

ONE MAN'S HUNGER

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INTRODUCTION

It has now been several years since I left the Baptist denomination, and I am pleased to believe that I have yet many friends within the organization who were and are puzzled by this action. They are due an explanation. Oral attempts to explain this action have proven unsatisfactory. This has been due not only to emotional factors but also to the depth of the issue involved. To discharge this debt I now endeavor to set forth in orderly manner my reasons.

First, let me state emphatically that it was not because of personal difficulties with any individual or group of individuals within the denomination. On the contrary, relations were always most friendly, even with pastors with whom I served as minister of education, a relationship that is often characterized by friction. This is not to say there were no differences of opinion; it is only to say that the differences were never allowed to sever the friendship.

Concisely put, I was driven from the Baptist denomination by a change of convictions regarding the church. The nature of these convictions and the factors that lead to their development follow.

The Awakening!

One has little control over his convictions. They are strengthened, weakened or changed by experience. True, he may so cherish a conviction that all contradictory evidence is rejected regardless of its validity or source, but the humble, sincere seeker-after-truth is not afraid to examine himself to see if he “be in the faith,” to search the Scriptures “whether those things are true,” and to “prove all things”—II Cor. 13:5; Acts 17:11 and I Thess. 5:21.

Most of my Christian life I had been troubled by a growing conviction that many of the practices of Southern Baptist Churches were fundamentally wrong. This conviction grew more rapidly after my call into the ministry when I was thrown into closer contact with denominational leaders and brought into a deeper study of the Word. Many times I had sincerely and fervently proclaimed that Baptists were nearer the truth than any other group, that the “New Testament” was our sole guide of faith and practice, and that we were not Protestants but rather groups of believers whose practice and polity were similar to that which had been in existence since the days of the apostles.

All this occurred while I was reading more books about the Bible than the Bible itself—when I was giving more energy and time to supposedly good religious activities than to prayerful, persistent searching of the Scriptures to see if those things were true.

When I did make this search, I was forced somewhat reluctantly into the conviction that the organization of which I was a member was not the church which Christ is building (Matt. 16:18), that it was not “the church which is His body” (Eph. 1:22-23). I could not escape the conclusion that it was but MAN’S ORGANIZED EFFORT to carry out MAN’S CONCEPTION of Christ’s program. Being man’s creation, it bore the image of its creator; it was unclean, inconsistent and ineffectual. It brought Christ, Whom it purported to honor, into disrepute and dishonor before the world.

Envy in the Front Ranks—James 3:13-18

There were several factors that contributed to the growth of these convictions. One of these was the political maneuvering of denominational pastors and leaders. The schemes and devices to which they resorted to obtain a desired office or program differed little from those employed by men in secular organizations. This practice is so prevalent and examples so abundant that allusion to them is all that is necessary. This maneuvering for positions of honor and authority stands in vivid contrast to I Cor. 12:18 and Gal. 5:25-26, and to the leadership of the Holy Spirit as demonstrated in Acts 13:2, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” Surely the above type of behavior argues very effectively that the Baptist Organization—at least through its leaders—is operating “after the flesh.”

“Let Us Do Evil That Good May Come”—Rom. 3:8

The objectives or aims of any organization do not so clearly indicate the location of its faith as do the methods employed in attaining those objectives. Many of the activities of the denomination are based on the assumption that the end justifies the means. Therefore pastors and leaders study psychology and other arts of handling and influencing people. Today’s most successful church leaders are not the most godly but the most skilled in managing and regimenting the masses into a unified program. The gimmicks, the psychological tricks, and other means employed, are seldom called into question. Success is its own excuse for being.

Judging “After Appearance”—John 7:24

Another factor indicating the “earthly” character of the people called Baptists is the standard by which they determine the success or failure of their endeavors. The check points of denominational health are BAPTISMS, BUILDINGS and BUDGETS. Churches that excel in these areas stand high in the esteem of the denomination and are held up for emulation through periodical and promotional literature.

