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This tract presented by:

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"Christianity Is Udenominational"

A radio sermon presented on WJRD,
Tuscaloosa, Alabama



By

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CHRISTIANITY IS UNDENOMINATIONAL

We are living in a highly sectarianized and denominationalized world. On every hand there are sects, parties, denominations, and religious groups of many colors, shades, brands, kinds, and sorts of doctrine and practice. These different and differing religious groups exist primarily because of the desire on the part of the members of the various groups to emphasize and perpetuate some particular doctrine they have espoused.

Occasionally the doctrine espoused and emphasized by a religious group is some fantastic, unscriptural theory or system conceived in the minds of would-be religious leaders. Often the emphasized doctrine is a morsel of truth to which have been added interpretation, comment, and explanation that *in effect* nullify the original portion of truth. The Pharisees were guilty of this very fault. God had said, "Honor thy father and thy mother." They said, "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, that wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God, he shall not honor his father." Thus, their "explanation" made void the Word of God; they interpreted the Word of God so as to relieve themselves of the responsibility the law of God placed on them to support needy parents.

Their religion was vain (Matt. 15:1-9).

Conditions Mold Language

Most religious people have come to recognize a denominationalized "Christendom" as very acceptable. They seem to think it is highly desirable that we have many churches wearing different names, believing different doctrines, and practicing different things. It is said to be very desirable that we have different churches so a person can become a Christian, then look around him, seek out a church that fits his mold of religious thought, then join the church of his choice.

As a result of this attitude, so-called "established and orthodox" religions have become firmly entrenched in modern thought and life. Also, there have arisen various accommodative expressions that are used to denote a denominational condition. People have come to think of "Christianity" in terms of various kinds. If a person, then, expresses a desire to become a Christian, many questions may be asked him. "What is your denominational preference?" "What church are you going to join?" "Of what persuasion are you?" as if to say, "What *kind* of Christian are you going to be?" All of this, just as if it were necessary to have a denominational preference, join some church, or take a stand with some sectarian

group. It has become an established principle in the thinking of many religious people today, that if a person becomes a Christian he *must* take his stand with some party that distinguishes itself, and separates itself, from the fellowship of other groups, the members of which, however, are generally recognized to be no more acceptable to God than members of other groups! Both the thought and the language have been coined to accommodate the divided state of so-called "Christendom," and with many, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that a person cannot be a Christian without joining some one of the so-called "orthodox and established" religious groups. The condition that fathered the language should never have existed. It is diametrically opposed to every principle found in the New Testament.

The Name Christian

The religious conduct of many is very confusing. Many of our friends claim to be Christians. On Sunday morning many of them enter a church building with a certain name over the door, go through a certain form, ritual, or program that reflects the heart of their faith. Others of them enter another building a few doors away, over which is another name, and they go through a different form, ritual, or program that somewhat reflects the funda-

mentals of their faith. Other groups of our friends go elsewhere, and do differently, and so on and on. Often, even, the father of a family goes to one church, the mother to another, and the children, so as to show no favoritism toward either parent, go to a third church or nowhere. This is America's bulwark of religion!

This divided religious condition should cause a thoughtful person to question, "Is it not possible to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, a child of God, without becoming affiliated with some particular denomination or sectarian group? Is it necessary to join some denomination, thereby forming stronger ties with its members, yet thereby severing religious connection with members of other churches, who are usually recognized by the former group to be equally acceptable to God? Is it not possible to be a Christian, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else? Would not that be sufficient?"

Peter said, "If a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name" (1 Pet. 4:16, R.V.). The name in which we are to glorify God is *Christian*. Hence, being a Christian *only* surely meets the approval of the will of God. Attempting to serve God through any other name detracts glory and honor from the holy name of Christ. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in

the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

In Acts 11:26 we read, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The name "Christian" distinguished the disciples of Christ from Jewish and pagan worshipers. What *kind* of Christian were those in Antioch? No kind. What *sort* were they? No sort. What *type* were they? No type. They were just *Christians*; that was all. Of what denomination were they? No denomination; denominationalism was not yet born. Of what sect were they? No sect; Paul confessed that after "the way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our Fathers" (Acts 24:14, emphasis the author's). But no inspired man ever recognized the New Testament church as a sect or denomination. The disciples at Antioch were Christians only. That and that alone is what churches of Christ plead for people to be today!

