



SEPARATED UNTO THE GOSPEL

*The Mission and Work
of the Free Presbyterian Church
of North America*



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of the Free Presbyterian Church
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Preface

*T*he following pages are a response to frequent requests from people interested in the Free Presbyterian Church for a concise description of our ministry and message. We have sought to present the material positively and briefly, and yet with sufficient detail to give a real insight into our stand on matters of doctrinal and practical importance. If this method of presentation raises further questions in your mind, or if you need fuller clarification of some of our statements, we invite your sincere inquiry. The minister of your local Free Presbyterian Church would welcome an opportunity to discuss such matters with you.

Thank you for your interest in our ministry. We trust the reading of this little booklet will bring blessing to you and honor to our triune God.

1 **Introducing the Free Presbyterian**

How It All Began

On St. Patrick's Day 1951 a new biblical witness was born in the village of Crossgar, County Down, Northern Ireland. As a result of the high-handed actions of the Presbytery of Down, the elders of the local Presbyterian church were prohibited from using their church hall for a gospel mission. When the elders refused to acquiesce in the decision, they were immediately suspended. All this took place less than twenty-four hours before the mission was due to commence. Those elders had no doubt as to their duty. They could not go back to their church without denying or compromising the gospel. That was something they refused to do. So they decided to leave a denomination that had no difficulty permitting dances and parties of various kinds in its church halls but that, in this case, banned the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They proceeded with the help of Rev. Ian R. K. Paisley, their guest evangelist, to form the Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. The Crossgar people were quickly joined by Dr. Paisley's independent congregation. In the months that followed two more congregations sprang up as the result of Dr. Paisley's evangelism and secessions from the Irish Presbyterian Church. The new church grew throughout the years until its witness was worldwide.

Presbyterian

The new church was Presbyterian in doctrine and government, though it departed from usual Presbyterian policy by recognizing that baptism is variously understood by good men equally committed to Scripture. This being so, the Free Presbyterian Church believed that Christians should not be kept apart by their acceptance or rejection of the historic Presbyterian view of infant baptism—all, however, rejecting the error of baptismal regeneration. It was called Free Presbyterian to indicate its liberty from any affiliation with a liberal church hierarchy or organization.

Protestant

The church was unashamedly Protestant. It gladly identified with the great Protestant Reformation. Throughout its history it has stood opposed to the ecumenical movement's efforts to promote union with the Church of Rome, because that church still holds to every dogma that caused the Reformation in the first place. In theology the church is Reformed. It stands foursquare in the great Geneva tradition of Calvin, Knox, the English and American Puritans, and some of the most used revival preachers in history.

Evangelistic

The church has always tied its Calvinism to evangelism. It is a praying church with a burden for the salvation of sinners. Its growth has been through unremitting evangelistic outreach, preaching the gospel "in season, out of season."

Emphasis on Prayer

Great prayer meetings have been the secret of the church's life. We do not merely pay lip service to prayer. We recognize that we have a long way to go in the experience of power in prayer, but we are seeking to follow on to know the Lord and to learn to pray in a way that will be gloriously effective.

An International Fellowship

Today there are some 100 Free Presbyterian churches and extensions in various parts of the world—in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Australia, Canada, and the United States. We also have missionary works in Spain, India, Nepal, South Korea, Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Jamaica, Mexico and Dominican Republic. In 2005, for their better government, the congregations of North America were formed into an autonomous presbytery as The Free Presbyterian Church of North America. The Ulster and North American presbyteries, however, maintain a fraternal relationship resulting in an international Free Presbyterian Church family. The spirit of family fellowship among all these far-flung congregations is deep and sweet. We hope you will sense that as you visit one of our local churches.

Why “Free Presbyterian”?

Presbyterian Belief

Presbyterian refers basically to a form of theology and of church government. The form of theology is that exposition of Scripture which is called “Reformed.” It sees the Bible as a basic unity, with both the Old and the New Testaments declaring the one triune God, one Saviour from sin, one way of salvation, and one covenant of grace. Presbyterians see all of Scripture falling under two covenants, the covenant of works and the evangelical covenant of mercy. The covenant of works was made by God with Adam prior to the fall (Gen. 2:16-17; Hos. 6:7, margin). After the fall God never set before men the possibility of eternal salvation by works. We reject the notion that God placed fallen man under the series of probations. Man’s probation ended with the fall. After that he could be saved only by grace without any merit arising from his own works. Thus, throughout Scripture the Lord presents us with a covenant of mercy or grace that sets forth His sovereign terms for saving sinners. He has administered that covenant in various ways, progressively leading up to the full revelation of His grace in the incarnation and atonement of His Son. Galatians 3 and Romans 4 show that Old and New Testament believers are seen by God in the same covenant. Romans 11 makes the same point under the figure of the olive tree. We are grafted into the tree of the Old Testament church. In both Testaments God’s people are saved on the ground of the righteousness of Christ received by faith (Rom. 4:1-13; 5:1). It is a mistake to think that in the Old Testament God’s people were saved by their personal obedience. The law always exposed sin and condemned even the most religious Jews (Rom. 7:7-11), but it was attended by a ceremonial code of sacrifices that prefigured the coming once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Even during the period from Moses to Christ, God saved men only by free grace through faith. Hebrews 11 shows just how real and powerful the faith of the Old Testament saints was.

We believe it is vital for us today to maintain this basic unity of Scripture. It opens up the Old Testament in a wonderful way and enables us to see Christ as its central message—and, after all, He saw Himself in the same way (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

Thus, true Presbyterianism maintains the centrality and all-sufficiency of Christ in all its preaching. It sees in Him the perfect revelation of God to men (John 1:18; Matt. 11:27). It refuses to deal with such subjects as God's predestination, or Christ's particular redemption of His people by His blood, or man's moral responsibility, in mere philosophical terms. These are parts of God's revelation of grace in Christ, and it is in the context of His person and work that we must handle these truths. Hence our theology is as evangelically warm as it is biblically orthodox.

Presbyterian Church Government

Presbyterian also has special reference to a form of church government that seeks to follow Scripture as closely as possible. It differs from Independency in that it works on the biblical principle of the interdependency of local congregations. It differs from Episcopacy in that it has no clerical hierarchy.

In the government of a local Presbyterian church, the spiritual oversight is committed to elders, or presbyters (which is merely the Greek word for “elders” in an Anglicized form). We believe that in the New Testament the apostles committed the administration of church ordinances and the regulation of church affairs to officebearers, not to a clerical hierarchy or to the congregation at large (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Elders had the responsibility for the spiritual affairs, while deacons had special responsibility for the church's temporal affairs (Acts 6).

In Presbyterianism, as in Scripture (1 Tim. 5:17), some elders are ruling elders, and some are ruling and teaching elders. In other words, a minister or preacher is joined by men appointed and ordained (Titus 1:5) to form the spiritual oversight of a local church. These and all other officebearers are elected by the vote of the communicant members of the church (Acts 1 and 6).

There is clear evidence in Acts 15 that the final court of appeal in church issues does not lie in the local congregation but in a body of elders representing various associated congregations. As Presbyterians we recognize the role of the united eldership of a number of associated congregations as a court of appeal for matters originating in a local church. This presbytery, as it is called, expressed the unity of churches with a common doctrine banded together for mutual support and prayer, for the protection of their common testimony, and for joint efforts to spread the gospel and establish new churches.

We could sum up the Presbyterian belief on this principle of interdependency as follows:

1. *The unity of the church.* The Scripture picture is not one of a great number of totally independent churches. Acts 15 makes this clear.

2. *Ultimate ecclesiastical authority is not vested in the local church,* but in a presbytery made up of elders from the constituent congregations. In Acts 15 the principle of the lesser church court being subordinate to the greater is also established.

3. *The equality of the elders.* At the general council in Jerusalem, there is no hint of an hierarchy, and the language of Galatians 23 confirms this. Indeed, the Greek of Acts 15:2 makes it clear that the apostles sat on that council as elders, while the Greek of verse 6 indicates that there were elders who were not apostles. The distinction between elders who rule and elders who rule and teach is made in 1 Timothy 5:17, but both have equal standing and power in the courts of the church.

