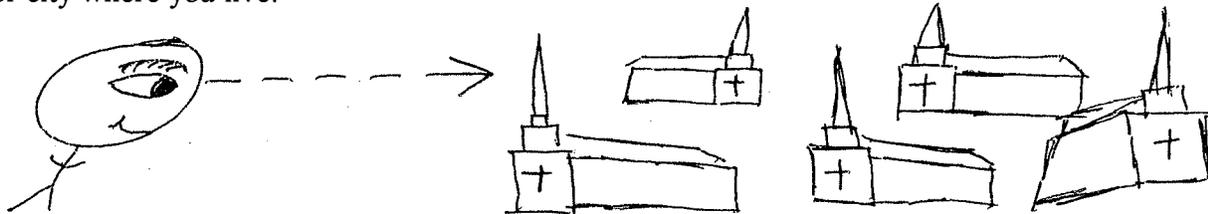


CHAPTER 10

TAKING A LOOK AT THE CHURCHES OF TODAY

Let's take a look at the churches that are in the world today and the churches that are in the town or city where you live:



What do these churches do? What do these churches believe? What do these churches teach? What do they do, how do they do it and why do they do it?

There are many different kinds of churches. There are Bible churches. There are Baptist churches. There are Catholic churches. Can you think of other kinds of churches? _____

Take your phone book and look up "CHURCHES" in the Yellow pages. What are some of the different kinds of churches that you find?

Think again of these many different kinds of churches. Do all of these churches believe the same thing? Do all of these churches teach the same thing? Do all of these churches have the same practices and customs? As you visit church after church today, what do you notice? Do you find great similarities between churches or do you find great differences between churches? _____

Suppose you were able to climb aboard a "time machine" and go back to the days of the First Century (AD) in the time of Peter and Paul and the other early Christians. If you were to visit the different churches (in Jerusalem, in Ephesus, in Corinth, in Antioch, in Philippi, etc.), what would you find? Would these churches believe and teach the same thing? Would these churches all have the same practices and customs? Would you find great similarities or great differences between the churches? (see Chapter 6 where we learned that the early New Testament churches had the **same** teaching, the **same** practice, the **same** custom and the **same** order).

The 20th century churches are much different than the 1st century churches. **WHAT HAS HAPPENED? WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?**

Two Parables

God is not shocked and surprised by what has happened to the churches. God knows all about it and before it ever happened God said it would be so! Let us consider two very short parables which Jesus gave which are found in Matthew chapter 13:

The Mustard Seed

Read Matthew 13:31-32. It is obvious that this parable is talking about amazing growth (from a tiny seed to a great tree). What kind of growth is this parable talking about? Is it talking about normal, healthy growth or is it talking about abnormal and unusual growth?

We must understand that a mustard plant is a herb or a bush. It is not a tree. How amazing then that in this parable Jesus said that this mustard plant became “a T_____” (Matthew 13:32). In Luke we learn that it became a “_____ tree” (Luke 13:19) and in Mark we learn that it had “_____ branches” (Mark 4:32). In other words, if you were to ever find a mustard bush as big as this one, it would immediately be listed in the Guinness World Book of Records!

An actual mustard plant as found in Palestine may under favorable conditions reach as high as 10 feet (as high as a basketball hoop). At the very most it might reach 15 feet but it rarely gets that tall. Would you normally consider a plant that is 15 feet tall to be a “GREAT TREE”? _____

In the natural world mustard bushes do not grow into great trees with great branches. In the Lord’s parable this is exactly what happened. This kind of growth is abnormal, unusual, freakish and unnatural. This is nothing less than a great monstrosity!

This is exactly what has happened during these last 19 centuries. Christianity had very small and simple beginnings. It began with 120 faithful disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit to come (Acts 1:15). At first the plant of Christianity grew strong and healthy (we studied this in chapter 5). It was not long, however, before Satan went to work on the plant. Out of Christianity there grew up a monstrous religious system which we might call “CHURCHIANITY.” This is exactly what we have today: a complicated and confusing religious MESS!

