

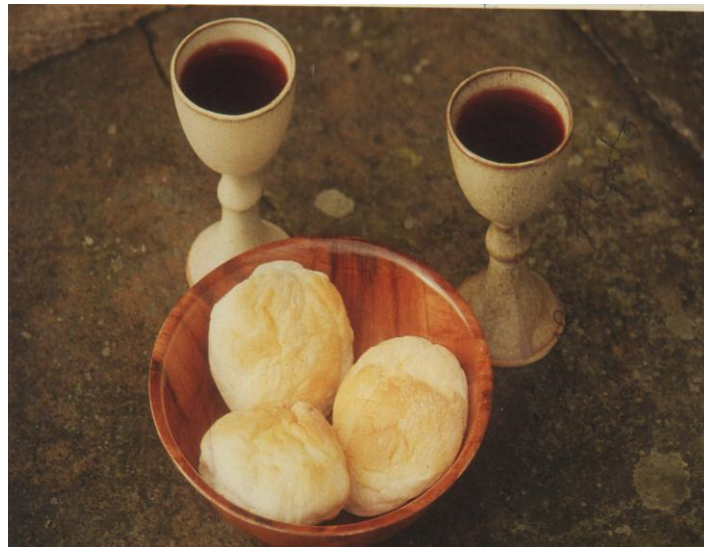


charlton and blackheath christian fellowship
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Charlton & Blackheath Christian Fellowship

The Church in the Boys' Brigade Hall

Children and the Breaking of Bread



***A discussion of the issues relating to the participation of children
in the Breaking of Bread***

Prepared by Mike Leader, June; revised 2006, 2009, 2015, 2017, 2025

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Children and the Breaking of Bread

Introduction

Charlton and Blackheath Christian Fellowship (CBCF) is an independent church, not part of a historic denomination, which has been in existence for nearly forty years. It was founded as a fellowship of Christian believers who had experienced personal renewal through the Holy Spirit and who looked to the bible for inspiration and authority in the outworking of their life together.

When CBCF was recognised as a charitable trust in 1989 a “Doctrinal Basis of Faith” was adopted, which set out the main beliefs held in common by members of the fellowship.¹ Paragraph eight reads:

The observance of Baptism by immersion of believers as an ordinance of divine institution, the Lord’s Supper as a commemoration of our Lord’s death but not as being a sacrifice for sin or involving any change in the substance in the bread and wine.

This statement clearly places the gospel ordinances of Baptism and Communion in a reformed theological context. There has been little discussion or teaching about these two ordinances over the years in the wider church and there is a considerable variation in understanding about the way in which children should participate in the Breaking of Bread or Communion, particularly in regard to whether they should receive the elements of bread and wine.

This paper seeks to examine the biblical and theological issues relating to the participation of children in the Breaking of Bread and to explain the current practice at CBCF for the future in a pastoral context.

Baptism

“It is impossible to discuss the question of who may participate fully in communion without eventually touching on the question of baptism”²

In a guide to the discussion of *paedocommunion*³ Steve Dole (Curate at St John’s, Blackheath) points out the logical connection between “*baptism as a sign of entry into the visible church, and communion as a sign of ongoing participation*”. He also says that those who favour the practice of paedocommunion would argue for the consistent application of the same principles used to justify *paedobaptism*⁴.

Believer’s Baptism

CBCF has always practiced *credobaptism*⁵ by total immersion, sometimes called *Believer’s Baptism*, which means that those who are baptized are of an age where they can personally make a profession of faith. There are strong biblical arguments to support this practice.

