



Free Methodist **Handbook**

United in Mission, Vision and Calling



Free Methodist Church in the United Kingdom

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Mission - The mission of the Free Methodist Church is to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith.

Vision - The vision of the Free Methodist Church is to be a healthy biblical community of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and congregations.

Calling - The calling of the Free Methodist Church is:

- To reopen Wesleyan wells and rediscover living holiness
- To reform the church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land
- To revive, enforce and defend the pure apostolic doctrines and practices of the early church
- By planting healthy Biblical congregations
- By affiliating congregations who share our vision, values and calling
- By serving the whole church irrespective of denomination or stream

Essential Foundations

We are committed to live in harmony with the Bible

We are committed to live in harmony with the Articles of Religion (Our doctrines)

We are committed to live in harmony with the Membership Covenant

Pastors are committed to live in harmony with their ordination vows

Leaders are committed to lead the church in harmony with our mission

Leadership Initiatives

Pastors and churches are free to strategise and minister in ways that build on the essential foundations and develop the profile of a healthy church.

A Healthy Church

Worships in spirit and truth

Prays without ceasing

Constantly reaches the lost for Christ

Produces fully devoted disciples

Grows through multiplication

Ministers to the poor and disenfranchised

Engages in our world missionary movement

Organises around our mission

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Introduction

People sometimes ask “What’s the difference between Free Methodists and Methodists? Why are they called Free Methodists? What are Free Methodists like?”

This booklet has been produced for those who would like to know more about the calling, values and beliefs of the Free Methodist Church. We hope the material in this booklet will prove helpful to new members and to churches considering affiliating with the Free Methodist Church.

All churches have three basic elements that define them.

- 1** Some shared belief found in Statements of Faith or Articles of Religion
- 2** Some agreed expected behaviours either written or sometimes unspoken
- 3** Some means of making corporate decisions and maintaining order.

The Free Methodist Church has chosen to write these down so everyone can know where we stand.

FM Core Values

1 Mission and Vision

The **mission** of the Free Methodist Church is to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith.

The **vision** of the Free Methodist Church is to be a healthy biblical community of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and congregations.

2 Calling

The **calling** of the Free Methodist Church in the United Kingdom is to fulfil the task given to the first Methodist preachers. In their day they witnessed the nearest thing to New Testament Christianity that the United Kingdom has ever seen. We are called to reopen Wesleyan wells and rediscover 'Living Holiness' in the 21st century.

John Wesley's contemporaries claim that he was raised up to revive, enforce and defend the doctrines and practices of the New Testament Church.

It is important that we not only teach what the New Testament apostles taught but function as they functioned if we are to see what they saw. Like Wesley before us our calling is not just to plant Free Methodist churches and affiliate congregations who share our values and calling, but to work to see renewal in the church irrespective of denomination or affiliation.

We are called to *"reform the nation, in particular the church; to spread Scriptural holiness over the land"*. (John Wesley)

3 Essential Foundations

We are Committed to Living in Harmony with the Bible

We believe the Bible is God’s inspired word which should direct the way we live as individuals and operate as a church.

“In common with John Wesley we acknowledge that several elements help us to understand revealed truth – such as reason, tradition and experience – but standing at the head of the line is the Bible. If the Bible and the church seem to be in disagreement, the Bible takes precedence. If the Bible and human reason appear to be in conflict the weight falls on the side of the Bible. We believe the Bible has primary authority.” (Bishop Bastian)

We are Committed to Live in Harmony with our Articles of Religion (Doctrinal Statements)

Our doctrinal statements reflect a Wesleyan perspective:

- We believe that all people are sinners by nature and practice.

“We are all corrupted by sin and totally depraved, but God extends grace to everyone which enables us to answer God’s call and turn to Christ for forgiveness. This is prevenient grace – grace that goes before.” (Bishop Bastian)

By prevenient grace we mean the grace that comes to people before they have any concern about God. Prevenient grace includes natural conscience and all the convictions of the Holy Spirit, which if yielded to increase in frequency and intensity.

- We believe all people can be saved because Jesus Christ died for all people and not just for some people.

We see the most desperate sinner as having the potential to become a devoted follower of Jesus. We believe the atonement Jesus Christ made on the cross is sufficient for the needs of all sinners of the world and is potentially effective in the lives of all, but will only be effective for those who repent and believe.

This was a main emphasis in the early Methodist movement.

“The results of this emphasis were numerous: the gospel of Christ was offered to the poor, the downcast, the spiritually disenfranchised. It was preached with great optimism and expectancy. None was excluded from the scope of its appeal. Hope was generated in the hearts of the hopeless. Methodists’ meetings became places of gladness and rejoicing. These results were related to the deep Methodist conviction that all men may be saved.” (Bishop Bastian)

- We believe that all Christians can know they are saved because the Holy Spirit witnesses with their spirit that God has become their Father.

“Believers are secure in Christ as they exercise God-given faith. But they know they must not trifle with the grace of God by returning to a life of sin. Their security is not grounded in an unconditional election made before the world even existed. Their security is in Christ now, by faith.” (Bishop Bastian)

- We believe that all Christians can be saved from both the guilt and power of sin in order to live an upright Godly life in this present age.

Scripture teaches that His divine power has given us everything we need for life and Godliness, and everything we need to participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. The grace of God is sufficient to enable us to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age. Jesus gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

We are Committed to Live in Harmony with our Membership Covenant.

The Covenant expresses what we believe are God-ordained principles that should govern our everyday lives. We believe these statements of principles arise out of the direct, clear teaching of scripture and have as their authority, not human traditions but God's word.

The principles are expressed as plural statements to demonstrate our belief that biblical principles become personal practices as we belong to a living community where we support one another and are willing to hold one another accountable.

The Covenant has been designed so it can be used as a responsive reading in public worship. (See the Covenant in Chapter 3).

Our Pastors are Committed to Live in Harmony with their Ordination Vows.

