

From Atheist to Theist (Part 47)

Transition to the Supernatural

By

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I became a Christian in 1971 after spending five months attempting to disprove the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, and the reality of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. I was a journalist and an atheist at the time I conducted the investigation. I interviewed a scientist who was a Christian and he challenged me to prove his claims to be wrong. I accepted the challenge and began the investigation. You can read the details of my investigation in a series of reports titled ‘Convince Me There’s A God.’ You can read the series here.

My investigative report was based on evidence available to me in 1971. I promised that after I finished detailing my investigation I would do a follow-up report about what evidence I had found since May of 1971. Did I discover anything in the months and years that followed that changed my mind about my decision to leave atheism for Christian theism? That’s what I will address in this new part of my series.

However, before I begin presenting what evidence I've come across in the last 55 years, I'd like to explain what happened to me when I became a Christian. I admit it was a bit of a surprise.

The Supernatural

Terry Lytle asked me a simple question at the end of my investigation. Was there any ‘reason’ why I shouldn’t believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? I paused, thought for a few moments, then told him I couldn’t think of a ‘reason’ not to believe in Christ. My many questions had been answered to my satisfaction as an investigator. Terry and I sat at the desk in his office. He told me to tell God what I thought and what I wanted. I told God I was a sinner and asked for His forgiveness. I thanked Him for the gift of eternal life that He offered me for believing in Jesus Christ.

Think about that for a minute. A Christian was asking an atheist to talk to God. Atheists don’t believe in God. They don’t believe in the supernatural. So, why would I want to tell God what I thought and what I wanted? Good question.

That moment was both transitional and defining for me. I was physically sitting in a chair at a desk, but something 'supernatural' was going on in a sphere about which I knew nothing. I was about to talk with God and He was listening. I was about to tell God that I was a sinner and needed His forgiveness. God was listening. I was about to tell God that I believed His Son, Jesus Christ, had paid the penalty for my sins on the Cross. God was listening. I asked God for forgiveness based on Christ's sacrifice. God was listening. I told God that I believed Jesus had risen from the dead and would raise me from the dead to give me eternal life. God was listening. That's all I knew to tell God, so Terry said 'Amen.' God was listening.

I opened my eyes and saw a big smile on Terry's face. He shook my hand and called me 'brother.' I had apparently just 'crossed over' from atheist to theist, from unbeliever to believer. I guess I smiled back, but I didn't cry or laugh or jump up and down or shout or do anything more physically than to just say 'thanks.' I remember thinking I had made the right decision – the reasonable decision – but I didn't have any strong emotions about what had just happened. I got out

of my chair, thanked Terry again, left his office, got in my car, and drove home. What I didn't know until later was what happened 'supernaturally' when I prayed that prayer.

The 'supernatural' is a strange thing in a way because you don't see it. Jesus summed it up nicely in John 3:8 –

> "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I knew something had happened to me because I had just 'talked' with God, but I couldn't describe it in physical terms. Even though I had covered hurricanes and other types of storms as a journalist, all I could do was describe how wind impacted physical things. I couldn't see the wind itself. "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." I learned later that I had an experience with the Holy Spirit of God the moment I asked God to forgive me and said I 'believed' in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. What did God do in that moment? He 'saved' me. How?

1. He demonstrated His love for me and was merciful and kind toward me (Romans 5:8)
2. He forgave me and redeemed me through the shed blood of Christ (e.g. Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Revelation 5:9)
3. He justified me – I was no longer under His 'wrath' or 'condemnation' (Romans 5:9)
4. He 'cleansed' me from all unrighteousness' and made me 'righteous' through Christ (e.g. Romans 5:19; 1 John 1:9)
5. He reconciled me to Himself and brought me close to Him (e.g. Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:19-23)
6. He 'accepted' me and gave me His 'peace and joy' (e.g. Ephesians 1:6; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22)
7. He made me 'spiritually alive' (e.g. John 6:63; Romans 6:11; 1 Corinthians 15:22)
8. He gave me the gift of 'eternal life' and recorded my name in the 'Book of Life' (e.g. Romans 6:23; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5)
9. He made me 'a new man,' created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. and placed me into the

'Body of Christ' (e.g. Ephesians 2:15; Ephesians 4:24; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27)

10. He adopted me as His own child – I belonged to Him (e.g. Romans 8:15; Romans 8:23; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5)
11. He made me an 'heir' with Christ and 'guaranteed' my inheritance by giving me His Holy Spirit to live in me (e.g. Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 1:11; Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 3:24)
12. He blessed me with 'every spiritual blessing' in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3)
13. He 'sealed' me with the 'Holy Spirit of promise' (Ephesians 1:13-14)
14. He 'freed' me from sin and death (Romans 6:5-11)
15. He gave me 'access' to talk with Him about anything at anytime (Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:11-12)
16. He gave me 'spiritual gifts' and made me His 'ambassador' (e.g. Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11)
17. He gave me 'works to do' that He had chosen for me long ago (Ephesians 2:10)

18. He gave me ‘hope’ in this life and for the one that would follow (e.g. Romans 15:4; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:5-6; Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:3-8; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17; Titus 1:1-3; Titus 2:11-14)
19. He ‘seated’ me with Christ ‘in heavenly places’ (Ephesians 1:19-21)
20. He promised that I would be with Him forever and ever (e.g. 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 John 2:17; Revelation 1:5-6; Revelation 22:5)

I know that’s a lot to happen from my short prayer, but there’s more I could say about what happened to me spiritually in that moment. The 20 things I listed above are just a short list of things God did for me the moment I asked for His forgiveness and told Him I believed in what His Son had done for me on the Cross and by rising from the dead.

> “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31

"… if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. " Romans 10:9-10

Learning and Emotions

Once I became a Christian I found that I had an almost insatiable hunger to learn about God. My relationship with the Bible changed that day. The Book that I had once tried to prove was not credible and unworthy of anyone reading it, became the Book that I wanted to read and study every moment of every day. The more I read, the more I learned. The more I learned, the more I began to appreciate all that God had done for me. That's when 'emotions' kicked in.

I started attending the same church my parents attended. I enjoyed learning from the pastors, but what I was not prepared for were the emotions I would experience. I remember the first time I sang 'Amazing Grace' in the church. Tears began flowing down my face and I struggled to sing the words. They meant so much to me. Each word said exactly what I had been feeling:

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:
’tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease:

I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine.

Amazing Grace by John Newton continues to be my favorite song. Though I enjoy many other Christian hymns and spiritual songs, nothing touches me like 'Amazing Grace.' I still tear up every time I hear it or sing it. Singing that song in that church 55 years ago opened up a spiritually emotional channel that I didn't know existed.

I had challenged the existence of God, the reliability and credibility of the Bible, and the reality of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – only to find that all of it was true. Even as Jesus told one of His followers two thousand years ago:

> "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

He is all of that and so much more!

I am —

Loved By God

Saved By Grace

Blessed Beyond Measure

Next Time

What I plan to do next is share the ‘process’ of how a former atheist can come to an understanding of what it means to be a child of the ‘Living God.’ That may help explain my thinking when I later share if I found any ‘new evidence’ that would change my decision about leaving atheism for Christianity.

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