

A Tragic and Interesting Story

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In 1975, while attending the annual lectures at Abilene Christian College (Now Abilene Christian University) I had the privilege of witnessing an occasion that underscores one of the ironies of our times. I was invited by Hardeman Nichols to go to a church building where he baptized Vi Simonds. I went, along with a few others, including Vi's husband, John, who had been Lutheran preacher for many years, with an M. A. in Sociology and Counseling and a Ph.D. in Church History. He was baptized into Christ the previous fall. After Vi's baptism, Marvin Bryant, who helped teach both John and Vi, told us all (including Vi) that of the 47 denominational preachers converted through his and Robert Shank's efforts over the preceding four or five years, she was the last wife to obey the Gospel.

Forty-seven couples! Marvin Bryant was a Presbyterian preacher for many years before obeying the Gospel. Robert Shank, powerful preacher, and exceptionally influential author studied himself out of the Southern Baptist denomination in recent years. These brethren, due to their unique backgrounds, spend all their time contacting and studying with denominational preachers: Nazarenes, Disciples, Southern Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and others. I saw them later at Freed Hardeman lectures with three of the men with whom they were currently studying. They have seen the beauty of simple, pure New Testament Christianity. Its appeal has been so strong that it has mastered their lifelong ties to doctrines, sources of livelihood, and even family members. This is one of the most thrilling stories of modern times to lovers of Truth!

Now for the irony. While a more and more denominational preachers are discovering the New Testament church and fleeing denominational fetters to enter it, several of "our own" preachers are wanting to move the church ever nearer to denominationalism. They want us to adopt denominational ways and teachings, remain silent about their erroneous doctrines and extend full fellowship to them. Some view the church as a denomination already. It is an interesting, but tragic irony that seeks to bind upon the church the very bonds that many others are seeking to escape.

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