



Can I Be Just a Christian?

*A discussion between Stranger,
Partyman, and Brewer*

BY G. C. BREWER

Revised by P. S. Mason

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FOREWORD

This book was originally published by G. C. Brewer with the title, *Can a Man be Just a Christian?* I am making the book available again in slightly revised form because it explains in clear terms a concept the Christian world desperately needs today — the concept of nondenominational Christianity. It is my personal conviction that Christians will never find unity any other way.



I

(Brewer's study. Enter Mr. Stranger)

Stranger: "Good morning, Reverend Brewer. My name is Stranger. I heard you preach last night, and want to tell you I enjoyed it."

Brewer: "Call me Mr. Brewer, if you will. Thank you for the compliment."

Stranger: "I have been hearing of you for a long time, but last night was the first time I ever had the pleasure of hearing you. Yes, I enjoyed the sermon very much. You certainly have large crowds. And I liked the congregational singing. To be frank, I was pleasantly surprised by your service. I - I didn't hear what I expected exactly. You know - ah - well, I enjoyed the service."

Brewer: "I am glad you were with us and I appreciate your telling me you enjoyed our worship. We make no effort at display, and we do not have anything for entertainment. Our worship is plain and informal, but we try to make it spiritual and uplifting. We would be glad for you to visit us again."

S.: "Yes thank you, I intend to come again. I tell you I was surprised."

B.: "In what way were you surprised?"

S.: "Well, I didn't hear what I expected to hear."

B.: "May I ask what you expected to hear?"

S.: "Well, you believe — or I've heard people say that you all — well, your people have not been very congenial or something, you know."

B.: "Perhaps you are right, we have our faults, just like other people."

S.: "Now that is exactly the point. I expected to hear you condemn everyone else and justify yourself, and you didn't do it. But your people are getting this attitude from somewhere; they would not once admit that they were wrong in anything."

B.: "Is that true? Maybe you simply did not understand."

S.: "No, I have heard your men argue that no one can be saved unless he is a member of your denomination. I don't say you ever taught that. I don't think you did, but some of your

people think that.”

B.: “I would not attempt to defend all that my brethren may have said. We have all made mistakes in our efforts to teach the truth, and we have often been misunderstood, and sometimes misrepresented. I still think you are under a misapprehension. If you heard someone say that you must be a member of the church in order to be saved, he was not talking about ‘our church’ or ‘our denomination’ or any other denomination.”

S.: “Why, I have heard them say that in order to be saved you must be a member of the church of Christ!”

B.: “I don’t doubt that for a moment, but the brother who said that did not, unless he had no idea what we are trying to do, use the name church of Christ in a denominational sense. The church of Christ includes all Christians. Do you believe a man can be saved without becoming a Christian?”

S.: “I didn’t mean to start an argument. I don’t think religious arguments ever do any good. You have your opinion and I have mine, and we just as well go our separate ways.”

B.: “I doubt that you have any greater distaste for religious arguments as they are generally conducted than I do. But as intelligent men why may we not at least arrive at a correct understanding of each other’s views even if we differ. Is it broad-mindedness or narrow-mindedness that disqualifies us from discussing our differences?”

S.: “Well, when men see that there is no hope of agreement, there is no use to talk further. You have said that no one is a Christian except members of your church, and of course I can’t accept that.”

B.: “You misunderstood me. I agree that it is useless to prolong a discussion, but let us at least try to understand each other, even if we do not agree.”

S.: “Very well, but I certainly thought you said that all Christians are in the church of Christ.”

B.: “Our trouble arises from a different understanding of the term church of Christ. When Christ said, ‘Upon this rock, I will build my church,’ what denomination did he refer to, or propose to establish?”

S.: “Well, naturally I suppose you think he referred to the one you belong to, and other men think the same about theirs,

so we don't get anywhere."

B.: "It does seem that we can't 'get anywhere,' but I'll make my point clear yet, if you will bear with me."

S.: "I do want to understand you, but I believe that there are Christians in all denominations."

B.: "I am sure you do, but don't you also believe that one can be a Christian without belonging to any denomination?"

S.: "Well, I have never thought about that, but I suppose he could."

B.: "Then we are agreed on that point. That is what we have always taught, and we have tried to be Christians only — not the only Christians — but Christians without any denominational name or affiliation."

S.: "But you are a member of a denomination, will you not admit that?"

B.: "No I will not admit that — at least I am not conscious of being in a denomination. I remember when I was converted to Christ and became a Christian, but do not remember ever having joined a denomination."

S.: "Then when did you become a member of your church — the one you call the church of Christ?"

B.: "By conversion, and at conversion I became a member of the only church I am a member of or ever expect to join."

S.: "But that makes conversion equal to church membership!"

B.: "Exactly so. We read of the 'household of God' (Eph. 2:19) and Paul tells us that the 'house of God' is the 'church of the Living God' (I Tim. 3:15). One becomes a member of the house of God, or family of God the same way a child becomes a member of your household or family, namely, by birth. When we are born again, 'born of the water and of the Spirit' (John 3:5), we become children of God — hence members of his house or family or church."

S.: "Well, don't you think that many people who are not members of your church have been converted or born again?"

B.: "Please understand that I am not talking about 'my church,' but about the Lord's church, the one he established. I have no church, except in the sense of belonging to one, and do not even belong to any except the one that conversion and

regeneration made me a member of — the family of God, or church. God has no children that are not in his family.”

S.: “Well, now, if that is not equal to saying no one is a Christian but persons belonging to the same church you do, I admit I am dense. You say you are a member of the church of God — that you were made so by conversion, and that all other converted persons are in the church with you — they were put there by their conversion. Now, that can’t mean anything else except that the members of all other churches are not converted. Will you still say that I misunderstood you?”

B.: “You reason well, and there is only one point of misunderstanding, but it is the same one that has troubled us all along. I do not say that the members of other churches are not converted, hence not Christians. Everyone that is a Christian became a member of the church of Christ by conversion, by becoming a Christian; then afterward, by some process other than conversion — some ceremony — he was attached to, inducted into, or received by some denomination; some institution other than that which conversion made him a member of.”

S.: “You think, then, that a man can be a member of two churches at once!”

B.: “I do think it possible for a man to become a member of God’s church by obeying the gospel and then to become a member of some denomination. I don’t think that this should be done, you understand, but I think it can be and often is done.”

S.: “Oh, I understand that people can be members of the universal church, the spiritual body, without belonging to any particular denomination. I agree with that.”

B.: “Good! I thought we would agree when we came to understand each other. That is the idea that I have tried to express all along. That is the church I have been talking about and that is what we always mean when we speak of the church of Christ — the spiritual body or family that contains all of God’s people, wherever they are.”

S.: “But you admit that there are Christians who are not in fellowship with you, not in your communion, hence not in your denomination. So it seems to me that what you speak of as the church of Christ is as much a denomination as the one I belong to — the Baptist Church.”

