

A FIRM FOUNDATION

The articles of Faith and Rules of Practice
Of the Church meeting for worship in
Eden Chapel, Cambridge

INTRODUCTION

Over one hundred years ago the Church meeting for worship in Eden Chapel, Cambridge published a ***Declaration of faith and Practice***. The authors were careful to explain that their action was prompted by "a desire for the glory of God, and with a hope of promoting and maintaining unity, harmony and peace amongst ourselves; and also that those who desire communion with us may easily understand what our principles are as a baptised Church of Christ." Forty-three years later this Declaration was considerably revised and reappeared under the rather bald and uninviting title ***Articles of Faith and Rules***.

The publication of this present booklet, containing as it does an entirely new definition of the faith and practice of the Church, calls for some explanation. First, let it be said that A Firm Foundation does maintain a continuity with the earlier confessional statements of the Church. We are not so foolish as to assert that our understanding of the Faith owes nothing to the sanctified studies of former generations of godly men. Rather, in upholding the fundamental Biblical traditions upon which this Church was founded, we gratefully acknowledge that "other men have laboured and we have entered into their labours."

However, while this new Statement of Faith is unashamed of its pedigree, It is evidently a child of the twentieth century. In fact, it was born as a result of a deep conviction that the Church of Christ is obliged constantly to submit her faith and practice to the light of Scripture and to ensure that her presentation of the truths of the unchanging Gospel is relevant to the generation in which God has placed her.

We publish ***A Firm Foundation*** with the fervent prayer that this booklet may be used by the Holy Spirit to lead many people to a deep knowledge of the truths of divine revelation. Although we do recognise the role of such a confession of faith in defending the doctrines of historic Christianity our main concern is that this booklet shall fulfil a positive function in the edification of Christians and the instruction of those who are seeking for truth. This declaration of our Faith is our response to the call of the prophet Isaiah:

**"Shout and sing for joy, O Inhabitant of Zion,
For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."**

The reader's attention is drawn to the passages for study, which follow each article of faith. We have deliberately avoided citing isolated texts of Scripture so as to escape the impression that the doctrines of our Faith rest upon unrelated statements of the Bible. The passages for study, on the other hand, provide the basis for a thorough doctrinal study of the Word of God and we ask all who read these pages to "study the Scriptures every day to see If what they are now being told is true." (Acts 17: 11, J.B. Phillips).

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A FIRM FOUNDATION

1. The Scriptures

We believe that the Bible to be the Infallible Word of God. Although the glory of the Lord is revealed in the created universe, sinful man is unable to attain a perfect and saving knowledge of God without further revelation. To meet the needs of fallen mankind God has graciously provided the Holy Scriptures as a complete and reliable unfolding of His character and will. The Scriptures are thus of divine origin. In communicating His revelation God used human authors without employing them mechanically or disregarding their personalities. Nevertheless the Holy Spirit so overshadowed and guided the writers of the Scriptures that their work was preserved from all error. We therefore accept the divine authority of the whole Bible, that is, the sixty-six books of the Old and New testaments, excluding the apocrypha, and confess the written Word of God to be our supreme judge and guide In all matters.

We acknowledge the validity of true Biblical scholarship and encourage those who seek to establish a correct Interpretation of God's revealed truth. Diligent and careful study of the Word of God is to be welcomed, provided only that it be carried on In complete submission to the authority of the Scriptures and therefore in the spirit of humility and reverence that such recognition demands.

Passages for study: Psalm 19; Acts 17: 22.32; Romans 1: 14-32; Exodus 4: 10.16; Luke 1: 1-4; 2 Timothy 3:14.17; Hebrews 1: 1-2:4; 2 Peter 1: 16-21; 2 Peter 3:1-2; Revelation 22:18-21.

2. The Being of God

We believe that the living God of whom the Scriptures speak is alone worthy of our worship, praise and service. God is glorious and infinite, yet gracious and merciful. The holiness and majesty of God should inspire reverent fear in the hearts of men, yet the goodness and love of the Lord lead His children to rejoice In Him.

We declare God to be our Creator. He alone is immortal and eternal, possessing life In Himself, while all else that exists derives its being from Him. The boundless universe and the smallest creature on the earth display the glory of God's creative work, while the supreme act of creation was the forming of man, made in the image of God and Intended to worship and enjoy his Creator for ever.

We declare God to be our Sustainer. The world has not been abandoned to the powers of chance nor to the wills of ungodly men. We rejoice In the absolute sovereignty of God over all events great and small and believe that He Is ceaselessly active In upholding and controlling the universe and in guiding history towards its predestined end.