When the peerless Apostle stood before Agrippa, the king said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). What kind of Christian was Paul trying to persuade Agrippa to become? No kind but just a Christian; that was all. What denomination, sect, or party was Paul trying to persuade Agrippa to join? No denomination, sect, or party; but he urged him to become a Christian, a member of

the New Testament church; that alone was sufficient. By what authority, then, do preachers today ask "candidates" to join some denomination, sect, party, or religious group unknown to the New Testament? Such an idea originated not in the mind of God, and such a plan was never revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The churches of Christ today insist that it is not only wise, desirable and possible for a person to be a Christian only, but they also insist that it is sufficient and just what the Lord requires. They, as the Apostle Paul did, plead for people to become Christians only. They ask no one to be any kind of Christian different from what Paul asked Agrippa to become; that was just a Christian. They plead for no one to be any brand or type of Christian different from what the disciples at Antioch were; they were just Christians. Surely that is infallibly safe.

Jesus was not a sectarian. The Jewish world into which he was born was divided into sectarian parties. There were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenees, and others. Jesus could have spared himself much persecution had he aligned himself with one of these parties. He was born under the law of Moses, lived up to the laws' demands, and was a faithful Jew. He did announce principles which were to be incorp-

orated in the terms of his will following his death and the abolition of the law, but he lived according to the law and taught others to do so during his personal ministry (Lk. 17:14). He was a Jew by flesh and by religion (during his personal ministry), but he was neither a Pharisee, Sadducee, Essene, nor Herodian. He refused to be sectarian, and we should refuse to be sectarian.

On the Foreign Field

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, eminent Methodist, former missionary to India, notes in *The Christ of the Indian Road* that division is one of the chief problems facing the American missionary to India. Missionaries from American churches of Christ, now in the Orient, state that division among professed Christian missionaries is very perplexing to the oriental mind. When Christ is preached (tinted with denominationalism of any sort), the big problem that arises in the oriental mind is, "If I accept Christ, why will you want me to join some particular denomination?" The oriental mind can see no reason nor sense in having different brands and kinds of Christianity; in this, the oriental mind is more logical than the mind of many in "enlightened" America. There is neither reason nor scripture for factions among believers.

The churches of Christ today have an opportunity that has not been

equalled since the days of the Apostles. Surely, the teeming millions of earth are seeking the teachings of Christ, free from the shackles and bonds of denominational creed and dogma. The truly undenominational plea presented by churches of Christ will fill the need. The truth has tremendous advantage over error, and the growing antagonism to denominational creeds and to division increases that advantage. Brethren, the challenge is ours; shall we be recreant to this noble challenge?

Why Should Christians be Differentiated?

On the great western plains, the cattlemen of the various ranches brand their cattle as a mark of identification. The particular brand denotes the owner, and distinguishes one man's cattle from another.

Many people seem to want distinguishing marks for Christians that separate some from others. As the brand on the cattle does not determine the quality of the cattle, they think the particular name that distinguishes one "Christian" from another is of no consequence; we are all Christians anyway, so they say. Of course, this argument is based upon the rash and unscriptural assumption that there are Christians in all churches, that one group is as good as another, and that between the denominations we have only

minor differences that are insignificant, yet are adequate to the satisfaction of personal preferences.

But who delegated authority to any man or group of men to sit in council and pass legislation distinguishing one group of Christians from another group of Christians? If, as it is claimed, there are Christians in all churches, whence the authority to herd off one group of Christians into one lot, separate them from the fellowship of other Christians, erect walls, partitions, and barriers that prohibit their cooperation and fellowship with other Christians, most of whom, it is claimed, are equally acceptable to God? What logic, scripture, or reason dictates such a course? By what authority do religious conferences, conventions, synods, and church councils assume unto themselves the power to differentiate so-called "Christians"?

Furthermore, why should one Christian *want* to be distinguished from another Christian? If two men are Christians, why should they *want* to erect barriers (such as are generally thought to be of no importance) to fellowship? Why should they not want to shake hands, and then together march under the blood-stained banner of Jesus Christ, united in heart, task, and purpose?

