

The Brethren

What Is So Unique About Them !!!



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 1. Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone)
 2. Sola Fide (Faith Alone)
 3. Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)
 4. Solus Christus (Christ Alone)
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Brethren Distinctives

Brethren Assemblies are a unique Christian group, and both insiders as well as outsiders to this group should know why it is so. While the church has seen many reformations, the reformation brought in by the Brethren is unusual and has left an impact upon all church groups.

The Brethren are relatively a small conservative and Bible-believing Christian group that has left a remarkable impact upon Bible exposition and Christian practices worldwide. Most church historians are of the opinion that the influence of this group is unproportionately high when compared to the small number of churches that the Brethren have worldwide.

The Brethren movement with its origin in the 1800s went one step beyond Reformation. This movement went back to the Bible to reclaim the full biblical truth. It embraced right Biblical doctrines, right Biblical emphasis, and right Biblical practices. It also rejected widespread errors in the church.

The story begins with Emperor Constantine who in the fourth century helped to push the Christian church into total doctrinal darkness. The rise of the Roman Catholic church, the suppression of all the core biblical truths, and biblical illiteracy continued till the time of Martin Luther. Possessing and reading the Bible was forbidden for Christians till that time. Bible and biblical truths were kept completely away from Christians.

Biblical truth became public once again with the Protestant Reformation. However, since

Luther, Calvin and many other Reformers were former Roman Catholics, they continued to follow many erroneous doctrines and practices. Reformation started with Luther, but it did not reach a mature level of Biblical understanding at his times or till a few centuries after. Another Reformation was needed and that came with the arrival of the Brethren Movement.

The Brethren movement with its origin in the 1800s went one step beyond Reformation. This movement went back to the Bible to reclaim the full biblical truth. It embraced right Biblical doctrines, right Biblical emphasis, and right Biblical practices. It also rejected widespread errors in the church. There were a number of Reformation before the Brethren, but most of them were partial. Some emphasized the right doctrine, but embraced pagan practices. Others emphasized biblical practices, but soon fell into error because they did not give emphasis to the Bible, the source of truth.

A combination of right doctrines, emphasis, practice, and rejection took for the first time when the Brethren Movement arose, and that is why the Brethren Movement is unique in Church History. We therefore look at this uniqueness or Brethren Distinctives under the following headings

- Biblical In Doctrine
- Right In Emphasis
- Right In Practice
- Biblical In Rejection

The Right Doctrinal Stand

The pioneers of the Brethren movement realized that unless a structure is built on the right foundation, it would

collapse. While it is possible to build something that outwardly looks beautiful and attractive even if it does not have a strong foundation, outward show is not the purpose of spiritual reformation. The purpose is to build up a healthy and vibrant community of God's people, who grow and multiply standing upon the strong and sure foundation.



Rev PE Mammen of Kumbanad, one of the the first person who gave rise to the Brethren Movement In Kerala, India

Thus right from the beginning the pioneers of this movement emphasized the need for a right understanding of the Scripture. They made Bible-exposition an essential part of church meetings, and devoted considerable time to study and teaching of the Scriptures. What is more, they kept reminding believers that like the Bereans (Acts 17:11) everyone needs to read the Bible and examine everything in its light. Examine all things and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21) became their slogan.

As a result, weekly and even daily Bible studies became widespread in the Brethren Movement. While many churches gathered people for daily programs, they did so for rituals – and that also, for man-made rituals that only enslave people. However, the Brethren gathered people for studying the Scripture, the divine communication for mankind. Thus their understanding of the Scripture reached a high level and even young people became good at preaching and teaching. This has benefited not only the Brethren, but also all other Protestant church

groups because whenever people try to spread deviant teachings, the Brethren are always at the forefront of opposing it. Since the Scriptures are taught to them right from their childhood, they are usually better equipped to spot error, identify the biblical problems, and oppose it. In this way the Brethren have played a substantial role in keeping the Protestant Christianity active, alive, and opposed to error.

