

Introduction:

If you are like me, childhood memories are sparse. There are a handful or two of events that made a lasting impression for one reason or another. Like when David found the note I wrote Jessica asking if she would “go with me,” and he read it out loud to the entire class. Or the time that Matt snuck up behind me and started slamming my head into the desk. I merely tried to defend myself by pushing him away from me, but got two weeks’ detention, the only time I ever got detention in school. Or the time the neighbor kid choked me, saying he was just messing around, but I couldn’t shake him loose, and I honestly thought he wasn’t going to stop. When I consider the kinds of things I do remember, I’m really surprised at this next one. I was about Trina’s age (she’s 9, by the way), my family and I were members of the Baptist denomination in North Carolina. There were a couple of sisters who lived down the street from me and we had become friends. When I found out that they also attended a church somewhere, I asked what most people today consider the most natural question. “What denomination are you?” Their answer obviously shocked me because I still remember the conversation today. They both looked at me like I was speaking a foreign language and said something along the lines of, “What do you mean? We’re just Christians.”¹ To which I responded, “I understand you are Christians, but what denomination of Christian are you?” To which they said, “I don’t know. We’re just Christians.” To which I said, “I get it, we’re all just Christians. But I’m in the Baptist denomination. What denomination is your church part of?” To which they responded, “I don’t understand, we’re Christians.” I look back on that memory and wish I could find those two girls whose names I don’t even remember because I’ve wanted to find out what they meant. Had they just not been exposed to the modern divisions in the supposed name of Christianity and so truly just didn’t know what denomination their congregation was part of? Were they actually part of the denomination named “The Christian Church” and didn’t know there were others? Or were they really just Christians without being part of any denomination? I’d love to know. And I’d really love to know if they are serving the Lord today just as Christians.

But all of this leads me to the question I want to address this morning. This month, we are learning “In the Beginning of Our Congregation, God.” That is, we must put God in the beginning of our congregation. When we look around and see all different kinds of churches, involved in all manner of denominational divisions, a natural question is what denomination will a church that is putting God in the beginning be part of? Then are we part of that denomination? What denomination are we? I want to answer that question for you today. For our guests, as I answer this question, I am also asking you that question. What denomination are you? How would you answer that question? I hope as I answer this question for you that by the time I’m done, you’ll want to answer that question the exact same way I do. When I’m done, I’m going to invite you to be part of the exact same kind of Christianity I’m part of. Get ready. That is where we are going in this lesson.

I need to preface this lesson for both members and guests. I’m going to say some things that are shocking and may even come off as harsh. I know that few people in modern mainstream religious America agree with what I’m about to share. I mean no disrespect to anyone. I don’t think the people who disagree with me on this are wicked, evil, awful people. I simply disagree with them. Further, I believe the Bible supports what I’m saying. If you are a guest here today and I say something shocking to you, please understand that today in different parts of the lesson I’m just as likely shocking some of the members. And so I’m going to ask all of you, whether guest or member, to please patiently hear what I believe the Bible teaches on these issues and then give careful and prayerful consideration of it. After you’ve done that, if you think I’m misunderstanding something, I’m happy to have any discussion on these topics that you want.

Discussion:

I. What is a denomination?

A. Before learning what denomination we are, we must first learn what a denomination is.

¹ I don’t pretend to believe I remember the exact wording of this conversation. But this gives the gist of it.

1. "Denominations are associations of congregations—Though sometimes it might be said that congregations are localized subdivisions of denominations—that have a common heritage. Moreover, a true denomination does not claim to be the only legitimate expression of the church" (Donald G. Tinder, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1984, p. 310).
 2. "Denominationalism – A term for the continuation of the organizations and emphasis on the divisions and distinctions of Protestantism" (Donald T. Kauffman, *The Dictionary of Religious Terms*, 1967, p 147).
 3. "A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy." (*The American Heritage Dictionary 4th Edition*)
- B. A denomination is an organized collectivity of local churches. It is bigger than a local church. It is smaller than the universal church. Further, a denomination, by its very nature, is an emphasis of division. When a person is a member of a local church that is part of a denomination, that person is claiming to be a member of three different institutions: the local church, the universal church, and the denomination.