4. *The right of the people to a real part in the government of the church by means of electing the officebearers of the church.* Acts chapters 1 and 6 give instances of this in the early church. Yet, as Acts 15 shows, this part in government does not extend as far as in modern Independency.

As Presbyterians we do not deny the legitimacy of churches

that disagree with us on church government, but we do believe that the polity we practice is “founded on and agreeable to the Word of God,” to use the language of the Scottish ordination formula.

What Free Presbyterian Implies

The *Free* in our name refers to our total dissociation from the major Presbyterian denominations of the world, which have largely repudiated the historical Christian faith. We have no affiliation with the World Council of Churches or any of its international, national, or local organizations. Thus *Free* speaks of our liberty to stand without compromise for Christ in a day of apostasy. Many evangelicals have stayed in apostate churches. Others have separated but have not made any strong protest against the betrayal of the gospel by apostates and by the compromise of those evangelicals who have put denominational loyalty before obedience to the biblical command to separate. We view our freedom as liberty to stand resolutely for Christ, to defend the gospel, to oppose apostasy and compromise, and to urge God’s people to cease all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. For us freedom is freedom to be holy, observing both personal and ecclesiastical separation unto the Lord.

Principles of Worship

Worship has been defined as “reverent devotion and allegiance pledged to God.” It usually is extended to include the rites or ceremonies by which our devotion and allegiance are expressed. Our English word *worship* is basically the same word as *worth*. Worship is really “worthship” and denotes that God is worthy of receiving the praise and honor we bring to Him. From the Old and the New Testaments we glean that corporate worship is mandatory for God’s people (Heb. 10:25). It is to be marked by a sense of the presence of the Lord (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4). Its main elements

are prayer and praise (Psa. 105:1-4; Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42), the reading of the Word of God (Luke 4:16-17), the preaching of the Word (Luke 4:18-20; Acts 13:5; 2 Tim. 4:1-2), and the administration of the sacraments (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-24). This worship is to be spiritual and sincere (John 4:24). It is not to degenerate into a mere mechanical, ritualistic, or liturgical form (Matt. 15:8).

The Central Act of Worship: Preaching

This we seek to maintain. In line with historical Protestantism and, more importantly, in line with the emphasis of the New Testament, we hold that the faithful preaching of Christ is the central part of Christian worship. Paul said, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17). This is not to undervalue baptism, but it is to establish the primacy of preaching in Christian worship. That is why in our services the preaching is central.

The Bible We Use in Our Services

In carrying on this preaching ministry the Free Presbyterian Church has, throughout its history, used the Authorized (often called the “King James”) Version of the Scriptures. We wish to avoid the confusion that arises from the use of many different translations and paraphrases in church services. We believe the Authorized Version is unrivaled as a translation of the Scriptures and that, unlike most modern translations, it reflects the authentic, historic Hebrew and Greek texts that God “immediately inspired, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.8).

The Bible Sets the Standard

We believe that the best way to achieve a biblical experience of worship is to be governed as to the content of our worship by the Word of God. This is called the regulative principle of worship. Some churches, notably the Lutheran and Anglican communions, have adopted what is known as the normative principle, which states that if an activity or form is not forbidden in Scripture, it is acceptable. The regulative

principle, on the other hand, would admit only what Scripture authorizes. Presbyterians have historically held that the only way to worship God is the way He has commanded or set forth in His Word. This is a sound basis for worship as long as we allow that such things as can be proved permissible by reference to some general principles of Scripture, even when they are not expressly commanded, are to be justly included in Christian worship. Some extreme upholders of the regulative principle have opposed the introduction of weekly prayer meetings, Bible classes, and Sunday schools.

Our Music

You will find in all of our churches a great love for singing to the Lord. Not only because God has called upon His people to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise” (Psa. 100:4), but because He has put a “new song” in our mouths to magnify His greatness and His goodness (Psa. 40:3). We believe the Bible clearly directs us to use music that will reflect the majesty and glory of our God and of the gospel message.

The music we use in our worship (whether vocal or instrumental) clearly reveals that we are “new creatures in Christ,” that old things have passed away and all things have become new. The devil has his own music, which the world—wittingly or unwittingly—employs to honor him. But we believe that this kind of music has no place in the life of the Church, which is not to be “conformed to this world,” but “transformed” into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2). We reject the modern-day notion that says in order to reach the world with the gospel, we need to use the world’s music. We therefore refuse to use Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and any style of music that, in our estimation, not only denigrates Christ and His gospel, but also reflects the spirit of the world, a spirit that is given over to entertainment instead of to the worship of God and the edification of the saints.

As a consequence, we make good use of the oldest hymnbook of the Church—the Psalms—as well as the great old hymns of the faith, which are so rich in doctrine and Christ-honoring

music. The Lord has “put a difference” between His people and the world (Ex. 11:7), a difference we want to be seen in our praise and worship of the Triune God.

The Key to True Worship

We seek to avoid both the deadness of the fixed liturgical form of some churches and the distracting disorder of others. The key to true worship is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We seek to maintain the liberty to sense and follow the leading of the Spirit, to express the spontaneity and joy of a living relationship with Christ, to convey the solemnity of appearing in the presence of the God of heaven, and to impress upon all present the majesty and mercy of God and the great issues of eternity. We enjoy meeting with one another. Fellowship is a part of worship (Acts 2:42), but most of all we come together to meet with our Lord.

The Lord’s Table

That fellowship with the Lord is especially sweet at the Lord’s Table. In Presbyterian church history, the communion season has often been the time God has chosen to visit His people with revival.

In the Free Presbyterian Church, each session (i.e., board of elders) has the right to determine the frequency of observing the Lord’s Supper. We adhere strictly to what is the historical Protestant view of the ordinance. We repudiate the Romish notion of transubstantiation and Luther’s idea of consubstantiation. There is no change in the physical elements. There is no bodily presence of Christ. Neither is the Supper a sacrifice for sin. It is a blessed memorial in which Christ’s “death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace” (*The Shorter Catechism*, 96). Thus for us a communion service is no mere “add-on” or afterthought to another service. It is a solemn privilege to remember Christ, and as we do so we earnestly crave the manifestation of His glory to the reviving of our souls.

It is the Lord's Table to which we come. It is not a denominational table. All who credibly profess salvation in Christ, are seeking to maintain a pure testimony, and are not currently under discipline for sin in their local church are welcome to participate in services that for many of us are a foretaste of heaven. Here we view our Saviour in symbols that point us to the day when we will see Him face to face.

Our Statement of Faith

Some well-meaning people insist that they have no human Creed, no confession of faith, because the Bible itself is their statement of belief. That sounds very spiritual, but in fact those who most loudly state this position are usually the most dictatorial in forcing their adherents to accept their interpretation of what the Bible teaches. In other words, every group of professing Christians has a confession of faith, written or unwritten. When it is unwritten, it usually gives the leadership more power to direct the consciences of the adherents.

Our Sub-Standards

Our written statement of faith is set forth in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Larger Catechism* and *The Shorter Catechism*, as amended and printed in our *Book of Church Order*. Our amendments of the Westminster Standards modify the statements of the Confession adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America in 1788 in five areas:

1. They modify and abbreviate the Confession chapter 23, *Of the Civil Magistrate*, at section 3.
2. They place an Additional Note and an Addendum to the Confession chapter 25, *Of the Church*. The Additional Note at section 6 reflects the Church's openness on the eschatological interpretation of the "man of sin." The

Addendum reflects the Church's position on standards of ecclesiastical and personal separation.

3. They carry an Additional Statement to the Confession chapter 28, *Of Baptism*, at sections 3–4, to declare the Church's policy of admitting to equal standing in membership and ministry believers who hold to credobaptism (the view that it is scriptural to baptize only those who have made a credible profession of personal faith in Christ) with those who hold to paedobaptism (the view that it is scriptural to baptize the infant children of baptized believers).