We declare God to be our Redeemer. In its inception, provision and application, the salvation of sinners is entirely the work of God. Moreover, in the unfolding of the redemptive purposes of God, the Triune nature of the Divine Character is clearly revealed. We confess therefore, with the Church of all ages, that our God, though one in Being, exists eternally In three distinct persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, inseparably united in the essence of the Divine Being.

Passages to study: Psalms 8,96,104; Genesis 1-2; Isaiah 40:12-13; Daniel 4:33-37; John 17:1-10; Romans 11:33-36; Ephesians 1:3-14; Revelation 21:1-7.

3. The Fall of Man

We believe that man was created holy and truly happy. He possessed an inward knowledge of the will of God and enjoyed intimate and unbroken communion with the Lord. However, encouraged by Satan, Adam rebelled against God, thus forfeiting his original blessedness and leading the entire human race into spiritual ruin. The Genesis account of the fall of man we accept as historically accurate and as the only adequate explanation of human history.

The sinful nature of Adam has been passed on to all subsequent generations of our race, resulting in the corruption of the mind and will of every man. In this fallen and spiritually dead condition men are unwilling and unable to seek God as their highest good. The Scriptures repeatedly trace evil behaviour not solely to environment or lack of education but to the wicked nature of man and the seriousness of man's condition is seen, not only in the unhappiness it brings on earth but in the fact that sinners are under the wrath of a holy God.

Passages for study: Genesis 3; Psalm 51; Isaiah 55:1-7; Jeremiah 17: 9-10; Matthew 15:17.20; Romans 5:12.21; Ephesians 2:1-10,4:17-24; James 1: 13-18.

4. The Plan of Salvation

We believe that the salvation of men is entirely the result of divine grace. In eternity God determined to save a great multitude of sinners and in wonderful grace the three persons of the Trinity were all Involved in planning and executing the redemption of the Church. This divine initiative was not conditioned by any anticipated merit or faith in its objects but was motivated only by God's sovereign love.

In the covenant of grace the Father is revealed in Scripture as the source of the blessings of salvation, setting His love upon the redeemed and ordaining Christ to be their Redeemer. Thus, in obedience to the Father's will, the eternal Son of God became flesh. Conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, He united His divine nature with a truly human nature and, free from all taint of original sin, lived a perfect life, yielding full obedience to the holy law of God. By His suffering and death on Calvary Jesus acted as a substitute for His people, bearing the full penalty of their sins and reconciling God and man. He was buried but rose again on the third day, breaking the power of death and bringing everlasting life to all believers. He ascended into heaven, where He lives and reigns, interceding for His Church and governing the affairs of men until the end of time.

Passages for study; Genesis 3:8-15,12:1-3; Hosea 11:1-9; John 17:13,26; Romans 8:28-9:33; Revelation 7:9-17; Ephesians 1:3-6; Luke 1:26-38. John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-10; Hebrews 4:14-16; John 1:26-37; Isaiah 53: 1 Corinthians 15:1-25; Acts 2:29-36.

5. The Application of Salvation

The salvation which has been secured by the work of Jesus Christ is applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit. By His powerful and mysterious work dead souls are quickened into spiritual life and given the desire and ability to repent of sin and believe in Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Awakened by the Spirit, sinners are justified by faith alone and are united to the Lord Jesus in all aspects of His redeeming work. Thus renewed, the believer is adopted into God's family and becomes a partaker of the divine nature.

It is possible for a true believer to be so overcome by temptation as seriously to backslide, but the saving grace of God cannot ultimately be frustrated and all who are truly converted will certainly persevere and enter into the joys of heaven.

Passages to study: Acts 10:43-47,16:13-15; 11 Corinthians 4:1-6; Galatians 3: 24-4:7; Romans 8:6-17; John 10: 25-29.

6. The Christian Life

We believe that the true Christian will rejoice in the twin blessings of the new covenant, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the creation of an Inward desire to glorify God by a life which conforms to His laws. Good works and practical holiness are indispensable evidences of a real experience of divine grace. We believe that the Christian has a vital role to play in society and must not withdraw into a life of seclusion, yet Christian behaviour is not to be governed by a spirit of the world but rather by the unchanging laws of God, declared in the ten commandments, expounded in the Sermon on the Mount and the epistles and exemplified in the life of our Lord Jesus.

Passages for study: Psalms 1,37,119:1-16; Jeremiah 31: 31.34; Matthew 5:13-20, 7:15-29; Romans 6: 1-14; James1: 21-27, 2:14-26

7. The Church

We believe that the true Church consists of the whole number of God's elect. This glorious and, as yet, Invisible Body of Christ, comprises all in every generation and from every land who have been quickened by the Spirit and brought to trust in the Saviour.

