

Why I Left the Christian Church

By Terry Sanders

I was born and raised in Southern Indiana to a good home although my parents never attended any church after I was about 6 years old. In the summer time I would walk to the Methodist Church and attend Sunday school with some schoolmates. This sporadic exposure to religion ceased when I was about 11 years old. I did not attend any church of any kind until adulthood. As best as I remember I did acknowledge the existence of a "Supreme Being" and that was about it. A good time was first and foremost in my mind. I was playing softball and took an interest in one of my teammate's sister. She and I started dating and became serious with plans for marriage. I was off work from March-June 1976 due to knee surgery (old baseball injury). Martha, my fiancée, would pick me up and take me with her to church - - The Christian Church in Shoals, Indiana. This was a very conservative Christian Church. Attendance on Sunday morning would be about 200 in a town of 800. I attended with her nearly every Sunday morning. We were married in November of 1976. I was baptized in December of 1977. Martha was expecting our first child in 1978. I was now teaching the largest adult Bible Class on Sunday morning (45-50), subbing for the preacher, serving as President of a Men's Fellowship, leading singing and serving as a deacon.

I thought I was pretty knowledgeable on the Bible. I thought that some books from the Gospel Advocate Bookstore would be better than those from Christian Standard. My eyes began to see things I had never seen before. I was soon studying like a drowning man. I begin questioning the preacher and elders about different things. I do not know how many times I was told "It doesn't matter."

I believe that this attitude of "It doesn't matter" did more than anything to cause me to leave the Christian Church. Keep in mind that his attitude was not in the direction of opinion, but was directed toward the Scriptures. "What about instrumental music?" (re. Eph. 5:19) "It doesn't matter." "What about church dinners?" (re. 1 Cor. 11:22) "It doesn't matter." "What about fellowshiping denominations?" (2 John 9) "It doesn't matter." Nearly every matter was handled in this fashion. This attitude brought me much anguish. Here I was, becoming more and more involved with the word only to find out that my then brethren had little use for it! Finally, on November 11, 1980, I resigned from all capacities and membership of the Christian Church.

I had been having some conversations with a 2nd cousin who was a member of the church of Christ in Loogootee, Indiana. He gave me a tract containing the material written in 1944 by the late Floyd Decker on "Why I Left The Christian Church." I could see so many similarities in what brother Decker wrote and what I was experiencing myself. This tract had a profound influence upon me. This same cousin and I attended one night of a Gospel Meeting at Mt. Union. I heard acapella singing in a church service for the first time. The preacher, John Paul Edwards, preached on "The Mind Of Christ," and called out a great many passages in his sermon. This calling out of so many passages was very welcome to me, but there was something else I heard that night. When a passage was called, I knew that the majority turned in their Bibles and read it. How did I know this? I could hear the pages being turned! Yes, it was overwhelmingly audible in that little building. To say the least, I was impressed since this was so different to what I was accustomed to at the Christian Church.

As I attended services at Loogootee, I began to hear the Bible used in Bible Study and in sermons. I remember the first time I heard a lesson on "How To Establish Bible Authority." I was overcome! This was what I knew was right. That day I overheard some members complaining about hearing "that same old sermon again!" I nearly wept as I realised that I had never heard anything like it and that it was likely preached for my benefit! When I asked question, the answers were not "It doesn't matter," but "The Bible says" I knew that this was as it should be.

As I now had some foundation with which to build upon, I studied a great many things. It was "as though scales had been lifted from my eyes." I spent all my spare time reading and studying. Soon the subject of my own salvation came to the forefront of my thoughts. Why was I baptized? What were my reasons? My honest answers were: 1) To please my wife; 2) To "get the preacher off my back" since he was pressuring me to be baptized. (He had developed the view that he had sinned by performing the wedding ceremony for Martha and me. This sin could be alleviated by my baptism).

Neither of these "reasons" were even a 42nd cousin to anything in the Bible. I had not complied with Acts 2:38! I determined to do so and was baptized for the remission of sins on January 4, 1981.

I began leading singing immediately. Soon I was teaching a class and brethren encouraged me to preach. The person who encouraged me the most in serving the Lord was sister Io Crim (passed away in 1989). A few of us at Loogootee decided to start a work in Shoals where we lived. After a while we were successful in seeing three other families and a few individuals leave the Christian Church and take a stand for truth. Today this church thrives. My son-in-law, Sean Sullivan, preaches for them. I preached by appointment from 1981 until 1990 when left secular employment to preach full-time.

As I pen these words, I have reflected upon these events of the last twenty years. There have been highs and lows as there are in all aspects of life. All in all as I meditate about taking a stand for truth and the works that were done in years gone by, I am persuaded that I have no fear to stand in judgement for them. It does matter what the Scriptures say (John 12:48). It is the truth that sets free (John 8:32). The gospel of Christ is where that truth is found (John 6:68). There really was no other choice to be made.