B.: "If there are any Christians who are not in fellowship with me it is their fault. I have not disfellowshipped anyone who is a Christian. I will work with any of God's children in doing the work of the Father. Now if some of God's children — my brethren — go into denominations, they thereby separate themselves from me. They accept the name, rules, and body of doctrine necessary to be a member of that denomination, while I remain only a Christian and follow only the Bible. I am not under any governing body of church officials. I do not give heed to any law made by a pope, council, synod, convention, or association. You say that you are a Christian, but you also say you are a Baptist — a member of the Baptist Church. Could you not be a Christian without belonging to the Baptist Church?"

S.: "Oh, certainly. I don't think that Baptists are the only Christians. I'm not that narrow."

B.: "I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to imply that. I was sure you would say that you could be a Christian and not be a Baptist. You claim to be a Christian and I claim to be a Christian, and as Christians we are alike, we are brothers in all that is common to Christians, but we differ in those things that are peculiar to Baptists. So you have added something that differentiates us. You say you are a Christian and a Baptist — a Christian plus something, whereas I am a Christian only."

S.: "You keep using the expression, 'You say you are a Christian.' Do you mean by that you don't think I am a Christian?"

B.: "Not at all. I mean that I let you decide for yourself. I am not to judge. Only you know whether or not you accept Jesus as your savior and obey him. If you came to me to inquire what to do to become a Christian, or if you were seeking to know whether or not you had properly complied with the Lord's requirements, I would point out the conditions as they are expressed in the New Testament, and then I would ask you to decide whether that was what you did in turning to the Lord. But that is not the point under discussion. I am proceeding upon the assumption that you are a Christian. In this discussion I have tried to explain our attitude toward denominationalism. I have been on the defensive."

S.: "Well, I wouldn't want you to take the offensive. In your 'defensive' you have landed some heavy blows against other churches."

B.: "Have I been unkind or discourteous?"

S.: "Well, no, not to me. But you think your church is not a denomination and all the rest are. I don't see how you can make that out."

B.: "You have admitted that we can be Christians and not belong to any denomination. That is all I claim. Can you not allow us to be Christians and not try to force us to be something more?"

S.: "Did you not do something to get into the church of Christ just as I did to get into the Baptist Church? Did they not receive you?"

B.: "No, I have never subscribed to the views of any denomination. I became a member of the Lord's church by obeying the gospel."

S.: "But weren't you baptized by the people of your faith as I was baptized by Baptist people?"

B.: "You were baptized by the authority of the Baptist Church expressed by vote of the members after they heard your confession. I was baptized by the authority of the Lord Jesus and in obedience to his word, for the purpose of receiving the promised blessings — the pardon of sins and other things — not for the purpose of entering into the fellowship of a denomination."

S.: "But who baptized you?"

B.: "A preacher of the gospel."

S.: "But was he not a member of your church — the one started by Alexander Campbell?"

B.: "If he was a member of any denomination, he didn't let me know it. He certainly did not ask me to comply with any denominational laws or support any denominational organization. Nor do I follow any doctrine of Alexander Campbell. Campbell's plea, along with many others, was for Christians to drop all denominational creeds, names, and organization, and follow nothing but the Bible. Those who did this are generally called the church of Christ, but this is not the name of the church. It is only a descriptive term. The church of God or the church of the Firstborn are equally suitable, but confusion

occurs when we use those descriptions. We do accept Campbell's plea not to follow any teaching or organization of men, but only because we believe it is also taught in the Bible." (Matt. 15:7-13; I Cor. 1:12-15; I Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:8, 11-12)

S.: "But by what authority were you baptized?"

B.: "By the authority of Jesus Christ expressed in the Great Commission, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' (Matt. 28:19) When the Ethiopian treasurer was baptized by Philip after a simple confession of his faith in Christ (Acts 8:26-39), of what church was he then a member? I did the same thing he did. Why did that not make me a member of the same church?"

S.: "But, I would like to know just why you then began work with these people — the church of Christ — and not with the Methodists or Baptists or Presbyterians. Is it not because you agree with their doctrine and do not agree with the doctrine of the others?"

B.: "I am a Christian — a Christian only — because obedience to the gospel as described above made me a Christian and did not make me a Methodist or a Baptist or a Presbyterian. In order to get into any of these denominations I would have to apply for membership and be received by them according to their respective ways of receiving members."

S.: "Well, you know you are connected with a body of religious people who are separate and distinct from other religious bodies. Now, why is that peculiar and distinct body of people not as much a denomination as the other bodies are? That is what I want to know. But just now I must be going.

B.: "But will you promise to let me try to answer that last question? Will you permit me to show you why the people who are Christians only are separate from others and yet do not constitute a denomination?"

S.: "Yes, I would like to talk with you again. I want to see how you would explain that. But for the present I must say goodbye."

B.: "Farewell."

II

(*Mr. Brewer's study. Enter Stranger and Partyman*)

Stranger: "Good morning Mr. Brewer. This is Mr. Partyman."

Brewer: "Very glad to meet you Mr. Partyman. And how are you this morning. Mr. Stranger? These chairs may be a little dusty. My study has just been swept."

Stranger (*taking a seat*): "I have been talking to Mr. Partyman here about the conversation you and I had some time ago on the subject of the church, and he expressed a desire to hear you explain your views. I took the liberty to bring him along this morning. I hope you do not object."

Brewer: "Not at all. I am glad he came. Are you a Christian, Mr. Partyman?"

Partyman: "Yes, sir. I have been a Christian and a member of the Methodist Church for nigh on to forty years."

Stranger: "Mr. Partyman is a Methodist, I am a Baptist, and you are a member of the church of Christ, as you would say."

B.: "No, that is not the way I would say it. I would say Mr. Partyman is a Methodist, you are a Baptist, and I am a Christian. Those are the names we wear. Then if the idea of denominational membership were not made clear by those terms, I would further say, Mr. Partyman belongs to the Methodist denomination, you belong to the Baptist denomination, and I belong to no denomination."

P.: "Why, if that isn't bigotry! While you are telling how you would say it, I'll just tell you how I would express myself. I would say I am a Methodist, Stranger is a Baptist, and you are a Campbellite."

B.: "Yes, some people cannot express their feeling any other way. They can't seem to bear anyone's trying to be Christians only."

P.: "Why should it be any more offensive to you to call you a Campbellite than it is to me to call me a Methodist or to Mr. Stranger to call him a Baptist. You called us by those names and then in contrast called yourself a Christian. I think that is narrowness."

B.: "Mr. Partyman, if it offends you in the least to call

you a Methodist, I shall never be guilty of that offense again. I have no desire to accuse a person of being a Methodist when he denies it. But you voluntarily told me that you were a Methodist . . .”

P.: “I do not deny being a Methodist. I am proud of the fact. My Father and Mother were Methodists before me. I have been a Methodist for forty years and I expect to die a Methodist.”

B.: “Very well, then you should not object when I call you a Methodist.”

P.: “Neither should you object when I call you a Campbellite, unless you admit you are ashamed of being a Campbellite.”

