

WHAT I BELIEVE

Christopher Gudmundsson, updated 2004

The following is my statement of faith. It sets forth, hopefully in systematic fashion, what I believe to be the primary tenets of a genuinely biblical and Baptist theology. I wish to be clear that I do not conceive these as merely what I prefer to believe, for believing what one prefers to believe is at the heart of what the word “heresy” means. These are the principles to which my best efforts at honest biblical interpretation have led me. Only a clear conviction that I have read Scripture wrongly will suffice to change them; yet by the same token, such a conviction would render such a change quite necessary.

*This statement of my faith is, of course, an adaptation of *The Baptist Faith and Message, 1963*. In using it, I have rearranged much and reworded more. In no place have I subtracted from the BF&M’s content. In many places, I have added to the content of the BF&M, believing further clarity necessary for stating my convictions rightly. Since this doctrinal statement was first written in 1997, I have elected to keep my own article on marriage and family, rather than rewrite it based on the 1998 statement. I am, however, in full agreement with that document – as well as with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.*

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1. The sixty-six books of the Bible make up God’s only written revelation of Himself to mankind. They are His Word, our Holy Scripture. 1.1. God has revealed Himself in many ways throughout time. He is made known clearly in His creation, in our consciences, and in all of history; this is general revelation. He has revealed Himself in dreams and visions, by audible words, by prompting thoughts and words immediately in human minds, and by enabling certain Apostles and Prophets to record the revelations they received infallibly for posterity to read; this is special revelation. He reveals Himself supremely in the person of Jesus Christ, the living Image and Word and Son of God; this is final revelation. 1.2. The commands and covenants of God, and all the necessary story of His dealings with mankind in general and His people Israel in particular in the previous ages, have been recorded for us by holy men of old, without failure, without lack, and without error, all preparing for the coming of Jesus the Messiah. These writings are called the Old Testament. The words, deeds, teachings, and commandments of Jesus have been declared, explained, applied, and passed down to us by the mouths and pens of His apostles and prophets, without failure, without lack, and without error. These writings are called the New Testament. 1.3. These oracles of God have been given to mankind in perfect purity by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. He so exerted His power on, in, and through the human authors of Scripture that, while their writings reflect their own words, thoughts, and even idiosyncrasies of grammar and vocabulary, yet what they wrote was the flawless revelation of God – breathed out by His very mouth. Not one word of the original manuscripts of Scripture, not one letter, not one part of a letter, ever fails or is found false. Thus when all the facts are known, all statements made in the original manuscripts of Scripture will be found to have always been utterly true, in their descriptions of natural phenomena and historical events as well as in matters of faith and morals. Therefore all Christians now may confidently maintain that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. 1.4. Lest there be confusion, let us be as clear as we can be: Jesus is the living Word, the supreme revelation of God, Who is revealed to us in fullness and purity only by the Holy Spirit as He speaks through the Scriptures He inspired – our Holy Bible. To put it another way, the Bible is God’s written Word, inspired by His Holy Spirit to tell us about His living Word, His Son Jesus. 1.5. Since the Bible has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, it is a perfect treasure of divine instruction, utterly sufficient for the maintenance of the human soul in a state of godly well-being. Because it alone reveals the principles by which God judges us, it 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 convictions should be tried. 1.6. Proper interpretation of Scripture—that is, interpretation reliable for determining the one true meaning of any

passage of Scripture—will be accompanied by a humble reliance upon the heart-humbling, mind-opening, illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. It will be accomplished by lexical, grammatical, syntactical, historical, and literary inquiry into the intended meaning of the human author, by diligently comparing various passages in accordance with the principle of the analogy of Scripture, and by interpreting all according to the criteria of the unique divine/human person and the gloriously saving work of Jesus Christ Himself.