The Free Methodist Church ordains pastors for ministry and in consultation with pastors and local church leaders appoints them to their sphere of service. It is our understanding that in New Testament times those who gave oversight to the local church were appointed by apostolic leaders rather than called by their congregation.

All our pastors make themselves accountable to the Free Methodist Church and their character and conduct is reviewed annually.

Leaders are Committed to Lead in Harmony with our Mission.

Our Mission is to make disciples and everything we do should serve this purpose.

4 Leadership Initiatives

Placing mission ahead of method, our pastors and churches are free to strategise and minister in ways which build on our essential foundations and fulfil our profile of a healthy church.

5 Profile of a Healthy Church

We believe the local church is God's instrument to transform society. We believe a healthy church should have the following eight characteristics.

A Healthy Church Worships in Spirit and Truth

A Healthy Church Prays without Ceasing

A Healthy Church Constantly Reaches the Lost for Christ

A Healthy Church Produces Fully Devoted Disciples

A Healthy Church Grows through Multiplication

A Healthy Church Ministers to the Poor and Disenfranchised

A Healthy Church Engages in our World Missionary Movement

A Healthy Church Organises around our Mission

These 8 characteristics are explained in chapter 4

FM Calling (Our Heritage)

Our calling is best discovered by looking at what God did in the 20th, 19th, 18th and 1st centuries.

Free Methodism comes to England

In the late 1960s many in Methodist churches were concerned about the growth of radical theology that challenged the supreme authority of scripture and rejected many of its great evangelical doctrines and spiritual experiences as outdated and irrelevant.

Until 1970 evangelicals within the Methodist Church felt that as their church originated in an evangelical revival and John Wesley's sermons and notes on the New Testament had been part of the official doctrinal foundations, they held the "title deeds" of the denomination.

Evangelicals within the Methodist Church had to decide to remain and work for reform, or leave. Rev F B Mitchell, Rev R Taylor, and Rev J B Walton decided to link up with the Free Methodist Church of North America rather than establish independent congregations.

F B Mitchell writes "Small groups often purchase doctrinal purity at the price of becoming 'orphan' churches, and they withdraw into cultural backwaters out of touch with society around.....John Wesley's original vision of a faith that embraced the affections as well as the intellect, emphasised scriptural holiness and social righteousness, along with his insistence that 'the world was his parish', drew this group of Methodists to link up with the world-wide Free Methodist Church."

J B Walton, looking back on those early days, believed we were called to be:

Saturated with God
True to the Scriptures
Powerful in prayer
Led by the Holy Spirit
Winning the lost.

Free Methodism established in the United States

It has been noted by church historians that as Christianity moves with the centuries it tends now and again to wander from the founding principles of the New Testament Church. God then calls forth a prophet to lead in a restoration or reformation. Often these reforms lead not to reformation of the original group but to the reorganisation of a new movement to precipitate the witness renounced or neglected by the parent church.

This was the case with Benjamin Titus Roberts who was born in July 1823 and entered ministry in the Methodist Church in America in 1848. Under his ministry churches began to flourish and revival blessings were experienced. He however, was becoming concerned by the worldliness he found invading the church and wrote an article which he entitled ‘New School Methodism’.

In this article he expressed concerns that most of the ministers of his day had no time for the holiness message and old style holiness preaching. *“Old school Methodists rely upon the agency of the Holy Spirit and the purity of the Church. New school Methodists appeared to depend on the patronage of the worldly, the favour of the proud, and various artifices of worldly policy.”*

This article provoked a reaction which was to lead to the establishment of the Free Methodist Church at Pekin, New York, on 23 August 1860. The new movement saw themselves as Methodists because they embraced the biblical message and lifestyle of the early Methodists. The name ‘Free’ was chosen to emphasise their desire to see:

- Freedom and spontaneity in worship
- Free seats for all, especially the poor
- Freedom for all slaves
- Freedom from secret societies.

BT Roberts was a champion for equal rights (especially for women), a writer, publisher, Christian educator and holiness preacher.

He was, in a sense, the John Wesley of his generation.

Methodism established in England

John Wesley believed that God raised up the preachers called Methodists to *“reform the nation, and in particular the Church; to spread Scriptural holiness over the land”*.

Following his Aldersgate experience on 24 May 1738, he began to preach justification by faith to all who would listen.

From 1739 until his death 52 years later it has been estimated that he travelled some 225,000 miles and preached more than 40,000 times, sometimes to crowds of as many as 20,000. At his death he left behind 72,000 Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland and a Methodist Church in America of some 75,000 members.

Those who buried John Wesley in 1791 in London, wrote the following epitaph which can be found on his grave. *“This place made sacred by the mortal remains of the venerable apostolic Wesley. This great light arose by the singular providence of God to enlighten these nations and to revive, enforce and defend the pure apostolic doctrines and practices of the primitive Church.”*

It is important to note that John Wesley’s great quest was not to establish a new church but to see New Testament Christianity restored to the land of his birth. He did this by reviving, enforcing and defending the apostolic message and promoting apostolic methods.

When we say the Free Methodist Church is Wesleyan in doctrine and practice we mean we seek to be a New Testament Church.

Conclusion

In the light of the way God has led the people called Free Methodist it is clear that we carry a responsibility to see the message of Scriptural holiness restored as we revive, enforce and defend New Testament doctrine and New Testament practice.

The Free Methodist Church has a:

- Spiritual heritage from which others can draw

- Family network to which others can belong

- Calling which others can help us to fulfil

FM Members

A good idea of what Free Methodists aspire to can be found by reading the Membership Covenant which seeks to express what we believe are God-ordained Biblical principles which should govern our every day lives.

Covenant

Members of the Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other members of the church, make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the church:

We confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By faith, we walk with Him. We commit ourselves to know Him in His full sanctifying grace.

As regards God

As God's people, we reverence and worship Him.

We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship and partaking of Holy Communion.

We commit ourselves to observe the Lord's Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal and service.

We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As regards ourselves and others

As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs.

We commit ourselves to be free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same.

We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God.

We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As regards the institutions of God

As a people, we honour and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state and church.

We commit ourselves to honour the sanctity of marriage and the family.