4. They place an Additional Statement to the Confession chapter 32.2 and 33.1-3 to reflect the Church's allowance of a diversity of views in some areas of eschatology. These statements deal with the often debated questions of how to interpret the Bible's teaching on the subject of the millennium. Our statement of faith gives liberty to adopt a premillennial, postmillennial or amillennial view of prophecy, with the proviso that no prophetic interpretation is acceptable that alters the central truths of the gospel as expounded in other parts of our confessional standards.

5. They add a chapter to the Confession, *Of the Holy Spirit* (Chapter 34).

The Trinity

The cornerstone of our theology is what we may call the Godhood of God. We are happy to believe all He has said about Himself in His Word. That means we believe that God is a trinity, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). Hence we preach the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit. How God is one and undivided in His eternal essence and yet three in His personal subsistences we do not pretend to comprehend. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). No! But we can accept what He has revealed of Himself.

The Sovereign Majesty of God

The Scriptures quoted above—a few of scores of such expressions in the Bible—present us with a God whose majesty surpasses all description. The glory of His absolute perfection blazes upon us as the sun in all its splendor. He is holy (Isa. 57:15) and reigns in absolute power over all His creation. Every angel, demon, and human, together with every other part of creation, is under His direct control. He is answerable to none but Himself. He can do what He wills, and what He wills is always right. We believe it is important for the pride of man to be humbled before the holy majesty and sovereignty of God. Until and unless this happens, a man or woman cannot begin to enter into life and a right relationship with God. No one will see his need of salvation until he sees that he is under the wrath of a sin-hating God.

The Mercy of God

We mention salvation because the Bible shows that the holy, majestic, sovereign God of all creation is a God of mercy and of love. People often say, “If God is a God of love, why does He allow such and such a thing to happen?” What blasphemy it is for a fallen creature to question the reality of the love of the all-wise God when He has given us the greatest possible proof of His love: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By nature we are “dead in trespasses and sins” and we live “according to the prince of the power of the air” (that is, the devil), and we are “by nature the children of wrath...But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:1-7).

We preach the reality of the love of God in Christ. This is the message sin-cursed souls need to hear. To lead people to know God in truth is the burden of this ministry. Jesus said,

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee [the Father] the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent” (John 17:3). Paul yearned to “know him [Christ], and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10), and Peter instructed God’s people to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Thus to hear a message that expounds what God is, so that the majesty of His glory and of His grace floods our souls, is the urgent need of all men, saved and unsaved. That is the chief burden of this ministry.

2

Points of Doctrinal Emphasis

Scripture

The Bible the Very Word of God

We believe the Bible to be—not merely to contain, but actually to be—the very Word of God. In the words of B. B. Warfield, we “look upon the Bible as an oracular book—as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says—not a book, then, in which one may by searching find some word of God, but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.”

This is no more than the Bible teaches about itself. It claims divine inspiration: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself constantly appealed to Scripture. He stamped its history, its miracles, and its canon (i.e., the books that properly should be included in it) with His personal authority. Therefore, for example, we cannot reject the historical reality of Adam and Eve without repudiating the authority of Christ (Matt. 19:4, 5). We cannot deny the Scriptures without denying Christ.

Our Sole and Sufficient Authority

These Scriptures are our authority in all matters of faith and practice. Jesus said, “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Again, “One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). Thus in settling any point of doctrine the question we have to ask is, “What saith the Scripture?”

Holding the authority of Scripture as a revealed truth, we necessarily believe the sufficiency of Scripture. We need no other authority for faith and practice. This is not to say that the Bible deals exhaustively with all subjects. Clearly it does not, but we accept nothing as true that stands in opposition

or contradiction to the Bible. We do not need or accept any additional authority, whether it be the claimed traditions or teaching authority of the Church of Rome, or the visions and voices of the self-styled Charismatic movement.

How Should We Treat the Word of God?

This is more than a theoretical position. It is a life-governing conviction. Hence we read the Bible, we study it, we preach it, we seek to obey it, and we spread its message. We are not impressed by a doctrine or a practice merely because it is currently popular. Nor for that matter are we more likely to accept it just because it is “old-fashioned.” If it accords with Scripture, that is what commends it to us, whatever the current state of opinion in church or state may be.

What an unspeakable blessing it is to have the Word of God in our own language! Queen Victoria is reputed to have called the Bible the secret of England’s greatness. It remains the secret and foundation of any church that aspires to do a work for God. We unhesitatingly embrace it as our chart and compass.

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

That God has an eternal purpose is beyond dispute (Eph. 1:9; 3:11). This purpose is based upon His infinite wisdom (Eph. 1:11; Job. 12:13). It is a purpose that includes “whatsoever comes to pass.” Psalm 135:6 is clear on this point: “Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.” God’s purpose even includes the wicked actions of sinful men (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Psalms 76:10; Proverbs 16:4). We cannot understand how such actions can be according to God’s purpose while men are yet responsible moral agents who are held answerable for their own sin. However, we believe that no act or event in

all creation falls outside the decree of God. God's purpose is, therefore, universal. Theologians have spoken of some decrees being decrees to permit such things as the fall and subsequent sins. This explanation helps our understanding, but it still leaves a mystery beyond our comprehension. God's purpose is also unchangeable (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:10) and absolute—that is, unconditional. It does not depend for its fulfillment on anything not decreed by God. He works “all things” according to His purpose (Eph. 1:11).

Election

The sovereignty of God is seen in creation (Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11; Prov. 16:4). It is equally seen in providence (Psa. 103:19). He controls the elements (Luke 8:25) and the animal creation (Gen. 2:19; 6:19, 20), as the plagues He sent upon Egypt powerfully prove. He controls all men (Prov. 21:1; Jer. 10:23). Angels and even demons obey His pleasure (Psa. 103:21; Mark 1:27; Job 1:6-12; Matt. 4:11). Isaac Watts properly said:

*There's not a sparrow or a worm, but's found in
His decrees;
He raises monarchs to their throne and sinks
them as He please.*

What is true in creation and providence is also true in salvation: God is sovereign. “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

The Bible is clear that God chose a people unto salvation (Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). This divine choice is unconditional; that is, God did not choose some because He foresaw they would believe. Faith is not the cause, but the result of God's choice in election. Peter makes this clear when he says that Christians are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). Obedience is the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5), and election is unto it, not because of it. Also, foreknowledge is not merely foresight or prescience. The syntax of Acts 2:23 indicates that God's foreknowledge is

His “determinate counsel.” Thus repentance and faith are gracious gifts of our sovereign Lord given to us on the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8, 9; Phil. 1:29).

Human Responsibility

God’s sovereignty does not destroy man’s moral responsibility. Man is God’s rational creature. He is a sinner willfully. He is a willing slave to his depravity. He does not sin because of God’s election. He sins because of his own willful wickedness. God holds every sinner responsible for his actions and attitudes.

Such is the depravity of man that he is incapable of spiritual good (Rom. 8:7; 3:10-19). Left to himself, he would never choose God or obey the gospel. His carnal mind is enmity against God. His only hope lies outside of himself in the God of all grace.

Election and Evangelism

That is why we believe a biblical emphasis on the sovereignty of God is essential to true evangelism. It certainly does not hinder evangelism. Romans 9:1-3 shows that a strong belief in God’s predestinating and electing purpose goes hand in hand with a burning passion for souls.

We have no time for a dead, intellectual Calvinism that refuses to offer Christ freely to sinners with the assurance that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Some of the greatest revival preachers in history have been strong asserters of God’s sovereignty in salvation, men like John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Asahel Nettleton, George Whitefield, Robert Murray McCheyne, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

We stand in that historical and honored line that is traced directly from Scripture through the most glorious ministries God has ever given to His church. We refuse to “democratize the gospel,” as one writer put it, by saying, “God did His part; now it is up to you to do yours.” Salvation is not a joint effort. It is a divine work received by faith without works.

