in the Bible, but when we talked to the priest he had different thinking, and the Baptist preacher had another line of reasoning — and he said there are more than 30 different kinds of Baptists, alone, not to mention all of the other denominations. It makes it very confusing, trying to understand all of these things together.”

“That's the problem,” Andrew said. “I think they can't be understood together, because they contradict each other. The Catholic doctrine of salvation can never be reconciled with the Baptist doctrine, because one ‘baptizes’ infants and the other doesn't; one sprinkles water for baptism and the other says it's being put under the water. And both disagree with what we've read again and again in the book of Acts about the purpose of baptism, that it is *for the forgiveness of sins*.”

“Your question today about the conflict between the verse the preacher quoted and what we've read was a good one. Shouldn't the Bible agree? What's wrong if it doesn't?” Rachel asked.

“Well, in the secular world if I’m reading directions on how to do a thing — and if the directions are correctly written — then if one part seems to be contradicting another, I’d go back and study the whole thing again to see where my understanding was wrong. And I’d have to study until all the directions were fitting together.”

“Shouldn’t it work that way in spiritual things, too?” asked Rachel. “Let’s see that place in Ephesians. *‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.’* Let’s just consider it, part by part. *‘By grace you have been saved...’*

“Are we saved by grace? Can we be saved without God’s grace?”

“Naturally everything we have spiritually is by the grace of God. No matter what we might do on our own, we can’t forgive our own sins — and nobody else can do that — so it *has* to be by God’s grace.”

“So this part of the verse fits with what we’ve already studied. Now, what about the words *‘saved through faith’*? Was faith necessary for the people to be saved, as we read in the book of Acts?”

“Yes, they were always told that they must believe that Christ was the Son of God.”

“Without faith could they have actually been baptized?” asked Rachel.

“No, not really, because they had to understand what they were doing and the choice they were making, in order to follow Jesus and to be a part of His church. Those men that Paul met — they didn’t have the right faith, because of a lack of knowledge when they were baptized, so it didn’t count as baptism. When they properly understood the truth, it says that they were baptized in the name of Jesus. It didn’t even say ‘baptized again’ which shows

that God hadn't recognized what they had done earlier."

"So it was actually through their faith that they were saved by God's grace, but *not* without the obedience that is a part of genuine faith," reasoned Rachel.

"Which means that this Scripture in Ephesians doesn't conflict with the directions in Acts," Andrew said. "**Grace and faith and obedience, all work together** to result in salvation. And we don't have to leave off one verse in order to accept another. We can accept and follow *all* of them."

"We must keep that rule always in our minds, Andrew," urged Rachel. "**Whatever the Scriptures say must agree with the other Scriptures on the same subject**; if it seems not to, then we can know that *we* are at fault in our understanding, and not that God's word is at fault; and not that we can take one verse and ignore another."

"Very good thinking!" agreed Andrew. "Now, what's your thinking about the preacher's comments about the church not being important, and that salvation comes one way but church membership comes another?"

"Well, back to our favorite chapter," laughed Rachel. "If God added to the church those who were being baptized and were thus being saved, then I would conclude that the church — that is, the group of people making up His family — is the most important thing in the world to Him."

"And that anyone who follows the pattern of faith and obedience, as shown in the book of Acts — even there in Acts 2 — will certainly be added by God to that same church," Andrew finished. "But where *is* that church, in the world today?"

"I don't know," Rachel admitted. "Do you think there have been too many years since the beginning, and that it has gradually changed so that we don't recognize it?"

"But if it had changed that much, would it still be recognized by God as His church?" asked Andrew. "We have all of these groups today, but we haven't read about their names or many of their practices in our study of the Scriptures, at least up to this point. We'll keep these questions in mind as we read. But, for instance — even though the Baptist preacher said that Baptists were the followers of John, we haven't read about 'Baptists' or 'Baptist churches' anywhere in our studies."

"So, we need to be looking in the world today for a church called after God or Christ," suggested Rachel.

"But, back to the earlier thought: there may not even be a church in the world like that one now!" Andrew pointed out. "Surely if there was one here in this city, we'd know about it. So what do we do? If we are baptized correctly, will God add us to that original church?"

"Since that's the promise in Acts 2, I believe He would. You know, Andrew, the more I think about it, the more it seems to me that the general thinking about 'the church' is wrong," Rachel said thoughtfully. "People speak of it as though it is some club or something that was just 'organized' and then people could join it or not. But the Scriptures seem to be showing that, individually, we do certain things in obedience to God, that these things bring about our *birth into His spiritual family*, and that the church is *the result*. When God takes us out of the world and makes us His, *we are the church* — not that we **join anything** by our own choice. Does that make sense to you? Do you see the difference?"

"Yes, I think you're right," answered Andrew. "If we would think of *the family of God*, and that we are naturally born into it when we obey Him, we wouldn't think of *the church* as some *separate thing that we might become members of later, or not be members of at all, if that was our preference.*"

"But back to our original concern," Rachel said. "Suppose

we do obey God, and are added to His family — to that church we've been reading about in the Scriptures. In **that time when the church was new**, the Christians gathered with each other weekly — even daily — to worship. But how would we worship today? We haven't found that original church, so can we meet with the Baptists, or the Catholics, or where? Even their worship doesn't fit what we studied about the early church. Could we be true to the Scriptures if we worshipped with them?"

"I wouldn't feel right doing that, just as I wouldn't feel right going along with the Catholic sprinkling of babies or the Baptist teaching that we are saved by faith alone. If the doctrine contradicts the Bible, then I believe we can't worship with them and support what they're doing," Andrew reasoned, with a thoughtful frown on his face. "I believe, until we find the church we've been reading about, we'll just have to obey God ourselves and do the best we can to worship and work for Him on our own."

"Won't that separate us from our family and friends?" asked Rachel.

"Do you remember that I asked you if you had considered that our studies might lead us to the same conclusion Saul reached, when he had to leave the Jewish faith which he had defended so strongly?" Andrew reminded.

"Yes," answered Rachel. "But if these things are true, what choice do we have? Our commitment at the start was that we wanted to understand and obey exactly what the Bible teaches."

"And, in doing that, we may feel some rejection — persecution — like Saul had. Some may not understand what we're doing. But since we're convinced that this is the right thing, we'll want to be explaining what we're learning to our family and friends. Maybe we can convince them, and they'll want to obey that pattern in the New Testament, too. Who knows what may happen, if we will sincerely and carefully follow just what God says in His word?"



search for truth

“You’re Lost!”

Rachel sat very still, holding the sleeping Timothy. He had played energetically all morning, so he was more than ready for his afternoon nap and had nestled contentedly in her arms as she rocked him to sleep, singing softly. Her heart swelled with thankfulness for such a precious baby — such a precious gift and responsibility. He was growing strong and healthy, with an alert expression in his eyes as he seemed to be watching everything going on around him. “What will you be?” Rachel asked, stroking his dark hair. “What differences will be made because you lived? How well will we guide you? I pray that we will help you to learn that God must be the most important One in your life.”

Rachel was surprised to hear Andrew at the door. “Is something wrong?” she asked, laying Timothy in his bed and going to Andrew. “You’re home from work early!”

“Nothing’s wrong. But I was thinking about the studies we’ve been having, and suddenly a terrible thought came to my mind! We’ve been so intent on **understanding** what the Bible says and about *how* those early people were saved and about the church, wondering *which* church to join, and all of those questions. But, just now at work, I thought, ‘*You’re lost, Andrew!* You see yourself as a good person, obedient to civil laws, a good husband and father, so you’ve been feeling comfortable in all these studies. But

the truth is, you're not saved! If you died this minute, you'd be lost eternally. As much as you think you love Jesus, He's not your Savior! You're not a Christian! *You're lost!*!"

"Oh, Andrew!" Rachel said, sudden tears forming in her eyes. "You make me look at us as God must be seeing us! How could we have been reading all of these things and studying all of these questions without realizing the urgency of obeying God, so that our sins could be forgiven and we could be safely born into His family?"

"I don't know," answered Andrew with a puzzled frown, "but the question now is, 'How are we going to be baptized?' There's no one here who's teaching just what we've been reading in the New Testament, so there's no one to baptize us."

They sat in silence for several minutes, studying over their problem. Finally Andrew said, "We know that baptism is a burial in water, and..." Picking up the Bible he turned to Acts 2:38 and read, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" So we understand *how* baptism is to be done, that it is for the forgiveness of sins, and that it marks the beginning of a new spiritual life."

Rachel also opened her Bible and turned to a verse she remembered reading in Matthew. "Before Jesus went back to heaven, He told the apostles here in Matthew 28:19, '*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*'"

"And the place in Romans — where was that?" Andrew questioned as he turned pages. "Here it is, Romans 6:3,4: '*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ*

Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.'

"Now, let's write on paper each of the things we've learned about salvation from these verses," Andrew suggested. "First, because we **believe** in Christ as God's Son, we **repent** of our sins before we can be **baptized**."

"Don't forget that Philip told the Ethiopian that he could be baptized *if* he believed in Christ, and so he made a **confession** that he believed that Jesus is the Son of God," Rachel reminded.

"Yes," agreed Andrew. "Jesus had said that we have to confess Him before men if He is to confess us before His father. So the confession must be made. Then baptism itself is *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*; it's for **the forgiveness of sins**; the one who is baptized *receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, making him alive to God instead of being dead in sin*. Baptism is a **burial** in water, because the sinner goes down into the water to wash away his sins, as Jesus was buried, and then he comes up out of the water as a *new creature* before God. As the sinner obeys God in these things, he is **born again** — we read that in John 3 — and God *adds* him to Jesus' family, the church He had promised to begin when He was talking to the apostles in Matthew 16."

"So in this process," Rachel said, "we are doing what was described in Romans 6: being buried with Christ in likeness of His death so that we can be resurrected like Him, too — and in this process, we are saved *by God's grace, through the faith that has prompted us to obey Him*."

"O.K." Andrew concluded, "so we know exactly *how* to receive forgiveness, *how* be baptized, *how* to become a part of the church — at least, according to all of these verses we've read in the Bible."

“But what can we do about it?” asked Rachel.

“Well, suppose we go to the Baptist preacher and tell him all of these things we’ve learned, exactly what the Bible teaches about salvation and baptism and His church, and then — what do you think about asking him to baptize us in just this way? — not according to Baptist doctrine, and not to be joining the Baptist church, but so that God can add us to His church?”

“Why, Andrew, what a wonderful solution to our problem!” Rachel exclaimed, jumping up to give him a hug. “Let’s call and see if he would be willing to do that, and when we can come over!”

Later that night Rachel and Andrew sat in the darkness of their bedroom. Though no words were being spoken, the feeling of sweet peace was strong between them. Finally Rachel reached over and took Andrew’s hand in hers. “This has been the best day of our lives! Before, the day of our marriage was the best, and then the day of Timothy’s birth, but nothing can be better than knowing that we are forgiven, and that we can truly call God our Father.”

“Yes,” Andrew responded. “Probably Mr. Thomas wasn’t too happy about baptizing me according to our understanding of the Scriptures, since it differed so much from his, but I’m thankful he did it.”

“And I’m so happy I thought to ask you to baptize me, Andrew. It makes it even more special that it was by your hands that I could be born again. Knowing that everything we’ve done has been exactly as we’ve read in the Scriptures gives me such a feeling of joy and contentment in my heart.”

“Me, too,” agreed Andrew. “But this is only the beginning. Jesus told his followers to go into all the world and preach the gospel. You know, Rachel, we feel alone just now, not knowing if there are other Christians just like us in the world. I believe there

are, and surely we'll find them. But until then, we have so much studying and growing to do. If we're the only voice here in this town, speaking out for just what the Bible teaches, then we have a huge responsibility. How can we understand these truths and not live them before our family and friends, and how can we keep quiet and not try to teach others what we've learned?"

"The first thing is to start thinking about worship on Sunday," suggested Rachel. "In order to have the supper like the early church did, we have to locate the unleavened bread like they used — or surely I could make some. It would only be flour, salt, oil and water — that shouldn't be too difficult. I'll buy the grape juice at the market."

"And I'll plan a lesson from the Bible for us to study," offered Andrew. "Just think what it means to be actually going *into the presence* of the One who created the whole universe and everything in it, and to be allowed to *worship Him* as His children and to call Him Father! Somehow, I'd never thought before what an awesome thing it is to be able to worship God!"

"I want to talk to my sister about what we've done, and also to Elizabeth down the street. I believe that if they understood these things, they would want to obey God, too. Maybe they would come over for our period of worship Sunday," Rachel suggested.

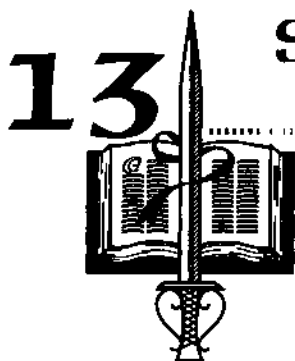
"That's a wonderful idea," Andrew agreed. "I've already been talking to John, who works in my office. I'll ask him if he wants to come Sunday. It's so exciting, just thinking about being able to help people that we love to understand the truth, so that they can be saved, too."

Then Andrew turned to Rachel, taking her hand in the darkness. "All along we've been praying, asking God to help us understand what we were studying. Now, we can pray in this new relationship, as His children." He bowed his head.

“Our Father in heaven, thank You that You have helped us to understand and to be able to obey You. Thank you that we can go to bed tonight with the peace in our hearts that comes from being forgiven and knowing that we are saved. Thank you that we can worship You and that we can share these precious truths with those we love.

“Most of all, thank You that we can teach Timothy as he grows, so that he will also be saved eternally. You’ve blessed us with so much, Father, and we thank You for Your love and the love of our Lord Jesus.

“Help us, now at the beginning of wearing the name ‘Christian’ never to shame that name by our speech or behavior, and help us to be faithful to the commitment we’ve made to be Your children. In Jesus’ name we ask these things. Amen.”



search for truth

"We Are Christians!"

When Rachel woke the next morning after her baptism, she still felt the sweet excitement and peace of being new! Her thoughts turned to the relationship she knew she had with God, because she had now been born into His spiritual family, the church, through baptism. "I don't know if there are other people in the world today who have followed what Andrew and I have done, but I do know that — at least, up to this point — we've done the right thing! Now, we need to continue to study and learn the things that God would have us do with the rest of our lives!" With those thoughts she turned to wake Andrew.

"Good morning, sister!" Andrew said, opening sleepy eyes. "How does it feel to be one day old in a new life?"

"Wonderful!"

"Let's make a practice, at the very beginning of this new life, to take time each morning to read and discuss God's word, and to pray about the things that we need to take before our Father," suggested Andrew. "Since our souls are of eternal importance, we should be more concerned about feeding them than feeding our physical bodies."

Rachel brought the Bible and concordance, along with notebooks.

"In order to better understand the Bible, I think we should spend part of our time reading the Old Testament," Andrew said.

"Yes," agreed Rachel. "Knowing the work of God in creation, and the history leading up to the coming of Christ will surely help us to grow in the right way. There is so much said in the denominations about keeping the Ten Commandments and the Law. We need to understand about that — but I don't even know where to find those laws!"

"So we begin with Genesis —"

"But I want to continue to study about Christ and the church in the New Testament," Rachel urged. "Couldn't we do both?"

"Of course," agreed Andrew. And so a routine of morning studies and a time of prayer was developed. Both Rachel and Andrew found that the spiritual beginning to the day continued to fill their thoughts throughout the remainder of the day. Looking back to their lives and interests before Timothy's birth and before their decision to make God the center of their existence, they were amazed at the differences. They were more considerate and gentle with each other. They found a new patience in dealing with problems. Their goals in life had changed drastically. Where, before, "things" and money seemed to be the most important achievements, now they realized that they were thinking very little about physical possessions. And they felt a happiness and a security they had never known.

"In fact," Rachel exclaimed to her friend, Elizabeth, as she was talking to her about the many changes in their lives, "it's so thrilling to me to realize these things that I look for opportunities, whenever I'm talking with others, to tell them what's happened to us!"

"But I don't understand," Elizabeth answered. "Your parents are believers in Christ, so you were brought up with that faith.

What's different now?"

"I think the great difference is in the way we're studying the Bible and depending on it as the guidance in developing our lives," answered Rachel. "You see, my parents are members of the Baptist church, and that is what I was until we realized that the Scriptures have different teachings altogether about salvation and the church, and even about worship. So I'm not a Baptist anymore, and Andrew's not Catholic. We're Christians!"

"But you can't be *just* a Christian!" objected Elizabeth. "Of course we're *all* Christians, but people will want to know *what kind* of Christian you are, what denomination you're a member of. Everybody's *something!*"

"That's what I'm trying to explain," Rachel answered. "When you read the New Testament, there were no denominations! Nobody had to explain what kind of Christian he was because there were only Christians! We've read those Scriptures in the book of Acts and have done exactly what those early people were told to do to obey God. So we're not *any kind* of Christian — we're only Christians, members of the church that Jesus began then."

"But you'll worship with some church, won't you?" asked Elizabeth.

