

Membership Class 5

South Grove Free Presbyterian Church Tuesday 18th May 2010

Deuteronomy 32:1-4; John 6:69; John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:15-17

The beliefs and theology of the Free Presbyterian Church is the historic theology of the Protestant Reformation. This doesn't mean that Christianity began at the time of the Reformation but rather that true Biblical Christianity was once again emphasised in a world that had been kept in darkness and superstition under the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, the foundation stones of our denomination, along with all other Evangelical and Separated Churches, can be traced back to the Early Church. It is essentially the historic Christian faith as revealed in the Scriptures that we adhere to. You will find that much of what is contained in sound confessions of faith find common ground. Clearly, there will be differences but on fundamental issues historically believers are in agreement. The tragedy of our times is that many who fall under the nominal tag of Christianity have abandoned their confession of faith and therefore the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Our Statement of Faith

Our first and primary standard for faith and practise is God's Word. The voice of Isaiah must permeate everything we do and encounter, **"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"** Isaiah 8:20

We also have sub-standards, a written confession of faith. Some people, even though they are well meaning, object to written confessions of faith and argue along the lines that *the Bible is their statement of faith*. While this sounds impressive it isn't accurate because every group of professing believers has a confession of faith i.e. *what they believe and don't believe*. It is either written or unwritten. The problem with an unwritten confession is that there is no source to appeal to, no public expression of what that body holds to. This can lead to people in leadership dictating the consciences of believers. When the Lord Jesus asked Peter in **Luke 9:20**, **"Whom say ye that I am?"** Peter responded, **"The Christ of God"**. Again in **John 6:69** Peter said, **"And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."** Not only did he say this but He also was inspired to write his letters and in **1 Peter 1** we are particularly presented with the glorious Gospel of Christ. So Confessions and written statements of faith occupy an important role within the Church and they always have done as long as they are subject to Scripture and are not viewed as an inspired authority. Doubtless, many creeds and confessions of men are far removed from God's Word and so must be rejected.

The written statement of faith of our Church is contained in *the Westminster Standards* (this includes the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) and *the Articles of Faith of the Free Presbyterian Church*.

The Articles of Faith

Attached to these notes is a copy of our articles and they can also be found at the back of the booklet "Separated unto the Gospel" and online at www.freepres.org.

Simply put our Articles are meant as summary points of particular emphasis and therefore are an accurate guide to what we would expect prospective members to hold to. They also modify the Confession. Room is made in the Free Presbyterian Church for those who hold Baptist and Paedo-Baptist views of Baptism. Also there is room for differing view of Eschatology as long as there is belief in *the visible and personal return of Jesus Christ*.

Baptism will be discussed another time but suffice it to say that as a Church we realize that bitter controversy has surrounded the modes and subject of baptism. This has consequently divided the body when that Body ought to have united in a witness against all the onslaughts of modernism. Our position therefore encourages every believer to hold and practise their own belief while at the same time honouring the views of others. Keep in mind that this extends to both *mode and subject* – we allow pouring, sprinkling and full immersion believing that each is a picture of what takes place in salvation. We allow the baptism of believer's children and believing adults. We do not hold to the error of baptismal regeneration.

The importance of Doctrine

Surely the greatest weapon within the Church is a believer who has a thorough understanding of the Word and its teachings and has a deep, prayerful and practical walk with God. We encourage Christians to strike this balance: to avoid dead orthodoxy and to steer clear of a shallow understanding of the Word. The first is void of power and life and the other tends to sensationalism in all its forms. The importance of doctrine is seen in light of all past and present day attacks on God's Word or the compromise of it. Jeremiah described how the Word of God challenged his heart. **"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*"** Jeremiah 20:9. These days that burning fire has been covered by the attempts to undermine or change what God has said.

The teachings of Scripture ought not to be perceived as dry but instead as a means of refreshing our hearts **"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass"** Deuteronomy 32:2 Prospective members are not required to read all the Westminster standards but to hold to and contend for Scriptural truth that we believe is concisely set out in our articles. Among the many areas that are under attack I want to highlight a couple:

The Bible – its verbal Inspiration, its inerrancy and absolute authority

It claims Divine Inspiration (**see 2 Tim 3:16, 17**). The Lord Jesus constantly appealed to the Scriptures as sole authority, **"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."** John 5:39. Under this point we must emphasize that the Free Presbyterian Church uses the Authorized Version of the Scriptures which is based on the Hebrew Masoretic Text and Greek Received Text. We wish to avoid the confusion that arises from many different translations used in Church services and we believe the A.V. to be unrivalled as a translation.

The Trinity – We are Trinitarian and this covers many areas of thought. We believe that God reveals Himself as one true and living God and in the Godhead there are three Persons, equal in power and glory – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We do not try to comprehend this because we can't! Instead we accept what He has revealed of Himself. Under this we further affirm that when God the Son was manifest in the flesh He did not cease to be God. Jesus Christ is not God humanized or man deified but the God-man – two distinct natures yet one Person forever. We earnestly hold to His Eternal Sonship, Virgin Birth and Impeccability. The Holy Ghost is not an impersonal force, or *merely a power of God*. He is God, He can be grieved, he can be striven against, He can be lied to, He can comfort His people – all of these attributes and many more prove He is a Person of the Godhead.

In closing, our articles should create no difficulty for those who are genuinely saved and hold dear to the Word of God.