

First Baptist Church

Article III - An Affirmation of Our Faith

I. The Doctrine of The Bible

A. Revelation: The Bible was revealed to man by God.

God made known to man that which he wanted man to know. Some of the information is related to present-day instruction on how to live and be rightly related to God and one's fellow man. Other information is related to prophetic statements about the future. Hebrews 3:7 says, "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says. . . ." Then it quotes a passage from Psalms, which was written by King David, indicating that the human writing was revealed by God.

Central Passage: Hebrews 3:7

B. Inspiration: God saw to it that when men wrote down His revelation, they did so without error.

Not all of God's revelation to man was recorded in the Bible. Some of it was very personal, between God and one individual. But for that part of God's revelation to man that was written down, God became involved in the recording process to such a degree that, while He did not dictate or over-ride each individual author's personality, He saw to it that what the writer did record was what He wanted recorded and that it was without error.

Central Passages: 2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16-17

of C. Illumination: The Holy Spirit must enable people to understand and embrace the truth of Scripture.

Man's natural ability to grasp and embrace the information in the Bible is limited. Much of it is spiritual information that man does not readily understand or accept. To overcome this fact, the Holy Spirit gradually enables the receptive mind to understand and embrace more and more of the Bible, as the Christian matures in his or her spiritual walk.

Central Passage: I Corinthians 2:12

D. Interpretation: We must be diligent students of Scripture to understand its deeper teachings.

Gaining a deeper grasp of the Bible is a two-way street. It is true that it will not happen unless the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind of the Christian, but neither will it happen unless the Christian is diligent to pursuing biblical knowledge. The more the Christian reads and studies the Bible, the more the Holy Spirit will illuminate his or her mind, which encourages the believer to read and study further.

Central Passage: 2 Timothy 2:15

II. The Doctrine of God

A. Existence: God exists.

In a scientific culture, some are reluctant to believe in a being they cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. However, God cannot be dealt with in a laboratory. He must be dealt with in the courtroom. It is impossible to generate proof of His existence, so we must look for evidence of His existence. While the Bible simply assumes that God exists, it also provides excellent evidence, so that believing in His existence is an intellectually reasonable thing to do.

Central Passage: Romans 1:20

B. Attributes: The fundamental characteristics of God.

God is a personal being, and as such has individual characteristics that distinguish Him from all other beings. These characteristics are called "attributes." Some of His attributes are shared by mankind since God created man after His personal image. These are called "personal" attributes. He has other characteristics, however, which go beyond man and are true of Him alone. These are the attributes that define "deity" and are called "divine" attributes.

Central Passages:

1. Omnipotence: God is all-powerful. Job 42:2
2. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere simultaneously. Psalm 139:8
3. Omniscience: God knows all things. Psalm 139:4

C. Sovereignty: God can do whatever He wills.

God is all-powerful and has the ability to do what-ever He wills. This sovereignty is only exercised in harmony with His goodness, righteousness, and other attributes, and it extends to the entirety of creation for all time. In His sovereignty, He has determined everything that has happened and will happen, and yet has done so in such a way that man has true "volition," or choice. This is one of the mysteries, or "unexplainable" things, of Scripture.

Central Passage: Psalm 135:5-6

D. Trinity: God is three persons, yet one.

Another mystery of the Scripture is the Trinity. The Bible says distinctly that there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4). But it also seems to say with equal clarity that there was a man, Jesus Christ, who claimed equality with God the Father, and there is someone called the Holy Spirit who is also equal with God the Father. How do you put that together? Historically, the concept has been termed the "Trinity." There is one God who exists in three persons. While it is impossible to give an illustration of the Trinity, the evidence remains and has been embraced as a fundamental teaching of Christianity from the beginning.

Central Passages: Deuteronomy 6:4 & 2 Corinthians 13:14

III. The Doctrine of Christ

A. Deity: Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate.

Though Jesus was man, He was also God. The second member of the Trinity existed before He was born as Jesus of Nazareth. Christ was active in the creation of the world and during the Old Testament. When the timing was right, the Christ, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth but did not forfeit His divinity at any time.

Central Passage: John 1:1

B. Humanity: Christ was a man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Though Jesus was God, He was also man. Christ took on the form of humanity, and though He did not sin He tasted all other human experiences, including hunger, fatigue, and sorrow, etc. He was supernaturally conceived, was born of a virgin, and lived a fairly normal early life as a carpenter's son in Nazareth of Galilee. As a man, He was crucified, died, and was buried.