We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ.

We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens and we pray for all who lead.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As regards the Church

As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world.

We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love and understanding in all our relationships.

We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship for the glory of God and the growth of the church.

We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

1 Why do we have Members?

We believe membership is an aid to discipleship

Church membership offers new Christians the opportunity to pledge publicly their love and loyalty to Christ and the Church, and to identify through membership with a local congregation. It makes them integral parts of a loving community, gives them a sense of accountability necessary for spiritual growth, and through mutual Christian commitment enables them to better carry out their mission in the world.

We believe membership was one of the reasons John Wesley was able to preserve fruits of the Revival.

John Wesley believed that those who were serious about their salvation would demonstrate their seriousness by the lifestyle they adopted. He developed three standards by which members in early Methodist Societies sought to evidence their desire for salvation:

- *“by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind”*
- *“by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men...”*
- *“by attending all the ordinances of God, such as public worship, ministry of the Word, the Lord’s Supper, family and private prayer, searching the Scriptures, fasting and abstinence.”*

We believe membership is a New Testament practice.

The New Testament Church clearly had a leadership structure (Acts 15:6; 20:17; 1 Tim 3 etc), and a kind of “membership” from which, in certain circumstances, people could be excluded (Matt 18:15-19; 1 Cor 5:9-11). Leaders were appointed in churches (Tit 1:5) and this could only be either by each leadership group selecting successors or by being chosen by the church members. Even in the New Testament Church, where the apostles had been chosen directly by the Lord Himself, there was the example of some leaders (including Stephen) chosen by “the whole congregation” (Acts 6:5). Having an official “membership” clarifies who is eligible to be a part of this process.

2 Who can become Members?

The New Testament model of repentance, faith and baptism constitute the primary requirements for membership. This makes membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the Body of Christ. We are open to all whom God has awakened and support them with the healing and equipping power of the Holy Spirit in His church.

3 What Questions do we ask of Potential Members?

- Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?
- Do you believe the Bible is God's written word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit and do you accept its authority for what you believe and how you live?
- Do you resolve, by God's grace, to be Christlike in heart and life, opening yourself fully to the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of the church?
- Do you accept the Free Methodist Articles of Religion, Membership Covenant and principles for the lives of its members and the governance of the Church?
- As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist church, within and beyond this congregation and will you join us in giving sacrificially of your time, talents and resources to help us carry out that mission?

4 What Expectations do we have of Members?

Our expectation is that members will, with the encouragement of the church and the assistance of the Holy Spirit grow in grace and Christian maturity. “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ”. Ephesians 4: 14 & 15.

To live self controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age we will by God’s grace need to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. For example, in the Membership Covenant we commit ourselves to “refrain from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment” this leads us to abstain from all idolatry, occult practices, spiritism, witchcraft and astrology and from solemn oaths of secrecy and membership in secret societies. We also commit ourselves to be “free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body” this leads us to advocate an alcohol, tobacco and drug-free lifestyle and warn of the danger of gambling, pornography and homosexual behaviour.

FM Churches

Formation of New Churches

We are charged with the task of reaching new territories and new populations with the Gospel. The biblical Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) commands believers to make disciples in every place and among all peoples. The fulfilment of this mission requires larger and more effective local churches as well as more and varied local churches.

Reaching unreached people is the motive for the planting of new churches. Each church should be eager and open to win all people to Christ and incorporate them into membership. Yet within each population group there are persons who, because of geographic distance or language or cultural differences, can more readily be reached by new churches than by existing ones. Creative strategies and multiple styles of ministry are required.

Most new churches will come into being as local churches form new groups nearby or use their facilities for new kinds of ministry. Others will come about as individuals or teams are commissioned at the local, conference, or general level to enter new areas. In still other cases, already existing groups may discover the benefit of affiliating with the Free Methodist Church and sharing in its mission. In each instance, the ultimate goal is not only to reach more people and see them mature in Christ, but also to reproduce new local churches.

Organisation and Structure

We recognise the diversity in the Free Methodist Church, therefore we recognise the need for diversity in board and ministry structures to produce our profile of a healthy church. Ministry settings vary due to size, goals, and culture. The local church is free to organise its board and structures in such a manner as to maintain our values while seeking to develop a healthy church.

Profile of a Healthy Church

We believe the local church is God's instrument to transform society. We believe a healthy church should have the following eight characteristics:

A Healthy Church Worships in Spirit and Truth

Nothing can fully heal our souls, emotions and relationships more thoroughly than true worship of God. When we turn our hearts and minds toward God, we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and His outpouring of grace. We are changed as God turns our love from self to Him and to others. Worship involves "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and God promises to "fill" such people.

A Healthy Church Prays Without Ceasing

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christ-likeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group prayers are effective for those who are in Christ. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasises our dependence on God.

A Healthy Church Constantly Reaches the Lost for Christ

Jesus came to "seek and save" the lost. He left us, His disciples, on this planet to do the same thing. Every church must continually train in the principles, practices and prayers of "faith sharing". More than seventy five per cent of the people who become Christian disciples do so because of the testimony, deeds and encouragement of someone they trust.

A Healthy Church Produces Fully Devoted Disciples

According to the Great Commission disciples are made as Christians go to the lost, baptise those who believe and teach those who respond to do all that Jesus commanded us to do. We see small groups within the church as the best environment for the mentoring and care of new believers.

A Healthy Church Grows through Multiplication

Within the church, we should regularly see reproduction of disciples, leaders, groups and congregations. Disciples produce disciples; leaders produce leaders; groups produce groups and congregations produce congregations. To assume that only evangelists and teachers produce disciples or that districts plant churches is to miss the power of the reproductive nature of the local body of Christ.

A Healthy Church Ministers to the Poor and Disenfranchised

That the poor have the gospel demonstrated to them by word and deed was one of the marks of the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Therefore the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve our particular care. Perhaps there aren't poor people in our community but there are those who do not fit into the "system". They are disconnected because of their condition, ethnicity or status. These people need the good news of God's grace.

