

“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:2-5)

Why I Left the Episcopal Church

By Keith E. Clayton

MY STORY:

I did not leave the Episcopal Church because of any personality clashes with anyone. I had friends in that denominational body of folks. I was personally friendly with many people in the congregation of those adhering to Episcopalian beliefs in Essex Junction, Vermont. I personally liked the Episcopalian priest. I was not disgruntled with anyone at St. James Episcopal Church. So, you may ask, why leave? Even more importantly, you may wonder, why write this tract? I pray that both of these questions will be fully answered by the time you finish your thoughtful and open-minded reading of my journey out of the Episcopal Church. My purpose in writing this tract for you to read is rooted in my own desire to have you also be sure to follow the Shepherd and not the voice of a stranger. Please let me explain...and read with charity. I write in love for the Lord, for His Word, for your soul.

I was twenty years old and about to marry my childhood sweetheart at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Bennington, Vermont. It was suggested that I take some classes, that a religiously mixed marriage was not a good idea. I don't recall who suggested it, except it was regarded as good advice, by me. Since I had no real Bible training or knowledge, I agreed to the classes. I had been reared in the Congregational Church. That's where my parents occasionally took me as a child; but, I learned very little Bible there. We were Xmas and Easter attendees, with a few other outings for church thrown in. For "Sunday School" we just played and had arts and crafts...no Bible training. The sermons had precious little Scriptural content. So, I grew up thinking one church was as good as another, therefore, it made little difference to me what church I belonged to. After several classes I was "confirmed" into the Episcopal Church. But, I still knew nothing of God's Word. We never opened a Bible even one time in the confirmation classes I attended. I did not regard that as strange at the time, not having any real personal working knowledge of God's Word. Consequently, I "converted."

I was moderately active in the Episcopal Church. I was a "lay reader" for St. James Episcopal Church in Essex Junction. There were no Bible classes, nor training or education in the Scriptures themselves, offered by St. James Episcopal Church. As a "lay reader," I would get up to read publicly at the prescribed time as required by the particular liturgy that was being followed. I began to notice that I needed more study of the Word of God so that I could better understand what I was publicly reading. I found a Bible study group in the home of my neighbours, Gene and Linda Dumas, who were also Episcopalians before learning the Truth. I began to really study the Truth, the Bible.

The more I studied, independent of my denominational biases and without sectarian prejudice, the more I could see that what I was practising was not what is found in the pages of the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The differences between my own beliefs and what the Scriptures taught became more and more glaring. I began to feel hypocritical...to claim to be a Christian and not be following the teachings of Christ, the Shepherd of the sheep. But, I had a problem. I wanted the Episcopal Church to be the church described in God's Word, in name, practice and source of authority. I did NOT want to leave the Episcopal Church. My roots were sunk into her. I wasn't going to give up the Episcopal Church without a fight. And fight and argue I did. I was a antagonistic student, at times, in the Bible class I was attending. I was seeing that the Truth was different from what I wanted to believe. I did not want to change my beliefs. What would I do? I was in a terrible predicament. The folks I studied with had no denominational axe to grind. They were simply Christians only, believers in the Lord through the Word of the Lord.

Just before I departed the Episcopal Church, I wanted to give her every benefit of the severe doubts that study of the Scriptures had infused into my mind. The doubts were not about the inerrancy of God's Word, the Bible. The misgivings and suspicions were this-how could the Episcopal Church be so wrong on so many things? Impossible, I thought...and argued with myself and others as I could see passage after passage of God's Word teaching differently from the Articles of Religion (found in the back of the Book of Common Prayer, the creed book for the Episcopal Church). What I had believed to become an Episcopalian was decidedly different from what the New Testament taught I must believe in order to be a Christian. This was a crisis! I had always thought myself to be a Christian, even as an Episcopalian. I thought I would go to Heaven with all other Christians. I thought, and I thought. My soul was too important, my only eternal possession, to be mistaken about the practice of religion. Even though I didn't like what I was seeing when I compared myself and beliefs with God's Word, I still didn't want to change. But, if the Episcopal Church's teachings were not that of Christ, the Shepherd, then they would not lead me to forgiveness of sins and a home in Heaven with Almighty God. I had to be sure, before I left the Episcopal Church, that leaving her was the right thing to do. Who else could I go to for this last chance at trying to remain an Episcopalian? I went to Alex, my friend and the priest at the congregation in Essex Junction. This church did at least claim allegiance to Christ. There must be some reasonable and good explanation. I hoped there would be such.