Moreover, when religious leaders arrogate unto themselves authority to legislate in religious matters, and

insist upon observance of such rules within their respective circles, why will those who have laid upon them such burdens (heavy to be borne) submit to such high-handed religious wickedness?

God's Wall of Partition

God never erected but one wall of partition between people in any dispensation. To fulfill his righteous intent and purpose of sending his Son into the world through a chosen race, the nation of Israel, of the seed of Abraham, God gave the law of Moses that the children of Israel might be a separate people until Christ should come. Paul said, "What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made" (Gal. 3:19). And the seed is Christ (v. 16).

God erected this wall of partition separating the Israelites from the Gentile nations. This wall served its purpose until Christ came; he then tore it down. "For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-15). God erected the wall that separated Jew from Gentile; in Christ's death on the cross that wall was torn down. Now,

by what authority do men erect such walls as now separate the various religious groups? God abolished the wall he erected; now men build many walls.

Jesus said in John 10:16, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, and one shepherd." "This fold" referred to Jews; "other sheep" referred to Gentiles; the "fence" that separated the "other sheep" from "this fold" was the Mosaic law. That has been torn down. The Lord says, "They shall become one flock." Now men try to separate some sheep from other sheep, herd them off into another pasture, brand them a certain kind or type, and prohibit their running with other sheep! Yet, they insist that the sheep in one pasture are as good as the sheep in the other pasture! (One church is as good as another, it is said!) Then if one pasture is as good as another pasture, and the sheep in one are as good as the sheep in another, why separate them? They are all the Lord's sheep, it is said!

Let us not build walls of separation and barriers to fellowship by the creeds, catechisms, confessions of faith, church manuals, disciplines, church covenants, and doctrines of men. Jesus Christ has erected the only wall he wants erected, viz., the wall of obedience to the New Testa-

ment teaching that distinguishes the Christian from the world. There are two classes of mature people, those in the church and those in the world, the saved and the unsaved. Had the Lord wanted certain walls erected to separate some of the saved from others of the saved, he would have erected them himself. He has prohibited men's doing so, but many religious leaders have no respect for the authority of King Jesus. Churches of Christ oppose such false teachers.

How Can We Classify You?

When churches of Christ object to being classified as a denominational group, people ask, "How can we classify you?" "How can we distinguish you from other groups?" The answer is, they seek no classification separate from other Christians, *if such there could be*. New Testament Christians object to being distinguished from other New Testament Christians. They seek the fellowship and co-operation of all who are truly Christians. Those who are not New Testament Christians are not Christians at all; those, Christians seek to win to Christ the Lord.

But if some "classification" is insisted upon, follow this procedure: Remember that Peter, Paul, James, and John were Christians. Now, *classify them, distinguish them, mark them, identify them*. When thus you have done this (violating

no Scripture), you have classified, distinguished, marked, and identified members of the churches of Christ. They seek no further classification nor identification than characterized faithful Christians of the first century.

Name a group of the popular denominations today; it matters not which one you name. Who dares to classify Peter, Paul, James, and John with either one of these modern denominational groups? Who dares to put the present-day sectarian brands on these men? The apostles would not be accepted into the pulpits of present-day denominational churches as "orthodox and ordained pastors." Their teachings given in the New Testament would not be acceptable in most pulpits today.

Furthermore, if one were to classify Peter and James in a denomination that teaches "close communion" and Paul and John in a denomination that teaches "open communion," Paul and John could not observe the Lord's Supper with Peter and James! The position becomes even more ridiculous when we remember that *denominations* holding the "close communion" idea will contend that God has children in most all churches, and one church is as good as another! They say God has children in many churches, and they will all be together in heaven, but God doesn't

want them to eat together down here on earth! How ridiculous and absurd are the doctrines of men! If one church is as good as another, and it isn't necessary to be a member of any of them to go to heaven, why be a member of either one in particular? Truly the inspired apostles were not denominationalists in any sense of the word; neither should we be such.

New Testament Denominations?