A Healthy Church Engages in our World Missionary Movement

One thousand Free Methodists every year go to our mission fields to build, witness, teach, fix teeth, do surgery, pray, preach, bless and receive blessing. Every local church is encouraged to participate in our world missionary movement by praying, supporting or going.

A Healthy Church Organises around our Mission

We are committed to place mission ahead of method. This means that all our structures must serve our mission. Once a church understands its mission, making decisions about structure and function become easier.

Leadership of a Local Church

The leadership of the local church is composed of the senior pastor and ministry leaders in the church as determined by the society. It is recommended that there shall be no less than seven and no more than fifteen members.

In consultation with the Conference Superintendent the local church may choose other structures and titles to appropriately reflect operational values and become a healthy church.

For the health of the local church it is crucial that the leaders are people of spiritual depth. The scriptures provide guidance for persons in leadership. Leadership positions should be filled by members who:

- Live consistently within scriptural expectations for leaders
(Ex 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9)
- Express Christlike attitudes in life and in relationships
(Matt 20:26-28, John 15:12-17, Acts 6:1-7 and Eph 4:1-17).
- Continue in harmony with our Membership Covenant.
- Are vital in faith, faithful in attendance and financially supportive to at least the level of a tithe.

Oversight of the Churches

The Free Methodist Church is a connectional church with shared beliefs and values, where churches are encouraged to work together and support one another.

Each church selects leaders from among those members who are recognised to have the gifts and graces needed for leadership in the church. These leaders work with the appointed minister to develop the ministry of the church.

Each church also selects delegates who work with all the ordained ministers as members of the Annual Conference. The Annual Conference works to assist churches by offering practical advice and encouraging the development of vision. In consultation with local leaders the Conference appoints ministers to each church for an indefinite period. The Conference also selects one of the ordained ministers to serve as Superintendent for four year periods.

The work of the Superintendent and Annual Conference is overseen by the General Conference. Ordained and unordained delegates are selected by each Annual Conference to serve at General Conference which is held every four or five years. The General Conference deals with doctrinal and moral concerns raised by the churches, and selects Bishops to oversee the work in different regions of the world.

The work of the Free Methodist Church worldwide is co-ordinated by a World Conference of ordained ministers and unordained leaders drawn from every continent of the world.

We believe that having a combination of local leaders and District Overseers has New Testament precedence. In New Testament times it seems that most leaders were selected from the congregation but some, like Timothy and Titus, were appointed to oversee congregations by the apostles who exercised a more itinerant ministry.

We also believe it is right to work together. As in the New Testament Church, in times of need believers in one congregation may be asked to give to the needy in another congregation. It is also clear in the New Testament Church that major doctrinal issues were considered by a body with representatives drawn from the churches (Acts 15). We consider these issues at our General and World Conferences.

FM Lifestyle

1 The Goal of the Christian Journey

The Scriptures affirm that God’s purpose for humanity, from before creation, was that we should “be holy and blameless before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Timothy 2:4).

The goal of the Christian journey is nothing less lofty than to attain “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and to become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christ-like maturity. When we enter the life to come, our journey will be complete because we will be like God in an even fuller way than is possible now: “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Therefore, we as Free Methodists affirm with God’s Word that the proper goal for our Christian life is this Christ-like maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 1:16). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that He so richly provides.

2 The Way of Salvation

These paragraphs are an elaboration of what is affirmed in the Articles of Religion. The way of salvation is the path God has laid out for us to begin the Christian journey, and to grow in faith.

The way of salvation includes God’s gracious initiative for salvation, awakening to God, repentance, trust, assurance, consecration and sanctification.

God's Gracious Initiative for Salvation

In love God has graciously provided for the salvation of all humankind. God is love. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was sent by the Father as an expression of God's love for the world. The cross shows the extent of Jesus' love for all. The love of God is further expressed to the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality.

Awakening to God

The Scriptures teach that by nature humans are corrupt in every aspect of their beings and have gone far from original righteousness. Added to the depravity common to all because of the Fall, there are the enslaving effects of committed sins. We are unable in ourselves to come to God, but God in His grace reaches out to every sinner.

God takes the initiative in making sinners aware of their needs, using His Word, the revelation in Jesus Christ, the Gospel proclamation of the church, the witness of individuals, and the circumstances of life. By such means, the Holy Spirit awakens sinners to their needs and to the truth of the gospel (John 16:8, 13). Awakened, they must make a response, either rejecting the call of God or turning to God in repentance and faith.

Repentance and Restitution

All must repent in order to come into a right relationship with God.

Repentance calls for a sincere and thorough change of mind. To repent is to turn from sin with genuine sorrow and to turn to God in confession and submission. The whole person is involved: mind, feelings, will. Repentance is more than regret for wrongdoing or sorrow at being caught. It is personal sorrow that one has sinned against God. Repentance demands a radical turning from sin and a sincere turning to God.

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution – the effort to right one's wrongs when possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zaccheus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution save, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

Trust / Faith

Trust, also known as faith, is utter reliance upon God (2 Corinthians 3:4-5; 1 Timothy 4:10). Trust includes full acceptance of the promises of God, complete dependence on Christ's sacrifice for salvation, and unconditional commitment to the will of God.

Assurance

God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). The Holy Spirit witnesses to their own spirits that they are forgiven of their sins and adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:16).

Christians have peace with God through Jesus Christ because guilt is taken away and fear of judgment removed (Hebrews 6:11; 10:22). God continues to give assurance to believers through the Scriptures, the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit, and love for and fellowship with other Christians (1 John 3:14).

Consecration

God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1). Anything thus set apart is said to be consecrated.

Christians, therefore, must consecrate themselves to God and surrender their wills to the will of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 19:21). Those who desire inward sanctification must deny themselves, bear the cross, and follow Christ. Devotion to self is idolatry. A Christian who is divided in loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given pre-eminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life.

