

From Religion and Immorality to Christ

The Christian testimony of Jerry Marcellino

I was raised in a nominal Roman Catholic home on the west coast of the USA. I was baptized as an infant and received my first holy communion before I was seven years old. I attended parochial schools and CCD, and was confirmed with oil between my elementary school and early teenage years. Holding the intellectual type of Roman Catholic belief in God was something that was both a normal and natural part of my growing-up years. Even saying the required prayers before every meal, in bed every night, after going to weekly confession, and while I attended Mass never brought me rest. In fact they bored me. They were simply religious things that I tried to do often, but always and only out of a fear of God—the wrong kind of fear of God. Thus, it was my phobic type of fear, rather than a reverential type of fear of God, that actually moved me to try to obey God in the way that this system dictated. However, I failed miserably at trying to please God, and was disheartened, but I knew no other way to God. I was full of religion, but void of a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

While being raised in such a man-made religious context, I was pushed by my father to excel at sports. As a result, playing sports became as a god to me. So, I played every type of sport that was available to me in my area of California. Because succeeding at sports was drilled into me at a very early age, I developed an improper attitude to win at whatever the cost. This produced in me a prideful, angry, chip-on-my-shoulder type of character by the time I was in tenth grade. I then, took out this anger on my teammates and opponents during my high school years and ultimately earned a full-scholarship to play football at the University of Hawaii. Hawaii offered many opportunities to meet all kinds of people and to experience many different pleasures. My goal was ultimately to play professionally. I really thought I was something else, until my dream suddenly ended when I received a career-ending neck injury against BYU in the midst of my junior season. I was told by the doctor at that time that I could no longer play football, let alone, any other type of contact sport again or I would unnecessarily invite a paralyzing neck injury. So, after having indulged for years in an immoral lifestyle and "majored" in playing college football, instead of upon being responsible with my schoolwork, my life was now depressing and empty.

It was at this low point in my life that God put two men from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in my path who demonstrated to me, by their lives, the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. They spent time with me, fed me, prayed with me, and challenged me to consider the claims of Jesus Christ. They invited me time and time again to their Bible studies, and even though for months and months I never came they never gave up on me. Finally, I began to attend these studies and the seed of God's Word began to awaken me slowly. After being raised in a church that measured how much you knew God by your religious activity for Him, hearing the message of trusting Christ alone for salvation and cultivating a practical personal relationship with Him was all new to me. After being taught and drawn to these truths for about three months, the Holy Spirit, through their witness, prodded me to go out and buy a Bible and read it for myself. I

searched the Scriptures diligently and found a Jesus Christ that I had never known. Six more months passed until I was truly convicted of my sin and then moved by God to realize that only Christ's death on the cross could save my soul and give me eternal life. It was at this time that I truly repented of my sin and trusted in Christ alone for the complete forgiveness of all my sins.

Since that glorious day in October 1980, I have truly experienced the inner peace and rest that can come only from knowing God. I now no longer fear death and have an assurance of what the future holds for me when I leave this world. My Christian life, although not without difficulty, has been a blessed journey of growing deeper in my walk with Christ, my service to others, and in my burden to reach the lost. I now know who I am, why I am here, and where I am going. Life now has meaning and is worth living. I can get up each day, because God lives and is in control of history. I love Him and I am thankful that He has called me to live my life for His glory and His alone. My daily motivation is to know Him, please Him, and to make Him known. In addition, He has mercifully given me a wonderful believing wife and seven beautiful children, children that we are praying for and hoping to send as flaming arrows to a time we will not see. And if you can believe it, He has even called and enabled this great sinner, to preach the gospel to this present generation. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

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