

# Why I Left the Episcopalian Church

by Jeffrey L. Smith

On Wednesday, January 29th, 1986, at age 27 I was immersed for the remission of sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit after confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ. Although I had considered myself a Christian for many years, this was when I conformed to the gospel plan of salvation. Prior to that I had accepted several mutations taught by diverse denominations. Allow me to briefly describe my journey to the truth from the denominational world, and especially from the Episcopalian Church.

My earliest religious recollections involve attending a Baptist Church in Corning, NY, with my grandparents who faithfully drove by our house Sunday mornings to bring us to services. At age six my family moved 72 miles east to Binghamton, NY. When my mother joined the First United Methodist Church of Chenango Bridge they informed her that her children should have been baptized (sprinkled) soon after birth. This had not been done because the Baptists wait until the age of twelve or so to baptize. At their behest my sister and I were sprinkled at the ages of 5 and 7, respectively, and became members of the Methodist church.

My Methodism became less methodical in my teen years. As many teen boys whose fathers don't attend regularly I began to forsake the assembly in favor of more enjoyable Sunday morning pursuits: sleeping-in, cartoons, and western movies. By senior high I put more stock in scientific, evolutionary explanations than in religion. In four years of college I can remember attending services only once, when visiting a friend. If I wasn't a confirmed atheist I was, at least, a practical atheist.

Soon after graduation from college and beginning work as a Process Engineer for Corning Incorporated in Corning, NY, a fellow engineer invited me to join the choir in which he sang. I tried it, enjoyed it, and soon became a member of Christ Episcopal Church in Corning, NY. About this time I married Jean Ellen Barnes in the Methodist Church she had attended all her life. Upon establishing our home in Corning we placed our membership with the Episcopalian Church. They honored our Methodist baptisms and joining required us only to stand up front of the congregation when the Bishop came by and restate our belief in Christ.

I committed to being a faithful Episcopalian. I attended services regularly. I made most of the choir practices and sang in the choir each Sunday. Jean and I taught a Sunday School Class for teens. I attended a morning Bible Study before work for a time. I attended Ash Wednesday and Good Friday services. And the highest form of service I was permitted was serving on the rector search committee when we were looking for a new priest. I had reformed.

During this time a critical step in my search for God happened quite apart from my involvement with the Episcopalian church. My wife had become involved with the Corning Christian Women's Club. A few husbands of members decided to study evidences on their own. I met

regularly with three men from other denominations and systematically studied the evidence for considering the Bible to be God's word. As a result I became convicted that the Bible was indeed inspired and inerrant. I began reading the Bible daily. All this served to bring me near to my God and His will prepare me for a bold change.

In the fall of 1985 I accepted a transfer with Corning Incorporated to Paden City, WV, population 1,800. Our experience with several denominations had led us to a general approval of all forms of Christianity. We were open minded enough to acknowledge that a better form of worship might exist and took the transfer as a opportunity to look for it. We attended the Methodist and Episcopalian Churches in the area and then searched geographically. The closest church building to our new house served the Paden City Church of Christ. I first attended their services alone since Jean and the family, two children by this time, remained in New York.

If there is love at first sight between man and woman, couldn't there be love at first sight between man and the truth? I vividly recall memories of my first service with the Paden City Church of Christ. Notably absent were robes for the preacher, a choir, an organ or piano, use of the Lord's prayer, Prayer Books, and anything "canned." Notably present were heartfelt singing, prayers, a lesson that made sense, repeated admonitions to open my Bible, and genuine hospitality after services. One family asked me home for dinner after services. It was love at first sight.

I would like to say that I left the Episcopalian Church for cerebral reasons after a thorough study of their doctrine. But their doctrinal flaws appeared only in retrospect. After becoming a Christian I looked back and found that their Articles of Faith include salvation by faith only, infant baptism, and a host of other errors. But that's not what converted me. What struck me most and drew me toward the Church of Christ was the genuineness of their worship. It felt right. I now know that feelings can deceive, but feelings can be right. Worshipping with the Church of Christ felt right.

On that Wednesday in 1986, after evening services Jean and I told the preacher, Harry Rice, that we wanted to join that church. He said that we would have to talk. He and Elaine, his wife, came up to our house directly after services. He began to ask me questions and point me to answers in the Bible. When we got to the topic of baptism he showed me that sprinkling for baptism was not the Bible way. I was stunned. I thought I was a Christian, but could plainly see in God's inspired, inerrant word that I had not been baptized correctly. We returned to the building and I was baptized at about 11 p.m. My dear wife complied about ten days later.

My experience reminds me of baseball illustration. Suppose a batter hits a home run, runs the bases, is congratulated by his teammates, and is sitting proudly in the dugout when one informs him he neglected to touch home plate. Does he think he scored? Yes. Did he score? No. Not until he remedies that technicality. What does he do? He quickly returns to home plate and rectifies his error. So it was with me.

Friends, have you accepted, as I did, a mutation of the gospel plan? Sprinkling is not Bible baptism. Immersion of penitent believers is the Bible way. The Episcopalian Church endorses sprinkling, which the Lord did not authorize. Use of creeds, choirs, organs, and prescribed prayers cannot compete with genuine and heartfelt worship. For these and other reasons I left the Episcopalian Church and practice New Testament Christianity. Won't you?