B.: “But I deny that I am a Campbellite. I told you that I am a Christian. You told me that you are a Methodist, but suppose I should say you are a Mormon, and you should not object to being called a Mormon unless you are ashamed of being a Mormon.”

P.: “But that is absurd, for I am not a Mormon.”

B.: “Neither am I a Campbellite, but you persist in saying that I am. Suppose, in spite of your protests, I should insist that you are a Mormon, what would you think?”

P.: “Well, I could easily prove that I am not a Mormon. I never joined the Mormons: no evidence could be produced to show that I ever joined them. They never received me. They would not have me, for I do not believe their doctrine. I could not be a Mormon.”

B.: “Likewise, I never did join the Campbellites. There is no evidence to show that I ever did join them. They never did receive me. They would not have me, for I do not believe their doctrine. I could not be a Campbellite. I do not believe in any denomination. They may all have good doctrine in their creeds, but I do not believe in human creeds. The New Testament is my only creed.”

P.: “You are preaching for the Campbellites. That is pretty good evidence that you are a Campbellite.”

B.: “I beg your pardon. I am not preaching for the Campbellites. I am preaching the gospel as did the apostles and Timothy, and others. ”

P.: “But who supports you to preach this gospel?”

B.: "My brethren."

P.: "That is just it exactly. Your brethren in the Campbellite faith."

B.: "No, my brethren in the faith of the gospel. My fellow Christians."

P.: "Well, I am a Christian and I do not help support you."

B.: "No, you do not. If you helped to keep me preaching, you would want me to preach for the Methodist Church and to make all my converts Methodists. But as it is, the people who support me are Christians only, and they are satisfied for me to be under the government and control of Christ alone, who is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22), and to preach his will as it is expressed in the New Testament. I have the fellowship of Christians who are content with the New Testament simplicity in work and worship. A man who is a member of a religious party — even if he is a Christian — will not fellowship me unless I join his party and work according to its rules."

P.: "Well, all the people who are converted by your preaching join your church. I have not heard of their joining any other church."

B.: "Persons who obey the gospel as a result of my preaching are not asked to join any church."

P.: "I don't understand. Do you mean that you do not take them all into your communion — into this church?"

B.: "Brother Partyman, I try to preach the gospel as it was 'once for all delivered to the saints,' and I try to get people to obey the gospel just as they did in the days of Peter and Paul. There is nothing said in the New Testament about joining the church. No apostle ever asked anyone to join the church. In fact, that expression is not found in the whole Bible."

S.: "Do you mean to say that people did not become members of the church in the days of the apostles?"

B.: "No, I do not mean that. I know they did become members of the church, but they did so by obeying the gospel. The same process that made them Christians made them members of the church. We read that people 'believed,' that they 'repented and turned to the Lord,' and that they became 'obedient to the faith,' but we never read of their joining any church, of getting religion and joining the church, or of professing, etc. Such expressions were born of denominations. They are not

found in the Bible.”

P.: “And you think they got into the church then just as folks get into your church today?”

B.: “On the contrary, I try to get people today to do just as they did then. We try to follow apostolic precepts and example in all things. There should be no difficulty on this point, for nothing is plainer than the simple precepts of the gospel as it was preached by the apostles and as it was obeyed by thousands of people. Let us look at a few examples. Stranger, will you take that Bible and read for us some cases of conversion? If we learn how the apostles taught we shall have to turn to the history of their deeds — the Acts of the Apostles. Christ strictly charged these apostles not to begin to execute the great commission — that is, not to preach remission of sins in his name — until the Holy Spirit should come upon them and clothe them with power. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit and then at Jerusalem to begin to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name. Look at Acts 1:4 and 5, and Luke 24:46 through 49, Mr. Stranger. Is not that what those verses say?”

S.: “Yes, that is here in the verses you mentioned.”

B.: “Very well, let us continue then and see exactly how people were converted after these men received the promised Holy Spirit and began to carry out the commission of Christ. Stranger, will you turn to the second chapter of Acts and read for us? Do you have it? What does it say?”

S.: “Well, it says here in verses one to four that the Holy Spirit came upon them and filled them.”

B.: “That was as Christ promised. What else happened? Here is another Bible, Partyman, you follow along with us. I will read from memory.”

P.: “I don’t doubt it, this chapter is one of your sugar sticks.”

B.: “Why shouldn’t it be? This is the day the gospel began to be preached to all nations. This is the beginning of Christ’s church.

P.: “Well, I’ll take what it says, but I don’t want your interpretation of it.”

B.: “Wonderful! That is exactly what we want people to do. We believe God’s word can be understood without an interpreter or teachings of men. So we’ll just read, and I’ll let

you men do the reading. Proceed, Mr. Stranger, what is the next thing that happens?"

S.: "Well, in verses five through thirteen, it tells of the multitude coming together, and it says they were amazed because they could all understand the apostles. They were from different nations and spoke different languages. It says some of them thought the apostles were 'full of new wine.' "

B.: "Was that multitude assembled when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles?"

S.: "No, the sixth verse says they came together when they heard the sound."

B.: "Read on, what do you see next?"

S.: "In verses fourteen through thirty-six we have what Peter said to that multitude in explanation of the power that was displayed in him and the other apostles."

B.: "Yes, Peter's sermon. Summarize the main points of his message, Mr. Stranger."

S.: "He told them that they were not drunk, but that this was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that God would pour out his Spirit in the last days."

B.: "What next?"

S.: "Well, he tells them of Jesus whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead. He quotes from David to prove that God had promised to raise him from the grave. He says David was not yet raised, hence he spoke of Christ. He says Christ had been raised and that he and the other apostles were witnesses of the fact. He says that Christ is now at the right hand of God, and has received the promise of the Spirit and has poured out the power which they saw."

B.: "What was the conclusion?"

S.: "Do you mean what was the result of the sermon?"

B.: "No, what was his conclusion? What did he tell them to 'know assuredly'?"

S.: "Oh, that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ."

B.: "All right, now what was the result of this sermon?"

S.: "The thirty-seventh verse says when they heard this they were 'cut to the heart. . .'"

P.: "This Bible says, 'pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

B.: "Yes, you have the American Standard, and Stranger the Revised Standard Version. But what was the answer to this question? You read it from your Bible, Partyman."

P. (*reading*): "'And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

B.: "What verse is that?"

P.: "The thirty-eighth, as if you didn't know!"

B.: "Well, did they accept this answer? Were they baptized?"

S.: "Yes, verse forty-one says those who received his word were baptized, and about three thousand were added."

B.: "Do you see anything there about joining the church? Is the church mentioned?"

S.: "No, it is not."

B.: "Then apparently they did nothing to join a church except what Peter told them to do in verse thirty-eight."

P.: "We are way off the subject. We have just let you argue your doctrine — we have helped you."

B.: "Yes, you read the doctrine I teach every time you read the New Testament, and that is all we have been doing. Do you concede that I teach just what Peter taught in this chapter?"

