

DISCIPLES OF THE LORD'S CHURCH

Adapted from an article by the Rev. Geoffrey H. Howard

The church is the Lord's kingdom on earth. Just as the kingdom of heaven can be formed only within the heart and mind of each individual man and woman, so also with the church. The church begins to be built in us by the Lord when we are young. Each one of us has a special opportunity of serving the Lord and of bringing the kingdom of heaven closer to earth through what we learn and do. In one sense we are called upon to become like the disciples whom the Lord gathered so that He could begin His Christian Church.

Let us think about those disciples. The Lord called them together to receive His Divine instruction while He was on earth. For three years He taught them. Often they found that their lives were not made easier simply because they had chosen to follow Him. In fact, He told them that they could expect to be persecuted and ridiculed because of their willingness to follow Him.

It is the same with us. If we are to follow the Lord, then we must try to do what is right, to do what He asks us to do. Sometimes this is not easy. We can remember how frightened the disciples became when the Lord was being tried and when He was finally crucified. That was a very lonely time, not only for the Lord, but also for the disciples. It was a severe test of their faith, a temptation. However, once they had seen that the Lord rose from the dead and continued to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, those same disciples' faith was truly established. After that, all earthly fear left their hearts. In the end, Peter's faith became so strong that he preferred to die as a martyr rather than to again deny the Lord, as he once had.

Anyone who is prepared to believe in the Lord and to follow Him by doing what He says, can become one of His disciples. This is what the Lord asks of each of us. And it is the only way to live a life of true happiness and peace.

Only the Lord can give true happiness to us. We allow Him to make us happy when we follow Him and learn of His teachings, and thus when we are being one of His disciples. This is not always easy. Sometime we may be ridiculed and persecuted. The Lord does not promise that life will always be easy, but He does promise that if we are faithful to Him, then He will give us heavenly treasure which will last forever.

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the Lord can lead people to heaven only if there is a church on this earth that worships Him as the one God of heaven and earth. That church, even if it is only with a few people, may serve as the means whereby heaven can be kept open to the vast myriads of people who do not yet know the Lord. As long as such a church is kept alive in the hearts and minds of faithful men and women, the saving power of the Lord can be extended to anyone else who has only a few truths by which he may be led.

From this perspective, the New Church is vitally important. For the Heavenly Doctrine gives us a completely new idea of the Lord God, the Creator and the Savior of humankind. It tells us that there is only one God, and that He came on earth so that we might know Him and come to follow

Him. He created us so that we might learn about Him and also learn what He wants us to do so that He can lead us into His heavenly kingdom.

If we become good people, seeking to learn about the Lord and about how we should live, we can then affect the lives of many others, even those whom we cannot immediately see and perhaps may never know. The Lord leads all people through angels in the spiritual world, but those angels need some people on earth who know the Lord as He really is, and who worship Him. This is the responsibility the Lord places before those who will be of His New Church. Like the twelve disciples, we can help the Lord to bring others into heaven if we are faithful ourselves. For the true church can only exist in the hearts and minds of people who know the Lord and are obedient to Him.