

# WHY FREE CHURCH MINISTRY?

Serving God in the Independent Church

Graham Beynon

**10** Publishing  
a division of **10**ofthose.com

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (Anglicised Edition). Copyright © 1973, 1979, 1984 by Biblica (formerly International Bible Society). Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Copyright © 2015 by Graham Beynon  
First published in Great Britain in 2015

The right of Graham Beynon to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-910587-49-2

Designed by Diane Warnes

Printed in the UK by CPI

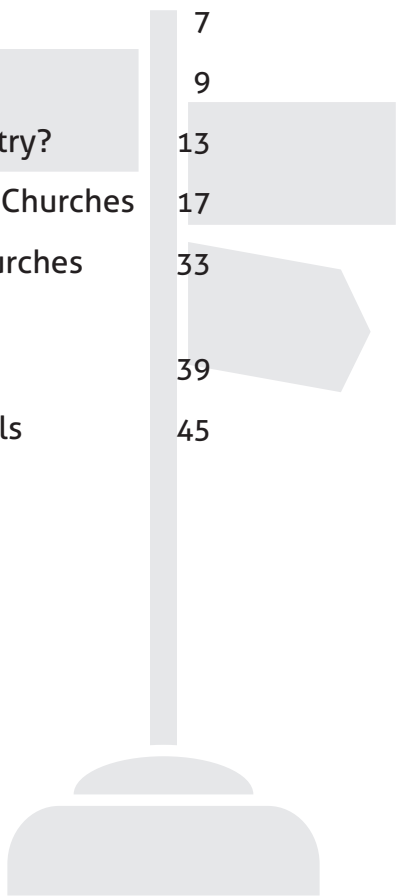
10Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com  
Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England  
Email: info@10ofthose.com  
Website: www.10ofthose.com

# CONTENTS

---



Series Introduction	7
Introduction	9
What Is Free Church Ministry?	13
The Biblical Basis for Free Churches	17
A Brief History of Free Churches	33
How Do Free Churches Work in Practice?	39
The Advantages and Pitfalls	45



# INTRODUCTION

---



In my late twenties I was considering going into full-time church ministry. I had been brought up in the United Reformed Church, but then had come to faith in an evangelical Anglican church. While at university I had gone to an independent church purely on the basis that the Bible was taught well there. I then was in a Baptist church mainly because of some personal influence. But which church should I plan to work in looking ahead to the future?

That was a significant question. It affected decisions on training in the short term, and then ministry in the future. I realised a number of factors came into play:

- My instinctive reactions: how did I feel about the different churches I had been in, and what was my impression of the denominations or groups they belonged to?
- Personal factors: my wife had grown up in independent churches and was very unsure about my going into Anglican ministry. Meanwhile my brother and various friends had gone into the Anglican Church.
- Theological issues: what did I believe about baptism and church government, and should

such things make any difference to where I would minister?

I came to realise that while the instinctive reactions and personal factors were significant, they should not be determinative. Actually, I should decide what my convictions were about the theological issues and choose a church grouping that best sat with those convictions. For me, eventually, that meant choosing free church ministry.

It's important to be clear that such issues are not the heart of gospel ministry – which is about teaching God's word and loving people – but are still significant within gospel ministry. Consider the following questions:

- Where does authority lie in the local church?
- How should churches be led?
- How should decisions be made?
- Who decides whether someone can belong to a church?
- What does, or should, membership of a church involve?
- How would a leader be removed from a church if they became heretical?
- Should a member be removed from a church if they are consistently immoral, and if so, how should that happen?

Gospel ministry in a church is always embedded in a context, and this list of issues form significant parts of that context. Some of them are more background related, whereas others connect more directly with church life, but they all play a part in shaping the context and nature of ministry.

Consider the analogy of family life. How you make decisions, whether you all eat together, who does which chores and so on do not make up the heart of life as a family. But they are part of the context for life together as a family and some of them significantly influence that life. So it is with churches. And therefore those considering church ministry need to decide which context they will work in.

This small book is written for those in a similar position to me all those years ago. You may have a background in different churches as I did or you might feel a strong instinct towards, or away from, different denominations. Recognise the significance of those factors, but try not to let them rule the day. Grow in your convictions as to what God teaches about church life and let that shape your decision.

To help with that I want to explain what free church ministry is, the biblical basis for it, its history, and how free churches work in practice; then we'll finish with some advantages and pitfalls. I am of course biased.

I write as someone who has come to free church convictions. I will do my best to discuss the issues even-handedly but you may want to read something from another perspective as well. I hope, though, that what is written here will help you decide where to serve the Lord Jesus.

# WHAT IS FREE CHURCH MINISTRY?

---



The first thing we should do in thinking about why you might choose free church ministry is answer the question 'What is free church ministry?' And that's harder than you might think because one of the results of being 'free' is that you can be anything! So 'free churches' can vary widely from each other.

As we'll see later, the key driving force for the creation of free churches was the desire to organise church life according to biblical principles. Of course this desire was expressed by people who thought that the established church of the day *wasn't* currently organised by those principles.

## **INDEPENDENT ORGANISATION AND MINISTRY**

So at the heart of free church ministry is the 'freedom' to obey the Bible in church life. That is, it gives freedom from an institutional structure which dictates elements of church life. So, for example, a church within the Church of England *has* to have a Parochial Church Council, church wardens and so on as part of its leadership. Those working in such structures may be very happy with that, or they may prefer that was not the case yet have their own way of



working within these confines. But the point of free church ministry is that it is free from such confines.

So first, free church ministry is the freedom to organise churches as we think the Bible describes it. Leadership, church structures, decision-making, membership, exercise of discipline and more are all thought through from Scripture (hopefully with a healthy respect for past tradition). As we said above, this freedom has a knock-on effect: different ideas of what the Bible teaches about these areas leads to differences between free churches. But the point is that they are free to decide them.

Second, free church ministry means the freedom to exercise ministry in your setting as you think is most appropriate and helpful. That might mean employing certain staff members or starting new ministries such as a church plant. By comparison, in some institutional churches, permission from elsewhere is needed for such things – and may not always be granted. So free church ministry brings the freedom to decide the best way to minister where you are.

We can bring these two ideas together if we think of free churches as 'independent':

1. They are independent in their *church structures* – no human authority outside the local church tells them how to run themselves.