TESTIMONY

I was not religious in my youth. My family attended church sporadically until I was about the age of eight. We did have Bibles in our home, and I was an avid reader. When I experienced times of distress in my teens, I would read it in hopes of finding some encouragement. I was especially interested in the Book of Revelation and that was where I spent most of my time. When I was 15, I drew a picture of Jesus standing before the throne of God with seven stars in his right hand (Revelation 1:16). I am not certain why I drew this picture or what significance it had for me, but I still have it to this day.

When I left my home in Virginia and moved to Missouri, I stopped reading the Bible and lost all interest in the things of God. My father and I would often watch Jim Bakker in the early eighties as we found his show uproariously funny. His show came on around the time of the Benny Hill and this time became our comedy hour. We would watch Jim and Tammy Faye bilk their followers out of their money by doing such things as turning the lights down and claiming they could not pay their electric bill. Every show that they did had to do with fundraising and there was very little being said of any real value.

After watching the Jim Bakker show, and because I had no Biblical instruction, I began to view Christians as foolish people who were easily deceived by obvious charlatans. My understanding of the Christian faith was heavily influenced by this and I began to speak out against Christianity to my friends. I grew to disdain the Bible (even though I had not read it with discernment) and had little respect for those who adhered to it. It was because of ‘pastors’ like Jim Bakker, Benny Hinn, and a host of other imposters that I began to view myself as an atheist.

When I attended the University of Missouri, I studied Psychology and Philosophy. This experience did not improve my view of Christianity or the followers of Jesus. Most of my professors were atheists or even outspoken Marxists and they seemed far more intelligent than those who followed Christianity.

While studying Philosophy, I identified with Frederick Nietzsche and began to follow in his footsteps. I was intrigued by the idea of “will to power” in which a man should elevate every faculty he possessed in order to gain power in the world. If there is no God, then clearly the wisdom of Nietzsche was second to none.

There were a group of Christians on campus during this time called the “Navigators.” One gentleman whose name was “Larry” stopped by my dorm room to witness to me. He spent three hours attempting to reason with me about how I’ve “gotta believe” that Jesus was the Son of God or I would not get to heaven. I informed Larry that I did not believe in God and that I could not force myself to believe this even if I wanted to. He showed me an illustration of a chasm in which I was on one side and God was on the other and asked how I thought I could bridge the chasm. After I made several silly remarks about how this could be done Larry eventually gave up on me. His final words were that if I ever wanted to understand Jesus that I should read the Book of Matthew. This was the only thing that he said that made sense to me since it appealed to my intellect.

After graduating from the University of Missouri, I decided that I wanted to be a writer and my first book would be a critique of Christianity. After all, if I was going to follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche I would have to study the books that he studied. I also remembered that Larry said I should read the Book of Matthew if I wanted to understand Christianity so that is where I began. As I reached chapter four of Matthew and studied the temptations of Jesus, I remembered the words of Dostoyevsky in the Brothers Karamazov in the chapter called the Grand Inquisitor. Dostoyevsky wrote:

“And yet if there has ever been on earth a real stupendous miracle, it took place on that day, on the day of the three temptations. The statement of those three questions was itself the miracle. If it were possible to imagine simply for the sake of argument that those three questions of the dread spirit had perished utterly from the books, and that we had to restore them and to invent them anew, and to do so had gathered together all the wise men of the earth- rulers, chief priests, learned men, philosophers, poets- and had set them the task to invent three questions, such as would not only fit the occasion, but express in three words, three human phrases, the whole future history of the world and of humanity- dost Thou believe that all the wisdom of the earth united could have invented anything in depth and force equal to the three questions which were actually put to Thee then by the wise and mighty spirit in the wilderness? From those questions alone, from the miracle of their statement, we can see that we have here to do not with the fleeting human intelligence, but with the absolute and eternal. For in those three questions the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, brought together into one whole, and foretold, and in them are united all the unsolved historical contradictions of human nature. At the time it could not be so clear, since the future was unknown; but now that fifteen hundred years have passed, we see that everything in those three questions was so justly divined and foretold, and has been so truly fulfilled, that nothing can be added to them or taken from them.”

Suddenly, Jesus began to take on more credibility with me as the foolishness of Jim Bakker began to melt away. I moved on to the Beatitudes and was drawn to Christ’s care for the poor even though Nietzsche would have sneered at this. I was intrigued by Jesus’ humility, which is a characteristic that always attracted me, as well as His emphasis on righteousness. In the 1980’s there were so few people taking a stand on issues of right and wrong that God instilled within me an attraction to anyone who did take such positions.

Finally, I reached chapter twenty-four and was completely hooked on the idea of the ‘end times.’ I was a huge fan of comic books and science fiction. In my opinion at that time, Jesus was just another Seer who could predict the future. At this point, I stopped reading books that Nietzsche recommended such as Goethe’s’ “Faust” and I began to frequent the Bible prophecy section of my local bookstore.

The first book I found was by Hal Lindsey called “The Late Great Planet Earth.” After reading this book I was hooked on Bible prophecy and began to read as many of these types of books that I could find. Although I was mainly interested in prophecy, these books had the added advantage of informing me that Jesus died for my sins. Through these books I was finally exposed to the Gospel. By 1988, I was a firm believer in God but I believed that Jesus was just another great thinker like Socrates.