My meeting with Alex was tense. He knew I had come for answers to discrepancies I had found between the Word of God and the teachings of the Episcopal Church. He knew I wanted to talk about the things people are to believe in order to be Episcopalians (Articles of Religion-39 of them)...and ask why they differed from what the Shepherd taught in the Word of God. I learned that following the Shepherd will bring forgiveness of sins and a home in Heaven. I had to be sure. I wanted Alex to dispel my doubts about the differences. Alex appealed to no Scripture to answer my questions. He made one final statement, "Keith, your going way back. We've left that, progressed, and we don't go by just the Bible." That sealed my thinking. There was no pretence in Alex's answer. He had no intention of supporting the proposition that in order to be a Christian one must follow only Christ's Word. In essence, Alex had told me that the Episcopal Church is free to make up her own rules and it wasn't necessary to follow the Christ, except whenever the Episcopal Church saw fit to do so. In other words, it was all right with Alex if the Episcopal Church did not follow only the voice of the Shepherd. Yet, the inspired text of the gospel, from John 10:2-5, clearly teaches that the Lord's true sheep hear His voice only and will refuse to follow the voice of a stranger, that is, the voice of him who teaches anything different from or contrary to the teaching of the Shepherd.

A crisis had arrived. Whenever one's life is in error, and it is confronted with Truth, therein arises a predicament. We can either ignore the tension between our error and the Truth; or we can be true to God, humble ourselves, and adjust (repent) our lives to be in line with God's Word. One path is sincere and the other is hypocritical or dishonest. Whichever path one chooses in this crisis, know this, that such a one will never be the same again. Truth commands our attention and will affect our consciences one way or the other. One path will lead to true blessings from God and the other will lead to a false sense of peace with God when there really is none. Peace with God is on His terms (New Testament), not ours. Forgiveness of sins and the promise of a home in Heaven is bound by the authority of God, revealed exclusively in the pages of His Word, the Bible. My crisis was real. My consternation was great. My hopes at a Truth filled meeting with Alex, wherein my error could be shown to me, had been completely dashed. I responded to his declaration about "going way back" with this statement-"Yes, Alex, I am going back, back to the Bible, the Word of God."

It is the Word of God alone that can direct the ship of our lives and secure the destiny of our eternal souls in Heaven. I'm not unique in HOW that is accomplished. That's why I am trying to share this journey with you, so you will know why I had to leave the Episcopal Church. God is not one to show partiality (see Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; 1st Peter 1:17). Truth is not arbitrary nor malleable. Truth for one person is the same Truth for the next person. God has not spoken in unclear ways, nor with "forked tongue." The Lord

has spoken one message, and He has forbidden mankind to tinker with it (see Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 7:6-9; 1st Corinthians 4:6; 2nd John 9; 2nd Timothy 2:5; Revelation 22:18-19; Proverbs 30:5-6). Please take the time to look up and read the referenced passages of Scripture from God's Word. You will see that God is not a plastic God with a "tinker toy" church, wherein men can form their own churches in neglect of the total authority of Jesus through His Word over His church.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH vs. THE TRUTH

Please read carefully the following comparisons and contrasts between what the Shepherd (Christ) has said in His Word and the practices and writings of the Episcopal Church. The contrasts are not presented in any sort of ranking order in importance. The fact that these teachings do not align with the Truth in the Bible is what I am demonstrating...that the Episcopal Church cannot be the church of Christ described in the Bible for they teach other than what the Master taught. The Episcopal Church therefore has some other "head" and follows the "voice of a stranger." Take into account...

Teaching about the sole authority in the church belonging to Christ...

Episcopal Church teaches:

"The church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 607, Articles of Religion, Article XX). The church has authority to teach whatever she wants, even though the Article continues to state otherwise. The church can write the Articles of Religion and require such to be believed. The church can name itself however she wishes, including the name Episcopal Church for the collective, and Episcopalian for the individual members. The church can vote from time to time to change their beliefs and liturgy. In other words, a human organisation is the "head" of the Episcopal Church.

Bible teaches:

"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23, NKJV). Jesus built His church just as he wanted it. He is the Head of His church, His body. His church believes and practices only what the Head directs, just as our physical bodies are directed by our physical heads. Therefore, could Christ be the "head" of the Episcopal Church, wherein His Word doesn't have sole authority? It's either the voice of the Shepherd OR the voice of a stranger. It cannot be both.

In the practice of religion, is any book other than God's Word, the Bible, authorised for Christians?