II. The earmarks of a denomination (from the above definitions)

A. Earmark #1: Organization and official hierarchy beyond the local congregation

1. This is what makes a group of congregations a denomination. That is why I put this one first. Without this, the other two earmarks do not make a church a part of a denomination.
2. Most denominations begin in one of two ways. Today, already established denominations frequently split as multiple congregations line up on opposing sides of a disagreement. When this happens new denominations come into existence fully formed. However, many denominations begin as a single congregation. That is, a teacher in a certain location began to rebel against a church or denomination and gathered followers. They worked hard. They increased converts to their cause. Their congregation grew. Then they took their cause to other cities. They developed more followers. New congregations started.
3. The denomination is formed when the new congregations look to the first one as a mother church. That mother church is either the model for how the satellites work or even a source of the teaching allowed. As more congregations are established under the mother congregation, an official hierarchy is developed. There will be officers within a local congregation to make sure the members of the church follow the creed. Then there will be officers established over multiple congregations to make sure the congregations stay in check. As the denomination grows, more and more layers will be added. Usually, there is finally established one person or small group of people at the top who govern the entire denomination by their votes and decisions. This is the heart of what it means to be a denomination.

B. Earmark #2: A creed or statement of faith in addition to the Bible.

1. **I Timothy 3:15** says Paul wrote to explain how work ought to be conducted within the church. In **I Corinthians 4:17**, Paul indicated he taught the same thing in every local congregation. If every congregation were strictly following just the intent of the Bible, then for the most part we would all look the same. We would worship the same ways. We would work the same ways. We would teach the same message. Yet, look around, there is no unity, there is division. How are the divisions maintained?
2. It began back in the 4th century when Constantine called the Nicene Council. A couple of different teachers were arguing about the nature of Christ's deity and were forming followings behind themselves. Though he was attempting to stop this division, Constantine actually paved the way for all the division we see around us. He gathered representatives from churches all over the Roman Empire to determine what the truth about Jesus' divinity is. They then wrote a creed to clarify it. However, instead of making the Bible more clear. They took a step away from the Bible. From that point on, it was not enough to agree with inspired Scripture. One also had to agree with an approved creed (statement of faith). For many, a credal statement, determined, written, and voted upon by uninspired and ungifted men, holds as much weight as does inspired Scripture.
3. To be a part of the denominational organization, it is not enough to be a Christian. It is not enough to believe and obey the Bible; one must believe the Bible in accord with the denomination's agreed and voted upon doctrine. This leads directly to the next earmark.

C. Earmark #3: A name to distinguish from other denominations

1. One of the side points of denominationalism is the naming. In fact, the etymology or history of the word "Denomination" is not about hierarchy or faith statements, but about naming. To denominate is to give a name to. That being said, giving a church a name does not make it part of a denomination. However, denominations develop a name in order to distinguish themselves from the other denominations. These

names are, by nature, divisive. They highlight division. If you think I am mistaken, call a Lutheran a Baptist. Call a Pentecostal a Methodist. How do you think they will react? "I'm not a Baptist, I'm a Lutheran." That reaction demonstrates the division between the denominations.

2. Having said that, for the past 25 years or so there has been an increase of denominational churches not using their denomination's name. While there are more independent congregations cropping up, many times you will learn of churches that use no denominational name but are actually members of a denomination, still being run by the denominational statement of faith, and subject to the governing organization of the denomination. Some who use this kind of name may well be unaffiliated with a denomination, but many are still part of one denomination or another but think the denominational name hinders their impact. Be careful with this form of deception.

