

A FREE METHODIST PERSPECTIVE ON PREACHING

The Free Methodist Church believes that the Christian church, at its best, has always given priority to preaching, whether during the apostolic era, the Reformation, or at present. It subscribes to this priority for biblical reasons.

Jesus Christ came preaching. He sent forth His apostles to preach and to heal. After His ascension, when the day of Pentecost came and the Spirit was poured out upon the waiting believers, the first act of the apostles was to preach. From then on, in synagogues, town centers, jails, and the temple, they carried out this task.

They proclaimed that in Jesus, God's kingdom had come among us and explained the meaning of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand. As the church became established and grew, the apostles set forth what the implications of the gospel should be in the everyday life of Christ's followers. Preaching and teaching were wedded in ministry.

Eighteen centuries later the Methodist revival was a revival of preaching. The throngs listened to the fervent preaching of John Wesley and his colleagues. As the movement spread, the spirit of exhortation came upon converts who had neither special training nor ordination, and they too began to speak forth the Word of God with convincing force. Those "local preachers" became a major factor in the growth of Methodism.

The Free Methodist Church is in the biblical-Methodist tradition. It believes that preaching is a foremost activity of the Christian ministry and, in a larger sense, that the whole church is God's proclaiming agent.

This conviction has several implications: The hard work of preaching must have a priority in the time and energies of the Free Methodist pastor.

When the pastor preaches with clear, biblical content under the unction of the Holy Spirit, not only will salvation come to unbelievers but spiritual maturity will result in the congregation. Furthermore, under the influence of inspired, biblical preaching, young men and women will be led to follow God's call to preach the gospel.

Jesus came preaching. Those truly called by Him will also come to their task preaching.

RITUALS
THE SERVICE OF INFANT BAPTISM

(The minister coming to the font, which is to be filled with pure water, shall say:)

Dear friends in Christ:

God, through Moses, made covenant with Israel, saying to the people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

In the days of the New Covenant, Christ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." And on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter declared, regarding the salvation given through Christ, "The promise is to you and to your children."

It is therefore our privilege to present our children to the Lord and our duty to raise them in His ways. These parents now bring *this child* to offer *him/her* in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation to bring *him/her* up in the Lord's discipline and instruction.

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, who has made saving covenant with Your people and who, out of Your loving-kindness, has ordained that they should live before You in families; we thank You that it is our privilege to dedicate our children to You, in steadfast hope that they will cleave to Your covenant and live to Your glory. We entreat You for *this child* that *he/she* may be delivered from the power of sin and Satan and be set apart to You by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray for these parents that they may be given divine aid, so that both by instruction and example they may lead *this child* in the way of everlasting life, and so all may come in unity together to Your eternal kingdom. We pray for this congregation, that we may faithfully discharge our duties to both parents and child, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Questions to parents)

1. Do you, in the presence of God and this church, solemnly dedicate *this child* to the Lord?

Answer: We/I do.

2. Do you, so far as you are able on *his/her* behalf, renounce the devil and his works, the lure of the world and the sinful desires of fallen humanity, so that in the training of *this child* you will not be led by them and so that so far as you are able, you will keep *this child* from following them?

Answer: We/I do.

3. Will you faithfully strive by word and example to lead this child to personal faith in Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

4. Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments?

Answer: We/I do.

5. Out of them, will you diligently teach *this child* the commandments and promises of the Most High God, raising *him/her* in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

Answer: We/I will.

The congregation will now stand. Let us acknowledge our duty to strengthen this family with prayers and encouragement, thus aiding both parents and child to fulfill all that has here been promised.

(The pastor shall here take the child, and say:)

_____, I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray: O God, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, grant that *this child* may increase in wisdom and stature, growing in divine and human favor. So guide and uphold these parents that they may lead *this child* into that life of faith in Jesus Christ whose mark in this world is righteousness and in the world to come, everlasting bliss. May *he/she* be brought early to affirm in faith all that has here been pledged on *his/her* behalf, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of His glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 24, 25.)

(In the place of the second prayer, the pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer which will include the petitions set forth in the printed prayer.)

THE SERVICE OF INFANT DEDICATION

Dear friends in Christ:

God, through Moses, made covenant with Israel, saying to the people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

In the days of the New Covenant, Christ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these," and on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter declared, regarding the salvation given through Christ, "The promise is to you and to your children."

It is therefore our privilege to present our children to the Lord and our duty to raise them in His ways. These parents now bring *this child* to offer *him/her* in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation, to bring *him/her* up in the Lord's discipline and instruction.

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, who has made saving covenant with Your people and who, out of Your loving-kindness, has ordained that they should live before You in families; we thank You that it is our privilege to dedicate our children to You, in steadfast hope that they will cleave to Your covenant and live to Your glory. We entreat You for *this child* that *he/she* may be delivered from the power of sin and Satan and be set apart to You by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray for these parents that they may be given divine aid, so that both by instruction and example they may lead *this child* in the way of everlasting life, and so all may come in unity together to Your eternal kingdom. We pray for this congregation, that we may faithfully discharge our duties to both parents and child, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Questions to parents)

1. Do you, in the presence of God and this church, solemnly dedicate *this child* to the Lord?

Answer: We/I do.

2. Will you endeavor to live a life before *this child* which will give witness to your faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

3. Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God?

Answer: We/I do.

