

From Faith To Faith

I suppose that most people tend to stay in the same religion in which they were born. I was born into a Catholic family and was raised as a good little Catholic. I went to Church on Sundays and used the kiddie envelopes to put some coins into the collection basket. I was asked to become an altar boy but declined because I was too shy. I learned that my church was the one true church and my religion was the one true religion. Later I learned that my Catholic bible was the one true bible. I suppose if I had been born into a Jehovah Witness family my one true religion would be the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Or if I had been born in Saudi Arabia my one true religion would be Islam and my one true bible would be the Koran. As Einstein said, it's all relative.

I quit attending Sunday Mass regularly after I graduated from High School but resumed after I married. My sons attended Catholic schools and one became an altar boy. At one point I attended Mass daily, sometimes twice a day. I wore sacred medals and scapulars and said Rosaries. I had fierce arguments with my brother over Jesus and Mary. I started reading the bible and became fascinated with Genesis 1:26, which led me to try to reconcile some of my Catechism teachings with the bible, but discovered disagreements. I tried desperately to see Jesus in the bread on First Fridays Adoration but could not, and my faith soon faded. I had to find something else.

I used to hate religious radio and television programs. And I didn't care for the music or the normal talk shows on the radio on my work drives to Mississippi before I retired. But at least there was no chitchat on the religious talk shows so I started listening to those. Most of what those religious guys would say were in agreement with my Catholic teaching. But once in a while they would contradict and I would think that's because they didn't have the Catholic advantage. And I would get angry if they said anything against Mary.

But after a while, I started listening to the message instead of getting mad at the messenger. And I would call and ask for their brochures and tapes and videos. They would speak of being "saved again." What was that all about? They would speak of a "personal Lord and Savior." What was this "personal" thing all about? I thought Jesus died for the whole world, not for any particular person. And they would back up what they were teaching by referring to verse such-and-such in the bible. So I would get out my Catholic bible and the reading would be close, but not the exact words. So I thought, they must be using the King James bible and decided to buy one.

But it was a strange feeling going into a Christian bookstore. I had just gotten used to going into Catholic bookstores. The lady showed me where the King James bibles were (there were many kinds, even Catholic bibles) so I bought one that was recommended on TV. The format was completely different from my Catholic bible but at least I would now be able to follow along.

However, I have since learned that Catholic and Protestant bibles agree with each other on all major points of theology, and largely agree on most other points. The wording may be different but the teaching is similar. In fact, all quotes that follow are from my Catholic New American Bible.

One of the things that got me interested in the bible was listening to radio and TV pastors speak of prophecy and the end times. It would remind me of the readings at Mass that would refer to "wailing and gnashing of teeth." I would think, that's me, wailing and gnashing. Oh sure, I would feel good after going to confession, but that would never last long. No, there was really no hope for me at all. I would never be good enough for heaven, so there was nothing left for me except the hope of Purgatory rather than wailing and gnashing. What a thing to hope for! But those guys on radio and TV would show from the bible that wailing and gnashing was just for the "lost", not the "saved". They would say that there was nothing anyone could do to be good enough to escape God's wrath. The only requirement was faith in Jesus Christ.

I would also hear at Mass once in a while: "The wages of sin is death." That didn't sound too good, since I was always sinning. And of course, it tied right in with wailing and gnashing on judgement day. Those verses were written especially for me. I would sin and collect my wages of death and wailing and gnashing. But those radio and TV preachers would say that faith in Jesus Christ gives us everlasting life and spares us of that death.

But on the other hand, I believed in God and that Jesus died for the sins of the world. I'm part of the world.

But I learned that's not what the bible means by being a believer. Just believing intellectually is not what God wants. James 2:19 says even the demons believe and tremble. What God wants is for us to believe with our hearts. I learned that believing in Jesus means trusting completely that He died for my sins, and that he died in my place.

Although I continued attending Mass on Sundays, I quit going to the weekday Masses. But then it got to the point where even Sunday Masses were not fulfilling to me. Oh, it was nice seeing friends and all of that, but my spirit was just not being fed from the Mass itself. So I decided to put my faith where my heart was and make the big break.