“Friendship of the World”—James 4:4

One of the most serious charges to be brought against the Baptist sect is its surrender to the social pressures which Scripture calls “this world.” “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”—Rom. 12:2. In spite of this injunction the walk, talk, dress and thoughts of the average Baptist are fashioned by “this world.” *Every demand for conformity, from the latest whims of fashion to the deeper tides of human tradition, sweeps through the denomination with little or no opposition.*

The Party Spirit

Man has ever tried to invert God's order. Instead of believing that God has spoken, instead of trembling at His Word, man assumes the position of arbiter or judge and selects only such portions of the Word as support and harmonize with his own concepts. Thus he assumes the position of sovereign with respect to the Bible. He through his appointed leaders will synthesize a religious system based on the so-called fundamental truths of Scripture. Consistent with this assumed position, the natural man sees nothing wrong in legislating ways and means for propagating this synthetic program.

The Present Work of the Holy Spirit

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14). It is quite evident to even a casual Bible student that the Holy Spirit was sent to represent and function for Christ in this present dispensation. His headship in the assemblies of the early Christians is indicated by many Scriptures, but one will search the Word in vain for the modern concept of democratic or congregational form of government. The church which Christ is building is not a democracy! It is the “underground” monarchy of a rejected, crucified, risen, glorified, and soon returning King! To pretend to worship the crucified Christ while rejecting the ministry of the Holy Spirit sent for and by the resurrected, glorified Christ is somewhat analogous to Israel's rejection and murder of contemporary prophets while “garnishing the sepulchers” of their predecessors (see Matt. 23:29-30). The function of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Christ and to call out a people for His Name. It is not to build sects—to create confusion. No wonder His counsel is sought only at rare intervals among Baptists when circumstances betray the real character of CHURCHANITY to true believers.

A religious testimony without a real, living, present Christ is just another “religion.” In this dispensation the Holy Spirit IS Christ, for all practical purposes, fully clothed with all necessary authority and power. To deny Him is to deny Christ. Few will deny the existence of these things; many, however, will deny their importance and shrug them off as being of little significance because “there is so little we can do about them.” True, there is little I can do, but surely I am obligated to do that little.

A Gross Mis-Representation

Christ is not divided! To represent Him to the world as being divided is to misrepresent Him! An honest, unbiased investigation will reveal a deep and wide disparity between the church as conceived in the Scripture and the church as exhibited to the world today. To take this disparity lightly is to question the validity of the Bible and the importance of the church and its mission. By the behavior of the majority of professing Christians today, Christ has been relegated to a position alongside Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius, and Christianity to just another of the world's religions, differing only in degree and not in kind.

“If Any Man Be In Christ...”—II Cor. 5:17

As said previously, the result of these observations and experiences was the development of a conviction that the Baptist denomination was but a HUMAN endeavor to apprehend and to communicate Christ and His message. To many this may not seem to

be a serious indictment, but if the death of Christ meant anything, it meant the death of Adam. “If any man be in Christ, HE IS A NEW CREATION: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”—II Cor. 5:17. A Christian is not a “renovated Adam” with new ideas, new motives, and new resources. He is a new creation! His citizenship is in heaven; he is an alien on earth. His resources are from heaven; he is not dependent on “creature streams.” He has come to the end of all flesh—his own as well as that of his fellowmen. He has been translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. He feels and reacts and responds to a new environment of which hitherto he was not even aware. His wisdom and strength are from above; therefore he waits.

Of these new creatures the true church is composed. Each is vitally connected to Christ through the Holy Spirit. These and these alone know Christ and His doctrine (see John 10:14 & 7:17) for they have cast themselves into the only crucible that can separate truth from error.

A Leap In The Dark

Having become convinced of this, the problem of my personal responsibility came sharply into focus. What was I to do? It was while among the people called “Baptists” that I was brought to a knowledge of my sins and the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. My mother was a Baptist. One of my earliest recollections was of her on her knees praying, a practice she continued until disease numbed her mind and death closed her lips. It was the people called “Baptists” that had licensed me to preach and had paid part of my college education. Was I not thus obligated to the denomination from which I received so much? I was not to blame for the condition; nor were many others whom I felt to be sincere Christians. We had inherited a situation that was bad, but it was not our part to do the best we could under the limitations put upon us by circumstances beyond our control. What good could one do alone? Individually I am nothing; collectively we could at least make some impact for good on the society of which we were a part.

