

A Review of the 1963 Baptist Faith & Message

Vacation Bible School

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1963 Baptist Faith & Message Study

Introduction: Intent and Preamble



Baptists have often defended the concept that we have “no creed but the Bible.” The point is not that we have no beliefs or that there are no common themes of doctrine that tie us together. The point of the statement is that we would not allow a summary doctrinal statement define who we are.

We arose in response to a formalized church with defined doctrinal parameters and controls in place to enforce doctrinal conformity. Our very origins decried the need to read the Bible for ourselves to determine how we should present ourselves before God.

When Providence Baptist Church and Rocks Baptist Church were established, we were outlaw churches. It was illegal for anyone not authorized by the Church of England to preach. It was illegal for anyone to be baptized outside of the Church of England. Baptists decried such controls of belief and practice, determining that we have the right and the responsibility to read the Bible to determine what we should believe and how we should live out those beliefs in relation to the call of God upon our lives.

As Baptists, we were generally opposed to creeds, since they were used external controls placed above the Bible. Even as summary statements of basic beliefs, they have tended to be given more importance than the Bible they seek to interpret and summarize. As summary statements, creeds and confessions are interpretations of faith and doctrine. They focus our attention on specific issues and concerns, always with the uncomfortable possibility that as failing human beings we may have misinterpreted the Bible as we summarize the “highlights” of its message. This was the basic nature of our reluctance to adopt statements and creeds—we do not want any statement to usurp the authority of the Bible to speak and correct us.

In 1925, Southern Baptists first adopted a statement of faith for ourselves. We took pains to point out that this was not a creed and had no validity for being imposed on anyone. In that spirit, we also defended that this was a summary definition of what most Baptists believed. The writers took pains to be very general in their statement of belief, rather than defining specifics in various areas. While some people defended inerrancy, others did not, so the statement focused on the common ground of Biblical authority. While there was some discussion as to the nature and means of salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross, the statement focused on the common ground that Jesus’ death provided atonement.

Preamble:

The 1962 session of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in San Francisco, California, adopted the following motion.

"Since the report of the Committee on Statement of Baptist Faith and Message was adopted in 1925, there have been various statements from time to time which have been made, but no overall statement which might be helpful at this time as suggested in Section 2 of that report, or introductory statement which might be used as an interpretation of the 1925 Statement.

"We recommend, therefore, that the president of this Convention be requested to call a meeting of the men now serving as presidents of the various state Conventions that would qualify as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention committee under Bylaw 18 to present to the Convention in Kansas City some similar statement which shall serve as information to the churches, and which may serve as guidelines to the various agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is understood that any group or individuals may approach this committee to be of service. The expenses of this committee shall be borne by the Convention Operating Budget."

Your committee thus constituted begs leave to present its report as follows:

Throughout its work your committee has been conscious of the contribution made by the statement of The Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. It quotes with approval its affirmation that "Christianity is supernatural in its origin and history. We repudiate every theory of religion which denies the supernatural elements in our faith."

Furthermore it concurs in the introductory "statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life." It is, therefore quoted in full as part of this report to the Convention.

(1) That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add any thing to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

(2) That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.

(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so.

(4) That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.

(5) That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures. and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.

The 1925 Statement recommended "the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, revised at certain points. and with some additional articles growing out of certain needs" Your present committee has adopted the same pattern. It has sought to build upon the structure of the 1925 Statement, keeping in mind the "certain needs" of our generation. At times it has reproduced sections of the Statement without change. In other instances it has substituted words for clarity or added sentences for emphasis. At certain points it has combined articles, with minor changes in wording, to endeavor to relate certain doctrines to each other. In still others e.g., "God" and "Salvation" it has sought to bring together certain truths contained throughout the 1925 Statement in order to relate them more clearly and concisely. In no case has it sought to delete from or to add to the basic contents of the 1925 Statement.

Baptists are a people who profess a living faith. This faith is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ who is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Therefore, the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is Jesus Christ whose will is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

A living faith must experience a growing understanding of truth and must be continually interpreted and related to the needs of each new generation Throughout their history Baptist bodies, both large and small, have issued statements of faith which comprise a consensus of their beliefs. Such statements have never been regarded as complete, infallible statements of faith, nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority. Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us.

Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.

It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe.

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Comment:

The preamble to the 1963 statement, expresses that basic aversion to forced conformity of belief. It sets parameters for the statement to be used as a summary of interpretation, but not as a lens whereby one must interpret the Bible. The purpose of the statement is to include the majority of Baptists under the same umbrella. For this reason, the definitions laid out in the statement are couched in general terms rather than in specifics.

The Baptist Faith and Message statement of 1963 throws back to the 1925 version and to the New Hampshire confession before that. One of the underlying issues behind the statement in 1925 was the public clash between evolution and creationism. With the Scopes trials and the perception that science was working contrary to faith, fundamentalists took the spotlight and cried for Southern Baptists to set forth the propositions of Baptist faith. The push to establish the truths underlying faith took a more central stage in Baptist life than ever before. In response to this push, Baptists drafted the 1925 version of the document, though they were very careful to define that this was not to be used in any way like a creed. It was a summary of opinion—an interpretation of truth.

The 1963 preamble likewise sets forth that this statement is a guideline and informational. It is in no way a formal definition of what a Baptist *must* believe. It is an incomplete statement and reflects generalized Baptist understandings.

In 1925, we were living in the midst of an Enlightenment philosophy, which deemed that human society was evolving and had finally “arrived” at an “enlightened” state of knowledge. The 1925 version tied Christianity to Enlightenment philosophy. By 1963, we recognized that we should not tie faith to a specific philosophy. We had seen that the purported evolution of society had not quelled war, as we had lived through one more world war, one of larger proportions than the first. We recognized more than ever that our understanding of truth is ever limited. Our new statement, therefore, renewed its stress upon the relational character of faith—a growing relationship of dependence upon Christ.

Faith is defined as living, which denotes its dynamic nature. Faith is relational. Because faith is relational and living, we grow in faith. It should not, then, be reduced to a static set of belief statements. We had recognized error in our 1925 statement. We recognized as well that a child can come to faith without full knowledge of the doctrines we might expect an adult to understand. Faith is trust and dependence, not ascribing to a set of beliefs. It is undergirded with truth, but it need not understand that truth completely.

The preamble also speaks of faith as supernatural—more than history. There is history in our stories of faith. There is historical reality that forms and informs our understanding of God’s revelation. At the same time, our faith is more than historical. The importance of those historical events that inform and shape our relationship to and understanding of God lies not in the facts of history, but in their meaning. The preamble set forth for us the fact that there is more to faith than history or fact. Faith is supernatural—it goes beyond the bounds of history. God is not confined to history, nor is our faith limited to the historical world in which we live. The realities to which faith points us are greater than the limitations of the material (natural) world.

It is that other-worldly character of truth to which these stories of faith direct us. The truth in the text and stories we tell is an unchanging truth. It is also a truth that is greater than the scope of our comprehension.

The preamble set out a reaction to our reformation history clash with Roman Catholicism over the sources of authority for our faith. In contrast to four authority sources in Roman Catholic tradition (Bible, tradition, councils, and pope), we claimed only one authority. We set forth the Bible as the only authority, mainly for the fact that multiples sources of authority tend to disagree on certain points. Our determination, therefore, was that only the Bible would be authoritative, all else being commentary.

It is the Christ to whom Scripture points which grants authority to the text. It is therefore Christ who must be sought in the text. An encounter with this Christ necessitates a constantly growing understanding of truth. This comprehension of truth must be reinterpreted for each generation of believers. We recognized that the Truth underlying our faith was unchanging. We recognized as well that our understanding of that inviolable Truth is imperfect and subject to modification.

In line with setting forth the Bible as the only authority source for faith, we established that Jesus Christ is the highpoint of Biblical revelation. Christ Jesus, therefore, becomes the lens by which we read and interpret the Scripture before us. This is especially important as we read Old Testament passages that relate events without commenting on the appropriateness of the action described. It is in Jesus’ teaching and action that we perceive the appropriate manner for interpreting the events described for us in other portions of Scripture.

Scriptures:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its

matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

Ex. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Psalm 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isa. 34:16; 40:8; Jer. 15:16; 36; Matt. 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16 ff.; 17:11; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21

Comment:

The Bible is a record of revelation, not revelation itself. Revelation is God's communication to humanity, a process of self-disclosure. That divine disclosure was made to people as they interacted with God across the centuries. Part of this revelation was then recorded in the pages of what we call the Bible. While we might be tempted to call the Bible God's supreme revelation, it is merely the supreme account of God's revelation to us. God's supreme revelation came in Jesus Christ as God took human flesh in order to reveal Himself more directly to us.