"That's the problem we had," Rachel admitted. "As far as we've been able to check, there isn't a church here in our city that teaches and practices just what is written in the book of Acts. You see, Jesus promised that He would build His church. Give me your Bible and I'll show you what He said. '*...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*' (Matthew 16:18). Then here in Acts 2:47, it says, '*...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*' Those who were being saved were the people who had said in verse 37, '*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*' They were told, '*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*'

for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit....Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them' (verse 38, 41).

"That's what Andrew and I have done — we believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God, we've turned away from a worldly life and sinful things, and we were baptized so that our sins would be forgiven and so that God would add us also to that church, His family. We understand that that church is not one of the denominations, so when we were baptized we didn't become a part of a denomination. We don't know of any others in this city who have done these things in just this way, to be members of that original church. Do you?"

"No," admitted Elizabeth. "I hadn't even heard of that church before today."

"Yet, it's the only church talked about in the New Testament!" exclaimed Rachel. "So whenever you've read about the church in the Scriptures, you've actually been reading about that church!"

"But I didn't know that that church still exists in the world, as a literal church. I know our pastor says that the world-wide church of Christ is made up of the saved people from all churches."

"Yes, that was what I'd heard too," answered Rachel, "but just think about all the different things people are taught that they must do to be saved. When I became a Baptist, they baptized me — put me under the water in immersion — but they said that I was saved by my faith alone, that baptism had nothing to do with forgiveness of sins. Andrew's parents are Catholic, so he was sprinkled as a baby. Neither of those is what people were taught to do in Acts 2 to be saved. So how could Andrew and I have been members of that original church when we hadn't done what was taught in the New Testament?"

"I'm a member of the Freedom Church, but I've never been baptized," Elizabeth said thoughtfully. "So little is said about baptism or the church that I had just never thought about it."

"We're worshipping in our home," Rachel said. "Would you come Sunday? We'll study these things."

"I think that would be wonderful!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "I'll see you then!"

14 search for truth



Worship

In preparation for the first worship assembly in their home, Andrew and Rachel were studying the Scriptures carefully. "Just as we were taught wrong things about how to become a Christian," Andrew reasoned, "it's possible that the things we were taught about worship were wrong. In fact, some of the things must be wrong, because there is so much difference between Catholic worship and Baptist worship!"

"Here's a verse in the concordance," Rachel said, "*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*"

"A good warning," agreed Andrew. "So, back to our favorite chapter!" he laughed. "After the people were baptized and added to the church — which is our position now! — verse 42 says, '*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*' This tells us several things about their worship: the '**apostles' doctrine**' for us would be the study of the Scriptures; the '**breaking of bread**' would be the supper in memory of Jesus' death, as He had taught them just before His crucifixion; and **prayers** —"

"But is that all?" questioned Rachel. "On *which day* did the early Christians worship? I remember hearing about the 'Sabbath' day, and of course most churches worship on Sunday. But the

Sabbath is Saturday, so which is the right day for true worship?"

"Let's read and see what we can find in Acts," suggested Andrew.

There was silence for some time and then Rachel asked, "I wonder why God didn't just write out a list of how He wants us to worship?"

"Well..." Andrew answered thoughtfully, "I don't know *all* the reasons, but look at what we're doing, so that we can understand what true worship should be! We're reading and studying a lot of Scriptures! One reason was surely so that those who really want to know the truth will be drawn into more study of God's word, and learn many other things in the process."

"That's right," agreed Rachel. "Just think how many times we've begun with one search and have gotten involved in several others along the way!"

"For instance, here in Acts 11," Andrew said, "in verse 19 it shows that when the church was scattered because of persecution, they went out but they taught the gospel to Jews only. But in verse 20 it says that some of them began to preach to the Hellenists in the city of Antioch. Those weren't Jews — as Cornelius wasn't a Jew. In Acts 10 Peter had been especially sent to him by God, so this continues with the story of the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles."

"In verse 26 it says that Barnabas and Paul assembled with the church in Antioch for a whole year! So we know by this that the Christians met regularly," reasoned Rachel.

"And the end of the verse says, '*...the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*' So the church met, and they were called Christians — but *when* did they meet?" Andrew asked, continuing to read.

“Here in chapter 13, in verse 5, it says that Paul and Barnabas came to Salamis on a missionary journey and that they went to the synagogues of the Jews. In verse 14 it says they came to Antioch in Pisidia, *‘and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.’* Does this mean that they continued to worship with the Jews, in the synagogue, on the Sabbath day, as Christians, as the church?” asked Rachel.

“Paul and Barnabas were on a missionary journey, so there weren’t any churches in those cities yet,” answered Andrew. “In verse 15, Paul read the Scriptures and then preached to them, but in verse 45 the Jews rejected the message and in verse 46 Paul said that he would turn to the Gentiles. But when he left the city, he left behind disciples who had been converted by the preaching Paul and Barnabas did, according to verse 52.”

“Ah! look at chapter 20!” Rachel exclaimed. *‘Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul...spoke to them...’* (verse 7).

“This is interesting,” said Andrew. “In verse 6 it said that they stayed seven days in Troas, obviously in order to assemble with the church on Sunday. But then after meeting with the Christians for worship, preaching till midnight, and then talking until dawn, they left immediately to continue their journey! So in spite of the fact that they were in such a hurry to go on that they didn’t even rest after being up all night, they had waited seven days, **passing over Saturday — the Sabbath** —, waiting for the church to come together on **the first day of the week!**”

“In the concordance, 1 Corinthians 16:2 also talks about the first day of the week,” Rachel said. *“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”*

“So this tells about **the day of worship** and also that they were to take up **collections** for the work of the church,” Andrew concluded.

"We are getting a good picture of worship in the early church," Rachel said. "Besides these things, all groups today also sing hymns — some even have bands — so that's a part of worship, too. For singing, the concordance has several verses. One is Ephesians 5:19: *'Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.'*"

"There is no mention of a band or any instrument in that verse, except that the melody was to be made in the heart," observed Andrew. "We'll continue to study on these things, to be sure that we're understanding the whole truth regarding worship. Surely, we can't go wrong, though, if we do what we've read so far."

During the week Andrew and Rachel spoke to several of their friends and to their family members about the period of worship they were planning in their home the following Sunday. With sincerity and concern they prompted,

"It's so important that we remember that *we are the ones in need of salvation*, not the ones who are **deciding the rules of salvation**. When we read of the greatness of God, we're reminded of our own smallness, of our own dependence on Him for guidance.

"Jesus said in John 12:49, *'...I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.'* Because He had spoken only what the Father directed, He warned in verse 48, *'He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.'*

"Jesus' words of warning are the reason we want you to meet with us on Sunday: to search the New Testament, to understand what He wants us to be and to do, in order that when we come to the time of judgment, His words will assure that we will be saved eternally."

15 search for truth



True Worship – a New Experience

Rachel woke earlier than usual, with a feeling of excitement. Their first Sunday as Christians! Their first day of worship!

She slipped quietly out of bed and went to their sitting room to be sure everything was in order there. Then she went to the kitchen to prepare the bread for their first observance of the Lord's Supper. As she measured the flour, oil and water, mixing them carefully and making the bread into a small flat loaf, she felt humbled that her hands could prepare such an important part of the worship of God. "Thank you, Father," she prayed, "that you have given us this supper, to help us remember at what price we were saved."

At nine o'clock, Andrew and Rachel welcomed Elizabeth and her husband. "James decided to come with me, to check out this 'new religion'," she laughed.

John, Andrew's friend at work, also joined them. And Rachel was very happy when her sister, Mary, came, too.

"Thank you all for having the interest in spiritual things to come today," Andrew began. "This is a very special day for Rachel and me, our first time to worship God since our baptism! So you will understand that we're very new in all of these

things, but we're eager to share what we're learning.

"I think it would be good for us to begin our worship with prayer.

"Our Father," Andrew began, "what a privilege to be able to worship You, and to know that we are Your children, that we can rightfully call You 'Father'. Please help us, Father, as we study Your word today, that we may understand what we study, and that all of us always may want to know the truth above all else. Forgive us, Father, for the sins in our lives and the many times we fail to be what we should be. In Jesus' name we ask these things. Amen."

"By way of explanation," Andrew continued, "when Timothy was born we realized what a responsibility it is to actually shape a soul for eternity! Rachel and I began to seriously study God's word, wanting to be sure that we teach Timothy only the right things.

"I bought copies of the Bible and a concordance at a book store, and we began. Since we already believed in Jesus as the Son of God, we decided to read, first, the book of Matthew, and then Acts. But we also looked up words in the concordance, to locate other verses dealing with particular subjects.

"Since I had a Catholic background, and Rachel's was Baptist, one of the first things Rachel tried was to look up the various familiar churches in the concordance. It came as a real surprise when none of them were listed! How could we learn more about the Catholic Church or the Baptist Church if they were not even in the Bible?

"So we decided simply to try to understand what the Bible itself teaches about salvation. As we've studied, we've learned some surprising things. We located, in Acts 2, the story of the actual beginning of Christ's church, as He had promised in

Matthew 16:18: *'...On this rock'* — the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, which was the confession Peter had just made — *'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'* At the end of that chapter He had promised the disciples, *'...there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom'* (Matthew 16:28).

“As we were reading in Acts 2, the story of the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to build His church, we mentally put ourselves in that group. We heard Peter explain, first, that the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles was fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy through Joel, that **the kingdom was finally and actually beginning.**

“Then he taught us, using other prophecies spoken by David, that the Man, Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the Lord and Christ they had been looking for. We already believed in Him so we were ready to ask with them, *'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'*

“Then Peter said to them, *'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'* (Acts 2:38).

“Rachel and I knew that we had not done this. As Catholics, my parents had me sprinkled to dedicate me when I was a baby. Rachel had been baptized, but not to have her sins forgiven. So we realized that we needed to do what those 3,000 did on that first day. This past Friday we were baptized, and we have faith that God forgave us and added us to His church, just as He forgave those people on that day. *'And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved'* (Acts 2:47).

“You might say, ‘But you are not an ordained pastor. You haven’t attended a theological seminary. What makes you think your interpretation of all these Scriptures is right?’

“Rachel and I are not saying that we, as humans, are right, and that others are wrong. The fact is that the Scripture — God’s word — is right, and anything or anyone who disagrees with it is wrong. I came across a verse in Romans 3:4 which says, *‘Let God be true but every man a liar.’* This is what we believe, and wherever the churches and doctrines of men disagree with God, all of us must agree that **God alone is right.**

“This is what we want to study together in the weeks to come, so that all of us can be united in that one church we read about in the Bible.”



SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Growing, and Learning

What It Means to Be a Christian

With Timothy asleep in her arms, Rachel went to visit Elizabeth. Over a cup of hot tea, Elizabeth said, "The meeting at your house Sunday was very different. It made me think about many things. I want to ask our pastor about our church — when it began, and the doctrine of how we are saved. I remember only that he says we must have faith in God."

"It will be good to ask him," Rachel agreed. "Actually, we know nothing of how the many churches began. Andrew and I have been so surprised to read of only one church in the Scriptures. We've known of all of these different ones all of our lives, so it never occurred to us that Jesus began only one kingdom or church."

"You're right," Elizabeth answered. "If the Bible talks about only one church, then there should be only one. That makes sense to me, even as little as I know about the Bible. But surely our pastor knows something we don't know, something that will explain how all the churches started."

"Maybe so," Rachel agreed. "And if he does, we want to learn

it, too, because, above everything, we want to know the truth."

"Rachel, when Andrew explained that Jesus wanted the church to remember Him in the Supper, as he read the Scriptures and explained how we are to think of the sacrifice of Jesus' body, and that our sins are washed away in His blood, it made all of that meaningful to me, as it had not been before. Once or twice I've been to a meeting in my church when they had the supper, but I didn't understand much about it."

"Evidently the Supper was very important to early Christians," Rachel said. "Here in Acts 20:7 it says that the reason the disciples met together was to break bread."

"When Andrew read the verse that warns about looking into our own hearts to be sure we are able to eat the Supper, and then he asked us to sit quietly and pray those few minutes, I knew I couldn't take the bread and the juice. My heart kept saying, 'But you have never done what God asked, in order to be a part of His family.'"

Rachel reached out and covered Elizabeth's hand with her own. "But, Elizabeth," she consoled, "you need only to study more so that you can understand what God would have you to do. You know Andrew and I will be happy to study along with you."

"I wish James had Andrew's interest in family and spiritual things. I'm not sure he even believes in God. He never joined any church. He thinks that most religious people are hypocrites."

"Well, naturally, anybody can be hypocritical," Rachel admitted, "but that doesn't mean that the Bible itself is wrong, or that the life it teaches us to live is wrong. Already, no longer than Andrew and I have been studying, I can tell that our lives are definitely better. Before, the center of our thinking was our work and the money and the things we wanted to buy. Timothy's birth changed so many things. We decided that, at least for now, I should stay at home and be a mother for him."

“How can you make it financially?” Elizabeth interrupted.

“It won’t be easy,” admitted Rachel, “but we believe we can manage if I’m very careful in the use of things at home — not being at all wasteful. And Andrew will try in every way to be the best worker at his office so he will get regular promotions. We’re learning that being a Christian causes us to genuinely do our very best in whatever we’re doing. Jesus promised in Matthew 6:33, *‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.’* We’re convinced that one way this promise is kept is that as we live the right way, being honest and dependable, and doing our very best, the natural result is that the good things we need will slowly accumulate. And then there is God’s promise that He will add His own care and blessings so that the needs will be met.”

“But, Rachel, yesterday when we were worshipping, you and Andrew gave money in the collection. Since you aren’t working, can you really spare that money for the church?”

“We studied about giving, and we saw in the Old Testament that the Jews gave a tithe of all that they earned — at least 10% besides their free will offerings. At one time the prophet Malachi challenged them with the question and accusation, *‘Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, “In what way have we robbed You?” In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. “Bring all the tithes into My storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and prove Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it”’* (Malachi 3:8-10).

“Andrew and I talked about their hypocrisy in claiming to be God’s people, and yet robbing Him, and we decided that there is no point in anything we’re doing, spiritually, if we don’t try to be

right in all the points. So when Andrew gets his check, we are setting aside 10% for God. After that money is taken out, we have had to make a budget — this much for the house, this for transportation, this for taxes, this for food and clothes, this for unexpected extras. And we hope to save a little. It isn't easy but we believe God will help us as we put Him first."

"That takes a lot of faith," Elizabeth remarked. "But what will you do with the money that will belong to God, since you're not giving it to an organized church?"

"In time, surely there will be others in the church. Then the men, together, will decide how to use it. There may be poor people who need help — and there will even be opportunities to teach the gospel that will cost money. Whatever the need, we know it will be used to help people see God's love."



search for truth

Gifts for the King

"I don't agree with you!" Mary declared with some anger as she looked accusingly at Rachel. "How can you and Andrew be so sure you're right and everybody else is wrong? What's so special about this little church you've started? It's just another church, among hundreds more — only yours is nothing! You don't even have a pastor or a church building!

Rachel's eyes were bright with tears. "Mary, Mary, please don't be angry with Andrew and me," she begged. "I realize that from your point of view, what you're saying seems right. But try to forget what you've heard — that 'One church is as good as another' or 'Go to the church of your choice' or 'Take Christ into your heart as your personal Savior — only believe, and you'll be saved!' So many 'sayings' are repeated over and over, as though they were in the Bible. But they aren't there! You believe them as the truth only because you've heard them so long. And when we show you in the Scriptures that there was only one church in the beginning, you think that what we're showing you is a lie because you haven't heard it before!"

"I **have** heard it!" Mary answered quickly. "I've heard our pastor say that the saved of **all** churches make up the *spiritual* Church of Christ! So he's saying there's only one church, too — but it's not one group meeting at one address; it's the good people

from all churches.”

“But, Mary, when you read about the church in the Bible, it wasn’t some invisible heavenly list of people of many different groups and beliefs. It was a *literal congregation of Christians*, worshipping together in Corinth, and others believing and practicing the same things in Jerusalem, others just like them in Ephesus, and in other cities throughout the world! They weren’t **different churches**. A Christian could go from one city to another, and he could locate brethren and be accepted by them because they were united in Christ,” Rachel explained. “Look — here’s a concordance. Find any of the denominations listed in the Scriptures! They aren’t there!”

“Not any of them?” asked Mary.

“No, none of them. Don’t you see our predicament, Mary?” Rachel asked with pleading eyes. “When we put out of our minds all the religious ideas we’d been taught, and we accepted the Scriptures just as they are, in honesty **we had to do what we’ve done.**”

“But what you’re saying is so different from all the others,” Mary objected. “Even your worship is different. The singing sounds strange without a piano or some kind of instrument. Will you find somebody to play for you later?”

“That’s the point, Mary. Worship isn’t ‘for us’ or because something sounds **strange** or **good** to us. Real worship is adoration of God, and doing what **He** asks, so that we please **Him**.

“In stories of the past when kings had absolute authority, their subjects were told which gifts they were to bring to their king. They came before him with bowed heads, presenting their gifts with humility, fearful of displeasing the ruler who held over them the power of life or death.