Central Passage: John 1:14

C. Resurrection: After being killed, Jesus was raised to life again.

After being falsely accused and tried in a series of kangaroo courts, Jesus was subjected to the form of capital punishment reserved for non-Roman citizens. He was flogged, a savage punishment which, itself, killed 60 percent of its victims; then He was nailed to a wooden cross where He died. Afterward, He was wrapped in burial clothes and placed in a sealed tomb where He remained for three days. At the end of that time, a miraculous earthquake occurred and an angel moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb to reveal that Jesus was raised from the dead after three days, just as He said He would be.

Central Passage: Romans 1:4

D. Return: Jesus will return to earth at some time in the future.

The picture of the Messiah in the Old Testament was an uncertain one. Some of the prophetic passages spoke of a humble-servant Messiah while other passages spoke of a glorious and powerful king. So stark was the contrast between these two kinds of passages that some old Testament scholars thought there would be two Messiahs. With the additional revelation in the New Testament, we now know how to reconcile these passages. Jesus came the first time as a humble servant and died for the sins of mankind. After He was resurrected, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. Some day in the future, and according to Biblical prophecy it could be soon, Jesus will return to earth as a powerful and glorious king to institute righteousness on the earth.

Central Passage: Titus 2:13

IV. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

A. Personality: The Holy Spirit is a personal being, not an impersonal force.

The Holy Spirit is sometimes perceived as the religious equivalent of school spirit. This is not accurate. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is treated as a person and given the attributes of personality, such as emotions, actions, intellect, and relationships.

Central Passage: Ephesians 4:30

B. Deity: The Holy Spirit is divine, the third person of the Trinity.

Not only is the Holy Spirit a personal being, He is also divine. He possesses divine attributes, such as omnipresence and omnipotence. He performed miracles only God could do, such as the creation of the world and the miraculous conception of Jesus. In addition, He is associated on an equal plane with the other members of the Trinity.

Central Passage: 2 Corinthians 13:14

C. Salvation: The Holy Spirit is instrumental in personal salvation.

The Holy Spirit plays the instrumental role in the personal salvation of individuals who become Christians. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to see our sinfulness and realize that we should turn from sin. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to see that, in order to become Christians, we must believe in Jesus, ask Him to forgive us of our sins and give us eternal life, and commit our lives to living for Him.

Central Passages:

1. Conviction: Revealing a need to change. John 16:8
2. Regeneration: Imparting a new spirit and eternal life with God. Titus 3:5
3. Indwelling: Living within a believer. Romans 8:9
4. Baptism: Placing a believer, spiritually, in the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13
5. Sealing: Guaranteeing the believer's relationship to God. Ephesians 1:13

D. Gifts: The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual abilities to Christians.

God wants to use each of us to minister to others. The Holy Spirit gives us a special spiritual "gift" to minister to others. It is something we enjoy doing and something at which we are effective. However, since God is working through us with this gift, the results must always be attributed to Him and not to ourselves. We must guard against two imbalances. We must not become discouraged if our results are meager, and we must not become inflated if our results are abundant. For in the true exercise of spiritual gifts, it is God who produces the results, whether meager or abundant.

Central Passage: 1 Corinthians 12:4,11

V. The Doctrine of Angels

A. Angels: Ministering spirits from God.

The Bible teaches that God uses a numberless army of angels to help execute His will in heaven and earth, and that among their duties is ministering to Christians. Perhaps this is where the concept of guardian angels came from. They are personal beings, spirits that God created before Adam and Eve, and are not "ghosts" of people who have died.

Central Passage: Hebrews 1:14

B. Demons: Angels who fell.

The Bible teaches that a large number of the "righteous angels" rebelled against God and now form an evil army under the command of the devil, who uses them to further his will, which is counter to the will of God. This corruption is often referred to as the "fall" of these angels.

Central Passage: Jude 6

C. Satan: The highest angel who fell.

The Bible teaches that Satan was originally the highest angel, but because of pride he fell, rebelling against God and leading many lesser angels to rebel against Him also. In doing this he became evil and corrupt. He is a real entity who oversees the forces of darkness in the world and seeks to neutralize and overthrow the will of God.

Central Passage: 1 Peter 5:8

D. Defenses: Using God's protection.

In the Bible, Satan is called the deceiver and the destroyer. He deceives in order to destroy. A primary strategy is to make that which is wrong look right and that which is right look wrong. The Bible teaches that protection from Satan is available to the Christian.