In *Systematic Theology*⁶ Wayne Gruden supports total immersion by quoting Mark 1:5, where people were being baptized by John *in* (Greek text) the River Jordan; Mark 1:10, where Jesus came up *out of the water* (Greek text) following His baptism; Acts 8:38, where Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch went *down into the water*. Further evidence for total immersion comes from John 3:23, where John was baptizing at a place because it had “much” water (Literally ‘many waters’). Gruden also argues

¹ See Appendix A

² Steve Dole. *The Full Participation of Children in Communion* October 2003

³ *paedocommunion* is the practice allowing children to receive the elements of bread and wine

⁴ *paedobaptism* is the practice of baptizing children (infants)

⁵ *Credobaptism* is the practice of baptizing only those who confess faith in Christ

⁶ Wayne Gruden. *Systematic Theology*. IVP 1994
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that the symbolism of baptism being a union with Jesus in His death, found in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12, strongly implies baptism by immersion.

He cites Acts 2:4, *those who received his word were baptized*, to support the practice of only baptizing those who are able to make a believable profession of faith. Similarly, in Acts 8:12, Philip baptized men and women *when they believed*. Peter ordered the baptism of those at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48) who *heard the word and received the Holy Spirit*. In all these cases baptism is given to those who received the gospel and believed in Jesus for salvation. There are further examples in the New Testament.⁷

Infant Baptism

In contrast to Believer's Baptism, the baptizing of infants (paedobaptism), sometimes called "christening", is widely practiced by the major Christian denominations and even some churches with a reformed tradition. This practice falls into two main streams of tradition, Roman Catholic and Protestant; although in the Anglican tradition there is some fudging of the edges.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, baptism is one of seven sacraments⁸ which are understood as a means of the Church conveying God's grace to people, by the authority of the priest but without the necessity of personal faith. Sacraments are seen as working *ex opera operato*, which literally means "by the work performed". This implies that the act of baptism causes regeneration. Baptism is regarded as *necessary to salvation* and as *causing* regeneration (new birth) and should therefore be given to all people.

The Protestant paedobaptist view is sometimes known as the "Covenant Argument". It sees the children of believing parents as part of the "covenant community" and justifies their baptism using three main points:

- Infants were circumcised in the Old Testament
- Baptism in the New Testament can be equated with circumcision in the Old Testament
- Household baptisms are reported in Acts 16:15,33; 1 Corinthians 1:16

While there are similarities between circumcision and baptism there are important differences. In the Old Testament circumcision had nothing to do with a profession of faith. It was a physical sign of entrance to the "covenant community". All Jewish men were circumcised and so were their servants. In the New Testament, Paul points out in Romans 2:29 that "circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit", i.e. spiritual and not literal". In the New Testament church the crucial factor appears to be saving faith and new birth, through which a person was incorporated into the body of Christ, the church. Baptism was an initiation, but also testified to the spiritual regeneration that had already taken place in a believer.

The argument from reports of household baptism depends on an assumption that there were infants in the households. There is no mention of children or infants and so this can be categorised as an argument from silence and not good theological practice. Two of the examples of household baptisms, however, show clear indication of household faith: the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:32-33) and Stephanus (1 Corinthians 1:16 and 16:15)

⁷ see Acts 16:14-15, 32-33; 1 Corinthians 1:16

⁸ Sacraments – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (Communion), Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony. Definition of sacrament, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace". Children and the Breaking of Bread

The position of the Church of England is further confused by its baptismal liturgy. In the 1662 Prayer Book⁹ text the priest prays that the infant being baptized “*may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration*”. In the exhortation the priest goes on to say, “*Doubt ye not therefore, but earnestly believe, that he (Christ) will likewise favourably receive this present infant; that he will embrace him with the arms of his mercy; that he will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of his everlasting kingdom*”. The priest then prays, “*Give thy Holy Spirit to this infant, that he may be born again, and made an heir of everlasting salvation*”.

Similar references are found in the first English Prayer Book of 1549¹⁰ which also concludes the baptism service with the baptized person being anointed with oil by the minister, preceded with the words, “*Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath regenerated thee by water and the Holy Ghost. . .*”

In the Alternative Service Book 1980 the blessing of the water is accompanied with the words, “*Send your Holy Spirit upon them to bring them to new birth in the family of your Church, and raise them with Christ to full and eternal life*”. After the baptism a prayer is said, giving thanks that “*these children have been born again into new life*”.

