

Why I Left The Baptist People **by Harry Lewis**

I had been attending the Amo Indiana Baptist Church for some months before becoming a Christian and a member of the Plainfield church of Christ. My wife had been a member of the Baptist church for many years, and my oldest son had gotten an award Bible, before my conversion, for perfect attendance with the Baptist. As I was growing up in Southeast Missouri, the only religious instructions I received was in two Baptist Churches in my home town.

When I realized that I needed God in my life I reacted in a Baptist way doctrinally--I prayed for Jesus to come into my heart and save me. I never was officially a member of a local Baptist Church by baptism, but I would have been if I had not been studying, and trying to find in God's word what I was doing in religion. I could not find the very basic Baptist practices I was engaged in so I left them and took my stand with those who profess to be Christians only.

As I was in this period of transition, the questions I was asking my "pastor" in the Baptist Church were answered with growing hostility and evasion. The evangelist at Plainfield, (Aude McKee) on the other hand, was eager for me to ask any question and was exceptionally patient in pointing out Bible answers for them. I was hooked (Matthew 4:19)! At this point in my life I was reading the Bible on a daily basis and when I got a Bible answer to a religious question I was impressed only if it did not contradict something I had already learned. It was evident to me at that early time that the Bible ought to be treated as truth (John 17:17), and truth does not contradict truth!

The questions I was asking were centered around the identity of the church, the plan God has revealed to save souls; and His provisions for keeping men saved. There were several Baptist people with whom I was working, so there was a continuing daily discussion of religion. Some of the questions we discussed, and which I asked the Baptist preacher were:

Did John the Baptist Start The Church?

Did John the Baptist start the church, and was Jesus a Baptist? We obviously looked for some evidence to show, from the Bible, that John started a church of any kind before the death of Jesus. More specifically, we wanted to know if there was a 'Baptist Church' revealed at all! Many arguments were offered: Some said there was a plan of salvation early on (John 3:3-5). We heard about the collection Judas kept in the bag (John 12:6; 13:29). We heard the argument that men had a savior before Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (Matthew 1:21). Some thought the fact that the gospel was mentioned was proof that the church existed (Mark 1:1).

These all sounded hollow, however, when we read such verses as Ephesians 1:7. Salvation takes BLOOD (Hebrews 9:22)! That blood purchased the Church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:22-25). The remission of sins had to have a beginning, and Jesus told us when it was (Luke 24:47). "Saved" and "remission of sins" actually mean the same thing, and remission of sins did not begin until after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When, however, remission of sins did begin, Jesus added those who were being saved to HIS church (Acts 2:47). The church belonging to Christ did not

exist without the blood which bought it, and when it did come into being Jesus was adding the saved (i.e. Those who had remission of sins) to it!

When we add to all this the fact that Jesus, and not John the Baptist is called the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus, and not John the Baptist, was called the foundation of it (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20-21). Not once is John the Baptist mentioned in connection with the origin, headship, leadership, lawgiver or any other office in the church. It must be said at this point, if John started a church of any kind it is obvious that it is not the church that Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18-19. The future tense of this passage cannot be lost upon the honest truth seeker!

Salvation by faith only?

Of course, the plan of salvation taught by my Baptist friends was one of "faith only." On pages 61-62 of the Hiscox Baptist Manual I ran into a problem with this doctrine. Page 61 says salvation is "wholly of grace," but on the very next page, it was pointed out to me, this same book says "justification, includes pardon of sins" and is "solely through faith." Up to that time the Baptist people with whom I had talked said they did not have any book except the Bible. When I realized this was not exactly true, and I had to deal in open discussion with the manual, there was one embarrassment after another. I had to admit that if there was any difference between "saved" and "justified, with remission of sins" I could not find it.

Just what does the Bible say about "grace only" or "faith only" salvation? Well it did not take long for a young Mormon to show me, from the Bible, that I was in over my head on "faith only." He turned to James 2:24 where we read "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." I caved in! What would you have done, my Baptist friend? With Baptist doctrine I could not even answer the Mormons. Needless to say I began to lose faith in the doctrines I had been taught. One answer kept popping up on the lips of those who were asked for help. The standard answer was "doctrine doesn't really matter." When, however, 2 John 9-11 was discussed I did not even make that response, for it was easy to see that without the doctrine of Christ no one could have God. Do you really want God, or do you want a lame excuse? Beloved friend, please answer this question tonight, out loud, after you turn out the light!

