

Thomas Helwys—Baptist and Arminian

Thomas Helwys was the first permanent Baptist and founder of the First Baptist Church in England. Helwys was Arminian in theology as evidenced in his 1611 *A Declaration of Faith*. In 2009, Mercer University Press published the book, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys* written by Joe Early. Early has provided the reader with a concise theological biography of Helwys and a compilation of all his extant writings. It is the first time that all of Helwys writings having been available in one volume. Early provides some helpful background to Smyth's *A Declaration of Faith*:

After breaking with John Smyth in 1610, Thomas Helwys wrote A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland in 1611. Recognized by the majority of Baptist scholars as the first true English Baptist confession of the faith, the purpose of A Declaration of Faith was to differentiate the beliefs of Helwys's congregation from that of Smyth's. The confession contains twenty-seven articles. Despite their separation, the confession illustrates Smyth's and the Mennonites' influence on Helwys's doctrine in the denial of limited atonement and the ability for a Christian to fall from grace. A significant difference from Smyth and the Waterlander Mennonites, however, is discernable in Helwys's Calvinistic insistence on original sin and what was referred to in his time as "free will." Other difference include Helwys's denial of succession, which he referred to as Old Testament doctrine, his acceptance of some oaths it they did not compromise one's Christian life, the bearing of arms in self-defense, and the ability for a church member to participate in the government. The only original copy known to exist is in the York Minister Library.

Before presenting his Declaration of Faith, Helwys provided his readers with several pages of prolegomenon to explain the reason for his actions. Many of these pages were not accessible, and the pages that are included are quoted from Walter Burgess's 1911 work John Smyth the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England with Fresh Light Upon the Pilgrim Fathers (London: James Clarke & Co., 1911), 2005-11. [The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys, p. 64]

A
Declaration of Faith
of
English People
Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland [1611]

Hebrews 11:6. Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11)

Romans 14:23. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

To All The Humble minded which love the truth in simplicity, Grace and peace.

A Declaration, Etc.
We Believe and Confess

1. That there are THREE which bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the SPIRIT; and these THREE are one GOD, in all equality (1 John 5:7; Philippians 2:5, 6). By whom all things are created and preserved, in Heaven and in Earth (Genesis 1).
2. That this GOD in the beginning created all things of nothing (Genesis 1:1) and made man of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7), in his own image, (Genesis 1:27), in righteousness and true Holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Yet tempted, fell by disobedience (Genesis 3:1-7). Through whose disobedience, all men sinned (Romans 5:12-19). His sin being imputed to all; and so death went over all men. [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 68]
3. By the promised seed of the woman, JESUS CHRIST, and by his obedience, all are made righteous (Romans 5:19). All are made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22). His righteousness being imputed to all.
4. That notwithstanding this, Men are by nature the Children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Born in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). Wise to all evil, but they have no knowledge of good (Jeremiah 4:22). *The natural man perceives not the things of the Spirit of God* (1 Corinthians 2:14). And therefore man is not restored unto his former estate, but that as man, in his estate of innocence, having in himself all disposition unto good, and no disposition to evil, yet being tempted might yield,

or might resist: even so now being fallen, and having all disposition to evil, and no disposition or will unto any good, yet GOD giving grace, man may receive grace, or my reject grace according to that saying; (Deuteronomy 30:19). *"I call Heaven and Earth to record. This day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life, so that both you and your seed may live."*

5. That before the Foundation of the World GOD Predestinated that all that believe in him shall-be saved (Ephesians 1:4, 12; Mark 16:16) and all that do not believe will be damned (Mark 16:16) all which he knew before (Romans 8:29). And this is the Election and reprobation spoken of in the Scriptures, concerning salvation, and condemnation, and that GOD has not Predestinated men to be wicked, and so to be damned, but that men being wicked will be damned, for GOD would have all men saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) and would have no man to perish, but would have all men come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9) and does not will the death of him that dies (Ezekiel 18:32). And therefore GOD is the author of no man's condemnation, according to the saying of the Prophet (Hosea 13). Your destruction O Israel is of yourself, but your help is of me.

6. That man is justified only by the righteousness of CHRIST, apprehended by faith (Romans 3:28. Galatians 2:16) yet faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

7. Men may fall away from the grace of GOD (Hebrews 12:15) and from the truth, which they have received and acknowledged (Hebrews 10:26) after they [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 69] have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted of the good word of GOD, and of the powers of the world to come (Hebrews 6:4, 5). And after they have escaped from the filthiness of the World, may be tangled again therein and overcome (2 Peter 2:20). A righteous man may forsake his righteousness and perish (Ezekiel 18:24, 26). Therefore let no man presume to think that because he has, or once had grace, therefore he shall always have grace. But let all men have assurance, that if they continue to the end, they will be saved. Let no man then presume; but let all work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

8. That JESUS CHRIST, the Son of GOD the second Person, or subsistence in the Trinity, in the Fullness of time was manifested in the Flesh, being the seed of David, and of the Israelites, according to the Flesh (Romans 1:3 and Romans 8:5) the Son of Mary the Virgin, made of her substance, (Galatians 4:4). By the power of the HOLY GHOST overshadowing her (Luke 1:35) and being thus true Man was like us in all things, sin only excepted Hebrews (4:15) being one person in two distinct natures, TRUE GOD, and TRUE MAN.

9. That JESUS CHRIST is Mediator of the New Testament between GOD and Man (1 Timothy 2:5) having all power in Heaven and in Earth given to him. (Matthew 28:18). He is the only KING (Luke 1:33) PREIST (Hebrews 7:24) and PROPHET (Acts

3:22). Of his church, he also being the only Law-giver, has in his Testament set down an absolute, and perfect rule of direction, for all persons, at all times, to be observed; Which no Prince, nor any whosoever, may add to, or diminish from, as they will avoid the fearful judgments denounced against them that will do so (Revelation 22:18, 19).