The Leaven

This parable is found in Matthew 13:33. Leaven is something that penetrates and permeates and spreads. In the Bible the term “leaven” is not used in a good sense, but in a bad sense to describe that which corrupts and ruins (Matthew 16:6,12; Luke 12:1; Mark 8:15; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9).

The Church started out with the simple truth of God. It began pure and right and straight. But Satan has injected his leaven and has successfully corrupted the churches. Today we find that “Christianity” has been corrupted by such things as unbelief, worldliness, immorality, hypocrisy and legalism. The churches have lost the simple truth which they once had.

The Simplicity That is In Christ

Notice the warning that is found in 2 Corinthians 11:3. The same devil who tricked Eve is alive and well on the earth today seeking to CORRUPT our minds: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be _____ from the _____ that is in Christ.” In light of this important verse, let us first consider Christ and His truth and then we will consider what Satan is trying to do (see next page).

SIMPLE CHRISTIANITY:

CHRIST

His Truth and His Gospel



Simple (not complicated or cluttered)--2 Cor. 11:3

Straight (not crooked or tangled)

Sufficient (it's enough; nothing needs to be added to it; it's all that we need!)

Solid, Stable, Safe (you can stand on it without fear)

Satisfying (John 6:35)

Sacred (it is holy and it is just the way God wanted it to be)

COMPLICATED AND CORRUPT CHRISTIANITY:

THE DEVIL'S WORK



to Corrupt (to ruin and wreck God's simple truth)

to Complicate (compare 2 Cor. 11:3)

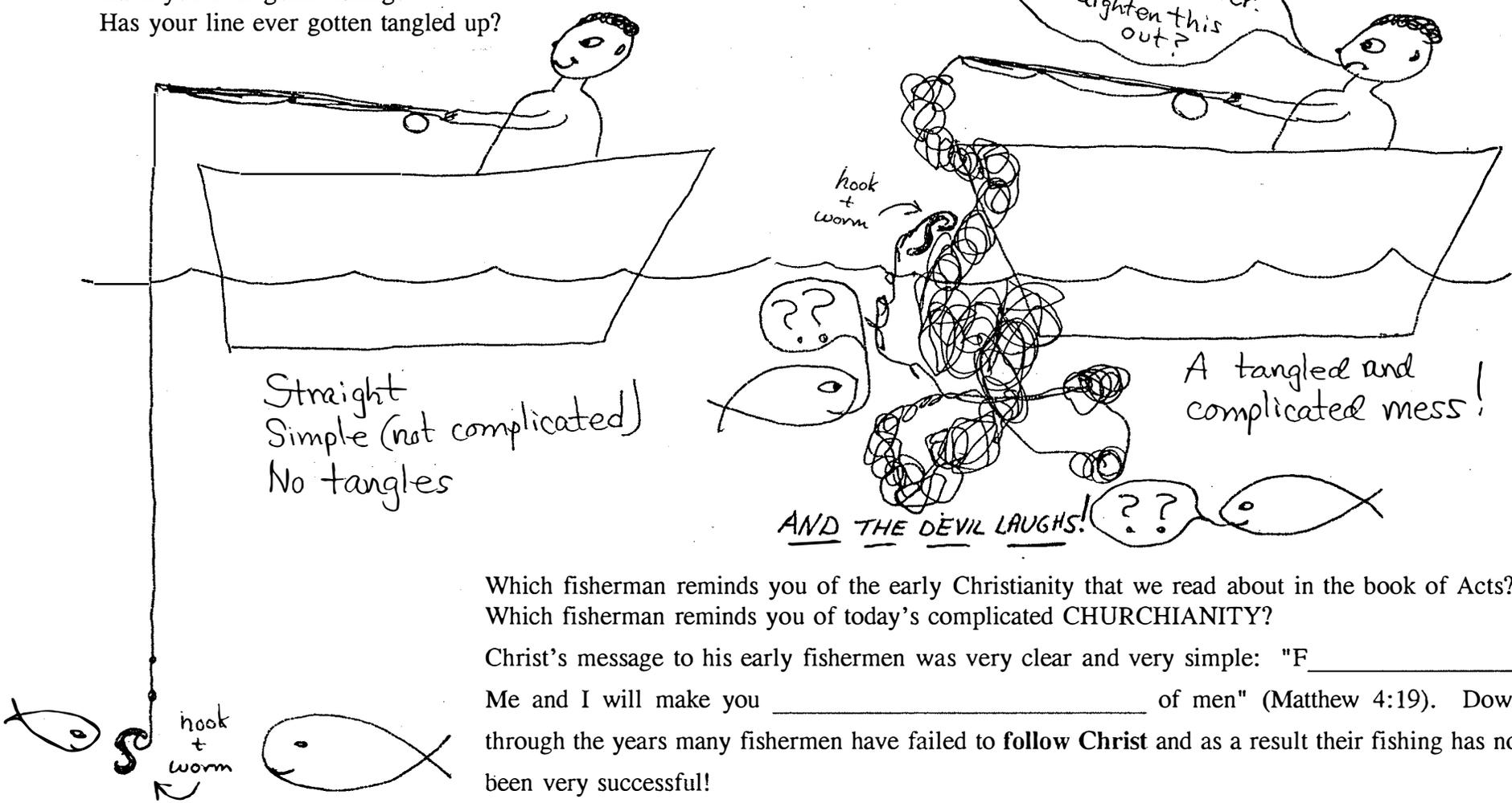
to Confuse (God is not the Author of confusion but the devil is--1 Cor. 14:33)

