

**Theological Conference 2007**  
**A Pilgrim's Journey from Legalism to Freedom**  
Al Spangler

When Anthony called to see if I would be attending the Theological Conference this year, he said one of the scheduled presenters had to cancel, and asked if I would be willing to fill the open slot? While he said the topic could be one of my own choosing he suggested something along the lines of what I shared as a Faith Story two years ago, would be beneficial. With a busy work schedule and a short time to prepare I felt comfortable with Anthony's suggestion.

The title for my presentation today drew upon two sources of inspiration. The first was:

**Heb 11:13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and **pilgrims** on the earth.

**Heb 11:14** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

**Heb 11:15** And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

**Heb 11:16** But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

The second source of inspiration was based on a book that was part of a personal library given me by a close friend and now departed fellow minister. The book was one whose title was familiar, but one I had never read. It was **The Pilgrim's Progress** by John Bunyan.

Whether one fully comprehends it or not, upon conversion, we all begin a journey of Faith. As with any journey, it has a starting point and a desired destination. For some the destination is heaven for others it is The Kingdom of God. While I believe the Kingdom of God is the most biblically correct destination, never the less, the journey will be similar. However, I don't believe any of those such as John Bunyan who felt the destination is heaven will be disappointed upon arrival, to find that in reality, it is the Kingdom of God.

There should be no variance among Christians as to how we arrived at our respective starting points.

**Joh 6:44** No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

**Joh 6:45** It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

The biggest variance among Christians is the starting point of their journey upon accepting Jesus Christ. All the various starting points consist of a combination of truth and misunderstanding (error). The mix will vary as will the nature of the misunderstanding. While the early church had the good fortune of starting with the highest percentage of truth verses misunderstanding; as the book of Acts and Paul's epistles make clear, the early church was not without misunderstandings.

My journey which I want to share with you, like your own, is on-going. None of us has yet reached the ultimate destination in our walk of faith. My journey chronicles the road I traveled from my own starting point to my current location, which in my title I call freedom. The key for me or any Christian getting to this point, regardless of our respective starting point, was provided by our savior Jesus Christ.

**Joh 8:31** Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, **If ye continue in my word**, then are ye my disciples indeed;

**Joh 8:32** And ye shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free.**

## **Background**

### **Thirteen Years Worldwide Church of God 1966-1979**

#### **Hierarchical Organizational Structure**

**WWCG was combined sections of Old Covenant with New Covenant**

Sabbath

Holy Day Observance (Festivals)

Tithing (up to 3 tithes)

#### **Believed Jesus pre-existed as part of Godhead.**

Referred to Christ as Creator and God of Old Testament

Claimed existence of God the Father first revealed by Jesus

#### **Claimed to be God's True Church**

#### **I left WWCG due to revelations of scandal and corruption**

Meeting with Gerald Flurry, Pastor now head of Philadelphia Church of God

#### **Four Years with WWCG Spin-Off Groups 1979-1983**

Church of God International

Biblical Church of God

During this period I began to question Holy Day Observance especially the validity of linking observance to ones salvation. The Sacred Calendar debate during the early 80's made it clear, that even proponents of Holy Day observance could not agree on what days they were to be observed. God is not the author of confusion. (1Cor 13:33)

I also came see errors in previous understanding requiring Tithing as part of New Covenant. Tithe went to Levitical Priesthood. I felt it was fine as a Biblical principle to follow in free will offerings. I could see no Biblical authorization for New testament Ministers calling for or accepting tithes previously directed to Levitical Priesthood. The Jews today do not tithe because there is no Temple and Levitical Priesthood in place; however, they still have many beautiful Synagogues.

#### **Twenty Years in Church of God (Seventh Day) 1984-2004**

Served as Pastor and Associate Pastor in Portland Oregon

Kept Sabbath, Passover (Lords Supper) but did not observe Holy Days

Believed Jesus pre-existed but not as God (until 2004 doctrinal change)

Around 1997 in my research while working with one of our congregation, who was being pulled towards the Trinity, my eyes were opened to see error in my beliefs regarding Christ. I found my previous beliefs that Jesus pre-existed as a member of the God head as I had been taught in WWCG was in error. I also seriously doubted he pre-existed.

During 2003, key Ministers within CG7 began pushing for a doctrinal change that made Jesus God the Son, creator of earth and coequal with God. Myself along with the other Associate Pastors in the Portland Church worked with considerable help from Anthony whose book we all had copies worked to counter this movement with in the General Conference. Locally I gave a series of sermons, drawing heavily for Anthony & Charles Hunting's book on the trinity, entitled "Hear O Israel"

In spring of 2004, the Ministerial Conference was held to debate and vote on this doctrinal change. Unfortunately it was adopted by over a 2/3rds margin.

I sent in my resignation letter June of 2004.

## Major Awakening

During the time were working to counter the proposed doctrinal change concerning God and Jesus Christ we had been in communication with Anthony who was providing valuable assistance. I also started visiting the Restoration Fellowship web-site to gather additional information on the subject. I came across the article entitled: **The Law, the Sabbath and New Covenant Christianity** this was before it was put into booklet form.

The more times I read the paper, the more it opened my eyes to see what I previously thought was Biblical truth regarding the Sabbath, was actually a misunderstanding. I could see what I had been taught and felt I understood was based on inductive reasoning, just as the Trinity and other Gnostic doctrines. I had preached for years on the importance of using deductive reasoning in studying the Bible and avoiding inductive reasoning. **Quite frankly I felt much like Paul probably felt when he encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.**

**Act 9:3** And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

**Act 9:4** And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Here are just a few of the many key Scriptures I felt were clear, with no ambiguity.

**Neh 9:13** Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

**Neh 9:14** **And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:**

**Deu 5:3** The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even us*, who *are* all of us here alive this day.

**Gal 5:2** Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

**Gal 5:3** For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that **he is a debtor to do the whole law.**

**Gal 5:4** Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

**Gal 5:5** For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

**Gal 5:6** **For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.**

**Gal 5:7** Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

**Gal 5:8** This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

**Gal 5:9** A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

**Gal 5:10** I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

**Gal 5:11** And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offense of the cross ceased.

**Gal 5:12** I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

**Gal 5:13** For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

**Gal 5:14** **For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**

There are many more and if you are wrestling with this issue in your own walk of faith I encourage you to prayerfully read this excellent booklet. **The Law, the Sabbath and New Covenant Christianity**

## Conclusion

**Tradition that is not totally Biblical based leads to bondage.**

To avoid this trap follow what I shared earlier in this message.

**Joh 8:31** Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, **If ye continue in my word**, then are ye my disciples indeed;

**Joh 8:32** And ye shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free**.

**There is no short cut to true freedom; one has to seek and find truth to be truly free.** Never, forget there are deceiving principalities and powers in high places working against us.

**Eph 6:12** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

**We cannot overcome the enemy, find truth and gain freedom without an abundant measure of God's grace.**

**Keep Your Focus Christ Centered.**

**Heb 12:2** Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Phi 1:6** Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:

Finally, let me share one of my favorite scriptures. I feel it effectively sums up what I learned in my journey from legalism to freedom.

**Mic 6:8** He hath showed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?