Episcopal Church's practice:

They use & bind the Book of Common Prayer with its enclosed Articles of Religion for religious practices.

Bible teaches:

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9, NKJV). The answer is, no, other teachings are not allowed, even if they come from an angel. Only the Bible is inspired by God. The Shepherd speaks to us only through His Word, regarding what we are to do to follow Him. Certainly an angel is a higher being than mere men. Yet, angels are not allowed to make

changes, deletions or additions to the Word of God. Certainly men are not allowed to do so either.

Should anyone be called "Father" as a religious title?

Episcopal Church's practice:

Their priests are called both "Father," and "Reverend." Some of their priests take on even grander and elongated titles of honour and elevation.

Bible teaches:

"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9, NKJV). Such titles were never worn by the Lord's inspired apostles, nor any Christians in the New Testament. Titles of reverence or elevation are forbidden among disciples of Jesus. Such titles are the voice of a stranger, not the Shepherd.

What should the followers of Christ be called?

Episcopal Church teaches:

"Episcopalian."

Bible teaches:

"And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26, NKJV). Any name that is not Scriptural causes divisions among those who profess to follow Christ, and is not approved by God's Word. Consider 1st Corinthians 1:10-13. It is obvious that no follower of Jesus in the New Testament ever called himself an Episcopalian. It is the voice of a stranger since it is not authorised by the Word of the Shepherd. The very use of an unscriptural name causes division. It also shows a lack of reliance upon the voice of the Shepherd. Jesus speaks only through His Word and He never directed His people to be called any denominational name whatever, either as a collective or an individual. His people as individuals will wear only His name, the only name authorised, "Christian." They wear such because they are truly His disciples, and disciples of no one else. The local church, a collective of Christians in a given locale, would not accept any unscriptural or misleading designation.

Original guilt for sin (inherited sin), does the Bible teach that babies and small children are sinners, in need of redemption?

Episcopal Church teaches:

The reason Christ came as a Man was to "reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 603, Articles of Religion, Article II).

Bible teaches:

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezekiel 18:20, NKJV). Jesus told his disciples to not hinder the little children from coming to him for "such were the kingdom of Heaven." He spoke of their innocence and humility. Episcopalian teachings on this subject is not only an addition to God's Word, but also a contradiction of the Shepherd's word. Jesus didn't come to the earth for "original guilt" of sins. Worse, God did not need to be "reconciled" to man. The process is actually the opposite of this teaching. God didn't sin, man did. God didn't need reconciling, man did/does.

Are we justified and saved by faith only?

Episcopal Church teaches:

"We are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 605, Articles of Religion, Article XI).

Bible teaches:

"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."? And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:19-24, NKJV). The Episcopal Church has presented us with another contradiction of the Shepherd's voice.

Will a "Sacramental" system (meaning special observance of the Lord's Supper and baptism) save a person?

Episcopal Church's practice and teaching:

Article XXV on page 607 definitely teaches the concept of salvation by the "sacraments." In short, a person can refuse to hear God's Word and reject submission to the Truth all his life, yet, if he was "baptised" as a baby (one of the two Episcopalian sacraments) and is a partaker in the Lord's Supper; then, he will be saved from his/her sins.

Bible teaches:

There are no verses of Scripture which use the word "Sacrament" or "Sacramental." The Bible does not even hint that there is any such thing as a "sacramental salvation." Consider, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9). The clear teaching here is that no matter how many times one might ingest wafers and wine, or have had water poured upon them as an infant, no one can ignore the Word of God and expect any remission of sins or favour from God at the Judgement Day. The teaching of the Episcopal Church on a sacramental system of salvation is the voice of a stranger and not the Shepherd.

Baptism of infants and small children is a common practice. Does such a "baptism" have power to make a soul right with God?

Episcopal Church teaches and practices:

In the Book of Common Prayer, p. 608, Article XXVII, we see the teaching of the "Baptism of young Children" is put forward. The practice is in hopes that such an infant so baptised will take upon this act as his own act when he is old enough and becomes "confirmed."

Bible teaches:

There is no verse in the New Testament which teaches any need for children to be baptised. They are not sinners. They have no inherited sin, nor guilt of sin. They do not have a sinful nature. In every case of conversion to Jesus in the New Testament, the folks who were converted were of the age of accountability. They were sinners. They were first able to HEAR the Truth. Second they were able to understand and believe the Truth. Third they examined themselves by the Truth and counted themselves as guilty of sin in the eyes of God. As a result they voluntarily and gladly submitted to being baptised (immersed-not sprinkling-is the only baptism authorised in God's Word) in water, into Christ's death (Romans 6:3-7; Acts 8:35-38; Acts 22:16; 1st Peter 3:21), for the remission of their sins. (See Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17; Acts 2:37-38). This is not a process that one person can

do on behalf of, another person, such as what happens in infant "baptism." An infant certainly cannot do it for himself, and he doesn't need to. None of the Episcopalian practice regarding sprinkling infants is in God's Word. It is the voice of a stranger.