May I Come to Christ Without Knowing I am Elect?

Scripture never instructs a sinner to try to discover if he is elect and then come to Christ. In fact, it forbids prying into the secret counsel of God (Deut. 29:29). God's instruction to a sinner is, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). He assures all that obey this instruction that He will in no wise cast them out (John 6:37), but will give them eternal life (John 3:16).

Every sinner's duty is to obey God. That means every sinner should come penitently to Christ. Once he has come and received eternal life as a free gift, he has a biblical ground of assurance that he is one of God's elect (1 Thess. 1:4).

The Person and Work of Christ

"The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, forever" (Shorter Catechism, 21).

Paul said, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). The same apostle wrote, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23). Christ's person and work, then, lie at the very heart of the Christian message.

The Eternal Deity of Christ

Jesus Christ is essentially and eternally God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). In Romans 9:5 Christ is said to be "over all, God blessed for ever." In Titus 2:13 He is called "the great God and our

Saviour Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is “God...manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The True Humanity of Christ

The miracle of all miracles is that God the Son became a man. He did not cease to be God, but He took a true human nature—a real body and a reasonable soul—into union with Himself. He came into the world as a babe, having been conceived by the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-35). What a miracle! What condescension! “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5). Only as a true man could our Saviour suffer, be tempted, take our place, bear the wrath of God against men, and by His own meritorious obedience procure salvation for His people. The price of such a salvation was incalculable, but, as the hymn writer so beautifully put it, “Jesus paid it all.”

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

The key note of the gospel in the preaching of the apostles is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every time they preached they gave prominence to the resurrection. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;...was buried, and...rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). His resurrection declares His deity (Rom. 1:4) and the reality of His people’s acceptance with God in Him (Rom. 4:25). Our Saviour is a living Saviour and is therefore able to save. He who conquered sin and death can save souls from both. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

The Second Coming of Christ

This same Jesus is coming again (Acts 1:11). The bodily return of Christ is the “blessed hope” of the church (Titus 2:13). It is a hope that causes those who cherish it to live in purity (1 John 3:3). God’s people have differing interpretations as to the prophetic details of their Saviour’s return—for example,

whether it will be pre-, mid-, or post-tribulational, and whether it will be pre-, post-, or a-millennial—but they are all perfectly agreed that He is personally coming again.

The Free Presbyterian Church encourages Christians to major on the glorious certainty of the Lord's return. We do not exclude believers from our fellowship because of minor differences in eschatology. Every preacher obviously has to preach what he is convinced the Scripture teaches, but his appeal is to God's Word, and he will not try to bind the conscience of a brother who happens to disagree with him on some details of eschatology. These matters are not unimportant, but to us they are not matters over which Christians should separate one from another.

Preaching Christ

When Paul said he preached Christ, he meant it. And so do we. Jesus Christ is the great subject of our preaching. We lay great emphasis on the objective work of Christ. He has made an all-sufficient atonement for all His people. In a day of man-centered preaching we constantly proclaim that it is not the strength or merit of our faith that saves, but the strength and merit of Him in whom it rests. Christ is all our merit, and we need no more (1 Cor. 1:30). By the imputation of His righteousness we are freely justified (Rom. 3:20-28). This free justification provides the motive power for our service (Gal. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:14). We do not believe in guilt theology—making believers feel bad enough for doing or not doing something that they will do what we command just to ease their consciences. It never works! We believe in grace theology. We will preach against sin in the lives of Christians, but always to point them to Christ (Heb. 12:1-3). It is only as “we see Jesus” (Heb. 2:9) and understand our full acceptance by God on His merit without our added works (Eph. 1:6) that we will have the power to do good works and strive after holiness. Thus we preach Christ as the message both sinners and saints need to hear.

C. H. Spurgeon's eloquent statement at the opening of his great Metropolitan Tabernacle in London perfectly states our purpose in preaching.

I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the Person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist, although I claim to be rather a Calvinist according to Calvin, than after the modern debased fashion. I do not hesitate to take the name Baptist [in our case, Presbyterian]...but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is...Christ Jesus, Who is the sum and substance of the gospel; Who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.

This is the heart of the ministry of the Free Presbyterian Church. This is the undergirding reason for every stand we adopt. We expose and oppose the apostasy that is all too clear in many churches. We do not do so because of a desire to be contentious. No, our contending is for “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). It is our commitment “not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). That compels us to be “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17).

Peter said, “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious” (1 Pet. 2:7). We want every worshipper in our services to feel and know the preciousness of Christ, the One whom Solomon described so beautifully in his Song: “Yea, he is altogether lovely” (Song of Sol. 5:16).

The Holy Spirit

For some years now there has been a great deal of interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, not all of it has been biblical or healthy.

The Deity of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is more than a divine influence or attribute. He is a divine Person. He is truly God, the same in substance and equal in power and glory with the Father and the Son. “The Lord is that Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). So the title of deity is clearly given to Him. This is seen also in Acts 5:3, 4, where lying to the Holy Ghost is termed lying to God. The attributes of deity are ascribed to Him in Scripture, as are the acts of God, such as creation (Gen. 1:2), resurrection (Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18), regeneration (John 6:63), and the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16).

The Work of the Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit who convinces men of sin (John 16:8). He it is who quickens, or regenerates, souls dead in sins (John 3:3-8; Eph. 2:1). He baptizes every regenerated soul into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). He indwells every believer and makes him His temple (1 Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit sanctifies those whom He indwells (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). He begets an attitude of prayerfulness in believers (Rom. 8:26). He is the promised “Comforter,” the Paraclete, the One called alongside God’s people to help them. He is Christ’s Vicar, supplying to Christians today what the physical presence of Christ meant to His Disciples when He was with them on earth (John 16:7, 13-15).

The Power of the Spirit

Christ promised His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). In this way they were to “receive power” (Acts 1:8), or “be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). He fulfilled His promise to them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). At various later times we read of those same disciples being “filled with the Holy Ghost” (e.g., Acts 4:8, 31).

This fullness of power was to equip them for service. Every Christian is to live his life constantly full of the Holy Ghost (Eph. 5:18)—constantly under the control of the Spirit. Scripture also speaks of special demonstrations of the

Spirit's power in and through the witness of His people. The exhibition of that power is what constitutes true revival, and the more widespread the demonstration of power, the greater the revival. In the Free Presbyterian Church we lay great emphasis upon the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We pray constantly for His fullness of power. We long for true revival. We do not despise the ordinary means by which the Lord carries on the work of His church, but we pray earnestly and continually that in His sovereign grace He will visit us in revival fullness.

The Charismatic Movement

We view true revival as being far different from the phenomena associated with the modern Charismatic movement. That movement has become more and more an ecumenical tool to produce a one-world church. It is light on the essential doctrines of the gospel. It exudes the atmosphere and techniques of the world of show business. Its claimed "gifts" have little or nothing in common with the gifts of the Spirit set forth in Scripture. For example, the gift of tongues in Acts 2 was a gift that enabled God's servants to preach in languages they had never learned. That is the essence of the biblical gift of tongues. In contrast, the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic use of tongues is a jumble of meaningless sounds.

We reject what we believe to be counterfeits of the gifts that the Spirit gave to the early church. We also reject the claimed extra-scriptural revelations of modern Charismatics. One of the leading theologians of the movement has taught openly that not all God's truth for us is in the Bible and claims authority for the visions and voices of prophets like himself. We reject all extra-scriptural revelation as a dangerous delusion. Furthermore, the Presbytery does not permit anyone who practices the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic form of tongues (either in public or private) to be in membership of any Free Presbyterian congregation.

However, the Charismatic misuse of such biblical terms as "being filled with the Spirit" must not prejudice us against a scriptural pursuit of the Spirit's power in our ministry.

Throughout church history God has imparted to His servants special enduements of power to preach the gospel. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John Wesley, C. H. Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, and a host of other great preachers knew the anointing of God's Spirit for service. They were not dabblers in tongues and extra-scriptural revelations. They were not interested in high-powered human promotions. They cried to God for the power of His Spirit in revival fullness, and He answered their cry. We look to Him to answer us in the same way.