S.: "But we want to know why you people do not constitute a denomination. . ."

P.: "Yes, and if you are the church of Christ, we want to know where the church of Christ was before Alexander Campbell was born to establish your church. That is what we want you to tell us; we have let you get off the subject."

B.: "No, we were not off the subject at all, and I would not like for us to get off at just this point. Now, you have just read from the second chapter of Acts where sinners were convicted of sin by the preaching of the gospel; they heard and it cut to their hearts. When they inquired what to do Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. They did this and after that time are referred to as the church. Apparently nothing else is required to be added to the church, for nowhere in the New Testament is any other thing asked of people desiring to be saved. Now, did this make those people members of

some denomination, or was it the church of Christ — or the church of God — that they were made members of? If they were not made members of any denomination by thus complying with the requirements of the gospel, why may we not comply with the same terms in exactly the same way now and not be in a denomination, but be exactly what those converts became? Honestly now, what church was it that those people were added to that day?”

P.: “It was not the Campbellite Church, I am sure of that, for it was not in existence for eighteen hundred years after that.”

B.: “Good! Thank you, Partyman. If that did not make Campbellites then, it will not make Campbellites now, and this is just what I’ve been trying to show you. When I obeyed the gospel just as those people did on Pentecost, I was added to the same church that God added them to, and when I teach others to do this, I know God adds them to the same church, and you yourself have said that it is not the Campbellite Church. Therefore, I know I have never been made a Campbellite. I am not very concerned with Alexander Campbell’s church as long as I can this easily avoid getting into it. I prefer to just follow the New Testament and you have agreed with me that it did not make Campbellites. Is the question not then settled?”

P.: “No, it is not settled, but I knew you would condemn everyone but your own church. I told Stranger you would do that. You always do it everytime you preach. I am glad I am not that narrow. I am going. Stranger, you can stay longer if you want to.” (*Exit Partyman*)

B.: “Well, he got the last word in whether there was anything it or not.

S.: “Mr. Brewer, I feel that I owe you an apology for bringing that fellow in here. I didn’t know he was that way. Methodists are usually very liberal.”

B.: “Oh, no, you don’t owe me an apology. I meet men like Partyman nearly every day. Yes, as a rule Methodists are liberal, but he is an exceptionally partisan Methodist.”

S.: “Don’t you think some of your people are unreasonable, too?”

B.: “I’m sure that they are.”

S.: “Well, now that we are alone and calm again, I want

you to clear up the point that we were on when our former conversation ended. You say you do not belong to a denomination, and that your people do not constitute a denomination, yet you and your people are a separate and distinct body of religious people. Now, I have been studying this question, and I looked up the word 'denomination' in the dictionary. I find that it means 'a class or society of individuals called by the same name; a sect.' Why is not your church a denomination? It is a separate group of people called by the same name."

B.: "Neither the name Christian or church of Christ is a sectarian or party name. The terms are universally applied to all followers of Christ. You belong to that class of individuals called Christians, and so do I, hence we are in the same class. Being both Christians, we are both in Christ's church. But you are also a Baptist — you belong to the class, party, or denomination called by the name Baptist — and I do not belong to that party and therefore we are separated. The name Christian will not separate us; we both wear it. But the name Baptist designates you as belonging to a certain party of Christians; it is a party name. I belong to no party of Christians. I am simply a Christian and would be in accord with all other Christians if they did not belong to parties."

S.: "But does 'denomination' mean 'party'?"

B.: "Certainly it does. Did not your authority give 'sect' as one of its meanings? The terms sect and denomination are synonymous. A sect is also a party."

S.: "Well, that may be true, but there is still a difficulty. Your people are certainly a distinct party or body. You are part of no other bodies. Don't you think it is possible to make a party name out of a universal name? Suppose there should be a political party organized in this country called 'American Citizens.' Would they be any better than Republicans or Democrats simply because they used a universal name? Suppose they should claim they were not a party because every citizen of this country would be an American Citizen, yet they are a party with a special party platform. Would their claims be true? It seems to me that this is what you are doing. You claim you are not a denomination because you wear a universal name, yet you are a separate party with a set of beliefs, just like everyone else."

B.: "I'll answer your questions in the order you gave them. Yes, it is possible to sectarianize the name Christian and church of Christ, but that is what we try to avoid. Some of our members have never understood what we are pleading for and use the description of the church in a sectarian sense, but most do understand that the church of Christ includes all Christians, even those in denominations. You will also notice that we spell church with a small letter. In designating an American citizen, you spell the word with a lower case 'c', but in referring to a member of the American Citizen party, you would have to use a capital. Now your illustration is not accurate because your party is a party with a peculiar party platform, whereas we as a religious people have no party platform, or creed. Our creed is one that all Christians will accept — the New Testament. That belongs to no party. It belongs to us all."

S.: "There, now, you used the expression, 'we as a religious people.' Now that body of religious people is bound to be 'a people' apart from other religious people, hence a party or denomination."

B.: "Of course we are not a part of any religious denomination, for we refuse to be divided into parties. Yet, we are in a body to ourselves, but we are forced to be because others separate themselves from us by going into sects. Let us suppose a case. The denominations in our town decide to have a union meeting. Let us suppose that they secure the services of a famous evangelist, whose duty will be to convert people to Christ — to make Christians, and then to allow them to join any denomination they may choose. Let us further suppose that the evangelist preaches the gospel just as recorded in the New Testament, and that as a result five hundred persons obey the Lord and become Christians. Now, after this meeting is over, let us suppose that these five hundred Christians are gathered together at the union meeting house and all the preachers of town are there with cards for these people to sign, signifying their choice of denomination. Now, imagine that fifty of these Christians go into the Baptist Church, according to the Baptists' way of receiving members. Seventy-five of these Christians go into the Methodist Church — take heir vow, etc.; and one hundred join the Presbyterian Church. Thus these two hundred and twenty-five new converts are not only separated from the other

two hundred and seventy-five, but are separated from each other by party names and doctrines. But now the remaining two hundred and seventy-five have no preference among the denominations, and they don't wish to be divided. Therefore, they decide to remain Christians only and worship God together and labor to get others to become Christians. Now, what denomination would they belong to?"

S.: "They would belong to one all their own."

B.: "Why so? To what denomination did the five hundred belong at the end of the meeting?"

S.: "They did not belong to any denomination."

B.: "Exactly. Now these two hundred and seventy-five just remain as they were, and work and worship just as all did during the evangelistic campaign. Why are they now a denomination?"

S.: "Well, they are separate from the others."

B.: "But who is responsible for the separation, those who remained out of all parties or those who joined different parties?"

S.: "This is the point I want Partyman to help me on, but he would not wait until we got to the subject. He is better informed than I am."

B.: "You had better make another appointment and bring him along again."

S.: "Do you mind?"

B.: "Not at all. I shall be glad to see you."

S.: "Very well, then, we will see you again in a few days."