The Bible itself declares the continuance of God's revelation¹. Revelation is dynamic and continues into our own age. We are called to a living dependence upon God who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures and continues to speak and reveal divine truth to humanity. Hebrews speaks of God revealing Himself in various manners through the prophets and through the son. The Gospel writers wrote of what Jesus said and did. Their words point to God's revelation in Christ—He is the supreme revelation. What we have is a record of that revelation.

In the Christ event, the fullness of God is most clearly expressed on the background of monotheism. Christ's message, however, dominates the New Testament in a sense more completely than simply the fact of or the historical events concerning Christ. The incarnation has its greatest significance to humanity in the message that Jesus Christ expressed—essentially, the accessibility of God as expressed in Jesus' incarnation, teaching, and giving of the Spirit. In this sense, the "Christ event" is integral to of the message that Jesus Christ proclaimed and yet proclaims.

The message of the Bible is truth. This need not imply a 19th Century understanding of history-writing. In that idealized standard for recording history, it was assumed that history could be written from an unbiased perspective. We have since recognized that selecting material to include and exclude expresses interpretation. All reporting or recording is interpretation. We interpret by choosing what we understand to be important,

¹ Hebrews 1.1-4 denotes that God has effected revelation through many means in the past and that supreme revelation is in the Son, not written scripture. In John 16.13-14 Jesus teaches that the Spirit will teach and guide the disciples in all things, expressing that even after Jesus' resurrection, God's revelation, though supreme in Jesus, would not yet be complete.

excluding those points we deem insignificant. The message of the Bible is true as regards its intent and character.

Along with a changing appreciation for the character of recorded events and the role of interpretation, we recognized that there can be a difference between the message and the elements of a narrative. Truth is the Bible's intent. At times, however, it may tell a fictitious story (Jesus' parables) to communicate that truth.²

The 1963 statement as the 1925 avoided the issue of the inerrancy debate. It focused on the intent of the Biblical text, rather than categorizing the kind of literature that we should find in the Bible. We focused on the validity of the Bible's message, not the means in which it communicates that message. The underlying principles that we deemed of overriding importance is the Bible's authority and dependability.

When the prophet Nathan came before David, he intentionally deceived the king. He told him about a poor man with a single sheep and a rich man who stole that sheep to feed a guest. On a surface level, that story was an outright lie. Nathan intended David to believe the story as though it were true. He tricked David—lied to him. Nathan misrepresented his message, but he did so in order to help the king to understand his message. When David recognized the injustice in Nathan's reportedly true account, Nathan clarified the lie. "You are the man!" Nathan's account was not true, but he communicated truth—very effectively.

Nathan's lie was the medium for truth. We prefer to call it a parable. The point is that we must recognize the difference between the truth of the message and the elements used to communicate that message. If the Bible chooses to round numbers, use numbers symbolically, fuse various characters into one, or even create "fictitious" accounts in order to communicate Truth, that does not invalidate the Bible as true. We can still recognize the truth of the message it presents. This is what we mean by saying the Bible has truth for its matter. Its message is true, whether it uses sarcasm, irony, humor, figurative language, parables, symbols, or specific "historical" description. Its message is true and trustworthy.

Inerrancy theory places human logic ahead of trusting the Bible. It effectively says that if the Bible is completely true in every respect, then it is believable and acceptable for revealing God's will. If it is not completely true in every respect, it is not God's Word and it is without worth.

On the other side of the question are those who would affirm that the Bible points them to God and God's will without regard for every detail conforming to what we might

² 2nd Samuel 12:1-8. While we would shy away from classifying Nathan's parable as a lie, his intent is to deceive David in order that he might help David accept the truth of his actions.

define as absolute truthfulness. We trust the Bible to reveal God through its words. We do not place conditions on believing the Bible. We assume that the same God who can reveal Himself to us through nature, donkeys, prostitutes, kings, prophets, and in flesh as Jesus Christ can likewise use unfaithful translations and tainted versions of the Bible to speak to us today.

It is worth noting that the 1963 statement does not use inerrancy language, though it does make room for those who would hold to inerrancy theories. It does not force the issue one way or the other, but holds both perspectives within its wording. It focuses on the common belief among Baptists. Regardless of one's views on inerrancy, we can all hold to the definition that the Bible's message and intent is true and that it achieves that intent.

God:

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Gen. 1:1; 2:7; Ex. 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11 ff.; 20:1 ff.; Lev. 22:2; Deut. 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chron. 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isa. 43:3, 15; 64:8; Jer. 10:10; 17:13; Matt. 6:9 ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Rom. 8:14-15; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself the demands and necessities of human nature and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, partaking of the nature of God and of man, and in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to

judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Gen. 18:1 ff.; Psalm 2:7 ff.; 110:1 ff.; Isa. 7:14; 53; Matt. 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16, 27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6, 19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18, 29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16, 28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20, 28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5, 20; Rom. 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3, 34; 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8, 24-28; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Heb. 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15, 24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Rev. 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Gen. 1:2; Judg. 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalm 51:11; 139:7 ff.; Isa. 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matt. 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10, 12; Luke 1:35; 4:1, 18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17, 39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Rom. 8:9-11, 14-16, 26-27; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19; 1 Tim. 3:16; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:14; 3:16; Heb. 9:8, 14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Rev. 1:10; 22:17

Comment:

The stress on speaking of God is placed on the unity of God. There is but one God. God's character is without reproach and God's qualities are pure. Because of God's identity and character, we owe God our highest allegiance. As we speak to Trinitarian doctrine, the statement stresses God's oneness.

In elaborating the doctrine of the Trinity, we chose the Latin term, *persona* to refer to the essential unity among the three expressions of God. This term referred to the mask used by an actor in a Greek play. The same actor alternated masks to become different characters. The actor was always the same, but presented a different "face" or character to the audience. In a similar vein, the New Testament uses the different *persona* of God much more interchangeably than we are wont to do. Paul first speaks of Christ indwelling the believer, and then speaks of the Spirit in the same manner. Jesus declared his continued presence with the disciples, yet spoke of going away to send the Comforter to be present in His stead. As we look at some of the "distinctions" between the faces of God, we must remember the Bible's stress on God's essential unity.

The 1963 statement stops short of describing God in categories of omnipresence and omniscience. It stresses rather the perfect character of God than questions of knowledge and metaphysics. Rather than using the term “all-knowing,” the texts says “all-wise.” In this way, the statement avoids the questions of whether or not God’s knowledge is limited with respect to the specifics of future events or determining whether God is concerned with certain aspects of knowledge. The text thus avoids turning God into a databank of information, focusing on God’s understanding and application of knowledge (wisdom) to conform to His will. For many today, this definition does not go far enough, but the phrasing was designed to include varied positions on details. God’s grace, care, and wisdom are the highlights of this description of God as Father.

We characterize the Father essentially in terms of Creator and providential care over creation. Stress falls on God’s power, authority, and loving character. The Son is characterized mainly in respect to being the human face of God—what God looks like in human form. The Spirit reflects God’s semi-tangible interaction with humanity.

In describing the work of Christ, we should highlight one example of how the 1963 statement stops short of over-explanation. There is more than one way to understand why Jesus died on the cross. The Bible presents at least eight different expressions that offer some kind of explanation, but none are established as being the comprehensive or defining explanation. The Bible speaks of the cross as the ultimate expression of God’s love, defining the extent of human sin, declaring Jesus as a true prophet, as necessary, as redemption, as reconciliation, and as ransom. While it consistently uses the expression that Jesus dies “for” us or “for” our sin, the Bible does not define the use of that term. On behalf of, as a result of, in place of, in response to, in favor of, taking the brunt of, or even because of are all possible interpretations of the term “for”. Only a close reading of the contextual usage can determine its meaning in any given context.

The 1963 statement includes room for all of these different expressions, focusing on the intent of Jesus’ death, not the theory to describe it. Jesus died to offer redemption. That is the core Biblical teaching, common ground for Baptists.

The Greek and Hebrew terms for spirit can be translated as wind, breath, or any other form of moving air. Neither language has specialized terms for these concepts. When the term “Holy Spirit” appears, the Hebrews would have considered it as “the Breath of the Holy One”—God breathing upon the people in a form that was almost tangible.

The highlight of the Spirit’s work comes from the passage in John 14, in which it is the Spirit’s task to convince and convict the world of sin. This means that evangelism is not the task of convincing, but of presenting the gospel for understanding. It is also the Spirit who empowers the church to fulfill its purpose and call.

Man:

Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is the crowning work of His creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by His Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence; whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin, and as soon as they are capable of moral action become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore every man possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Gen. 1:26-30; 2:5, 7, 18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalm 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 17:5; Matt. 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:10-18, 23; 5:6, 12, 19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18, 29; 1 Cor. 1:21-31; 15:19, 21-22; Eph. 2:1-22; Col. 1:21-22; 3:9-11

Comment:

As mentioned before, the topics covered in the 1963 statement often reflect issues in the society at large. The first line of the statement on humanity addresses one of these issues, stressing the creation of humanity as a special act of God, distinct from the rest of creation. This phrase responds to claims of evolution that would attempt to link humanity to the rest of the created order.