to Clutter

to Create a MESS out of what was once beautiful and wonderful and sacred

Name _____

Have you ever gone fishing?
Has your line ever gotten tangled up?



Which fisherman reminds you of the early Christianity that we read about in the book of Acts?
Which fisherman reminds you of today's complicated CHURCHIANITY?

Christ's message to his early fishermen was very clear and very simple: "F _____
Me and I will make you _____ of men" (Matthew 4:19). Down
through the years many fishermen have failed to **follow Christ** and as a result their fishing has not
been very successful!

Let's take a look at some of the "tangles" that we find today in the world of "Churchianity."

Water Baptism

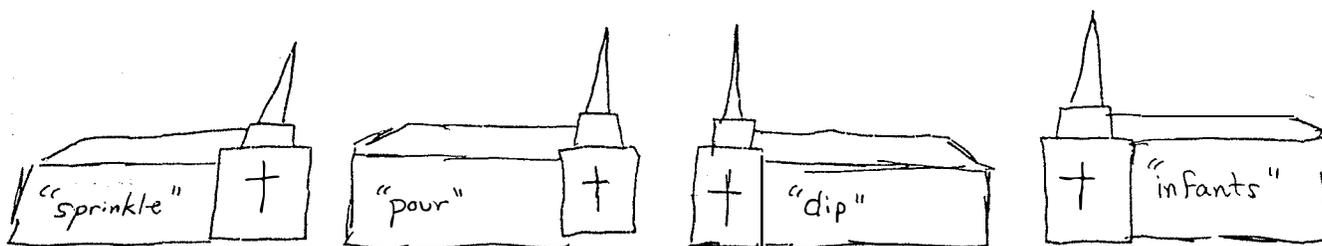
Do all churches believe the same thing about baptism? Is the simple truth of baptism taught by all the churches or has the devil tangled the whole thing up into a mess? As we look at the churches of today here are some of the differences that we find:

(continued on the next page)

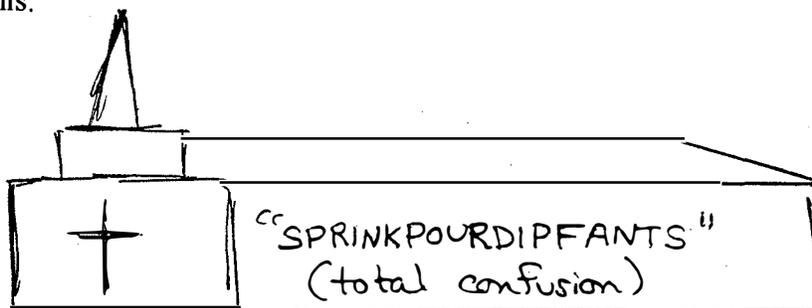
some sprinkle, some pour, some immerse
 some baptize babies, some do not baptize babies
 some do not baptize at all
 some think baptism saves
 some think baptism washes away sin
 etc.

