

Why I Am Not A Nazarene

By J. R. Bronger

In June of 1972 my wife, Sue, and I were baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). Like many of our brothers and sisters in Christ we came out of religious error. Our involvement was with the Church of the Nazarene, headquartered in Kansas City.

I was not raised in the Church of the Nazarene. I joined the Nazarenes after my "conversion experience" in their Sunday evening "evangelistic service." That evening began with special singing that touched the heart with love and need. This was followed by a soul thrilling sermon concluding with an "altar call." I, with a broken heart over sin and tear stained cheeks, made my way to the altar. Falling on my knees I began to pray that God would somehow save a wretch like me. I truly wanted to accept Christ. What began with tears ended with tears. Just four short years later I left dear friends, never to be a Nazarene again.

I did not leave the Church of the Nazarene because I found the people to be insincere hypocrites. Nor did something happen to offend me personally. I left because error condemns one, regardless of sincerity (Matt. 15:14; 2 John 9-11); and the Nazarene Church was founded and does flourish upon error. Christ desired that His followers be ONE (John 17:20-21), yet the Nazarene Church exists, as does any denomination, because man disregards the prayerful wishes of Christ. These Bible truths cut through all the external good works being done by Nazarenes (Matt. 7:21-24), therefore I left the Nazarenes to become a Christian, and only a Christian. I was a member of a denomination that began less than 100 years ago. "In Oct., 1895 a number of persons under the leadership of Phineas F. Bresee, and J. P. Widney, formed the First Church of the Nazarene at Los Angeles, CA." (Church Manual, pg. 17). These men agreed on this name after about nine years during which a number of people "Interested in promoting the **Wesleyan Doctrine** and entire sanctification organized and held weekly religious services." (Ibid. pg. 1) Ignoring this secular history, I sought to be a "hyphenated Christian." I felt that Paul must have been a "Nazarene-Christian" based upon Acts 24:5, where he is called a "Ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." I even heard preachers say that since Jesus was "Called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:23), then believers should be called Nazarenes.

Jesus was a Nazarene because He was from Nazareth, and "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets." The name seems to have been given to the followers of Christ by their enemies as a name of aspersion. The early disciples were given the name Christian (Acts 11:27). This is the name that glorifies God (1 Peter 4:16). Even after Paul was accused of being a "Ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" he tried to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian not a Nazarene (Acts 26:28). How can we do that which the apostles of the Lord would not do? (Phil. 4:9). I could not, therefore I left the Nazarene Church.

I made my way to the altar, described earlier, because this is what I had been told to do. I truly wanted to be saved, expressing this desire, I was told: "Lay it all upon the altar, call on the name of the Lord, keep nothing back, pray through, leave it to God ..." I was only told what they were led to believe by their Church Manual (pg. 30). There was much shouting and loud praying. The preacher, and others gathered around me, laying their hands on me, weeping openly and praying for me. After awhile, I felt an emotional relief, like nothing I ever felt before. I jumped up and lifting hands

toward heaven, shouted: "I'm saved, thank you Jesus." I began to work diligently, I scheduled recreational events, home prayer meetings, I participated in the Nazarene Young People's Society (N.Y.P.S.). Much later I was baptized.

After reading through the book of Acts, I went to our "Minister of Music," an ordained preacher and a close personal friend, telling him I wanted to be baptized. The only reason I could give was "Peter said to be." (Acts 2:38). After consulting with the "Pastor" I chose to be immersed. This might surprise those who do not know that the Nazarene Church offers you an option. "We believe that Christian baptism is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers...Baptism being the symbol of the New Testament, young children may be baptized...Baptism may be administered by **sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.**" (Church Manual, pg. 33).

A greater injustice has not been done to the Lord's plan of salvation than done by the Church of the Nazarene. I do not know what happened to me that Sunday evening, but it did not save me. No one was ever saved by praying through at an altar. Search the New Testament and you will never find the sinner being told to pray for salvation. You will never find salvation coming as a result of shouting, crying or praying. You will never find where the Bible says that baptism is a symbol, or that one is saved at the point of faith.

One "Calls upon the name of the Lord" when he arises and is baptized as the servant of God said in Acts 22:16. Saul had been a believer for three days, he had engaged in prayer, nevertheless he had yet to have his sins washed away (Acts 9:5-11). He did not receive forgiveness until he was baptized (not sprinkled or had water poured over his head) for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16).

The same is true today. No one is saved without being baptized in water. The Nazarene Church ignores this. Consequently, they, like the Pharisees: "Shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (Matt. 23:13). How can one teach contrary to the gospel of Christ? I could not, therefore I left the Church of the Nazarene.

It was devastating to realize that I had been deceived. To discover that your sincere efforts to serve Christ are contrary to His Will (2 Jn. 9-11) is overpowering. About this time I begin listening to a call-in radio program, hosted by Ken Green, evangelist with the Southend Church of Christ, in Louisville, Kentucky. My wife and I decided to attend the services of the Southend church one Sunday morning. Having secured a substitute for my Sunday School Class, I confided in a close friend that I planned to visit the church of Christ. He responded: "You will never be back." He was correct, I left the Nazarene Church a few days later.

Letters of explanation were written to all with whom we had been close, listing many reasons why we had to separate ourselves from the Church of the Nazarene. I also wrote asking that if I was incorrect in my understanding of various doctrinal matters, to please let me know. NO ONE RESPONDED!

Within three years of my coming to Christ, I was preaching the gospel "full-time." I concluded that there must be many others like I had been; empty souls "hungering and thirsting after righteousness." Men and women, not knowing the possibility of serving Christ without denominational fetters.

Perhaps you know some Nazarene that would desire to know these truths. If so, please give them this article. Or possibly, you yearn to cast off human bondage. Then leave denominationalism! Like others before you, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Forgiveness is much too precious to reject. That is why I am not a Nazarene.