III. What do we find in the Bible?

- A. With all the denominations around us, we have to ask which one will a church who is putting God in the beginning be part of? What denomination do we find sanctioned in Scripture? Before that, perhaps we should ask if we even find denominations in the Bible. Do we find these earmarks of denominationalism at all?
- B. In the New Testament, we see no organized collectivity of congregations.
 1. We find the universal church, the collection of all Christians, of all locales, of all times. Jesus spoke of this in **Matthew 16:18**.
 2. We also find local congregations, groups of Christians within a given geographical locale who assemble together regularly under a common oversight—see **Romans 16:16; Galatians 1:2**.
 3. Further, we see no organizational structure or governing hierarchy beyond the local congregation except Jesus Himself as the head. In **Acts 14:23**, Paul appointed elders in every congregation he had established. In **I Peter 5:1-4**, we learn elders are to shepherd the flock among them. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd over all churches, but there is not hierarchy of offices over multiple congregations. There is never once an indication that councils, judicial procedures, presidents, or popes were to be established over multiple congregations in the New Testament. Each congregation was autonomously self-governed.
- C. In the New Testament, we see no creeds besides the Scriptures.
 1. **II Timothy 3:16-17** plainly claims all we need is Scripture. Scripture equips us for every good work. God has given us His Word. We don't need man's creeds.
 2. I am not here talking about men writing articles or books in which they explain what they believe. I'm talking about men writing governing documents for churches which purport to run the church and govern the teaching of the churches. When men write governing documents and creedal statements of faith, even with the best of intentions, they separate Christians and churches from the Word God gave.
 3. Creeds used to govern churches run into one of three possible problems. They either 1) add to the Word of God or 2) take away from it (cf. **Deuteronomy 4:2**). Or 3) perhaps they are simply the same as the Word of God. But if they are, then the creeds are unnecessary. Yet some would suggest creeds take the Word of God and make it understandable. Are we suggesting God has written His Word in such a way that it cannot communicate to the people He loves? We need no creed except God's revealed Word.
- D. In the New Testament, we see no name for Christ's universal church or for His local congregations.
 1. Here is the kicker. Do you know what name we see given to the universal church and/or local congregations in the New Testament? Absolutely none. Never once is the universal church or are local churches named in the New Testament. They are merely described.
 2. In **Romans 16:16**, Paul referred to multiple local congregations as "the churches of Christ." Why? Not because that was their name, but because that is what they were. They were assemblies of people who were of Jesus Christ.
 3. In **I Corinthians 1:2** and **II Corinthians 1:1**, Paul called the local congregation to which he was writing, "the church of God that is in Corinth." Why? Not because that was its name, but because that is what it was; the assembly of people in Corinth who were of God.
 4. In **Galatians 1:2**, Paul spoke of "the churches of Galatia." Why? Because that is what they were, assemblies meeting in various locations in Galatia.
 5. In **I Thessalonians 1:1** and **II Thessalonians 1:1**, Paul wrote "to the church of the Thessalonians." Why? Because that is what they were, the assembling that was among and made up of Thessalonians.
 6. In **I Thessalonians 2:14**, Paul called the churches of Judea, "the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea." Why? Because that is what they were, groups of people meeting in the region of Judea who were of God because they were in Christ Jesus.

7. In **I Timothy 3:15**, Paul called it “the church of the living God.”
 8. When Paul wrote to Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae, he wrote “to the saints who are in Ephesus” (**Ephesians 1:1**); “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (**Philippians 1:1**); and “to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae” (**Colossians 1:2**).
 9. In **Acts 24:14**, Paul referred to the church as “the Way.” Luke also used that terminology when he said Felix had “a rather accurate knowledge of the Way” in **Acts 24:22**. Why? Because that is what the church of our Lord is. It is the Way. That is, it is the group of people who follow, the Way, the Truth and the Life to the Father who is in heaven (cf. **John 14:6**). It is the group of people who walk on the straight and narrow Way of Jesus Christ (cf. **Matthew 7:13-14**). By the way, this is the closest thing to an actual name for the grouping of Jesus’s disciples found in the New Testament.
 10. Just prior to Paul calling the church “the Way.” Tertullus had referred to the church as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (**Acts 24:5**). Paul commented on use of the term “sect” but didn’t correct the “Nazarene” terminology (**Acts 24:14**). Why would they be called “Nazarenes?” The terminology came about the same way “Christian” did. We are called Christians because we follow Christ. They were called “Nazarenes” because Christ was a Nazarene, and they followed the Nazarene.
 11. Look at the descriptions in **Hebrews 12:22-24**. We come to “the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” In that text, the same church is referred to as “Mt. Zion,” “the city of the living God,” and “the heavenly Jerusalem.”
 12. Often, it is just referred to as “the church”—e.g. **Acts 11:26; Philemon 1:2, et al.**
 13. These various descriptions do not describe different divisions of Christ’s church or different denominations. The reason the New Testament writers could use so many different descriptions is because that is what they were. They were accurate descriptions not names. We can use any and all of these descriptions today to describe both this congregation and the universal church.
- E. Having said all of this, what do we find in the New Testament? What denominations do we read about? None. After **Acts 2:41**, when about 3000 souls were added to the initial 120 disciples, if you asked them of what denomination they were part, what would they say? They would have acted a whole lot like my two childhood friends. They would look at you like you are nuts. They would say they were merely the saved. They were merely part of Christ’s church or kingdom. They were God’s assembly. They were disciples of Christ. After **Acts 11:26**, they would have said they were Christians. They were not a part of any denomination because no denominations existed. God did not develop or establish any denominations. They were part of local congregations and they were part of the universal body of believers. They were not a part of any intermediate organization. They believed what they were taught by the inspiration of the apostles and accepted no other creeds or teachings (**Galatians 1:6-9; II John 9**). They would have described themselves as of Christ or of God or even of God in Christ, but they would not have felt the need to provide distinguishing names so you would know how to identify them from all the other people out there that claimed to be Christians.