In my youth, I would lay awake at night thinking more deeply about the meaning of life and what my purpose should be. As I considered the words of the most popular philosophers, I decided that the atheist thinkers like Nietzsche and Sartre could never solve any real problems because they did not have a foundation from which to reason. Although Descartes had “I think, therefore I am” as his starting point, this foundation was insufficient for understanding anything. The reason that I found these beliefs to be insufficient was because they could not adequately address the questions that arise when I contemplate the reality of death and eternity. It was plain to me that both concepts existed, and that no ‘great thinker’ could deal adequately with them. I saw no value to the will to power or creating my own meaning in life if I were hit by the proverbial Mack Truck while crossing the street someday. It was then that I was led to make God my foundation for understanding reality. Therefore, to understand God, I would have to read the Bible more thoroughly and come to a greater understanding of Him.

It was not long after coming to this conclusion that my family moved to Sioux City Iowa, and, it was there that I met my future wife. I fell in love with her within two weeks of our meeting and I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. She was a devout member of the Assemblies of God church in Sioux City, and I was not yet a Christian. This did not escape the notice of some of her friends who recommended that she break up with me so as not to be ‘unequally yoked.’ She was about to break up with me before, in desperation, I proclaimed myself a Christian even though I was not. Fortunately, I had studied the Bible sufficiently to fool her into thinking that I was a Christian. This false proclamation of faith was sufficient for her, and we continued dating, became engaged and were eventually married.

Apparently, God, in his mercy, accepted this lame proclamation of faith and would eventually draw me to Christ.

I went to church only to please my wife because, due to my experience with Jim Bakker, I still had the view that most Christians were not very bright. Some of the congregation would speak in tongues and I would cringe because I felt like they were putting on a show. If anyone was going to increase my faith, it would have to be done through reason rather than theatrics.

Since most of the witnessing I received came from books, it was fortunate that I stumbled upon one (I cannot remember the title, but I believe it was by John Montgomery or maybe C.S. Lewis) that led me to believe in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. The book basically pointed out that there are only three options when one considers who Jesus truly was. The author posited that Jesus could only be one of the following: (1) mentally ill, (2) a liar, or (3) the Son of God. I was still under the impression that Jesus was a great philosopher (and perhaps a great mystic) and never considered worshipping Him as God. However, great philosophers do not proclaim that they will emerge from the clouds to judge the earth. It was this realization that eventually led me to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and I had become his devoted follower.

In our new town my wife and I attended a Baptist Church. It was not until the mid-nineties that I decided to be baptized out of obedience to Christ. I did not believe that baptism saved me from my sins and was a little taken aback when the other members of the congregation acted as if I had just become a Christian. I had considered myself a Christian for some time and to be told that only now I was a Christian alarmed me. My wife and I thought that this was false doctrine, and we left that church not long after our baptism.

When I left the Baptist church, I moved on to a popular church in town called the Church of the Nazarene. Since I still was not a big fan of church in general, my mind usually wandered rather than listening to the sermon. However, a new pastor came in and he was a little more exciting. He brought a new curriculum to the church like Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven theology as well the philosophies of a host of ‘emergent church’ leaders like Rob Bell and Biran McLauren. As I listened to these sermons, I began to wonder why what was being preached from the pulpit bore so little resemblance to what I was reading I Scripture. The realization that I was being taught false doctrine began to concern me, so I began to seek out those who taught sound doctrine.

I began to explore the internet and found a website called “Worldview Weekend” with Brannon Howse. He seemed to be expressing the same concerns that I was experiencing with the Southern Baptist Convention. He was also on board with my understanding of eschatology, and I learned a great deal from Brannon and his partners. Brannon also had another teacher on his radio show named Chris Rosebrough who soon caught my attention.

Chris Rosebrough had a show, called “Fighting for the Faith,” in which he taught laymen how to recognize a false teacher. He would examine sermons and explain how these people had deviated from Scripture and were teaching meaningless gibberish. It was then that I began to understand the difference more fully between false doctrine and sound doctrine.

Once I learned how I was being deceived by my own church, I pulled my family out and left church in 2012 for about four years. I listened to internet church and followed sermons by Chris Rosebrough and John McArthur. I finally grew tired of this and began to seek out another church that my family could actually attend without being outraged by the foolishness being taught there. I would listen to sermons throughout the area and could not find a church that actually rightly handled God’s Word. Finally, I found a Presbyterian Minister who was actually faithful to God’ s Word and became a member of that church. I have learned that it is not the denomination that is important, it is the pastor who is either faithful to God’s Word or is unfaithful to God’s Word.

Throughout my Christian walk, whenever I showed a desire for truth, God would put someone in front of me (“Larry,” Hal Lindsey, my wife, other writers, pastors) who would bring me a little closer to a saving faith in him. I sometimes quip that ‘Pastor’ Jim Bakker turned me into an atheist and Frederick Nietzsche led me to Christ.

I have studied the theology of many people who have a wide variety of ideas regarding how to interpret Scripture. I have studied the Pentecostals, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, the Baptists, the Nazarenes, and the Presbyterians. After much consideration I have decided to call myself a ‘Gospelist.’ I have learned that when I view Scripture through the lens of the Gospel, I am much less likely to be deceived. When I shine the light of God’s law and his Gospel on most people and theologies, it tends to reveal whether they are standing on the truth or not.

I have also learned to exegete Scripture in such a way as to ensure that God’s Word speaks for itself. Those who write dissertations on certain Scripture are usually just bloviating and I am no longer captivated by the ‘over-intellectualization of Scripture.

This website is the culmination of what I have learned as someone who was not raised in church. It is my hope that others will build on what I have learned, or offer legitimate corrections, so that we can all gain a greater understanding of God’s Word. Nothing would please me more than to see an army of Christians proclaiming God’s law and his Gospel in response to the evil that is enveloping this nation and the world.