

Why I Left Institutionalism

by Rick Christian

1978 was a very important year in my life. Several things occurred which not only affected my future but also my present. I turned 20 years of age, I met and married my first wife, Sharon of 4 years until her passing to her reward, and I left institutionalism. Being very honest, when I left institutionalism it was not my intentions to leave institutionalism for I didn't know what institutionalism was. Problems had occurred at the church I was a member of in Ravenswood, WV and I was just fed up with the problems. My dad was a deacon and was involved in trying to get the problems resolved. It seemed there was constantly a gripe and a grumble and I got tired of it. I was living at home with my parents, parents who had reared me from birth to respect them and had faithfully taken me to church all my life. As a result of this teaching, I had obeyed the gospel in 1976. The decision had been made by my parents to go to church at Sand Street in Ravenswood. Now, one of the most difficult challenges of my life confronted me when I reasoned with myself that my parents were wrong. You see, to me, they were going to that "anti" church. Now, did I know what "anti" meant?? No, not at all, but I just knew they were wrong for going to "that church." Why "that church?"

In 1972, a split occurred in Ravenswood when about thirty some folks left and began a separate congregation. Their reason for leaving was over what they believed to be an unscriptural appointment of elders at Kaiser and Douglas. It later became apparent that they were standing against other doctrinal issues as well, such as unscriptural church cooperation, social gospel, Herald of Truth. etc.

With a little rebellion in my heart, which was wrong, I decided to go elsewhere but not to Sand Street. I still was not happy with this kind of arrangement. I began to notice how my parents were coming home from church without all the griping and grumbling. They were enjoying church services. After only a couple of weeks, a gospel meeting was being held at Sand Street. Knowing of the problems at the Kaiser and Douglas congregation, brother Mike Willis preached lessons on institutionalism. I took one of my friends from Kaiser and Douglas with me to the meeting and came in and sat in the back. I was received well. I heard brother Willis preach on the orphan homes issue. It made me think. Not just think but study. I left Kaiser and Douglas. Why? What did I begin to see?

I began to see that things we were practicing at Kaiser and Douglas, under the guise of good works, had no authority from the scriptures. As one brother said one time, "When it's good, it's good," to justify a work being done, I had fallen under that same false presumption. A busing program, Vacation Bible School with KoolAid, Cookies, Estes Rockets being shot off in the building. Galloping cowboy members, benevolent rooms, supporting orphan homes from the church treasury, gimmicks, gadgets and gizmos I had thought were good works. I needed to be shown that Titus 1:16, Titus 3:1 and Ephesians 2:10 establish that a good work is based upon

obedience to God's commandments and not the ideas of man. I had been deceived into thinking that as long as you got them there it had to be a good work. Where in God's book is anything other than the gospel to be used to encourage people to come to the Lord???

In study, it became more clear why the word "anti" was used so freely. "Anti" was used to truly cloud the real issue. It was used to say "that church" was opposed to supporting orphans, "that church" was opposed to church cooperation, "that church" was opposed to evangelism on the radio and T.V. and "that church" was opposed to supporting colleges. This was not the truth at all for you see, that church was simply establishing everything she did by book, chapter and verse with a healthy and godly respect for the silence of the scriptures. Thus, upon further examination I found "that church" was opposed to orphans for the Bible says in James 1:27 that this is an individual responsibility to provide for fatherless and widows. At Kaiser and Douglas we were never taught the distinction between individual responsibility and church collective responsibility when the Bible is clear on such matters. I Timothy 5:16-"If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." This wasn't so hard for me to see for we've been making the same argument with John 15 on the vine and the branches that the branches are not DENOMINATIONS or CONGREGATIONS but INDIVIDUALS!! (Refer also to Galatians 6:10) These brethren had not one bit of lack of love for orphans.

Neither did that church oppose church cooperation. They just simply followed by the example in the Bible where in Benevolence when a church was unable to take care of their needy saints, (and churches in the New Testament were charged to take care of saints alone, (rc)), each church acting autonomously sent relief as they had ability to the church in need. There was no sponsoring church arrangement!! Where in the New Testament was there ever a sponsoring church arrangement? I couldn't find one and still can't find one. (Please refer to the following passages: Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:24-28; I Corinthians 8 and II Corinthians 9).

In the area of evangelism, at Kaiser and Douglas, emphasis was placed on the importance of supporting the Herald of Truth, a world-wide television and radio program overseen by brethren in Texas at that time and supported by brethren from other places. Is there anything wrong with preaching on the radio or television I thought? NO. Matthew 28:19,20. So what could possibly be wrong with this? Answer: Where is the scripture for one church to take on a work which it is unable to fully support itself? Where is the scripture for a church to develop an institution, any institution with a board of directors to do it, the churches work, for it under the disguise that it's under the oversight of the elders? This was what was wrong with the Herald of Truth. The New Testament shows that when preachers were supported in evangelism, the money was sent directly to them, not to some missionary society or some organization or even the church, the money was sent directly to the evangelist. This is the pattern for us to follow in evangelism. This is the Bible authority! (II Corinthians 11:8; Phillippians 4:15-16).

Was "that church" opposed to colleges? NO , NOT AT ALL. Colleges supported and ran by churches? Yes. Where is the authority for such? God expects his church to train the preachers and teachers of today and tomorrow and his plan works and will work. How? 2 Timothy 2:2- "And the things that thou (Timothy, present generation, rc) has heard of me (Paul (rc), among many witnesses the same commit thou to faithful men, (present generation (rc), who shall be able to teach other also (next generation (rc). When we let the church be what God designed it to be (Eph. 3:10), then it will accomplish everything God wants it to in the realm of teaching, edification and benevolence. (Eph. 4:11,12)

"Yea, but "that church" doesn't believe in providing entertainment for the young people." I found out that was wrong; for, you see, they just didn't provide any entertainment of any kind for young or old from the church treasury. Where is the authority for a congregation to fund roller skating parties or bowling parties or sports teams etc. That's all they were asking at "that church" and that's all we must ask, Where is the authority. I see where God created another institution besides the church to take care of the social aspects of individuals and that is the home and family.

(Ephesians 6:1-4). Paul drew a plain line between a place for social and a place for spiritual in I Corinthians 11:34-"And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation...." and Romans 14:17-"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Friend, I used to hear preachers stand and tell us of following the Bible in everything we do. I just assumed we were doing that at Kaiser and Douglas and I assumed wrong. In the area of our salvation I was taught the importance of doing what the Bible says. I was told I must follow the pattern God has given in salvation. I was told I must follow by the pattern God has given in worship. This is true. Friend, how in the world can it be right then when we deviate from the pattern God has given in his book on those things mentioned above.

I left institutionalism because of a love for the truth and not a love for man. I Corinthians 4:6- "...that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written...." When I left, I was withdrawn from and shunned by those of Kaiser and Douglas but I desired to follow by the truth more than the errors of men.

Friend, don't assume you're right, search the scriptures. (Acts 17:10,11). Have a good and honest heart and search to see by what authority you are doing a work. If it be by heaven, then hold on to it, if it be by men, then seek to change it and if you can't, leave and worship with those who seek to speak where the bible speaks and be silent where the bible is silent. They're still out there and I'm proud to be a part of the one true church of our Lord.