

Why I Left...

The Lutheran Church

By Brent Forsyth

"From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Psa 119:104). I have discovered in my years in Christ that some brethren don't like articles on denominations, especially ones that show by the Bible what might be wrong with them. This is not an article designed to "bash" anyone in the Lutheran Church. It is not an article that denies that there are good people within the Lutheran Church.

However, when it comes to one's eternal destiny, it is not a time for pride (James 4:6-10). I am thankful that a family of Christians took the time and cared enough about me to show what believing in God and the Bible was really about. Hopefully, my story will help you in teaching your neighbor from the Lutheran Church.

My parents enrolled me in a Lutheran school in California starting in kindergarten. They also attended the large Lutheran church located right next door. I remember learning over the next six years the biblical stories of Joseph, Abraham, and Moses. I recall the people at church always being friendly and smiling. The teachers were topnotch and every morning began with a Bible lesson. I would worship with about a 1,000 people each Sunday. We had an organ, choirs, handbells, trumpets, sermons, and pastors who wore white robes with colorful sashes around their necks. I grew up with kids that didn't use four letter words or listen to music with disgusting lyrics. I had teachers that, when someone was bad they didn't get sent to the principal, but to the corner to pray for forgiveness (who would you rather talk to—the principal or God?). At age seven I went through "Confinnation" classes. I'm not sure what all that was about, mostly memorizing stuff so that at the end I could take the Lord's Supper.

The Lutheran Church taught me that the Bible was the inspired word of God. I learned that Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins. I was educated that God created marriage between a man and a woman. I learned about the Godhead, which is usually termed "the Trinity." With all these positives one might wonder why I ever left.

Where is the True Church of the Bible?

Among all the positives, there was one big negative—I learned the Lutheran Church was not the church Christ built (Matt 15:13; 16:18; 28:20). I discovered this from my neighbors, who were simply Christians, who invited me to study the Bible with them. The Bible study didn't just happen overnight. Instead, it came about because we had developed a relationship with each other. The father would invite me to play basketball with his friends from church. The mother would invite me over to talk. They had a daughter a year younger than I who I was hoping to date, but that was not in the cards. The reason I was willing to study the Bible with them was not just because I wanted to learn more about God's word (I really did), but because I knew they cared about me. I have since learned in my own studies with others that developing relationships and trust with unbelievers is often the first step to converting someone (1 Cor 9:19-23). Some might call this "relationship evangelism" (Acts 19:3 1).

I can't say that I remember every lesson they taught me, but I remember that first one. I recall I was quite excited. I was going to impress them, showing how much I knew about the Bible. I even brought my Lutheran Catechism along. I had never really used it before, but I was Lutheran so I had to take it, right? In the end, I was shocked to find out that I didn't really know that much about the Bible. They took me through a summary of the Bible and then started showing me where all the denominations came from. I use this same lesson today, though I don't start with it (see Mark 4:33).

That was my introduction to the church of Christ we read about in the New Testament. In the Lutheran Church I had been taught that everyone is different, but everyone is okay as long as they believe in Jesus. The Lutheran Church was very casual when it came to the Bible. They taught it, but whether you actually followed it was up to the individual. In fact, the only thing they really kept track of was your contribution.

As I studied with my neighbors I began to compare both religions. I attended the Lutheran church at 8:00 in the morning. Then I would drive over to the church of Christ by 9:30 for Bible class and worship and then back at 6:00 p.m. I started to see that God has given us the Bible to follow faithfully—not casually. It is our standard—not a general guide.

Respecting Bible Authority

Here are some of the passages that helped me the most to learn the importance of carefully following God's Word:

1. Galatians 1:6-10

I saw that no one has a right to change the gospel, not even an angel. As I looked at the Lutheran Church I had to admit that there were many manmade traditions. Matt. 15:1-9 also opened my eyes in this regard

2. Revelation 22 :18-19

This enforced to me that no one is allowed to ignore or add commands to God's word. Again, there were things in the Lutheran Church I simply could not find in the Bible and some things in the Bible I couldn't find in the Lutheran Church.

3. Leviticus 10:1-3

This is the account of Nadab and Abihu offering up strange fire to the Lord. As I saw that God took their lives for profaning only one thing in his divine plan. It made a big impact in me. Soon to follow were lessons on the true nature of Christ's church and Christian responsibilities to God.

All along was the issue of baptism. I even remember going over to my neighbor's house to ask them if they thought I should be baptized again. Though I was sure I would be one day, I wanted to investigate this closer. I was baptized as a baby in the Lutheran Church. Here it was to be the happiest day of my life and I couldn't even recall it (though I did have a picture to confirm it did happen). In The Lutheran Catechism the question is asked, "What is baptism?" The answer is, "To baptize is to apply water by washing, pouring, sprinkling, or immersing." A careful study of baptism in the New Testament proved to me that "sprinkling," practiced by the Lutheran Church, was not biblical baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; Tim 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21)

Another question posed in The Catechism was, "Who is to be baptized?" The answer, "Those that can receive instruction are to be baptized after they have been instructed in

principle doctrines of the Christian religion.” That sounded good, but then why was I baptized as a baby? The answer was found in this question: “What about children?” The answer is “Infants are to be baptized for they are included in the words of all nations (Matt 28:19).” A sub-point to that answer is what really blew me away “Infants too can believe (Matt 18:6).” That was news to me; I couldn’t even remember my baptism, let alone believe!

What really troubled me was the answer to this question:

“Can anyone be saved without baptism?” The answer, “A person can be saved if they believe in Jesus Christ before their death.” I knew that wasn’t what Jesus said in Mark 16:16.

Overcoming The Final Obstacle

Yes, I was ready to be baptized, but there was still one obstacle— my family. I was around twenty years old when I began studying with my neighbors. I was old enough to make my own decisions; however, like many, I found it difficult to leave the fact that I was “Lutheran.” It really does become an identity. It is not just turning away from a church, but from family as well. How could I no longer follow the “family” religion? How could I tell my parents that I was baptized when, in their mind, I already was? How would I explain missing a family get-together because I wanted to be with my brethren worshiping God? For those who have been in the church for many years, it may be difficult to understand why it takes some so long to be baptized, but this is a big part of the delay.

It’s not that I didn’t love God; it was being committed enough to make a complete life change. Isn’t that what baptism is really all about? I finally found the strength through Christ to respond to the invitation and remember being splashed with hugs and kisses from the brethren (1 Pet 1:22).

The years following my baptism brought great growth in faith and God’s word. Through the love and encouragement of a great congregation I grew to lead prayers, teach Bible class, and preach sermons. Today, I have been preaching for eleven years (two of those in Romania). I married a wonderful Christian wife and have three children I am trying to bring up in the Lord. I often wonder what my life would have been if Christians had not taken the time to care, love, and teach me. The people in the Lutheran Church were loving, sincere, and dedicated, but didn’t compare to my brethren who put God first and self last (Luke 9:23).