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My Experience as a Pentecostal.

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

My Experience as a Pentecostal.

INTRODUCTION

Though I am not in the Pentecostal churches today and many of my doctrinal beliefs have changed this testimony is not about condemning all Pentecostals since I did enjoy many years of fellowship and more important than this, I found the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace and love of God during those years. Today my mindset concerning my Christian family is that I belong to the Global family of Christ which is made up of faithful brothers and sisters from all religious institutions, demolitions and churches including many who do not belong to any religious organisation and do not attend any established church building. I rest in Jesus words:

- My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27)

Since Jesus knows who belongs to his global family, I don't need to judge another Christians salvation. If all we do is set our focus on what is wrong in a church we could condemn every church on planet earth, I believe in sharing both what is good about a church and sharing what may not be so and would never condemn (as some do) every believer who is in a Christian church and belongs to a Christian organisation or institution simply because I may not agree with certain teachings their church, organisation or institution may hold.

AN INDIVIDUAL STORY AND EXPERIENCE

Since this testimony goes back at least forty-five years it certainly would not apply to everyone. It is my individual story and my experience only. Many ideas, goals, teachings and even the focus of many churches have changed over the years therefore much of this testimony may not be applicable in much of today's modern Christianity. This testimony is focusing on faithful Pentecostals who have a true desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. I am sharing it because I am hoping it will help those in other faiths understand the motivation of the heart of Christians who love Christ, understand the message of the cross, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and that we are only saved by faith and by God's grace but may have a different understanding and interpretation of other verses or details of the Bible. Though I had a good family, good friends and a good life and basically enjoyed it when I was twenty I began to search for more meaning to life, I thought there must be something more than just working, partying sleeping and dying so I started reading books on ESP and self-hypnosis, believing at that time that the something more must be some type of supernatural power of the mind. I read many books on ESP, self-hypnosis, the power of positive thinking and anything relating to the human mind until I read a book by Billy Graham called, *World Aflame*.

1

Though there may be some things in the book today that I might not agree with, at that time in my life when I had no knowledge of God at all Billy Graham's book, "World Aflame," showed me that the messages and prophecies of the Bible were just as real today, as they were two-thousand years ago, this amazed me. Since I had always thought, "What possible use could a book written two-thousand years ago have for anyone today?" I read more books by the same author and later went and brought a black leather-bound King James Bible with rice paper pages and gold edges. At that time, I mistakenly believed if the Bible didn't have these qualities it was only a book and not a proper Bible. Then for about eighteen months each night, with the aid of the Daily Union Scripture booklets I began to read the Bible I had brought. Later I had a desire to go to a church, I went to one that was close to me, but no one talked about God once the service was finished and I had a multitude of questions I wanted to ask. The

minister wore a black robe and white collar so I thought, "What would he know about me?" I was still living a worldly life. After about six weeks of attending this church a friend took me to an Assembly of God church. To my pleasant surprise they did nothing else but talk about God, their excitement about knowing God thrilled me and after two-weeks a beautiful married couple asked if I would like them to come around and teach me the Bible, I was thrilled and excited to say the least.

MY CONVERSION

After attending the AOG (Assemblies of God) church for about six weeks, I responded to an altar call fully aware I was a sinner before God and on that altar call, I received Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour, soon afterward I was fully immersed in water and baptized. There was singing, tongue talking and all sorts of things going on around me, but none of it mattered, because I knew that this was between me and God, it was not a decision I had made easily. I knew it was a total surrender of my life to God and to Christ at that moment.

Ever since that day my life changed, God filled my heart with His love, His mercy, His grace, and clothed me with the righteousness of Christ, which I certainly was not worthy of and even now after all these years of walking with God I am still fully aware that I am made righteous before God only because of what Christ did for me at Calvary. Since the day that Jesus Christ saved me from my sin, I have never again wondered what life was all about. Jesus ended my search for the meaning to life.

Jesus said:

- All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37).

2

Through all my failings, trials, troubles and hardships of life, I am constantly amazed at how faithful the Lord has been to me with these words.

Following are seven things that attracted me to the Pentecostal faith nearly forty-five years ago:

1. Their understanding of God's grace and the atmosphere of joy.
2. They were not formal, legalistic or judgmental, but accepted people as they were.
3. Their worship was not solemn and make me feel like I was attending a funeral service, but was joyful (probably because their focus was more upon the celebration of Christ's resurrection rather than his brutal, bloody and cruel death).
4. They believed God in His time would change those who were seeking Christ, as they absorbed the teachings of the Lord and the apostles and grew spiritually in the love of Christ and the grace of God.
5. Their messages related to present day life and were not simply some intellectual historical event that had no bearing or application to my life, my faith or the world today.
6. They constantly talked with excitement about God and the Bible even when they were not at church.
7. Their underlying belief was that those who belonged to Christ would develop a greater and closer loving and intimate relationship to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and from this love they would endeavour to live a life that honours God and brings glory to the name of Jesus.