Does all of this sound confusing and all tangled up? Just think what unsaved people must think when they see all these churches that are supposed to be “Christian” and they all have different ideas about baptism. Suppose an unsaved person were told to write a paper on “Christian baptism.” In order to get his information for the paper, he goes around and visits the different churches. Do you think he will get a clear understanding of what Christian baptism really is?

Consider these four churches that teach different things about baptism:



When people look at this, what idea do they get about baptism? Perhaps it all blends together, something like this:



The unsaved are confused. The people in the churches are confused. They all have their tangled up ideas about what baptism is and often they do not want to see what the Bible really says about it. A person might go to a church that baptizes infants. He might say something like this: *“I was baptized as a baby. If this kind of baptism was good enough for me then it must be good enough for others also. I’m glad to see that other babies are being baptized also. My church has always done it this way, so it must be right!”* Does this really make it right? This man has had a tangled line for so long that he does not know that there is such a thing as an untangled line!

Pastor A believes that baptism saves. Pastor B sprinkles babies. Pastor C does not baptize people at all. Pastor D thinks that babies who die will go to hell if they have not been baptized in water. Suppose all four of these Pastors decide to have a church service together. They worship together and hold hands as “brothers.” Would this help people or would this confuse people? What would people think about baptism? Someone might say, “I suppose it does not really matter what a person believes about baptism. It must not be very important. I suppose a person can believe whatever he wants about baptism and he doesn’t even have to believe in baptism at all.”

The Lord's Table

There is also much confusion about the Lord's Table (or Communion). Roman Catholic churches have a teaching which is called "TRANSUBSTANTIATION." They believe that when a "priest" says certain words the bread and the wine are **changed** into the actual body and blood of Christ (even though it still looks, smells and tastes like bread and wine). They believe that Christ is being sacrificed again and again every time there is a Communion service (which they call "The Mass").

Is this what your Bible believing church teaches? Would this kind of teaching be confusing to people who were members of this kind of church? Would they have a correct understanding of the once-for-all, perfect sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:10-14)? Would this create confusion for the unsaved people who look at the churches? Would they think of this as some kind of "cannibalism"? Would they get confused as they see different churches teaching different things about communion?

Organization

How should a church be organized? What leaders should a church have? The Bible speaks of two kinds of leaders or officers in the local church (see Philippians 1:1, the last 3 words): _____ and _____ [Note: The terms "bishop" and "elder" are used to describe the same officer. See Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Timothy 3:1-2.] The New Testament churches had ELDERS (bishops) and DEACONS.

What do we find today? Did you know that many churches have DEACONS and TRUSTEES? What happened to the ELDERS? Where did the TRUSTEES come from? The word "TRUSTEES" is not even found in the Bible!

The Roman Catholic church has very high officials or leaders who are called "CARDINALS" and their highest leader is called "THE POPE." But the words "CARDINAL" and "POPE" are not even found in the Bible. The Catholic church also has a special group of men who are called "PRIESTS."

Some churches are led and controlled by certain men who are outside of the church. The individual churches are controlled by a powerful DENOMINATION. For example, the leaders of a Methodists denomination may tell a Methodist minister that it is time for him to pack up his bags and move to another church. Even though this minister may want to stay he must obey the orders which he has received from the denomination.

The early churches were organized in a very simple way, but as we look at many modern churches we see that organization has become a very complicated thing. The little mustard seed and the little mustard shrub has grown into a monstrosity!