IV. What about us?

- A. I must address two groups as I answer our initial question: What denomination are we?
- B. To our guests: We are no denomination.
 1. Though we recognize all other believers who have submitted to Jesus Christ in baptism for the remission of their sins as Christians and though we recognize all other congregations who merely use the Scripture for their authority as legitimate churches, we are not affiliated in any official or organized capacity with any other congregation. We have no outside board, council, conference, president, or pope governing us. We have elders within our congregation who shepherd. We have deacons who serve. We have evangelists who preach. But we have no offices or officers beyond our own local fellowship. We are nothing more than a group of Christians from this area who have agreed to assemble, worship, and work together under the oversight of a common leadership.
 2. Many churches today that claim to be non-denominational actually mean they are multi-denominational or inter-denominational. That is, whether or not the congregation is associated with a denomination, they don’t care what denomination individual members claim membership in. It is a point of pride with many churches to proclaim that they do not care if you are Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, or Episcopalian, you can be part of their congregation. To be clear, not only are we non-denominational, but not finding the authority for such an organization, we are, for lack of a better term, anti-denominational. That is, we are opposed to the establishment of denominations and opposed to membership in them. We encourage you to leave denominationalism behind entirely in favor of simple Christianity.

3. That being said, I hate to be one who simply talks about what we are against. Let me tell you what we are for. You see, we are not merely non-denominational or anti-denominational, we desire to be pre-denominational. That is, we want to be nothing more or less than what those Christians were on the day of Pentecost when Christ's church was first started before denominations came along to divide things up. We invite you to be part of pre-denominational Christianity with us.
- C. To our members: We must not forget this. We are of no denomination. And we must always stand up for and defend simple Christianity against the divisiveness of denominationalism. We must not compromise on this issue lest we simply produce more of the same ungodly division that has gone before us. Please be aware that just about every division that has occurred and every congregational practice we believe is wayward stemmed and started from a noble desire to maintain faithfulness and orthodoxy. Nobody ever started a practice with the idea that it would take people away from Scripture or God's plan. We must never think that our own desire for faithfulness and orthodoxy is a magic shield against the same pitfalls others have fallen in through the years. With that in mind, I'm going to go out on a limb this morning and offer some challenges for us and some words of caution.
1. Regarding organization.
 - a. I am glad to say that, officially, this congregation is part of no organizational hierarchy. Officially, there is no Christian or group of Christians outside this congregation that governs or oversees us, nor is there any group that we govern or oversee. Nor are we organizationally affiliated with any other congregation to accomplish the work God has given to us as a congregation.
 - b. However, if we are not careful, the seeds of denominationalism will corrupt us even as we stand behind our proclamation of pre-denominationalism. This happens when we make decisions about how the work of this congregation will be run not based on what is scripturally authorized and what is beneficial for our congregation, but based on what other churches do or how Christians in other churches will react to our decisions. Beliefs and practices are not denominational because some denominational church does it. After all, most denominations believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. Most denominational churches meet for worship on Sunday. If we are more concerned about which churches believe, teach, and practice certain things than we are about whether they are in the Scriptures, then we are being poisoned by denominationalism.
 - c. In like manner, there are many other churches that have our same non-organizational plea. I'm glad for that. However, not only must we refuse to band together in an official denominational structure, we must refuse to unofficially let the "brotherhood" govern us. If we make decisions based on what other Christians or other churches, even ones that have the same back-to-the-Bible plea we have, rather than based on the New Testament, then we are being poisoned by a denominational mindset.
 - d. Further, if we assume that because a congregation is wrong or sinning because of how they compare to us instead of based on how they compare to Scripture, then we will have fallen prey to a denominational mindset.
 2. Regarding creeds.
 - a. I am glad to say that, officially, this congregation has no creedal statement other than the Bible. Officially, there is no man-written set of statements or beliefs that govern what we believe, teach, or practice here. We have the Bible as the source of our teaching.
 - b. However, if we are not careful, the seeds of denominationalism will corrupt us even as we stand behind our proclamation of pre-denominationalism. This happens when we develop catchy ways to systemize God's pattern as seen in the New Testament and end up lazily treating them the same as God's Word, answering Bible questions based on our summations and summaries instead of strictly from the Scripture.
 - c. I'm going to ask my brothers and sisters to carefully consider what I'm about to say without giving way to knee-jerk reactions. What passage can you go to in order to tell me the 10 Commandments God gave Israel? That's easy, isn't it? **Exodus 20** or **Deuteronomy 5**. How about this one? What passage can you go to in order to tell me what are the two greatest commandments? That's also easy. **Matthew 22:34-37; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:27-28**. Try this one. What passage can you go to in order to tell me the four things Scripture is profitable for? Another easy one. **II Timothy 3:16-17**. Okay. Try these. What passage can you go to in order to tell me the 5 steps of salvation? What passage can you go to in order to tell me what are the 3 works of the church? What about the 5 acts of worship? You can't. Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying those constructs are unscriptural. They are good and biblical as far as they go. But we need to recognize them for what they are. They are