“God is our King, the absolute authority over all of us. Jesus

warned that those who come before God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and that we are worshipping in vain if we do it according to doctrines men have developed. See the warning Jesus gave here in Matthew 15:9: *'And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*

"Like the kings of old, God has asked us to bring gifts when we come into His presence. One gift He wants is our hearts, open to a knowledge of His word, as we study the Scriptures. He wants our prayers of thanksgiving for all He does for us, and He wants us to ask for our needs, just as Jesus taught His disciples here in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Part of our worship of God is the Supper we eat, to remember the death of His Son. This was most important to early Christians. On one occasion (Acts 20:6-11) the apostle Paul waited over in Troas from Monday until the following Sunday, in order to meet with Christians to break bread — to eat the Supper Jesus had given the night of His betrayal. But on that occasion in Troas, after worshipping with the church and continuing the meeting all night, Paul was in such a hurry that he and his group went on their way the next morning! Paying attention to details like these in the Scriptures helps us to understand the importance of the Supper, and that it was the focus of worship every Sunday — not once or twice a year, as many groups do today.

"Giving of money we earn is another thing God asks. Here in 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9 we read that we are to give freely and cheerfully to God.

"The fifth gift God asks us to bring to Him in worship is *'the fruit of our lips'* (Hebrews 13:15). Andrew and I looked up all the Scripture references to music in the early church, and every time *'singing'* was specified. When our King has asked for one kind of music — music made on the instrument *He* created — we can't defiantly bring Him pianos and organs and guitars, can we, Mary?"

Rachel asked. "We have to remember always that God is the one to be pleased, not ourselves. Through the years and the additions of these 'doctrines of men', many changes have been made. But just as Jesus warned, worship according to the doctrines of men is still in vain."

Mary sat quietly after Rachel had finished her explanation. Finally she said, "What you're saying makes sense. It's just so different, though. I have to have more time to study."

18 search for truth



“Re-baptism” – Is It a Sin?

The worship meetings continued Sunday after Sunday. In time it was decided to meet also on Sunday evenings for a period of informal Bible study and discussion. Andrew and Rachel were happy with the growing interest being shown in God's word.

Usually during lunch break at work, Andrew and John also studied together, with others frequently joining in. On this particular day John seemed unusually serious. “I agree with what we've studied, Andrew,” he said, “but I don't know what is the right thing to do. I've already been baptized. I was sincere about that, and when you showed me in Ephesians 4:5 that there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, I became totally confused. Wouldn't it be wrong for me to be baptized again?”

“What was the purpose of that baptism, John?” Andrew asked.

“I honestly don't know what the preacher said. He was a denominational preacher so he must have taught their doctrine, but I'm not clear on what that was. I remember that I was asked to make some statement, and that we all prayed before I was baptized. Whether they were saying that my sins were being washed

away by the blood of Christ through the baptism, I don't know. I only know that I have thought of myself as a saved person from that time."

"In the Scriptures, as we've been seeing in our group discussions, John the Baptist, Jesus, and then the apostles were continually teaching about the coming of the kingdom — His church — so that after the beginning of the church in Acts 2, people could choose to come out of the world and be a part of that separate body of people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. When Philip went to Samaria (in Acts 8), he preached things concerning the *name of Christ* and the *kingdom*.

"Can you imagine that God would forgive anyone of their sins, even though they might go through the form of baptism, if they had not heard of Christ and if they did not believe in Him, choosing Him as their one and only Lord?" Andrew asked.

"Of course not! It wouldn't be real baptism if a person didn't believe in Christ," John quickly answered.

"The church is a distinct body of people, separated in lifestyle and allegiance from the world around it. It is 'a kingdom' within itself. Can you imagine that God would add anyone to the church, separating him spiritually from the world around him, if he had never heard of the kingdom and if he did not choose to be a part of it?"

"No, it wouldn't seem fair if God did that, without people choosing it themselves," John admitted.

"At the time you were baptized, did you believe in Christ as your Savior?"

"Of course!" John laughed.

"Second question!" Andrew continued. "Just as Philip preached about the kingdom to the Samaritans, had you heard about the

Lord's church when you were baptized? Were you choosing to leave everything else and to be baptized into the body of Christ? Had anyone shown you 1 Corinthians 12:13? *'For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...'*"

"No," John answered, "I didn't know about any of those things, or about the church. I've only heard of it in these past few weeks of studying with you. But maybe God added me to the church then, even though I hadn't heard of it."

"But then He would have been making the choice for you, to come out of the world and to be added to His body, wouldn't He?" asked Andrew.

"Yes — I couldn't choose, since I didn't know," agreed John.

"But suppose He had added you then, by HIS choice. And suppose that, now that you do know about the church, you said, 'NO! I was born a — whatever — and I'll die the same! I don't want to be a part of that narrow little church!'

"Do you see, John, how unfair it would be for God to put anybody into something he didn't choose to be a part of?"

"Yes, I can see that point," John admitted.

"Here in Acts 19 you can read about a group of men who had been baptized but their understanding about Christ wasn't correct, so God didn't recognize what they'd done as being *'baptism'*."

"Yes, here in verse 5 it says, *'When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.'* And it doesn't even say *'again!'*"

"So if anything about a person's obedience to God was not according to the Scriptures, he needs to make it right. There really is *only one baptism* — **only one birth into the Lord's church!** Often people have been taught wrongly, and they believe they are

saved even though they are not, John. Now that you understand how we are saved, and that baptism is the new birth which puts us into Christ and into His church, you can be truly baptized according to the Scriptures," Andrew urged.

"I want to do that," John answered. "Could you baptize me, Andrew?"

19 search for truth



Jesus — The Christ

Rachel sang softly, patting Timothy who was almost asleep for his afternoon nap. "How fast he's growing!" she thought. "In a few more days we'll celebrate one year since his birth — and how much our lives have changed in that year!"

She quietly opened her Bible and began reading in Philippians. The love Paul expressed for his fellow Christians in that book made it one of her favorites. *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy..."* (Philippians 1:3,4). How often she had those same feelings and thoughts for their young brothers and sisters in Christ. "And I wonder," she said aloud, "how many and where other brothers and sisters live in the world? There must be more people who are trying to follow only the Bible! Surely someday we'll find others!"

Continuing to read, Rachel came to the fifth verse of chapter two: *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God*

also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

"What an interesting passage," Rachel thought. "Somehow I had imagined that Christ had always been the Son of God, subject to God as a physical son is obedient to his father. But these verses speak of equality and of emptying Himself and becoming obedient. I want to ask Andrew about this!"

That night Andrew had barely come inside the house when Rachel rushed out from the kitchen to greet him. "I'm so excited, Andrew!" she said. "I came across a Scripture today that raised many thoughts and questions. Could we postpone the reading we'd planned and look up Scriptures on Christ instead?"

"Of course," Andrew answered with a puzzled smile, "but you've had faith in Christ from childhood. What special thing are you wanting to study?"

"How have you imagined Him, from the beginning?" she asked.

"As the Son of God."

"But I was reading in Philippians 2 today, Andrew, and in that passage it sounds like there was *equality* in the Godhead from the beginning, and that He *emptied Himself* somehow and *became obedient* to God. I've never thought of Him from that viewpoint before."

"Neither have I," admitted Andrew. "If that is really what those verses mean, we have a lot of studying to do! We'll get the concordance and look into this tonight."

When dinner and the evening work had been finished, and

Timothy had had his time of playing and bath and was settled for the night, Andrew and Rachel sat down to study.

"Have you realized, Andrew, that in the past we would have done the same general things, but our minds would have been on this work at home and what we did today or what we would do tomorrow on our jobs? Now that we're Christians, though the work itself hasn't changed, our focus has. We look at everything as it relates to God and to His importance in our lives. Simply the change in emphasis has made such a difference in life itself!"

"You're right, Rachel. We have something eternal to live for now, not just 'things' and 'today'. Now, let's think," Andrew began, taking out a pad and pen. "There must be other Scriptures we've read, and have overlooked, that will shed light on Christ's relationship before His birth into the world."

"I know!" exclaimed Rachel. "A very familiar one — John 1: *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life...'* LIFE — that's a power, an attribute only God possesses!"

"I'll write those points..." Andrew began his notes: **The Word — with God — was God — all things made through Him.**"

Rachel read further: "In verse 14 it says, *'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father...'*"

"Hebrews 1:3 talks about His existence in the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person. That must be saying that they are of the same spiritual essence."

"The second verse of Hebrews 1 also talks about the role of the Son in creation, and verse three shows that even now He

upholds all things by the power of His word.”

“But look at verse 5, Rachel. This is a prophecy from the Psalms (2:7), and it says, ‘*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*’ Surely this is saying that there was a **point in time** when the Word **became** the Son of God, a point in time when He was begotten! The rest of the verse is further explanation, ‘*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son.*’ Those prophetic statements were written in future tense, showing that at the time the prophecy was inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Word **was not** the Son, but that He would **become** the Son at some later time!

“Look! It says in verse 6 that all the angels would worship Him when God would bring the Firstborn into the world. Wouldn’t that have reference to the angels appearing in the heavens at the time of Jesus’ birth?”

“That makes sense,” agreed Rachel. “This is such an exciting study! I want to understand whatever is possible about all that had to be done to save us. Can we continue to study tomorrow night?”

“Sure!” Andrew said. “I’m excited about learning more, too.”

20 search for truth



Jesus – The Christ Part 2

“Well, that makes sense,” exclaimed Andrew, as he re-read Luke’s account of the conception and birth of Christ. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35). So it was when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary that the Word was begotten of God, that the Word in some way *‘emptied Himself’*, and humbled Himself to be made like man, and that He became obedient as a Son to the Father.”

Rachel was reading further in Hebrews, where they had left off the night before. “Here in Hebrews 2:17 it says, *‘...in all things He had to be made like His brethren....’* And over here in the 5th chapter and 8th verse it says that He *learned obedience* as a Son. That means He hadn’t been the Son, obedient to the Father, from the beginning! In emptying Himself and being born as a human, obedience was a *new thing* for Him. It had to be learned!” Rachel exclaimed.

“This is beginning to shed new light on what our salvation cost,” Andrew reflected. “It means that, at least for some time, there was a complete change in the Godhead, so that Christ could be truly the brother of man.”

"But if Christ wasn't the Son, seated at the right hand of the Father during the Old Testament period of time, **where** was He, and **what** was He doing? Is there any mention of Him then — or only of God, who became the Father?" asked Rachel, puzzled.

"I'm wondering how much we've just assumed and injected into the Scriptures, by thinking of Jesus as always the Son with the Father," mused Andrew. "I'm thinking now of prophetic Scriptures in this new light. You know Isaiah prophesied that there would be a voice crying in the wilderness — John the Baptist — saying, '*Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God...*' (Isaiah 40:3). The Jews would have thought of God [the Father] when reading those words, but by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew (3:3) identified 'God' or 'Jehovah' as Jesus Christ. Even in reference to the creation, we think of God [the Father] primarily, but John said it was **by** the Word and **for** the Word that all things were made. There's a verse in Colossians, too — here it is, 1:16 — '*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on the earth, visible and invisible...*' So when Genesis 1:26 tells us, '*God said, "Let us make man in Our image..."*' the One of the Godhead doing the speaking could even have been the Word!"

"There's another place I've just remembered," exclaimed Andrew, turning pages quickly. "Here in 1 Corinthians 10:4, talking about the Israelites as they were in the wilderness, Paul wrote that they all, '*...drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*' There's a reference in Isaiah — here, in chapter 48, verse 21 — about this: '*...The Lord [Jehovah] has redeemed His servant Jacob!*' *And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.*'

"Let's turn back to the story of the Israelites and see what we can learn about Christ there," suggested Rachel.

“Here in Exodus 3 is the first time God talked to Moses about bringing the people out of slavery,” Andrew said. “Well! What a strange thing! In verse 2 it says that *‘the Angel of the Lord’* appeared to Moses in the flame of the bush, but in verse 4 and thereafter the One appearing to him is called *‘the Lord’* and *‘God’!* He speaks with the voice and authority of God. He says, *‘I am the God of your father — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’*” (Verse 6) Andrew continued to read, coming to verse 14. “Listen to this, Rachel! When Moses asked His name, *‘And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*”

“But just yesterday I was reading John 8 — a tremendous debate between Jesus and the Jews — and the Jews reached such a point of exasperation that they finally asked, *‘Who do You make Yourself out to be?’* in verse 53, and here in verse 58 Jesus assured them, *‘...before Abraham was, I AM.’* Their response was to take up stones to kill Him, because they identified *‘I AM’* with the name of God, as He had spoken to Moses, so to them this was blasphemy, that Jesus was claiming to be God. And He was. Putting these verses in Exodus and John together, it would seem that *‘the Word’* was actually *‘the Angel of the Lord’* who spoke to Moses. But He had **not yet subjected Himself**, taking the form of man, **so he spoke with the voice of God, with equal authority!**”

“Let’s check other verses in the Old Testament that talk of this *‘Angel’*,” suggested Rachel. “Honestly, in all the reading we’ve done during these months, I had never noticed this *‘person’!*”

To her surprise, she found numerous references in the concordance to *‘the Angel of Jehovah’* or *‘the Angel of the Lord’*: Genesis 16, 17, 18 and 19; Exodus 14:19; 32:34; Judges 2:1; 13:6; 2 Samuel 14:17,20; Isaiah 63:9 were only the beginning of the list. “You know, I believe *‘the Angel of His Presence’* in Exodus 32 and 33 and in Deuteronomy 4:37 must be the same Person,”

Rachel exclaimed. "He has to be one of the Godhead, because He is called God and the Lord, and He speaks as God, yet in Exodus 14:19 it says *'the Angel of God went before the camp of Israel'* and in Exodus 33:2 God says, *'I will send My Angel before you,'* and, look — here in verse 5 He says, *'...I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a still-necked people.'* But in verse 14, God promised Moses, *'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'*"

"Back here in Exodus 23:20,21, God told Moses, *'Behold I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.'* These verses show that One in the Godhead was the Sender, and Another — the Angel — was the One being sent. Yet, the Angel had the power to forgive, or not to forgive, a power which only God can claim!"

"It makes me think that even though the Word spoke and acted with full authority in the Godhead, even during that time He was already functioning in the role of Mediator between God and man," Andrew observed thoughtfully. "The similar passage in Exodus 33:2-5 makes a strong distinction between the One who was speaking to Moses and the One who was being sent to lead the Israelites. And the Sender said that He was sending His Angel, for if He Himself went with them, He would consume them because of their rebellious hearts!"

"Here's another place which speaks of the exodus from Egypt, Andrew, — Isaiah 63:7 talks about *'the Lord'* and His great goodness toward Israel, then verse 9 says that *'the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit....'* What an exciting passage of Scripture! Actually, *the three Persons of the Godhead* are here — and **'the Angel', the Word or Jesus** of the New

Testament, was even then doing the work of redemption! And it says that they *'grieved'* the Holy Spirit, just as we are warned that we can grieve the Holy Spirit today!"

"So, the Word was not just sitting in Heaven, waiting for His turn to come on the scene!" concluded Andrew. "He was working for man, helping him, even redeeming him, all along! Now, Rachel, we need to start over with our studies, and re-read the Old Testament, looking for references to the Word and the work He was doing. And we need to re-read the New Testament, too, to understand exactly what it teaches about the cost of our salvation. These passages we've read have opened my eyes about so many truths that I had never realized."

21 search for truth



Jesus – The Christ Part 3

Andrew suggested, as he and Rachel took up their materials to continue the study of Christ, "Let's pray especially tonight that God will help us now and in the days to come, as we study this subject that's so vital to our salvation, that we'll be able to understand what is revealed in the Scriptures, and that we won't be blinded by what we've only thought in the past."

"I agree," Rachel answered. "Realizing the relationship in the Godhead from eternity, and the work of the Word in the Old Testament, is helping me to appreciate more fully the complete change that took place when He was born as a human. Since we had read that part in John 8 last night, I was just re-reading the book of John today while Timothy was having his bath. The difference between the way the Word spoke as God in the Old Testament and as the Son of God in the New Testament is amazing."

After praying, Andrew turned to the book of John and began to read aloud. "You're exactly right, Rachel!" he exclaimed after reading only a few minutes. "I'm going to mark the verses where He says He was sent by the Father, or that He came to do the Father's will, or that the words and works He did were from the Father. In every statement He was expressing His subjection to God. And look here in verse 26 of chapter 5: *'For as the Father*

has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have live in Himself.' Jesus was saying that even as a man, and as the Son subjected to the Father, He had the power of life — a characteristic inherent only in Deity, in God. But He said He had that power because the Father had granted it!"

"Yet in John 1:4, speaking of the Word as He has existed from eternity, it says, *'In Him was life.'* — not life through being granted it by God, but the power of life within Himself! Is this one of the effects of emptying Himself, as we read the other night in Philippians 2?" Rachel asked.

"I think it must be," Andrew answered. "And the verse in Hebrews (2:17) that talks of Him being made in all things like His brethren must have literal meaning: that He laid aside all the powers and rights that were His as the Word, and made Himself completely dependent on God, just as humans are dependent! What a change!"

"But how did He do the miracles, if He wasn't using His own power?" puzzled Rachel.