2. There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and sovereign Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and in all other perfections. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. 2.1. The one God has revealed Himself as existing eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons, but one God, without division of nature, essence, or being. 2.2. God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the counsel of His own will. He is all-powerful, all-loving, all-wise, and utterly above us, having an essential ultimacy to His being and His doings which defies full comprehension by any created thing. God is fatherly in His attitude toward all His creation, yet is Father in truth only to those who become His children through faith in Jesus Christ. 2.3. The Son of God is the unique and eternal Word and Image of the Father—the only fully divine, accurate, and intelligible representation of what God is. His coming to us as the Christ was promised of old and expected throughout history. He became incarnate as the man Jesus of Nazareth, miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. The man Jesus neither was indwelt by the Christ nor attained Christhood at some point in His life; He was and is the Christ—the Word incarnate, God of very God and man of very man. Jesus Christ perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself the 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 substitutionary death on the cross He made full, final, and definite atonement to the Father for the sins of all who believe. 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 as Lord alone at the right hand of God, to whom all creation owes allegiance, obedience, and worship. There at God's right hand, too, He is the one Mediator, partaking of the nature of God and of man, 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. Through His Spirit He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever-present Lord. 2.4. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ. Like the Father and the Son, He is authentic deity, and properly to be worshipped. He is a person like the Father and the Son, and not merely a divine force or energy. He baptized God's people on the Pentecost following the Lord's Resurrection, thereby fulfilling the Lord's promise. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures, and through illumination now He enables men to accept their truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. He extends an experience of His original baptism to every believer at the moment of regeneration. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer until 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.

3.1. Angels are created beings, of entirely spiritual nature, which nonetheless are depicted in Scripture as having all the attributes of true personality. They were created as the servants of Almighty God and exist solely for that purpose. Angels are neither the lords nor the servants, but rather the helpers and protectors, of God's people. They are always described in Scripture as having great power and glory. 3.2. Some of the angels of God fell into evil at some point in the dateless past, and still exist as the opponents of the people and purposes of God in the world. They are identified in Scripture as evil spirits, demons, or devils. They are depicted in Scripture as being organized into a kind of hierarchy under

the rule of the greatest and most powerful of their number, known as the Devil or Satan. 3.3. These beings are not to be taken as mythical personifications of abstract good or evil, nor as products of the superstition of the ancients, but as real, personal, spiritual beings existing in space and time.

4.1. 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. The first man Adam, under the temptation of Satan yet of his own will, transgressed the command of God and fell from his original innocence. Consequently, his posterity inherit a nature and an environment polluted by and enslaved to sin. Born sinners, with our affections by nature fixed on godlessness, we become transgressors as soon as we are capable of moral action. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship, begin to restore true freedom of choice, and enable man to fulfill His creative purpose. 4.2. The sacredness of human life is grounded in the truth that God created man in His own image; therefore every human being, from conception until natural death, possesses immense God-given dignity and is worthy of the respect and love of every Christian.

5.1. Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who will receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. 5.2.1. Regeneration, or the new birth, is the gracious work of God whereby a spiritually dead sinner becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is a permanent change of heart, wrought sovereignly and effectually by the Holy Spirit, to whom the sinner freely responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by whom the sinner is given a new nature and a new life. 5.2.2. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace; that is, the choice to repent and believe is both a single gracious work of God and a single responsible human choice. Real repentance is a genuine turning from sin to God. Saving faith is the commitment of the entire personality to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. 5.2.3. Repentant faith secures remission of sins and justification unto righteousness. In the remission of sins, God mercifully acquits the repentant sinner of his sin, based on Christ's propitiation wrought out on the cross. In justification, God graciously imputes to the believing sinner the very righteousness of Christ Himself. The penitent and believing sinner is thus brought—by divine grace alone, through repentant faith alone—into a relationship of peace and favor with God. 5.3. Sanctification is the process, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is separated from sin and set apart for God's own use. The believer thereby is enabled and motivated to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. The regenerate man will demonstrate his own regeneracy, both to himself and to others, through the evidences which his sanctification will provide as he mortifies sin and grows in the graces of the Spirit throughout his life. 5.4. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. In the Day of Christ, the saints who have died will be resurrected, and those who are yet living will be translated; all will be supernaturally, totally, and permanently delivered from every vestige of the presence of indwelling sin.