The movement stands upon four key and cardinal doctrines which are not allowed to be compromised or diluted in any way. These doctrines are:

- Sola Scriptural (Bible Alone)
- Sola Fide (Faith Alone)
- Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)
- Solus Christus (Christ Alone)

We have given the concise form of the cardinal doctrines above first in Latin and then in English. The Latin form was common during the Reformation and we keep repeating the Latin phrases as a reminder to the history of Reformation. While many churches proclaimed one or more of the above doctrines, they did compromise with some of them. For example, some churches that emphasized Christ alone negated Grace Alone by adding works to salvation. The Brethren are one of the few who stood steadfast without compromising on all the four cardinal doctrines above. We will thus look briefly at the four cardinal doctrines here.



V Nagal, a German missionary who encouraged the early Brethren in Kerala

We will discuss all the four unique doctrines in detail:

1. Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone):

Numerous churches, denominations, and false cults would like to add their pet doctrines and practices to Christian truth and practice. For this they take help from man-made sources such as church-tradition, the teaching of a prominent leader of the church, or the books written by the founder of the denomination or the cult. Thus for them Christian truth is to be derived from the Bible PLUS other sources, and this is how they turn into denominations, movements, or cults that are unbliblical.

The Brethren Movement recognizes that once anything is placed alongside the Bible as an equal or reliable source of doctrinal authority or divine truth, it is divine truth that gets diluted. Human philosophies, aspirations, and even perversion becomes prominent. A good example is the Roman Catholic Church that uses tradition to impose celibacy upon people who serve the church. This is a totally anti-biblical idea that has become the source of all kinds of moral corruption in the last 1500 years. Bible plus anything (as a source of authority in church or in doctrinal matters) will always result in the obscuring of divine truth.

The first people who left denominational churches in England or in India to form New Testament Pattern Churches had 1800 years of Church History to glean from. Looking at it, they realized that unless the new movement gave the Scripture the unique position it deserves in the church, the new movement would eventually fail. Thus right from the beginning these New Testament Pattern reformers emphasized the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone), and the Brethren worldwide therefore came to be known as "People of the Book".

They based this stand upon numerous statements in the Bible, including the following verses:

- He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and *as for his judgments*, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalms 147:19, 20)
- All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2Timothy 3:16

They also based this stand upon the observation that both Lord Jesus Christ as well as the apostles always relied upon the Scripture, not upon human opinion. "It is written" was a common phrase used by Jesus and the apostles. The believers at Berea were commended by God (Acts 17:11, 12) as being more noble because they decided the veracity of messages they heard by searching for those things in the Scriptures.

The also emphasized that any compromise on "Revelation in Bible Alone" will open up a floodgate of errors, and time has proved them right. Thus people who are faithful to the New Testament model strongly refuse to compromise on this doctrine.

2. Sola Fide (Faith Alone): The whole world is reeling under the guilt of sin. It craves for forgiveness. Many of them go one step further and crave to attain not only forgiveness, but also a state where they are pronounced righteous. Everyone knows that a person who has paid the penalty for a trespass is a 'former' offender. Similarly, even if a sinner is forgiven, they know that it makes them only a 'former' sinner. They do not automatically become innocent or righteous.



Koshy Matthuni, one of the earliest Brethren in Kerala, was kicked out by his own family. He had to bury his young wife behind his house because the Brethren were at that time persecuted by everyone

Very few people love the 'former' sinner tag and would love to be declared totally righteous. They work hard for such a transformation. This desire to be declared 'totally innocent' and 'righteous' is so deep-rooted in human hearts that all religions exploit this human craving. They tell people to give alms, do penance, and be subject to the whims and fancies of an elite class of priests to forgive their sins, or to procure such forgiveness. This is why people of all religions slave themselves to the priestly class. The Christian church is no exception.

From the time paganism entered the Church at the time of Constantine, majority of Christian denominations have been demanding alms, penances, and slavish subjection to priests if people wish to be justified, if they wish to be declared innocent and righteous. However, this is totally

contrary to what the Bible teaches.

According to the Scripture God grants justification to man as an outright gift. There is nothing that man can contribute to obtain this justification. All what he can do is to believe and obtain justification as a gift. Belief is a totally non meritorious activity, this is called Justification by Faith. We read:

- Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20
- Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

The Brethren assemblies emphasized this doctrine right from the beginning. They clearly taught that no work was needed, or accepted, for a person to be justified. Justification was offered by God as a gift. The moment a person believed in Christ, he was declared as innocent and a saint. While other evangelical churches corrupted this doctrine by adding man-made conditions such as a second experience, a deeper life, sinless life, spiritual ecstasy, or other post-salvation conditions for being justified, the Brethren movement stood strong on the Biblical foundation that justification is by faith and by faith alone. Others confuse the doctrine, the Brethren do not.