(Exit Stranger)

III

(Brewer's study, Enter Stranger and Partyman)

Brewer: "Good morning, gentlemen. Come right in. I see you are faithful in keeping an appointment. Will you be seated?"

Stranger: "If we may have a little of your time this morning, Mr. Partyman has some points he wants to submit for your consideration. He says, however, that he doesn't want you to interrupt him. He says you confuse ideas."

B.: "Well, I shall try to be courteous to Mr. Partyman, and if I misstate or misunderstand him at any time, I hope you will correct me. Have I not always been fair?"

S.: "Yes, I think you have, but somehow Partyman and I can both see our side much clearer when we are off to ourselves than when we are talking to you. You seem to head us off or something, and we want to present our views before you say anything."

B.: "If Mr. Partyman will confine himself to the issue, I will not interrupt him. But there should be some understanding here. How long does he wish to talk and will he stay to hear me when I am allowed to reply?"

Partyman: "I don't want to argue. There is no good in arguments. And I don't want any of your slick-tongued, practiced Campbellite dodges, and supposed cases. This way of dogmatizing and debating and sending everyone to hell but your own little narrow-minded sect of belligerent Campbellites is uncharitable and unChristian. I'm a Christian myself. I don't believe in belittling people."

B.: "I see you do not, Brother Partyman. So proceed in your charitable way to present some 'real facts.' What facts do you refer to?"

P.: "Well, the last time you presented to Stranger a supposed big union meeting in which five hundred persons were converted, but none of them joined any church until the meeting was over and then you had a number of them develop a Campbellite tendency and kick up a fuss. And Stranger didn't know any better than to let you get by with it and think you had made a point. Now in the first place, no such meeting was

even held or ever will be held. In union meetings the converts express their preference of church at the same time they give their lives to the Lord. There is never any such procedure as you proposed. And in the second place, the people who are converted in union meetings do not become Christians according to your doctrine. You think people have to be baptized. Union evangelists do not baptize anybody. Therefore, your supposed case is without point in this discussion."

B.: "That supposed meeting was only to illustrate a point. We specifically stipulated that the evangelist preach the gospel as recorded in the New Testament and that the converts must obey the gospel. Such a case is not at all impossible, and it makes clear the fact that people can become Christians — members of Christ's church — and not belong to any denomination. But since you object to an imaginary case, we will discard it and deal with real cases. Now, take that meeting in which three thousand were converted and see what you can say about it. Those three thousand were added to the Lord's church. To what denomination did they belong?"

P.: "There you go, right back to Pentecost! You said you would not interrupt me. I want to deal with you and your people as you are right here among us. I know you are a denomination. I can prove it if you will let me."

S.: "Let Partyman present some things he showed me before we came."

B.: "Very well, proceed."

S.: "Give your definition and description of a denomination, Mr. Partyman."

P.: "A denomination is a body or party of religious people who are in agreement in doctrine, uniform in worship, and wear the same name. They are separate and distinct from other organizations or bodies of religious people and as a corporate body they own property and carry on religious enterprises, educational, charitable, and missionary. Now, I find here in Lubbock an organization of religious people wearing the name church of Christ. They are different from the several other denominations of town in name, in doctrine, and in worship. They have their official board, own property, employ a preacher of their own faith, and carry on religious activities. Now I do not find any other body in this town of the same faith and order,

but I move over to Sweetwater, and there is a body of the same people; same in name, in doctrine, in organization, in worship, and in claims. In Fort Worth I find another body of the same people. In Dallas I find them again. I go over the state and I find them in every county and in nearly every town. I find that they have a school at Abilene and a paper — a party organ — at Austin. They also have one or two orphanages. I go on through Oklahoma and Arkansas and I find the same people. I cross over to Tennessee and Kentucky and everywhere I find them the same in name and claims. They all are in agreement and a preacher that is acceptable with one is acceptable with all. And yet I find that this people — this band, party, cult, or denomination of people — universally and uniformly have the unmitigated audacity to claim that they are not a denomination. To me this is absurd — too absurd to talk about — therefore I must go —”

S.: “No, Mr. Partyman, wait until Brewer replies to these points. I think he will have to capitulate now. You got our views well expressed at last. Now Mr. Brewer, just tell why you are not a denomination? What do you lack? You *know* you are a denomination.”

B.: “No, indeed, we are not, any more than —”

P.: “See there, don’t that beat you?”

S.: “To save my life I don’t see how you can make that claim.”

B.: “Will you let me show you? You asked what we lack, will you allow me to answer?”

S.: “Personally, I’m anxious to hear your answer.”

B.: “Partyman’s representation is not quite true to facts. In the first place we do not all wear the name, church of Christ, nor do we use it in the sense of a title or proper name, but simply as a description. God never gave his church a name, for names were unnecessary until men started denominations. Many descriptions of the church are used in the New Testament, such as church of God, church of the First-Born, and church of Christ. All of these are simply descriptions of a certain group of people, namely, those people who belong to God, or Christ. Any of these descriptions would suit us fine and some non-denominational churches use others besides church of Christ, but we generally use this description to avoid confusion

with denominations. We do not consider it as *the name* of the church, however, and it would do to simply put 'Church' over the door. Some congregations have done this, but it creates confusion.

"If all the churches have the same doctrine it just goes to show that God's word is sufficiently clear for everyone to agree on its teaching without any creds of men or decisions handed down by councils. It proves that man-made creeds are unnecessary.

"In the next place, there is no collective connection or organic union among the congregations. As a corporation or organization they own no property and operate no school or orphanage, nor do they print a paper. There are no church institutions among us —"

P.: "Does this congregation not own this house? Is not Abilene Christian College a church school? Did not this church send a donation to that school recently?"

B.: "Give me time, Mr. Partyman, and we will cover one point at a time.

"1. There is no organic connection between Christ's churches. They have no central head and therefore no headquarters. Christ is the head of the church and heaven its headquarters. (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:22, Col. 1:18) Hence, there is no earthly headquarters or source of authority. Each congregation is independent. As a local organization, the church has its officials — elders and deacons (Acts 14:23, I Tim. 3:1-13) — but these officials have no jurisdiction over any other church, and they are answerable to no superior official or church dignitary. They answer only to Christ. They hold their place by selection and appointment of the congregation and, of course, they must satisfy the congregation that they perform their scriptural functions. The congregation thus organized may own property, but no other church could touch it. If there should cease to be a congregation, the property would be disposed of as provided in the deed."

P.: "Well, that is just like other denominations."

B.: "No indeed. The Methodist Church owns property in this town. Now, suppose something should happen to take all Methodists out of this town. Who would get the Methodist Church Building? Would not that property belong to the

Methodist Organization, and could not the presiding elder of this district sell the property and turn the money over for use by Methodists elsewhere?"

P.: "Why, of course."

B.: "Well, we could do no such thing, for we have no such organization. Our building belongs only to us as a local group of Christians. Furthermore, we could sell our building without consulting anyone, for we have no denominational machinery. We are under no one's authority but Christ.