With these and many other arguments I would try to justify my remaining among those to whom I was *somebody*. To abdicate this position of esteem and opportunity for religious service and to assume the position of “nothing but a Christian” was to me like jumping out into the dark. It was like leaving something tangible and real for something intangible and unreal.

The Pressure Mounts

Nevertheless I could not marshal enough arguments to combat the pressures that were enveloping me. I could see that I was coming to a “Kadesh Barnea” which would demand either a deeper faith or bolder unbelief.

It needs to be said here that during this inner conflict, I, at least to some degree like the apostle, “conferred not with flesh and blood.” Friends with whom we now share these convictions were then strangers to us. I do not mean by the above statement that I talked to no one of the problem. I talked to many, but they were fellow Baptists who, though admitting that much of what I said was true, still saw no reason to be alarmed, and discouraged me from taking the matter too seriously.

I sought to escape these mounting pressures by resigning as minister of education in a relatively large church and seeking opportunities of service in or with smaller ones. It was my vain belief that many of the unscriptural practices and conditions previously noted were the result of the size of the organization. This led me to unite with a very small church in California. The experience here was one of complete disillusionment. Perhaps it was because my eyes had been opened and my conscience made sensitive to many of these things, but building programs, finance committees and enlargement campaigns were offensive to me. It seemed that there in that little church I could detect the seeds of every unscriptural position and unspiritual practice so apparent in the larger organizations. What was wrong with it? It provided an occasion for a platform upon which the “old man” could operate. I could see that it served only to cloud vital issues, to confuse sincere seekers, and to give the atheist and scoffer an occasion to mock.

My Decision

One Wednesday evening I arose in prayer meeting and in substance said:

I have something to say. For a number of years my conscience has disputed many of the practices of Baptist churches. The number of such practices is increasing while the opposition to them apparently is decreasing. Having been a Baptist all my Christian life, it is but natural that I look upon the shortcomings of my denomination with a great deal of tolerance. I have. There is a point, however, where tolerance becomes a vice instead of a virtue. The task of reconciling WHAT OUGHT TO BE with WHAT IS has now become impossible! My wife concurs in this conviction. We request that our names be stricken from the roll of this church.

We went home that evening realizing to some degree the seriousness of the step we had taken. We felt lonely and strange. This feeling was intensified the next Sunday when for the first time in our lives we had nowhere to go to “church.”

What happened subsequent to this experience is another story. It is a story of conflict without peace within. It is a story of the progressive discovery of FRESH EVIDENCE that GOD IS, that Christ is present in this world in the person of the Holy Spirit and is building His church. In the former case there was a frustrating struggle to MAKE THE FIRST ADAM APPEAR LIKE THE SECOND ADAM; IN THE LATTER THERE IS THE REWARDING ENDEAVOR OF KEEPING THE FIRST Adam on the cross and the Second enthroned in the heart.

To the “father of the faithful” came God’s Word long ago, “Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house.” To the believer today the call is yet coming “COME OUT from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and TOUCH NOT the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, SAITH THE LORD ALMIGHTY.”

Where Do You Stand?

Of those who have ears to hear and hearts to obey this call God is not ashamed, and to such He will make known in fuller measure the riches of His grace. O Christian, let me ask you some searching questions: “Is Christ divided?” Is God “the author of confusion?” Are you endorsing by your presence and supporting by your time and effort a man-made religious program? (See Matt. 12:30). If so, you are misrepresenting Christ!