man's attempt at collecting, organizing, and summarizing some Biblical teaching on various issues. Practically speaking, they were developed by some man who wrote sermons or articles on those topics, and someone else liked them so he preached them too, and someone else liked them and he repeated them, and so on until they became quite common in churches with a similar heritage to ours. It is one thing to treat these sermons as Scriptural, as pointers to the Scripture. It is another to treat them like Scripture. We must not allow these sermons to become the "officially unofficial" creed of the congregation. We especially must not allow them to become the "officially unofficial" way we expect every congregation or every preacher we will call faithful to talk about these subjects. When we do this, we actually end up in danger of comparing our practices not to the Scripture, but to man's summation of the Scripture. When we do this we are in danger of believing something is authorized because it fits neatly into a preacher's sermon structure rather than because it can really be supported by the Bible or of assuming it isn't scriptural because it doesn't fit neatly into the preacher's sermon jargon without actually checking the Scripture. When we do this, though we may protest all day long that we don't have an official creed, we will be committing the same error as those who do have one. Again, I'm not saying those sermons and summations are unscriptural; I am saying they are not Scripture, and we must be careful to make that distinction.

3. Regarding names.

- a. I am glad to say that of all the congregations I've been part of, this one pushes back against the idea of having a distinctive name to align us with a certain larger group of believers while distinguishing us from everyone else who claims to believe. It pushes back against having a name that is supposed to stand for a certain cadre of doctrines and beliefs. Though on our bank statement we use the description Livingston Avenue Church of Christ, our present sign simply explains that Christians meet here and this is a church that belongs to Christ. Most of our materials simply describe us as a group of Christians that meet on Livingston Avenue. This is because we realize all these descriptions apply to us. Further, we realize we don't need a distinguishing name, rather we need to be a distinct people.
- b. However, if we are not careful, the seeds of denominationalism will corrupt us even as we stand behind our proclamation of pre-denominationalism. The fact is this aspect of denominationalism is so deeply engrained into our minds many of us would rather cave to simplicity and the path of least resistance than proclaim the truth on this. No matter what is on our sign or our letterhead, how many of us when people ask what denomination we are, rather than claiming we are no denomination will just say, "Oh, we're Church of Christ"? Do you speak of "Church of Christ preachers" and "Church of Christ colleges" and "Church of Christ churches"? When trying to distinguish between people who claim Christianity but follow men's creeds instead of the Bible and people who are truly following Biblical Christianity do you cut to the chase by asking, "Are they Church of Christ?" All of these "shortcuts" are the tendency of denominationalism that we must remove.
- c. Would we be aghast if someone ever called us the Livingston Avenue Church of God? "Oh, but Edwin," someone will say, "We're not the church of God?" Are we not? Then there is something wrong with us. No, we are not part of the denomination that calls itself the Church of God, but we are a church of God. We are a church of God in Christ. We are a church of the Nazarene. We are of the Way. And yes, we are a church of Christ. But we aren't part of any denomination or association of congregations using these as names. We are simply an independent group that knows every one of these descriptions applies to us.