Andrew sat quietly for several minutes, thinking deeply. "I've wondered about Jesus' statements, here in Matthew 12:24-32, where the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. He said in verse 28 that He was doing those things by the Spirit of God. Then He said that words of blasphemy spoken against Himself would be forgiven, but in verse 32 He warned, *'...but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.'* Jesus was one of the Godhead, and the Holy Spirit was also one of the Godhead. Why would blasphemy against Jesus be forgiven, but not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

"You were asking, Rachel, by whose power Jesus did His miracles, if He had laid aside His own powers in order to be dependent on God, as His human brethren would be dependent?"

This Scripture — and all His other statements — show that, truly, it was by the **Holy Spirit** that He did everything. People looking at Him in the flesh could be forgiven for not realizing that He was actually One of the Godhead, because He *looked* like other men; but no human could do the works He was doing, works that He repeatedly attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit. If people could look at those wonders, and say, ‘This is being done by Satan’s power!’ what further power could God use to convince them? That’s why they wouldn’t be forgiven!”

“So all of these verses which show Jesus’ oneness with humans do have *literal* meaning?” Rachel asked. “He **emptied Himself, He learned obedience to the Father, He was made in all things like His brethren, He died instead of us to take our sins, and so that we can live with Him!**

“Andrew, I’d always thought of Christ sitting at the right hand of His Father before He was born in the flesh. That was just an assumption, as these Scriptures have shown. Now I’m wondering if my thinking about Him during *this* age is correct. After His resurrection, did things go back as they had been before He came into the world?”

“We’ve found only statements of equality before His birth, though we did see that even in the Old Testament He was working in the role of Mediator, and that He was sent by God. Yet, when He spoke, the tone and authority couldn’t be distinguished from the Person of the Godhead who became the Father! Not having yet emptied Himself, He was truly equal, though each Person had individual work to do. But the picture of the Son seated at the right hand of the Father is found only in the New Testament revelation, so far as I remember.”

“I’m thinking of two verses — Matthew 28:18, and Philippians 2:9,” Rachel said. “When Jesus was about to ascend to Heaven, He said, ‘*All authority has been given to Me...*’ and in Philippians, Paul wrote that because of Jesus’ obedience ‘*...God*

also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name...' These verses are talking of His relationship **now**, they are not describing the equality He had with God *in the beginning*. True, He now has all authority and He has been highly exalted above all else, but that authority and glory had been *inherently* His as One of the Godhead from eternity. These verses say that He *now* holds this authority and exaltation **because of His obedience and because God has GIVEN it to Him!** That's an entirely different thing!"

"Is all of this saying that the 33 years Jesus lived in a human body and the death He died for us were not the end of the sacrifice?" asked Andrew.

"Always I've thought His death was the sacrifice," replied Rachel. "But maybe we haven't paid close enough attention to what the Scriptures are actually saying. If He was equal from eternity, and not the Son at the right hand of the Father, then it means that even when He ascended to heaven, everything didn't go back to the way it was. It means that some changes continued."

"You know we've talked about *'the Word'* acting as the Mediator in the Old Testament period, before He was born as the Son. But do you remember 1 Timothy 2:5? *'For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.'* That verse is describing present tense — **now** — and it is as **a man** that He mediates between God and us! Even now, He is still the brother of man!"

"What a sobering thought, Andrew!"



search for truth

Jesus – The Christ Part 4

Andrew and Rachel continued to study the Scriptures, looking particularly for verses dealing with Christ and His relationship, both in the Godhead and with man, following His ascension to Heaven. They were surprised to realize how much they had missed in their previous readings. "It just shows why we need to study and study and study!" exclaimed Andrew. "When you asked that we look at some verses about Christ, I thought we understood at least the basic truths about Him, but how much we'd missed, and how much we've learned!"

"I've hardly been able to wait for you to come home from work, so we could do more exploring together!" Rachel laughed. "But the continuing changes in the relationship between God and the Word, as we were reading last night, are truly staggering thoughts."

"There's another verse in Philippians that sheds light on this question. In 3:20,21 it says that we are waiting for the coming of our Savior, *'the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body...'*. Do the Scriptures ever say that our immortal bodies will be like God?"

"Not that I can remember," Rachel answered slowly, "but there's another verse something like the one in Philippians, a

verse that has always been special to me, but I never really thought of what it's promising! In 1 John 3:1 and 2, John wrote, *'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ...it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.'*"

"There's another verse," Andrew said, turning pages quickly. "In Romans 8:11 Paul wrote that *'...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, through the Spirit who dwells in you.'* And look at this verse! (16,17) *'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.'*"

Andrew sat back in his chair, a look of stunned amazement slowly crossing his face. "Rachel, are all of these Scriptures really saying what I think they're saying? That when the Word emptied Himself and took the form of man, it wasn't a sacrifice of 33 years, but a commitment for eternity? Does His love, even now, make Him subject to the Father and the brother of man?"

"What else could it mean when it says that we will be joint heirs with Christ?" Rachel responded. "He was the **One for Whom** and **by Whom** all things were created, according to Colossians 1:16, so from the beginning He was in position to **give** an inheritance. To change His entire relationship in the Godhead so that **He becomes the heir of God, along with His brothers**, is a sacrifice I never even considered!"

"Did our salvation really cost that much?" Andrew asked, shaking his head and wiping the tears that were coming to his eyes. "How could God — how could Christ — love sinners that much?"

Rachel's lips were trembling as she answered, "So, whatever love we give in return, whatever we do in this life for God, it's nothing in comparison to what He's done and is doing for us. Oh, Andrew, how could we ever doubt that He hears our prayers and is ready to give us anything we ask that's for our good, when this tremendous outpouring of love has already been made?"

"You're right. How much this knowledge has increased my faith!"

With the passing of the weeks, as both Andrew and Rachel continued to study, they were amazed at how many Scriptures they now noticed which confirmed their new understanding of the cost of salvation. "Listen to this," Andrew said one night. "These verses in 1 Corinthians 15:24 and onwards are talking about the return of Christ. *'Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.'*

"This picture further fills in what was said in Romans 8 about us being joint heirs with Christ. He is reigning now as the King over His kingdom, the church, but after *'the end'* He will turn the kingdom over to God and will be subject to Him in some deeper way than He is now. Whatever that may mean, it certainly shows that the change in His relationship in the Godhead is eternal! It means that in order **for us to be the children of God eternally, He remains our firstborn Brother, being the bridge that binds us with God!**"

"Isn't there a verse in Galatians —" Rachel began, turning pages quickly. "Oh, Andrew, do you remember what a strange 'new' thing the Bible seemed only a few months ago? We didn't

know even the names of most of the books, and had no idea of anything in these pages except maybe ‘..God so loved the world...’ We thought we knew about His love, and yet we understood nothing of what those words really mean! I’m so thankful we’ve made Him the center of our lives!”

“Me, too,” agreed Andrew.

“Yes, here it is — Galatians 4:4-7. It’s talking about Christ coming into the world in the fullness of time, ‘...*that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*’ Isn’t this saying that it’s because of the Spirit of God’s Son in us that our own spirits realize and acknowledge that God is our Father?”

“And if He were not the continuing Son, how could we have that relationship with God as sons?” asked Andrew. “The end of the verse says the same thing: that it is only as that relationship continues *through Christ* that we can be heirs of God! And these verses tie in also with Romans 8:17! Isn’t it exciting to see how all of these passages are fitting together, and are explaining each other? That’s what’s so wonderful about growing in a knowledge of the Scriptures! The light one verse sheds on another just makes the whole message shine brighter every time we study!”



search for truth

Jesus – The Christ Part 5

“One thing I don’t understand,” Rachel said as they began their evening study. “If our salvation cost Christ so much more than His death on the cross, why is His death such a focal point in the Scriptures? Why is not the change in His relationship with God and with man emphasized more?”

“Now that we’ve begun to understand, we’ve actually found many, many Scriptures explaining the various aspects of that very point,” answered Andrew. “You know we’ve found that on every subject there seems to be ever increasing depths of revelation — so that those who hunger and thirst for truth can continue to grow and never exhaust the riches of His word. On the cost of our very salvation, really it’s enough to know that He died for us, because to the typical human mind, death is the thing most feared, the greatest price He could pay. Knowledge that He paid that price gives security. But, in continuing to study, we’ve seen deeper truths, and there will yet be more to learn. The beauty of God’s truth is that one part of knowledge never contradicts another. Whatever we learn will only deepen our understanding of Him and His love.

“But maybe there’s another reason His death is stressed, Rachel. It was in His dying that we were saved from spiritual death and eternal separation from God. And, YES! It was in His death

that He took our sins! in His death that, as 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains, ‘...*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*’

“THAT’S THE KEY!” Andrew almost shouted. “That’s it!” Just as death is the wage of sin for humans, it was in death that Christ took our sins as His own. That’s why He agonized so much in the Garden of Gethsemane — not that He was *afraid* of dying, but that He **KNEW** that when He took our sins, He would be forever bound to us, and the change in the relationship in the Godhead would be eternal!”

“Yes, He did say to Peter in the Garden that if He asked the Father, God would send legions of angels to save Him from arrest, so at that point He could have turned back,” reasoned Rachel.

“But if He **had** turned back — if He’d gone back to the equality He’d had from eternity — if He hadn’t actually taken our sins and died for them — none of us could be saved. But after He had been ‘*made sin*’, it was like buying something and paying a price for it; He couldn’t take back the cost. If He keeps us with Him eternally, the price for our souls is that equality He held with God. Really, I can’t think of any verse in the New Testament which states or even suggests anything different,” Andrew said, thoughtfully.

“And you’ve answered my question!” exclaimed Rachel. “If His death was **the binding point** with humanity — the point when He took our sins — then it’s logical that His death also be the focal point in our learning about salvation.”

“And, another thing!” Andrew almost shouted again. “That’s why baptism is such a focal point! Because it’s where we meet His death, and it’s **the binding point for us, too!** Before baptism, a person can turn away from Christ. But through baptism we not only are washed in His blood but, according to John 3:5, we are

born into the family of God. And though our failure to live for God might cause us to be disinherited, we can't be *unborn!*"

"Well, of course!" Rachel agreed. "So baptism is very much more than the 'ritual' some people think it is! Andrew, what exciting truths we're learning!"

"That brings up another 'ritual', as some people would label it: the Lord's Supper. Why would God make a memorial supper such a focal point of worship? I think I understand, now. Not only is the Supper a weekly reminder to us of the price paid for our salvation — "*...This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*" *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes*' (1 Corinthians 11:25,26). So the Supper is a memorial to us, but as we partake of it week after week, we are also continually reminding any on-lookers of His death!"

"Verse 28 makes a full circle of the meaning of the Supper," Rachel said. "Look at the parallels that continue: His death was **the binding point**, when He was **made sin for us** and we were **made the righteousness of God in Him**. Baptism is **our answer** to His death, **our binding point with Him**, when we lay our sins on Him and are covered in His righteousness. The Supper turns our minds back to His death, but then in verse 28 we're instructed, *'But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.'* So, while we're remembering what our salvation cost Him, we're also looking into our own hearts and checking our manner of life! That means that, week by week, we should be renewing our commitment to God and to Christ, before we eat of the Supper."

"What a beautiful picture!" Andrew concluded. "How could anyone who understands these truths ever doubt God's love or question anything He asks us to do?"



search for truth Growth and Outreach of the Church

With the passing months, as Andrew and Rachel studied, they eagerly shared what they learned with anyone who would listen. As a result, the church had long outgrown their sitting room. For their meetings they had rented a hall in the center of the city, and there was discussion of some more permanent arrangement. They didn't want their primary emphasis to be a physical building, but they were convinced that it would be a useful tool for further growth.

After John's baptism, his brother and his wife and daughter had obeyed the gospel. John's bride-to-be was baptized shortly before their marriage.

Elizabeth expressed continual thanks for what Christianity had done for her family since she and James had become Christians. James' interest in their home life had deepened, and a new closeness had developed between him and their two teenage sons.

Mary, too, was now a Christian, though her husband seemed as irreligious as ever. "Don't be discouraged," Rachel consoled her. "As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:1, by your life — putting God first, and showing the good changes the Gospel has made in you — you can teach him. Your faithfulness is actually his only hope, you know."

One by one, other friends and family members were won, so that now the number assembling for worship on Sundays was almost 100. Rachel and Andrew were happy beyond anything they could have imagined.

The men met regularly to talk at length about questions that had developed through their studies at home. They also discussed and planned what they should do to spread the Gospel. Frequently Andrew reminded, "We don't want anyone in this city to die and meet God without having had an opportunity to obey Him. When we remember what our salvation cost God and our Lord, we just can't fail to do our part in teaching."

As many as possible gathered each Saturday and went out to make calls, more mature Christians pairing up with newer converts, so that the younger ones could learn how to be effective in talking with people and explaining the Scriptures. Andrew and John usually saw people who had visited the worship assembly. Besides encouraging them to allow someone to come to their home for a weekly study, they urged them to attend the meetings regularly. In addition, they offered a Bible study course by mail. Realizing the need for materials people could study on their own, Andrew had written a series of lessons and the men had taken money from the treasury for the printing and postage.

Already numerous ones had enrolled in the correspondence studies. Mary volunteered to help Rachel correct the lessons. "Isn't it amazing how much we've learned as we've done these corrections?" she laughed, as they worked busily one afternoon.

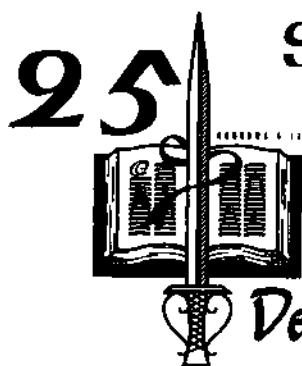
"Yes," agreed Rachel. "Maybe that's why God gave Christians the responsibility of teaching others! Angels could have done a better job, you know! But my best knowledge has come through studying for others."

"Mine, too. As I'm reading, I think, 'Oh, this will answer Sarah's question', or 'I need to show this verse to Ruth!' She's

very close to the truth, Rachel. I think she'll be baptized soon."

The men had drawn lines on a city map, dividing it into sections. Systematically those who could spare time on Saturdays were covering the blocked-off areas. They had printed leaflets, explaining basic points about the Gospel and the church, and giving the times of the assemblies of the church. They had also prepared a sheet for a small survey form, giving space for the name, address, children and their ages, religious preference, and interest in home study or a study through the mail. At the end of the sheet a notation could be made if some member of the family was chronically ill, if the people were elderly, or if there was evidence of need of some type of help the church might be able to give. The sheets were kept in a growing file, separated into blocks as the city map had been divided. Elizabeth had offered to put color-coded tabs at the top of each sheet, indicating at a glance those who showed interest or were in potential need of help.

On week-nights several home studies were always in progress, sometimes as neighbors and friends came to the homes of Christians, and sometimes as various ones in the church set up studies in the homes of people who visited the assemblies or had completed the correspondence course and wanted to study further. Frequently, calls were made late at night to spread the word that a baptism was about to take place. John had built a small concrete-block baptistery in the corner of his garden, and a happy group would gather around to witness the solemn moment of the birth of a new soul. The meaningful tradition developed of asking the new male Christian to lead the group in prayer immediately after his baptism, and then all would join hands in a circle and sing. A favorite with everyone was "O happy day that fixed my choice on Thee, my Savior and my God! Well may this glowing heart rejoice, and tell its raptures all abroad!" The "telling" — passing the news of the Gospel on to the friends and loved ones of the new Christian — was so much the emphasis of all members of the church that it automatically became the central aim of each one who was baptized.



search for truth

History of Denominationalism

Andrew could hardly control the excitement in his voice when he came home from work. "Look, Rachel! Look at this book I found at the bookstore on the way home! It tells about the denominations and how they started! This will answer many of our questions!"

Rachel reached for the book eagerly. "**History of Christianity,**" she read. "Yes, this should be an interesting history to read. We can start tonight!"

"Well, this book, quoting from other sources, says that the Catholic Church claims to be the first one and that Peter was the first Pope. That's what I was taught all my life as a Catholic, but we know by the Scriptures that that wasn't so," Andrew said, as he read the first few pages while Rachel cleaned the dishes after they ate. "Before we go on to read this history, we should actually get in mind what the New Testament teaches about the history of the church."

"At least the inspired history is recorded through the first several years," Rachel agreed.

"Acts 2 shows the beginning of the church," Andrew began. "And we know from Colossians 1:18 that Jesus — not Peter — is the only true head of the church. 1 Corinthians 3:11 also says that

there is no foundation for the church except Christ. So on this point, the Catholic church is wrong. There can be no man sitting in the place of Christ, claiming to be the head of the church and having authority as God over the church.

“So when Paul warned in — let’s see — here in Acts 20:29,30, *‘For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.’* — he was saying that among the leadership in the church itself, even among the elders or bishops, error would develop. He said something similar in the letter to Timothy, I think. Yes, here in 1 Timothy 4:1: *‘Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times **some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.**’*

“Another reference is in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: *‘Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [the day when Christ returns to take the Saints together with Him in the clouds, V. 2] will not come **unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**’* He even goes on to warn in verse 7, *‘For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...’*

“This is amazing, Rachel! In these three specific doctrines, he is describing the Catholic Church! They have one who sits as the head of the church, exalting himself as God; and they forbid their priests to marry; and for centuries they also forbade the eating of meats on Fridays!”