"2. Let us next look at schools, orphanages, papers, etc. It is true that we have such things, but they are not operated by any organization. They are operated by groups of Christians who have gotten together for this purpose, and the money is raised by freewill offerings. Suppose you and Stranger went together to put out a religious paper. Would it be a Methodist or a Baptist publication?

P.: "Well, neither."

B.: "Then why does it make us a denomination for some Christians to put out a paper exalting Christ? The views of the paper are only those of the persons involved, not of any church hierarchy. The churches of Christ have no denominational officials, no denominational money, no denominational institutions — for the reason that Christ's church is not a denomination.

"3. As to your finding churches at different places wearing the same name and practicing the same things, that can also be done in the New Testament. We have the church at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Ephesus, at Philippi, etc. There was some cooperation between these congregations but there was no organic connection. They were independent. They had no pope, cardinal, presiding elder, or any such machinery as the denominations that men have organized and called churches have."

P.: "Well, what you said certainly does not make me have as high regard for your church as I had before. I thought you did have some system, some organization with businesslike and sensible methods."

B.: "We do not belong to any denomination. We belong only to the church Christ built upon the rock, over which he is Head, and we have no rules of government, no methods, and no system except that which he gave us through the inspired

apostles. I am sure these laws and methods do not seem sensible or businesslike to men, or they never would have established denominations of their own, with laws and machinery of their own devising."

P.: "But do you not think that we must have organization and order in religion?"

B.: "Yes, but I think the Lord's way is far better than man's way. A local congregation as an independent organization is the only organization the Lord ever authorized."

S.: "Do you not have any organization except the local church?"

B.: "Absolutely none."

S.: "Do you not have state connection and then national organization?"

B.: "No, we are just Christians. We have no organization other than the local congregation."

P.: "That is nothing but religious anarchy, spiritual sovietism. You recognize no head, submit to no authority, and are not directed by any leaders. I am glad I am a Methodist."

B.: "Oh, we have a head, Mr. Partyman, Christ is the Head of his church. We submit to his authority in all things. His will for us is found in the New Testament, and it — the New Testament — gives us instruction and authority for all good works. (II Tim. 3:16) Do you not believe the Word of God is a sufficient guide in religious matters? Instead of anarchy we have an absolute monarchy. Christ is King of his kingdom and the sole Ruler of his people."

P.: "Well, I think we ought to have some sensible organization. Some human officers that we can see and understand and that can be business managers for the Lord's work. Of course, we acknowledge Christ as supreme, but we want men to lead us and interpret Christ's will for us and formulate our faith so we know what we believe."

B.: "I think you could learn a valuable lesson from the example of Israel. Like Israel you also want a king. They were not satisfied with God as their Ruler and Leader, and clamored for a king. God gave them a king, but you know the result. Division, wars, oppression, and finally ruin. And denominationalism has brought similar results. It causes division, rivalries, contentions, and sectarian hatreds. Nothing so hinders

union among believers as denominational creeds, machinery, monetary interests, and high-salared officials. Of course, it is natural for men to boast of their powerful organizations and impress the world with statistics. But how different are the spirit and teaching of the New Testament. Christ said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'" (Luke 17:20-21)

P.: "Well, I want you to know I am glad I am not a Campbellite. You have not convinced me. Proselyting people is all you try to do. I told Stranger that you was just like all the rest of 'em. I knew you would get mad before we quit. That's why I didn't want to argue. There is no good in arguments. I believe in letting everybody believe as he pleases. I have no more to say." (*Exit Partyman*)

B.: "Well, Mr. Stranger, will you also go away?"

S.: "I had just as well, I suppose. You got into questions that I had not thought about. This denominational machinery business put me to thinking. But you know, we Baptists don't have all that ecclesiastical hierarchy that the Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists have. This discussion made me glad that I am a Baptist. But wait now; I don't want you to start on us. After all, don't you think it right for people to join the church of their choice? We can never see things all alike anyway. I'd like to hear your opinion on this sometime, but I must go now."

B.: "Well you come again?"

S.: "I hope to."

B.: "I shall be glad to see you."



IV

(Reading room of Y.M.C.A. Brewer, Stranger, and Partyman meet and exchange greetings, after which the following discussion takes place.)

Brewer: "Have you men been studying the question of denominationalism any more?"

Partyman: "I have not. I am satisfied with my church, and I don't intend to change my ideas or my relationship, therefore there is no use for me to study anything else. My church is as good as any other."

B.: "Brother Partyman, what could possibly be 'as good' as finding God's will and doing exactly that — no more and no less. I try to be a student of God's Word, and I think I would accept any new truth that may come to my attention. I would change my teaching and practice if I should find that either were out of harmong with God's Word. It might be that my ideas are simply inherited or borrowed from someone else and not taught in God's word at all. God said concerning the Jews of old that 'their fear of me is a commandment of men,' and Christ tells us that if we teach for doctrine the commandments of men, our worship is vain." (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:9)

P.: "That is just equal to saying that everyone is wrong but you, and that you would like to proselyte everybody to your own denomination. I've heard those arguments for forty years, and I understand your meaning. I am glad I am not that narrow."

B.: "Whether the man who confesses both the possibility and probability of his being wrong and expresses a desire to be put right and a willingness to change when he sees his error exhibits more narrowness than the man who says he does not want to learn anything and he would not change if he found that he were wrong, I am willing for the world to judge. I have never said or even thought that everyone else is wrong and I am right, but I know that the doctrines of men are wrong and the Bible is right. Therefore, those who follow the precepts of men are wrong and those who follow the teachings of the Bible are right. I make every effort to be in the latter class, and that is why I believe in measuring my doctrine and practice by the Bible."

P.: "But you are always trying to measure someone else by your interpretations of the Bible."

B.: "There again you misrepresent —"

Stranger: "Of course, we all admit that it is right to follow the teaching in the Bible. The Bible is the standard, but we should not be compelled to submit to some other man's interpretation of the Bible."

B.: "Amen, brother. That is just why I would not belong to a denomination, for that is exactly what the councils, conferences, synods, and conventions do when they make laws and creeds for their respective bodies to believe."

P.: "But isn't that exactly what you do when someone joins your church? For example, I don't agree with your interpretation of baptism, but you wouldn't let me in your church unless I accepted your interpretation would you?"

B.: "We do not expect everyone to agree on questionable issues, but baptism is not one of these. Scholars in every denomination have the same opinion as to what the New Testament teaches and what the early church practiced in regard to baptism, and that includes Methodist scholars such as Adam Clarke."

S.: "Before we get into an argument, there is one point that I am interested in, and when I get Mr. Brewer's idea on that, I think we had better declare an armistice."

B.: "What is the point?"

S.: "You remember I asked you last time we talked if you do not think it is right for people to join the church of their choice. Don't you think a man ought to exercise his own volition in matters of that nature? You know a man's religion is a very private and sacred thing, and surely a man should be fully persuaded in his own mind. You seem so broad-minded and liberal I can't think that you would not agree to this, but Mr. Partyman frequently speaks of your proselyting people and thinking that your church is the only one that is right, and I just want you to speak freely on this point. What is your idea?"