Therefore, to open themselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God. They freely yield all to the purposes of God and devote every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13). Christians cannot be delivered from the dominion of sin if they permit self to reign in their lives. They cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Sanctification

Christ gave himself “even unto death” for the cleansing of His Church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 13:12). His disciples are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1). Paul prayed “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.” (1Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer’s life, as the believer co-operates with the Spirit. And a deeper relationship with Christ is possible when the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; 1 John 1:5-2.1).

God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier (1 Thessalonians 4:7- 8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Coming into the life at conversion, He fills with His unrivalled presence when the Christian’s consecration is complete, cleansing the heart and empowering for witness and service (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:3; Acts 1:8). The Christian’s life will be transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Inward sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (1 Peter 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-20). When they are cleansed, they are not made perfect in performance, but in love (Hebrews 6:1; 12:14; Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:12-13).

3 Genuine Christian Character

Christian character begins with life in the Spirit, and is nourished by the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. This section describes some of the spiritual disciplines that are essential for Christians.

Prayer

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christ-likeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Prayer should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group prayer are effective for those who are in Christ. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasises our dependence on God. Both prayer and Bible study should be regular, without becoming mere rituals (Psalm 119:11; 10:5).

Study of the Word

The Bible is our source for discovering how we may grow. It is the Christian's "growth manual." It must be taken seriously as the final authority for our lives; therefore, it ought to be read and diligently studied for its meaning. God will speak to growing Christians through its pages if they are listening. The value and meaning of life are found in this book. The prayerful study and application of Scripture is a means of cleansing and of changing attitudes and behaviour.

Life in the Church

Growing Christians find their supportive environment in the fellowship of believers. They do not live independently from the Body of Christ. Worship requires a proper attitude toward God. It involves the believer's active participation. Believers should prepare their minds and spirits for worship. Sincere followers of Christ reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, dedication, confession, faith and service.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are vital parts of the life of the Church that were commanded by the Lord. God has promised to graciously meet the person who faithfully takes part in these sacraments. As a part of the Body of Christ, believers must take part in corporate church worship as well as in the other ministries of the church. Small group participation is a means of grace and growth. Support, insight, inspiration and discipline are fruits of fellowship.

Spiritual Gifts and Ministry

Growth comes with the acceptance of full responsibility for the use of natural talents and spiritual gifts in service and ministry. The Holy Spirit endows every believer with natural abilities for service and ministry. These are a trust. They must be used only in ways that will glorify God. The Holy Spirit also distributes, as He wills, spiritual gifts of speech and service for the common good and the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised under the Lordship of Christ with His love and compassion, and are not to be the cause of division in the church. Therefore, everything is to be done decently and in order. All communication in worship is to be intelligible (1 Corinthians 14). The believer is to seek as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness, not the gifts themselves, but the character and power of the Holy Spirit.

Love of Others

Growth in Christ requires taking responsibility to love others, all of whom are loved by God and made in His image. The quality of a Christian's relationships with others affects the quality of his/her own life. Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (James 5:16). The Ten Commandments, summarised into two commandments by Jesus, (Luke 10:25-28) teach the nature of our relationships with God and with others. Christians will express their love both by deeds of kindness and by personal words of witness that point to Christ as the embodiment of God's love and the Saviour of the world.

Divine Healing

All healing, whether of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God who is “over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). He may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counselling, corrected attitudes or through the restorative processes of nature itself. He may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or He may heal by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing which centres in the life and ministry of the apostles and the church. Consistent with the Scriptures (James 5:14-15), therefore, we urge our pastors to make opportunity for the sick and afflicted to come before God in the fellowship of the church, in strong faith that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal. At the same time, we recognise that although God’s sovereign purposes are good and He is working toward a final redemption which assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant physical healing for all in this life. We believe that in such cases He can glorify Himself through the resurrection to life everlasting.

4 Christian Living in the Modern World

This section arises from the experience of Free Methodists as they have lived out Christ’s command to holiness in the modern world. Therefore, it describes a Christian response to pressing issues in the contemporary world.

There is no claim made that this is a complete or final description of an appropriate Christian response to all of the important issues faced in the modern world, or that such a description could ever be written. Rather, the approach taken in the following paragraphs illustrates the ways in which a Christian must form a responsible and biblically appropriate response to contemporary issues.

Each member of The Free Methodist Church adopts the following paragraphs as an authoritative guide to living an authentic Christian life. These principles (indicated by italicised text) arise out of the direct, clear teaching of Scripture. The application statements that follow each principle represent the historic understanding of Free Methodists.

False Worship

Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament commandment, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The worship of any other person, spirit, or thing is idolatry.

We abstain from all practices that lead to idolatry. Occult practices, such as spiritism, witchcraft and astrology must be avoided. Moreover, Christians are to be on guard against the idolatries of the heart – the worship of things, pleasures, and self (1 John 2:16).

The Lord’s Day

God makes clear in Scripture by both example and command that one day in seven is to be devoted to worship and rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus declared that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

We need a special day in which we turn from our daily work to worship God and to renew body, mind, and spirit. The New Testament reveals that the early church moved from observing the last day of the week – the Jewish Sabbath, to worshipping God in Christ on the first day of the week – the Lord’s day, the day of His resurrection.

In keeping the Sabbath principle in a Lord’s day setting, we participate in corporate worship with the Christian community as the essential activity of Sunday (Hebrews 10:25). We refrain on that day from unnecessary labours and commerce, and recognise that salvation comes not from our own strivings but by grace, as we rest in God (Isaiah 58:13-14; Hebrews 4:9). Pastors and others who must be involved in necessary work on Sunday are encouraged to observe the Sabbath principle on another day.

Secret Societies

The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, we abstain from solemn oaths of secrecy shared with unbelievers which cloud our witness.

Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy or a secret password as conditions of membership are to be considered secret societies. In contradiction to the teaching of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join (Matthew 5:34-37). As Christians, therefore, we refuse to swear unreserved loyalty to any secret society since we see such an allegiance to be in direct conflict with unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. We must keep ourselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

Most secret societies are religious in nature. Prayers are offered, hymns are sung, and members engage in acts of worship before an altar. Chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. But the worship of these societies is unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). We refrain, therefore, from membership in all secret societies and when we unite with the church we resign from membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

Self Discipline

One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honour the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 6:19-20).