What is the name for the Lord's church?

Episcopal Church teaches:

"Episcopal Church."

Bible teaches:

There is no one proper name given to the Lord's church, the church He died to build. However, there are descriptive phrases used in the Bible to describe His true church. Any of these phrases are appropriate to use whenever we refer to Christ's church.

"Church of the Firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23, NKJV)

"Church of Christ" (Romans 16:16, NKJV)

"The church" (Acts 11:26, NKJV)

"House of God" (1st Peter 4:17)

"Church of the living God" (1st Timothy 3:15)

"Church of God" (1st Corinthians 1:2)

Both the name, Episcopal Church, and the attached denominational hierarchy are foreign to the Word of God. Therefore, it is the voice of a stranger and not that of the Shepherd.

In actuality, I could write an entire book on this subject. I spare you that in hopes this small pamphlet might cause you to also consider the evidence for Why I Left the Episcopal Church. The discussion of these matters in this treatise is but a small portion of what could be discussed. Truly, it is just a smattering of the evidence I was confronted with over twenty-five years ago. The eternal destination of your soul may hang in the balance, hinging upon how you may treat the issue of Truth vs. error. Or, put another way, the Shepherd's voice vs. the voice of a stranger.

I left the Episcopal Church so that I could become a Christian, and only a Christian...not a perfect person, but a forgiven sinner, saved by grace and Truth. Grace is connected to Truth (see John 1:17). Grace is never disconnected from the Truth of God's Word. I wanted to follow the voice of the Shepherd and receive the forgiveness of my sins in reality, and be added to His church, the church of Christ. I wanted to be Heaven-bound. I want that for you, dear reader, desperately. Every soul is precious and invaluable. "Every" includes your soul, too.

The Episcopal Church has digressed even further since the day I left her. She now accepts practising homosexuals and others who are immoral in other ways, right into her membership roles, without repentance. Such is certainly the voice of a "stranger," and not that of the Shepherd (Romans 1:18-31; 1st Corinthians 6:9-11). These folks cannot get into Heaven while refusing the voice of the Shepherd and accepting the voice of a stranger. Jesus said that "repentance" and "remission of sins" (Luke 24:47) would be preached in His name. Repentance always comes into the picture the Shepherd paints of salvation from sin's just and eternal penalty.

I know there are good and friendly folks in the Episcopal Church. I was once a member. Some of my relatives are still members of the same. The sad part is this...they have been given the illusion of peace with God. But, the reality of peace with God only comes from following the Shepherd. So, while they are following the voice of the "stranger," they have

perhaps become resistant to the voice of the Shepherd, like I was. Worse, maybe some are even closed-minded to the Lord Jesus and His Word. So, while they live upon this earth, they think they are right with God, when they are deceived into such thinking by the voice of a stranger. Such deception from the "stranger" shuts them off from the Truth, the voice of the Shepherd, BECAUSE they think they are right with God already and need no examination by the Truth. This is both sad and needlessly tragic, having eternal consequences.

In closing, please consider the consequences of being deceived by error...while mistakenly believing it to be the Lord you are following. This underscores the need to remain open to study of the Word of God, even if it isn't what we want to hear initially. What a pity it would be to get to the end of life, and to the Judgement Day, to have been fooled into accepting the unlawful and lawless religions of the denominational world. We could go around, claiming we are doing what we do for the Lord. BUT, if His Word hasn't authorised our actions, then they are in vain (Mark 7:7). Worse, unscriptural actions, no matter how sincere we are, will not give a good answer at the final Judgement. We will still be lawless relative to God's Law if we refuse to hear and follow His pure Word, and reject the voice of the stranger. What a terrible fate, to believe error to be Truth, only to be lost for all eternity. Think about studying God's Word without denominational spectacles in place...your soul's destiny not only "may" hang in the balance, but, most certainly it does!

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves... Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall" (Matthew 7:13-15, 21-27)

My best to you in your study of the Truth. It is the "road less travelled;" but, it will "make all the difference." Be one of the few, as in the days of Noah!

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