10. That the church of CHRIST is a company of faithful people (1 Corinthians 1:2. Ephesians 1:1), separated from the world by the word and Spirit of GOD (2 Corinthians 6:17) being knit to the LORD, and one to another, by Baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). Upon their own confession of the faith (Acts 8:37) and sins (Matthew 3:6).

11. That though in respect of CHRIST, the Church is one (Ephesians 4:4) yet it consists of diverse particular congregations, even so many as there will be in the World, every congregation, though they are but two or three, have CHRIST given them, with all the means of their salvation (Matthew 18:20; [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 70] Romans 8:32; 1 Corinthians 3:22). They are the Body of CHRIST (1 Corinthians 12:27) and a whole Church (1 Corinthians 14:23). And therefore may, and should, when they come together, to Pray, Prophecy, break bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances, although as yet they have no Officers, or that their Officers should be in Prison, sick, or by any other means hindered from the Church (1 Peter 4:10 and 2:5).

12. As one congregation has CHRIST, so do all (2 Corinthians 10:7). And that the Word of GOD does not come out from any one, neither to any one congregation in particular (1 Corinthians 14:36). But to every particular Church, as it does to all the world (Colossians 1:5, 6). And therefore no church should challenge any prerogative over any other.

13. That every Church is to receive in all their members by Baptism upon the Confession of their faith and sins wrought by the preaching of the Gospel, according to the primitive Institution (Matthew 28:19) and practice (Acts 2:41). And therefore Churches constituted after any other manner, or of any other persons are not according to CHRIST'S Testament.

14. That Baptism or washing with Water, is the outward manifestation of dying to sin, and walking in newness of life (Romans 6:2, 3, 4). And therefore in no way appertains to infants.

15. The LORDS Supper is the outward manifestation of the Spiritual communion between CHRIST and the faithful mutually (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). They are to declare his death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

16. That the members of every Church or Congregation should know one another so that they may perform all the duties of love one towards another both to soul and body (Matthew 18:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 12:25). And especially the Elders should know the whole flock, whereof the HOLY GHOST has made them overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2, 3). And therefore a Church should not consist of such a multitude that they cannot have particular knowledge one of another.

17. That Brethren who are impenitent in one sin after the admonition of the Church are to be excluded from the communion of the Saints [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 71] (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4, 13). Therefore the committing of sin does not cut off any from the Church, but it is the refusing to hear the Church to reformation.

18. Excommunicants in respect of civil society are not to be avoided (2 Thessalonians 3:15; Matthew 18:17).

19. That every Church should (according to the example of CHRIST'S Disciples and primitive Churches) upon every first day of the week, being the LORD'S day, assemble together to pray, Prophecy, praise GOD, and break Bread, and perform all other parts of Spiritual communion for the worship of GOD, for their own mutual edification, and the preservation of true Religion and piety in the church (John 20:19; Acts 2:42 and 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). They should not labor in their callings according to the equity of the moral law, which CHRIST did not come to abolish, but to fulfill (Exodus 20:8 &c).

20. That the Officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, 3) or Deacons, Men and Women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies (Acts 6:1-4).

21. That these Officers are to be chosen when there are persons qualified according to the rules in Christ's Testament, (1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9; Acts 6:3, 4). By Election and approbation of that Church or congregation whereof they are members (Acts 6:3, 4 and 14:23), with Fasting, Prayer, and Laying on of hands (Acts 13:3 and 14:23). And as there is one rule for Elders, therefore there is but one sort of Elders.

22. That the Officers of every Church or congregation are tied by Office only to that particular congregation where they are chosen (Acts 14:23, and 20:17; Titus 1:5). Therefore they cannot challenge by office any authorities in any other congregation whatsoever except they would have an Apostleship.

23. That the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are written for our instruction (2 Timothy 3:16) and that we should search them for they testify of [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 72] CHRIST (John 5:39). Therefore they are to be used

with all reverence, as containing the Holy Word of GOD, which only is our direction in all things whatsoever.

24. That Magistracy is a Holy ordinance of GOD, that every soul should be subject to it not for fear only, but for conscience sake. Magistrates are the ministers of GOD for our wealth, they do bear the sword for naught. They are the ministers of GOD to take vengeance on them that do evil (Romans 13). It is a fearful sin to speak evil of them that are in dignity [i.e., authority], and to despise Government (2 Peter 2:10). We should pay tribute, custom and all other duties. We are to pray for them, for GOD would have them saved and come to the knowledge of his truth (1 Timothy 2:1, 4). And therefore they may be members of the Church of CHRIST, retaining their Magistracy, for no Holy Ordinance of GOD debars any from being a member of CHRIST'S Church. They bear the sword of GOD, —which sword in all Lawful administrations is to be defended and supported by the servants of GOD that are under their Government with their lives and al that they have according to the first Institution of that Holy Ordinance. And whosoever holds otherwise must hold, (if they understand themselves) that they are the ministers of the devil, and therefore not to be prayed for nor approved in any of their administrations, —seeing all things they do (as punishing offenders and defending their countries, state, and persons by the sword) is unlawful.

25. That it is Lawful in a just cause for the deciding of strife to take an oath by the Name of the Lord (Hebrews 6:16; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Philippians 1:8).

26. That the dead shall rise again, and the living being changed in a moment, — having the same bodies in substance though diverse in qualities (1 Corinthians 15:52 and 38; Job 19:15-28; Luke 24:30).

27. That after the resurrection all men will appear before the judgment seat of CHRIST to be judged according to their works, that the Godly will enjoy life Eternal life, the wicked being condemned will be tormented everlastingly in Hell (Matthew 25:46). [*The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 73]