The germ of denominationalism apparently found its way into the church at Corinth. There arose division in the church over preacher preference. The controversy became rather heated. Paul said, "Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). It would appear to be a "Paulite Church," a "Cephasite Church," or an "Apollosite Church" in embryo. But that condition was severely condemned. "Now I beseech you brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Now, if inspiration forbade naming groups within the church after men *then* (even as good men as were Peter, Paul, and Apollos), by what logic or scripture do men name churches after men

today? Such is without scriptural authority, and is opposed to every principle of unity taught in God's Word. It is equally wrong to name a church after some particular doctrine, such as Advent, Holiness, etc., thus exalting the doctrine above the Christ.

Modern denominations exist in violent opposition to 1 Cor. 1:10. "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Paul here condemned division, while denominations foster division. Paul urged these Christians to be of the same mind, same judgment, and to speak the same thing. Denominations are not of the same mind, are not of the same judgment, and do not speak the same thing.

Christ prayed for all believers to be one (John 17:20-21). Religious leaders today thank God for many churches so a person can join the church of his choice! The churches of Christ stand unalterably opposed to such bigoted disregard for the prayer of our blessed Lord. People should give less concern to the "church of our choice" and more concern to the "church of Christ's choice," the one for which he died (Eph. 5:25).

Some Truth in All Churches

"But there is some truth in every church." This is admitted. But why should anyone insist that a person join some particular denomination in order to have access to the portion of truth taught by that denomination? Did not Peter, Paul, James, and John have access to all truth? To be sure, they did. The inspired apostles of the first century gave us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). If one is a Christian, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else, just as were Christians of the first century, he has access to the same truth to which they had access. It is not necessary to belong to any denomination to have access to whatever morsel of truth that denomination has to offer. The *Christian only* has access to all truth, and is bound to accept that truth and nothing else. As time passes and the Christian learns more truth (from the Bible), this new truth learned neither disqualifies him as a Christian, nor alters his relationship to the Lord and fellow Christians. He has simply learned more truth, his faith has been confirmed further, and he has grown stronger as a Christian. He is still the same kind of Christian he was before; he has grown in faith and in the grace of God.

In order to be a member of a denominational church and accept

whatever morsel of truth that denomination teaches, a person must also accept the many errors taught by the denomination. It is the point of error that makes the denomination distinctive. There is not a single mark of distinction of any denomination on earth that came from the Bible. The thing that distinguishes the denomination is what men have said, and what men have made the denomination to be. Why should a person be called upon to accept the errors in any denomination? Even if the person in a denomination learns that some distinctive doctrine of that denomination is wrong, he cannot give it up and remain loyal to the denomination. To give up the distinctive error (which should be done) would be to give up the denominational relationship.

To be a New Testament Christian is a grand and glorious privilege. We enjoy liberty in Christ, and freedom from the dictates of men, the authority of ecclesiastical councils, and would-be religious lords. No truth the child of God can ever learn will change his relationship as a Christian. Learning more truth will merely confirm and solidify his faith. "Stand fast therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1).

In Christ, people are bound only by the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). They are free to re-

ject all error (in fact, must reject it), and to continue throughout life a constant study of truth revealed in the pages of God's Word. What a privilege!

How Become a Christian?

Next, we inquire, how can a person become a Christian? We turn to the New Testament for the answer. God's children in the first century were Christians, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. The thing that made them Christians will also make us Christians now.

(1) The first requirement of the gospel is faith. A person must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God to be saved. Jesus said in John 8:24, "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Cf. Acts 8:37; 16:31; Heb. 11:6). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). (2) The Lord requires repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38). Repentance involves a change in heart and life. (3) A confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is prerequisite to scriptural baptism. (Cf. Acts 8:36-38; Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10). (4) In New Testament times no one was recognized as being "in Christ," where salvation is found (Eph. 1:7), unless that one had submitted to the command of baptism (immersion) unto remission of sins (Cf. Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:1-11; Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27). There is absolutely nothing de-

nominal in any way whatsoever about that. But men denomination-ize these teachings; they say we are saved by faith alone (which is not true, James 2:14-26). Men say baptism is non-essential; the Bible says baptism "doth now save you" (1 Pet. 3:21), and that it is the place where we contact the blood of Christ, which is the cleansing power (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:4). False teachers denominationalize the truth by saying sprinkling and pouring are just as good for baptism as immersion when the Bible teaches we are buried and raised in baptism (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:4).