“So the Catholic Church actually was the first ‘denominational’ group — as some of the leaders in the true church began to teach error and to lead congregations after them!” Rachel exclaimed.

“This book says that the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. was recognized at the first official council of leaders to make laws for the church — so this was the first ‘official’ break with the total authority of the Scriptures, as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Then in 608 a Bishop named Boniface proclaimed himself to be the ‘universal bishop’ or ‘pope’. In 1054 there was a major division in the Catholic Church. The Eastern part came to be called ‘The Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Eastern Church’ [or the Greek Orthodox Church], and the branch in Rome became ‘The Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church’. This division was primarily over their disagreement concerning **sprinkling of water for baptism instead of a burial, and the use of mechanical musical instruments in the worship.**”

“Of course, as a result, *in addition* to the **original** church of Christ, there were now **two other churches**, with their own heads and organization! So the division was well under way!” observed Rachel.

“Let’s see what happened after that,” Andrew continued. “This chapter says that the Lutheran Church is the oldest ‘protestant’ church — that is, a Catholic priest named Martin Luther objected to some of the practices in the Catholic Church and tried to ‘reform’ it to be more like the Bible teachings. At that time the Pope was selling ‘indulgences’: people could pay a set amount of money and be forgiven for sins they intended to commit in the future! The money was being collected for the construction of the huge cathedral of ‘St. Peter’s’ in Rome.

“Luther saw the evil in this practice and wrote his ‘protests’ called his ‘**95 Theses**’ and nailed them to the door of the cathedral in Wittenburg, Germany. In 1521 he was banned from the Catholic

Church. He didn't intend to begin a new church, but those who were following him continued after his death, and became known as the Lutheran Church."

"What are some of the teachings of that church?" asked Rachel.

"In many things Lutheran worship and practices were much like the Catholic Church, but changes have taken place through the centuries. In fact, the Lutheran Catechism says that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the one established on Pentecost!"

"So, both the Catholic and Lutheran leadership recognize that the true church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2!" Rachel exclaimed. "But the doctrines we've read, and the names they wear, are not the same."

"That's so," agreed Andrew, "In fact, one of the primary Lutheran doctrines is that *we are justified by faith alone*. This was Luther's way of reacting to the *Catholic doctrine of salvation by works and payment of money*. But Luther must not have believed what James wrote by inspiration in his book, '*Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*' (James 2:17,18,20). And, '*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only...for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*' (Verses 24,26).

"It was the teaching of **some Catholic doctrines** — like sprinkling for baptism instead of immersion, and sprinkling infants — and **adding some of his own ideas** that were in violation to the Scriptures — and then his followers **giving Luther's name to the group**, that resulted in the formation of **a new church** rather than turning the people back to the *original* church which was started on Pentecost, as Luther thought he was doing."

"So whenever people **add to the doctrine**, or take away from it, or change the doctrine of the New Testament in some way,

and develop churches that believe and follow those doctrines, they are starting new churches?" asked Rachel. "Is that how all the denominations started?"

"It must be," answered Andrew. "This book says that John Calvin, who lived in 1509-1564, was one of the earliest reformers. He was born to Catholic parents and was converted from Catholicism in 1533. The doctrine of 'Calvinism', which is taught by many denominations, was developed by him. According to this, the Westminster Association, in session from 1643-1649, framed the Westminster Confession of Faith. This became the doctrinal standard for both English and American Presbyterianism... There have been seventeen distinct segments of Presbyterians from near the beginning of the movement.

"Calvin encouraged a simple form of worship in his churches. There was *congregational singing only*, a departure from his early experience in the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin opposed the use of mechanical instruments as a departure from New Testament worship. He broke away from *the altar worship pattern*, and placed the *reading and preaching in the central place*. Strict *moral discipline* was exercised against cursing, adultery, playing cards on Sunday evenings, spending time in taverns, betrothing to a Papist, wife beating, etc., so that Calvinists were to have a high moral standard.

"Five points of Calvinism are listed: **Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.**"

"So, what do those things mean?" asked Rachel.

"Well, this says that *election* means that God has predestined and foreordained the eternal salvation of some men and angels out of His free grace and love, without any foresight of faith in either of them, and others are foreordained to everlasting death; **and the number of either is so certain and definite that it can-**

not be increased or diminished, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 3,4,5; Chapter 3; Article 2, Chapter 10.”

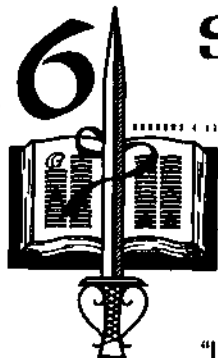
“But that can’t be true!” Rachel declared, jumping up to take the book and read it for herself. “What is the purpose of Jesus’ invitation, ‘*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden,*’ if it’s impossible for some to come? That doctrine contradicts the whole heart of the Bible!”

“So do the other four points of Calvinism,” Andrew said. “*Total Depravity* means that all people— even babies — are totally depraved and evil from birth. That’s why babies are christened in most churches that follow Calvin’s teachings, so they won’t go to hell if they die! *Limited Atonement* means that only those *God chooses* can be saved by the blood of Christ. *Irresistible Grace* means that when God chooses to save somebody, it’s *impossible* for that person to resist God! And *Perseverance of Saints* means that once a person has been saved, *he cannot leave God*; he cannot sin so that he will ever be lost, no matter what he does.”

“But these doctrines are putting all the responsibility on God!” objected Rachel. “HE is the one who decides who will be saved; no one can resist HIS CHOICE; and once HE has saved a person, that person does not have the free will to leave God — I’ve heard it expressed even in the Baptist church: ‘once saved, always saved’. But all of these things are so different from what we’ve been reading in the Scriptures! The free will of each one of us, to choose God and to obey Him, is what is stressed over and over!”

“Yes,” agreed Andrew. “From the beginning when Adam and Eve were allowed to choose whether or not they would obey God, the free choice has been given to all men. How sad, that such a doctrine as Calvinism would ever have been developed, and that many denominational groups would have taken that as the foundation of their beliefs. These things oppose the very heart of God’s appeal to man through Christ.”

26 search for truth



“Try the Spirits”

“I am so glad to have this book,” Rachel said as they resumed their study of the history of church development the following night. “I had no idea about how all the churches started. From childhood I had supposed they were all in the Bible, but this history shows that they were started as various men began to teach particular doctrines, and as others followed them. Actually, that’s what we were doing, Andrew — following what we were taught by our parents, and they were following what their parents taught them, and so it has come down through the centuries. But I didn’t know that before the 1500’s *none of the Protestant denominations existed*, that only the Roman Catholic church, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Lord’s church were in the world!”

“Neither did I,” admitted Andrew. “But seeing how divisions have occurred because of human thinking and commitment to personal beliefs, I am becoming convinced that *anywhere, in any age, and in any place*, people can leave truth and begin a new branch of error! It must have happened continually, ever since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and began His church. . . .”

“Of course!” exclaimed Rachel, thinking aloud. “Some in the church in Corinth were already dividing and leaving the pure truth, and some of the seven churches addressed in Revelation had taken up doctrines that were wrong — and God warned them that

He would remove their candlestick — their representation — if they didn't *repent!* In the same way, down through the centuries, 'denominations' must have developed wherever people began to add to God's word, or to take something away, or to twist its meaning. What a sobering thought for us as we try to leave all of the division behind to go back to the gospel as it was taught in the first century!"

"It will be good to share this new knowledge with others in the church," Andrew said thoughtfully. "I'm sure they know nothing of the history of denominationalism, either. This certainly illustrates Jesus' warning, '*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*' (Matthew 15:9)."

"Your book is a very helpful tool!" Rachel said as she picked up her pen and notebook, ready to take notes again. "Since my family has traditionally followed the Baptist belief, I want to learn about that church."

"This history, referring to the **World Book Encyclopedia**, says that the first Baptist Church was organized in London in 1607 by John Smyth, but that Baptists claim that the church was originally started in the days of John the Baptist and that all who were baptized by him were actually Baptists — that would include even Christ! Some say it was started when the 12 apostles were chosen, and others say it was sometime during the ministry of Christ. But they say that the church talked about in the New Testament is the Baptist Church."

"That would be strange, since it is never called by the Baptist name in the Scriptures," Rachel answered. "But if it were the true church, its doctrines would be the same as were taught then. And I just thought, what a coincidence! — so far, each one of these churches we've read about recognize that the church was started in the New Testament times, but **they all claim to be that one!** If they can see and understand that much of what the Bible says,

why don't they just follow *all it says* about the church and salvation, and then they really would be that church?"

"That's the puzzle," admitted Andrew. "If all who claim to be believers in Christ really were following the same teachings — just as they're recorded in the New Testament — and if there really was only one church today, as in the days of the apostles, how much easier it would be for people to see the truth!

"This book says that at first the followers of John Smyth preferred to be known as Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Christians, or Believers, but that the name **Baptist** was first used in 1644 and the Baptist people have worn it ever since. What a shame, that they grew away from the truth, even in the name they would wear!

"There are now 28 different kinds of Baptists, divided according to differences in beliefs. Though they have a Standard Baptist Manual, not all follow it, or follow it closely. All (except Free Will Baptists) are Calvinistic in doctrine, some more so than others.

"But all believe that we are saved by faith alone. The one who wishes to be baptized is asked to confess that he believes that God has pardoned his sins, even before baptism, so though Baptists immerse, they insist that baptism is **not for remission of sins**; however, just as the preacher told us, *they also insist that one must be baptized to enter the Baptist church!*

"The person must also tell of some "experience" to show that he has been saved, and then the members vote whether to receive him and allow him to be baptized — though, according to their doctrine, he has already been saved at the point of belief in God and Christ! Isn't that amazing, that they would *presume*, as a group of *humans*, to vote on the acceptance or rejection of a person that — according to their own doctrine — God has already accepted!"

"So they believe that a person who has not been baptized into Christ can be saved and go to heaven, but he is not allowed

in fellowship in their churches simply on the basis of faith?" asked Rachel.

"And most of the groups practice 'closed communion', which means that the person who has not been accepted in full fellowship — those who haven't been baptized — can't partake of the Supper — though they don't have the Supper weekly, as Christians did in the New Testament."

"Last week two young men came to the door, wanting to study with me, Andrew. They said they were members of 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints'. At least they have Christ in their name, and they seemed very evangelistic and sincere. Does the book say anything about them?" asked Rachel.

"I keep thinking of the warning the apostle John gave in 1 John 4:1: *'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.'* We have so much to be thankful for, that we have the written word of God and can compare every teaching with what the Holy Spirit caused to be written.

"Let's see what we can learn about **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints**. It is better known as the Mormon Church, was organized on April 6, 1830 in Fayette, New York, by Joseph Smith, Jr., with six members. That tells the story right there, before anything else is considered," Andrew said. "Its full name, and its better known *name*, is *not used in the Scriptures*. It was *not started in Jerusalem*, on the day of *Pentecost*, in the *first century*, and it was *not started by Christ*. So, none of its identifying marks match what the Scriptures say about the church which was established by Christ.

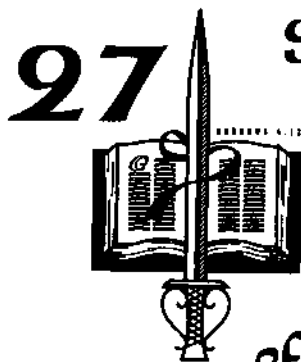
"But let's see some of their doctrines. Joseph Smith claimed to have a vision in which an angel, Moroni, appeared to him and told him the location of some plates of gold on which were written the words Smith was to translate. The book that resulted is called

The Book of Mormon.

“Rachel, do you remember what Paul wrote in Galatians 1:8,9? By that warning the Holy Spirit prepared Christians for just such claims as this. *‘But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so say I now again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.’*”

“But since John Smith claimed to have a new revelation from God, he would be saying — like all the others we’ve read about — that the church he started is the true one recognized by God! **Isn’t that amazing?** — that we don’t read about any of these churches in the Bible, and yet all of them say they are the church of Christ, the church we read about in the book of Acts!”

“And all believers could be in that one original church if they didn’t add their own names and write their own creeds and books with their own beliefs and practices that are different from the doctrines taught in the New Testament. How simple the truth is! How easy it would be for all of us to be united in Christ!” Andrew said with intensity of feeling.



search for truth

The Coming and Power of the Holy Spirit

In his visits among neighborhood families, Andrew had met a man who had shown interest in studying the Scriptures. He arranged a study on a weekly basis in his home. "I am a member of the independent group meeting near here, called 'House of Faith'," Mr. Seville explained the first night. "We are a new group. We've been meeting only three or four years."

"We have been meeting less than two years, ourselves," Andrew answered. "We have followed only what we've been reading in the New Testament, so we are part of the body or church of Christ."

"Well, actually, we are that original church, too! So we are the same! Then you must be experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit!" exclaimed Mr. Seville.

"In what way?" asked Andrew. "On the day the church was started, Peter told the people that when they were baptized they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we've studied, we've understood that we were dead in sin, but when we were baptized God's Spirit came within us to make us alive to God, spiritually, according to the promise in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and John 6:63: *It is*

the Spirit who gives life... So we know that God's Spirit dwells within us and helps us in our spiritual life. Even Romans 8 says that He *'helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit makes intercession for us with groans which cannot be uttered.'* And Ephesians 3:16 promises that we are *'to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.'*

"But didn't you read about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, promised by John the Baptist when he said that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Ghost and with fire? Haven't you experienced speaking in tongues and healing the sick, as preachers in our movement have done?"

"No, we haven't. Since both of us think we're part of that original church, and we should be the same in belief, let's take a careful look at what the Bible teaches about the coming and power of the Holy Spirit," suggested Andrew.

"That's a good plan," agreed Mr. Seville.

"First, it seems important to realize that not **everything** written in the Scriptures was spoken to **every one**. For instance, when Paul told Elymas, the sorcerer, *'...the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time...'* (Acts 13:11), he was not speaking to everyone, but that promise was made only to Elymas. In the same way, we need to consider to whom the promises were being made concerning the baptism or the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

"In John 14:26 and 16:13, Jesus made the promise to send the Comforter to guide the apostles into all truth and to bring to their remembrance all that He had taught them; we can turn back to John 13:5 and see that this setting was when Jesus was teaching a very select group about the Memorial Supper. The promise was not made to *all the general public and crowds of people*.

Later, when the promise was made in Mark 16 that they would be able to do miracles, again, Jesus was speaking to the apostles, and the explanation was given as to why the miracles were necessary: *'And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word through the accompanying signs**'* (Verse 20).

"Even concerning the miracles of Jesus, John explained in John 20:30,31: *'And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**'* So there was a purpose behind the performance of miracles — not just to make a sick body well or to raise some dead person. If God's purpose was only to give health to people, He could easily banish sickness from the entire world with a single word, but He hasn't done that. The real purpose in all of Jesus' miracles, and also those of the apostles, was **to convince people beyond any doubt that they spoke the message of God.**"

"But on the day of Pentecost the people were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and He manifested Himself through making them speak in heavenly tongues, just as He does today!" Mr. Seville explained.

"What kind of 'heavenly tongues'?" Andrew responded.

"Unless there is someone to 'interpret' no one knows what is being said. It's a 'heavenly language', and only God understands," answered Mr. Seville.

"How does the Spirit come in this miraculous way?" asked Andrew.

"We pray for the baptism, and we know He's been poured out on us when we speak in tongues and do other things."

"It's true that when the Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:4, that they began to speak in other languages by the power of the Spirit. But verses 6 and 8 show that the '*tongues*' were **real languages!** The people in the crowd asked, '*How is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?*' People were there from about seventeen nations, representing many languages, yet all the people were able to hear the message of the gospel in the language of their birth!"

"But we speak in *unknown tongues* today, by the power of the Spirit," Mr. Seville insisted. "Even our preachers do this, and this is the same power the apostles had. That's why some of our churches are called Pentecostal, and some are Apostolic! Our names and practices are from the Bible!"

"But give close attention to what you're saying, Mr. Seville. The word '*apostle*' is in the New Testament, as well as the word '*Pentecost*', but these were never used as **names for the Lord's church!** And the '*tongues*' the Christians used in those days were simply languages they hadn't studied. The Spirit empowered them to know and speak other languages so that they could more quickly spread the message of the gospel. Is that how your preachers use the '*languages*' today? When someone comes here from a foreign country, is he able to speak directly to the people in their own language, even though he's never studied it?"

"Oh, no, of course not! For such public speaking he uses a translator. But sometimes in his message he begins to speak in that heavenly language."

"But that isn't what we read about the languages in the New Testament at all!" exclaimed Andrew. "In fact, when you look closely in the Scriptures, you will see that even though according to Acts 5:32, the Holy Spirit was given to all who obeyed God, it was only through the apostles that **miracles** were done, as we

read in verse 12 of that chapter: *'And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.'*"

"What you're saying is not what we practice in our church," Mr. Seville insisted. "We'll talk more about these matters next week."

"Yes," agreed Andrew, "for as you said at the first, we *should* be united in what we believe and practice, since we're both convinced we're following what the New Testament teaches."

"But I'm afraid you're denying the present power of the Holy Spirit in this age," Mr. Seville said as he was leaving.