When I was in the Pentecostal church, they taught that within all of us there is an impulse or proneness in human nature to sin (to go the wrong way) (i.e., selfishness, ego, pride, inward thoughts of lust, anger, envy, jealousies and such like things). Since we all recognised these things within our own nature, we were always very conscious that we were a fallen creature before a Holy God. This belief, made us fully devoted to Christ, by love because without him we were totally aware that we would be separated from God the Father because of this fallen nature and have no hope of salvation outside of Christ.

SATAN AND EXCUSES TO SIN

Since moving away from Pentecostalism and visiting other churches I have heard many say that Pentecostals use Satan and God's grace as an excuse to sin. They say that those in the Pentecostal faith lay the blame on Satan and do not hold themselves accountable for their own behaviour. This was certainly not true of those I knew in the churches I was committed to. As sincere Pentecostals we were very clearly taught the following words of James:

- Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire (James 1:14)

We did not see Satan or our understanding of sin dwelling in human nature as an excuse to sin, nor did we ever think that because we were saved by grace, we were free to live a lifestyle of sin. Though my intellectual understanding of many Scriptures at that time was misguided my commitment, heartfelt passion and love for God was real and the desire of those I fellowshiped with were truly repentant if they did wrong and all who I knew desired to live a better life before God. From my experience I can only say that all the sincere Pentecostals I knew who were seeking God had a deep longing to change and be more like Christ and desired to do what is right before God (of course there are exceptions), but the majority were motivated by the following two things:

1. The fact that God is a Holy God, therefore to please Him one should endeavour to live a holy life themselves.
2. Jesus Christ is the example to every believer and to live the Christian life is to aim to live as Christ did.

3

Since coming into a better and clearer understanding of the Bible my faithfulness emotions, affections, passion and sincerity for Christ and God have not changed, so what is different some might ask? Simply this, my intellectual strength is far stronger and because of that I have a greater sense of peace and contentment. This is because I now not only have a far greater clarity of thinking so there is no confusion, but I also have complete mental confidence and assurance in the entire Bible, not just based on faith, but also on intellectual understanding of the entire message from Genesis to Revelation. I fully understand the promise of God and the big picture of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and it is an absolutely amazing and miraculous eternal story. Previously, I had an understanding of the Bible, but it was like a Jigsaw puzzle that had all the corner and edge pieces in place, but some of the middle pieces were not. Now the puzzle is complete, from the beginning to the end all the pieces are in place and it is a wonderful story from Genesis to Revelation. The difference could be likened to watching a movie we love on a small oval screen in black and white or watching the same movie in Technicolor, my previous understanding of the Bible was like watching a movie that I loved in black and white (though I didn't know it at the time), but now though the Bible is the same, it is like seeing it in Technicolor and on a wide-screen.

Forty-five years ago, I spoke in tongues (the kind of babble heard in some churches today) for seventeen-years, believing it was a private prayer language given to me by the Holy Spirit. This belief in the mysticism of speaking in tongues (babble) I believe opened my mind to accept many other misguided concepts and doctrines that we were taught and I guess are still being taught in some churches today. In those early years I was very naive and believed any man who stood behind a church pulpit must know the Bible better than I do. At that time, I wrongly believed that men who had been to Bible colleges, had studied and been granted a religious certificate must be right in everything they teach so, I naively embraced their teaching on all things. I was taught that intellect, common sense and reason are all hindrances to the Holy Spirit. This teaching sounded reasonable at the time, but obviously it was based on a wrong understanding of Paul's teaching of various verses, but at this time I put too much trust in man and not enough in myself and God to guide me in understanding His word. This mistaken teaching was based on Paul's teaching that the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit, and the verse that says the Gospel is foolishness to those that are perishing. Based on a wrong understanding of these verses, I was taught that man's intellect, common sense and reason cannot be expected to understand the modern-day teaching regarding speaking in tongues (babble), because it is spiritual. We were taught the mind cannot understand spiritual things and that man's intellect, common sense and reason are actually hindrances to the Spirit.

I obviously now see how dangerous this teaching was. It opened my mind up to embrace all sorts of things. As soon as logic, common sense or intellect tried to warn that something was wrong, I didn't listen to it, because I genuinely wanted the things that were of the Spirit of God. During those early years some groups believed you could not be saved without speaking in tongues, but the churches I belonged to believed it was a second blessing to salvation. However, it was believed that speaking in tongues (the kind of babble heard in some churches today) was the outward evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Some (not all) reasoned that if a person speaks in tongues (babble) and confess to believe in Christ, they must be saved regardless of any doctrine they may hold, because they have what we believed (at that time) was the indwelling Holy Spirit. During that time the best way to witness to me would have been to concentrate on one topic and stay on it until we both either agreed or agreed not to agree. But what happened in most cases was that whoever was trying to show me I was in error, would try to cover far too many topics in the brief time they had which meant they never covered any topic fully.