The Lord Jesus Christ

We would think that Christian churches would all believe the same thing about Christ. This should be the case, but sad to say it is not. Some churches believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Creator of all things, the only Saviour of sinners and the final Judge of all men. Does your church believe this? _____ Other churches have different ideas about who Jesus Christ really is and what Jesus Christ really did. Some churches say that Jesus Christ is not really God. They teach that He was the best man who ever lived, but he was no more than a man. Some churches teach that the Lord Jesus was only a good teacher and a good example of how to live. Some churches do not even believe that Jesus Christ rose again bodily from the dead and they do not believe that Jesus Christ will return to earth some day.

Today it is possible to walk into 5 different churches and walk away with 5 different ideas about who Jesus Christ really is. Is this helpful to people or confusing to people? _____ The Bible warns about those who will come and preach “another _____ whom we have not preached” (2 Cor. 11:4). Those who preach “another Jesus” are just adding to the tangles and to the confusion (see Matthew 16:13-15 and Matthew 24:23-24).

The Bible

In the churches of today there is also much confusion about the Bible. There are churches that believe that the Bible is true and without error. There are other churches that believe that the Bible is filled with errors and contradictions and mistakes. There are churches that believe that the book of Genesis contains many nice stories (such as Adam and Eve and the great flood, etc.) but that these things never really happened in history.

The churches of today are even confused as to which books belong in the Bible. The Roman Catholic church has added several “extra” books. If you were to open a Catholic Bible you would see books such as Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, etc. Are these books found in **your** Bible? Does God want us to ADD to His Word (Revelation 22:18-19)? _____

Creeds

A CREED is a written statement of what a person or a church or a group of churches believes. In many churches the people recite the APOSTLES' CREED every Sunday. They say words similar to this:

*I believe in God almighty
And in Christ Jesus, His only Son, our Lord
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried
And the third day rose from the dead
Who ascended into heaven
And sits on the right hand of the Father
Whence He comes to judge the living and the dead,
And in the Holy Ghost
The holy church
The remission (forgiveness) of sins
The resurrection of the flesh
The life everlasting.*

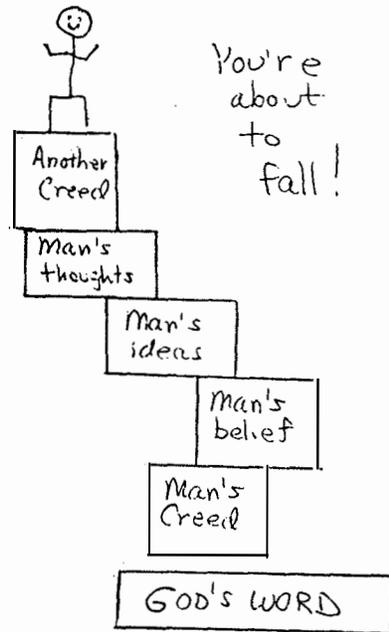
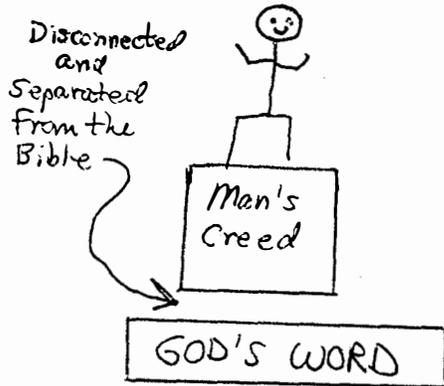
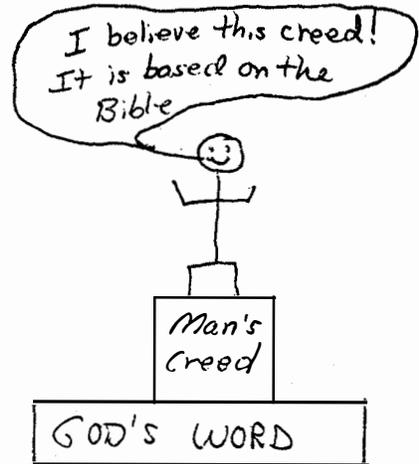
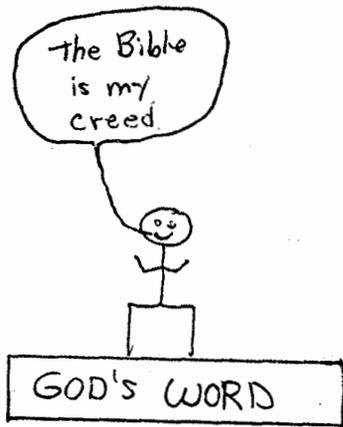
Do you believe the things that are mentioned in this creed? Would you say that this creed contains truth or error? _____

