

# ***Why I Left...***

## ***The Pentecostal Church***

*By Larry Sharpe*

I grew up Southern Baptist. At 12, my family became involved in the booming charismatic movement that believed in modern miracles and tongue-speaking. We began attending a Pentecostal congregation of the Assemblies of God.

Imagine the "culture shock" of going from a sedate Southern Baptist church to a shouting, clapping, tongues speaking, "holy roller" church. At our first visit, I was terrified. A man was circling the auditorium shouting. There were people everywhere speaking gibberish, and I was ready to leave and never return. But, we kept attending. The more we attended, the more we got used to it, and it became home. I enjoyed going and became active, often giving my "testimony."

I sought the "gift of tongues," which, eventually I received (I thought). I never questioned my religion or experiences much. They were real to me. My emotions backed up what I believed to be true. In my late teens, a young family moved next-door to us. The wife had grown up Nazarene, and her husband was "heathen," but was "converted" by his wife to the Nazarenes. J.R. and Sue Bronger were great people, and we became good friends. They were zealous in their religion, so we had common interests.

J.R. became the basketball coach for the Nazarene church he attended, and he asked me to play for him. I went to church with them some, but still attended regularly the Assemblies of God.

### **1. The Influence of the Truth**

Then, things began to change with J.R. He began to listen to a Louisville radio program, broadcasted by the South End Church of Christ with Ken Green. He pointed out errors in denominationalism from scripture. In time J.R. became convinced he was not saved because he had not done what the Bible taught in order to be saved (Acts 2:38). He believed in God and had obeyed Nazarene teaching, but had not done what the Bible said to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

He eventually was immersed into Christ for the remission of sins. J.R. had now left denominational error and was baptized into Christ and added to the one church or body of the saved (Eph 1:22-23; 5:23,26). In his zeal he wanted to convert his family and friends. When he tried to help me, I became angry. He told me I had not been saved because I, too, had not obeyed the Bible. And, I was in error in many ways, my soul being in danger.

I told him he could keep his new-found religion. I was just fine, thank you. There were times I was hateful with him. To his credit, J.R. kept his cool (Pray 15:1). Later, he told me there were occasions he wanted to pinch my head off.

But, how could I not be saved? I was sincere. I thought I was doing God's will, and I felt good about my beliefs. How could I be wrong and lost? Are not all good people of every denomination going to be in heaven?

My journey began. I did not give in easily, and resented J.R. even though he was my friend. Some of the Pentecostal members would say negative things about the "Church of Christ." I was confused. There was a great struggle in my heart. These new teachings seemed too narrow. I had never heard this before. In time, I fully surrendered to Christ. It was not easy but it was right.

And this article is written in the hope of helping people "come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Christians should reach out in love and concern for people.

## **2. Fully Following God's Will**

One of the biggest reasons I changed was because it does matter what we believe and how we approach God. Most denominations teach that all good people of every "Christian sect" will be saved. They say: "Doctrine does not matter as long as you are sincere." But, the Bible stresses over and over the importance of what we believe and how we approach God (Matt 7:13-14, Luke 6:46, John 8:31-32, Heb 5:9). That is as fundamental as any teaching in God's word.

God is holy and we must approach him as he directs (Lev 19:1-2; 1 Pet 1:15-16). The Lord struck Nadab and Abihu dead for their sin of offering "strange fire" which he had not commanded (Lev 10:1-3). And Jesus said in Matthew 15:9 that worship could be empty, or vain. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus states that many in the last day would be rejected even though they claimed to do things in his name. But, he will tell them he never knew them because they worked lawlessness. They did that for which they had no authority.

We Pentecostals were big on the "name" of Jesus. We would say, "In the name of Jesus we do this, or bind that, or cast out Satan." But, "in the name of someone" means to do that "by their authority." If someone stole your checkbook and began to write checks "in your name," they would be signing your name but would not have your approval or authority. So, just because we use the name of God does not mean we have his approval. We must go to scripture for all we do (Col 3:17).

God emphatically states, "Do not add or take away from my word" (Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5-6; 2 John 9; Rev 22:18-19). There were dire consequences when people acted without authority from God, such as Saul's partial obedience (1 Sam 15) or Uzzah's death when he irreverently touched the ark without authority (1 Chron 13:1-13; 15:1-3,13-15). I never heard this before. It does matter how we approach God! He says doctrine is important (1 Pet 4:11; Mark 7:1-13).