Central Passages:

1. Alertness: The Christian must know Satan's intention and be alert to his advances. 1 Peter 5:8
2. Armor: The Christian has defenses that are metaphorically called armor, which protect him or her from Satan's devices. Ephesians 6:13
3. Resistance: Once the Christian is aware of Satan's intentions and is using the "spiritual armor" discussed in Ephesians 6, he or she may resist any suspected Satanic advances with confidence of victory. James 4:7

VI. The Doctrine Of Man

A. Origin: Man was created by God in His image.

Man's purpose is to "know God and enjoy Him forever." Man was created in perfect fellowship and harmony with God, in His image. This does not mean physical likeness, for God does not have a physical body. But it means in the psychological, emotional, and spiritual likeness of God.

Central Passage: Genesis 1:27

B. Nature: Man has a spiritual as well as a physical dimension.

Man is spiritual as well as physical. Man's earthly physical body is destined to die. The moment he is born, the process is set in motion for him to die. His spirit, however, lives forever and transcends his physical limitations. After man dies, he receives a new body that lives forever.

Central Passage: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

C. Distinctiveness: Man has capacities that go beyond those of any animals and mark him as the pinnacle of God's creation.

Man possesses intellect, emotion, and will. With intellect he can know, reason, and think. With emotion he can feel, empathize, and experience. With will he can choose. These are all characteristics of God and, as such, are part of the "image of God" within man. They also separate man from the animals. In addition, man has the capacity for self-awareness, an awareness of God, an awareness of afterlife, and the ability to envision life in the future under different scenarios such as heaven and hell, etc. Man certainly has characteristics that overlap with the animals, but his capacities not only go beyond those of animals, he has capacities that no animals have.

Central Passage: Genesis 1:26

D. Destiny: Man will live forever in heaven or hell.

Though man's spirit inhabits a body at all times, that body changes after death on earth. A new body is received, depending on his destiny, in which he will continue to live forever. Destiny in hell is portrayed as agonizing torment, though little is known of the origins of that torment. Existence in heaven is pictured in great detail, though we still might wish for more details. The heavenly body is beautiful beyond imagination, exceedingly powerful, and not subject to time and space limitations. The citizen of heaven will rule

precincts of the celestial realm and will possess power, wisdom, and unbounded creativity.

Central Passage: Hebrews 9:27

VII. The Doctrine Of Sin

A. Nature: Sin is any lack of conformity to the moral perfection of God.

All that is good, right, and pleasant comes from God. Anything that does not come from God is the opposite. By definition, it must be bad, wrong, and unpleasant. We are creatures who sin. When we do, we bring bad, wrong, and unpleasant things into our lives, as His children we diminish the reputation of God our father, and we decrease the interest the non-Christian world might have in God because they do not see the difference between being Christian and not being Christian.

Central Passage: I John 5:17

B. Fall: The separation of Adam and Eve from God in the Garden of Eden because of original sin.

All the pain, all the evil, all the suffering that is in the world, that has ever been in the world, and that will ever be in the world can be traced back to one event: when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden. Because of the cataclysmically negative effects of that event, it has been referred to as the fall of man.

Central Passage: Genesis 3:6

C. Corruption: Mankind as a whole was corrupted by the original fall.

Sin entered mankind, and now all men are corrupted with sin. It is not that man is not capable of doing good (for certainly some people do wonderful things), or even that he is as bad as he could be (many people could be much worse than they are). It is just that he cannot keep from doing that which is bad, because his essential nature has been corrupted. David said, "in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). This does not mean that his mother sinned, but that all men are born sinners. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

Central Passage: Ephesians 2:1, 3

D. Rebellion: Because man's internal nature has been corrupted by sin, he cannot keep from committing personal sins.

Man's heart has been corrupted and therefore, he commits individual, personal sins. Some of these sins are sins of commission (things we ought not to do, but do) and some are sins of omission (things we ought to do but don't). They may be tangible acts, or they may be deficient attitudes, motives, or perspectives. When we compare ourselves with other people on external things, we might not do so badly. But when we compare ourselves with Jesus, who had no imperfections in act, thought, motive, word, or deed, we see that we fall short.

Central Passages: Romans 3:23 and 6:23

VIII. The Doctrine of Salvation

A. Basis: Salvation is a gift God gives to those who believe.

We cannot earn our salvation. We are imperfect, and we cannot make ourselves perfect. Yet God demands perfection. Therefore, all we can do is cast ourselves on God's mercy. In His mercy, God offers to forgive our sin and give us a new nature of holiness so that we can be in perfect relationship with Him. The completion of that relationship is not realized until we die and we shed the "body of sin" in which we live. God's offer has one condition: that we believe in and receive Jesus as our Savior.