You are hindering Christ's own redemptive program! To identify oneself with a religious sect is to endorse the sect. We are individually responsible for that which we collectively do. To think that we are responsible for only a part of a program in which we wholeheartedly concur is a delusion of Satan! Verbally protesting against an evil while yet partaking of its benefits and finding gratification in its fruits is cowardly and contemptible behavior by even the lowest standards. O Christian friend, be not deceived! What we truly believe is most accurately indicated by where we are, by what and whom we are identified with!! Jesus was so perfectly identified with the Father that He could not be a Pharisee or Sadducee. Because of His identification with the Father, HE WAS DIFFERENT! Concealing this difference could have made His path easier, but then it would have been denying the Father. This He could not do.

Believe God's Word !

Perhaps someone may think, "I would come out IF I knew what to do and where to go after I come out." To such I would reply, Believe God!! Believe Him when He says, "I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters." To "come out" after we know KNOW what to do and where to go is walking by sight. God gives light for only one step at a time. When the call came to Abraham, he got out, "not knowing whither he went." We will never find the right road until we stop going down the wrong road. We need to realize and acknowledge that we are lost, as far as our testimony is concerned, that we are just as helpless to serve Christ as we were to save ourselves in the first place, and that "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Every Scripturally enlightened person whose conscience is not seared, is dissatisfied in a position that does not accord with what he knows of Scripture and of Christ. To remain too long in such a position is to grieve the Spirit and to render the conscience insensitive to God's call. By coming out of the confusion of man-made religious programs you are saying to all who have ears to hear, "I believe that GOD IS, that HE KNOWS my need of fellowship and desire to serve, and HE WILL PROVIDE these as well all other of my needs!"

"Mark Them Which Walk"—Philip. 3:16-18

Again someone may ask, "Come out to what?" Since true Christianity is personal in nature, the question should be, "Come out to WHOM?" The answer is found in Hebrews 13:13, "Let us go forth therefore unto HIM without the camp, bearing HIS REPROACH." The phrase, "WITHOUT THE CAMP," indicates that Jesus Christ was and is a stranger to the religious inventions of men. To have fellowship with Him requires our recognition of their spiritual uncleanness and a willingness to "come out from among them." It is not enough, however, just to come out—we must come out "UNTO HIM!" This does not exclude the use of human instruments, but it does look beyond and perceive them as ones through whom God is speaking and acting. Thus it is right and proper to follow men who are ahead of us in the things of God—to "follow them as they follow Christ (see I Cor. 11:1 & Philip. 3:17). The qualifications by which these men may be identified are given us in Scripture in order that we might know them

and acknowledge them as ministers of Christ. “God is not the author of confusion!” There is liberty, yet divine order, in the church which Christ is building.

When we “go forth unto HIM” He will bring us into fellowship with others who are endeavoring to “walk by the same rule” and “mind the same thing” (Philip. 3:16).

IT IS THE W-A-L-K of the believer that AUTHENTICATES his testimony. See John 13:35; Rom. 16:17-18; Philip. 3:17; I John 3:14 & II Tim. 2:19-21. Thus we are enjoined to “MARK THEM WHICH WALK.”

“Wherefore, Come Out!”—II Cor. 6:17

During our Lord’s earthly ministry one came with this question: “Master, where dwellest Thou?” To whom Jesus replied, “Come and see!”

“The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands,” BUT He does dwell in His saints! “For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I WILL DWELL IN THEM, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. WHEREFORE COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM, AND BE YE SEPARATE, SAITH THE LORD, AND TOUCH NOT THE UNCLEAN THING; AND I WILL RECEIVE YOU, and will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT, perfecting holiness (separation) in the fear of God”—II Cor. 6:16-7:1

As ever, man’s ways are contrary to God’s ways. Man defines his holy places with spires that pierce the sky. God defines the holy place by words that pierce the heart!

ISAIAH 57:15—“For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is Holy, I DWELL in the high and holy place, WITH HIM ALSO THAT IS OF A CONTRITE AND HUMBLE SPIRIT, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

To those who are yet inquiring of the Master, “Where dwellest Thou?” the invitation is the same—“come and see.”

I CHRONICLES 16:29—“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name... worship the Lord in THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS (separation).”