The churches of Christ take the undenominational stand taught in the New Testament. They insist that this is sufficient, and will accomplish, through the power of the Word of God, the salvation of souls from sin now just as it was accomplished in New Testament times. They require nothing not authorized in the pages of the New Testament.

An Example of Conversion

The conversion of the eunuch is recorded in Acts 8:26-39. Careful reading will disclose that he heard the gospel, believed the gospel, repented, confessed his faith in Christ, and was baptized. After his baptism, he went on his way rejoicing, in the knowledge of sins forgiven. Was he saved? Certainly; who would deny it? Was he a

disciple of Christ? To be sure. Of what church was he a member? The one the Lord established, the one to which the Lord added him (Acts 2:47). The Lord always adds the *saved* to his church. That is sufficient today. Joining denominations is of men, and not of God. Churches of Christ, *gospel* preachers, and the Lord want you to be nothing more nor less than was the eunuch. After becoming a Christian, follow the numerous admonitions in the New Testament to continue in the faith (Col. 1:23; Rev. 2:10; 2 Peter 1:10).

Undenominational Worship

The churches of Christ plead for undenominational Christian worship. People should introduce and use in Christian worship only those things authorized in the New Testament. The New Testament authorizes (1) Preaching or teaching the Word (Acts 20:7), (2) The use of our voices in singing praise to him, and in teaching and edifying one another (Eph. 5:19), (3) The observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), (4) The prayers of the saints, (1 Thess. 5:17), and (5) Laying by in store, or contributing toward the work of the church, upon the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). There is nothing denominational about these items of worship. But men have denominationalized church worship. Without divine authority

they have introduced the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship, the counting of beads, the burning of incense, the washing of feet, the adoration of Mary, the worship of images, praying to the saints instead of prayers of the saints, and many other things not found in the New Testament. Secular history combines with sacred history in testifying that the practice of the first century Christians was the observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week, yet men denominationalize this sacred feast by observing it monthly, quarterly, or annually instead of on the first day of the week. In all of this, and more, leading religions of the world, numerically, have departed from the simplicity in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

Udenominational Organization

Churches of Christ plead for undenominational organization. Christians should have no religious organizations except that authorized in the New Testament. In New Testament times every congregation of disciples was independent of every other congregation. Congregations were not linked nor bound together by super organizations of any kind. During the first century the whole civilized world was evangelized, and that without super organizations, aid societies, or any institution different from the church. God's plan of

church organization was sufficient to accomplish the divine purpose in the first century, and the same divine plan is sufficient today to accomplish his purpose.

In New Testament times elders and deacons were appointed in the churches. The elders were also called presbyters, pastors, and bishops. They had no authority outside their own local congregations (Cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-10; Titus 1:5). Churches of Christ plead for this simple, sufficient, and scriptural plan now.

What Is a Church of Christ?

A church of Christ (Romans 16:16) is simply a group of baptized, penitent believers (Christians) who assemble to work and to worship God according to the New Testament. Their mission is to preach the gospel to every creature, to remember the poor, and to glorify God in life. They propose to establish in every inhabited locality a congregation of New Testament Christians. A more noble purpose could not be known; this is a divine purpose. Churches of Christ do not claim to be perfect, but their members strive day by day to become more and more like him who is our savior and Lord. Unto him be honor, glory, praise, dominion, and power in and through his church (Eph. 3:21) now and forevermore.

Kind reader, are you in some de-

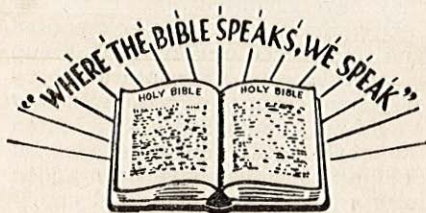
nominal church, held in bondage to the doctrines and precepts of men? "If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men" (Col. 2:20-22)? Would you not like to enjoy the liberty in Christ Jesus (Gal. 5:1)? "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

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