

A Solid Foundation

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.... Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you,” (2 Timothy 1:8, 13-14).

When we explain who we are as *Brethren*, sometimes we share our ordinances and some distinctive beliefs and practices. Yet it is a good reminder that we Brethren have a sound and solid foundation in the *historical belief and practice of the whole Church*. That is, the Brethren did not spring forth in 1708 fully formed and “new.” The early Brethren, as did the Reformers before them, grounded their faith and practice firmly in Scripture and Church history, and sought to recover the original faith as found in the New Testament.

"This body of Christians originated early in the eighteenth century, the church being a natural outgrowth of the Pietistic movement following the Reformation" (*Brethren Card*, #1).

So, it's good to understand that:

1. The Brethren are Christians. We are found to share the same *universal* Christian beliefs as the Church has held since the first century. We affirm the foundational beliefs as held in the statements of faith called the *Nicene Creed*, the *Apostles' Creed*, and the *Chalcedon Definition*. The *Apostles' Creed* is found in the responsive reading section of our Blue Hymnal. The historical Brethren caution with human expressions of creeds is that they cannot replace Scripture (particularly the New Testament), and that Christian living should adorn the faith to which we hold.

The Brethren *affirm* all that is orthodox: that is, *what has been believed everywhere and believed by all faithful Christians in every age*. We hold to the Faith once delivered to the saints. This includes basics such as the Trinity, the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, His bodily Resurrection, and the resurrection of all human beings to eternal life or everlasting judgment.

The Brethren *reject* heretical teachings that have cropped up through the centuries. This has included both moral laxity and doctrinal looseness that have ended up in some form of liberalism, universalism, or Unitarianism. Our commitment to the great body of sound teaching moves us to reject unorthodox ideas and aberrant theology that seem to come around again and again.

2. The Brethren are Reformation Christians. We hold, with the great Reformers of the 16th Century, that our final authority is Scripture, or the principle of sola Scriptura [Scripture alone]. This does not mean that the Bible is our *only* authority, but that our *final appeal* is to the Scriptures. In practical

effect, this requires us to reject medieval additions (purgatory, Mariology, the confessional, the mass, infant baptism, last rites, etc.).

Brethren elder, H.C. Early, said in 1908,

“The Protestant churches, for the most part, agree on the large and fundamental doctrines of the New Testament. ... They are the great doctrines believed and taught by them all, and the Brethren would be understood as believing and teaching them with all their heart. For them they contend as of fundamental importance. The Brethren are settled in the conviction that whatever else may be held in ever so good faith, it must be in vain if the foregoing doctrines, as fundamental doctrines, are not most heartily believed and accepted. On this point [the Brethren are] fully established.”

Being Reformation Christians calls us to hold the centrality of the Cross and the supreme value of the Atonement by the Lord Jesus Christ in our behalf. We understand, with the Protestant Reformation, that salvation is by grace alone through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

3. The Brethren are Anabaptist Christians. We understand the New Testament to teach baptism of believers only. The word, *Anabaptist*, (re-baptizer) is the nickname applied during the Reformation as the believers held to baptism of believers only, in contrast to the universal church practice of infant sprinkling.

We teach the Anabaptist emphasis faithful church membership and the outward expression of our faith through its New Testament rites (such as baptism) and ordinances. Our relationship with God is both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with His people). It goes beyond mere personal salvation. So we ask our prospective members to make an outward, public commitment to the congregation, and the congregation commits to each member to teach the Scriptures, proclaim the Gospel, and encourage one another.

We ask, “As you willingly unite with the Blue River Covenant Brethren Church, will you worship, serve, and share in its program, supporting it by your earnest prayers, loyal service, regular attendance, and faithful stewardship?” and “Will you hear and abide by the standards of the Church based on the New Testament, and help her in her ongoing work?”

We hold to Biblical obedience and practical holy living. This relates to the outward expression of our faith in Christ. The Church is to teach believers the whole counsel of God which includes *encouragement* to live a holy life and *accountability* to one another.

4. The Brethren are Pietist Christians. The Pietist movement arose in the late 1600s in response to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). The Pietists observed that many professing Christians had a nominal commitment to the Church, yet not reflected in personal, daily living. In other words, people were

stating a Christian connection (often through infant baptism), and not living out a vital Christian experience.

We Brethren are Pietist in that we emphasize a personal experience of the New Birth. We understand that we are to encourage both a personal trust in Christ for salvation and a personal growing walk with Christ through life. This growth happens through the personal disciplines of devotional prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. This is the inward expression of our faith in Christ.

These all, taken together (and sometimes in tension with each other) give us a firm basis on which to herald the Gospel, to live in experience of the fullness of Christ, and to worship and work together for the glory of God.

(This message was originally preached at Blue River on 5 January 2020.)

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