As Christians we desire to be characterised by balance and moderation. We seek to avoid extreme patterns of conduct. We also seek to keep ourselves free from addictions or compulsions.

We are committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. We find help through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

Stewardship of Possessions

Although as Christians we accumulate goods, we should not make possessions or wealth the goal of our lives (Matthew 6:19- 20; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we are people who give generously to meet the needs of others and to support ministry (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).

The Scriptures allow the privilege of private ownership. Though we hold title to possessions under civil law, we regard all we have as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards.

Gambling contradicts faith in God who rules all the affairs of His world, not by chance but by His providential care. Gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honour of a gift. It takes substance from the pocket of a neighbour without yielding a fair exchange. Because it excites greed, it destroys the initiative of honest toil and often results in addiction. Government sponsorship of lotteries only enlarges the problem. Because of the evils it encourages, we refrain from gambling in all its forms for conscience' sake and as a witness to the faith we have in Christ.

Entertainment

We evaluate all forms of entertainment in the light of Biblical standards for holy living, and recognise that we must govern ourselves according to these standards. The Scriptures say, “we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live” (Romans 8:12-13).

Our choices regarding entertainment must recognise that some modern diversions promote violence, excite sexual desire or awaken greed, and certain atmospheres encourage and promote tolerance of vice and vulgarity.

Therefore when making choices with regard to entertainment, before the Lord we should forthrightly answer such questions as: Does this activity enhance or reduce my witness as a Christian? Does it contradict the teachings of Scripture? Is my conscience clear? Will participation expose me to unnecessary temptation? Is this activity in any sense enslaving?

Misuse of Substances

As Christians we believe that life is full, abundant and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:35; 10:10). Therefore, we abstain from whatever damages, destroys or distorts His life in us.

Illicit drugs are prime offenders. Because various forms of narcotics cause untold damage to people and relationships and such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body and reinforce an unrealistic view of life, we avoid their use.

Because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves, we advocate abstaining from the use of alcoholic beverages (Mark 12:30-31). The abuse of alcohol, a legalised drug, is damaging to individuals, families, and society. It is unpredictably addictive and its destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Its abuse leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury and death. As concerned Christians, we advocate abstinence for the sake of health, family and neighbours. Moreover, we see the adverse social consequences as so pervasive that we seek by advocating abstinence to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives.

Because we believe Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts, we advocate abstaining from the use of tobacco. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially-offensive addiction. We take seriously the words of Paul, the apostle, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We endeavour by God's help to be understanding and supportive toward those who come to Christ with problems of addiction. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage of addictions, and desire to give whatever help and support are needed while fellow Christians seek full deliverance.

Pornography

The Scriptures warn that those who participate in sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). Therefore as Christians we avoid participation in these evils or in the glorification of these evils that is found in the many forms of pornography.

Pornography excites sexual lust, which is the debasement of a gift of God. It depicts and may encourage indecent and deviant sexual conduct such as fornication, incest, rape, sodomy, child molestation and bestiality. It may cause a progressive decay of moral values, beginning with addiction, followed by a desensitising of conscience, and tending toward the wanton acting out of perverted sexual conduct. It often victimises the innocent and unsuspecting.

For society, pornography is a rampant degenerative force. It damages and destroys. As Christians, we oppose pornography by every legitimate means.

Homosexual Behaviour

Homosexual behaviour is regarded by the Scriptures as immoral because it is a distortion of God’s created order, a practice contrary to nature. The sanctity of marriage and the family is to be protected against all manner of immoral conduct (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:23-28; Leviticus 20:10-16). The Scriptures speak explicitly against homosexual practice (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:8-10).

Persons with homosexual inclinations are accountable to God for their behaviour (Romans 14:12). For those who have fallen into the practice, the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and deliver (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Because the practice is a distortion of nature, therapy may be necessary for healing to take place.

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God’s agent of healing, ministering in love to homosexuals and giving them support as they learn to live a Christian life that is wholesome and pure (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

We oppose legislation that legitimises homosexual behaviour as an acceptable alternate lifestyle.

Sanctity of Life

God is sovereign: the world and all that is in it belongs to God. Though God's eternal purposes may never be thwarted by human action we are still free and responsible to make God-consistent choices in matters of life and death. Christians live in the reality that human beings are created for an eternal purpose.

Reproductive Technology - Reproductive technologies generate a large number of ethical, medical, legal and theological questions even as they offer hope. The guiding principle, that all human life must be valued, respected and protected throughout all its stages must be carefully and consistently applied to every new development.

Abortion - The intentional abortion of a person's life, from conception on, must be judged to be a violation of God's command, "You shall not commit murder," except when extreme circumstances require the termination of a pregnancy to save the life of the pregnant woman. Abortion, when it serves the ends of population or birth control, personal preference or convenience, and social or economic security, must be considered as selfish and malicious.

Euthanasia - There is no justification for euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. It is understood that a terminally ill person's request that life not be sustained by heroic measures, does not constitute euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. We recognise that it is permissible to use painkillers and other medications, which carry the risk of shortening life so long as the intent is to relieve or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death. We further recognize the responsibility of medical professionals to alleviate pain within these parameters. Christians must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living.

We believe that there is no such thing as a "useless" life. The value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us.

The Christian and Marriage

Principles Regarding Marriage - *Nature of Marriage: At creation God instituted marriage for the well being of humanity (Genesis 2:20-24; Mark 10:6-9). Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship which the Scriptures call “one flesh.”*

Sexual intercourse is God’s gift to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be celebrative (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. Likewise, it condemns all unnatural sexual behaviour such as incestuous abuse, child molestation, homosexual activity and prostitution (1 Corinthians 6.9; Romans 12:6-27).

Nurturing Healthy Marriages - The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the apostle’s command (2 Corinthians 6:14), we expect them to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnise a marriage. Those who unite believers to unbelievers go contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures.