6.1. Election is God's gracious and unconditional choice to regenerate, sanctify, and glorify some of fallen and undeserving mankind, known fully and individually to Himself from all eternity. It is a glorious display of God's sovereign goodness to those upon whom He freely wills to bestow mercy. It is infinitely wise, unassailably holy, and ultimately unchangeable. Its grand paradox is that it is consistent with both the absolute sovereignty of God and the complete responsibility of man; far from invalidating authentic human choice, election incorporates it as the ordained and necessary human means to the divine end. Properly understood, it excludes boasting, demands humility, and elicits a warmly evangelical concern for the souls of unbelievers. 6.2. All true believers endure to the end. While it is possible for one who merely professes salvation to fall away and thereby prove that he never has actually possessed salvation, those whom God has regenerated by the Holy Spirit and justified in Christ will never fall away from the state of grace. Believers may fall into sin through temptation or neglect, whereby they grieve the Holy Spirit, impair the graces and comforts of their salvation, bring reproach on the name and cause

of Christ, and ensure God's paternal chastening their lives; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

7.1. 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, labor, and expect that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. 7.2. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the conclusion of history, when God, in His own time and 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, the living will be changed, and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever with their Lord.

8.1. 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 discipline, gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. 8.2. Such a church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes as a spiritual republic under the Lordship of Jesus, according to the dictates of His Word. In such a congregation members are equally responsible to worship, labor, pray, and submit to the Body. Its Scriptural officers are pastors, which office is restricted to spiritually mature men who are able to teach, and deacons, which office is restricted to spiritually mature men. 8.3. The local church is the matrix of all genuinely Christian evangelism, discipleship, and worship. Membership in and accountability to a local church is everywhere assumed of believers in the New Testament. Nowhere does Scripture entertain the possibility of there being such thing as an unchurched Christian.

9.1. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the scriptural means for a new believer to make his initial confession of Christ before men, and to seal to his own conscience the gravity and irrevocability of his commitment. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in the newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Since it is a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership, as well as to the Lord's Supper. 9.2. 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. 9.3. The symbolic, nonsacramental nature of these ordinances must not be construed as license for believers to forego them. The New Testament never contemplates the existence of an unbaptized believer or a noncommunicant Christian.

10. 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. It should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, by resting from regular gainful work, and by seeking intentionally to enjoy the fellowship of family and friends.

11. 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 implies, among other things, a new birth in each believer of love for his fellow men and of concern for their eternal destiny. Evangelism and missions are therefore a telling evidence of regeneracy. For this reason they are expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Thus it is the duty of every Christian and of every church to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ, both in the immediate community and all around the earth, both by personal lifestyle witness and by every organized method consistent with the spiritual, intelligent, and holy nature of Christ's gospel.

12.1. God has ordained that His truth be acted out before the lost first and foremost upon the stage of the Christian home. In Scripture, the quality of believers' family lives is inextricably linked with the unregenerate man's estimation of the worth of the Christian gospel. 12.2 Therefore God has ordained that men must be the heads of their homes, leading and loving their wives with an active, involved, self-sacrificial concern for their holiness and wholeness. Conversely, women are to submit to their husbands' headship with a gentle and quiet spirit, making the welfare of their homes their paramount temporal concern. 12.3. Parents are commanded to train their children in spiritual and moral matters, being careful not to frustrate them through either laxness or overstrictness. They should pray, labor, and expect that their children will come to Christ and live for Him. 12.4. According to the teachings of Christ and His Apostles, divorce is never good, and remarriage after divorce is always sin. Divorce between believers cannot fail to shame the name of Christ and hinder the progress of His gospel. For this and other reasons, God declares categorically that He hates divorce. Therefore Christians must zealously guard the integrity of their own and each other's marriages.

13. God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians therefore 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, recognizing all these as being entrusted to them for the glory of God and for the service of 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 the earth. Although the tithe is not expressly commanded in the New Testament, it is never repudiated and it is consistently practiced. It remains the most patently Scriptural minimum proportion for giving.