28

search for
truthMiracles –
Tongues

“We’ll continue where we left off last week,” smiled Andrew as he welcomed Mr. Seville into his home. “I’ve done a lot of studying on the subject, and I hope you have, too.”

“I don’t know as much about the Bible as you do,” Mr. Seville said. “It’s enough for me that I know about the working of the Holy Spirit in the world today. You know Jesus warned that those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven!”

“And I would never want to deny anything God’s word teaches, or any power He has promised or does promise,” Andrew assured him. “My one concern is to understand the truth and to obey God.”

“Then why do you deny the Holy Spirit?” Mr. Seville insisted.

“I’m not actually denying Him, or that He works in our lives today, as is shown in the verses I mentioned before in 1 Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians. Without His life in us, we would be dead in sin! But it concerns me that both of us are trying to follow the same book, as it speaks on the same subject, and yet our conclusions are so different! *Something is wrong*, and we need to *prayerfully* and *carefully* study what God says in His word, in order to know where we’ve gone apart in our understanding.

"If we begin in Acts 2 with the outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles and the giving of the gift of the Spirit to those who were baptized as is recorded in verse 38 — *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* —, we can ask, 'Is this what happened in my life?'"

"Yes," answered Mr. Seville. "I was baptized with the Holy Spirit, and then I was baptized in water."

"But that isn't what the apostles told the people on the day of Pentecost. You don't claim to be an apostle and that you were baptized as they were on that day, do you?"

"All I know is that in our church all the saved people are baptized with the Holy Ghost."

"But after the Spirit was poured out on the apostles in Acts 2, thousands of people were simply baptized in water in the days and weeks following. They were saved as a result of their obedience, and they were given *the gift* of the Holy Spirit; yet **the Scriptures don't say that any of them were baptized with the Holy Spirit,**" Andrew reminded. "In fact, it wasn't until Cornelius and his family were converted, even several years after Pentecost, that another case is given of baptism of the Spirit. Explaining what had happened, Peter referred back to Jesus' promise '*... you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...*' and he said, '*the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at beginning.*' (Acts 11:15,16). The fact that Peter had to refer all the way back to Pentecost to show another time of baptism with the Spirit shows that only the apostles and Cornelius (the first Gentile converts) had such a baptism! For all others, water baptism for the remission of sins was commanded. Have you and the members of your church been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins?"

"Water baptism is not of any real importance, only as a sign.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit that is stressed in our church."

"Yet, Jesus said in John 16:13 that when the Spirit came, He would glorify Christ, not Himself! The Holy Spirit seems to be the subject of your gospel. This isn't what Jesus said the Spirit would do when He guided the teaching of the apostles.

"But when we continue to read in Acts, Mr. Seville," Andrew went on in a quiet voice, "we see that in Acts 6, seven men were especially chosen to work. Verse 3 says that they were *'full of the Holy Spirit'* yet it was only **after** the apostles had prayed and laid their hands on them (verse 6), that they began to do wonders and signs among the people (verse 8)! Going on in our search, we come to Acts 8 where Philip — one of the chosen men of chapter 6 — went down to Samaria to preach the gospel. He proved that He spoke from God by the miracles he did (Verse 6), and people were convinced. Verse 12 says that *'when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.'*

"Because the New Testament had not yet been written to guide the young churches in their development, when the apostles heard that a church had been established in Samaria, they sent two apostles — Peter and John — to them **so that they might give special gifts of the Spirit.**

"But, Mr. Seville, why didn't those Samaritan Christians receive the *baptism of the Holy Spirit* at the point of their conversion? Or why weren't they told to **pray** to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Or why didn't *Philip* lay his hands on them and give them miraculous gifts? Neither of those things happened, because **that was not the way the Holy Spirit was given to people other than the apostles — then or now. It was only through the prayers of the apostles and the laying of their hands on selected people that the miraculous gifts were given!** We have this shown clearly, because verse 16 says that *'when Simon [who had been a sor-*

cerer, deceiving people by claiming to do miracles] saw that through the laying on of **the apostles' hands** the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that **anyone on whom I lay hands** may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:18,19).

"Think about this, Mr. Seville. Philip could do miracles, but **he could not give that power to others**. Obviously, from the text, **only the apostles** could give miraculous gifts, through laying their hands on *selected* people — not on everyone, for Simon received no gift!

"You can read through the New Testament and you will find no other way that the miraculous power of the Spirit was given to anyone. It was not ever given as a result of prayer, as people claim today! Not a single soul in the New Testament ever *prayed* to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and not a single soul was ever *commanded* to be baptized with the Holy Spirit! **Humans cannot command the Spirit of God!**

"So, since the apostles died long ago, who has laid hands on 'Pentecostal' people in this century to give them such gifts?" asked Andrew.

"Ours is not like that. We pray only, and if we are strong enough in faith, we can speak in tongues and some can do miracles. I've even heard that some raise the dead," answered Mr. Seville.

"But this is not the way it happened in the first century. We have no Scriptural basis for what you're teaching. Don't you see that I can't risk my soul, and the souls of my family members, by following something people only claim but that I can't read for myself in the Bible? I think the problem is that when people pick up only words from the Scriptures — such as 'Pentecost', 'tongues', 'Holy Spirit baptism', 'gifts' — and don't look closely at what is actually being said about those things, then wrong doc-

trines can develop.

"Mr. Seville, the Holy Spirit Himself directed the writing of the Scriptures. Peter said in 2 Peter 1:21, '*...holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*' And as that word was being written, it was being confirmed or proved to be the Word of God by the miraculous signs being done by the writers, as we read in Mark 16:20. God's revelation is complete. It has been fully confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no new message, and no new messenger, so there is no need for miracles today.

"But the sick still need to be healed, and we need God's wonders to convince people," insisted Mr. Seville.

"Do you remember in 1 Timothy 5:23 that Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake and his frequent infirmities? In 2 Corinthians 12:7 we read about Paul's *'thorn in the flesh'* which was never removed. According to 2 Timothy 4:20, Trophimus was left in Miletus, sick, but he was not miraculously healed by Paul! And Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:27), whom Paul loved greatly, was so sick he almost died, yet he was not cured by a miracle! Even during the time of miracles, they were not used to heal Christians; they were not used simply to make people well, but their purpose was to make believers, as was the case when Philip preached to the Samaritans! It's different today, though. Big campaigns are advertised, COME BELIEVING, and you WILL BE HEALED! Does that sound like what was done in the first century? And if it isn't the same, would the Holy Spirit teach one thing in the Bible, and yet be leading people to do different things today?

"When the Holy Spirit taught in that time that we are born into the one body of Christ through the waters of baptism (John 3:3,5; Romans 6:3,4; Acts 2:28-47), would He really lead you today to say that water baptism isn't important? Or would He lead people to start individual churches with names like 'Bible House', 'Believer's Church', or 'Revival Hall' when those names are not

what He gave in the Bible?

“You see, Mr. Seville, it’s a very serious thing to be claiming the miraculous leading of the Holy Spirit today. Jesus said that those who would be baptized with the Holy Spirit would be able to recall *all that He had taught*, and that they would be guided into *all truth*. That means that you who claim to speak by His power today should make *no error* in any of your teaching; there should be *no contradiction* with anything that has been written in the Bible. In fact, you should be able to quote the Bible perfectly because the Spirit would also bring all of those things to your remembrance. But when you can’t do these things, and when your doctrines contradict what has already been written and confirmed in the New Testament, this proves that it is not by the power of the Spirit of God that you do anything.”

“All this that you’re saying confuses me,” admitted Mr. Seville. “I want to come to your meetings and study more on these things. It’s important to me, too, that we be able to agree on what the Bible teaches. Surely there can be only one truth.”

29



search for truth

Outreach with the Gospel

"Andrew," James said after worship one morning, "I have a cousin who lives just down the road, in Suddoth. I've talked with him about the gospel, and he also took the Bible correspondence course. He's interested in learning more, so I was thinking it would be good if you and I could go to his home for studies on a weekly basis."

"That's wonderful!" Andrew answered with excitement. "When would he like to begin?"

"Both he and his wife will be free on Saturday evenings," James said. "If you can make it, we'll plan to go there Saturday."

The study with Matthew and Sara was begun and continued for several weeks. Their attitude was positive, with a strong desire to please God and to have a Christian home. "Both of us want to be baptized," Matthew said at the close of one study. "We realize that we aren't Christians, according to the Bible, and we want to have our sins forgiven."

Following their baptism, the men of the church met to discuss the need for meetings at Matthew's home. "We want to give the people of that area the opportunity to hear and obey the truth, too," Andrew explained. "For this first month, maybe Matthew and

his family can make the trip over here to worship with us. In the meantime, why don't we shift our Saturday house-to-house visits there and advertise the meetings we'll begin from next month in their home?"

"I have a suggestion," John volunteered. "Since those people have not heard of the church or the true gospel, why don't we have a meeting the first week of next month, continuing each evening, Sunday through Sunday, with various ones of us doing the speaking, so that we can have a strong beginning for the Sunday meetings there?"

"That's a wonderful idea!" James agreed. The other men voiced their approval, and soon a list of volunteers had been made for speakers at each of the eight meetings. Subjects were discussed, and decided upon as well. Everyone was excited about this new step of growth in their efforts to evangelize. Never did they allow themselves, as a body of people, to forget that they had been saved and that their first priority in life was to share the gospel with others.

The first Saturday of house-to-house visitation in Suddoth was like a holiday. All in the church who could participate packed picnic lunches and left early for the work. About fifty men, women and children met at Matthew's house and prayed together before dividing the city into sections and assigning parts to each one. Having already had much experience at home, they went out with smiles and confidence, sure that they would find some hearts that would be open to the truth, as their own had been.

Andrew reminded them of Jesus' words: *'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...'* (Matthew 11:28). But he also pointed out that they should not become discouraged if people showed no interest. "Jesus also said, *'Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it'* (Matthew 7:14). So many are preoccupied with the things of this

world — as we were before our conversion — and because of their preoccupation, not many are looking for the gospel. But it's the ones who are looking that we want to find, and God will help us to do that!"

At every home, some tract or other piece of literature was left, and also an advertisement about the coming meeting. Numerous ones signed up for the Bible course so that some were already beginning to study on their own before the date arrived for the gospel meeting.

Several of the families were enjoying the evening meal together on the last Saturday of the month. "This has been a new experience for us," John said. "I'm so glad this opportunity came, and I don't know why we never thought of going to cities around us before."

"Maybe we thought we had our hands full here," laughed James, "but we've learned that we can do more. After this, I think we should repeat this same thing in Bundi, then in Anton, then move down to Cary and see who is looking in each of those places!"

"And planning together, working together, sharing picnics and fellowship meals at the end of a hard day of work have been good for us as a church," observed Andrew. "We're much closer together, and we have such a good feeling of accomplishment about what we're doing."

A hall had been rented for the gospel meeting, and as many of the church as possible went over for the first gathering on Sunday night. Everyone was eager to see how the community would respond, and it was encouraging when a total of seventeen visitors came the first night. Andrew spoke, introducing the theme of the meetings: *Jesus Christ and His Body*. Each night one of the men developed the subject further, ending with a lesson by John

on the last Sunday evening, explaining the wonderful hope of Christians: *'Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also'* (John 14:1-3).

The attendance had grown at each of the meetings, with many coming back each night. A record was kept of names and addresses of all who attended, and thank you notes were sent by the women of the church. During the week, several had stayed after the meetings to ask questions. What an exciting thing it was when five of those who had shown the most interest expressed their desire to be baptized on the last night! A new congregation was in the process of being born!

30 search for truth



Premillennialism and the Coming of Christ

Continuing with studies that had resulted from the house-to-house visitation in Suddoth, Andrew was meeting weekly with Jacob and Miriam Ellsworth. They were regularly attending the Sunday gatherings at Matthew's house, but they had many questions and were eager to learn answers. It was decided that, for the benefit of the new Christians as well as the Ellsworths and others who might want to come, Andrew would lead a period of Bible Study each Tuesday night, dealing with some of the conflicts in their beliefs.

"I'm confused on the meaning of this 'millennium' I've been hearing about," Jacob began. "Some say that Jesus will come, and that He will set up His kingdom in Jerusalem, to reign there a thousand years. They quote the Scripture about the lamb lying down with the lion, and they say that Christians will reign with Christ after the Battle of Armageddon has been fought and won. What about all of that? Will Jesus reign as king in Jerusalem?"

"It's an interesting thing to me," answered Andrew, "that the Jews were looking for an earthly king and for the old kingdom of Israel to be restored in Jerusalem, to such a degree that **they could not see Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies!** And people today make the *same mistake!* In spite

of all that Jesus and His disciples taught and wrote, even today most believers in Christ are waiting for Him to come back to this earth and reign as a king.

“But in very clear language, Jesus Himself said to Pilate at His trial: *‘My kingdom is **not** of this world...’* (John 18:36). That should settle the question, once and for all. But still, people refuse to believe Him.

“In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist had come preaching, *‘...the kingdom of heaven is **at hand**...’* and when Jesus was baptized and began to preach, He, too, said, *‘...the kingdom of heaven is **at hand**’* (Matthew 4:17). When the disciples finally understood who Jesus was — that He was truly the Son of God — Jesus said that He would build **His church** upon that fact, and then He promised in the next verse, *‘...I will give you the keys of **the kingdom of heaven**...’* (Matthew 16:18,19). In verse 28 of that chapter, He promised, *‘...there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in **His kingdom**.’* In Mark’s recording of this promise, another factor is mentioned concerning the coming of the kingdom: that it would come **with power** (Mark 9:1). So, as we read the Scriptures, **when the power came**, we know that this was heralding also **the coming of the kingdom!**

“In Acts 1:3, before Jesus’ ascension to heaven, He was with the disciples, *‘...speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.’* In verse 6, just before Jesus returned to the Father, Peter felt compelled to find out exactly when that long-awaited kingdom would actually come, so he asked, *‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’* Do you see that **even then**, after all of Jesus’ teaching about the spiritual nature of His kingdom, still His own disciples were expecting Him to restore the might and glory of the old kingdom of David in Jerusalem? **Many preachers and believers, even today**, would echo Peter’s question. They are standing at the very same place in their understanding and expectations.

"But a drastic change took place in the understanding of Peter and the other apostles just a few days after Jesus' ascension to God. On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, and they began to preach the *gospel of the kingdom* for the first time! **The power had come!** Peter quoted from Joel 2, concerning the out-pouring of the Spirit of God, and he said, '*...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...*' (verse 16). He preached about King David, and about Jesus being raised up by God to be both Lord and Christ, the king reigning even at that time on David's throne, which was not in Jerusalem but was at the right hand of God! Truly, the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus came to establish among men, was and is a *spiritual kingdom!*

"At the end of Peter's very convincing sermon, the people cried out, wanting to know how to be forgiven for crucifying the one whom God had sent as their King, and '*Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ... Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*'

"The word '*church*' simply means '*the called out*', those who have been called out of the world to be a part of the Lord's family, His spiritual body, His spiritual kingdom. All of these terms, and others, are used in the Scriptures to show us the relationship between our Lord and His people. All of these terms are also used interchangeably, and all have reference to the same group of people, those who have been saved out of the world, by being washed in the blood of Christ. We read, '*...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood*' (Revelation 1:5). John's statement in Revelation goes

even further, to say of us who are children in the kingdom, that Christ '*...has made us kings and priests to His God and Father...*' (Verse 6).

"Before the day of Pentecost, all references to the kingdom were in the future tense — a thing not yet in existence. But after the day of Pentecost, all the passages speak of the kingdom as being already in existence. That date was the dividing line. On that date the kingdom or the church was no longer a thing of promise, but it had come at last! From that day the doors of the kingdom had been opened by the keys given to the apostles, and people could obey God and be added to the church or kingdom.

"Some people read Revelation 20, where John wrote of those who 'lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years,' and they misunderstand. This is not a description of an earthly throne or of Christ reigning in Jerusalem. If the text is read carefully, we see that John said, 'And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them, And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.' So John saw a heavenly scene, of souls who had been martyred for Christ, and these reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

"In 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, the apostle Paul described some interesting things for us. He said that in Adam all die, that is, all of us become sinners and are subject to death because of the sin brought into the world through Adam and Eve. But through Christ we who have been born into God's family — the church, the kingdom — we have been made alive spiritually. Then Paul said that Christ is the firstfruits, the first to be resurrected; but '...afterward those who are Christ's at His coming [when He comes at the end of the world]. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under**

His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. ... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.'

"Do you see from these verses that Christ is reigning at the right hand of God **now**, in His kingdom, and with His saints, and that He will continue to reign until He comes in the clouds to herald the end of this age? In 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8, Paul encouraged Christians who were being persecuted by saying, *'and to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* Continuing, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, *'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.'*

"This is a description of the end of this age: that Christ will come in the clouds with His mighty angels, and that the dead in Christ will be resurrected, and then those who are alive will be changed and will join them in the air. Peter, in 2 Peter 3:10-13, describes what will happen to this world: *'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to the promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.'*

“So, Jesus and His apostles were continually teaching that His kingdom would be started during the lifetime of the apostles — and the promise was fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when the kingdom (which is also the church) was started. Since that day Christ has been reigning over His kingdom from heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God. (Read also Daniel 7:13,14 for a description of this scene.) The souls of the martyred dead are said to be reigning with Him, and we who are living in this world as a part of that kingdom are also reigning as kings and priests, according to Revelation 1:5. We reign with our Lord until His return when we will be caught up to meet Him in the clouds. He will then turn the kingdom over to God, and God will reign over that new heaven and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. But this earth on which we now live will be burned up, and the heavens will melt with fervent heat.