Pastors shall see that all candidates for marriage have received premarital guidance, using materials consistent with denominational teaching. We further encourage local churches to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

Healing Troubled Marriages - The church which is alive to God has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. The chief resources are the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, prayer and the sacraments, counsel and support. Through the church's ministry, God can bring healing and reconciliation.

Therefore, if our members find their marriage in crisis, we encourage them to seek the counsel of the pastor and submit to the guidance of the church. Professional counsel may be necessary.

When an impossible situation is destroying the home, we advise that Christians may separate. In such cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union.

Divorce - When one marriage partner is a Christian and the other a non-believer, we believe that the Christian may not for that reason divorce the unbelieving mate (1 Corinthians 7:12-13), because Christian love may redeem the unbeliever and unite the home in Christ (1 Corinthians 7:16).

When a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union. Where reconciliation is impossible, a divorce may be allowed (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

Desertion is the abandoning of a marriage without just cause. We believe that a person denies the faith when he/she deserts a spouse deliberately and for an extended period of time. When the desertion leads subsequently to divorce, the deserted partner is no longer bound by the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Where reconciliation is impossible in a troubled marriage, we acknowledge that divorce may be unavoidable (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). When marriages break down completely, we recognise that, in the words of Jesus, "hardness of heart" is implicit on one or both sides of the union (Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 10:5-9).

Though the Scriptures allow divorce on the grounds of adultery (Matthew 5:32) and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), they do not mandate divorce and we advise counsel with church leaders to seek other alternatives. One of these may be for both to live celibately.

Recovery After Divorce - Divorce always produces trauma. It is the breaking of a covenant, thus violating God's intention for faithfulness in marriage (Malachi 2:13-16). For this reason divorced persons should be helped to understand and remedy the causes for the divorce. They should seek pastoral counsel. Professional counsel may also be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, the marriage partners must be helped to replace them with new attitudes and behaviours that are Christlike (Colossians 3:1-15). Repentance and forgiveness are crucial to recovery. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to wholesome participation within the church. The church must extend its concern to family and others affected by the divorce.

Remarriage After a Divorce - A divorced member or one who is considering marriage to a divorced person must come under the authority, counsel and guidance of the church.

Persons who have been involved in divorce while in a state of unbelief shall not for that reason alone be barred from becoming members, even though they remarry. Similarly, believers are not prohibited from marrying a person who was divorced while an unbeliever. A member of the church divorced from an adulterous spouse or deserted by an unbelieving mate, after attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation have been rejected, may remarry (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-11; 1 Corinthians 7:15).

FM Doctrine

GOD

I. The Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, the maker and preserver of all things. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in eternity, deity, and purpose; everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.

II. The Son

His Incarnation - God was himself in Jesus Christ to reconcile people to God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He joined together the deity of God and the humanity of humankind. Jesus of Nazareth was God in flesh, truly God and truly human. He came to save us. For us the Son of God suffered, was crucified, dead and buried. He poured out His life as a blameless sacrifice for our sin and transgressions. We gratefully acknowledge that He is our Saviour, the one perfect mediator between God and us.

His Resurrection and Exaltation - Jesus Christ is risen victorious from the dead. His resurrected body became more glorious, not hindered by ordinary human limitations. Thus He ascended into heaven. There He sits as our exalted Lord at the right hand of God the Father, where He intercedes for us until all His enemies shall be brought into complete subjection. He will return to judge all people. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

III. The Holy Spirit

His Person - The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, He is one with them, the eternal Godhead; equal in deity, majesty, and power. He is God effective in Creation, in life, and in the church. The Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ were accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He continues to reveal, interpret, and glorify the Son.

His Work in Salvation - The Holy Spirit is the administrator of the salvation planned by the Father and provided by the Son's death, resurrection, and ascension. He is the effective agent in our conviction, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. He is our Lord's ever-present self, indwelling, assuring, and enabling the believer.

His Relation to the Church - The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church by the Father and the Son. He is the church's life and witnessing power. He bestows the love of God and makes real the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the believer so that both His gifts of words and service may achieve the common good, and build and increase the church. In relation to the world He is the Spirit of truth, and His instrument is the Word of God.

SCRIPTURES

IV. Authority

The Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. As attested by the early church and subsequent councils, it is the trustworthy record of God's revelation, completely truthful in all it affirms. It has been faithfully preserved and proves itself true in human experience.

The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the languages and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture.

The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son, and the destiny of all humankind. It also teaches the way of salvation and the life of faith. Whatever is not found in the Bible nor can be proved by it is not to be required as an article of belief or as necessary to salvation.

V. Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. Both Testaments bear witness to God's salvation in Christ; both speak of God's will for His people. The ancient laws for ceremonies and rites, and the civil precepts for the nation Israel are not necessarily binding on Christians today. But, on the example of Jesus we are obligated to obey the moral commandments of the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

VI. New Testament

The New Testament fulfils and interprets the Old Testament. It is the record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is God's final word regarding humankind, his sin, and his salvation, the world and its destiny.

The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

HUMANKIND

VII. Free Moral Persons

God created man in His own image, innocent, morally free and responsible to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. By the sin of Adam, man as the offspring of Adam is corrupted in his very nature so that from birth he is inclined to sin. He is unable by his own strength and work to restore himself in right relationship with God and to merit eternal salvation. God, the Omnipotent, provides all the resources of the Trinity to make it possible for man to respond to His grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By God's grace and help man is enabled to do good works with a free will.¹

VIII. Law of Life and Love

God's law for all human life, personal and social, is expressed in two divine commands: Love the Lord God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself. These commands reveal what is best for persons in their relationship with God, others, and society. They set forth the principles of human duty in both individual and social action. They recognise God as the only Sovereign. All men as created by Him and in His image have the same inherent rights regardless of gender, race, or colour. All should therefore give God absolute obedience in their individual, social, and political acts. They should strive to secure to everyone respect for their person, their rights, and their greatest happiness in the possession and exercise of the right within the moral law.

