

Background of *A Centennial Statement*

When the 1981 General Conference directed that a statement of the beliefs and practices of The Brethren Church be developed, a group of volunteers began at once to work. Agreeing that we are a noncredal fellowship, they set out to prepare a centennial statement in honor of the denomination's founding in 1883.

For over two years the task force labored to produce a document that would be a testimony of our beliefs and practices. The 1983 General Conference accepted this statement as "a testimony of the faith and life of The Brethren Church at this milestone in our history."

The statement is in two parts, reflecting the historic stance of our church that faith must be seen in life. Scriptural references are provided for documentation and for more in-depth study.

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A Centennial Statement

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The Brethren Church was formally organized at Dayton, Ohio, on June 6-7, 1883. The Brethren movement from its beginnings in 1708 had always avoided a formal creed, fearing that it would limit the work of the Holy Spirit in shedding new light on Scripture. The Dayton Convention reaffirmed this historic position that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our all-sufficient creed and rule of practice.

With that unchanging creed, each generation of Brethren must struggle under the Spirit's guidance to discern the meaning of Scripture for its life. Such a process has several important values: it can give renewed purpose and direction to the church; it can bring the church to greater unity in thought and practice; and it assists the church in declaring its fundamental beliefs to the world.

This centennial statement, therefore, is not meant to be a creed but a milestone in the spiritual journey of The Brethren Church. It is a testimony of this generation's faith and life.

The Message of Faith

The Word

Brethren doctrine centers on Jesus Christ as the living Word of God. The Holy Spirit progressively revealed God's one plan of salvation in Christ from its first promise in the Old Testament to its fulfillment in the New. Given in human words in history, the Scriptures of both Testaments are the inspired Word of God, authoritative, trustworthy, and true in every respect. The New Testament, witnessing to the climax of that history, is the final rule of faith and life for the church. As an expression of grateful love to God, Brethren believe and obey the Bible, for only the written Word reveals to us Jesus Christ, the living Word.

John 1:1-4, 14

1 Pet. 1:10-11

Gen. 3:15; Matt. 5:17-20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; John 10:35

Heb. 1:1-2

John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 5:3; John 5:39, 45-47; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47

The Triune God

The Bible reveals one true and living God in three equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This one God is eternal, infinite, personal, and perfect. The description and reality of the trinity transcend human reason, logic, and proof; they remain matters of revelation, confession, and worship. In holy love the triune God, by an act of sovereign will, created the universe and all living things. In this activity, as in everything touching the world of space and time, all three persons of the Godhead participated.

Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 2:5; Gen. 1:26; 3:22; Matt. 3:13-17; 2 Cor. 13:14; Ex. 34:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:17

John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 13:12

Gen. 1:1-2:3; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3

John 14:9-12; John 16:13-15

The Father

Scripture reveals the first person of the trinity as the Father. The created world testifies to Him in both the external order of nature and the internal working of conscience. As the Father of Old Testament Israel, He led the nation with parental love and care, with warnings, chastenings, and promise of inheritance. He sent His beloved Son into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. All who confess Him as Lord, the Father makes a new creation and adopts as His children.

Psalms 19:1; Rom. 1:20-21; Rom. 2:14-16

Is. 63:15-16; 64:8; Ps. 78:1-72; 105:1-45; Ps. 106:1-48

Deut. 7:6-16; Matt. 3:16-17; John 6:57; John 8:42; 17:8; John 1:12; Rom 8:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 4:4-7

Sin

God created humanity, male and female, in His own image with freedom to obey or disobey Him. As a result of their disobedient choice sin entered our race, and its effects of guilt and corruption have passed on to every person. The image of God, though not destroyed, is now distorted. Sin dwells in all people, making them unable to please God or to escape its power in their lives. The penalty of sin is death, but a new, right relationship with God is promised to those who accept life in Christ Jesus.