## **3. Following God's Way of Conversion**

Another reason I left is because I had not done what the Bible said to have my sins forgiven. I was always taught baptism had nothing to do with salvation. The denominations teach salvation by "faith only," or by "praying through" at the altar, or by saying "the sinner's prayer." They teach that a person needs to be baptized, not to be saved, but to show they have been saved. I had been immersed as a Baptist and a

Pentecostal, but not for the forgiveness of my sins, which the Bible teaches (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21).

Question: Do you believe a person must be in Christ to be saved? Is that not what the Bible teaches (2 Cor 5:17)? So, how does a person get into Christ? Galatians 3:27 states we are baptized into Christ. Now, how can a person be in Christ before baptism? If he is not in Christ, he is not saved. That is a logical conclusion. The New Testament teaches faith, repentance, confession (Rom 10:9-10), and immersion in water to have our sins cleansed (Rom 6:17-18,4-6). I had never heard that before. If I had not done what the Bible said I was still in my sins. That is when I began to look more critically at my experiences and feelings. If my experiences were not lining up with the word, then which is wrong? My emotions or God's word?

#### **4. The Original, Udenominational Church**

Something else which caused me to leave Pentecostalism, though it took a long time to see, was that in the New Testament there were no denominations. There was no Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, or Pentecostal churches, etc. I had obeyed adulterated Baptist and Pentecostal teachings, but had not obeyed pure Bible teaching. Those doctrines put me in those churches, but I was not yet in Christ, and added to his church body of saved people (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 1 Cor.12:13; Eph. 1:22-23). Biblically, the church of Christ is the saved. As people were immersed into Christ their sins were forgiven and they became part of the New Testament church (Mart 16:18). There was only one church body (Eph 4:4). These folks from the church of Christ were trying to get me to leave denominationalism, the churches of men, and simply be a Christian, a part of the Lord's one church. God wants us to be united in Christ, not divided (John 17:20-21, 1 Cor 1:10). Here were some people who were doing things according to the New Testament, and that began to appeal to me.

#### **5. Trust God's Truth, Not Your Feelings**

It's hard to let go of long-held beliefs. We cling to what is comfortable. Those emotions, feelings, and "experiences" often take precedence over the word of God (Rom 10:2). Emotions are a big appeal of Pentecostalism. It was hard to let go. But the word is our objective standard. It will judge us in the last day (John. 12:48), not our emotions, or religious experiences, because these can be misleading (Prov 14:12, Matt 7:22).

A newspaper article a few years ago stated there was a "Flat Earth Society." The 2,800 members believe the earth is flat. Suppose you were trying to convince a member the earth was round. You show pictures of the earth from space as evidence. But then they said, "I feel in my heart the earth is flat."

Even if their emotions back them up, the evidence does not. They are wrong, period! Do people not do the same thing with the Bible? Here is what the Bible says to do to be saved, and people have not done that. Who is wrong? Paul was once deceived. He thought he was right with God when he was not (Acts 26:9; 1 Tim 1:12-17). Paul said many of the Jews were religiously zealous, but lost (Rom 10:1-3). The heart can be deceptive (Jer 17:9)! If you want to believe what you are taught is true, your emotions will back that up. In Genesis 37 Jacob thought Joseph was dead, but he was not. Jacob mourned as though he were. His feelings confirmed the erroneous information. So, trust God's word, not your feelings (Prov 3:5, 14:12)! It alone is truth (John 17:17).

## **6. Miracles?**

Miracles (divine intervention suspending natural law) have ceased (Zech 13:1-4). God is still all-powerful, but he is today working providentially. The miracles of the New Testament were temporary, confirming Jesus was the Christ, and the apostles were his messengers (John 3:2; Acts 1:8). When the New Testament revelation was completed (1 Cor 13:8-10), miracles ceased (Mark 16:19-20; Heb.2:3-4). The New Testament is complete (Jude 3, John 16:13). The word is what we need to guide us (2 Tim 3:16).

As a Pentecostal, I never saw a miracle like the lame or blind healed or the dead raised. They came unhealed and left unhealed. One of the greatest "miracles" of Pentecostalism was that I did not have the eyes to see the truth (2 Thess 2:9-12), but let the power of suggestion and emotions blind me.

May the good Lord help us all to see his truth. Glory to him!