Once saved, always saved?

When my Baptist friends learned I was moved by faith to "accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior" by prayer for salvation, they began to advance the idea that I was saved and could not be lost. This may be a comfortable doctrine for a person who has never read the Bible, but it has an empty ring to those who were studying the Bible every day with men of several denominational persuasions. After they chop your head off about half a dozen times, you begin to fear the sword (Ephesians 6:17). There is one thing we all must guard against, that is fear of learning the truth (Galatians 4:16).

I had precious few opportunities to feel good about truth when I was trying to defend Baptist doctrine, and the "once in grace always in grace" doctrine was no exception. I had just read both letters written by Peter, but 2 Peter 2:20-22 was a shocker for me in relation to the "once saved always saved" idea. One of my Baptist friends was asked about this passage, and he

said "God never called his people hogs and dogs!" That was rich! The problem is, God was talking to those who had "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If these were not children of God, I would not know how to describe them. Remember, truth does not contradict truth!

I found folks who said "you cannot fall from grace," but a friend of mine pointed out 1 Corinthians 10:11-12 and Galatians 5:4, so Acts 11:17 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 took on a whole new meaning. The scriptures demanding faithfulness to God really began to mean a great deal to me when I realized the extent to which the Baptist teachers were willing to carry the "no fall" doctrine.

A man I debated on the apostasy question admitted that he believed the statement made by Sam Morris many years ago. That statement says "We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul. All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger...The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul...The way I live has nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of my soul. (Admitted to be what Mr. Gerald Smith, a Baptist preacher believed-2nd night, 1st negative, Smith-Lewis debate.)

There is no doubt in my mind that this Baptist preacher really believed what he said. He thinks the word of God really teaches this. He has heard it so long that it sounds like truth to him. His teachers hide behind closed doors and teach such rank error year after year, and their people feel hurt when they are challenged to prove it from the Book (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Friends, when you teach things such as these, you better teach that doctrine doesn't matter.

The fact is, however, any doctrine which teaches that lies are as good as truth, hate is as good as love, adultery is as good as faithfulness in marriage, murder and idolatry are just as good as serving the only true God, is not in the doctrine of Christ. Those who have not the doctrine of Christ cannot have God (2 John 9-11). I thank the God of heaven that we live in a country in which we can freely study and discuss the word of God. It was as a result of just such a free and open discussion that I learned and obeyed the truth.

Obeying the truth

A little over two years after becoming just a Christian (1964) I was asked to begin preaching at the Plainfield church of Christ, where I had obeyed the gospel (1964). In early 1980's I debated a Baptist preacher on the plan of salvation and the apostasy question. Words cannot express the joy and satisfaction of knowing the truth, and having an opportunity to defend it in the face of opposition. That is especially true when I realize that I could have so easily been on the other side. I realize if that ten years had been spent among the Baptist people it would have been much more difficulty for me to have obeyed the truth. I thanked the

God of heaven many times during and after those debates that I had "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

I have many friends, and much family among the Baptists to this day. I love them, and pray for them; but I no longer delude myself into believing that very many of them will change. Only those people who heed the admonitions in God's word will escape from Satan's errors. They will have to "study-be diligent" (2 Timothy 2:15). They will have to learn not to go beyond (2 John 9-11). They will need to learn to call Bible things by Bible names, and do Bible things in Bible ways (1 Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17). They will have to read or listen to the reading of God's word with understanding (Ephesians 3:3-4; Revelation 1:3; 2:7; 1 Timothy 4:15-16; etc.).

They will need to obey from the heart that form of doctrine which the apostles delivered (Romans 6:16-18). Jesus knew, however, that relatively few men and women would ever do these necessary things (Matthew 7:13-14). Dear reader, I hope and pray to God that YOU will!