- d. "But Edwin," someone will protest, "we know what they mean and they won't understand. It is just so much easier to say we are 'Church of Christ.' They'll get the idea." No, they will get the wrong idea. And I fear this seems appealing to us because some of us still have the wrong idea. It is true that teaching and furthering error has always been easier than explaining the truth. Instead of abandoning the teachable moments and furthering the widespread misunderstanding among others and even ourselves, let us stand up and speak the truth. The "Church of Christ" is not the only right denomination. Properly understood it is no denomination whatsoever. We are not part of the right denomination. If we are part of any denomination, we are wrong. Let us forever ban from our vocabulary the phrases, "I'm/he's/she's Church of Christ," "He's a Church of Christ preacher," "There were Baptists, Methodists and Church of Christers present," "the other denominations" (a subtle statement that we are one denomination and the rest are the others). These kinds of statements further misunderstanding and error not only "out there" but even "in here." I was 8 or 9 years old when someone told me she wasn't any denomination but was just a Christian, refusing to give me any other explanation other

than being just a Christian and it so shocked me I still remember it. Imagine what might have happened if she had been able to actually explain what she meant by that. Imagine what opportunities to share the gospel and the truth about Christ's blood-bought church we might have if we quit taking the denominational and easy way out but instead insist we are simply Christians rather than giving the notion that we are some denominational division of Christianity.

- D. I'll tell you why this lesson is so important to me. Some years ago, when I was in college in Alabama, I was talking with a sister in Christ about a local congregation that was abandoning the faith. The congregation was embracing all manner of false teaching and was unifying with churches that do not teach the gospel of Christ as found in the Bible. But what upset this sister most of all was that she happened to look in the phone book and saw that the congregation had their name listed not under the "Church of Christ" heading, but under the "Non-denominational" heading. It is sad that an erring church might teach us something about the nature of local congregations. Further, it is sad when supposedly Bible-believing Christians think there is something wrong when a local congregation proclaims it is non-denominational. That is what we are. If it is not what we are, it is what we had better become because that is what we find in the Bible—non-denominational Christianity.

Conclusion:

I began with a story. Let me end with one as well. The funny thing is though my conversation with those two sisters in North Carolina has stuck with me, it didn't change anything at the time. After all, I was 8 or 9. Over the next 5 or 6 years, I was taught in my Baptist youth groups that despite the name Baptist, I was just a Christian. That term "Baptist" was given by men because of the way that particular denomination baptizes, but didn't change the fact that we were just Christians. A few years later, my Mom died. Eventually, my dad started dating the woman who is now my step-mother. She was a biblically-defined Christian. Before they were married, my dad was restored to the biblically-defined faith in which he had been raised. While they were dating we started attending a church of God in Blytheville, Arkansas. No, not one of the churches of the denomination "Church of God;" but a pre-denominational church that is really of God, that is, of Christ. And people there started bugging me about leaving my denomination and just being a Christian. I was livid. I was so mad. How dare my dad leave the church he had been raising me in after my mom died? How dare these people act like I needed to leave it too? And how dare they suggest that I was anything but just a Christian? I couldn't wait until I grew up so I could get out of the house and go back to my old church. But when dad remarried, he sent me up to an old family friend who was also a member of the Baptist church in Idaho for three weeks while he and my step-mom honeymooned and then consolidated houses. One day, I was overhearing the family friend and his nephew, a Baptist pastor, discuss something that was going on in the Southern Baptist Convention. I don't remember what they were fretting about, I only remember this statement. The family friend said, "If they keep doing this, I'm going to quit being a Baptist and just be a Christian." And my little house came crashing down. I didn't understand everything about church membership and salvation, but I knew this: that is what I wanted. I wanted to just be a Christian. As soon as the trip was over and I got back home, that is exactly what I did. And I'd like to invite you to do the same thing.