

From the Worldwide Church of God

I was raised attending and believing in the teachings of what was then a pseudo-Christian cult, the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) and its founder, Herbert Armstrong. While in college, I temporarily stopped attending church, but I knew I had to get back to going. I met the man who would soon become my husband. After we were married he began attending with me, and we were both baptized there a few months later. We now considered ourselves indwelt by the Holy Spirit, due to the ministers laying hands on us immediately following our baptisms.

I don't remember ever doubting that it was God's one true church and that Herbert Armstrong was the end-time apostle who we were to follow. Our strong beliefs that we were to observe the Old Testament Holy Days and the Saturday Sabbath were not to be compromised no matter what. Without these, we believed, there was no way we could understand God's plan or be a part of His family. They were our identity as the true people of God.

Many people today have seen the cheap-grace side of professing Christianity, but I spent most of my life in the other ditch of legalism, and it is just as ugly, despicable, and dangerous. It involves a hopeless system of trying to do every little thing right in order to appease God and make ourselves right in His eyes, usually while overlooking the glaring sin that is so much a part of us. My hope was that some day, by trying harder, I would achieve a state of being righteous enough. It was a life of bondage, frustration, and discouragement. Needless to say, my "Christianity" didn't produce much joy.

I believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but I didn't believe that He was God, the Son. We were actually quite opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity and didn't believe Jesus should be worshiped, because that would have elevated Him to equality with God. The whole concept of Jesus being "God with us" was something I didn't understand, and the idea of being saved by trusting the finished work of Christ was foreign to me. Salvation was something I hoped to attain by doing the best I could, but there was never a time when I thought I had reached that. When I was most honest with myself, I despaired in wondering how I was ever going to make it. My only solution was to just keep trying harder.

In the late 1980's Herbert Armstrong died. Joseph Tkach—the man he had appointed to take his place—began making changes in the church. There were minor ones at first, and those didn't get a lot of attention. Then around the mid-1990's, more substantial changes were made. People felt betrayed and began leaving and starting churches that held to the teachings of Mr. Armstrong. When the Trinity doctrine was introduced to the church and the idea that God didn't require us to observe the Holy Days and the Sabbath, my whole foundation, like nearly everyone else's there, was shaken.

The church was in chaos, and I didn't know where to turn. The people I had always looked to were in the same predicament I was in. At times I thought I was going crazy and wanted to die. Lifelong friendships and even some families were splitting apart. For

the first time, I was having thoughts that maybe we had been wrong after all, but I still didn't know what was right or what the truth was. I doubted whether or not I would ever again be able to really know anything for certain. Everything I had been so sure of was either changing or in conflict with other things I was hearing. Every belief I had clung to was so entangled in every other belief. I didn't have a clue how to go about sorting it all out. It's hard to convey the degree of hopelessness and confusion I felt. I would never have chosen to be thrown into a state like that. God could have let me have my way, stay on the path I was on, and not go through that crisis, but I'm eternally thankful now that He did not. How gracious He was to bring me through that!

During this time, my husband attended a Promise Keepers conference and heard a message that God used to work in him and change his heart. When someone invited him to a Baptist church in the area, he was ready to go, and I reluctantly agreed to try it—a miracle in itself! It was scary, and I felt torn. People were worshiping Jesus freely and singing to Him, and I wasn't sure what to make of that.

Through a series of events, we got connected in a small group there. It was a new thing for me to be around lots of real Christians. Even though I know they had to sometimes wonder what planet I was from, they never treated me that way. My husband had the unfortunate job of dealing with my instability. I was like a roller coaster. He exhibited the patience of Christ and tried to help me, but he didn't know how. Gently but progressively he moved us towards attending only the Baptist church. Mostly because of me, we attended both places for six months. There were and still are lots of people I love in the Worldwide Church of God, but they didn't seem to have any more answers at that time than I did. It was like we all had the same problems, but no one had the solution.

By the time New Year's 1997 came around, we had quit going to the Worldwide Church of God completely. We spent a lot of time at the new church. Little by little my questions were being answered, and the bigger pieces of the puzzle were coming together. I had come to realize and believe that Jesus is God and worthy to be worshiped, which was a big thing. People at this church talked a lot about salvation and being born again. My ideas about what salvation was, how it was possible, and even the great importance of it had been so twisted that it took some time for me to understand that it truly is a free and precious gift which comes to us through faith and that we can actually have it now. There were many other aberrant positions that I held to, and the road to orthodoxy has been a long one. But I firmly believe that He who has begun a good work in me will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

One night, close to a year after we began attending church there, the pastor preached from 1 Corinthians 1:18 on The Foolishness of the Cross. I knew that I had treated the cross and Jesus' work on the cross as foolishness my whole life and that I was therefore perishing in my sin. I realized that I needed to be saved, and I desperately desired that. By God's grace, I prayed and trusted in Jesus alone for eternal life.

Jesus Christ, the One I had long denied, in His infinite love and mercy, was pleased to rescue me from the depths of darkness, deception, confusion, and hopelessness and become my Lord and Savior.