3 **Points of Practical Emphasis**

The Christian Sabbath or the Lord's Day

The Westminster Confession of Faith states in Chapter 21, Section 7, “As it is of the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord’s Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath.”

The Free Presbyterian Church heartily agrees with this succinct summary of Scripture regarding the duty of man to observe one day in seven as God’s day. The Confession correctly presents the basic premise of the fourth commandment—that a seventh of the time allotted to man is to be observed as a sabbath or day of rest (which is the meaning of the word “sabbath”).

It should be carefully noted that the fourth commandment not only stipulates that one day in seven is the Lord’s, but it is also written in such a way as to permit the change of the actual day of the week for the observance of the Sabbath without violating the commandment itself. This commandment does not say that man is to remember “the seventh day to keep it holy,” but he is to “remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” We point this out because of the error of many in insisting that the word sabbath means “seventh.” It does not. As already noted, the word “sabbath” means rest or cessation. The Lord simply commands us to keep holy the day of rest. Moreover, the fourth commandment does not state that “the seventh day of the week is the sabbath.” Rather, it states that “the seventh day is the sabbath.” In other words, by the term “the seventh day” the Lord speaks of the day following the six days of labor, *whatever those six days of labour*

might be. Therefore, by this clear language, the fourth commandment was written so as to allow a change of the day for the observance of the sabbath without in any way violating the commandment.

The resurrection of Christ ushered in the change of day for the observance of the sabbath. One might wonder why the first Christians, who were Jews themselves, suddenly began to meet for worship on the first day of the week. The explanation can only be attributed to our Lord's rising from the dead on that first day to signify the finished work of redemption. Thus the principle of the fourth commandment—one day in seven being the Lord's—remained unviolated, while the keeping of that day took on a much fuller meaning that it had in Old Testament times. The Christian Sabbath or the Lord's Day, continues to be not only a memorial of God's finished work at creation, but it is also a memorial of Christ's finished work of redemption.

“There remaineth therefore a keeping of sabbath [the literal rendering of the original text] to the people of God...” (Hebrews 4:9). We believe therefore that the observing of one day in seven is still binding on mankind. The Lord has graciously given us six days for work and recreation — we are not to rob Him of the other, the sabbath day. The Free Presbyterian Church therefore holds that since the believer is “not without law to God, but under the law to Christ...” (1 Cor. 9:21), he is to sanctify the Sabbath “by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.” (Shorter Catechism, 60).

Christian Baptism

The importance of Christian baptism is clear for all to see in the New Testament (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38,

etc.). Every branch of the Christian church has agreed that baptism is a divine ordinance whose observance is part of what constitutes a church. In this the Free Presbyterian Church is at one with all the rest.

Divided Opinion

However, historically there have been widespread differences of opinion among men equally committed to accepting the Bible as our God-given, inspired, and infallible rule of faith and practice. This is true within Protestantism. Evangelical Protestants reject the Romish notion of baptismal regeneration, but they differ among themselves as to the proper mode and subjects of baptism. Historically, the Reformed churches along with the Lutheran, Episcopal, Congregational, and Methodist churches have accepted that pouring, sprinkling, and dipping are all valid modes of baptism. They have also believed that baptism is the sign and seal of God's covenant with His people and that it should be administered to all who are in that covenant. They argue that the infant children of believers are included in the covenant and that therefore baptism should be administered to them.

Over against this view, Baptists and Anabaptists have argued that baptism must follow a personal profession of faith. It cannot legitimately be administered to children who have made no such personal profession. The New Testament nowhere commands or mentions the baptism of infants. The only baptism it knows is believer's baptism.

On the mode of baptism, Baptists insist that only immersion is acceptable because, they say, the verb baptizo means "to dip," and the symbolism of Romans 6 (death, burial, and resurrection) demands immersion. Interestingly the early Anabaptists of the Reformation period baptized believers by pouring.

Four Centuries of Controversy

It is easy to see what controversy the subject of baptism has engendered. Each point made by one side is vigorously contested by the other. After four hundred years of polemics the argument has not abated. Perhaps it will indicate the complexity of the

debate to point out that one of the best presentations of the Baptist case is by an ex-Presbyterian, while one of the best apologies for paedobaptism is by a Baptist pastor who set out to write a defense of his views and was converted to a Presbyterian view of baptism in the course of his study!

Difference Without Division

The Free Presbyterian Church recognizes that good men have differed and continue to differ on this emotive subject. Yet should God's people separate from one another over baptism? Can they not hold their view strongly while allowing conscientious brethren to hold a differing view? We believe they can and should. Thus our Additional Statement on *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 28.3-4, states:

We admit into our fellowship those who believe that covenant infants should receive baptism, the sign and seal of God's covenant with His people—defining an infant as a person who has not matured to the point of being able to respond to the obligations of the gospel call in repentance and faith. We equally admit into our fellowship those who believe that the sacrament of baptism, no less than the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, should be administered only to those who have come to a credible profession of personal faith in Christ. . . . In dealing with this subject that has long caused bitter divisions among God's people, we pledge ourselves to hold our views with a loving toleration and respect for differing brethren, all of us being united in repudiating the error of baptismal regeneration.

We do not undervalue baptism, but we do not want needless division either. We would not wish to be so exclusively Presbyterian that we could find no place for a C. H. Spurgeon just because he strongly adhered to believer's baptism. Nor would we wish to be so Baptist that we would exclude a Robert Murray McCheyne just because he held strongly to baptism for the infant children of believers.

In the World Council of Churches, Baptists and paedo-Baptists are seeking to work out an acceptable position that will do justice to all their traditions. They are doing this in a spirit of compromise on every major doctrine of the gospel. That is a betrayal. But is it not sad that Baptists and paedo-Baptists who agree in upholding every fundamental of the faith cannot usually find the love, the humility, or whatever it takes, to stand together in the unity of the gospel? We have long enjoyed the benefits of the fruitful coexistence and cooperation of credo-Baptist and paedo-Baptist brethren who have stood with equal commitment for the work and witness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Free Presbyterian Church.

Ecclesiastical Separation

The matter of fellowship is a very important one for all Bible-believing Christians. There are kinds of fellowship that call forth the condemnation of the Lord (James 4:4; Judg. 2:2, 3). Therefore, in all our fellowship we must be careful to safeguard our fellowship with Christ. The enjoyment of that fellowship is clearly tied by the Word of God to separation from spiritual wickedness and error (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Need for Separation

For years it was the practice of evangelical Christians to remain in denominations that were mostly nonevangelical, even liberal or Anglo-Catholic.

They gave expression to their evangelicalism mostly through inter-denominational societies and movements. They felt they could distance themselves from the rationalism or Romanism prevalent in their denominations without actually separating from them. With the formation of the World Council of Churches, it became very much more difficult for Christians to justify this position, because by virtue of their membership in the major denominations they

were part of the movement to create a one-world church under the leadership of the pope. The World Council of Churches, with no little help from Dr. Billy Graham, soon involved Evangelicals in its operation, with a consequent compromise of the faith they professed to uphold. Modern evangelicals in the ecumenical movement sound more and more like liberals, often questioning or denying parts of Scripture history and doctrine and involving themselves in the effort to produce union with Rome.

Thus ecumenism is a major reason for separation. It is not the only reason. Whether or not a church is in the World (or National) Council of Churches, if it denies the fundamentals of the faith, it should not be kept in the fellowship of God's people.

The Duty of Separation

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). We are instructed to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). To a Christian, Liberalism, Modernism, Romanism, and World Council of Churches ecumenism are undoubtedly "works of darkness." The duty of separation is plain. Paul teaches this duty again in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. John speaks of it in 2 John 10-11.

Christ the Focus of Separation

Separation is no mere negative reaction. It is thoroughly positive, because it is basically separation unto Christ. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:13). Fellowship in any organization that denies Christ, repudiates His Word, or departs from His finished work of atonement and the gospel of justification through faith without works is a fellowship that leads away from Christ. Our fellowship with Him demands our separation from apostasy and fundamental error.