B.: "I thought I made that plain in our first talk, but I will try again, and I will approach the subject from a different angle this time. In the first place, I will state that nothing is more clearly taught in the Bible than that man is a free moral agent; that his will is respected and that he has both the power and the

privilege of choosing his course of conduct — of choosing between right and wrong. But when it comes to obeying a command of God, man can exercise his power of choice just this far: he can either obey or disobey as he chooses. But if he obeys, he cannot choose his method of obeying, for there is only one possible way to obey a command, and that is to do just what is commanded, no more and no less. Now, when you speak of joining the church of your choice, of course you use the word church in the sense of a denomination. Now, if it is right for man to belong to a denomination at all, I suppose one would be as good as another, and therefore he would be free to choose the one he likes best. But I think the Bible teaches denominationalism itself is wrong. God's people should all be one."

P.: "And your church ought to be the one, you think. I am glad I am not that narrow."

B.: "No, I have no church and I belong to no denomination. I think all Christians should be united. As to 'joining churches,' let us find out something about the church as it is spoken of in the Bible. First, what is the church? Let the Bible answer. Brother Stranger, you read these references as I point to them."

S. (*reading*): "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.'"

B.: "'the body, the church.' Very well. That is Col. 1:18. Now read the twenty-fourth verse of the same chapter."

S. (*reading*): "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."

B.: "All right, 'his body, that is, the church.' Now please read Eph. 1:22, 23."

S. (*reading*): "'And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.'"

B.: "There it is again in reverse order. 'The church, which is his body.'"

P.: "What has that got to do with it?"

B.: "Just this, if the church is the body of Christ, then when you say, 'Join the church of your choice,' it is equal to saying join the body of Christ of your choice."

P.: "Well, that is all right. They are all bodies of Christ — that is, all orthodox churches are."

B.: "Let's see how many bodies God intended there be. Stranger, will you read some more for us? I'll mark the passages and pass them to you and we will not stop to comment."

S. (*reading*): "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call' (Eph. 4:4). 'For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (I Cor. 12:13). 'And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body' (Col. 3:15). 'For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.' " (Rom. 12:4, 5)

B.: "That is certainly sufficient to show that there is but one body, and that the church is that body."

P.: "Yes, but it said distinctly that there are many members in that body, and that is exactly what I believe. All the churches are members of the one great Spiritual body."

B.: "To be sure there are many members, but the individual Christians are the members. The church is compared to the physical body. One body but many members as hand, foot, eye, ear, nose, etc. So we — Christians — constitute the body of Christ. Read the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians. Paul there illustrates the unity of the body — not its divisions — and he says in the twenty-fifth verse that God had so distributed the spiritual gifts and 'so adjusted the body' 'that there may be no discord in the body,' and in verse twenty-seven he says, 'Now you (Christians) are the body of Christ and individually members of it.' The denominations are themselves bodies with many members instead of being members of one body. There is no justification of parties in the church, Brother Partyman. They are strictly against the teaching of the New Testament. Read all these references: Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 1; 10-13; 3:3; 11:17, 18; 12:13, 24, 25; Gal. 5:19-21; James 3:14."

S.: "Well, you think Christ has more than one church do you not?"

B.: "How many do you read about in the Bible? Christ said, 'upon this rock I will build my church' — not churches (Matt. 16:18). And Paul says Christ loved the church — not

churches — and gave himself up for it — not them — that he might sanctify it — not them . . . (Eph. 5:25-26). What do you say about the number Christ has, Brother Stranger? How many bodies does he have?”

P.: “Well, I know the Bible does speak of churches. I’ve read it many times.”

B.: “Oh, yes, you have read of churches in the sense of local congregations. As the ‘churches of Galatia’ (I Cor. 16:1), ‘the seven churches which are in Asia’ (Rev. 1:11). These were the different congregations in those regions. There were three prominent churches in Macedonia. They were at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, and Paul established them all (Acts 16 and 17). You don’t think he established a Mormon Church at Philippi, a Methodist Church at Thessalonica, and a Christian Scientist Church at Berea, do you Partyman?”

P.: “I don’t think Paul ever established a Mormon Church or a Christian Scientist Church anywhere. In fact, I know he didn’t. They are both abominations.”

B.: “A man who thinks people should join the church of their choice cannot with consistency object if people choose the Mormon Church, or the Catholic Church, or any other church. But, I, too, know that Paul never established any of those churches. And if he, or any other inspired man ever established a Methodist or Baptist Church, the writers of the Bible forgot to mention it. The churches Paul dealt with are called the churches of Christ, the churches of God, or a similar description.”

S.: “Well, I think it is true that Christ has one and only one great mystical body — that he has one church. But I think that it is the invisible church. The visible church is divided into branches. Did not Christ say something about the vine and the branches?”

P.: “Of course he did. I was just thinking about that. The different churches are the branches. That proves it.”

B.: “But you think some of the branches are abominations. Somebody ought to use the pruning knife, eh, Brother Partyman?”

P.: “That’s all a Campbellite is good for — argue, argue. There’s no good in it.”

B.: “Christ said, ‘I am the vine, you (disciples — indivi-

duals) are the branches. He (not the church) who abides in me, and I in him (not it), he it is that bears much fruit . . . ' (John 15:5). The Bible simply does not condone division and parties, gentlemen."

P.: "I've told Stranger all the time you did not think that any church is right but yours, and everybody is lost but your motely crowd. But I believe you are going to proselyte him in spite of me."

S.: "Well, right is right whether we accept it or not. A man who opposes the Bible is fighting against God. Mr. Brewer has not said that everybody will be lost."

B.: "From the first I have told you that I belong to no denomination. Christ has only one church and it is composed of all Christians wherever they are found. Every man that has obeyed the gospel, or has been born into the family of God, is a member of the same church to which I belong. If Brother Stranger is a Christian, he is already a member of the church of Christ."

P.: "Then why are you trying to proselyte him?"

B.: "I have done nothing but endeavor to teach the truth and I have done that in self-defense. Mostly, I have been answering questions."

P.: "Now you know you would like to get Stranger to quit the Baptist Church and join your church!"

B.: "I have no church for anyone to join. I think that proselyting people from one denomination to another is unworthy of any Christian, especially if he thinks that one denomination is as good as another, but —"

S.: "That is what I have wanted to hear you say. Now, Partyman, you ought to quit accusing Mr. Brewer of proselyting. I knew —"

B.: "Excuse me, I was not through. I said it is poor taste to proselyte people from one denomination to another, but to get people to quit all denominations and be Christians only is different. I would like to see all of God's people united. Therefore, I say, lay all party names aside, abandon all sectarian doctrines and creeds, and be Christians only. Teach and practice only that which is in the Bible. Have no church organization which is not authorized in the Bible. One man will not quit his party or church to join another man's church, nor should

he be asked to. But we can all accept the Bible and become and be just what God wants us to be. Sectarianism is sinful. Christ wants us all to be one." (John 17:20, 21)

S.: "To me that seems both reasonable and scriptural, and I am about convinced that the position is absolutely correct."