3. Sola Gratia (Grace Alone): Just as people want to be declared innocent everyone everywhere also have a craving for obtaining 'salvation'. Deep in their heart people know that they need salvation and security in their after-life, and therefore they are willing to do anything to obtain it.

In the numerous holy places of India we can witness people who are going around totally

naked even in chilling cold seasons, people lying on bed of nails or on sharp pieces of glass, thorns, etc. and people who always remain standing and who never sit down, people who raise one hand and who never move it so that it becomes like a piece of wood, and people who hang their tongue out never to pull it back. We also see others who always lie only one one side, doing everything that way, people who roll thousands of kilometers on road and mud to reach holy places. This in a shocking manner shows how far people are willing to give away comforts and torture themselves to obtain salvation.



A Sanyasi reclines on a bed of nails to obtain salvation/justification

All religions use this desire of mankind to exploit them with man-made ways of salvation. People are asked to bring alms, undergo penance, and silently obey all the unfair and exploitative demands of the priestly class. The majority of Christian denominations are also guilty of doing the same thing. Just before the Protestant Reformation came, the priests were even selling certificates to assure people a place in heaven. All this is totally contrary to the Bible, but even today a good number of churches perpetuate the same error so as to be able to exploit people.

The Bible makes it clear that man cannot earn

salvation through any meritorious activity. Salvation is something so precious that the penance done by the millions upon millions of people from the start of the human race does not move us an inch closer to it. Rather, it is such a costly thing that God Himself had to pay the cost. What is more, once He paid the cost through the incarnation and sacrificial death of Christ, God now offers it freely to whomsoever is willing to accept this gift. Thus salvation comes through 'Divine Grace' and not through human merit. This is the doctrine of Sola Gratia or Grace Alone. We read:

- For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8
- Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. 2Timothy 1:9

Brethren assemblies uncompromisingly hold on to this truth, and all attempts to add human merits to grace is always opposed. Many churches claim that a second-blessing, speaking in tongues, baptism, or other religious rites are needed to make one's salvation complete. This way they add human merits to divine grace. We oppose all such human additions and modifications to the doctrine of salvation because all such additions nullifies the doctrine of grace.

4. Solus Christus (Christ Alone):

Almost everyone aspires to be saved. They wish to be assured about the safety of their next life. However, they very quickly realize that this is a task beyond human capacity and that they will surely need help from someone (a Saviour or a mediator) other than themselves.

The Scripture is very clear that salvation comes only and only through Christ. Only Lord Jesus is the mediator between God and man. There is no other mediator, and there is none other than Christ who is qualified to be such a mediator.

Unfortunately, mankind prefers to substitute their own saviors or Saviour figures instead of searching for what God says about the true divine Saviour. As a result, numerous people exploit the gullible people, promising them what only God can provide. Even Christian sects have fallen into this trap and they offer help from dead people, saints (prestigious dead people), and even Mary. Making people to look to these human saviors helps these nominal churches to exploit people, their

money, and their fears.

The Scripture is very clear that salvation comes only and only through Christ. Only Lord Jesus is the mediator between God and man. There is no other mediator, and there is none other than Christ who is qualified to be such a mediator. The Scripture says:

- And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. Acts 16:31
- Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12
- For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. 1Tim 2:5

The Brethren stand strong on these affirmations of the Bible, and do not accept any addition. There is no mediator whether it be Mary, saints, dead people, pastors, priests, or the Pope. Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and the only mediator between man and God.

The Right Emphasis

are highly biblical. However, for such a doctrinal stand to become effective, the right kind of emphasis is needed. Just as prescription of medicine should be followed by regular consumption of medicine, right doctrine becomes practical only when there is right emphasis in the church. However, today the Protestant Christendom has become so corrupt that they have added man-made sets of stipulations along with right doctrines. This in effect has totally destroyed the unique character of the New Testament church and has made these churches resemble the Roman Catholicism out of which we came out.