LOOKING BACK

Looking back I can see that when I felt I was being threatened by someone telling me what I believed was wrong, without realising it I would unconsciously switch the conversation to another theme or subject, so I was never brought to a final conclusion on any one issue and therefore never had to question whether what I believed was true or not. Though I had a passion and zeal for the Lord and certainly taught the message of the cross, the message of salvation and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus correctly there would be other things that I was teaching that I don't agree with today. Does this mean I was an evil person I don't think so, consider Paul for a moment: he was cruelly and brutally persecuting the church believing he was acting on God's behalf it wasn't until Christ appeared to him that he was confronted to face his error and change his direction. Now Jesus didn't appear to me, but he did bring circumstances and events into my life and used a very dear friend to persuade me to question all that I had been taught, but many years passed before I began to question. Now there is no-doubt in my mind that there are many good and faithful brothers and sisters in churches today who for whatever reason have not yet been inspired to question what they are being taught, but that is not to say they won't be as I was in years to come.

I mention this because there is a danger in the teaching of some churches in the global Christian community that has the potential to develop harshness in the heart toward those who have a passion for Christ and faithfully follow him, but happen to hold a different view of certain Scriptures. This harshness often develops a spirit of:

- Separation, superiority and elitism.
- A dismissive attitude.
- Quarrels and arguments.

To avoid this attitude toward others who may belong to the global body of Christ when sharing our faith with those who differ we should always use the following formula of Timothy since it applies to every Christian that has a desire to share their faith.

- The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

We can witness without love, but we cannot be a good witness without it, the apostles and Christ were powerful witnesses, because they loved and cared about all people (perhaps with the exception of the prideful religious hypocrites). We should always keep in mind the testimony of Paul. He had a love and a zeal for God and a great compassion for what he believed God wanted, but he was grossly misguided intellectually which resulted in him persecuting the body of Christ. God recognised Paul's love and zeal; He did not condemn Paul, but showed him a better way. Though Paul's heartfelt love, passion and zeal for the immortal invisible Almighty God the creator of all things and source of all life remained the same, his life and behaviour totally changed once he had a clear understanding of God and His plan of salvation through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the Christian community would be a better witness to the world if we all treated other faithful Christians who have a zeal for God as God treated Paul. Especially since the global body of Christ is made up of people from diverse nations, cultures and languages with different customs and traditions and not only do we all come to God with varying levels of education (especially religious education) and with various hurts, wounds and past baggage, but we are also all on a spiritual journey in Christ growing in knowledge, faith and the fruits of the Spirit. Every believer is going to be at a different level in their strength of faith and understanding of the Bible, in their perception of what the Christian life requires and their level of maturity and closeness to God. Some will be strong in Christ while others will be infants living from the flesh and acting in a human way. From my personal experience it appears (to me at least) that in almost all-religious organisations there are the following three groups of people:

1. Those who are spiritually strong and self-motivated these people don't need others to motivate them to seek God; they do their own reading and seek out places of fellowship and worship where they know they can spiritually grow.
2. Those who are faithfully seeking God, but it is a struggle, they need encouragement and help.
3. Those who are indifferent to how their life impacts on God's honour and Christ's good name and the Christian faith, these people have no interest in taking the time to seek God on their own, but they do attend to the outward religious stuff because it is what is expected of them.

Because of these things I personally believe that blanket judgments and statements should never be made that condemn the multitude because of the bad behaviour of a few, neither should the majority be judged or condemned because of the poor testimony of some individuals in a religious organisation, church or group.

IN CONCLUSION

Perhaps some might be wondering, "Was I saved on that day I was water baptised?" I know people who would love me to say, "No I was not saved until I understood the Bible from Genesis to Revelation," but my honest answer to the question is simply this, "If I was not saved on that day when I was water baptised, I am not saved today." Nothing has changed my passion, devotion, commitment to follow Christ and love for him is the same today as it was when I surrendered my life to him. I have come to believe that we all begin as spiritual infants and that our spiritual journey will take us through deserts, wildernesses, beautiful oasis, through dark forests and forests full of the most glorious light until the Lord we all love who is missing from the bloodstained cross returns in glory to gather us to himself. May you continue to grow in faith and wonder and may the Lord bring many blessings into your home.

For further information concerning tongues see the title:

- 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

In, Commentary NT (ON WEBSITE MENU).

- My Experience of Speaking in Tongues.

In, Testimony (ON WEBSITE MENU).

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