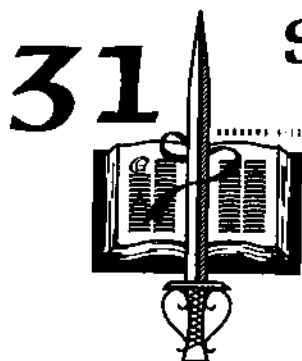
“Consistently, Christ pointed His followers to the new spiritual world, to the new Jerusalem and the new kingdom of spiritual Israel. We — His church — are that new kingdom, and we are promised an eternal home in that new earth He is preparing. Why would anyone want to cling to an erroneous idea of a physical kingdom set up in the literal city of Jerusalem, in this sin-cursed world, when we are promised so much more?

“In concluding our thoughts in the lesson tonight,” Andrew said, “we want to answer the questions, ‘But when will all of this happen? When will Jesus return? Will it be at a time set by some religious leader who says, ‘Be prepared! The Lord is coming on such-and-such date! He has revealed it to me!’

“When Jesus’ disciples asked Him when the end would come, He answered, *‘But of that day and hour no one knows, no not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ...Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him’* (Matthew 24:36,44).

“Those who claim special revelation today, who say that they

know when Christ will return, are contradicting the very words of the Lord they claim to follow. They are making themselves to be as high as God, knowing what Jesus says only God knows! Let us beware of such false teachers, for they have no revelation! Instead, let us listen to the words of Christ and obey Him: *'Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him'* (Matthew 24:44)."



search for truth

Development of the Church

Good things were happening in the church with the passing of the years. The congregation in Bandra had saved and borrowed money so that property could be purchased and a building was constructed. There was adequate space for growth for the congregation which numbered almost three hundred now, even though several families had started meeting on the other side of town some years back and a thriving congregation had developed there as well, enabling the church to give more attention to reaching the people in that area. The church in Suddoth had taken root and developed to be able to provide for its own preaching and evangelism. The members had even constructed a building for their worship and other activities. Promising congregations also existed in five other neighboring towns.

On a monthly basis, according to a scheduled plan, all who could would gather at one of the meeting places and then they would go out to cover as much of the town as possible with literature and invitations to attend the special meeting which would be conducted that night in that place. In this way, once or twice a year, most of the people in each community were reminded of the church's existence. After an enthusiastic singing and preaching service, there would be a time of fellowship, of light refreshments and opportunity to get to know any visitors who had come for the

meeting. This had proved to be a very effective means of spreading the news of the gospel, of increasing the size of each congregation, and of increasing the fellowship among the brethren throughout the area.

"Isn't it exciting," Rachel asked Andrew one night, going home from such a meeting in Suddoth, "to think of how the Lord's church has grown and of how many brothers and sisters we have now?"

"Yes," answered Andrew. "I'm so thankful for Timothy and the seriousness he brought to our lives. If it hadn't been for his birth, we might have wasted all of our energy and years, just working for material possessions that will be burned up with this earth — and we would have lost our souls! What a narrow escape!"

"Last night he was asking me if he's old enough to obey the gospel yet, Andrew. To me he seems so young, yet he's fourteen. I'm sure he'll be making that commitment soon, and Titus won't be far behind him. They're good boys. And they've been blessed to have the love and security of Christian parents. The work of God and the study of His word is all they've ever known! But there's no greater gift we could have given them!"

"Not only are the boys maturing," answered Andrew. "The church is maturing too. John was suggesting that we invite the brethren from all the congregations, since we're centrally located, and have a week's meetings for serious study about the development of elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers, so that all of us can share our thoughts and all can benefit by working together to a greater degree of maturity, especially in our organization as congregations. Though the church in Bandra is fourteen years old, and a number of the men are old enough in the faith, and have children who have also been baptized, no elders and deacons have been appointed anywhere yet."

The idea was circulated among the congregations. On the first night of the meetings, everyone was overjoyed to see the crowd of people who had gathered — more than six hundred! How thrilling it was to realize such strength, to hear such beautiful singing, and to enjoy such warmth of fellowship!

Andrew addressed the entire group, explaining the purpose of the gathering and the plan for study. “We know that we read in the New Testament of various works and responsibilities in the church. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, we are told of elders and deacons, and of their work and qualifications. We read also in Acts 20:28 that the elders are to feed the church, and to take care of the flock which has been entrusted to their care. In 1 Peter 5:1-4, we see further instructions to the elders in the church. Paul sent Titus on a journey to Crete, to appoint elders in every city, so we know that this is the plan God had for the church. Until we complete His plan of organization, we have not fully obeyed Him, and we aren’t functioning as He would have us to do.

“We know, too, that the church must have evangelists, preachers, and teachers. We see examples of these works in Paul and the other apostles, in Timothy, Titus, Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla. We read commands that the older women are to teach the younger women and the children, that the older men are to teach the younger men to be sober and exemplary of good works, so that the word of God will not be blasphemed.

“During this week, we have arranged individual classes for instruction in these various topics, and you may choose which ones would benefit you most. We have classes for those who want to develop to be elders; another for men who would qualify to be deacons. Some among us have been preaching the word for years, alongside our secular work, but there’s a need for men (with the help of their wives) to give their full time to evangelism — traveling to new areas and planting churches — and there’s a need for men to work with the congregations we’ve already begun, to give

all of their time to study and teaching in homes, so that the church will grow faster. Having men to do this work, though, doesn't mean that we as individual Christians will do less — **we can't hire someone else to do our work for us.** But just as Paul on occasions was supported so that he could be free to give all of his time to evangelism, and churches sent money to cover his needs (Philippians 4:15), we can do the same today.

"I think we've done well in each congregation with developing classes for our children, realizing the importance of teaching them the truth from their earliest days. Because of that, we have some experienced teachers who are going to be training those who would like to learn how to teach the various age groups."

The week was a time of tremendous spiritual growth for all who participated. The result was that members went back to the individual congregations and began to apply what they had learned. Within a very short period of time three of the congregations — after careful study of the meaning of the qualifications laid down for elders and deacons — had selected men for those offices and they had been approved by the members of the congregation which they were to shepherd. From the beginning, the men took their responsibilities seriously, meeting regularly to discuss plans for the outreach and growth of the church in their area, and praying about any problems which they saw among the Christians for whom they knew they would one day answer to God.

Out of the meetings, also, four of the men began to study in preparation for leaving their secular work to devote all of their time to teaching and working with local congregations. There was great excitement about the growth expected from the work they would be able to do. Inspired by their example, two of the young unmarried men decided to prepare themselves for the work of evangelism. With these six wanting to have concentrated studies, Andrew and John offered to begin formal classes three nights a week, using the libraries they had built up over the years, and sharing the

knowledge they had gained through their own studies. The classes proved to be so beneficial that, as word spread about them, several others began to attend. Rachel volunteered to have studies with any of the wives who were interested in improving their knowledge of the particular work of women, and gaining practice in teaching individually.

One night, tired from the long day of work and the challenge of the special classes, Rachel and Andrew were preparing for bed. "I was thinking tonight, Rachel, as I looked at those young men in my class, that with these years of growth, the church in this area is on solid ground. Even if we died, there are others, strong in the faith, who would continue to spread the word!"

3 2



search for truth

Rearing Children

"I've never been happier!" Rachel said, between laughter and tears, as she and Andrew prepared for bed. "To see our own Timothy being baptized into Christ is the fulfillment of a precious goal!"

"I agree," Andrew said, hugging Rachel. "All of us have so much to be thankful for, to know the truth. How blessed Timothy and Titus are, that they have the advantage of being brought up according to God's word, and that they can avoid so many of the problems and dangers faced by other young people."

At breakfast the next morning, Timothy's face was serious. "Mother," he said, "I know you've always taught me the verse, 'Evil company corrupts good habits,' and I've tried to be careful about choosing friends. But there's one boy in my class at school. I don't know what to do about him. Sometimes he's such a bully that I really dislike him. But sometimes I feel sorry for him. I think, deep inside, he doesn't know how to behave or what to do. I think his mom and dad are divorced, or maybe it's just that his dad's not at home much. Anyway, he hasn't had much help from his parents."

"With so many problems in the homes, it's no surprise that children are all mixed up," Rachel agreed. "What are you asking? for permission to make a friend of this boy, if you can?"

"I think so," answered Timothy. "In the past some of my friends have attended Bible classes with us, and some of them even brought their parents so that they learned the gospel. But now that I'm a Christian, I feel even more responsibility to help my friends. After all, if I'm old enough to be a Christian, they are too. And one of my earliest memory verses was Jesus' statement, 'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much — and you always emphasized MUCH — fruit; so you will be My disciples.' Maybe Jeremy really is a lost cause, and I can't help him, but I want to try. I promise not to fall into his kind of life, so don't be afraid of the 'bad association'!"

"I have more confidence in your spiritual strength than that, Timothy, and I'm glad you want to help Jeremy. I'll help any way I can — maybe you'd like to invite him to stay with us over the weekend, and to go to worship with us. And I'll be praying for your wisdom in talking to him," promised Rachel.

The following week Timothy made opportunities to speak to Jeremy, to be on the same side with him in whatever sports and games they played, and he suggested that they study together to prepare for up-coming exams. "Why d'you want to waste time like that?" ridiculed Jeremy. "Who cares about dumb exams? I've got more important things to do!"

"But I thought you liked science and wanted to prove to Mr. Merkle that you could make the top grade on this exam."

"Na — That's just talk!" Jeremy answered, trying to dismiss the whole subject. "Why don't you come with me? Some of the other guys're havin' a party. Let's crash it!"

"No, I can't do that. I have to study. And, really, I want to study, because I know that whatever I put inside my head now will be the tools I'll have to work with all my life," explained Timothy. "I want to have a good life, and the best way to do that is to prepare

— which makes exams important! My Mom said she'd cook pizza tonight. Why don't you call home and ask if you can spend the weekend with me? That'd give us lots of time to study and to play some ball, too."

"O.K. O.K. You talked me into it," agreed Jeremy. "I'll stop off at the house and get some clothes — but I'll have to call later. Nobody'll be there till my Mom comes from work tonight. She'll be glad I'm stayin' over with somebody, though — less trouble for her!"

The weekend proved to be a good one. Titus joined Timothy and Jeremy in their games, and they also did a surprising amount of studying. Jeremy had a good mind, and he learned quickly, enjoying the feeling of achievement. "Maybe I *will* make the top grade," he laughed. "Goin' over these things, I'm rememberin' more than I thought I would."

"Maybe you will," admitted Timothy, laughing too, "but not if I can beat you! I'd like to be head of the class myself!"

That night, long after the lights were out, Timothy was surprised when Jeremy began to talk quietly in the darkness. "You wouldn't like spendin' the weekend at my house," he said. "My Dad's not like yours. He's not there much — good for us — 'cause, when he is, he's always drinkin' or high as a kite on drugs and you never know what he'll say or do. Mom tells him to stay away, but he never listens. Before the divorce they used to fight all the time. I'd wake up in the night and hear her screamin' and throwin' things at him, tryin' to run him off. And then I'd hear him beatin' her. It was a scary thing for a kid."

"I would have been scared, too," admitted Timothy.

After a few minutes of silence, Jeremy said, even more quietly, "Maybe that's why I got tough. I didn't want him — or anybody else — ever to beat me like that."

"But you didn't like your dad being tough in a mean way, did

you?" asked Timothy.

"No — I hated it, and I hate him!" Jeremy blurted out.

"Then why do you do to other people the very things you hate?"

There was a long time of silence. Finally Jeremy answered, "I don't know. I never thought about it like that."

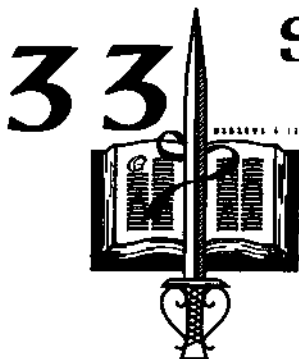
There was another time of silence before Jeremy asked, "So why is your family so different from mine? Even my mom fusses at me all the time but, here, nobody's been mad at anybody this whole weekend!"

"I guess we'd rather be happy with each other than mad," said Timothy. "But the real answer is more than that. You know, we study a math book to learn math, and the more we study, the better we are at math. There's a "life" book, too, and the more we study it and learn to do the things it teaches, the better we are at life! To a smart guy like you, does that make sense?"

"Yeah — but now you're goin' to start handin' me that goody-goody religious stuff. That's just so you can go to heaven — if there is a heaven! Who needs that stuff now?" Jeremy asked, ridicule coloring his speech.

"Who said it's goody-goody religious stuff, and only to get us ready for heaven? That just shows you don't know a thing about it!" exclaimed Timothy indignantly. "Every day I find uses for the lessons my parents have taught me from the Bible. That's what they live by, and that's what I live by! If we didn't have the Bible, our lives would be in such a mess we wouldn't know which way to turn!"

Again the silence, and finally Jeremy asked, "Like mine?" Another silence. "O.K. O.K. I'll come with you to these Bible classes and see what it's all about. Maybe my mom will come, too. Believe me — she's a miserable person and bent on making life miserable for me! She needs help, too."



search for truth

Principles at Work

Jeremy's mother, Sandra, declared she had no time for 'church'. Being the only wage-earner, and with no husband to depend on for any help, she worked over-time as much as she could. Jeremy had practically raised himself from the time of the divorce when he was seven. He would come home from school and eat what he could find, watch TV, or play — or fight — in the street with other boys in the neighborhood who were also on their own in the afternoons. From an early age they had formed themselves into a small gang of ruffians, getting into more trouble than they could fight their way out of. Sandra was always fearful of phone calls at night, expecting a report of some trouble Jeremy was in with neighbors or with the police.

Usually on the way home from work, Sandra would pick up something quick for the evening meal and then would do washing or other house work until time for bed. She worked also on Saturday whenever she could. Sunday was reserved for sleeping late and doing the marketing and other necessary work in the house. "Where's the time for anything else?" she demanded when Jeremy asked if she would attend the Sunday worship with him and Timothy's family. So Jeremy went alone.

"I met Jeremy's mother today," Andrew told Rachel one night

when he came home from work. "Actually, she's in an office just down the hall from mine. I hadn't realized that that was who she is. She's terribly short-tempered, and not very well liked because of that."

"Maybe you can befriend her and can help with some of her problems," encouraged Rachel. "I have to feel sympathy for anyone who couldn't stay home and rear her own children. These years of loving and guiding Timothy and Titus have been precious to me. What a loss it would have been if I'd been just struggling every day to manage somehow to pay the bills, and facing all the problems alone."

"Yes," agreed Andrew, "I'm very thankful that you were willing to budget closely and to do without some fine but totally unnecessary things, so that you could stay at home with our boys. At least, in our case we had a choice. Sadly, in Sandra's there wasn't any choice at all."

The next day Andrew introduced himself to Sandra, explaining that he was Timothy's father, Jeremy's friend. "Oh yes," Sandra acknowledged, "Jeremy's told me about you. He asked me to come along on Sundays, but you can see I don't have the time. I have to admit, though, that he's easier to manage since he's made friends with your son. I told him his wild friends were no good for him, but he never listens to me. He's a brat — that boy! Too much like his father!"

"I don't know about that," answered Andrew, "but he's an intelligent boy. He and Timothy study together, and the competition's good for both of them. In fact, Jeremy says he's learned a useful Bible verse, too, in Proverbs 15:1: *'A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.'*"

"So that's what he means when he keeps reminding me, 'A soft answer, Mom! A soft answer!' I didn't know where he'd got-

ten that. I'm always so tired, it's hard for me to be patient with anybody."

A few days later Sandra came into Andrew's office. To his surprise she was carrying a small Bible, and was laughing. "Jeremy said his teacher in Bible class has been studying Proverbs with them, and he showed some verses to me! I never knew there was such a sense of humor in the Bible! This one was good for both of us: '*A foolish son is the ruin of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continuous dripping.*' Then I was reading a little more before going to bed, and I found this one: '*It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.*' So I told Jeremy he'd better just go sit on the corner of the housetop, because I've been 'contentious' too long to change now!"

"No --- it's never too late to change any habit, if a person really wants to change," assured Andrew. "And the changes that are guided by God's word will make life better in every way."

"I'm beginning to see, just from these humorous verses Jeremy showed me, that there is practical use for these things in daily life. I thought the Bible was only for religious guidance."

"No," answered Andrew again. "Like a loving father, God has written the instructions in the Bible to help His children live the happiest, fullest, richest life possible in this world, as well as to prepare for the eternal life to come. Sure, there's sin and wrong all around us, but when we listen to God and obey Him, we escape so much that's bad even in this physical life."

"But how can the Bible make a real difference to me, with all of my problems?" asked Sandra.