Separation, Not Isolation

Our separation should not blind us to the duty of Christians to express their love one for another and their spiritual unity

in Christ. The Free Presbyterian Church therefore seeks to stand with faithful men and churches around the world, even when they do not endorse all our positions on matters that, though important to us, are not fundamental to the gospel. Whitefield was a Calvinist, Wesley an Arminian. Yet Whitefield strove hard to ensure that they stood firmly together in the work of the gospel. Spurgeon endorsed and promoted Moody, much to the chagrin of some who thought that Moody, a confessed Calvinist, was not Calvinistic enough. We seek to express the fundamental oneness of God's people in any way we can without compromising the fundamentals of the faith. We are biblical separatists, not isolationists.

Personal Separation

Christians are to “walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Holiness is to be the hallmark of their lives (Titus 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:16). The plain admonition of Scripture is, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14). We are so to walk that we “grieve not the holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30).

Separation unto God is the essence of personal holiness. There can be no real holiness without a forsaking of sin. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Thus Christian holiness goes much deeper than merely doing some things and refraining from doing other things. It does include actions, but it goes all the way down to the love of the heart.

Sin is What the Bible Says It Is

Obviously all that the Bible identifies as sin is sin and must not only be forsaken by God's people but judged by the church. Church discipline on sin is an essential function of every true

church. While elders must not become spiritual tyrants, they are to “watch for (the) souls” of the people under their care “as they that must give account” to the Lord (Heb. 13:17).

In exercising that discipline we will wholeheartedly accept the biblical definitions and descriptions of sin. There are those who want to break free from “the tyranny of Bible texts,” as they put it. According to these people, while Bible texts openly condemn homosexuality, for example, there is nothing inherently sinful or unchristian in the practice. One major U.S. denomination’s Special Committee calls homosexual love “justice love.” It includes many other practices that the Bible terms immorality in that description and refuses to condemn them if “there is genuine equality and mutual respect” in them because Christianity’s overriding themes are justice and love. We reject this flagrant abuse of Scripture. We repudiate modern humanistic psychology’s anti-Christian notions and enthrone the Word of God as our final arbiter in judging sin.

Conformity to Christ

Holiness is likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul described it as Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19). When God predestinated His people, it was that they should be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). He commands us to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) and to live with Him as our example (1 Pet. 2:21).

This means that what to a carnal man appears to be deprivation—“Christians have to give up so much!”—to a Christian is essential to real happiness. A true Christian cannot rest happily in known sin. We believe the old Puritan dictum that a man must first be made holy before he can be made happy.

Personal Standards of Members

The only written standards that are required of members of the Free Presbyterian Church’s General Presbytery in matters not directly commanded or prohibited in Scripture are voluntary abstinence from alcohol, sensual dancing, gambling, and “the pleasure crazes of the world.”

Obviously this requirement is not intended as an exhaustive

list of dos and don'ts. For example, there is no mention of using tobacco or narcotic drugs. In fact, the drug problem had not arisen when the Presbytery addressed the matter of personal standards. Also, there are things such as women's headcovering in public worship that are the constant belief and practice in every Free Presbyterian Church that are not mentioned for the simple reason that at the time the Presbytery statements were drawn up no body of Christians had the slightest doubt of their necessity. Our Presbytery has not sought constantly to update a list of commands and prohibitions because for the most part our members spontaneously adopt a course of personal separation. Furthermore, the elders of each local church have the primary task under God of upholding what they know to be the historic position of the denomination. The broad reference to "the pleasure crazes of the world" is a reminder that our elders are to keep a constant watch that the spirit of worldliness does not come in to destroy our fellowship with the Lord and our usefulness in His service.

Why Have Such Standards

Some churches see no reason to have any standards in areas not subject to a specific biblical command or prohibition. One church leader recently wrote that Christians could enjoy in moderation whatever the Bible did not forbid, including drinking, dancing, and playing cards (and he was not referring to games like Uno). By the same logic they should be able to enjoy marijuana, especially in places where it has been cleared by the government for legal use. We do not hold this view. We believe there are guiding truths in God's Word that not only authorize the kind of standards we have adopted, but necessitate them.

First, a church just as much as an individual Christian has the duty to do all that is necessary to guard its testimony so that it can most effectively witness for Christ in the situation in which He has placed it. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (Rom. 14:16) means just that. Even in reference to things that may not in themselves be sinful, we are to judge our participation not by the standard of what is our personal right, but what will best safeguard our testimony.

Second, every good church has exercised the right to take the steps it has considered necessary to protect its testimony and advance the cause of Christ, even where it had no explicit biblical command. Thus Presbyterians historically “fenced the table” at communion and imposed the use of communion tokens. They also demanded that every elder and minister subscribe to *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Though no such demands are made in Scripture, they were perfectly biblical in establishing these standards. The overall principles of holiness among communicants and the oversight of the congregation by elders true to the Word of God are clearly scriptural, and these principles were best served by the standards they adopted.

We believe that the broad standards laid down by our Presbytery are equally right and biblical.

Gambling and Dancing

Gambling is the expression of covetousness. It is a violation of the clear principle of Scripture that financial gain should come from honest labor or legitimate investment (2 Thess. 3:10; Matt. 25:27), or by inheritance.

Dancing in the modern context is openly sensual. By definition it depends on an appeal to sensuality, and we are expressly commanded not to walk after the flesh, but to abstain from fleshly lusts (Rom. 8:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Abstinence

Many people who agree with us on the foregoing matters yet disagree with our standard of abstinence from the nonmedicinal drinking of alcohol. They argue that wine was used by God’s people throughout biblical history and that it is therefore wrong to *impose* a standard of abstinence on our church members.

“Impose” is the wrong word. We are a fellowship of people who voluntarily abstain from alcoholic drink. Those who wish to be communicant members with the right to vote and,

in the case of men, be voted into office obviously must agree to voluntary abstinence.

We abstain for testimony's sake. Leaving aside the considerable exegetical controversy as to whether the Bible does in fact sanction the use of alcoholic drink, there is good reason for the temperance stand. This is a case where our abstinence is a step to protect our testimony and enlarge our usefulness in gospel witness.

Our country is sinking in an ocean of alcohol. This is the major form of drug addiction in the land. Alcohol is killing its millions. To seek to bear an effective witness to this drink-sodden generation we have adopted a policy of abstinence for our membership.

We abstain out of love for the brethren. Many people in our churches have been saved out of alcoholism. We take Paul's words very seriously: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21). We believe that Christians' indulgence in alcohol is very definitely a source of stumbling and offense to those whom the Lord has saved out of utter bondage to drink—as well as to the many who are still enslaved by it.

Paul lays down the same rule. There are things that we may personally and narrowly consider lawful to us but that are not expedient and are not for the edification of others (1 Cor. 10:23). With that in mind Paul lays down this rule for God's people: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth," or welfare (v. 24). That is a command. It is an ordained rule or standard. We believe it makes it incumbent on us, faced with the utterly incalculable devastation caused by alcohol, to separate ourselves totally from it unto the Lord. And it is unto the Lord that we do this. This is no bitter legalism. It is an expression of our love for the Lord, for His testimony, and for the welfare of others.

God commended abstainers. It has become popular—for everyone from secular writers to Roman Catholics to some Calvinists—to belittle and vigorously condemn those who take our position. That does not concern us in the slightest. When Jonadab the son of Rechab entered into a covenant to

abstain from drinking wine and commanded it to his sons, he was not condemned by God, but commended. His sons were not mocked as a bunch of embondaged legalists, but were held forth as a good example by the Lord (Jer. 35:5-14). We believe abstinence for the reasons we have cited still has His commendation.