The New Testament also uses the term Church in a restricted and local sense. Christians in a particular locality are encouraged to covenant together in a visible bond of fellowship and such groups are designated in Scripture as local Churches of Christ. True local Churches are characterised by the faithful preaching of the Gospel, steadfast adherence to apostolic doctrine and practice and the maintenance of true godliness among the membership.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ exercises His government of the local Church through men gifted and called to occupy the office of elder. According to Scripture an elder must be a man of unquestionable godliness, sound in faith and with an evident ability to exercise spiritual authority In the Church. The work of eldership includes the ministry of the Word, the pastoral care of all the flock, the enforcement of a scriptural discipline and the promotion of evangelistic, missionary endeavour. Scripture warrants the setting aside of at least one teaching elder, or pastor, to the whole-time ministry of the Word.

The other office of a permanent nature in the local Church is that of deacon. Deacons are responsible for the administration

of the temporal and material aspects of church life and the ministers of practical compassion to the needy within the congregation. Nonetheless, Scripture requires the same spiritual qualities in a deacon as in an elder and no individual should enter either office without a clear call from God, confirmed by the judgement of the whole church.

We believe that Christian Churches within a geographical area should seek fellowship together, manifesting visibly the spiritual unity in Christ which is already theirs. Scripture lays an obligation upon us to confer with like-minded Churches on matters of common concern such as the definition of doctrine, the exercise of discipline and the fulfilment of our Saviour's great evangelistic commission.

Passages to study: Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 8:5-11; Ephesians 5:24-27, Acts 14:21-28; Philippians 1:1-2; Galatians 1:1-9, Acts 20:17-38; Hebrews 13:7-17; Acts 6:1-7, 15:1-6.

8. The Ordinances

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted Christ for His own glory and the spiritual good of His children and that both ordinances are to be observed in the Church throughout the Gospel age.

The practice of believers' baptism rests upon the direct command of the risen Lord and is endorsed by the clear example of the apostolic Church. Believers who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ are the only valid subjects of baptism. Furthermore, we believe that the symbolic nature of this ordinance is best displayed by immersion in water, which

mode proclaims, according to Scripture, the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

While baptism is initiatory, the Lord's Supper is a continuing means of grace to the regenerate heart. We deny that grace is conveyed automatically through this ordinance, yet, to the true believer, Christ is present and those who meet around the Lord's Table in humility and true faith can confidently expect to find spiritual refreshment as their souls are nourished by the Bread of Life. This holy Supper must always be approached in a spirit of reverence, humble self-examination and preparation of heart and mind so that, in faith, we are ready to receive what God promises to give. Furthermore, the Lord's Supper should not only strengthen faith in Christ crucified but, by reminding them of their oneness in Him, should strengthen the love of believers one toward another and, since it is to be observed only "until He comes", the ordinance should quicken anticipation of the glorious second advent of the Lord Jesus.

We believe that the very nature of these ordinances indicates that converts should not partake of the Supper until they have first identified themselves with the Lord Jesus in baptism. Both ordinances belong in the context of the local Church and the elders have authority to withhold them from any who bring the name of Christ into dishonour. In giving expression to the unity of the true Church of Christ visiting believers who are in fellowship with other evangelical Churches may be invited to join us in our communion at Lord's Table.

Passages for study: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 14:17,25; Acts 2:38-47,8:26,39; Romans 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

9. The Last Things

We believe in the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This great climactic event will be visible and personal and will herald general resurrection and final judgement. The bodies of the just unjust alike will be raised from the dead, when the ungodly will hear the dreadful sentence of the righteous Judge and will be banished for ever from the presence of God, while the Church will be presented faultless through the merits of Christ and will then begin to enjoy the everlasting blessedness of the new creation purged of sin and filled with divine glory.

"Even so, come Lord Jesus." Amen.

Passages for study: John 14:1-6; Acts 1:6-12; Romans 8:18,25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 5:24-29,11:21-27; Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 1: 4-8,19:1-9,21.

RULES OF CHURCH PRACTICE

1. Membership of the Church

Membership of this local Church shall be open to all Christians who, walking in obedience to the commandments of the Gospel and affirming their assent to our Articles of Faith, desire to unite with us in fellowship and service.

