

Out of Legalism

As far back as I can remember, about age 5, my mother had cancer. For the next six years I saw her deteriorate until she died when I was 11. I felt cheated and angry and had hostility toward God and toward other people.

During my high school years, I became rebellious, started hanging around other rebellious teens, and started using drugs and alcohol. My senior year in high school a lot happened. My dad had just remarried, and my two best friends died—one in a car accident, and the other committed suicide. My stepmother was Lutheran, and my dad and I were confirmed in the Lutheran Church that year, but I rarely attended and had little real interest in it.

In 1980 I went to college where I met the woman who would soon become my wife. We were married several months later. She was raised attending the Worldwide Church of God (Armstrongism) and had made it clear to me while we were dating that those were her beliefs and that she intended to live her life accordingly. A few months after we were married, we both got baptized in the Worldwide Church of God.

After many years of legalistic living and trying to earn salvation, the Lord began to work with me by causing me to have doubts and questions in my mind on many issues. When changes were made in the church around 1995 and things were in turmoil, I felt the freedom to attend a Promise Keepers gathering. I believe seeds were planted then, and about six months later I attended the big Promise Keepers Conference in the city. There was one speaker there who said something that just kept going through my mind. He said that our church couldn't save us. Since I was in the Worldwide Church of God, which we had believed to be the only true church, this made a great impact on me. Further, he went on to say that it was only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone that we could be saved. When the conference was over, I went home, got on my knees, prayed for forgiveness, and put my trust in Jesus Christ for my salvation.

After reading John Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one part struck me as a good illustration of what happened to me. It was when a character called Faithful was walking, and a man came up, hit him, knocked him down, and continued hitting him. Faithful got up and cried out for mercy, but the man replied that he did not know how to show mercy and knocked him down again. He would have finished him off, except that Someone stepped in and stopped him. The one who beat him and could show no mercy was Moses with the Law. We can try to keep the Law, but we all transgress it, and it can only condemn us. Jesus, who is rich in mercy, steps in and saves us, and that is what He did for me.