With Protestant Reformation, an increasing number of churches realize that their doctrine needs to be right. Many of them have produced statements of doctrine that

The Brethren have given emphasis to the essentials right from the beginning, and some of these include:

- Separation
- Priesthood Of All Believers
- Autonomy Of The Local Church
- Necessity Of Evangelism
- Necessity Of Church Planting

We need to discuss each one in detail:

1. Separation: It becomes clear even to a casual observer of the Scripture that God wants His children to be in the world, but be separated from the world in certain things. In other words, we are people with dual citizenships and therefore we need to be careful in what we do and in what we avoid. This is based upon the principle, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19). "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:14).

God's children continue to live in this world after their salvation. During this time they enjoy dual citizenship, of the earth and of the heaven, with totally conflicting demands. Thus there is a constant battle within the Christian life (and within the Christian society) to arrive at a compromise between the demands of the old and new citizenships of the Christian – a compromise between Christian theology and earthly outlook. This kind of a compromise reduces the conflict, and is a great gain for the world, but is a great loss for the church. Such a compromising believer is never able to attain the sanctification, maturity, and spiritual effectiveness for which he/she has been called by Christ. The Scripture warns against compromise, against mingling with error, and against certain types of fellowships. We read in the Scripture:



The human race craves for pagan practices, as the Old Testament history has repeatedly demonstrated, but God's children need to practice separation.

- I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:15,16)
- I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator,

or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

- If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 10,11)
- Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. (Colossians 2:8, 16-23)
- And I heard another voice from

heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. (Revelation 18:4)

From these it is obvious that God wants his children not to be part of those forms of Christianity which are contrary to the Scripture. God also wants His children to be away from evil and sin. What is more, He wants His children not to have fellowship with heretics who are within the family of God, if the heretics do not give heed to doctrinal correction and if they continue to perpetuate their teaching in the family.

Though the Brethren are courteous and friendly to all, they refuse to be part of any endeavor that encourages sin, compromise, error, or heresy. They do not endorse ecumenism, and do not participate in activities that are aimed to promote ecumenism. They are also the first to spot error within the assemblies and outside and they are the first to expose such error. The ultimate aim of all this is to show the world that God's children do not endorse sin, compromise, and heresy.

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error within the assemblies and outside and they are the first to expose such error. The ultimate aim of all this is to show the world that God's children do not endorse sin, compromise, and heresy. There are very few churches that are as strong in these matters as the Brethren Assemblies are.



Ecumenism tries to unite all Christian denominations under the Roman Pope, and the tries to bring all religions under one roof and under one head! Brethren are totally opposed to this compromise.

2. Priesthood Of All Believers: A

special Priesthood to manage religious affairs is known in all religions, including the Jewish faith. It is God Himself who appointed the Old Testament priesthood, its protocols, and its standard operating procedure. However, by the time of Eli the Jewish priesthood was used by many in priestly families for unlawful gains and improper favours. By the time of Nehemiah things degenerated to such a level that Jewish priesthood joined hands with abominable people to work against God's people and divine statutes.

God had different plans for the New Testament era. He brought forth this plan first by destroying the separation between holy and the most holy place in the Jewish temple. Second, place he promoted ALL his people to priesthood so that in the New Testament there is no longer a special priestly class of people. With that God abolished the special priestly class, priestly families, priestly protocols, standard operating procedures, the

altar, sacrifices, incense, and the special vestments worn by priests. We read in the Scripture:

- Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1Peter 2:5
- But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1Peter 2:9
- And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:6
- And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:10

Thus God has brought in a radically new system in the New Testament where every believer, man or woman, is a priest. He/she no longer needs the ministry of a priestly class of special people. On the contrary, each believer-priest in the New Testament is expected by God to function faithfully in the priestly duties given to that person.

While many Protestant churches pay lip service to this New Testament principle, they effectively nullify this principle by "granting" titles like Pastor, Center Pastor, Reverend, Most Reverend, Right Reverend, Archbishop, etc. The Brethren are the only group that emphasizes this New Testament principle with all their heart and all their might. This is the reason why we do not see a special class of priesthood in the Brethren assemblies. There is no special vestment, no hierarchy of priests and bishops. No special priestly class is needed in the Brethren Assemblies to conduct marriages, funerals, dedicatory prayers, baptisms, or the Lord's Supper. No formal

license is needed to preach or teach, and every person gifted in teaching is encouraged to teach, while even those without the gift of teaching are encouraged to share their insights from the Scriptures. This is something unique to the assemblies, and it is impossible to find a church which gives such an emphasis to this most important New Testament principle.

