

THE IRON GATE

There was a wicked city. In the middle of the city was a lofty church. That church had the tallest steeple that ever was built. In the steeple was the grandest bell that ever was cast. When the bell was struck, it pealed forth with such a mighty knell that every building in the city rattled; some even shook to their foundations. It was all very frightening at first, because here and there a building had collapsed. But nothing had fallen in a long, long time, so the townsfolk had gone back to playing and dancing in the streets.

Seeing the church, Christian tried to go inside. But in the middle of the doorway was a massive iron gate. It had strong iron bars. Looking through the bars he saw lots of people inside. They were marching around in lock-step and chanting the same words to each other over and over again. They nodded approval to each other and kept telling each other how great they all were. They were God's elect weren't they, and that was that.

Christian tried with all his might to open the gate, but it wouldn't budge. Then he noticed a heavy bronze plaque bolted to the gate with big bronze bolts. The headline engraved on the plaque read:

Church Doctrines and Traditions

Imposing and well-dressed men rode up in fancy cars. They mounted lofty pedestals and stood guard over the plaque. The pedestals were very tall and had signs that read, "*Pastors and Evangelists Only.*" These elevated men held out collection plates and cried, "Give, oh, give more! We need to build a bigger church, and get a louder bell." Other men stood behind them as reinforcements; these worthy gentlemen had arm-bands that read "*Infallible Theologian.*"

People came up and bowed to the men, then they all breathed on the plaque and polished it with their handkerchiefs, like you would a pair of glasses. Some folks even knelt before the plaque and kissed it. For all of them, the gate swung open by itself.

There wasn't any light on the plaque and the print was very small. What's more, there was an awful lot of it, so Christian held up his Bible, which shines in the dark.

Squinting and adjusting his bifocals, he started to read the fine print, muttering and groaning and becoming more and more agitated. Finally, Christian could stand it no longer. "These doctrines do not agree with Scripture," he cried in a troubled voice.

Christian then opened his Bible and began to read aloud. As each verse was read, a crack appeared in the plaque, then another, and another, until the plaque shattered into a zillion pieces. As it splintered and fell, it just made a tiny tinkling sound, but at that sound, the buildings of the wicked city quaked and fell until few were left.

The people in the church clapped their hands and giggled with glee, "The wicked city has fallen, the wicked city has fallen!" They puffed out their chests and ran around shaking hands and congratulating each other. They never realized that it was not their bell, nor their lofty church, but the reading of the Bible that made the buildings fall.

After the commotion had died down some, most of them went back to their chanting and marching in lockstep, while others started working on a new plaque. They were so busy making sure everyone was keeping in step that they forgot to take down their iron gate.

Christian didn't want to chant or march in lockstep behind an iron gate, so with Bible in hand, he turned and walked away. A few people with Bibles in hand came out from the church and went with him. As they strolled along, they were all joyously singing, reading their Bibles, and sharing what they read with any passerby who would listen.

Soon there was a huge crowd around them singing and reading their Bibles. Then someone said, "Let's build a church and make a plaque . . ."