Application for Membership

Applications for membership must be made to the elders who will then appoint at least two of their number to arrange an interview with each candidate. If this interview provides satisfactory evidence of the applicant's Christian experience and

knowledge of the doctrinal position of the Church, the elders shall call a members' meeting at which they may recommend the acceptance of the applicant into our fellowship. If the consent of the Church is then given, the applicant shall, after baptism (in case of baptised Christians previously in fellowship elsewhere, on receipt of an acceptable letter of commendation) be given the right hand of fellowship and granted all the privileges and rights belonging to members.

Testimony of new Members

New members shall be given the opportunity to speak a word of Testimony to the gathered Church. Yet, such action must be seen not as a condition of fellowship, but rather as a free act whereby we may rejoice together in the grace of God.

Responsibilities of Membership

Every member of the Church shall be expected to contribute toward the development of true spiritual fellowship by the pursuit of practical holiness, love of all the brethren, faithful attendance at all regular meetings for worship, ministry and prayer and regular, practical support of the work of the Gospel. Any member consistently neglecting his responsibility or guilty of action by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonoured shall be subject to the admonition of the elders.

Termination of Membership

Termination of church membership as a disciplinary measure we recognise to be a most serious action. However, in order that

the purity of the Church may be maintained, any member guilty of a serious offence and remaining unrepentant despite repeated admonitions must be removed from the membership of the Church. Yet, our zeal for the glory of God must ever be tempered by a loving and prayerful concern for the full restoration of the offender.

Members of this Church who move away from Cambridge must be encouraged to seek fellowship in that locality in a Church where the Gospel is faithfully preached and the doctrines of the Christian Faith are upheld and loved. In exceptional cases where a transfer proves impossible membership with us may be retained as long as there is agreement to maintain real links of fellowship with the Church by all possible means including regular correspondence with our elders.

2. Meetings of the Church

Members' meetings must be held regularly, at least once in each quarter of the year. Meetings must be publicly announced at least one Sunday in advance. The purpose of such meetings shall be:

The Purpose of Church Meetings

- (i) the transaction of all church business. For example, the presentation of the names of prospective members, the election of elders or deacons and all other acts which rightly belong to the gathered Church. Matters of business discussed in a church meeting must be regarded as of a confidential nature.

- (ii) for the officers to share with members their plans for the work of the Church. Opportunity should be given for open discussion of all aspects of church life and thus, in fellowship with the members, the elders can seek to discern the mind of Christ for the Church.

- (iii) to provide opportunities for fellowship in the Gospel. Brethren and sisters should be encouraged to share their spiritual problems in order that "we may bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

An annual church meeting shall be held at which reports of all aspects of our work must be presented and the Financial Account examined and approved.

3. The Officers of the Church

Preparation for Elections

All elections to office within the Church must be preceded by times of special prayer in order that the members may unite in seeking the will of Christ in respect of potential elders and deacons. Moreover, no election shall take place unless the Pastor, or another teaching elder, has first delivered a clear, simple exposition of the relevant passages in the Pastoral Epistles so that members may measure all candidates for office against the Scriptural standard.

Elders

Whenever It becomes evident to the elders that Christ has placed within the fellowship men whose spiritual gifts and pastoral concern indicate that they may be called to eldership, they shall approach such brethren to discover whether they are conscious of the sense of divine call to the work of pastoral oversight. If the agreement of such men is obtained they may be nominated as candidates for eldership. The Church must be given adequate time to consider the matter prayerfully and shall then, at a specially convened meeting, express Its judgement. Members unable to be present shall be given opportunity to register their vote and, if in the opinion of nor less than seventy-five per cent of members voting the candidate is suitable for office, he shall be received as the gift of Christ to His Church and, in due time, ordained as an elder.

The Pastor

In the calling of any man to the full-time pastoral ministry of the Church the same basic process must be followed. In addition, however, the Church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential minister and, before being asked to express its judgement, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Biblical doctrine we seek to uphold.

The Task of the Elders

Among the regular tasks of the elders priority must always be given to the supervision of all aspects of the teaching and pastoral ministry of the Church. In particular, they are to ensure

that all who minister the Word to the congregation share our fundamental convictions concerning the nature and content of the Gospel of Christ. In respect of pastoral work, the elders must ensure that all members receive spiritual help and counsel. They should allocate time for the visitation of every family belonging to the Church at east once each year.

Deacons

The deacons are to be concerned with the practical details of church life, undertaking tasks of administration, maintenance and the care of church members in need of material help with the broad policy established by the elders. The elders must review the numerical strength of the diaconate at least every three years and, whenever it becomes evident that the current needs of the Church make an increase in the number of deacons desirable, the members are to be encouraged to nominate members considered suitable for this office.¹ Any two church members may nominate another member for the diaconate, provided they first obtain his or her consent. Nominations shall be presented to the elders and, if endorsed by them, shall come before the Church to be decided in the same manner as in the election of elders. If the number of nominations exceeds the number of places vacant on the diaconate, the nominees with the highest percentage of votes in their favour shall be inducted to office.