But it was very hard to do. It really took all the courage I could muster to leave my church and go alone to another church. I tried one church nearby because I used to watch the pastor on TV. Their service was in two parts - the first hour was praise and worship and the second hour was the teaching. But when the band started playing it felt more like entertainment than praise and worship. I gave it one more Sunday but couldn't take it any more and decided to try somewhere else.

Every time I'd go down Carol Sue toward Whitney in my neighborhood I'd see this sign for Heritage Bible Church. So I decided to give it a try. And it was the most amazing thing, because the pastor turned out to be someone that I had been listening to each morning on the radio.

To say that I was excited and blessed wouldn't be the half of it. I had been wishing for that kind of church near my home. The pastor does not preach, but rather teaches from the bible. He encourages everyone to verify what he teaches against the bible. I have learned *how* to read the bible by paying attention to context, and not just pick a verse here and there and apply my own or someone else's meaning.

When I would discover a new truth in the bible I would get excited and tell my Catholic friends, but there was little interest. And when my friends would hear that I left the Church few seemed interested in why I left, except one or two. Some would say, "I'm happy for you. We all need to find God in our own way," or "All religions worship the same God," or words to that effect. Most would say nothing. Only one friend was concerned enough to inquire as to why I would want to leave the traditions and rituals of the one true Church, and even offered to bring me back into the fold.

But I did not leave one church to join another church, nor did I leave one religion for another one. What I actually did was leave one relationship for another. I left a relationship with my former church and religion, and began a new relationship with Jesus and my Father, which is in heaven. And I abandoned one faith (in my works, which was hopeless) for the faith of Jesus Christ. I am now a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Although we are all creatures of God, not all are children of God. We become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

Becoming a child of God has reinforced things that I learned as a Catholic. But it has also allowed me to discard errors that I had previously learned.

1. God alone is God. I was taught in Catechism that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing and all-present, which is also taught in the bible. I was also taught that certain people who die and go to heaven could hear the prayers of people on earth and petition God to grant their requests. Blind faith in this teaching allowed this belief to persist until I placed my faith in Christ. A little thought on the matter will reveal a problem: to be able to hear the prayers of every living person on earth at once, one would either have to have super hearing and communication skills (there are hundreds of languages in the world), and/or be everywhere on earth at all times. Those are attributes that only God possesses. Not even an angel can be in all places at once, and they are the only beings used as God's messengers. I must have a faith that is reasonable and makes sense, not a blind faith. God alone is God.

Scripture reveals the fallacy of believing that others can have attributes of God. The bible reveals that God alone is God and that he shares his glory with no one.

Isaiah 44:6 **Thus says the LORD**, Israel's King and redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last; **there is no God but me.**

Isaiah 42:8 **I am the LORD**, this is my name; **my glory I give to no other,**
nor my praise to idols.

2. Authority. We submit to authority to teach us our faith. There can only be one authority; otherwise conflicts and confusions arise. The above remarks on prayers show just one example of tradition contradicting scripture. The choice I had to make was this: which authority was I going to submit to, God's (the bible) or man's (traditions). I chose God. But how do I know that the bible is the word of God, or that there even is a God?

The reason men have authority is because they either claim the office by force or else they are voted into the office. However the reason the bible is authoritative is not because men say so, but because of the evidence. The bible was penned by approximately 40 people (most of whom never knew each other) of varying backgrounds, education, and countries over a period of about 1500 years. And all of their writings flow together with a continuity that is nothing short of miraculous. Historically proven prophecies concerning Jesus, the Jews and the Gentiles have been fulfilled to the letter. This is strong evidence that someone outside our realm (God) inspired all those people to write all of those scriptures and to collect them all together into one book. The evidence says that people did not originate the book, but that God wrote the book through people for the specific purpose of revealing his righteousness to us.

The bible tells us in 2 Timothy 3:36, "All scripture is inspired by God..."

2 Peter 3:15-16 tells us that Paul's writings (and thus, the New Testament) were all considered as being scripture, that is, inspired of God.

3. Traditions. Some say that scripture is not complete enough to base our faith on, and that it must be supplemented with traditions. If the scriptures are of God, who knows all, etc., it is unreasonable to say that His word alone is not sufficient for me. I must have a faith that is reasonable. The apostle Paul tells us that the scriptures are sufficient to bring a child to salvation.