In the most recent rite, Common Worship¹¹, the Prayer over the Water contains the following words:

*“We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism.
In it we are buried with Christ in his death.
By it we share in his resurrection.
Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.
Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son,
We baptize into his fellowship those who come to him in faith.

Now sanctify this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit,
They may be cleansed from sin and born again.*”

These quotations show that Anglican liturgy from its first Prayer Book in 1549 down to the latest Common Worship published in 2000 has consistently implied that infants are born again through the water of baptism. This position is closer to the Roman Catholic understanding of baptism than to the protestant paedobaptists.

Breaking of Bread

In considering the question of whether children should participate in the Breaking of Bread and receive the elements of bread and wine, it is necessary to clearly understand what is taking place in this gospel ordinance.

A variety of terms are used in different Christian traditions to refer to this ordinance, such as Eucharist, Mass, Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper and the Breaking of Bread. In the two thousand years of church history individual terms have become associated with a particular theological understanding and practice, and have then been shunned by those of a different tradition. In evangelical circles Eucharist and Mass have usually been associated with Roman Catholic teaching and practice, and their use avoided.

⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer 1662*

¹⁰ *The First English Prayer Book 1549 John Hunt Publishing 1999*

¹¹ *Common Worship – Services and Prayers for the Church of England 2000 Children and the Breaking of Bread*

The ancient term *Eucharist* is derived from the Greek *eu* meaning “good” or “well” and *charis* meaning gift or grace. Literally it means ‘good gift’ or ‘good grace’ and is routinely translated in Scriptural texts as ‘thanksgiving’. It is usually applied as a title to the service surrounding the re-inaction of the Lord’s Supper and has come to mean that the sacrament is a means of grace given as gift to the church, for which thanks is extended to God.

Historical position

There are various theological positions with regard to what happens in the Breaking of Bread or communion.

- **Transubstantiation**

This position is held by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches teaching that when the priest speaks the words of consecration over the bread and wine¹² the actual substance of the bread and wine is transformed in to the body and blood of Christ, even though the outward appearance remains unchanged. Christ’s sacrifice is repeated and continued.¹³ The Eucharist is one of the sacraments and a means of grace. The non-Eucharistic service of Benediction is still popular in many Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic (Anglican) churches. This involves the consecrated bread being ‘exposed’ on the altar, usually in a Monstrance¹⁴, so that the congregation can venerate it as the true body of Christ.

- **Consubstantiation**

In the Reformation, Martin Luther rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and concluded that although there was no transformation, the spiritual body of Christ is present, or contained, “in, with and under” the bread of the Lord’s Supper. He based this on the idea of Christ’s *ubiquitous* presence, i.e. that Christ is physically present everywhere.

- **Real Presence**

Many Anglicans adhere to a belief which comes out of Luther’s position known as *the Real Presence*, and teaches that Christ is in reality present in the Eucharist under the form of bread and wine. In his early writings Archbishop Cranmer, the 16th Century Anglican reformer, refers to a ‘real’ or ‘corporeal’ presence. In his later writings he tended towards a ‘true’ and ‘spiritual’ presence.

The Articles of Religion of the Church of England (39 Articles), produced under Archbishop Parker in 1563 and finalised in 1571 are still in force today. They were a revision of an earlier set of 42 Articles, largely the work of Cranmer, which were issued by Royal Mandate in 1553 but never enforced. They sought to state the position of the embryo Church of England in relation to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the reformers and anabaptists on the other, and are often seen as pursuing the *via media* or ‘middle way’ between the two theological positions. This has led some scholars to conclude that Anglican doctrine is both *catholic* and *reformed*.

