

“Why I Left Denominationalism”

By: Gary W. Summers

From childhood until about the age of fifteen I attended a denomination. No, there was no choice in the matter, and I did not enjoy it--even though I had sung in the choir. Part of the reason I disliked the worship ordeal was that it was very formal, and I had to be quiet--and still, which is tough for youngsters. But even as I reasonably conquered the temptation of restlessness, the hour was no less enjoyable. As soon as I could get away with it, I quit attending.

Probably, it would have been difficult to explain what turned me off about it, being as yet unknowledgeable in the Scriptures. A general impression would have been all that could be cited rather than detailed specifics. The entire worship experience could be characterized as artificial, superficial, and formalistic--from the organ music which silenced everyone who entered into the "sanctuary" to the "responsive" readings (which required little thought), the entire hour was programmed.

Did I make any effort to learn about any other religious group? No, because I foolishly bought into the devil's uninspired notion that "all churches are alike." I became one of those creatures that believes in God but has no use for "church" connections or activities. None of that "goody-goody" stuff for me. Things remained that way for about three years when the cute little teenage girl who is now my wife invited me to attend worship with her.

My motive in agreeing to go with her was less than honorable. In fact, my mind was already made up that we would go through the perfunctory motions of worship, and then I would explain to her what was wrong with everything. She would probably be surprised at such hostility, but so be it. Ironically, I was the one who was surprised. Whoever said that all "churches were alike" had lied.

Instead of artificiality there was genuineness. Friendliness abounded rather than strict formalism. In place of a sophisticated speech was a sermon delivered with conviction. Instead of superficiality there was vitality. My presuppositions having been blown to smithereens, I grew interested in what was going on but remained cautiously skeptical (looking for opportunities to catch these people in some kind of hypocrisy--which never happened).

As time passed by, I came to understand what the differences were between the Lord's church and denominations. For the first time I was taught the gospel and that I needed to obey it. Wonderful fellowship, meaningful religion, and encouragement to obey were excellent drawing cards, but the clincher was the emphasis upon truth.

The Truth Revealed in the Bible

Why it did, I don't know, but truth mattered. Perhaps it was the fact that children were taught that telling the truth was right and lying was wrong that made truth seem important. In conjunction with that, I was fortunate enough to grow up in an age when respect for authority was still being taught (if not consistently practiced). Truth was authoritative, and all forms of authority must be respected.

If the Bible didn't mention Christmas and Easter (and it doesn't), then that settled the matter; they were not to be observed as religious holidays. If the Bible said, "Sing," then that eliminated the use of instruments. If the Bible said, "Go ye," then it was time to be evangelistic. If the Bible said there was but one gospel (Gal. 1:8-9), then all others were false. It was that simple. It still is. Its importance has not changed. Proverbs 23:23 still says: "Buy the truth, and do not sell it; also

wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." The words of Jesus have not changed; it is still the case that all who continue in His word are His disciples indeed. They shall know the truth, and the truth will set them free (John 8:31-32).

Along with everything else we need to communicate to those outside of Christ is this fundamentally crucial attitude of seeking the truth. Ask people what they look for in a "church," or ask them to select a word that would characterize the "church" they attend. They will think of several descriptions, but they will not describe themselves as "a people that exalts, searches for, and abides by truth." We ought to plant some seeds here. "Does your church emphasize truth?" "What is the authority in your church?" "What is more important than truth?" No matter what is given (spirituality, for example), it must be derived from the Scriptures.

We must challenge people's thinking with things that we used to say, "Will you study with me and show me from the Bible why you do what you do? I will be happy to do the same with you." "Neither of us has anything to fear from truth.

If our idea is right, fine. And if we learn that we were mistaken about something, so much the better. In either case, we have nothing to lose and everything to win"

One final word. There are those among us today who would remove the emphasis upon truth. Why? They say the emphasis on truth has led to division. So? People getting married has led to divorce. Shall we just commit fornication?

Likewise, shall we just give up our distinctive stance for truth because some have had more zeal than accuracy? If God's people shy away from the pursuit of truth, we will have nothing to offer those who are lost. We would be no different than any other religious group. If God's people choose to walk in darkness, the world will not be made any brighter.