

PREFACE

The Free Will Baptist denomination is a fellowship of evangelical believers united in extending the witness of Christ and the building of His Church throughout the world. The rise of Free Will Baptists can be traced to the influence of Baptists of Armenian persuasion who settled in the colonies from England.

The denomination sprang up on two fronts at almost the same time. The southern line, or Palmer movement, traces its beginnings to the year 1727 when one Paul Palmer organized a church at Chowan, North Carolina. Palmer had previously ministered in New Jersey and Maryland, having been baptized in a congregation which had moved from Wales to a tract on the Delaware River in northern Pennsylvania.

The northern line, or Randall movement, had its beginnings with a congregation organized by Benjamin Randall June 30, 1780, in New Durham, New Hampshire. Both lines of Free Will Baptists taught the doctrines of free grace, free salvation, and free will, although from the first there was no organizational connection between them.

The northern line expanded more rapidly in the beginning and extended its outreach into the West and Southwest. In 1910-1911 this body of Free Will Baptists merged with the Northern Baptist denomination, taking along more than half its 1,100 churches and all denominational property, including several major colleges. On December 28, 1916, at Pattonsburg, Missouri, representatives of remnant churches in the Randall movement reorganized into the Cooperative General Association of Free Will Baptists.

Free Will Baptist in the southeastern United States, having descended from the Palmer foundation, had often manifested fraternal relationships with Free Will Baptists of the Randall movement in the north and west; but the slavery question and the Civil War prevented formal union between them. The churches in the southern line were organized into various associations and conferences from the beginning, and had finally organized into a General conference by 1921. These congregations were not affected by the merger of the northern movement with the Northern Baptists.

Now that the remnants of the Randall movement had reorganized into the Cooperative General Association and the Palmer movement had organized into the General Conference, it was inevitable that fusion between these two groups of Free Will Baptists would finally come. In Nashville, Tennessee, on November 5, 1935, representatives of these two groups met and organized the national Association of Free Will Baptists.

This body adopted a treatise which set forth the basic doctrines and described the faith and practice that had characterized Free Will Baptists through the years. Having been revised on several occasions, it serves as a guideline for a denominational fellowship which comprises more than 2,400 churches in 42 states and 14 foreign countries.

The National Offices are located at 5233 Mt. View Road, Antioch, Tennessee 37013-2306. National departments operating here include the Executive Office, Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Retirement and Insurance, Free Will Baptist Foundation, Master's Men and Woman's National Auxiliary Convention. The mailing address is P. O. Box 5002, Antioch, Tennessee 37011-5002.

Free Will Baptist Bible College is located at 3606 West End Avenue, PO Box 50117, Nashville, Tennessee 37205.

The Sunday School and Church Training Department and Master's Men are located at 114 Bush Road, P. O. Box 17306, Nashville, Tennessee 37217.

PART I - CHURCH COVENANT

Having given ourselves to God, by faith in Christ, and adopted the Word of God as our rule of faith and practice, we now give ourselves to one another by the will of God in this solemn covenant. We promise, by His grace, to love and obey Him in all things, to avoid all appearance of evil, to abstain from all sinful amusements and unholy conformity to the world, from all sanction of the use and sale of intoxicating beverages, and to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." We agree faithfully to discharge our obligations in reference to the study of the Scriptures, secret prayer, family devotions, and social worship; and by self-denial, faith, and good works endeavor to 'grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together for church conferences, public worship, and the observance of the ordinances of the Gospel; nor fail to pay according to our ability for the support of the church, of its poor, and all its benevolent work. We agree to accept Christian admonition and reproof with meekness, and to watch over one another in love, endeavoring to "keep the unity of the Spirit" in the bonds of peace, to be careful of one another's happiness and reputation, and seek to strengthen the weak, encourage the afflicted, admonish the erring, and as far as we are able, promote the success of the church and of the Gospel. We will everywhere hold Christian principle sacred and Christian obligations and enterprises supreme; counting it our chief business in life to extend the influence of Christ in society, constantly praying and toiling that the kingdom of God may come, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. To this end we agree to labor for the promotion of education and denominational enterprises, the support of missions, the success of Sunday schools, and evangelistic efforts for the salvation of the world. And may the God of peace sanctify us wholly, and preserve us blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.