"Even here at work, it will change things. As you practice giving a soft answer, with a smile, gradually that will change your relationship with others in the office. They'll like you better, that'll

make you happier, and when you're happier you'll do better work. Better work, a soft answer, and a smile will get you promotions and that will help your financial situation. And when there's less money pressure and more happiness, things will ease up at home. You'll be happier there, you and Jeremy will begin to enjoy being together and doing things together. That will bring more occasions for talking about the things in your heart, and those talks will create a deeper understanding and love between you. Gradually, your whole life will be changed."

"It sounds so simple," Sandra said wistfully. "I wish it could be as easy as that."

"I didn't say 'easy'," Andrew corrected, "but it is *possible*, and it's the only way for you to have happiness, even in this life. Just think about the way you and Jeremy were going, Sandra. He would soon have been in a serious gang, probably on drugs, and giving both of you endless heartaches. Such troubles at home would have permeated your hours away from home, too, so that your job would have been affected. But God's word can lead you away from all of those problems and can make life something worth living. Why don't you try it, for Jeremy's sake, as well as your own?"

"O.K. I'll try," Sandra conceded. "I won't be able to sleep late on Sundays anymore, but it'll be worth it! I have a lot to learn, and a lot of 'mothering' to make up to Jeremy. I hope you and your family will help us..."

"Of course we will," Andrew assured her with victorious joy in his heart. "That's what we love doing best! I'm here to answer Bible questions and offer advice every work day, as well as being always as close as the phone. My wife, Rachel, will be able help, too, any time you need her. And I can't wait to tell Timothy that you'll be coming with Jeremy for Bible classes and worship Sunday!"



search for truth

Heaven!

"Andrew, when you come home from work we need to go to the hospital to visit Martha and to comfort her family. She's growing weaker day by day, and the doctors give them no hope that she'll recover. I know she's old, but they're such a close family, and losing her will be hard for them — for all of us, because she's been a faithful part of the church for so many years. It will seem strange to assemble for worship and not to see Martha there, and not to have her help in the other work we do as a group."

"I know how you feel. I've been thinking about their grief, and the grief of the church. I've decided to teach a lesson on this subject Sunday."

The visit was made, though Martha was too weak and ill to know that Andrew and Rachel were there. They talked at length with Martha's sons. Jonathan was a Christian, but Anthony lived in a distant city and had had no interest in spiritual things. He had been surprised to see the concern shown by the church, the steady flow of visitors, and the food that had been brought daily to Jonathan's house. In his own life, he realized the absence of such support.

On Sunday, Andrew got up to present the lesson for which he had made special preparation. He had prayed earnestly that

God would help him to put into the minds and hearts of the Christians the hope and joy he, himself, felt after having re-studied the promise of eternal life with God — Heaven!

“All of us know that Martha is at the point of death,” he began, “and we have conflicting emotions about her illness. Naturally there is grief, because we will miss her as a part of our family, but we remember the words of Paul when he said in 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14 that he did not want us to sorrow, *‘...as others who have no hope, For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.’*”

“This morning we need to ask ourselves again, ‘What is this life all about?’ There are those who don’t believe in God, who think that nothing exists after the death of this body. They live only for money, food, and the pleasures of this world. And usually their ‘pleasures’ destroy them.

“Others believe that there is a god, and that they must worship him. They call him by many different names, portray him in carvings with many different forms and faces, and worship him in many different ways. Some have such shallow faith that they could be called ‘believers’ in name only. Others do acts of penance, often inflicting great physical pain and torture to their own bodies as a means of worshipping and serving their ‘god’.

“But who is God? What do we really know of Him? How much can the human mind, with its limitations, understand of God?”

“And why ask such questions? We ask because we can’t really know about the place He has promised as our eternal home unless we know something about Him! We can learn about God in His word — how much He shows of His heart there! But we can also learn as we study the things around us. Paul wrote to the Roman church, *‘...since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are*

made, even His eternal power and Godhead...' (1:20).

"When Darwin was developing his theory of evolution, neither our powerful microscopes nor telescopes had been developed, so he could not see the wonders that today's scientists can see. There are still those, like Darwin, who are looking for any explanation for man and the universe that excludes belief in God. But there are also scientists who are simply studying the wonders that exist, using the powerful equipment available to them. Such true scientists are actually studying and trying to understand the mind and works of God!

"Darwin thought that a cell was only a small bit of matter, nothing at all complicated, but he couldn't see the miniature universes contained within each cell! He couldn't see the 10,000-volume library that makes up the center of the cell, containing all the instructions for every activity for every cell of the body — yet somehow each cell knows exactly which page of which volume of this huge library to open and read, for the specific directions for its own work! Within each cell are factories for building from raw materials whatever that cell is supposed to make. There are also storage places, transportation systems, and disposal systems. And as scientists are able to look deeper and deeper into the cell's systems, they see even more **miniscule systems** and **parts**, perfectly designed and working together to make the **cell** work properly. And the **cells** work together to make the **organ** work properly, and the **organs** work together to make the **body** work properly, and even all of the separate species of life — along with non-living things — are all so **interconnected** and **interdependent** that we can't survive without each other!

"Within each cell is a marvelous world of design and knowledge, showing the mind of God. And within each human body are 100 trillion of these amazing cells, each doing its own work, and each building its own replacement as the body renews itself! Some cells are replaced every few hours, some every seven days!

Most of the body is less than one month old, with the exception of brain cells and nerve cells! What an amazing and wondrous creation we live in, yet we take it as a common thing, just because we've always lived in these bodies and because they work so amazingly well! In a lifetime, for the body to be sick is the exception, not the rule.

"To study the human body, seeing its wonders, teaches us a great respect for the power of God, for the knowledge of God, and even for His love for us, that He would entrust to our care such an astounding piece of equipment!

"But God has done more than that. We go from the parts of a cell, some of which are millions of billionths of an inch in size, to consider the entire universe. How large is it? Who can know? Actually, is not space endless, like eternity? Even trying to think in such terms staggers our minds. Yet whole worlds of galaxies and heavenly bodies are out there, testifying to the awesome power of God.

"Light travels 186,000 miles per second. That works out to be about 6 trillion miles in a year of time. But scientists tell us that they have detected stars that are billions of trillions of miles away from the earth. BILLIONS OF YEARS OF TIME AWAY FROM US! How can we even begin to conceive of the greatness of a God who could create all of this by the simple word of His mouth!

"And yet this tremendous universe works so perfectly together that scientists can measure and study the heavenly bodies in their relationship to each other, and they can figure the exact split second when they can fire a rocket and send up a space ship to go to Mars or a satellite to go into an orbit around the earth! This requires tremendous intelligence and ability on the part of man, but he is only performing a small incident in the midst of the unspeakably marvelous creation God has put into place!

"The earth itself is turning on its axis at the rate of 1000 miles an hour! Do you feel even a small vibration of that movement? Do you feel a single breeze? Do you live in fear of being sucked off the planet by the hurling strength of that rotation at such a speed? No, we feel nothing! Nor do we feel that we are moving at the rate of 12,000 miles an hour as our earth makes its yearly revolution around the sun! And we feel nothing of the speed as our entire galaxy is flying through space at the rate of 120,000 miles an hour! What holds us on the earth? Why don't we feel this movement? Scientists say it's gravity, but they don't really know what gravity is or what causes it or how it works!

"Hebrews 1:3 says of Christ, the Word of creation, *'who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power....'* Such a God made us and loves us, and such a God has said, *'Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.'* (John 14:1-3)

"We pinch this arm and we feel substance! We touch the dirt under our feet, and subconsciously we feel that we're on solid ground — substance — REAL THINGS! Somehow, to the physical mind, *this* is the **real** — and, in contrast, that promised *spiritual* world is the nebulous, the almost imaginary world without substance. But we're wrong! Every second since our births, these bodies have been in a state of decay and coming death! This world is not lasting! Nothing that seems solid and real to us is of enduring substance!

"Yet the God who is eternal, who is of imperishable substance, the God who made all of this that is so wondrous to us — that God has promised, *'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man things that God has prepared*

for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). And He said through the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:20,21, concerning these amazing bodies in which we live, these bodies that are dying day by day: *'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'*

"This is our promise as His children, our hope, our expectation. This is the new heaven and new earth which awaits all those who are born into His family and die in faithfulness to Him, according to Revelation 2:10.

"Just before coming here to speak to you, word was brought to me that our sister Martha has died. My first feeling was sorrow, but then I thought, 'Martha has passed through the door into that real world! Martha knows — now, *this minute* — the splendors and wonders of that world, without the limitations of the physical! She has reached that goal all of us are looking toward! What victory! What freedom! What life!

"Brethren, let us keep our eyes fixed on that goal as we live through the dangers and hardships of this world, and let's keep heaven always in our hearts. This is the promise we have of our God! This is the God we serve!"

35



search for truth

The Voice from Afar

Rachel had worked hard all morning with spring cleaning and preparation of food to take to Elizabeth's for the evening meal. Elizabeth had not fully recovered from recent surgery, so the women in the church had made a sign-up sheet for volunteers to prepare food for the family.

Tired, she sat down to rest for a few minutes and turned on the radio. The music playing on the station was a familiar hymn. What amazed Rachel, though, was that she heard only the beautiful blending of human voices, with no accompanying instrument. This was so different from the typical religious broadcasts that she was curious to know more about this one.

The speaker began with a plea: "There is one God, one Lord, and one Bible. Yet there are many differences among believers. Let us all — those who profess belief in Christ — return to the Bible for all that we say and do in religion. If we would put aside our personal opinions and preferences, we would be united in Christ. All of us would be members of that church which was begun by our Lord on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, just after His resurrection from the grave and His ascension to the Father in heaven. All of us would be called Christians. All of us would obey the same commands to be saved. All of us would worship in the same way. We would be one spiritual family in the entire world, working together to bring the message of salvation to those who don't know God.

"You might ask, 'But how can such unity exist? And does it matter if there are many names and many churches, as long as we believe in the same Jesus?'

"Yes, it does matter, my friends. Jesus Himself warned in Acts 7:21-23, *'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. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"'*

"Jesus also prayed in John 17:20,21, *'I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.'*

"Among those of other religions, the statement is often made, 'You say that there is only one God, and that the Bible is His book. Yet there are many churches, teaching many, many different things. If Christians are so divided, not knowing what your God wants you to do, how can we who are outside understand what He wants?'

"It's just as Jesus said: divisions among those who believe in Him cause confusion in the rest of the world. But what a convicting power it would be if all of us only believed and practiced exactly what the Bible teaches, and by our lives we showed the beauty and unity in Christianity. The effect of that unity would be as Jesus prayed: the world would believe that God had sent Him.

"If you would like to know more about this plea of the church of Christ, we invite you to write to the address which will be given at the end of this broadcast.

"Of those who are believers in Christ, I would ask: Have you confessed Jesus as your Savior, as we read in Matthew 10:32: *'Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.'* Have you turned away from a life of sin, in order to obey God with a penitent heart? Have you been buried with Christ in baptism, as we are taught in Romans 6:3,4, being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3,5) into the kingdom of Christ, which is His spiritual body, His church?

"We plead with you to consider these truths and to become a part of God's family on earth, by obedience to His gospel."

Rachel quickly wrote the post box number and address given in the closing announcements. Then she sat back in her chair, feeling stunned, excited, wondering. "Everything he said — everything — could have been said by one of us," she thought aloud. "O-oh — could this be? Could this really be the Lord's people?" Tears began to run down her cheeks at the thought that, after all of the years of standing alone, they might be on the threshold of finding other Christians in many other places in the world!

When she heard Andrew coming home after work, she ran to the door to meet him. "What's wrong, Rachel?" he asked, in alarm, seeing the tears that had begun to flow again.

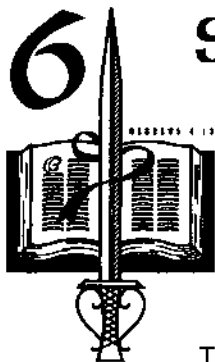
"Oh, Andrew!" she exclaimed. "— not wrong, but maybe so *very right!* This afternoon I heard a radio program and — you won't believe it! — you could have preached the same sermon and made the same plea! In such a few words he pointed out the Scriptures concerning salvation. He even talked about the church being the spiritual body of Christ, and he was saying that all believers should be united so that the world will believe that Jesus is from God!"

"How wonderful!" Andrew said, hugging Rachel close in joy and thanksgiving. "You surely wrote the address where this man can be reached?"

"Oh, yes!" laughed Rachel. "Here it is. We must write and ask about all of this. I can't wait to get the answers back!"

"Won't the other brothers and sisters in the church be excited?" asked Andrew. "Let's pray, Rachel, and thank God for this wonderful thing that's happened."

36



search for truth

Discovery!

The taxi had stopped and let them out at the address Andrew had given. Andrew and Rachel looked at each other, excitement glowing in their eyes.

"This is it!" Rachel whispered in awed tones. "The sign says 'The Church of Christ Meets Here'."

"They went to the entrance of the building and found the door unlocked. "Perhaps someone will be here already," Andrew said, opening the door. "The schedule said that the worship period begins at nine Yes, someone's coming!"

"Good morning! I'm Anthony Yarrow, and this is my wife, Anita."

"Oh, yes," smiled Andrew, relieved to hear the name of the man with whom he had corresponded since Rachel had found his radio program. "I recognized your voice from the broadcast! I'm Andrew Kewani, and this is Rachel."

Like long-lost family members the two couples hugged each other. "We're so happy you could come!" exclaimed Anita. "We want you to get to know the Christians here."

"And we want to hear about the church in other places," Andrew urged. "We've been so excited ever since we heard the

program and realized that there really are others in the world who are obeying the same gospel Peter preached on that Pentecost day, and being added by God to that same church."

But further talk had to wait until later. The auditorium was filling, as people were seated and then quietly bowed their heads in prayer. One brother began to lead the group in a softly-sung hymn.

During most of the worship period, tears glistened in Rachel's eyes, and many times she and Andrew exchanged glances, realizing that everything about the worship was exactly the same as in Bandra. But how sweet was the realization that they were assembled in the presence of God with members of their spiritual family which, until now, they had only *hoped* existed somewhere else in the world!

Anthony's very moving lesson was based on Hebrews 12:18-24. "We come into God's presence as his children, to worship and glorify Him. The writer of Hebrews contrasts the Israelites' experience with ours. He says to us, *'For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")'*

"As children in God's family, our feelings as we come into His presence to worship Him are so different from the Israelites. The one who was inspired to write the letter to the Hebrew Christians said, *'But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to **the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn***

who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.'

"Today -- just now -- we should be conscious of the fact that we as a body of people have entered into God's presence in spirit to worship and honor Him. Not only are we in His presence, but these verses say that we have come to the assembly of the church of the Firstborn, worshiping our Father with all of those faithful brothers and sisters whose names have been registered in heaven along with ours.

"We have come to the New Jerusalem, to the very throne of God as described in Revelation 4. We are surrounded, in spirit, by an innumerable host of angels who are singing, '*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!*' (Revelation 4:8). And, '*Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!*' (Revelation 5:13).

"We have come before Jesus, our Savior and Brother, who sealed the covenant of the New Testament between God and ourselves with His own life's blood. With what reverence and awe we should enter such company, where we as sinful humans have no right to be, except through God's love and mercy and forgiveness!"

The lesson was then brought to focus on the memorial supper of Christ's death. Rachel's mind turned back to the day, so many years ago, when she and Andrew had begun on the long journey of seeking the truth. She remembered the terrible feeling in her heart the evening Andrew had come home from work to say, "We're lost!" And she remembered the sweetness in her soul when Andrew had raised her from the waters of baptism and she knew they were now God's forgiven children. "How precious these years have been," she thought. "Thank you, Father, for such great love.

Thank you for bringing us to this day and to this place, so that we can know more of our spiritual family while we still live in this world."

After the dismissal prayer, Andrew and Rachel were introduced to the congregation, and an explanation was given for their presence. There was a general mixture of laughter and tears in the greetings as everyone hugged and welcomed them. "We're so excited!" Anita said, hugging Rachel again. "Anthony and I can't wait to visit the Christians at Bandra — and to tell you about the congregations of the Lord's people that exist all over the world!"

"Rachel," Andrew spoke softly as they lay in the darkness of the bedroom that night in Anthony and Anita's house, "this is a little taste of heaven, isn't it?"

"Yes," Rachel murmured. "After all those years of thinking we were alone in trying to follow only the Bible, trying to believe and practice just what those early Christians did, how wonderful it is to know that there are actually Christians in most countries of the world, and that we number into some millions! How wonderful to look forward to that new heaven and earth where all of us can be together and with God, forever!"

"How wonderful!" echoed Andrew, and he began to pray: "Father, we never dreamed of such a day as this! When we understood the truth and knew that in order to follow Your word we would have to leave the people and doctrines and churches that were familiar to us, and to stand alone, we were willing to accept that separation. How thankful we are that You blessed us, through these years, with finding others who had a love for Your truth, and that we've had the strength of a growing body of brothers and sisters. Now, today, we've opened our hearts to many hundreds of thousands that we have not seen, and will not see in this life, but they are people that we love because all of us are Your children. Thank you for the blood of your Son which binds us together in Your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."