14.1 The process of Christian discipleship is by definition a learning process; thus the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is coordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches, both personal and financial. 14.2 The Christian education of children is pre-eminently the privilege and responsibility of the parents, who are accountable ultimately to God Himself for their attention to or neglect of their children's education in matters of Christian faith and conduct. Each church should supplement and undergird the efforts of parents by providing opportunities for both children and adults to be educated more fully in the things of God, and to be challenged in their Christian commitment. Churches in cooperation should seek to establish and maintain an adequate system of schools, colleges, and seminaries. 14.3 In all Christian education there should be a proper balance between intellectual freedom and responsibility. The freedom of a parent, of a pastor, of a teacher in a church school, or of a professor in a denominationally-supported institution of learning is bounded by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the binding authority of the Scripture's teaching, and by the distinct, divinely ordained purpose for which the relationship or the school exists.

15.1 New Testament churches should cooperate with each other in missionary, benevolent, and educational endeavors for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. 15.2 All associations, conventions, and institutions formed in such cooperative efforts should be expressly designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of Christian people in the most efficient manner that can be discovered. They should be freely disbanded when it becomes evident that they have outlived their usefulness to the churches and to the Kingdom. While they exist they should be accountable only to the churches which form them, and not at all to each other. This accountability to the churches should be absolute and comprehensive, embracing all matters of philosophy, policy, and procedure. 15.3 In all cooperative efforts each church, as a body autonomous of external human control, but accountable directly to Jesus the Lord of the church according to the dictates of His Word, is responsible to be an intentional influence in behalf of the convictions it holds, or else to seek other avenues of cooperation in keeping with those convictions.

16.1 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 in 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. Thus each Christian who wishes to impact his society for the good must be actively and intentionally committed to a lifestyle of personal holiness and personal evangelism. 16.2 Having understood that merely changing laws is not sufficient to change society in any lasting way, the Christian should in the spirit of Christ oppose every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. He should work to protect and provide for the unborn, the orphaned, the abused, the aged, the needy, 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 use all appropriate political or cultural means available to effect change in the direction of public righteousness, and 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 Word.

17.1 According to both the express teaching of Christ and the undeniable testimony of human history, the only infinite and eternal peace the world will ever know awaits the coming of Christ and the establishment of His personal reign over the earth. 17.2 Nonetheless, it is the duty of Christians in this present age to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness, and to pray and work for peace among nations. In accordance with the spirit of the teachings of Christ, they should do all in their power to put an end to war and strife. 17.3 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; thus work for the cause of missions is work for the cause of peace.

18.1 God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from human doctrines and commandments which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Any individual or institution that attempts to coerce the conscience of man in any theological or ideological direction whatsoever, thereby usurps a prerogative which is God's alone, and which He Himself will not exercise until the end of the world. 18.2 Church and state should therefore be separate. The state owes to every religion and to every person protection and full freedom in the pursuit of spiritual ends, and in the formation and propagation of religious convictions. Thus the state has no right to impose penalties or deny privileges to any man on the basis of his spiritual convictions or activities, nor any right to levy taxes expressly for the support or propagation of any form of religion or irreligion whatsoever. 18.3 The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends, and flourishes best in a society in which it is neither supported nor suppressed by the civil power. Therefore Christians who live in lands where they are permitted to have a voice in determining the laws by which they must live, should jealously guard their freedom from governmental interference in spiritual matters. Likewise they should refuse any offer of aid or support from the government in the prosecution of spiritual ends. Since Christianity is the truth, it has nothing to fear and everything to gain in a frank and open competition among faiths. For this reason, a free church in a free state, fulfilling the Great Commission in a free market of ideas, has the greatest potential to impact its culture for Jesus Christ. 18.4 Civil government being ordained of God for the suppression of immorality and the protection of the God-given rights of men, Christians are under divine obligation to conduct themselves as good, loyal, submissive, responsible citizens. Nevertheless, when the civil authority demands of the believer some act or attitude which is contrary to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, that believer is responsible to obey God, not the civil authority. When such civil disobedience is required of a Christian, it is to be carried out quietly, unpretentiously, passively, offering to the civil authority neither resistance nor defiance nor deceit, but a simple, silent willingness to endure the consequences of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.