Along with this statement of humanity as special creation, we find mention of being created in God's image. While there is considerable discussion to define specifically what "image of God" means, the contexts of the passages where it is found tend toward the issue of stewardship—functioning as God's representatives within creation—servants of the Most High. The 1963 statement, however, does not enter into that kind of specifics. It was written as an inclusive umbrella, offering the common opinions of Baptists that we could readily agree upon.

Regarding original sin, the 1963 statement focuses on our inheritance of an inclination toward sin that bears fruit as we act upon that inclination. It does not delve into more specific definitions on which consensus would not be attained.

Salvation:

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal

redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

B. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

C. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

Gen. 3:15; Ex. 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matt. 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22 to 28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14, 29; 3:3-21, 36; 5:24; 10:9, 28-29; 15:1-16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Rom. 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3 ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18, 29-39; 10:9-10, 13; 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 1:18, 30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:9-22; 3:1 ff.; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1 to 12:8, 14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-23; 1 John 1:6 to 2:11; Rev. 3:20; 21:1 to 22:5.

Comment:

The Biblical words we translate as save or salvation include various concepts, such as healing, rescuing, redeeming, cleansing, restoring, and making whole. The trend in the Bible is toward a holistic approach to salvation that affects the entire person. Thus, the statement mentions the “whole personality,” as being influenced by the process of salvation. Rather than referring simply to a future heavenly state, the Biblical witness speaks to the radical change of a life, including the present and tangible aspects in this world.

The major Old Testament understanding of sacrifice revolved around introducing one into the very presence of God. As the blood was understood to contain the “life force” of an individual or animal, its release from the body was deemed to allow that life to return to the Creator.³ One expected the sacrificial animal to bring one into God’s presence. This is

³ Genesis 4:4 and other passages speak of the blood being one’s life, or as here, crying out to God from the ground.

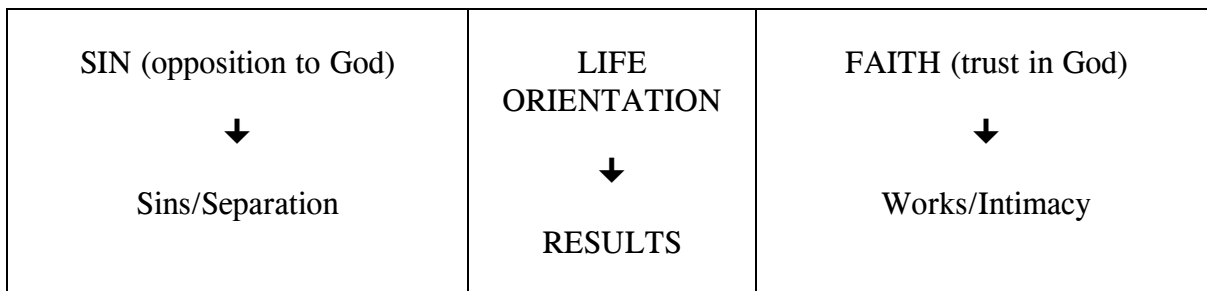
the reason blood was sprinkled upon those offering the sacrifice, to enable them audience with God. This audience with God was an essential anxiety of the people. By His own death, Jesus became not only the sacrifice, but the one bringing the sacrifice, Himself introducing us into God’s very presence to intercede with Himself on our behalf.

This free offering on the part of Christ is by definition far greater than any other attempt to gain access to God. To refuse the access that Jesus offered is to reject what God has done and God’s invitation to intimacy. There can be no other way to God than by accepting grace, for anything else is a rejection of God.

This redemption offered by Christ is eternal. The focus is not eternity in terms of time, but in terms of enduring quality. Redemption means that we belong to God and are no longer our own or slaves to another.

Paul’s language in Philippians 3 directs one ever onward toward complete conformity to the image of Christ, not being limited to a generalized maturity. Christ is ever the goal for the maturing Christian, an unending progress of development for limited frail humanity. This does not allow for a legal perspective of guilty versus innocent, but demands the growth of a living relationship directed toward maturity.

Rather than regarding sin from a legal perspective, the emphasis is on the direction of one’s life. Sin is best understood as an orientation that expresses itself in rebellion towards God. This orientation results in specific sins, whether these be defined as failure to reach the goal of perfection or actions that rebel against God’s instruction and will. In consequence, sin also leads to separation from God. By contrast, faith is also a relationship of dependence upon God. Rather than rebellion, faith seeks to accept and honor God and God’s will. Its natural result is what we would call good works and intimacy with God.



Faith is understood here as relational dependence upon Christ. Salvation includes the entire person. It begins with the initiation of the relationship, grows in maturity (sanctification), and will culminate in a further fulfillment.

God's Purpose of Grace:

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is a glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the cause of Christ, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-8; 1 Sam. 8:4-7, 19-22; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 31:31 ff.; Matt. 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22, 31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45, 65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6, 12, 17-18; Acts 20:32; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7, 26-36; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Eph. 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Col. 1:12-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2:10, 19; Heb. 11:39 to 12:2; 1 Peter 1:2-5, 13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2

Comment:

The statement avoids getting into differences of opinion on what we would call the Calvin-Arminian debate. The focus is once again on the common points of agreement. In speaking to election, the statement stresses grace and goodwill. Room is made for free will of humanity in responding to God's call to salvation. God's sovereignty is still held forth, tempered by goodness and wisdom.

This stress on God's gracious purpose rules out an extreme form of predestination in which God reportedly predestines individuals to hell. The language also holds in check any attempt to assert superiority over those who are not saved. This is checked by a reminder of our responsibility with regard to salvation and the salvation of others.

Security of the true believer is established in terms of expecting the faithfulness of individuals who have truly accept the lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives. The determination is made here that those whose faithfulness does not endure are either not living up to their calling (but remain under grace) or never truly accepted the gospel of grace.

The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing

the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.

Matt. 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42, 47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23, 27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11, 21; 5:22-32; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:1-15; 4:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Rev. 2-3; 21:2-3

Comment:

The stress of the statement is on the local church. In referring to baptized believers, we should remember the original Baptist emphasis on a regenerate membership. This local body is made up of those who have accepted the Lordship of Christ for themselves and then gathered into a local body to express the corporate aspect of that relationship. While there is here some distance from the more original Baptist concept of the Baptism of believers, the emphasis is still that these have come together based upon a living faith in Christ Jesus.

The ordinances pointed to here would be baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is one of the weaker points of the statement, as it relies too heavily on the historic Baptist position against sacramental theology. In responding to the Catholic list of sacraments, we kept the two that we saw the Bible supporting, but did not look any further. We redefined the sacrament as commandments, but did not look to see if there were other commands that Jesus had left for the disciples. There would be ample Biblical support for including in the list of ordinances acts like foot-washing that is still practiced in some circles. Since we have reinterpreted sacraments as ordinances, we might also list the non-ritualistic commands to love, make disciples, and so forth.

Autonomy has been a hallmark of Baptist polity from inception. Each local body is understood to have the right and the responsibility to make its own decisions in response to the leadership of Christ Jesus as Lord. The stress on democratic processes and equal responsibility among the membership denote that there is to be no authoritative figure to lead by demand, but by example. Not only is a pastor not to exert authoritarian power over a church, all responsibility is supposed to be shared among the body equally.

In speaking to the officers of the church, the statement depends too much upon the traditional structural forms of Baptist churches and too little on the Biblical witness. In the Bible, we find not only pastors and deacons as designated leaders, but also bishops,

apostles, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and prophets. Ephesians 4 lists four offices, linking the term pastor to the term teacher. This is a rather different perspective from that of our practice and that of the 1963 statement.

While the focus here is on the local church, the statement recognizes that the universal church is much broader than its local expression, encompassing not only non-Baptists, but believers throughout time as well. We are a body that gives local expression to Christ, and yet we are part of something much greater as well.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matt. 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; Acts 20:7; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21; 11:23-29; Col. 2:12

Comment:

As mentioned above, the statement focuses on two ordinances in reaction to the sacraments of Roman Catholic tradition. The wording is also a reaction to theories of the significance of the rituals in question and how they operate in relation to faith and salvation. In this text, stress is given to the understanding that the ordinances are symbols of salvation, but do not impart grace and salvation of themselves. They are witnesses and ritual reminders of God's saving grace, not the means of salvation.

Just as baptism was set apart as a distinction of a regenerate membership (only those who made a conscious decision to follow Christ could be considered believers), the Lord's Supper was treated in the same manner. It was reserved for those who had already made a decision to follow Christ, being regenerated by the indwelling to the Holy Spirit. Setting the Lord's Supper apart had more to do with witness to the need of the individual to make a personal decision for faith than any other reason.