3. Autonomy Of The Local Church:

Church is a totally new system instituted by God. It is completely different from anything that one sees in the Old Testament and it was a mystery before the day of Pentecost. Starting from that day, God revealed numerous things about the Church and Church Age. This information is spread from the book of Acts to the book of Revelation in the Scripture. When all this information is collected and arranged, it becomes clear that the Church of Christ is not to be organized like a human organization.

The New Testament Church is a very large family, with born again members spread throughout the world. The New Testament makes it clear that they are to gather into churches, but that these churches are not to be made into any kind of human organization or hierarchy. There are a number of reasons behind this new command, and one of them is to preserve His church from human control and manipulation. However, practically every Protestant church in the world has organized itself into a hierarchy and there is absolutely nothing in such hierarchies that grant autonomy to the local church. They have used this hierarchical power to introduce man made rituals, demands, and theology to exploit their members. This is totally contrary to the New Testament pattern.

The Brethren are practically the only church in the world that literally and strictly adheres to

the principle of the autonomy of individual churches. Each church is autonomous, and is under no pastor, no bishop, and under no hierarchy. Yet the Brethren worldwide continue to be one New Testament pattern movement because every autonomous church stands upon one and the same foundation, which is the Bible and not any man-made system.

The Brethren are practically the only church in the world that literally and strictly adheres to the principle of the autonomy of individual churches. Each church is autonomous, and is under no pastor, no bishop, and under no hierarchy.

4. The Necessity Of Evangelism:

Preaching the gospel of salvation to the unregenerate is a constantly occurring theme in the Bible. The history of Jonah is the finest example of evangelism and its after effects. Lord Jesus Himself provided a great model through His call for repentance, and commissioned twelve and then seventy to preach the gospel.

Once the Church Age came, the command to preach, teach, make disciples, baptize etc. became stronger. Just before the Church age was about to begin, the Lord commanded "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). They were to start from the time that the Holy Spirit came to the earth in a special

manner. Thus the command to evangelize is to be taken seriously by every generation, exactly the way first the disciples and then the new Christians took this command.

Once people come to Christ, there is a tendency in most evangelistic activities to send them back to their own man-made denominations. This would quickly sap their new-found joy, deprive them of their spiritual priesthood, and would subject them to a man-made and exploitative hierarchy. Soon their spiritual joy would be quenched. However, the Brethren have always stood for nurturing new believers. For this they plant new churches whenever there are two or three new believers are there.

Today there are very few Protestant churches that take the command for evangelism seriously. The man-made hierarchy of these churches have invented numerous man-made aims and goals and all their energy is spent on these worthless and often anti Christian man-made goals. The Brethren, however, have taken evangelism as a high priority activity right from the start of this movement. They know that Christ commanded His children to do so, and they do it with full commitment and vigor. While some churches try to bring

people to Christ by promising health, healing, prosperity, the Brethren do not use any of these manipulations. They preach the gospel, convince people through the power of God and the Scriptures, and bring them to salvation.

5. The Necessity Of Planting

Churches: The last two centuries were times of great revival and evangelistic activity for many. However, a good number of such high-visibility evangelists prefer to send people back to their own man-made, compromising, churches after people accept Christ. A good modern example is the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association which claims to have led hundreds of thousands to the Lord. However, once a person accepts Christ through them, the Lutheran is sent to his Lutheran church and the Roman Catholic back to his Catholic church.

In other words, once people come to Christ, there is a tendency in most evangelistic activities to send them back to their own man-made denominations. This would quickly sap their new-found joy, deprive them of their spiritual priesthood, and would subject them to a man-made and exploitative hierarchy. Soon their spiritual joy would be quenched. However, the Brethren have always stood for nurturing new believers. For this they plant new churches whenever there are two or three new believers are there. They do not worry about numbers, buildings, or a special man-made priesthood. On the contrary, their whole attention is upon the spiritual growth of the new believers and that is why church-planting is given high priority where there are two or three news believers. This is something unique to the Brethren.

Biblical In Rejection

separated unto God right from the moment of his conception. Therefore he had to observe strict separation from Wine. He was not supposed to marry gentile women. Priests in the Old Testament were separated people, and they were not supposed to act like common Jews.

