

Converted To Christ! (Why I Left Denominationalism)

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By request, I am writing to explain why I left a denominational church to become a member of the church of Christ. My hope is that this will not only be encouraging to those who are members of the body of Christ but will also be a useful tool in guiding the lost to the truth in God's word about salvation.

Up until the summer of 1998 I was brought up in a Southern Baptist church. My parents raised me to be a faithful member and I was considering entering some form of church ministry. In 1997 I was introduced to Dr. Hoyt Chastain and studied religious topics with him for a few months. Dr. Chastain is a retired Missionary Baptist preacher and a very experienced public debater. He was giving free lessons on the Greek language and Bible analysis at the church where I regularly attended. I knew nothing about the church of Christ until I heard Dr. Chastain explain some differences between denominations and the church of Christ.

When I first heard of the church of Christ and some of its doctrines, especially baptism and hymns without instrumental music, I thought it was one of the most ridiculous ideas I had ever come in contact with. I could not understand how a church that proclaimed to believe in God could say instrumental music was wrong in worship and baptism was required for salvation.

With the help of some friends in the Mt. View church of Christ in Foster, OK, I was able to help set up a public debate between Dr. Hoyt Chastain and David D. Bonner, who is a well-studied preacher in the church of Christ. During this four-day debate I was able to discover what I needed to study and how to go about it. This debate was good in showing me what I needed to study, but I found that isolating myself from the religious opinions of others and studying on my own was the most beneficial to me.

There are many doctrinal differences between the church of Christ and denominational churches. The main ones that I focused on and had to be convinced of were the teachings on the establishment of the church, baptism and instrumental music.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

In Matthew 16:18-19, Christ said, "I will build my church" and would give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. In this passage we find that "kingdom" and "church" are meant as the same thing. Some who were with Jesus would not die until the "kingdom" of God or "church" of God came with power (Mk. 9:1). This shows that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those who were with Jesus in those days.

In Luke 24:47-49, Christ told His disciples that repentance and remission of sins should be preached beginning at Jerusalem. The disciples were told to go to Jerusalem and wait to be endued with power from on high. Acts 1:8 confirms that they would receive power "after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." If we can find when the Holy Ghost came upon them then we can know when they received the power that was promised to them. And if we can see when the power came then we can see when the kingdom or church was started. In Acts 2:1-4 it is obvious that the power came to the apostles when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, therefore it should be clear that the church was established with power on the day of Pentecost.

To be further convinced of the establishment of the church I found I had to examine the uses of the words "church" and "kingdom." I found in the Bible that until Acts 2, the words "church" and "kingdom" were used in the future tense, but beginning in Acts 2:47 the present tense is used, "and the Lord added to the church (present tense) such as should be saved."

BAPTISM

All of my life, I have been told that a person is saved before and without baptism, however, Mark 16:15-16 gives the true order of salvation. In this passage, Christ commands His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel. What order of salvation did this gospel teach? Christ said, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He did NOT say that the person who believes shall be saved and then some other time at that person's convenience they can be baptized.

Christ told His disciples that repentance and remission of sins would be preached beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47). While in Jerusalem, the apostles witnessed the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. As Peter preached in Jerusalem, he taught repentance and remission of sins which was what Christ had told him to preach. Peter told those who were "pricked in their hearts" to "repent and be baptized for the remission (or forgiveness) of sins" (Acts 2:37-38).

However, I was hardheaded and these verses on baptism were not really enough to convince me to convert from one faith to another. The conversions in the book of Acts are what convinced me. When the Samaritans heard and believed Philip's preaching - they were baptized (Acts 8:12). When Simon believed - he was baptized (Acts 8:13). After Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch - the eunuch was baptized (Acts 8:35-38). A woman named Lydia who heard Paul preach was baptized after her heart was opened (Acts 16:14-15). When Paul and Silas were in prison, a jailer asked them what he must do to be saved. They said to believe on the Lord and after they spoke to him the word of the Lord, he was baptized (Acts 16:25-34). During Paul's conversion, he was told to "arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:8-16). These conversions taught me that baptism is a very important part of what was being preached to these men and women who were being converted to Christ.

Being saved from our sins is what the term salvation is all about. What better way is there to be saved from sin than to be forgiven of our sin? Baptism is the act that Christ expects every sinner to obey for the remission (forgiveness) of our sins (Acts 2:38).

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

When dealing with this subject, I needed to understand that the New Testament is the authority for our pattern of worship today. Christ's sacrifice took away the first law so that a second one could be established (Heb. 10:1-10). The Old Testament law was nailed to the cross and done away (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15). The new law {testament} did not go into effect until after the death of Christ (Heb. 9:15-17). Since the laws and practices of the Old Testament were done away, we should look to the New Testament for our doctrine and pattern of worship.

If we are going to use the New Testament for our worship pattern, we must find examples and commands of HOW or WHAT to do. When music is mentioned in the worship of the New Testament church only vocal music is mentioned. There are several examples and commands of singing or vocal music in the New Testament (Mt. 26:30; Mk. 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; Heb. 13:15; James 5:13). There is not one scripture that even indicates instruments should be used. I found that while it was very easy to see the truth on vocal music, the emotional bond I had for instrumental music (having been a "Christian Rock" musician) was the most difficult thing I had to overcome. Therefore, I decided that I would please God by keeping His commandment of vocal music rather than please myself and men with instrumental music. By doing this, I knew I would not be adding to the pattern of worship that God has set forth in His word (Rev. 22:18-19; 1Cor. 4:6).

CONCLUSION

All of these teachings were very difficult to accept in my mind, but the more that I studied the more I became convinced of the truth. It did not take very long for me to run out of excuses for the denomination of which I was a member, and so after struggling with what my friends and family might say, I finally decided to account for myself (Rom. 14:11-12) and obey the gospel plan of salvation. I realize now that the most important decision I ever made was being baptized into the one and only church that Christ built (1Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23).