

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

Statement of Faith:  
of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church of Aurora

1. Bible:

We believe the Bible to be the complete Word of God; that the sixty-six Books, as originally written, comprising the Old and New Testaments were verbally inspired by the Spirit of God and were entirely free from error; that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice and the true basis of Christian union.

2. God:

We believe in one God, Creator of all, holy, sovereign, eternal, existing in three equal Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3. Christ:

We believe in the absolute and essential deity of Jesus Christ, in His eternal existence with the Father in preincarnate glory, in His virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, triumphant ascension, mediatorial ministry, and personal return.

4. The Holy Spirit:

We believe in the absolute and essential deity and personality of the Holy Spirit Who convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; Who regenerates, sanctifies, illuminates and comforts those who believe in Jesus Christ.

5. Satan:

We believe that Satan is real and exists as an evil personality, the originator of sin, the arch-enemy of God and man.

6. Man:

We believe that man was divinely created in the image of God; that he sinned, becoming guilty before God, resulting in total depravity, thereby incurring physical and spiritual death.

7. Salvation:

We believe that salvation is by the sovereign, electing grace of God; that by the appointment of the Father, Christ voluntarily suffered a vicarious, expiatory and propitiatory death; that justification is by faith alone in the all-sufficient sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and that those whom God has effectually called shall be divinely preserved and finally perfected in the image of the Lord.

8. Future Things:

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ; in the

resurrection of the just and the unjust; in the eternal blessedness of the redeemed and in the judgment and conscious, eternal punishment of the wicked.

9. The Local Church:

We believe that a church is a company of immersed believers, called out from the world, separated unto the Lord Jesus, voluntarily associated for the ministry of the Word, the mutual edification of its members, the propagation of the faith and the observance of the ordinances. We believe it is a sovereign, independent body, exercising its own divinely awarded gifts, precepts and privileges under the Lordship of Christ, the Great Head of the church. We believe that its officers are pastors and deacons.

10. Ordinances:

We believe that there are only two ordinances for the church regularly observed in the New Testament in the following order:

a. Baptism

which is the immersion of the believer in water, whereby he obeys Christ's command and sets forth his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

b. The Lord's Supper

which is the memorial wherein the believer partakes of the two elements, bread and wine which symbolize the Lord's body and shed blood, proclaiming His death until He come.

11. The Church and State:

We believe in the entire separation of church and state.

12. Religious Liberty:

We believe in religious liberty; that every man has the right to practise and propagate his beliefs.

13. The Lord's Day:

We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day and that, in a special sense, it is the divinely appointed day for worship and spiritual exercise.

14. Civil Government:

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment for the interest and good order of society; that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honoured and obeyed except only in the things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the only Lord of the conscience and Prince of the kings of the earth.

A. 'Why are there so many Christian denominations?'

1. many people ask this
  - a. sometimes in a disparaging way
  - b. sometimes in questioning the validity of the Christian faith
  - c. and sometimes with a real concern for the witness to Christ in the world, so that they seek an organizational unity of various church bodies and denominations
  
2. so many differences between churches can present a problem to the sincere Christian
  - a. some time ago as lady I know was moving to a different community and seeking for a new church home
  - b. she asked me about one specific group of baptist churches,
  - c. 'how do they differ from us?'
  - d. she wasn't the first, nor the last, to ask that question
  
3. I would like to address that question this morning
  - a. Why are there so many baptist groups?
  - b. What distinguishes one from another?
  - c. What distinguishes baptists from other denominations?
  - d. today, I am using the term baptist with a small 'b'
    - (A) that includes big 'B' Baptist churches such as ourselves
    - (B) but it also includes a large number of other baptist groups: Mennonites, Pentacostal assemblies, most Associated Gospel churches, Brethren assemblies, Nazarenes, 'Independent' churches, and many of those calling themselves 'community' churches
  - e. first, though, let us lay a Scriptural foundation for what constitutes the church of Christ.

B. The Scriptural Foundation

1. Acts 2 records Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost – the day of the Holy Spirit's falling upon the disciples in miraculous power. The sermon focuses on Jesus of Nazareth, put to death by man's wicked

hands according to God's predetermined plan, but raised from the dead to be both Lord and Christ. Peter's audience, pierced to their heart by conviction, cried out, 'what shall we do?' Starting with verse 38 we read:

2. <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.' <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
  
  3. <sup>42</sup> They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.
- (Acts 2:38-47)