The statement does not dig into the meaning of the ordinances, other than to spell out the more obvious symbology of the ordinances. While New Testament baptism was a rite

of conversion, the 1963 statement deals with it as a symbolic ritual pointing back to a prior event of conversion.

The text speaks of the overt symbols of Christ's death, burial, resurrection that can be seen in the ordinances. They are dealt with as witnesses to the realities of faith, rather than having their own significance. Much more could be said of the specific meaning of the ordinances and even of expanding one's list of ordinances. The statement, however, is a focus on the common understandings of Baptists, looking for the middle ground of what Baptists already believe, rather than seeking to teach believers to grow beyond their present understanding. The following section on the Lord's Day could likewise be deemed an ordinance in certain respects. The purpose of the statement, however, is to help Baptists find commonality and unity in the common elements of faith and understanding.

The Lord's Day

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, work of necessity and mercy only being excepted.

Ex. 20:8-11; Matt. 12:1-12; 28:1 ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3, 33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1, 19-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Col. 2:16; 3:16; Rev. 1:10

Comment:

The Lord's Day is defined as an institution for regular observance and a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The language makes the distinction that this is a development in Christian tradition, more than from Biblical injunction. The second point made is how this day is to be observed. It is to be employed specifically in spiritual activities, thus to distinguish the day from the rest of the week. There is a hint of Sabbath legalism, but with the correction of allowing for work of necessity and mercy as exceptions to refraining from secular pursuits.

This section of the statement has been largely ignored by Baptists over the last few decades. We have drifted away from the Sabbath teaching as being of lesser importance than other issues. The 1963 statement recognizes that Jesus did not ignore the Old Testament teachings on the Sabbath, but reinterpreted them as being for our benefit. They were not to be a burden, but a blessing. This is reflected in the language of the statement.

The distinction of celebration on the first day of the week is an ancient Christian tradition that distinguished Christians from Jews. Our celebration on Sunday signified our

weekly recognition of Jesus' resurrection and the subsequent hope in the gospel. This change from the Jewish Sabbath is not based on the Bible, but on tradition. The incentive to set apart a standard day of worship and rest is solidly based on Biblical teaching. In our having ignored the Sabbath principle in recent years, the loss is our own.

The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Gen. 1:1; Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 3:2; 4:8-10, 23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Rom. 5:17; 8:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 1:13; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Rev. 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22

Comment:

There are two sides to the scope of God's Kingdom—God's exercise of sovereignty. To begin with, God's sovereignty extends over the entire universe. As Creator, God is Lord of all the created order. On the other hand, God is Sovereign and King over those who willfully accept allegiance to God. In this manner, we set the scope of how God exercises divine authority over the universe, distinguishing these two levels of sovereignty. For those who accept God's authority over their lives, there is a different level of interaction with God's exercise of sovereignty. Under this aspect of God's reign, we enter into a subservient relationship of faith we call salvation. Having distinguished the two aspects of God's reign, the statement turns its focus on God's particular reign within the life of the believing community.

God's kingdom or reign is already present in the lives of believers. One enters this reign through a decision and action of will. It is a question of commitment and allegiance based upon trust. While we experience God's reign in our interaction with God, there is yet a future fulfillment of greater reality which we await. The Bible speaks of the coming of God's reign, the messianic age, or the appearing of Christ Jesus.

Entrance into God's reign is by relationship. Jesus spoke much of this reign of God, focusing of our entering into alliance with the Father and living a different quality of life that would endure the ages. He spoke of entering the kingdom through the exercise of will on the basis of God's gracious invitation. The statement speaks of this realm as that of

salvation. We are rescued to be transferred to the realm of God's grace and rule within our lives.

As we experience this personal reign of God, we are called to extend God's reign in the lives of others. We are to work for God's will to take place in our lives, being accomplished upon the earth.

Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Isa. 2:4; 11:9; Matt. 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:1 ff.; 2 Thess. 1:7 ff.; 2; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7 ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Rev. 1:18; 3:11; 20:1 to 22:13

Comment:

The statement does not go into definitions of how God will close out this age and bring the world to an end. There are many opinions raging on the market, the most visibly discussed being that of dispensationalist (that God had different ways to deal with humanity in different ages) and millennialist (theories regarding an earthly 1000 year reign of Christ Jesus) theologies. The absence of language to speak on such issues is due to the low priority of the discussion and the lack of consensus among Baptists on the theme. The only language employed here is to the effect that God will do as God sees fit. We should not impose a definition of how the future will appear. It speaks in general terms to those issues that are more clearly laid out in the Bible.

The statement on Christ's visible, personal return was a response to certain sects declaring that Jesus would or had returned invisibly. The statement also links Christ's return to judgment and the resurrection of the dead. This link is also a response to claims of Christ's secret return. There is a statement regarding Hell that answers arguments for universal salvation or that God is too loving to punish people. In response, the statement characterizes Christ's judgment as being righteous.

While the language here pictures Heaven and Hell too geographically for my taste, it does a good job of defining what is essential in the gospel message and ignores issues that

can not be easily decided. I would prefer an explanation of hell as being eternally separated from God, and heaven as being eternally present with God, without respect to language of place. This statement was not crafted to address individual preferences, however, so much as to clarify the larger issues of common acceptance among Baptists. It is not a statement of fine precision and intricate detail, but a large brush-stroke of commonality and clarity.

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by personal effort and by all other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6; Isa. 6:1-8; Matt. 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8, 16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2:8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Rom. 10:13-15; Eph. 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 2:1-3; 11:39 to 12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Rev. 22:17

Comment:

The statement speaks to the duty of every believer—every church. The gospel charge to make disciples of all nations is a common enough theme of Baptist heritage that on this point the statement need not mince words. New birth is here defined as necessarily equating to love for others. This paragraph speaks to the believer's spiritual need to be directly involved in missionary efforts.

It is the duty of every believer to seek to win the lost. Personal effort and all other means in harmony with the gospel are to be utilized. This portion of the text recognizes the history of the Crusades, as well the difficult struggle of Baptists in colonial America to gain the right to believe and life faith in accordance with the dictates of conscience. Faith is not to be coerced, but it is to be taught, shared, and promoted. It is good news that may not be left under wraps of lived in private.

This is perhaps the strongest statement in the document. Of all the paragraphs, this one is addressed essentially as a commandment. There is no room in this paragraph for "difference of opinion," for this is the central tenet that brought Baptists together in the first place. The individuals and churches are autonomous and are given freedom to respond to God's leadership without interference from others. It is in evangelism and

missions, however, that Baptists came together to form our associations, conventions, and denominational entities.

Education

The cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian schools is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

Deut. 4:1, 5, 9, 14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Neh. 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalm 19:7 ff.; 119:11; Prov. 3:13 ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7, 11; 15:14; Eccl. 7:19; Matt. 5:2; 7:24 ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 4:8; Col. 2:3, 8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:14-17; Heb. 5:12 to 6:3; James 1:5; 3:17

Comment:

Public access to education was not always available in America. Education was often restricted to those who had better financial stability. Early on, Baptists invested in educational causes, in great part to stimulate people to read the Bible. Education also became an early avenue for beginning missionary work not only in the US, but also overseas. This led to the understanding that education is co-ordinate with missions and benevolence.

This is not a Biblical statement. It is an understanding and conviction that arose from Baptist history and evangelistic practice. As a result of that understanding, this statement stressed the Baptist theme that education called for liberal investment to aid people from the standpoint of benevolence and spirituality as well. In keeping with that understanding, the development of a network of Christian schools was deemed very appropriate and necessary.

The statement seeks a balance between academic freedom and responsibility. Freedom is never absolute, since there are limitations on truth and on one's freedom to interpret Scripture. The limits include the pre-existence of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the purpose of the school. This is not an extensive list of limitation, and this is specifically a safeguard to encourage academic freedom of investigation. As can be seen

throughout the statement, the purpose is to unite Baptists under our commonalities, not to trace distinctions and highlight points on which we might disagree.

The statement sets forth the ideal of Christian schooling without making it a mandate. The wording here reaches back to the 1925 statement, but has included some drastic corrections. The 1925 linked Christianity too much with the philosophy of Enlightenment. Rather than reducing faith to being a product of philosophy, this restatement attempts to accept the most positive contributions of the philosophy and build upon them.

Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Gen. 14:20; Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 8:18; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21,42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Rom. 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; 12:15; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19

Comment:

There are two foundational aspects of the topic of stewardship: God is the source of all blessings and God is the owner of all things as Creator. The logical end of this understanding is that we own nothing, but owe all to God. Rather than being owners, we are then stewards of God's blessings.

