

Why another church?

In one sense, there is only one Church, consisting of all the Christians in the world. But in the common usage ‘Church’ refers to a group that shares a common cultural background, recognizes a common way of relating to God, and (or) yields to one set of authorities. Some churches see themselves as the only true way of approaching God; others see themselves as one of many possible and acceptable ways of relating to God. We belong to the latter. *We* exist because we believe that God has called us—at least for now—into one of these special relationships. This relationship says nothing about how others should be worshipping God.

What are your doctrines?

First, we believe that God speaks to all who will listen, today. That means that we can know God’s will directly, not only by understanding the Bible. Also, we try to put our trust in God Himself, rather than in His words and promises. The reason for this is that in our fallen state we may (and *will* on occasion) mishear God. Third, we consider ourselves joined by His Spirit, not

by doctrinal agreement. Even then, there is no test to see if our members agree with these beliefs. Maybe some don’t.

How do you view the Bible?

We see the Bible as the reliable Word of God, but not the *only* message of God to men. A consequence of this is that we need not be bound by universal principles. Since the situations Christians meet today often differ from the situations dealt with in the Bible, Christians who depend on the Bible alone must use their cleverness to determine how Bible situations and biblical principles apply to the current situations. Those who listen to God directly don’t have to be so smart—He can tell us what to do or how a biblical passage applies now.

What is your attitude towards other churches?

As each Christian is in a different relationship to God, so God allows churches to exist for people with different ways of relating to Him. No one group has all the Truth (we believe): certainly we don’t. Additionally, since the Fellowship in Houston meets on Saturday night, that (purposely) allows any who wish to, to belong also to another church, as many (in Houston and

elsewhere) do.

Where do you draw the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable beliefs?

In general, we leave such boundaries to God. We would probably not reject any person, although we reject the idea that all beliefs are equal, and certainly reject those beliefs that contradict the basic tenets of the Bible. There are many paths to God, but all (whether the believer recognizes it or not) are through the person of Jesus (JOHN 14:6).

How is the Fellowship organized?

We have a definite, legally established organization, including a Board of Trustees which exercises pastoral oversight and an Executive Committee which carries out day to day leadership. They do real and significant work, but do not attempt to control members’ actions or thoughts. These officers feel called to the work they do but enjoy no great prestige because of their position. In fact, many of the members probably could not name all the officers. There is no paid clergy. Positions of actual leadership in meetings appear and disappear from time to time, as God directs.

Is there anything else you want to make known?

One of the original desires of those who founded the Fellowship was freedom in the Lord. Humans, however, tend to take such a living relationship with God and freeze it into *the* permanently acceptable way of relating to Him, as if any way of relating to God were perfect enough to be valid for all time or all people. They thereby *deify a way of relating* to God, making it into an *idol* that subtly replaces God as the object of worship. Thus, often born in freedom, Christian groups tend to evolve into caricatures of themselves, mimicking their founders' relation to God by confusing means with the end. It could well happen to the Fellowship. This document, for instance, could become a precise *prescription* instead of a loose *description*. The three central doctrines above could become The Three Doctrines, even though members of the first generation, if asked to name their central doctrines, would certainly not say that there are three. Some would say there are none.

We have included in our written rules a means of ending the Fello-

ship, a sign that we do not want to fall into the trap of making our currently successful way of relating to God into a permanent one. We have no great expectation that our children will continue it. That matter is between them and God. Thus, we have girded ourselves against this way of losing freedom in the Lord. Even then, there are no guarantees for the future, only our relationship today.

This brief guide (by Ron Wiltse) is offered *in addition* to the longer one written by Jerry Fine. Its purpose is not only to provide a shorter introduction but, by its different approach, to show how FWC members differ in the way they view the fellowship. If this interests you, his longer introduction will answer many other questions.

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Some questions about

The Fellowship of the Way of Christ