Gen. 1:26-27; 2:16-17; Gen. 3:17

Rom. 5:12-19;

Gen. 9:5-6 Matt. 7:11; Rom. 3:23; 7:18-25; Rom. 8:6-8

Rom. 6:23; John 1:12

The Son

The second person of the trinity is the Son. He is the living Word, the revelation and revealer of the unseen Father. Although He possessed the divine nature from eternity, the Word became flesh for us and for our salvation. He was born of a virgin and lived the perfect human life upon earth. As Man and God, Jesus lovingly gave Himself for others in a ministry of service and reconciliation. His obedient life led to His sacrificial death in fulfillment of prophecy. Upon the cross He bore sin and its penalty in our place. He was raised and glorified in the body in which He suffered and died. He ascended as Lord and Savior into heaven, where He continually intercedes for those who are His and from which He will return in glory. Therefore He is the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in Him, submitting to His Lordship.

John 1:1-4, 14, 18; John 14:5-10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:3-4;

Phil. 2:5-11; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15;

Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:10-11

1 Cor. 15:3-4; Phil 2:8; Is. 53:4-12; 1 Pet. 2:24; John 20:24-29; Phil. 2:9; Acts 1:9-11; Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24, 28; Matt. 24:30

Acts 4:12 Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 5:9

Salvation

Salvation is both an event and a process: it is an accomplished fact, a continuing walk, and a future hope. Always the gift of God, salvation is received by repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, both witnessed to through water baptism. In faithfulness to His promises, God adopts believers as His children, forgiving their sins and giving them His Holy Spirit. They in turn demonstrate their faith by obeying the commands of Christ and following His example in daily living. Scripture uses various terms to describe aspects of salvation, but ultimately it means Christlikeness-conformity to the image of God's Son by the work of His Spirit within us. To that end we are kept by the power of God, which operates through our faith.

Phil. 1:6; Col. 2:6

Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12

John 1:12; Gal. 4:4-5; Acts 2:38

Matt. 22:34-40; Eph. 4:17-24; 1 John 2:4-6;

Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 4:11-16;

1 Pet. 1:5

The Holy Spirit

The third person of the triune God is the Holy Spirit. He was active in creation, the history of Israel, the inspiration of Scripture, the ministry of Jesus, and the birth of the church. The Spirit likewise acts today, opening the mind to understand Scripture, calling forth the response of repentance and faith, and giving the desire and ability to grow in Christ likeness. The New Testament portrays His activity as both event and process: It describes the event using the terms receiving, being filled, sealed, and baptized to indicate that the Holy Spirit comes to the believer at conversion. It describes the process as the Holy Spirit filling and equipping Christians at numerous times for special tasks. He joins them to Christ's church, directs them to a local congregation of believers, and bestows on them spiritual gifts for the church's ministry. The Spirit's indwelling is to make a visible difference in the lives of Christians as they yield to, and cooperate with, His transforming power.

Gen. 1:1-2; Num. 11:16-30; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Matt. 3:13-17; Acts 10:38; Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor. 2:12-14

John 16:7-11; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 5:16-25

Acts 8:15, 19; 10:47; Acts 19:2; Acts 2:4; 9:17; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Acts 1:5; 11:16-17; 1 Cor. 12:13

Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 12:7-11

1 Cor. 12:13

1 Cor. 12:7

1 Cor. 6:17-20; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 3:14-19

The Church

God's purpose in human history is to form a people for His own glory. This purpose, begun in the Old Testament nation of Israel, is continued in the New Testament church, which is founded upon Jesus Christ. He calls it to be a visible body of His followers, extending His own ministry in the world. It is composed of all who have received Him as saving Lord and have committed themselves to being His faithful disciples. This one body finds expression in local communities of believers who are responding to the call of God. Through mutual submission they covenant together for the purposes of worship, nurture, evangelism, and service.

Ex. 6:7; Deut. 7:6-8; Is. 43:5-7

1 Pet. 2:9-10

1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 5:13-16; 2 Cor. 5:18-20

Acts 2:38-41; Matt. 16:24-26

1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 1:2

Eph. 5:18-21

Acts 2:42-47

God in His gracious love gave to the church special gifts through His Spirit. These gifts, varied and numerous, have but one purpose: to strengthen the body by equipping each member for ministry. Love is the framework in which the gifts operate and guides their use for the common good.

Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31;

Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26; Eph. 4:12;

1 Cor. 13:1-13; Eph. 4:15-16

God also gave to the church ordinances, symbolic rites established by the command and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles. They are pledges of our faithfulness to Him, visible declarations of the gospel, and necessary expressions of an obedient faith. The ordinances include baptism by trine immersion; confirmation by the laying on of hands; the threefold communion service consisting of the washing of feet, the love feast, and the bread and cup; and the anointing of the sick with oil. The ordinances uniformly testify to the gracious work of the triune God for His people in the past, in the present, and in the future.

John 13:16-17

1 Cor. 11:26

John 13:15

Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 8:14-17; Acts 9:10-19

John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 11:20-22; 1 Cor. 11:33-34; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Mark 6:13; James 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 11:26

Last Things

By the sending of His Son, God inaugurated the last days. Therefore the church waits eagerly for the consummation of the divine plan in Christ. Prior to that, the human body at death returns to the dust from which it came. The soul of the Christian goes immediately to be with the Lord, while the souls of the unsaved enter into torment. The climax of God's plan will include the personal, visible return of Jesus Christ from heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords; the bodily resurrection and judgment of believers unto eternal life; the bodily resurrection and judgment of the wicked unto eternal punishment; and a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, where the saved will live eternally with the Lord. The Bible does not focus so much on the details and order of final events as on how believers are to live in light of these things.

Heb. 1:1-2; Rom. 8:22-25; 1 Cor. 15:20-28

Gen. 3:19; Ps. 104:29

Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:21-24

Matt. 16:27; 24:1-51; Acts 1:11

1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Tim. 6:14-15; Rev. 19:16;

Rev. 20:1-22:5; Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Is. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:13

2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:11-15; 1 John 3:2-3

The Life of Faith

Brethren have asserted from their beginnings that believers must hold correct doctrinal beliefs and also demonstrate visibly the new life which they have received in Christ Jesus. Thus doctrine is no mere exercise of the mind but a declaration through the entire life that Jesus Christ is Lord. For this reason Brethren life, like Brethren belief, centers on Jesus Christ.

Matt. 7:21-27

God has made available to us in Christ and the Spirit, in Scripture and the church, all the resources needed to live the life of faith. By His life Christ exemplified the walk to which we are called; by His death He made possible renewed fellowship with the Father; by His resurrection He revealed the power that is available to us. The Holy Spirit now enables us as God's children to live in obedience to Scripture and grow in spiritual maturity. Scripture provides the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles which we are to follow as a loving response to God and as a means of glorifying Him. The church is the gathered community which nurtures believers in the life of faith. Using these resources, we can demonstrate the new birth through new behavior. What we are by faith in Christ we are to become by faithfulness to our Lord.

1 John 2:6; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; 1 John 1:3

Eph. 1:18-21

Rom. 8:12-17; Gal. 5:16-25; John 14:15, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; Col. 1:9-10

Heb. 10:23-25

Col. 1:21-23; 2:6-7

The Individual

Obedience

Personal obedience is a necessary expression of faith in Christ. We are to obey the teachings of Christ and the apostles not as a means of salvation, but as a grateful response to the grace we have received. Likewise our obedience is not motivated by slavish adherence to external laws, but by inner commitment to love God and please Him in all respects. While perfection is unattainable in this life, we press on toward the goal of full obedience to Christ.

Rom. 1:5; 16:26; James 2:18-26; Eph. 2:8-10

Col. 1:9-12; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Col. 2:20-3:3

Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Phil. 3:12-14

The Devotional Life

The devotional life is the practice of private worship. It recognizes that the heart of the Christian faith is a personal relationship between the God of holy love and human beings for whom He cares. For this bond of fellowship and love to grow, the believer must give consistent attention to prayer and to the reading and study of Scripture. In faithful devotional life God meets us and we meet Him. The effect is the believer's deepening trust, growing understanding, and Christlike living.