Article 28 is headed ‘*Of the Lord’s Supper*’ and reads:

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another, but rather it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death:

¹² “*This is my body (Hoc est enim Corpus meum), This is the Chalice of my blood (Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis mei)*

¹³ See Ott – *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*

¹⁴ *Monstrance from the Latin ‘monstrare’ meaning to show. It is an elaborate vessel, usually in the shape of a sun burst, with a central glass compartment so that the host (bread) can be clearly seen.*

insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of bread and wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.¹⁵

The range of theological tradition currently in the Anglican Church means that there are those who follow a 'catholic' tradition, believing in the Real Presence, while many evangelical Anglicans hold to beliefs of a more reformed influence, reflected in Article 28. Once again the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) is seen as a sacrament.

- **Calvin** (16th Century Reformer, Geneva)
Calvin did not accept that there was a physical change in the elements of bread and wine, nor that they somehow 'contained' the body and blood of Jesus. He taught that the elements *symbolised* the body and blood of Jesus and gave a visible sign to the fact that Christ Himself was present.¹⁶ Calvin emphasised the *epiclesis*¹⁷, or action of the Holy Spirit.
- **Zwingli** (16th Century Reformer, Zurich)
Zwingli had a much simpler view of the Breaking of Bread. He saw it as symbolically recalling an historical event and no more. This is sometimes known as *memorialism*.

Children receiving the elements of bread and wine

Background

Much has been written recently on the subject of paedocommunion and practice varies widely within the historic denominations. The tradition in the Roman Catholic Church is for children to be baptized as infants, prepared for First Communion at around 7 or 8 years old and the brought to the Bishop or Parish Priest for confirmation in the early teens. The Anglican Church has generally followed a similar pattern, but without First Communion, and confirmation requiring a Bishop to officiate. However, there have been a number of churches during the last thirty or so years who have been given permission by their Bishop to allow children to receive communion before confirmation. In 1997 the House of Bishops issued guidelines for "The Admission of Baptised Persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation".

The arguments generally used to justify paedocommunion in the Anglican Church relate to the logical connection between Baptism and Communion mentioned earlier.¹⁸ Support for this view can be found in the writings of the Cyprian, 3rd Century Bishop of Carthage, who gives several examples of paedocommunion. He also couples John 3:5 ("Unless a man be born again of water and Spirit. . .") with John 6:53 ("Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man . . .") to form a single idea of what was

¹⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer 1662*

¹⁶ *See Institutes 4.17.10*

¹⁷ *Epiclesis – means "call upon" or "call down" and refers to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist*

¹⁸ *See page 1*

necessary for participation in the Christian community.¹⁹ Cyprian believed that it is baptism which establishes membership of the Christian community and participation in the Eucharist which maintains membership. Augustine, 4th Century Bishop of Hippo, also developed a theology in which the communion of infants is both logical and necessary, building on the tradition he found in Cyprian.²⁰

The Reformers in the 16th Century were criticised by the Anabaptists²¹ for inconsistency in practicing paedobaptism yet not allowing infants to participate in communion. Supporters of paedocommunion to-day would similarly argue that it is inconsistent to baptise infants, incorporating them into the visible church, yet to deny them the on-going participation of communion.²²

The practice in many Reformed Churches to-day remains that only Church Members may receive communion. Church membership is usually associated with believers' baptism. Some churches admit baptised children to communion when they are of an age where they can 'understand' what communion is. There are a number of churches from a variety of traditions which either already admit children to communion, or are reviewing their practice with a view to so doing.

Where paedocommunion is practiced it is usually based on a similar argument to the Anglican view expressed earlier that children of believing families are possessors of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:13-14) and are therefore members of Christ's Church and part of the covenant community. They may be baptised as infants to signify and seal their relationship with Jesus Christ and become part of the covenant family. Baptism is seen as an initiation and is in a sense conditional on the child making a serious commitment to the Lord when they become able, and then being confirmed. This is seen as analogous to circumcision in the Old Testament. Those who are baptised into Christ possess full inheritance rights in the new covenant and are included in all its privileges (Galatians 3:26-29).