C. What do we learn, then from Acts 2?

1. What then constitutes a true local Christian church?
  - a. A true church is one preaching the gospel of salvation as the work of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
  - b. The local church consists of those who have believed and then been baptized, and then unite with the church
  - c. The true church provides an opportunity for believers to show practical love in caring for each other
  - d. A true church will also
    - (A) provide teaching so that believers may grow
    - (B) provides for regular worship, for partaking of the Lord's Supper ('[breaking bread](#)'), for fellowship

one with another, and for prayer

- e. These new believers continued to attend the temple, but their real gathering took place in one another's homes
- f. But note that it was not man's work but God's saving work that added people to the number or roll of the church

2. What then constitutes the teaching of a true Christian church?

- a. in your bulletin you will find our statement of faith
- b. it is also the statement of faith of the association of baptist churches to which we belong
- c. this outlines, in a very brief form, a list of non-negotiables in terms of matters of faith of this church
- d. while as a church, we may co-operate with born-again Christians who belong to congregations that do not hold to all of these statements, we cannot be united with other churches that deny one or more of them – they are just too important to be lightly set aside or discarded
- e. **In many cases denominations originated because people cared fervently, sacrificially, for the truths of Scripture.**
- f. Before reviewing some distinctions, let us look at the unity that exists in the church of Christ despite denominations

D. The Unity of the Church of Christ

- 1. a story, probably fictional, tells of a dream of John Wesley: <sup>-(2)}</sup>
  - a. **John was taken to the gate of heaven where he asked, 'Have you any Presbyterians here?'**
  - b. **'No, none,' responded the angel.**
  - c. **He asked of Baptists with the same response**
  - d. **Wesley, founder of Methodism, trembled, mustering courage to ask 'Well, then, how many Methodists have you here?'**
  - e. **'Not one,' replied the angel. And Wesley's heart was filled with dismay. 'We are unacquainted with earthly distinctions and denominations up here,' explained the angel.**
  - f. **'Well, then whom do you have here?' cried Wesley.**
  - g. **'Just a company of people who love the Lord,' answered the angel quietly.**

- h. Wesley was then conducted to the regions of despair. 'Have you any Presbyterians here?' he asked.
  - i. 'Yes, lots of them,' responded the keeper of the gate.
  - j. Wesley was mystified: 'Have you any Baptists here?'
  - k. 'Yes,' came the reply.
  - l. In fear and trembling, Wesley put his third question. 'Have you any Methodists here?' he asked, almost in a whisper.
  - m. 'Oh, yes, many of them,' quickly responded the gatekeeper. Wesley was stunned. No Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists in heaven, and lots of them in hell. What did it mean? Remembering what was said by the angel at the gate of heaven, Wesley mustered his courage and asked, 'Do you have any people here who love the Lord?'
  - n. 'Oh, no, no!' roared the gatekeeper. 'Not one. Nobody here loves the Lord.'
2. There are many terms used for uniting with a local church: coming into fellowship, being of the number or on the roll, or being a member, which is the term in our constitution.
- a. each is Scriptural but having different implications
  - b. Paul wrote to correct errors in the church at Corinth.
  - c. One error is stated in 1 Corinthians 11:18, 19: '[... when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you ... factions among you ...](#)'
  - d. Paul then proceeds to use three reasons for unity
    - (A) that we unite worship in the Lord's Supper
    - (B) that diverse gifts are given for one spiritual purpose
    - (C) that the church body is made up of members who each have their own place and service to the body
  - e. this he tells the body of Christ at Corinth, '[so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.](#)' (1 Corinthians 12:25)
  - f. but the term body is used of a much wider sense in Ephesians 5:23, '[... Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Saviour of the body.](#)'
  - g. when a person is born again by God's Holy Spirit, he immediately becomes a member of the body of Christ; so, then, you who are Christians here this morning, you are all members here in two different

ways

(A) members of the body of Christ comprising all believers

(B) members of this local body by your attendance, your worship and your fellowship with other believers

h. but some of you have committed yourselves to this church and its teaching by uniting in fellowship as well, by having your name on our roll, and as such members you also have a voice in the decisions of this local church.

i. **believers share in a common joy with other born-again children of God regardless of church affiliation**

3. now, let us briefly look differences that exist among churches, and even baptist churches, both non-essential and essential

## E. Some Non-Essential Differences between Churches

### 1. Church Polity or Government Differences

a. as you look at baptist churches you find that there exist many different structures

b. Big 'B' Baptists, are usually independent bodies. Most, but not all, are also congregational in their government. In our case, for example, while we are part of The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, like all its other churches, we govern ourselves, only conditional on agreeing with their statement of faith. This government is carried out under a board, made up, in general, of elders who ministering in spiritual matters, and deacons who minister in material matters

c. some baptistic churches are episcopal, in that a bishop has the charge and responsibility for a diocese consisting of a number of churches, with more or less authority over their finances, ministry, who is pastor and so on

d. others are presbyterian in government, with a synod of presbyters or elders who give spiritual direction to the churches under their oversight, with other matters left to each of the local congregations

e. while we seek to pursue the Biblical pattern, the NT is actually quite flexible in this respect, and evidence of each form is found in it. Church history has shown the strengths and weaknesses of each. The major weakness we have seems to be our tendency to splinter into many groups!