The real problem is that many people stop at creeds and they go no further. They should go back to the Bible which is the book the creeds are supposed to be based on. Many people stand on CREEDS instead of standing on CHRIST and the BIBLE. Instead of the Bible being the authority for what we believe, the CREED becomes the authority. When asked, "Why do you believe that?" they might say, "Because that's what the CREED says" instead of saying, "Because that's what God's Word says!"

Even if a creed is a good creed the problem is that often people do not understand the creed and do not believe the creed. CREEDS too often become separated from the Bible. WHERE IS TRUTH FOUND? WHY IS IT FOUND THERE? To find the truth you should not search through the creeds of men but you should "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES" (the Word of God). God's truth must be set in the Word of God so that it makes the sense that God meant it to make. If truth is separated from the Bible and disconnected from the Bible, then it will not make the sense that God meant it to make.

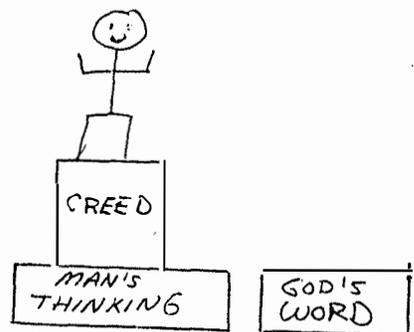
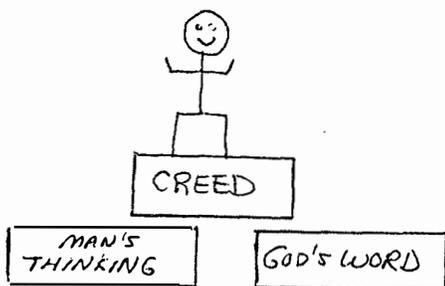
Where is the safest place to stand? Think of the following illustrations found on the next page:

Name _____



This creed is a dangerous MIXTURE of God's truth and man's ideas. We pollute God's truth when we mix man's ideas with it.

This creed is not based on God's Word at all!



The churches need to go back to the Word of God and stop standing on the ideas and beliefs and creeds of men. We need to go back to the Word of God which is simple and straight and true and uncomplicated!

Back to the Bible!!

It is not easy to untangle a messed up line (fishing line). It takes much patience and hard work to get that line back to the way it was in the beginning before it got tangled. In the same way it is not easy to get untangled from the MESS of CHURCHIANITY and to get back to the simplicity of God's Word.

Think of a Rubek's Cube. When you first buy one of these colorful cubes, it is in perfect order and all of the colored squares are right where they should be. But as time goes on you start working the cube and it becomes more and more messed up, especially for those who do not know how to solve it. It seems to get more and more complicated. The object is to get the cube to look just like it looked at the beginning.

God wants the church to look just like it did at the beginning. God wants the churches of today to go back to the Bible and find out what a church is and what a church should be doing. God started the church so that it was very RIGHT and very STRAIGHT, but we have messed it up.

Just as God has a wonderful plan for your church, so God has a wonderful plan for your life. Your life might seem all messed up like a Rubek's cube or all tangled up like a messed up fishing line, but God is an expert at removing the tangles and putting the life back in order. Have you given God the line and handed Him the "cube"?

In the next chapter we will continue to look at the churches of today and see how this affects missions.