2 Timothy 3:15 and that from infancy you have known (the) sacred scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Traditions can be good or bad, depending on their foundation. Jesus rebuked the Jews for forsaking the commandment of God in favor of their own traditions (Matthew 15:3, Jeremiah 6:16).

The bible is especially negative on future traditions, and actually predicts and warns against them (see the two epistles of Timothy). Traditions change over the years, and not always for the better, but scripture, the inspired word of God, is sure and steadfast (Psalm 119:89). When Jesus and Paul wanted to drive home a point, they would say, "As it is written," not "According to tradition."

4. Works. Based on their foundation, works can also be good or bad. Building hospitals and nursing homes and caring for the poor are all good works. But we do these things to help our fellow man, not to earn salvation. One does not have to be a Christian to do these things. A heathen can build hospitals and feed the hungry and care for the needy, etc. But that doesn't mean he is going to heaven.

The word of God teaches that good works are the results of being saved, not the means of salvation.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

The bible also teaches that our rewards in heaven are based on our good works. Paul tells the Corinthian believers that the only works worth doing must be based on Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Our works will be tested by fire on the day of judgement (the Day). Good works (gold, silver, precious stones) will receive a reward (wage), whereas not-so-good works (wood, hay, straw) will be burned up. However the person will still be saved and not denied heaven if his trusting faith is in Jesus Christ.

5. Faith. Faith plus experience allows me to sit in a chair without fear of it breaking. I was taught that faith in Jesus plus faith in my church plus faith in my works would get me to heaven, maybe. But neither my

church nor I had any experience in going there. However, Jesus has experience in going to heaven, and is preparing a place for me there if I would put my faith in Him alone. Since I have no experience in getting to heaven, the only logical thing to do is to place my trust in Jesus to get me there. The bible tells me that faith alone in Christ alone is the pathway to heaven. I have one logical faith in Jesus for salvation, not several blind faiths.

6. Salvation. It is of utmost importance to settle the question of salvation. No one can save themselves or anyone else. The LORD himself said through the prophet Isaiah that He alone is our savior.

Isaiah 43:11 **It is I, I the LORD; there is no savior but me.**

Peter also declared that salvation comes only by the name of Jesus, and not by anyone else. In Acts 4 and 5, Peter and John got arrested twice for preaching Jesus and were brought before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin gave them a stern warning never again to speak to anyone in His name. Their reply in Acts 4:19 and 5:29 was that they would obey God rather than them. In Acts 4:12 Peter said, "**There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.**" And once I discovered that Jesus is the only one that saves, there was no option but to turn to him.

The Gospel of John was written specifically to show how to get saved.

John 20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. [20:31] But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Over and over, John and Paul tell us that everlasting life (salvation) comes by belief or faith in Jesus Christ, and no one else.

John 3:15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

3:18 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

Romans 4:3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; [2:9] it is not from works, so no one may boast.

The whole purpose of publishing this testimony is to express the confidence of my salvation, not doubting, with the hope that at least one person will come to realize the folly of trying to earn salvation; but rather, salvation comes only through the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. This righteousness is given freely only to those who place their complete trust in Christ. When I leave this earth I will be accountable only to Jesus, and I will be able to bow my knee (Romans 14:11) and say, "I trusted completely in you, Lord."

My faith in Jesus is reasonable, sensible, logical, biblical and complete. Jesus shows us the way to eternal salvation. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "***I am the way and the truth and the life.*** No one comes to the Father except ***through me.***" There it is, straight from Jesus. He said that HE is the way. And he said that he saved me because of his mercy, not because of my good works (Titus 3:5). And since I am now a child of God, he gave me salvation, not probation, and will not disown me when I sin (1 John 2:1-2).

The grandest feeling in the world is to know that your salvation is secure in Jesus. It gives you a peace you just can't imagine. That's what I have - a peace "that surpasses all understanding" [Philippians 4:7]. I know where I am going when the time comes. There will be no wailing and gnashing of teeth for me.

- - - Final Thoughts: Do you have eternal life? Read John 3, Romans 3,4. - - -

Accept Jesus Christ As Your Savior