By abstaining we express our liberty, purity, testimony, and community. We enjoy life. We are not afraid to see the world in which we live as God's world, to be used though not abused. We rejoice in the truth of what is called "common grace" and can therefore happily receive all the relative good that has come to us through unsaved men as the provision of our loving God. Our standards are not standards of bondage but expressions of our liberty, purity, testimony, and community—because they tell the weakest saint among us that we care enough for him to banish even the possibility of our causing him to stumble.

The Place of Women in the Church

A burning question for many today is whether or not women may be ordained to the ministry of the church. It is often stated that any denial of such a right is demeaning to women and denies their equality with men in Christ. Requiring an all-male ministry and eldership is portrayed as sexism at its worst. More and more churches are sweeping away all restrictions on a woman exercising any part of the ministry of the church, whether in a preaching or a pastoral (including governmental) role. The Free Presbyterian Church takes the biblical position of historic Christianity on this issue and is therefore at variance with the modern trend.

The New Testament shows that women participated in the public prayer meetings of the church (Acts 1:14). As well as praying, they also prophesied. We are expressly told

that Philip's four daughters did so (Acts 21:9). Paul tells the Corinthians that any woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head (1 Cor. 11:5). Yet in the very same epistle Paul goes on to make this emphatic statement: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law....It is a shame for women to speak in the church" (1 Cor. 14:34, 35.).

There are those who do not scruple to say that Paul here contradicts himself. Such people deny the basis for Christianity. If we cannot trust an inspired apostle of Christ at this point, how can we trust him in any other statement of doctrine or practice? Paul made no mistake on this issue. Clearly, from all he says, there are times and places in which a woman may speak and others in which she may not. In 1 Timothy 2:12 he makes it clear what should govern the decision as to when and where it is proper or improper for a woman to speak: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." Here is the key. A woman is not permitted a pastoral or governmental position over men in a New Testament church. No ministry that places her in such a position is open to her. There is no question but that a woman may be every bit as spiritual and spiritually gifted as any man. That is not the point. The place of public ministry and pastoral government is not open to her, "not turned over to" her by the Lord, as the literal force of 1 Corinthians 14:34 has it. The Lord will give her fitting opportunities to exercise her gifts. She has a special role in the teaching of other women and the young (Titus 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). She may be a Priscilla and use her home as a pulpit to teach needy people the gospel (Acts 18:26). She may be so beneficial to the work of the church as to earn the title Phoebe earned, "the servant (or, deaconess) of the church" (Rom. 16:1). Here there is no hint that the word deaconess has reference to any elected office, but to Phoebe's selfless service to the church.

To sum up: "If woman is not assigned a different position, this is done, not by God, but by man, and by man in contradiction to God....Whatever sphere we may assign to woman in our church practice today dare not contravene her

divinely ordained subjection and obedience, for this would conflict with God's own order" (R. C. H. Lenski). Thus the Free Presbyterian Church, gladly affirming the rich ministry of godly women in the church throughout history, nonetheless maintains that no woman may scripturally be elected or ordained to any preaching, pastoral, or governmental office in the church.

Headcovering in Public Worship

*F*ashions change and tastes differ. Cultural variations abound among Christians of differing nationalities. The New Testament wisely makes allowance for such things and goes no further in matters of dress and appearance than to set down the principles of modesty (1 Tim. 2:9) and association—e.g., that we should be careful not to adopt any appearance that identifies us with grossly wicked people to whom a particular style or fashion is virtually a badge. This latter would seem to be implicit in Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:6, where it is probable that the shorn head refers to the mark of an harlot. Given these two principles, and accepting that in all things a believer is to adorn the gospel with humility and holiness, we can usually judge fairly easily which forms of dress and appearance are becoming to us as Christians. However, there is one item of Christian dress that the Bible does not leave to be judged in this way. That item is headcovering in public worship. The New Testament insists that it is required for women and banned for men. In this age of so-called sexual equality—a misnomer for the philosophy of radical feminism and anti-Christian humanism—this may seem strange. It is not strange. The Bible lays down these standards for very good reasons.

Headcovering for Women

Paul devotes half a chapter to the subject of headcovering (1 Cor. 11:1-16). He gives no indication that he is establishing a rule merely for the local situation in Corinth. He introduces such words as shame and dishonoring the head (ultimately Christ, v. 3). These ideas denote a moral issue of abiding significance, not some merely local question. Paul also makes a telling reference to the angels of God (v. 10) as a reason for a woman to cover her head in public worship. He says that nature teaches the same thing (v. 14). All of this strongly implies that Paul is laying down a general rule for all Christian churches, regardless of location or local culture. That conclusion is strengthened by what is said in verse 4. There the apostle forbids the use of a headcovering for men in worship. Both the Jews and the Romans had the custom of requiring men to cover their heads in religious worship. Clearly Paul was not addressing mere cultural questions. He was settling what is right and proper for Christians in whatever culture they live. We therefore take what 1 Corinthians 11 teaches as binding on us today.

In effect that settles the matter of whether or not women should wear headcovering in church services. No reputable exegete or commentator has the slightest doubt that Paul was insisting on the Corinthian women having a covering on their heads in public worship. We do not know of any Bible-believing church that would permit its men to wear hats or caps in public worship. Their reason is that 1 Cor. 11:4 prohibits it. No one doubts that that prohibition is still in force. By what stretch of exegesis or of logic can the parallel prohibition of women worshipping bareheaded be counted a merely temporary matter relating to the Corinthians but not to us? In the light of Paul's clear intention to establish a universal principle of conduct, how can we ignore the plain teaching that Christian women should wear a headcovering in public worship? In the Free Presbyterian Church, we do not. We joyfully accept it.

Judging by God's Standards

One of the reasons for women's headcovering is the respective roles of men and women in creation and in the church (vv. 7-8).

We must be careful not to define a person's worth or dignity by the godless standards of modern radical feminism or humanism. A woman's true dignity is in knowing and accepting the place her Creator and Redeemer has accorded to her. The same is true of a man. Woman's headcovering is an eloquent testimony to acceptance of God's standards, not man's. The basic principle is laid down in verse 3: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." Clearly the apostle is not discussing the issue of what the world calls "equality" or "dignity." He is discussing the issue of government and authority in the Christian home and the church. Furthermore, the three clauses in verse 3 must always be taken together. In other words, Paul is not arguing for male authority over the woman without regard to man's submission to the authority of Christ. He rather is bringing men and women to the place of submission at the feet of the Lord. Our homes and churches would be much happier and healthier places if we all, men and women, fully acknowledged the Lordship of Christ and obediently served Him in the role and capacity He has given to us.

A Symbol of Christ's Authority

In elaborating on this basic statement of principle (v. 3), Paul adds another in verses 4 and 5: men who pray or prophesy with a covering on their heads dishonor their head, even Christ. Women who pray or prophesy without a covering on their heads dishonor their head, the authority God has placed over them. Here is the importance of the headcovering. To reject it is rebellion against God's order of government in His church. It is as bad as a woman coming to God with a shorn head, which was the shameful badge of the harlot (vv. 5–6).

"Because of the Angels"

There is another reason for the headcovering. It is worn as a symbol of submission to authority "because of the angels" (v. 10). The reference to angels reminds us that in worship we are dealing with an unseen world and that we should order our behavior not in accordance with the prevailing ideas of

this present evil world, but with the enduring standards of rectitude that God has ordained. Angels are present at the church's worship, and they cannot dismiss inappropriate attire as a matter of little importance. Rejection of God's ordinance regarding headcovering is inappropriate in the sight of angels because it savors of rebellion against the divinely ordained structure of authority. The angels personally witnessed the havoc such rebellion wrought in their own ranks and in the garden of Eden. Thus they cannot regard as unimportant any rejection of something that God has established as necessary to the church's worship.

Furthermore, the angels' very presence in our worship services teaches some very important lessons. We may consider two. First, it teaches us that a headcovering for Christian women in the worship of God is not demeaning to women. Angels are superior in rank to humans (Psa. 8:5), and they cover themselves before the Lord (Isa. 6:2). How then can any Christian woman look upon God's ordinance that she wear a headcovering as an imposition, or injurious to her dignity? The second lesson is that we should gladly accept every ordinance of God for our worship and service. Though superior in rank to men, angels willingly submit themselves to be servants of believers (Heb. 1:14). Clearly then, no Christian woman should reject the God-ordained symbol of her submission to His authority as an infringement of liberty or a denial of her dignity.