The great men who left nominal and worldly churches to become the founders of the Brethren movement were men deeply committed to the Bible. Thus one of the first thing they did after their separation was to reject a number of things. These include:

- Vanity, Pomp And Show
- Man-made Church Hierarchy
- Salaried Priesthood
- Man-made Creeds And Customs

1. Vanity, Pomp And Show Rejected:

Human heart is totally devoted to vanity and therefore all religions add all kinds of vanity, pomp, and show as it grows and becomes powerful. The 1800s were a time like this worldwide. The industrialized nations were rich with factory produces coupled with loot from their colonies. The Colonies like India had a substantial business class among Christians who were rich. Thus churches everywhere had access to plenty of money but no accountability to man or God. Pomp and show, coupled with luxuries, was the order of day. Church buildings were built to impress people and the liturgy was meant to terrorize the common man.

The first thing the new believers did was to abandon all pomp, show, and vanity. Church services were conducted in common man's language, special priestly vestments and contrived prayers read from books were done away with. Plain halls were used as churches, and all ceremonies including marriage and funeral were made simple. Since gold

The idea of separation comes with the stipulation that the separated ones reject certain things and ideas as stipulated by God.

A good example is Samson who was

ornaments had become a prime symbol of vanity among Kerala Christians, these were also abandoned. There was no more clergy laity difference. All believer-priests were equal in the Lord. Thus the Christian faith of the early Brethren returned to the simplicity of the New Testament era by rejecting all show of human vanity.

The first thing the new believers did was to abandon all pomp, show, and vanity. Church services were conducted in common man's language, special priestly vestments and contrived prayers read from books were done away with. Plain halls were used as churches, and all ceremonies including marriage and funeral were made simple.

The situation continues to be the same today, in spite of much compromise. There is neither special priestly vestments, nor the artificial liturgy that is seen in nominal churches. In general Kerala Brethren continue to keep ornaments of gold, silver, and precious stone away as a part of this choice, and in this matter they are unique among all the assemblies everywhere in the world.

2. Man-made Church Hierarchy

Rejected: There is no hierarchy in the church age. We read "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). All hierarchy has been abolished in church. There is no special priestly class, special vestments, no special liturgy. There are no church unions, no centers, no central pastors or bishops.

However, all of this is contrary to human wisdom. If there is a special priestly class, special vestment, special liturgy which is to be administered only by the appointed ones, then a few priests can control vast numbers of people. The common man can be manipulated at will because only the priestly class has the authority to interpret the Bible in such a system. This is why all kinds of bizarre hierarchical systems and stipulations have come up on the Church age. The ultimate purpose is to enslave people, whereas Christ has liberated people.

In keeping with the Scripture, the Brethren strongly and totally reject all man-made church hierarchy, church-unions, ecumenism, and artificially contrived liturgy. In keeping with the New Testament truths, the Brethren also totally reject the concept of a man-made priestly class and priestly hierarchy. In fact they believe that this hierarchy, through Ecumenism, will ultimately form the One World Church, which would become the Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Harlots. The Brethren reject the Mystery Babylon and also its present manifestation in the form of man-made church hierarchy.

3. Salaried Priesthood Is Rejected:

According to the word, a person is to be paid a salary when he is employed by someone. Thus the moment people brought in the worldly system of a special priestly class "appointed" by the church, they also brought in the

concept of paying them a salary. Thus the priests in these churches are hirelings of the church, not servants of Christ.

These priests and pastors are subject to a human office, central authorities, and are liable for transfer exactly the way it happens in government offices. There is also plenty of lobbying for transfer to better (rich) churches, and those who go against the hierarchy are sent to bad churches as "punishment transfer".



There is absolutely no Scriptural warrant for these things and the Brethren reject it

All of the above happens when the house of God is managed using earthly principles. There is absolutely no command or precedent for such man-made organization in the New Testament church. The Brethren therefore reject the Salaried Priesthood as a totally man-made and carnal institution. Those who serve as evangelists and elders in Brethren assemblies do not serve a human hierarchy. They do so unto God, and no salary is ever given to them. There are neither transfers to rich churches for one's favorite people, not punitive transfers to those who do not conform to the hierarchy.