f. **The forms of government of various denominations have addressed differing needs faced by the church.**

## 2. Charismatic

- a. properly speaking, charismata refers to gifts to a Christian to serve the church, distributed at the Holy Spirit's will
- b. I believe that these charismata can be divided into two
  - (A) the extraordinary gifts that were given in NT days in order to confirm the gospel message and the authority of the apostles who bore that message, these being miracles, speaking in tongues, and predictive prophecy
  - (B) the regular gifts that are required in all ages in order that the gospel may prosper and the people of God built up in their faith and works
- c. What are called 'full gospel' or (incorrectly) 'charismatic' churches believe that both kinds of gifts are still given to the church today.
- d. I believe that with the completion of revelation and the completion of the apostolic ministries, that first group ceased, even as Paul foretold in 1 Corinthians 13:8, 'Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.'
- e. I perceive dangers in their position, particularly respecting the final authority of Scripture
- f. These churches, however, have alerted many to the dead formalism that may have crept into their lives & worship

## 3. Character of Worship

- a. it seems that one of the surest ways of causing a division in the church of Christ is to make some change in the way it worships: in the choir, the music, the worship leader!
- b. how unfortunate that is! This is one of the reasons that we often have a call to worship or other portion from the book of Psalms, so that we can see just how varied and diverse was the worship of the people of Israel.
- c. God's people are diverse
  - (A) some are given to worship in a quieter fashion
  - (B) some with more exuberance, making a joyful noise

- (C) but in any case we are to ‘... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father’ (Ephesians 5:18v-20)
- d. the variety found in creation suggests God is pleased to be worshipped in many ways, if it be in spirit and in truth

#### 4. The Heart of the Matter

- a. we could go on with a list of things in which churches differ
  - (A) in the way the communion is served
  - (B) in the names given to its leaders
  - (C) in the position they hold on the second coming
  - (D) in the relative emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in the realization of salvation
  - (E) even on what part women can take in Christian service
  - (F) needlessly accentuating wherein Christians differ
- b. but let us get right to the heart of the matter
- c. In order to make a little more room in its sanctuary, made some changes in the front platform and the placement of the musical instruments, the pulpit, and so on. The first Sunday, the minister was berated by a member of his congregation. ‘The communion table should be in the very middle of the front, because to remember Christ is central. The pulpit should be behind the table in the centre, because the preaching of the word is central and stands behind remembering Christ. If it isn’t changed back, then I am leaving this church!’ The pastor responded mildly, ‘If Christ is central to your life, do these externals matter?’
- d. The church I need to attend is the one that helps me to put Jesus Christ in the very centre of my life.
- e. and with that, let me warn of

#### F. Some Essential Differences between Churches

- 1. Churches which deny that the Bible is God’s own word
  - a. this I give first, because it is the cause and source of every other essential difference between churches

- b. the denial of the authority of God's word may be actual or factual – by what they teach, by the way they act
- c. some churches, in their teaching refer little if any to the Bible, but speak the commandments and traditions of men
- d. some actively deny its authority and inspiration, treating it as just another book
- e. so, over time with God's word denied, so also pass the Deity of Christ, the reality of sin, the necessity of salvation, and every other precious truth that Scripture contains: –

2. Such churches teach we can be saved by our works

- a. this lie dates back to Cain and Abel, with Abel coming by God's way, and Cain by his own works
- b. such a church proclaims another alien gospel which is really not another gospel, for it offers not true message of salvation that can be taken by a person in their sin
- c. but condemns its listeners to a lost eternity
- d. we are to have nothing to do with such churches

G. Conclusion

1. this message is not to inspire you to look for another church

- a. but rather to point out some important truths of our faith
- b. and to distinguish them from those on which we can agree to disagree, and so maintain the unity of the body of Christ
- c. but also, if the time should come when you are looking for a church in which to worship, you will make that choice based upon essentials rather than non-essentials

2. perhaps, too, this may help you when an unbeliever questions you as to all the denominations

- a. that you may avoid getting into side-issues
- b. and point such a person the Jesus Christ

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. From *Fredericksburg Bible Illustrator*, 1997 – Kerux illustrations #15101