The 1963 statement takes this understanding and applies it to our relationship to the Gospel as well. We are trustees, or stewards, of God's message of love, acceptance, and salvation. With Paul, we should recognize the burden upon us to share the gospel with the entire world. Nothing belongs to us. All that we have and are belongs to God, first as Creator, and second as Lord and Savior. God's ownership extends to our time, talents, energy, intellect, and gifts, as well as to our material and physical possessions.

Following Paul's injunctions to the churches to raise funds to meet the needs of Jewish Christians suffering famine, the statement reminds us of our duty to contribute liberally, cheerfully, and systematically to meet not only the material, but also the spiritual

needs of others. This is one of the obligations of Christian faith. It is not to be deemed a burden, but a blessing to make valid and valuable contribution to meeting the needs of others in service to Christ. After all, it is God who is the true owner of our resources and our very lives. They are placed in our care as a trust. This responsibility to meet the needs of others through sharing our resources is a responsibility that is shared equally by all of the body.

Cooperation

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Ex. 17:12; 18:17 ff.; Judg. 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Neh. 4; 8:1-5; Matt. 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1 ff. Acts 1:13-14; 2:1 ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 1:6-10; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 1:15-18

Comment:

Believers are called to organize themselves in cooperation to fulfill the will of God. The task we are given as believers and disciples is far greater than we can accomplish as individuals, or even as local churches. The local church is obviously the first arena for cooperation among believers, yet it is also unable to fulfill its mission adequately without external, cooperative support. The 1963 statement sets forth a reminder that these means of association should be viewed as voluntary and supportive networks, not avenues for exerting authority over others. They should be channels of cooperation among equal partners.

Cooperative efforts should include missions, education, and benevolence as tasks working in tandem to promote the extension of Christ's reign. The individual tasks are parts of a larger picture that requires more energy and investment than can be provided by an isolated group. It is in cooperating on larger issues that we become more visibly the

body of Christ. Our unity in cooperation speaks to the world in witness to an identity beyond ourselves—the body of Christ around the world.

Organizations among churches and individuals should be designed to direct the energy of believers toward our common mission and ministry. This does not excuse the individual from personal participation, nor does it allow for us to “outsource” ministry to the efforts of others whom we support. It is more the sense of channeling energy to expand our effectiveness beyond what we can accomplish as individuals and churches.

The purpose of cooperation is to fulfill the mission that Christ has given us as His representatives upon the earth. The purpose is active and external, not to grant an external identity, nor to enforce conformity. It is to channel and enhance our efforts through more effective means.

Cooperation is desirable between denominations, though this should not bring one to violate personal convictions, nor one’s loyalty to Christ or the Bible as God’s Word. It is good to cooperate beyond our comfort zones and preferred opinions, but there will be limits upon some of these forms of cooperation. We could join with Bahai’s and even Jehovah’s Witnesses to promote world peace. We would not want to join with them for efforts of theological education and missions.

The Christian and the Social Order

Every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in his own life and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian should oppose, in the spirit of Christ, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. He should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

Ex. 20:3-17; Lev. 6:2-5; Deut. 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 8:16; Matt. 5:13-16, 43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3 ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Rom. 12-14; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23 to 11:1; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8

Comment:

Christianity and faith are to be more than expressions of one's personal life. There is to be an extension of one's faith that enters into the larger world and society. Christ has a will for our lives as individuals, just as Christ has a will for the societies in which we live and work. We are called as Christians to make an impact in our communities and in the larger societies in which we participate.

The societal purposes of God can only truly be reached through personal renewal and regeneration on the individual level. We should, however, seek to extend the changes in our personal character into the larger world around us. Christianity should not be reduced to the desire to change the overall morality of a society, for such changes cannot be lasting. Lasting change can only come through accepting the lordship of Christ by each individual. The import of this is that morality cannot be legislated effectively. True and meaningful change occurs at the individual level, not on a political or otherwise corporate level.

As believers, we are called to oppose greed, selfishness, and other forms of vice. This has not been a strong point for us as Baptists in the last generation. Rather than oppose these things, we have been part of their promotion in society, allowing the mindset of corporate America to influence our participation in society without actively working in accordance with this statement. Greed, selfishness, and vice are foundational to the way that American capitalism functions. We have largely ignored our responsibility to set the pace in this area.

While we have not ignored Christ's call to provide for the needy, certain changes in the way our government has responded with social services have lessened our attention to those in material need. Part of this lessening of our perceived personal responsibility to care for the needy has to do with the changes that Christians have brought about in urging the government to shoulder a civic responsibility to care for the population. Unfortunately, while we have led government into this arena, industry and society has been slower to move to help the needy, and government has not really done enough.

The scandals of Enron, Worldcom, Xerox, and the like were fed in large part by Baptists who somehow ignored their responsibilities as Christians to lead industry in principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. The 1963 statement is clear on our responsibilities, but there seems to be a great chasm between what we report to believe and how we actually live. There is definitely room for growth in this area.

The 1963 statement here is an encouragement for us to be ready to work with anyone and everyone to meet these larger goals for society. We should not compromise our faith and loyalty to Christ in the process, but neither should this be necessary to achieve the desired result. Essentially, we must remember that we are called to lead the way for social

change, rather than follow the lead of others. We are to follow Christ's leadership and allow faith to take root and act in our lives, seeking to make a difference in the larger society as well.

Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love.

Isa. 2:4; Matt. 5:9, 38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36, 38; Rom. 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Heb. 12:14; James 4:1-2

Comment:

This statement on peace is much stronger than it may at first appear. It classes peacemaking as a duty of every believer. This is not an optional accessory to faith. It is the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus that enables and undergirds our attempts to make peace. We are enjoined by Christ to do everything in our power to put an end to war. That would rule out the doctrine of pre-emptive war set forth by the Bush administration to justify the invasion of Iraq. Baptists seem to have changed our position very significantly on this question since 1963.

In 1963, we had recently been involved in the second world war and seen the devastation that war had occasioned in the lives of the families of servicemen and in the war theaters of Europe and the Pacific. We understood the disastrous nature of war and just how repulsive it was to the demands of the gospel. That did not keep us from entering Vietnam or Korea, but it gave us at least a temporary appreciation of the difference between the gospel of peace and the atrocities of war. It would appear that at least our convention leadership has made a complete about-face on this point. Rather than doing all that is in our power to end war, we seem to be promoting it.

The 1963 statement defines the Gospel as the true remedy for war spirit. The Gospel is understood to be a message of peace, hope, and reconciliation between enemies. Love for one another was set forth as the supreme means of working for reconciliation, peace, unity, and cooperation on efforts that are more important than our personal issues.

War is generally based on defending the need or desire of one group above the needs of another. The world's supreme need is to accept Christ's teachings and lordship. This is not something that can or should be imposed. It must be caught by the preaching and example of believers. The foundation of Christ's preaching is love. It was love that brought Christ to earth, love that offered forgiveness and reconciliation, and love that allows us the freedom to reject reconciliation with God. Love does not grow by force or imposition.

Religious Liberty

God alone is Lord of the conscience and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

Gen. 1:27; 2:7; Matt. 6:6-7, 24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Rom. 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Gal. 5:1, 13; Phil. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19

Comment:

In consistency with the paragraph on peace and war, religious liberty is understood as foundational to the ability to accept salvation, regeneration, and real faith. Baptists have long held to the principle that each individual must answer to personal conscience before God alone. This was the cry of Baptists in the 1700's such as John Leland. We would not allow any group to impose a framework for an individual's faith. We fought for the right and freedom of everyone to accept personal responsibility before God. We may believe many of the same doctrines, but it is up to the individual to stand in judgment before God.

In consequence of understanding the individual's responsibility to answer before God, Baptists fought for separation between church and state.⁴ We knew all too well how

⁴ William Hull, "Pluralism in the Southern Baptist Convention" in Honeycutt, *Review an Expositor*, p. 122-123, 139-140.

we had fought imposition of doctrine by a state-run church in Colonial America and in England. We understood that freedom for some meant the subjugation of others. Largely due to the voice of Baptists, the Constitution was amended to exclude the official establishment of religion in the form of a national church. We were aware that the vagaries of political power would at one point or another work against some who were striving to live in accordance with their conscience before God. We had learned well the lesson that politicians do better at representing their own interests than the interests of God.

From colonial days, we urged that the State owes protection to every church. Individuals need full freedom to pursue the spiritual ends of their religious convictions. This freedom needs government protection. In order for this principle to carry weight, this must include the utter rejection of favoritism of one or another religious group or religious orientation. Favoritism in promoting freedom of religion is simply a form of religious oppression. As faith in Christ cannot be coerced, we would desire that all have full opportunity to receive Christ and apply faith to their lives. If that choice is to be made freely, one must have equal freedom to reject Christ. That freedom is coherent with the gospel of grace that we preach.