IX. Good Works

Good works are the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ, but works cannot save us from our sins nor from God's judgement. As expressions of Christian faith and love, our good works performed with reverence and humility are both acceptable and pleasing to God. However, good works do not earn God's grace.

¹This kind of view of freewill and free grace was the universal teaching of the church during the first four centuries. Divine forgiveness and salvation are emphatically unearned free gifts, but God does not force them on us. He has chosen to permit people to accept or reject his plan (Lk 7:30) and will (Mt 23:37, Jn 7:17) for them.

SALVATION

X. Christ's Sacrifice

Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No other satisfaction for sin is necessary; none other can atone.

XI. New Life in Christ

A new life and a right relationship with God are made possible through the redemptive acts of God in Jesus Christ. God, by His Spirit, acts to impart new life and put people into a relationship with himself as they repent and their faith responds to His grace. Justification, regeneration, and adoption speak significantly to entrance into and continuance in the new life.

Justification - Justification is a legal term that emphasises that by a new relationship in Jesus Christ people are in fact accounted righteous, being free from both the guilt and the penalty of their sins.

Regeneration - Regeneration is a biological term which illustrates that by a new relationship in Christ one does in fact have a new life and a new spiritual nature capable of faith, love, and obedience to Christ Jesus as Lord. The believer is born again, and is a new creation. The old life is past; a new life is begun.

Adoption - Adoption is a filial term full of warmth, love, and acceptance. It denotes that by a new relationship in Christ believers have become His wanted children freed from the mastery of both sin and Satan. Believers have the witness of the Spirit that they are children of God.

XII. Entire Sanctification

Entire sanctification² is that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believers, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, are cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification enables believers to love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and their neighbour as themselves, and it prepares them for greater growth in grace.

XIII. Restoration

Christians may be sustained in a growing relationship with Jesus as Saviour and Lord. However, they may grieve the Holy Spirit in the relationships of life without returning to the dominion of sin. When they do, they must humbly accept the correction of the Holy Spirit, trust in the advocacy of Jesus, and mend their relationships.

The Christian can sin wilfully and sever his relationship with Christ. Even so by repentance before God, forgiveness is granted and the relationship with Christ restored, for not every sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit and unpardonable. God's grace is sufficient for those who truly repent and, by His enabling, amend their lives. However, forgiveness does not give believers liberty to sin and escape the consequences of sinning.

God has given responsibility and power to the church to restore a penitent believer through loving reproof, counsel, and acceptance.

²At the time of producing this booklet a new statement of Sanctification is being considered. The proposed new wording is:

'Sanctification (initial, progressive, entire) is that work of God whereby the Holy Spirit recreates His people after the likeness of God, changing them from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

When in faith believers surrender to God and die to self, the Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin through full consecration and a process of growth. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart's affections to the love of God, and empowers believers to please God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love their neighbours as themselves.'

THE CHURCH

XIV. The Church

The church is created by God; it is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head; the Holy Spirit is its life and power. It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect. It is an organism, not an unchanging institution. It exists to fulfil the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish.

The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ's instruction. The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members. In its requirements it seeks to honour Christ and obey the written Word of God.

XV. The Language of Worship

According to the Word of God and the custom of the early church, public worship and prayer and the administration of the sacraments should be in a language understood by the people. The Reformation applied this principle to provide for the use of the common language of the people. It is likewise clear that the Apostle Paul places the strongest emphasis upon rational and intelligible utterance in worship. We cannot endorse practices which plainly violate these scriptural principles.³

XVI. The Holy Sacraments

Water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ. They are means of grace through faith, tokens of our profession of Christian faith, and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith.

³ In public worship we would expect that a tongue would be followed by an interpretation.

Baptism - Water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers, as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; and, since infants are recognised as being included in the atonement, we hold that they may be baptised upon the request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. They shall be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership. ⁴

The Lord's Supper - The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To those who rightly, worthily, and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves.

Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken, and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

LAST THINGS

XVII. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a prominent Bible theme providing Christians with both their tasks and hope. Jesus announced its presence. The kingdom is realised now as God's reign is established in the hearts and lives of believers.

The church, by its prayers, example, and proclamation of the gospel, is the appointed and appropriate instrument of God in building His kingdom.

⁴The Free Methodist Church does not believe that children become regenerate through infant baptism. To avoid misunderstandings, in the United Kingdom we dedicate infants and baptise believers.

But the kingdom is also future and is related to the return of Christ when judgement will fall upon the present order. The enemies of Christ will be subdued; the reign of God will be established; a total cosmic renewal which is both material and moral shall occur; and the hope of the redeemed will be fully realised.

XVIII. The Return of Christ

The return of Christ is certain and may occur at any moment, although it is not given us to know the hour. At His return He will fulfil all prophecies concerning His final triumph over all evil. The believer's response is joyous expectation, watchfulness, readiness, and diligence.

XIX. Resurrection

There will be a bodily resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of resurrection unto life to those who are in Him.

XX. Judgment

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our deeds in this life.

XXI. Final Destiny

Our eternal destiny is determined by God's grace and our response, not by arbitrary decrees of God. For those who trust Him and obediently follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord, there is a heaven of eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence. But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God.



The Free Methodist Church is a body of dedicated Christians committed to the will of God as revealed in the Bible, Wesleyan in doctrine and practice, who consider themselves to be members of the body of Christ in this world.

The Free Methodist Church is committed to developing and maintaining congregations characterised by understanding, forgiveness, mutual discipline and assistance. They view local churches as mission outposts. Pastors are appointed not just to a local congregation and building, but to the evangelisation of whole communities, towns or cities. They believe the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve particular care and any individual can become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

The Free Methodist Church recognises no geographic, social, racial, or cultural limitations on Christ's command to preach the gospel of redemption and to share His message of wholeness. They are called to introduce all people to Jesus Christ. This includes the inner city, the countryside, villages and the marketplaces of the world.

The Free Methodist Church was first established in the United States of America in 1860, in England in 1971 and in 2005 has ministries in 70 countries worldwide.

Free Methodist Church in the United Kingdom