All Glory to Christ

The real beauty of Paul's teaching that women must, and men must not, cover their heads in public worship is that it lays all human glory and authority where it properly belongs: at the feet of Christ. A woman's hair is her glory (1 Cor. 11:15). It is right that she should cover it in worship, for there all the glory must be Christ's. Men declare the same truth by not covering their heads. To this day men remove their headcovering in the presence of superior authority. So it is here. By different actions, men and women join together in testifying that all glory and honor belong to Christ.

An Objection

Some object that a woman's "hair is given her for a covering" (v. 15) and she needs no other. This is to fly in the face of all Paul says. Those who believe that the covering of which he speaks is merely the woman's hair need only substitute hair for the covering in verses 5 and 6 to see how meaningless and impossible their argument is. Paul has made it clear that he is speaking of a covering placed on the head. In verse 4 covered literally means "having something on his head." That is Paul's theme. Nature gives a woman a veil in her hair. "It is a glory to her because it is a veil. The veil itself, therefore, must be becoming and decorous in a woman" (Charles Hodge).

Actually, there may be an additional thought in verse 15, which literally reads, "Her hair is given her instead of a covering." In this verse covering is a new word. In Hebrews 1:12 (its only other appearance in the New Testament) it is translated "vesture." It signifies something thrown all around a person, and Paul may be saying that Christian women have no need to wear the demeaning total coverage some religions impose on their women.

The Sole Christian Custom

The only proper response to a biblical teaching is joyful acceptance and submission. If people want to contend against us despite what 1 Corinthians 11 says, then our answer must be the same as Paul's: "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (v. 16). The apostle ends all argument with a statement of divine authority. He says that the churches of God have no such custom as women engaging in public worship without a headcovering, or men doing so with one, no matter what other groups may think about our practice.

A Joyful Gospel Testimony

In the Free Presbyterian Church we believe we should obey God rather than men—or women! That is why we follow the only custom on this matter that God ever established in His church—that men should not engage in public worship with

their heads covered, and women should not do so without their heads being covered. To us this is no legal bondage but a joyful gospel testimony to the sole glory of Christ in His church.

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage is a divine institution (Matt. 19:4, 5), not merely a social convenience. God's original appointment was the uniting of one man and one woman as one flesh. Monogamy and marital fidelity, therefore, constitute the biblical standard (1 Tim. 3:2; Ex. 20:14). The sacredness of the marriage bond is clear, not only from its divine institution, but from the fact that Scripture uses it to portray the union of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:25; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, the Free Presbyterian Church opposes all the philosophies and pressures of this age that tend to weaken or destroy the sanctity and permanence of marriage. Jesus said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).

Permanence of Marriage

Marriages between all legitimate partners are legally binding before God. This is true of the marriages of believers and of unbelievers alike. If a person becomes a Christian after his marriage, he ought not to regard his unsaved spouse as anything less than his true and legitimate marriage partner. His love and fidelity to her should not be diminished by his profession of faith but rather strengthened. Though there may be difficulties arising from an unsaved partner's antagonism or indifference to the gospel and its standards of holiness, the Word of God is clear that the believing partner must seek to maintain the marriage and by godly living endeavor to be a testimony to the other (1 Cor. 7:12-14; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2).

Mixed Marriages

Christians wishing to enter into marriage are admonished that it must be “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39; 11:11). This is the only stipulation the Bible lays down. While there may be circumstances that compel a minister or session to advise against a given marriage on other grounds, this is the only one that occupies a doctrinal position in the church.

Though it is wrong for a believer to marry an unbeliever, such a marriage, once entered upon, is legally binding. In the light of all this, the Free Presbyterian Church will conduct marriage services for couples where both parties are saved, or where both parties are unsaved, using the opportunity to seek to point them to Christ. What it will not do is wittingly to join a believer and an unbeliever in marriage.

Sins that Betray the Marriage Bond

Under the Mosaic law the penalty for breaking the marriage bond by adultery, sodomy, bestiality, or other gross uncleanness was death (Lev. 20:10, 13, 15). In such cases the Lord granted the most final of divorce settlements: execution. It appears, however, that the Jews did not invoke the full rigor of the law upon these marital crimes, but rather sought a bill of divorce that ended the marriage without calling for the death of the offending party (Deut. 24:1; Matt. 19:8). They also sought to extend the grounds upon which they could obtain a divorce beyond what Moses had enacted (Matt. 19:3). The Mosaic standard was that divorce could be obtained only because of “uncleanness” in a spouse (Deut. 24:1), that is, gross sexual impurity. The Lord Jesus Christ reiterated this, teaching that divorce on any other ground than “fornication” (the Greek word gives us the English word pornography) is invalid (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). He bluntly terms any remarriage under such circumstances “adultery.”

Paul’s Teaching

Paul addresses the issue of marriage breakdowns from a somewhat different perspective to deal with the problem encountered by Christians whose heathen spouses deserted

them (1 Cor. 7:12-16). He recognizes that where a wife is unjustly deserted, she is free (v. 15). He therefore appears to include desertion within Christ's definition of fornication, making it a just ground for divorce and remarriage. Where there is no such ground, he emphatically states that couples should not divorce or separate, and if they do they must not remarry (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Remarriage

While reconciliation is better than divorce, the remarriage of justly divorced people is recognized in both the Old Testament and the New (Deut. 24; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15). It would appear, however, that though divorced people were admitted into the New Testament church, they could not hold the office of elder or deacon. This may be deduced from 1 Timothy 3:2-5, 12.

With all this in view, the Free Presbyterian Church takes a strong pro-marriage position. It tries to understand the hurt of those who have suffered the betrayal of their marriage union. It also seeks to minister the gospel of grace to those whose sin has marred their own and other's lives. The Lord Jesus stated, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12:31). We try not to lose sight of that in dealing with the tragic causes and consequence of broken marriages.

Divorced People in the Church

The elders of each Free Presbyterian church may receive divorced people into membership if they are convinced that their present lifestyle is not condemned by Scripture. When received into membership, these brethren and sisters are welcome to participate fully in the life and fellowship of the church and to use their gifts and abilities to advance its ministry. However, no divorced person or one married to a divorced person may be elected to the office of deacon or elder. In addition, no Free Presbyterian church may be used for a marriage service involving a divorced person, nor may any Free Presbyterian minister officiate at such a marriage. This is not to question the legitimacy or propriety of the remarriage

of justly divorced people. It is simply a confession that often elders have only partial or very confused evidence relating to the cause of a divorce. If we make a mistake in recognizing a remarriage and allow the parties into membership, we can rectify it. If we have actually solemnized the marriage, we cannot. We know that good men and churches differ from us on this matter, but we believe that, on balance, it is more expedient not to conduct marriage services involving divorced parties.

As stated, however, we do sincerely seek to minister in love to divorced people. The tragedy of divorce is too great to be ignored. It has been our experience that under the Christ-centered preaching in Free Presbyterian churches, and amid the warmth of Christian fellowship, many a divorced person has come to know the power of the gospel to bring peace and freedom from the feelings of rejection, guilt, shame, and remorse that all too often haunt those who have suffered a divorce.

A Word of Introduction...

The gospel is the greatest story ever told, and the best thing about it is that it is absolutely true. In a world drowning in bad news, there is still good news for any and all who will receive it. It comes with all the authority of Almighty God and goes to the heart of the deepest needs of life.

The Apostle Paul states in Romans 1:1 that he is “separated unto the gospel.” this is the theme you will be able to trace through the pages of this booklet. We trust it will answer many questions you might have about our denomination. And for those questions that it raises, the minister of your local Free Presbyterian Church will be happy to sit down and discuss them with you.