Breaking of Bread in Charlton & Blackheath Christian Fellowship

In CBCF we break bread together on Sunday once a month in a variety of contexts, such as integrating with the worship, as a response to the preaching, or sometimes as the focal point of the meeting with the rest of the content built around it. Unlike many churches there is no accepted rite and whoever leads is free to use whatever words they may feel appropriate. One of the elders usually leads but others may also be invited to lead, in the spirit of the priesthood of all believers²³.

In practice the spoken word will often include some form of thanksgiving and/or the reading of a gospel narrative of the Last Supper or Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11. The method of distribution is also varied according to the context of the meeting. Examples include passing the elements around the fellowship, inviting the congregation to come to the front and take bread and wine from a central table, or occasionally breaking in to smaller groups to share the elements. There is a policy of "Open Table" and it usual to give an invitation to all believers to participate.²⁴

CBCF is made up of people from a variety of different church backgrounds, including Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, Free Church and New Churches, and those with diverse theological

¹⁹ Cyprian. *Ad Quirinum III, 25* Cited *Infant Communion Then And Now* by David Holeyton, *Grove Liturgical Studies* 1980

²⁰ Augustine. *De Peccat. Mer. Et Remi, 1, 24, 34.*

²¹ Anabaptists. Lit. "re-baptisers". *Radical Reformation groups who reinstated believer's baptism.*

²² Steve Dole. *Op. cit.*

²³ 1 Peter 2:9

²⁴ 'Open table' means that anyone who loves the Lord Jesus, from whatever denominational background, is welcome to share in the Breaking of Bread by receiving the elements of bread and wine
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backgrounds ranging from Calvinistic to Arminian. There is no desire on the part of the church leadership to impose any strict theological understanding of the Breaking of Bread. While we accept that enshrined in our “Basis of Faith”²⁵ there is a rejection of the teachings of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass²⁶, we would like to suggest some broad principles that reflect our current belief and practice.

- We recognise that in the Breaking of Bread we are obeying the gospel ordinance of Jesus to *‘do this in remembrance of me’*.
- The bread and the wine are symbols of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus.
- Jesus is spiritually present in a special way when we receive bread and wine, as He is whenever we meet together, according to His promise in Matthew 18:20: *“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”* As we receive the bread and wine in the presence of our Lord, we “feed on Him in our hearts, by faith, with thanksgiving”.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit brings grace to His people as they obey the commands of the Lord and respond in faith.
- We will endeavour to be open to the moving of the Holy Spirit in our observance of this ordinance, as in all our fellowship activity.
- We recognise that in breaking bread together we express our fellowship unity in the spirit of Acts 2:42, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”* and Acts 4:32, *“All the believers were one in heart and mind”*.

Children and the Breaking of Bread at CBCF

One of the foundations upon which CBCF is built is the authority of scripture. While we take note of the various theological positions taken by churches of the past two millennia, we would seek a sound scriptural basis for our practice. The issue of children and communion is not directly addressed by scripture so we must look at this issue in the light of general principles found in the bible.

The nature of the church which emerged following the dramatic events on the day of Pentecost can be seen for Acts 2:42-47 and the Breaking of Bread is mentioned as one of the four things to which the believers devoted themselves, together with the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship and prayer. New Testament writers show that much of the teaching in these early days was firmly rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. The ultimate fulfilment of God’s covenantal promise to Abraham is clearly shown to be the coming of Jesus as Saviour, offering forgiveness and new life. (Romans 9:8, Galatians 3:7-9)

We have already noted the perceived link between circumcision in the Old Testament and Baptism in the New Testament. There is a similar connection between Passover and the Last Supper, on which our present day Breaking of Bread is modelled. Jesus instituted the Breaking of Bread during what was apparently a Seder meal celebrating Passover. Children traditionally participated in Seder meals as part of the covenant family (Exodus 12:3-4; Deuteronomy 16:11, 14). The instruction was that the whole community of Israel should keep the Passover and Joel 2:16 breaks down the community to include children. It seems reasonable to conclude that children of believing parents are part of the covenant community and should therefore be allowed to participate in the Breaking of Bread. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the Apostle Paul talks about the ‘cup of thanksgiving’ being a participation in the blood of Christ, and ‘the bread that we break’ being a participation in the body of Christ. He goes on to say in verse 17: *“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”* Children are part of the one body and should be permitted to participate in its benefits.