4. Out of them, will you endeavor diligently to teach *this child* the commandments and promises of the Most High God, so that your child may early come to personal faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

(Then shall the pastor say:)

Let us acknowledge our duty to support this family with our prayers and encouragement, thereby aiding both parents and child to fulfill all that has here been promised. The congregation will affirm this by standing.

(The pastor shall then take the child and say:)

Name this child. Even as Joseph and Mary brought Jesus in the time of His infancy to the temple to present Him to God, so now, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we present ____ in an act of dedication to God, with a prayer that at an early age in life *he/she* may experience His justifying and sanctifying grace. Amen.

(Here the pastor shall pray an extemporaneous prayer on behalf of the parents and their child.)

Book of Discipline, Par. A/901, Sec. 2

THE SERVICE OF BAPTISM OF CHILDREN UNDER TWELVE

In lieu of the questions to parents or guardians in Paragraph A/901.1, the following may be asked candidates for baptism who are under twelve years of age:

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and do you desire to be baptized in His name?

Answer: I do.

2. Do you intend by this act to testify to all the world that you are a Christian and will be a loyal follower of Christ?

Answer: I do.

3. Do you believe in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

Answer: I do.

4. Trusting God to help you, will you resist temptation always and keep from doing those things which you know to be sinful or displeasing to God?

Answer: I will.

5. Will you attend the church services and do those things you know a Christian should do?

Answer: I will.

Book of Discipline, Par. A/902

THE AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISMAL VOWS FOR YOUTH MEMBERS

Dearly beloved, in your infancy your parents presented you at the altar of the church for the Sacrament of Baptism. That service was one of both dedication and consecration. Your parents dedicated you to the Lord and took vows on your behalf. They promised to teach you from the Word of God and to train you in the way that you should go.

God in His goodness has brought you to years of responsibility, and you now desire to acknowledge before God and His church the covenant then made on your behalf, to profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to consecrate yourself to Him, and thereby to bind yourself anew to His service.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has said, "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven."

Question: Do you confess your faith in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, and do you promise with the aid of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's faithful disciple to your life's end?

Answer: I do.

Question: Have you read and considered the vows taken for you in baptism, and do you affirm them with a humble and contrite heart, putting your whole trust in the mercy of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Answer: I do.

Question: Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace, to share faithfully in the worship and service of the church, to give of your substance as the Lord may prosper you, and to give your whole heart to the service of Christ and His kingdom throughout the world?

Answer: I do.

NOTE: Adults having been baptized in infancy should reaffirm their baptismal vows according to Paragraph A/353 of the *Book of Discipline*.

Book of Discipline, Par. A/903

THE SERVICE OF BAPTISM OF ADULTS

[Use personal names wherever possible. In the case of several candidates, use these or their(s) as applicable.]

Dear friends in Christ: our faith declares that by the sin of Adam, the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature, so that from birth they are inclined to sin; and that new life and a right relationship with God are possible only through the redemptive acts of God in Christ Jesus. Believing these declarations to be true, and in obedience to the command of Christ, (*Name*) _____ has come to make public confession that *his/her* sins have been washed away, and by means of baptism with water, to give sign of that inward washing and new life in Christ which are now *his/hers* by faith. We therefore implore you to pray that through this means of grace *he/she* may be further moved to keep covenant with God and so may *he/she* ever experience the constant washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. (*Then shall the minister say:*)

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, whose covenant is firm and whose promises are always to be trusted, we call upon You for (*Name*) that *he/she*, coming to *his/her* baptism, may by this act give clear witness that *he/she* has received Your inner washing through faith in the cleansing blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May *he/she* ever rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of Your Spirit, the fellowship of the church and the assurance of resurrection to glory in the world to come. (*Then shall the people stand, and the minister shall say:*)

Christ Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age."

You, who present yourself for water baptism, have heard this congregation's prayers that God will continue His loving favor toward you and bring you to His eternal kingdom. And God, who keeps covenant, has promised by His only Son, who offered Himself up for our redemption to grant you these gracious favors. You must now promise, in the presence of this congregation, to keep covenant with Him, renouncing the life of sin, believing His Holy Word and obediently keeping His commandments.

[The following is to be used by the minister as an introduction to the candidates' affirmation of their vows.]

Let us all reaffirm our faith by proclaiming together the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ His only son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

[The alternate version of the Apostles' Creed may be used.]*

(These questions are to be asked by the minister to the candidates for baptism in the presence of the congregation.)

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?
2. Do you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ?
3. Do you renounce Satan and his works?
4. Do you renounce the ungodliness of this world and all sinful desires?
5. Will you live in obedience to Christ?
6. Will you actively participate in the life and ministry of His church?
7. Do you accept the Old and New Testaments as the authority for your life?
8. Will you by this act of baptism testify to the world that you are a Christian?

(Then shall the minister take by the hand each person to be baptized, place them in a convenient place and shall baptize them by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the candidate's desire, saying:)

(Name)_____, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

(Then shall the minister use the following prayer, or substitute an extemporaneous one including the same petitions:)

God, our Father, who gives to all who repent and believe the gospel the right to be called children of God, may Your grace ever be effectual in this, Your child. And may *he/she* enjoy the greater baptism

of the Holy Spirit so that all sinful inclinations may be conquered by Your power, and every Christian virtue may live and grow in *him/her*. Grant to *him/her* a place of service in the fellowship of Your church and may *his/her* witness in the world bring glory to Your holy name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Here may follow a benediction if the service is ending.)

Book of Discipline, Par. A/904

* Alternate version of Apostles' Creed *(as found in the Catechism)*

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He arose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.