Having established that religious practice should be inviolate, the statement recognized that Christians have a duty to render loyal service to civil government. This duty to service must not conflict with service to God, but it must likewise be freely given. We were not called by Christ to withdraw from the world, but to be agents within the world, serving others with God's love. Our service to civil government should include obedience to its laws and participation in its processes. We are to remember, however, that we owe a higher allegiance to Christ Jesus, for we belong first of all to Him.

As church and state should remain separate to ensure freedom to respond to God's will, this separation should also deny our resorting to civil political means to carry out spiritual ministry. We are to be agents of change and moral compasses for industry, society, and government, but we should not use these as leverage points to carry out God's will. True faith is not coerced. The power of the Gospel is sacrificial love, not force.

The 1963 reiterated also the Baptist mantra that government should neither tax nor penalize religious expression. If government is not to exert influence over religion, neither must it benefit financially from religion. Such benefits would all too easily be used to exert leverage and power over religious expression.

The statement sets forth a free church in a free state as the ideal for both church and state. This is the extension of the principle of offering people free and unhindered access to God without the interference or aid of civil authority. In the latter 1700's these concepts were radically new. Before then, all governments were involved with religious power and

expression. Colonial America established an unprecedented ideal of granting the individual autonomy for expressing faith.

Government had never before been neutral toward religion, but used religion as a means for retaining its power base. This experiment was understood by Baptists as a gift to the world. We would fight for all to have the right to stand before God without the interference of government or other authority.

Our society has changed dramatically from those days. Our society is much more pluralistic in its religious expression. The principle set forth here still holds. If individuals are to have the freedom to relate to God on the basis of conscience, they must have the freedom to reject faith in Christ. We must continue to stand for the right of all to address God in freedom, not just for ourselves.

Changes in the 2000 Revision of the Baptist Faith and Message:⁵

There are numerous small changes in the text of the two documents. A cursory reading does not really show the dramatic differences that appear in the text. I will list here simply a few of the major themes that distinguish the two documents. A side-by-side comparison of the 1963 and the 2000 version of the statements with commentary was prepared by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.⁶ I will summarize here some of those findings.

The 2000 revision stresses a different definition of faith. Rather than understanding faith as a relationship, it is characterized as accepting a set of doctrinal beliefs. This can be seen in the manner the texts highlights references to knowledge, doctrinal accountability, and truth. The statement on doctrinal accountability lays stress its concept that doctrinal guidelines must be defined in much narrower parameters than in the 1963 statement.

This stress on narrower doctrinal definitions is also a great difference between the two statements. The 1963 version was written to bind all Baptists together under an umbrella statement that was broad enough for the great majority of Baptists to accept. The new statement adds a few words, phrases, and definitions that narrow the field considerably.

The preamble adds wording that this document is an “instrument of doctrinal accountability,” which gives it the force of a creed. The use to which the document has been placed in denominational life lends support to this notion. Rather than being a summary statement of what Baptists believe in general, the statement has become a definition of orthodox faith held over missionaries, seminary professors, denominational employees, Baptist Press and Lifeway writers, and volunteers serving alongside IMB missionaries.

⁵ For more discussion and analysis of the changes, see Russell H. Dilday, “Analysis of Changes in the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.” in O’Brien, *Stand with Christ: Why Missionaries Can’t Sign the Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

⁶ www.bgct.org/bfm/bfmcomp.pdf.

The 2000 statement redefines the Bible as God's revelation in opposition to 1963 understanding that the Bible is a record of God's revelation. The difference is a change from a stress on the events of revelation behind the text and a new focus on the words of the text. A possible interpretation of the 2000 statement on this point is that the Bible is the whole of God's revelation.

Removing language to the effect that Jesus Christ is the criterion for appropriate Biblical interpretation, the statement becomes in effect the guide to Biblical interpretation in the place of Christ Jesus. Since the 2000 calls itself an "instrument of doctrinal accountability" and a "guide to interpretation," it effectively takes Jesus' place as the lens through which we read and interpret Scripture.

The 2000 statement stresses God as being "all-knowing," thus entering into debate over the character of God's knowledge and issues of whether God cares to know all future events and possibilities. The Bible is clear on God having knowledge at least of the broad strokes of the future. It does not get into the kind of detailed knowledge of the future that the 2000 statement reflects.

In reference to Christ's death offering salvation, the 1963 did not enter into discussion of theories regarding the rationale for Jesus' death. It simply noted that Jesus effected our salvation through His death and resurrection. The 2000 version inserts the term "substitutionary" to describe Jesus' death, thereby limiting itself to one of several Biblical images or explanations of the way in which Jesus' death effected our redemption.

The revision statement on original sin breaks a long sentence into two, adding the word "Therefore" between the phrases. At first glance, this seems to make no difference other than to shorten the sentence for clarity. The extra term, however, has the force of blaming our sinfulness upon the action of the first human being. In essence, the revision says that we sin because the first human sinned. Without that first sin, we would not have become sinners. This is a very big difference in theology. The 1963 version spoke of an inherited inclination toward sin, but left guilt with us as we act upon that inclination. The 2000 revision states that we act upon an inclination because of the first sin. Sin is therefore, no longer our fault, but the fault of the first sinner.

The revised statement stresses a distinction between the genders, describing that distinction as part of the goodness of God's creation. That statement is no problem, but will work in tandem with further distinctions in following segments of the document which limit women from exercising ministry and from any position over men.

In describing salvation, the 2000 revision stresses the term justification as one of the essential aspects or stages of salvation. This stress adds to a legal understanding of salvation. Justification is God's declaring our innocence before divine law. The 1963 statement referred to salvation with a stress on its relational character as a process. There is not much change in wording, but there is an emphasis on the concept of justification.

The revision also adds "There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord." This is at first glance a very coherent statement in relation to the 1963 version. Since faith is being defined as the acceptance of a set of beliefs, however, this phrase has a very different character than what we might expect. If salvation is a question of legal standing before God and faith is the acceptance of a set of doctrinal beliefs, the logical implication is that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel were not saved, as they did not know the name Jesus Christ. The 1963 version would agree that there is no competing means of salvation apart from the Gospel and work of Jesus Christ. It would not demand the

use of a formulaic statement for salvation (“You must repeat the words: Jesus Christ is Lord”), but state the necessity to lay one’s life in dependence upon God in the manner which Jesus taught. On the surface, there is little difference here. Depending on how one interprets faith, there is the possibility of a great difference.

Sanctification is deemed to lead one towards spiritual maturity, whereas the 1963 statement established a longer range goal of perfection. Spiritual perfection establishes the process of sanctification as extending beyond death, whereas maturity could conceivably be achieved in this life.

Language on election changes its appreciation from “a glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness” to “the glorious display”. This means that election becomes the sole display of God’s goodness, rather than one among others.

Other changes in the revision include a stress upon God’s “commandments” rather than “teachings,” stressing a more legalistic or external nature of faith.

One change in the text altered a reading that stressed a shared responsibility among the church members as regards authority and decision-making. The text was changed to refocus the responsibility of all members in regard to accountability to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This change has the effect of releasing the membership from the decision-making process within the local church.

In terms of the role of women, the revision statement excludes women from serving as pastors, defending the qualification as scripturally-based. This removes the right of a church to determine whether or not to call a woman as pastor, since the revision claims to be an instrument of doctrinal accountability.

The revision statement on the Lord’s Day relaxes the understanding of the celebration. Rather than keeping the Lord’s Day separated for worship, devotion, and refraining from worldly amusements, the statement determines that it should include worship practices, but is silent on non-spiritual activities. One’s conscience is to be one’s guide for determining how to commemorate the day.

On evangelism and missions, the revision adds “The Lord Jesus has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations.” While this is certainly true, this is perhaps the weakest Biblical expressions of the commandment. Matthew’s version has Jesus commanding the discipling of the nations, which requires a much greater investment and a deeper understanding of the command. Preaching the gospel can be defined as a simple announcement of the message, with no further investment of energy needed. This accords well with strict versions of Calvinism, in which evangelism is reduced to gathering those whom God has already determined will be saved. This is the overall perspective within the revision document. It is sufficient to announce the gospel, for when the elect hear the message they will answer positively. In this same section, a phrase that called for “personal effort and all other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ,” was replaced with “verbal witness undergirded with a Christian lifestyle and other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.” This is a relaxation of the degree of effort involved in evangelism and missions.

The statement on education reverts to the 1925 language that linked Christianity to Enlightenment philosophy. The wording is different from the 1925 version, but the import is very similar. Stress is placed on the acquisition and thirst for knowledge, rather than the 1963 stress on education as a means for witness and benevolence.

In the statement on the social order, language was introduced that highlights sexual sins, while ignoring others. Along with this emphasis on sexual sin, there is a slight ease of personal responsibility for helping the needy, using the more corporate “we” in place of a more personal pronoun. Included here is also a statement highlighting the sanctity of life, with specific language to oppose abortion and euthanasia. While the corporate “we” is used in reference to meeting social needs, the phrase “every Christian” is maintained in relation to working for the correction of society, government, and industry as regards principles of righteousness, truth, and love.