Deut. 7:6-16; 1 John 4:7-19
Luke 5:16; Phil. 4:6-7
2 Tim. 2:15; 3:14-17
Phil. 4:8-9
Ps. 1:1-6; 9:10; Prov. 9:10

Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual maturity is the process of transforming the entire character of the believer into the image of Christ. He is the source, the focus, and the goal of this process. Christians mature as they practice a vital devotional life, use their gifts, share their faith, and demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. The result is a character marked by wisdom, balance, and, above all, love.

Eph. 4:11-13; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; Col. 2:6; Ps. 1:1-6
Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Pet. 3:15; Gal. 5:16-25; Col. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 13:4-7

The Family

Marriage

God ordained marriage at creation as the lifelong covenant between a man and a woman that creates a new family unit. The New Testament uses the relationship between Christ and His church as the model for the union between a husband and a wife. The love they share is demonstrated through mutual respect and support as each responsibly serves the other. Exclusive to marriage is the sexual relationship. It is God's gift, and is for the expression of intimacy and the continuation of the human race.

Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:3-6
Eph. 5:21-33
Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7

1 Cor. 6:9-11; Heb. 13:4; Gen. 1:27-28; Prov. 5:15-23

Family

The family is ordained by God as society's basic unit. Its nucleus is a husband and a wife and any children they may have. Scripture commands parents to provide the proper environment in which children can grow physically, emotionally, and spiritually. As an expression of this responsibility, parents are encouraged to bring their children before the congregation in an act of public dedication. By instruction and example, parents are to teach their children about faith in God, leading them toward personal acceptance of Christ as saving Lord. Children are to honor and obey their parents, and so learn to become responsible individuals through their parents' loving support and discipline. All family members share obligation for the care of one another.

Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24
Deut. 6:5-7; Ps. 78:1-8; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21
1 Sam. 1:27-28; Luke 2:22; Matt. 19:13-15
2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15
Ex. 20:12; Prov. 6:20-24; Luke 2:51-52; Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20
1 Tim. 5:8

The Church

Worship

The church worships when believers gather to praise and honor the living God. His nature and works call forth responses of reverence, submission, adoration, and celebration. These responses take the forms of reading and declaring His Word, praying, singing, giving, and other activities that glorify God. The worship experience should never be taken lightly. It requires preparing the heart, focusing the mind, exercising the will, and the participation of each worshiper. True worship glorifies God and renews His people.

1 Ch. 16:7-36; Ps. 8:1-9; 100:1-5; Rom. 11:33-36

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:18-20

John 4:23-24; Rom. 12:1-2; Ps. 33:1; Heb. 12:28-29

Fellowship

The source of Christian fellowship is our relationship with God restored through Christ. Fellowship is the bond that forms as God joins believers to one another in Christ's body by His Spirit. True fellowship is Christ-centered, resulting in a unity which is based on truth, love, and humility. Therefore togetherness without substance, emotion without obedience, or tolerance without caring cannot be fellowship. Genuine fellowship will produce a sense of mutual concern, wholehearted service, and abiding joy. The nearest the church approaches the divine ideal of fellowship is in the experience of the communion service.

1 John 1:1-3

1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:1-6

Eph. 4:14-16; Phil. 2:1-4

John 13:34-35; Gal. 5:13-15; 1 John 1:3-4

Discipleship

Jesus calls people to follow Him, learn from Him, and bring others to Him. This lifelong process is discipleship. It begins as the Holy Spirit leads persons to repentance and faith in Christ. It continues as they use the resources available in Christ and the Spirit, in Scripture and the church, to grow in the life of faith. The church is responsible to shepherd and nurture believers in their growth. Discipleship is not optional for the Christian. The life goal of every believer is Christlikeness.