While the elders will meet for prayer and discussion weekly, joint meetings of elders and deacons are to be held at least once in two months.

Period of Service

All officers appointed by the Church shall serve for an initial period of three years. If at the close of this time the Church is convinced that they have been 'proved'² worthy of their office an appointment for an unlimited period may be made.

If at any time complaints presented in a scriptural manner³ concerning the behaviour, teaching or overall spiritual slackness of any officer are found to have a basis in fact, then disciplinary action must be taken. If necessary the opinion of the Church must be sought as to the desirability of the individual concerned continuing in office and, if a majority in excess of seventy-five per cent of members voting expresses a lack of confidence in the officer, he or she shall cease to hold that position forthwith.

Officers shall normally retire from executive responsibilities on reaching 70 years of age. In exceptional circumstances an elder or deacon may continue in office after this time but must be confirmed in office annually by the Church.

Finally, if at any time it becomes evident that an elder or deacon, as a result of infirmity, has lost his or her faculties to such a degree as to render his or her active continuance in office a hindrance to the spiritual life of the Church, the elders, while seeking grace from God in their task, must take whatever action is considered appropriate to prevent confusion and disorder.

¹ Acts 6:3 ² 1 Timothy 3:10 ³ 1 Timothy 5:19

Rules of Conduct for Elections

- (i) Members wishing to nominate someone for office should discuss the matter with the pastor (or other officer) before approaching the candidate concerned.
- (ii) Members intending to vote against or speak in opposition to a candidate for office should express their objections to the pastor (or other officer) at least two weeks before the relevant church meeting.
- (iii) Voting for church officers shall normally be by show-of-hands unless a motion calling for a secret ballot, duly proposed and seconded is presented to the pastor (or other officer) at least two weeks in advance with a reasoned explanation.
- (iv) Only those votes cast for or against a candidate shall be considered in calculating the percentage of votes in his favour: abstentions will be ignored.
- (v) Members who are unable to attend a meeting for the election of officers and who offer their reasoned apologies in advance will be permitted to vote by proxy through the church secretary (or other officer).

The aim of these rules of conduct is to ensure:

~~that~~ that, as far as possible, no nomination proceeds without the support of the pastor and his fellow officers;

- ✍✍ that, as far as possible, nothing is said or done in regard to our church elections which shall cause embarrassment or hurt to any member;
- ✍✍ that no candidate fails to be elected for unidentifiable reasons;
- ✍✍ that weight shall be given to the opinions of only those members who show themselves willing to be actively involved in the business of the church;
- ✍✍ that our church meetings shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The following passages have been considered in formulating these rules: Matthew 18: 15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-13; Hebrews 13: 17; 1 Timothy 5: 19; Colossians 3:12-17; Galatians 5: 13-15

Associate Membership

Associate Membership

Students and others not permanently resident in Cambridge are eligible for consideration for Associate membership. Qualifications are identical to those for full membership as set out on pages 8 and 9. Where the applicant has membership in

another evangelical church a letter of commendation will be sought.

Responsibilities of Associate Membership

Responsibilities of Associate membership are the same as for full members but

- (a) while not resident in Cambridge they are released from the obligation to attend church services;
- (b) they will be encouraged to form firm links with an evangelical church during absences from Cambridge and may hold dual membership if acceptable to the other church;
- (c) whilst they will be encouraged to attend Church meetings they will not be eligible to stand for office or to vote;
- (d) student Associate members will be encouraged to support CICCUC or other evangelical groups within their Colleges and Institutions, and this commitment will be regarded as an extension of Eden's evangelistic ministry in the City and University.

Termination of Associate Membership

Associate members are under the discipline and pastoral care of the church officers. Termination of Associate membership as a disciplinary measure will be as stated on page 8. Associate membership will normally be terminated immediately the period of temporary residence ends, unless the member holds no church membership elsewhere. In which case it will be retained until a transfer can be arranged.

A more comprehensive exposition of Reformed Baptist principles will be found in the following documents:

Things Most Surely Believed Among Us - the Particular Baptist Confession of 1689 based largely upon the Westminster Confession. Available from Evangelical Press.

The Philadelphia Confession of Faith ~ the American edition of the 1689 Confession.

We Believe - the Strict Baptist Affirmation of Faith of 1966.