²⁵ Appendix A

²⁶ *The teaching that the priest in some way offers Christ’s sacrifice on the cross again in the Eucharist Children and the Breaking of Bread*

One particular argument against the inclusion of children in the Breaking of Bread is Paul's warning about eating and drinking the bread and wine unworthily found in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. Here there is a call for self-examination and for the 'recognising' (discerning) of the body of the Lord. The overall context appears to be about the selfish way people in Corinth were coming to the Lord's Table, causing disunity in the body (the church). 'A man ought to examine himself' seems to suggest that believers should consider whether relationships within the body reflect the character of Jesus when coming to His table. To prohibit covenant children from the table is in itself divisive in that it divides children from 'mature' members of the body, making them of less value, and contravening the Lord's own instructions to His disciples in Matthew 19:13-14: "*Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

Practical guidance

Having established in principle that children will be allowed to receive the elements in the Breaking of Bread, it is important to have some guidelines to make sure that they participate in an appropriate way. The elders at CBCF have agreed the following:

1. The primary responsibility for children lies with their parents. Parents should decide whether they want their children to receive the bread and wine.
2. Parents should make sure that their children have a simple understanding of why we break bread together. For example we are:
 - Obeying Jesus' command to remember Him
 - Celebrating His death and resurrection which makes it possible for our wrongdoing to be forgiven
 - Looking forward to Jesus coming back in glory
 - Celebrating our fellowship with each other as members of the body of Christ (church)
3. When we are sharing the bread and wine children should sit with their parents and receive as part of the family. Children whose parents are not present should sit with an adult (possibly a children's leader) or a family. Older youngsters (Youth Group age) may sit together for Breaking of Bread, with their parents' permission.
4. It is important that all children who participate should do so reverently.

Conclusion

I would conclude by saying that this is not necessarily the final word on this subject. I believe the position I have taken is biblically sustainable and I have tried to set it in an historical and practical context. I hope this will help to inform our thinking about this important subject and also to generate further study and discussion.

Mike Leader
(CBCF Elder)

June 2006

Revised July 2015, July 2017, February 2025

Appendix A

Charlton & Blackheath Christian Fellowship Trust

DOCTRINAL BASIS

1. The full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures contained in the Bible: their authority and sufficiency as not only containing, but being in themselves, the Word of God; the reliability of the New Testament in its testimony to the character and authorship of the Old Testament; and the need of the teaching of the Holy Spirit to a true and spiritual understanding of the whole.
2. The unity of the Godhead and the divine co-equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the sovereignty of God in creation, providence and redemption.
3. The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall and the necessity for regeneration.
4. The true and proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; his virgin birth, His real and perfect manhood; the authority of his teaching; His work of atonement for sinners of mankind by his vicarious sufferings and death; His bodily resurrection and His ascension into heaven; His present priestly intercession for His people; and His function as the Baptist with the Holy Spirit.
5. The justification of the sinner solely by faith, through the atoning merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
6. The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, regeneration and sanctification; also in ministry and worship and in the exercising of spiritual gifts through the body of believers.
7. The resurrection of the body; the judgement of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ with the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.
8. The observance of Baptism by immersion of believers as an ordinance of divine institution, the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of our Lord's death but not as being a sacrifice for sin or involving any change in the substance in the bread and wine.
9. The personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church.

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Registered Charity No 801409

*CBCF is part of River Network and is affiliated to Churches in Communities International,
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