Matt. 11:28-30; Matt. 16:24-26; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 14:25-33

Heb. 5:11-6:2

Phil. 4:19; John 16:13-14; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 10:23-25

Eph. 4:11-16; Matt. 7:21-23

Stewardship

God has entrusted to all persons resources to manage during their lifetime; for example, life, family, time, abilities, opportunities, and material possessions. While providing these for our enjoyment, He likewise instructs believers to entrust all back to Him, to be rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share. Because our culture has clouded the difference between real and perceived needs, the believer must learn to be content with what God has provided and renounce selfish materialism. Our example is Christ, who, though rich, became poor for the sake of others. Stewards who are found faithful do not put

1 Ch. 29:14; Ps. 24:1

Eccles. 2:24-25; 2 Cor. 8:3-5; 9:6-15; 1 Tim. 6:17-19

Matt. 6:24-34; Phil. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Heb. 13:5; 2 Cor. 8:9; Prov. 11:28; Luke 16:1-13; 1 Cor. 4:2

their trust in material possessions; they entrust these possessions to God, using them for His glory and the extension of His kingdom.

Discipline

The church is called to be a body which reflects God's character of holy love. Therefore the spiritual well-being of each member is its concern. This concern is shown in discipline that seeks the restoration of members whose behavior is damaging their relationship with God or other people. The primary responsibility for reconciliation rests with the person(s) involved. If this responsibility is not fulfilled, the church must take initiative to effect reconciliation because persistent sin weakens the health of the entire body. If these efforts fail, the final recourse is to remove the unrepentant member(s).

Eph. 1:3-6; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 4:7-8, 16

Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20

Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-22; 2 Thess. 3:14-15

1 Cor. 5:9-13

The World

The State

God has ordained governments as His agency for maintaining social order in a sinful world. Christians are to submit to governments by obeying their laws, paying taxes, and honoring those in office. We are to pray for our leaders so that we may lead quiet and godly lives. Christians should minister on behalf of the downtrodden, working within the system to bring about justice. When faced with an oppressive social order, they are to respond with love, demonstrating within the church a Christian alternative. Where obedience to Scripture conflicts with the law of the land, believers must be willing to suffer for what is right. Knowing that both individuals and governments are under God's sovereignty, the church summons all to repentance and submission to the Lordship of Christ.

Matt. 22:15-22; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-15

Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:17

1 Tim. 2:1-2

Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 22:22-23; 1 John 3:17

Is. 10:1-2; Amos 5:10-15

Dan. 3:13-18; Acts 5:29; 1 Pet. 2:20-23; 1 Pet. 4:12-19

Acts 17:30-31

Three Negatives

Obedience to Christ is the center of Brethren life. This conviction has led the Brethren historically to practice non-conformity, non-resistance, and non-swearing. In non-conformity, Brethren have sought to follow the way of Christ in contrast to the way of the world. In non-resistance, Brethren have renounced the Christian's use of violence in combating evil, striving, as far as possible, to be reconciled to all persons. In non-swearing, Brethren have sought to lead such trustworthy Christian lives that oath-taking becomes unnecessary. Every believer must live in a way that exhibits to the world the truth and love of Christ.

Matt. 7:13-14; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:14-16

Matt. 5:38-46; Rom. 12:14-21

Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12

Matt. 5:13-16

Social Concern

The church is called to be both witness and servant in society. As witness, the church is salt and light in the world. This includes not only living obediently but also addressing the moral and social issues of the day from the foundation of Scripture. As servant, the church is to radiate God's love manifested in Jesus. Among believers we seek to express this love through mutual aid and care. In the world we seek to minister to the whole range of human needs. Service to others is in reality service to Christ and a necessary expression of our obedience.

Matt. 5:13-16 1 Pet. 2:12

Zech. 7:8-14; James 2:1-16

Eph. 5:1-2; 1 John 4:7-11

Acts 2:44-45; Col. 3:12-14

Matt. 25:31-46

Evangelism

God has reached out in love through the person and work of Jesus to redeem a lost world. He demonstrated the heart of evangelism by sharing the good news with all whom He met. Christ promised abundant life to those who respond in obedient faith. Following His example, each believer, grateful to God and burdened for fallen humanity, shares with others the new life in Christ. This witness is a natural expression of the total attitude and life of the person under the Lordship of Christ. Empowered and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, believers model and proclaim good news to a dying world for the purpose of making disciples and building the church.

John 3:16

Matt. 4:23-25

John 5:24; 10:10

Acts 5:42; 1 Pet. 3:15

Acts 1:8

Matt. 28:18-20