What is done unto the Lord is done in faith, and it is the Lord who looks after them, not a manipulation-prone and sin-prone human hierarchy. The Brethren are unusual in this aspect of their church, and they take this stand so as to conform as closely as possible to the model provided by the Bible.

4. Man-made Creeds And Customs

Are Rejected: Just as people have a tendency to create a carnal hierarchy over churches, they also have a tendency to create creeds and customs without an end. Eventually these creeds and customs totally overshadow biblical truth.



There is absolutely no Scriptural basis for holy-water, holy-oil, anointing-oil, etc. in the New Testament. These are perversions that have entered the church from the pagan world

A good example is the holy-water used by many nominal churches and by many charismatic preachers. Just as non Christians use holy water to anoint buildings, people on death-bed and priests (when they are consecrated), these Christians also use this so-called holy-water for man-made rites related to separation, dedication, consecration, and death-bed ministries. They

call it as "anointing". This is an absolutely pagan concept, totally contrary to the principles of the church age.

Similarly, many churches have contrived creeds that are totally against the Scripture. Some of these reject the divinity of the Bible, others sanction and justify idol-worship, and still others elevate dead people (the so-called saints) and Bishops to the level of God. Bishops are often addressed as His Grace, His Worship, etc. whereas these are terms to be used only for God.

Then there is the the imposed celibacy of priests. There is absolutely no warrant for this in the Scripture. There is also no warrant for women in Christian ministry to undergo forced celibacy. This is totally opposed to the spirit of creation where man has been made to live with woman and have offspring. The amount of moral sin that this has created is mind-boggling. Worse, some Protestant churches force men to abandon their families after they are consecrated as Pastors. Again this is an open violation of the Scripture.

Carnal man loves to elevate human things to the level of the divine. This is totally and absolutely forbidden in the Scriptures. In keeping with such commands of the Scripture, the Brethren rightly reject all man-made creeds and customs.

Conclusion

From the time of Protestant Reformation, many churches have tried to get as close to the New Testament as possible. Conforming to the New Testament pattern requires that a church should have the right doctrine, right emphasis, and also that it should reject all what God rejects.

Many churches have the right doctrines, but they do not emphasize that which is to be given emphasis and thus the fail in conforming to the Bible. Others have the right emphasis, but do not teach the whole counsel of Scripture so that people soon drift into human do-goodism instead of a

Bible-based holy living. Still others try to give the right direction to the church through creeds and customs, but succeed only in taking the church closer to the carnal society.

The Brethren Movement, however, has succeeded in emphasizing the right doctrine, right practices, and also in rejecting all man-made additions to the church. Thus it is a unique group, as close to the New Testament principles as possible.

After reading this book, some of you might want to point to the shortcomings of the Brethren Assemblies. Please remember, shortcomings will always be there in the Christian world as long as our sin nature is with us. Thus the main question should not be "why are there these shortcomings in our churches". Rather, the right question that each one of us should ask is "since I am part of such a blessed group, what has been my contribution so far to enrich this group". Once our readers start asking this question honestly to themselves, they will find that they are on the path of a new transformation in their spiritual life.

Come, Let Us Go Back To The Bible!

Please Join The Mission of Brethren Research Group

Every reform movement comes to slumber in a century or less. There are practically no exceptions in the last two millennia of church history. Thus each generation needs Ezras and Nehemiahs to rebuild the foundations that were once laid down but which are in ruins now! The only solution is to go back to the Bible and its fundamentals.



The authors stand unashamedly and without wavering on the following fundamental principles: Bible Alone (Sola Scriptura), Faith Alone (Sola Fide), Grace Alone (Sola Gratia), Christ Alone (Solus Christus). With this in mind we bring to you a set of writers who stand strong on these principles.

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He has authored close to 100 books/ebooks and over 10,000 articles (2011) and a good number of his ebooks are available free. He is also an expert in Indian Numismatics.

He made a decision to serve the Lord and to stand for the Brethren Distinctives when at the age of 5 he witnessed how opponents to the gospel burned Bibles and gospels in Kota where his father (along with the late Dr. MA Thomas, late Paul S Cant, and KC John) was serving the Lord. In the past he has served as the Principal of Rehoboth Theological Institute (Brethren) and the Academic Dean of Brethren Bible Institute, Pathanamthitta. At present he is the Principal of Brethren Theological College, Kallisseri.



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