The statement on war did not undergo much change, other than the addition of one sentence that has an undertone of expecting God’s intervention in the world order to institute a reign of peace. It is not clear what the sentence specifically means, but it would appear somewhat out of character in the section unless it refers to Christ’s messianic reign.

There is one more section, the 1998 statement on the family, which suffered some revision between 1998 and the 2000 version. Of special note is the manner in which differences between men and women are treated. The statement mentions women being of equal worth before God, but in the same sentence places them in a submissive role of service to their husband. “She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.” With this sentence, a wife is given equal status and a position of subservience in the same breath, effectively negating equality of status.

While there are a few other changes to the document in the revision carried out in 2000, these are some of the more important changes. They highlight the kind of changes in both the character of the text and the manner in which it is being used in national convention life. Protests to the contrary aside, it is being used as creed and an “instrument of doctrinal accountability,” just as it claims to be.

It does not spell out all the details of the doctrine of the current convention leadership, but it clarifies some of the major differences in what the current leadership believes and what Baptists in the past accepted as their common ground of faith. Rather than being a document that was written to draw Baptists together, this revision was designed to distinguish those who would tow the party line and those who would hold on to the positions of Baptists in years past.

Denominational leaders have insisted that the changes in the revision were not substantial. They have expected Baptist not to pay close attention to this document. “While there have not been major changes to the document, the statement regarding the family in 1998 and other changes in 2000 have been appropriate responses to contemporary issues and challenges that have emerged in the last 38 years since the 1963 statement was adopted.”⁷ Reading the document as a theologian, I see very significant and major changes in terms of doctrine and in terms of intent. The revision of 2000 is much more than a revision. It is a new direction and a new directive for Southern Baptists. A summary statement of common faith has been transformed into an “instrument of doctrinal accountability”—a means of forcing conformity.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

⁷ Jerry Rankin. “Letter to IMB Missionaries.” January 2002, quoted in John Merritt, *The Betrayal... of Southern Baptist Missionaries by Southern Baptist Leaders, 1979-2004*. pp. 207-208.

Appendix—New Hampshire Baptist Confession, 1833

This Confession was drawn up by the Rev. John Newton Brown, D. D., of New Hampshire (b. 1803, d. 1868), about 1833, and has been adopted by the New Hampshire Convention, and widely accepted by Baptists, especially in the Northern and Western States, as a clear and concise statement of their faith, in harmony with the doctrines of older confessions, but expressed in milder form. The text is taken from the Baptist Church Manual, published by the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia.

Declaration of Faith

1. Of the Scriptures

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction;¹ that it has God for its author, salvation for its end,² and truth without any mixture of error for its matter;³ that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us;⁴ and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union,⁵ and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.⁶

2. Of the True God

We believe that there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is JEHOVAH, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of Heaven and earth;⁷ inexpressibly glorious in holiness,⁸ and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love;⁹ that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;¹⁰ equal in every divine perfection,¹¹ and executing distinct and harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.¹²

3. Of the Fall of Man

We believe that man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker;¹³ but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state;¹⁴ in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners,¹⁵ not by constraint, but choice;¹⁶ being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin,¹⁷ without defense or excuse.¹⁸

4. Of the Way of Salvation

We believe that the salvation of sinners is wholly of grace,¹⁹ through the mediatorial offices of the Son of God;²⁰ who by the appointment of the Father, freely took upon him our nature, yet without sin;²¹ honored the divine law by his personal obedience,²² and by his death made a full atonement for our sins;²³ that having risen from the death, he is now enthroned in heaven;²⁴ and uniting in his wonderful person the tenderest sympathies with divine perfections, he is every way qualified to be a suitable, a compassionate, and an all-sufficient Saviour.²⁵

5. Of Justification

We believe that the great gospel blessing which Christ²⁶ secures to such as believe in him is Justification;²⁷ that Justification includes the pardon of sin,²⁸ and the promise of eternal life on principles of righteousness;²⁹ that it is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through faith in the Redeemer's blood;³⁰ by virtue of which faith his perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us of God;³¹ that it brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures every other blessing needful for time and eternity.³²

6. Of the Freeness of Salvation

We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel;³³ that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial, penitent, and obedient faith;³⁴ and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel;³⁵ which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation.³⁶

7. Of Grace in Regeneration

We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again;³⁷ that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind;³⁸ that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth,³⁹ so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel;⁴⁰ and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.⁴¹

8. Of Repentance and Faith

We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God;⁴² whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ,⁴³ we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy;⁴⁴ at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on him alone as the only and all-sufficient Saviour.⁴⁵

9. Of God's Purpose of Grace

We believe that Election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which he graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners;⁴⁶ that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end;⁴⁷ that it is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy, and unchangeable;⁴⁸ that it utterly excludes boasting, and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of his free mercy;⁴⁹ that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree;⁵⁰ that it may be ascertained by its effects in all who truly believe the gospel;⁵¹ that it is the foundation of Christian assurance;⁵² and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence.⁵³

10. Of Sanctification

We believe that Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness;⁵⁴ that it is a progressive work;⁵⁵ that it is begun in regeneration;⁵⁶ and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means—especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer.⁵⁷

11. Of the Perseverance of Saints

We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end;⁵⁸ that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors;⁵⁹ that a special Providence watches over their welfare;⁶⁰ and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.⁶¹

12. Of the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel

We believe that the Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government;⁶² that it is holy, just, and good;⁶³ and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin;⁶⁴ to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church.⁶⁵

13. Of a Gospel Church

We believe that a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers,⁶⁶ associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel;⁶⁷ observing the ordinances of Christ;⁶⁸ governed by his laws,⁶⁹ and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his Word;⁷⁰ that its only scriptural officers are Bishops, or Pastors, and Deacons,⁷¹ whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.

14. Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer,⁷² into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost;⁷³ to show forth, in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life;⁷⁴ that it is prerequisite to the privileges of a Church relation; and to the Lord's Supper,⁷⁵ in which the members of the Church, by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ;⁷⁶ preceded always by solemn self-examination.⁷⁷

15. Of the Christian Sabbath

We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath;⁷⁸ and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes,⁷⁹ by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations;⁸⁰ by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private⁸¹ and public;⁸² and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God.⁸³

16. Of Civil Government

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interests and good order of human society;⁸⁴ and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed;⁸⁵ except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ⁸⁶ who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.⁸⁷

17. Of the Righteous and the Wicked

We believe that there is a radical and essential difference between the righteous and the wicked;⁸⁸ that such only as through faith are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and sanctified by the Spirit of our God, are truly righteous in his esteem;⁸⁹ while all such as continue in impenitence and unbelief are in his sight wicked, and under the curse;⁹⁰ and this distinction holds among men both in and after death.⁹¹

18. Of the World to Come

We believe that the end of the world is approaching;⁹² that at the last day Christ will descend from heaven,⁹³ and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution;⁹⁴ that a solemn separation will then take place;⁹⁵ that the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy;⁹⁶ and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell, on principles of righteousness.⁹⁷

Notes:

1. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Sam. 23:2; Acts 1:16; 3:21; John 10:35; Luke 16:29-31; Psa. 119:11; Rom. 3:1-2 (return).
2. 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Acts 11:14; Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:16; John 5:38-39 (return).
3. Prov. 30:5-6; John 17:17; Rev. 22:18-19; Rom. 3:4 (return).
4. Rom. 2:12; John 12:47-48; 1 Cor. 4:3-4; Luke 10:10-16; 12:47-48 (return).
5. Phil. 3:16; Eph. 4:3-6; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Pet. 4:11 (return).
6. 1 John 4:1; Isa. 8:20; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Cor. 8:5; Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:6; Jude 3:5; Eph. 6:17; Psa. 119:59-60; Phil. 1:9-11 (return).
7. John 4:24; Psa. 147:5; 83:18; Heb. 3:4; Rom. 1:20; Jer. 10:10 (return).
8. Exod. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 4:6-8 (return).
9. Mark 12:30; Rev. 4:11; Matt. 10:37; Jer. 2:12-13 (return).
10. Matt. 28:19; John 15:26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 1 John 5:7 (return).
11. John 10:30; 5:17; 14:23; 17:5, 10; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10-11; Phil. 2:5-6 (return).
12. Eph. 2:18; 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-5; comp. 2, 7 (return).
13. Gen. 1:27, 31; Eccl. 7:29; Acts 16:26; Gen. 2:16 (return).
14. Gen. 3:6-24; Rom. 5:12 (return).
15. Rom. 5:19; John 3:6; Psa. 51:5; Rom. 5:15-19; 8:7 (return).
16. Isa. 53:6; Gen. 6:12; Rom. 3:9-18 (return).
17. Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 1:18, 32; 2:1-16; Gal. 3:10; Matt. 20:15 (return).
18. Ezek. 18:19-20; Rom. 1:20; 3:19; Gal. 3:22 (return).
19. Eph. 2:5; Matt. 18:11; 1 John 4:10; 1 Cor. 3:5-7; Acts 15:11 (return).
20. John 3:16; 1:1-14; Heb. 4:14; 12:24 (return).
21. Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 2:9, 14; 2 Cor. 5:21 (return).
22. Isa. 42:21; Phil. 2:8; Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 3:21 (return).
23. Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 4:25; 3:21-26; 1 John 4:10; 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:1-3; Heb. 9:13-15 (return).
24. Heb. 1:8, 3; 8:1; Col. 3:1-4 (return).
25. Heb. 7:25; Col. 2:9; Heb. 2:18; 7:26; Psa. 89:19; Psa. 14 (return).
26. John 1:16; Eph. 3:8 (return).
27. Acts 13:39; Isa. 3:11-12; Rom. 8:1 (return).
28. Rom. 5:9; Zech. 13:1; Matt. 9:6; Acts 10:43 (return).
29. Rom. 5:17; Titus 3:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:7; 1 John 2:25; Rom. 5:21 (return).
30. Rom. 4:4-5; 5:21; 6:28; Phil. 3:7-9 (return).
31. Rom. 5:19; 3:24-26; 4:23-25; 1 John 2:12 (return).
32. Rom. 5:1-3, 11; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Matt. 6:33; 1 Tim. 4:8 (return).
33. Isa. 55:1; Rev. 22:17; Luke 14:17 (return).
34. Rom. 16:26; Mark 1:15; Rom. 1:15-17 (return).
35. John 5:40; Matt. 23:37; Rom. 9:32; Prov. 1:24; Acts 13:46 (return).
36. John 3:19; Matt. 11:20; Luke 19:27; 2 Thess. 1:8 (return).
37. John 3:3, 6-7; 1 Cor. 1:14; Rev. 8:7-9; 21:27 (return).
38. 2 Cor. 5:17; Ezek. 36:26; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:28-29; 5:5; 1 John 4:7 (return).
39. John 3:8; 1:13; James 1:16-18; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 2:13 (return).
40. 1 Pet. 1:22-25; 1 John 5:1; Eph. 4:20-24; Col. 3:9-11 (return).
41. Eph. 5:9; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 3:14-21; Matt. 3:8-10; 7:20; 1 John 5:4, 18 (return).
42. Mark 1:15; Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:8; 1 John 5:1 (return).
43. John 16:8; Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31 (return).
44. Luke 18:13; 15:18-21; James 4:7-10; 2 Cor. 7:11; Rom. 10:12-13; Psa. 51 (return).
45. Rom. 10:9-11; Acts 3:22-23; Heb. 4:14; Psa. 2:6; Heb. 1:8; 8:25; 2 Tim. 1:12 (return).
46. 2 Tim. 1:8-9; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Rom. 11:5-6; John 15:15; 1 John 4:19; Hos. 12:9 (return).
47. 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Acts 13:48; John 10:16; Matt. 20:16; Acts 15:14 (return).

48. Exod. 33:18-19; Matt. 20:15; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 9:23-24; Jer. 31:3; Rom. 11:28-29; James 1:17-18; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 11:32-36 (return).
49. 1 Cor. 4:7; 1:26-31; Rom. 3:27; 4:16; Col. 3:12; 1 Cor. 3:5-7; 15:10; 1 Pet. 5:10; Acts 1:24; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; Luke 18:7; John 15:16; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:12 (return).
50. 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Cor. 9:22; Rom. 8:28-30; John 6:37-40; 2 Pet. 1:10 (return).
51. 1 Thess. 1:4-10 (return).
52. Rom. 8:28-30; Isa. 42:16; Rom. 11:29 (return).
53. 2 Pet. 1:10-11; Phil. 3:12; Heb. 6:11 (return).
54. 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 13:9; Eph. 1:4 (return).
55. Prov. 4:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 6:1; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; Phil. 3:12-16 (return).
56. John 2:29; Rom. 8:5; John 3:6; Phil. 1:9-11; Eph. 1:13-14 (return).
57. Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 13:5; Luke 11:35; 9:23; Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 4:30 (return).
58. John 8:31; 1 John 2:27-28; 3:9; 5:18 (return).
59. 1 John 2:19; John 13:18; Matt. 13:20-21; John 6:66-69; Job 17:9 (return).
60. Rom. 8:28; Matt. 6:30-33; Jer. 32:40; Psa. 121:3; 91:11-12 (return).
61. Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; Jude 24-25; Heb. 1:14; 2 Kings 6:16; Heb. 13:5; 1 John 4:4 (return).
62. Rom. 3:31; Matt. 5:17; Luke 16:17; Rom. 3:20; 4:15 (return).
63. Rom. 7:12, 7, 14, 22; Gal. 3:21; Psa. 119 (return).
64. Rom. 8:7-8; Josh. 24:19; Jer. 13:23; John 6:44; 5:44 (return).
65. Rom. 8:2, 4; 10:4; 1 Tim. 1:5; Heb. 8:10; Jude 20-21; Heb. 12:14; Matt. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 12:28 (return).
66. 1 Cor. 1:1-13; Matt. 18:17; Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:31; 1 Cor. 4:17; 14:23; 3 John 9; 1 Tim. 3:5 (return).
67. Acts 2:41-42; 2 Cor. 8:5; Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 5:12-13 (return).
68. 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 3:6; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23; Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:6; 2 Cor. 2:7; 1 Cor. 4:17 (return).
69. Matt. 28:20; John 14:15; 15:12; 1 John 4:21; John 14:21; 1 Thess. 4:2; 2 John 6; Gal. 6:2; all the Epistles (return).
70. Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 14:12; Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 12:14 (return).
71. Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; 15:22; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1 (return).
72. Acts 8:36-39; Matt. 3:5-6; John 3:22-23; 4:1-2; Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 16:32-34; 18:8 (return).
73. Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:47-48; Gal. 3:27-28 (return).
74. Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Acts 22:16 (return).
75. Acts 2:41-42; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts and Epistles (return).
76. 1 Cor. 11:26; Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20 (return).
77. 1 Cor. 11:28; 5:1, 8; 10:3-32; 11:17-32; John 6:26-71 (return).
78. Acts 20:7; Gen. 2:3; Col. 2:16-17; Mark 2:27; John 20:19; 1 Cor. 16:1-2 (return).
79. Exod. 20:8; Rev. 1:10; Psa. 118:24 (return).
80. Isa. 58:13-14; 56:2-8 (return). Psa. 119:15 (return).
81. Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 11:26; 13:44; Lev. 19:30; Exod. 46:3; Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2, 3; Psa. 26:8; 87:3 (return).
82. Heb. 4:3-11 (return).
83. Rom. 13:1-7; Deut. 16:18; 1 Sam. 23:3; Exod. 18:23; Jer. 30:21 (return).
84. Matt. 22:21; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:1-8 (return).
85. Acts 5:29; Matt. 10:28; Dan. 3:15-18; 6:7-10; Acts 4:18-20 (return).
86. Matt. 23:10; Rom. 14:4; Rev. 19:16; Psa. 72:11; Psa. 2; Rom. 14:9-13 (return).
87. Mal. 3:18; Prov. 12:26; Isa. 5:20; Gen. 18:23; Jer. 15:19; Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 6:16 (return).
88. Rom. 1:17; 7:6; 1 John 2:29; 3:7; Rom. 6:18, 22; 1 Cor. 11:32; Prov. 11:31; 1 Pet. 4:17-18 (return).
89. 1 John 5:19; Gal. 3:10; John 3:36; Isa. 57:21; Psa. 10:4; Isa 55:6-7 (return).
90. Prov. 14:32; Luke 16:25; John 8:21-24; Prov. 10:24; Luke 12:4-5; 9:23-26; John 12:25-26; Eccl. 3:17; Matt. 7:13-14 (return).
91. 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Heb. 1:10-12; Matt. 24:35; 1 John 2:17; Matt. 28:20; 13:39-40; 2 Pet. 3:3-13 (return).
92. Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7; Heb. 9:28; Acts 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-11 (return).
93. Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:12-59; Luke 14:14; Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; 6:40; 11:25-26; 2 Tim. 1:10; Acts 10:42 (return).
94. Matt. 13:49, 37-43; 24:30-31; 25:31-33 (return).
95. Matt. 25:35-41; Rev. 22:11; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Pet. 2:9; Jude 7; Phil. 3:19; Rom. 6:32; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; John 4:36; 2 Cor. 4:18 (return).
96. Rom. 3:5-6; 2 Thess. 1:6-12; Heb. 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:5; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:2-16; Rev. 20:11-12; 1 John 2:28; 4:17 (return).

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