P.: "I knew he would proselyte you. For my part, I would not be a Campbellite if I knew they were right. Now, if Mr. Brewer thinks you are already a Christian, what advantage does he claim you will receive by leaving the Baptists and joining his church? If he does not recognize you as a Christian, it will confirm what I have told you all along; that he does not think anybody will be saved but his own crowd. Now you ought to be able to see his real doctrine."

B.: "Is it possible, Brother Partyman, that you have never yet seen my point? I have never tried to say who is a Christian or who is not a Christian. I have contended that denominationalism is wrong. If a person were living in adultery, would you think I was narrow, bigoted, and a proselyter because I plead with him to quit that sinful state? Yet this is all I am trying to do. I feel sure that the Bible teaches that denominationalism is wrong; I therefore try to avoid the mistake and plead with those who are in denominations to drop their party names and creeds and just be Christians. I have reasoned on the assumption that all the denominations are composed of Christians. That may not be true, but it is the hypothesis upon which we proceed when we call for God's children to unite. We thus assume that God's people are divided into different parties, and I think they are to this extent — there are Christians in the different parties; but who they are and where they are I cannot say. I know people must obey the gospel to be saved, or to become Christians (Rom. 1:16, I Pet. 4:17). But who has and who has not obeyed the gospel I do not know. If Brother Stranger obeyed the gospel and was born again, he then and thereby became a member of the church to which I belong and cannot now join it. After he thus became a Christian, he joined the Baptist Church — admittedly a party — and partyism is wrong. The Baptist Church is not mentioned in the Bible and is not mentioned in Church history for many hundreds of years after the last inspired man had ceased to live on the earth. A man can be a Christian and not join the Baptist Church. He can

do exactly what people did in the New Testament day and never become a Baptist. So why not be a simple Christian without party name, designation, or affiliation?"

S.: "That convinces me. I know that is right."

P.: "Well, you are twenty-one and no kin to me, so I guess I can't say anything. But I hate to see people so narrow. Will the Campbellites accept Baptist baptism?"

B.: "I cannot speak for the Campbellites. In fact, I didn't know there was such a group in town. I belong to no denomination, and therefore have nothing to do with receiving people. But Baptist baptism is somewhat different from Bible baptism."

S.: "You don't think a Baptist preacher can baptize a man?"

B.: "Oh, yes, it is not a question of the administrator. It is a question of teaching and purpose. Generally, the Baptists teach that baptism is a door into the Baptist Church. Hence, if a person was baptized simply to become a Baptist, he has not obeyed the Lord. The Baptists teach that when a person repents and places his faith in Christ, he is saved and his sins are forgiven. After his sins are remitted he then is baptized to get into the Baptist Church. But the Bible says, 'Repent, and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38). Or as Paul was told, '. . . be baptized and wash away your sins. . .' (Acts 22:16). Also, the Scriptures teach that we are 'baptized into Christ' (Gal. 3:27) as well as baptized into the church (I Cor. 12:13). You can see that there is a difference between Baptist and Bible teaching on the subject. I state this with all good feeling and kindness, and if I have misstated what Baptists teach, I hope to be corrected."

P.: "Well, I don't intend to sit here and listen to my religious neighbors abused in such a way. You will have to excuse me." (*Exit Partyman*)

S.: "Mr. Brewer, I know the Baptists teach what you have said, but I never believed that way. I was not baptized to become a Baptist, but I went to the Baptists because I could secure scriptural baptism at their hands. I believed that baptism is a command of God and I was baptized in order to be saved. I did not believe then nor do I believe now that the water saves, except that it brings us in contact with Christ who alone can save. Baptism shows our surrender and commitment to him. I

don't know how many Baptists believe that, but that is my view. What more do I need?"

B.: "You seem to have done all that the Lord requires in the matter of baptism. But, naturally, I wonder how you came to hold a view which is so different from the Baptist Church."

S.: "Well, my religious experience covers a period of about seven years. My parents were very devout Methodists. I always attended the Methodist services but I never took Jesus seriously. While I was in college, I was drafted and saw action in the front lines. When I was face to face with death, I became very concerned about my eternal destiny. I did not want to die unprepared, yet I didn't know what I needed to do. I told the Lord that if he would be with me through those battles and spare my life to get back home, I would give all the rest of my life to his service. I repeated this prayer every day and almost every minute during a battle. You know — were you ever in a war?"

B.: "No, I was not, but I can understand how you would feel the need for God when in such danger. Go on."

S.: "Well, the Lord spared me, and I kept my promise to him. I began reading the Bible and I continued to pray for guidance. I learned about baptism from the New Testament and I wanted to be baptized, but then the problem of who should baptize me arose. My parents wanted me to join the Methodist Church, but I could not accept sprinkling, infant baptism, and a number of other things I could not find in the Bible. The Methodist preacher agreed to immerse me, but he had already argued so hard against it I felt I shouldn't let him. I did not relish the idea of being baptized by a man who did not believe that the thing he was doing was right."

B.: "That reminds me of Paul's statement, 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.'"

S.: "I didn't know of that passage but that is the way I felt. So, I started going to the Baptist Church. I talked to the preacher and he said I was already saved and all I needed was to be baptized into the full fellowship of the church. I replied that I didn't believe a person could consider himself saved until he had been baptized into Christ, or however that verse goes. The preacher was surprised at my view, but he said that a faith like mine shouldn't be denied, and he was willing to baptize me because I wanted to obey my savior."

B.: "Did you confess that you believed God had forgiven your sins before you were baptized?"

S.: "No, I did not."

B.: "That is the confession the Baptists usually require, is it not?"

S.: "I have heard some Baptist preachers ask that, but I don't know how general it is. The preacher who baptized me asked, 'Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and do you now take him as your personal Savior?' I could certainly say yes to that question — that was the reason I wanted to be baptized."

B.: "Your case is similar to Saul's in Acts 9. You did all the Lord asked; anything more would be a requirement of men to initiate you into their fellowship."

S.: "Will your brethren accept me?"

B.: "I belong to no party, so we do not accept people by a vote. I belong only to Christ's church and my brethren are his followers. The Lord alone has the right to determine the law of pardon and terms of entrance into his church. This he did in Mark 16:16. You have obeyed these so you are already in the church. But you are affiliated with a denomination and you have concluded from our study that denominationalism is wrong. You should sever your connection with the denomination, be a Christian *only*, and find a group of Christians to worship with who wear no party name and have no party creed."

S.: "I will do just that. And I would like to worship with you here in this congregation."

B.: "We would be delighted to have you. I hope you will stand with us for pure nondenominational Christianity, even if it brings persecution. You know there are people more devoted to their sects than they are to Christ."

S.: "I would consider it an honor to suffer for Jesus. I must be going now. Good day and thank you for your patience."

B.: "Good day, and God bless you."