Central Passage: Ephesians 2:8-9

B. Result: God extends forgiveness for sin and eternal life to those who accept Him.

God's solution to man's inherent dilemma is to offer him forgiveness of his sins and to give him a new nature that is not flawed. Man still languishes under the impact of sin until his flawed body dies and he receives a new body. Then he is free to serve God forever in heaven in undiluted righteousness.

Central Passage: Romans 5:1

C. Cost: The penalty of sin is paid for by the substitutionary death of Christ.

Sin brings death. Since all have sinned, all have died, spiritually, and are separated from God. Jesus was without sin, and He willingly died with the understanding that His death

could count as a substitution for our own. If you believe in Jesus and receive Him as your personal Savior, God will then count His death for yours and give you eternal life.

Central Passage: 1 Peter 3:18

D. Timing: Our salvation is completed at the death of the body.

Man is body and spirit. Upon becoming a Christian, a person's spirit is born again and he is given eternal life. His body, at that point, remains unchanged. It is corrupted by sin, is susceptible to disease and death, and is inclined to sin. The brain, which is part of the physical body, is still encumbered with old programming that is counter to biblical truth. Because of this, the Christian experiences a continuous struggle between the new inner man who wishes to serve God and the outer man who feels the pull to sin (see Romans 7). This conflict continues until the death of the body, at which time the spirit of the Christian is transported immediately to heaven to await a new body, untouched by sin. (Romans 8:23)

Fortunately, until our salvation is completed with "the redemption of the body," when we sin after having become a Christian "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God does not want us to sin, but He recognizes that as long as we are in this body, we will. When we do, He cleanses us. The death of Christ on the cross was sufficient for all our sins, past and future. God is continuously working in our lives, however, to lead us to a more righteous lifestyle. If we resist this work of God, He chastens us, as any loving father would a child, to correct inappropriate behavior. (See Hebrews 12:4-13)

Central Passage: Romans 8:23

IX. The Doctrine of the Church

A. Universal Church: The Universal Church is the totality of all believers in Jesus.

The Universal Church, also called the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24), refers to all people in all parts of the world who have become Christians since the beginning of the Church and who will become Christians before Christ returns. The Church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and will culminate when Christ returns. Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18), and the Universal Church is to be the representation of Christ on earth, collectively doing His will.

Central Passage: Ephesians 5:25, 27

B. Local Church: A local assembly of believers organized to carry out the responsibilities of the Universal Church.

The church is not a building, but people. At any given time and place, Christians are to band together to carry out the responsibilities of the Universal Church. As such, they organize to govern themselves, select spiritual leaders, collect money for ministry, observe baptism and communion, exercise church discipline, engage in mutual edification and evangelism, and worship God.

Central Passage: 1 Corinthians 1-2

C. Leadership: Those in the church worthy of being followed because of their spiritual maturity.

Leadership in the local church is invested in pastor-teachers and elders. The Scripture appears to give freedom as to how this leadership is organized and functions, but it is quite specific about the spiritual qualifications. Only spiritually mature people are to be given high positions of spiritual leadership in the church.

Central Passage: 1 Timothy 3:2-4, 6-7

D. Membership: Belonging to the Universal Church and a local church.

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she immediately and automatically becomes a member of the Universal Church, the Body of Christ. Throughout church history, local churches have had varying requirements for membership that range from very limited to very strict. This appears to be a point of freedom given local churches in the Scripture. An important point, however, is that everyone should be a part of a local church. God never intended for Christians to try to make it alone. Placing oneself under spiritual authority and in mutual ministry with others is essential to spiritual health.

Central Passage: Hebrews 10:24-25

X. The Doctrine of Future Things

A. Return: Jesus will return to earth again.

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, buried, and resurrected about A.D. 30. He ascended into heaven where He has remained for the last two thousand years. At some time in the future, and from prophetic information it could be at any time, He will return to earth. When He does, it will not be as a carpenter's son but in power and glory, revealing His true cosmic sovereignty. During His first visit to earth, He came as a servant with an

emphasis on His humanity. During His second visit to earth He will reign as king, emphasizing His deity.

Central Passage: Matthew 16:27

B. Judgement: God will confirm the eternal destiny of all individuals.

At two different times and places, God will conduct audiences with all humanity to confirm our eternal destiny. Those who believed in Jesus and received Him will then be confirmed to eternity in heaven with Him. Those who did not believe in Him and receive Him will be confirmed to eternal separation from Him in hell.

Central Passages: 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Rev. 20:15

C. Universe: The old universe will be destroyed and replaced with a new one.

The present universe was flawed with sin at the time of the "fall" of man. While much of nature is beautiful, much of it is also destructive and uninhabitable. The universe will be destroyed with an apocalyptic cosmic fire and replaced with a new universe and a new earth that will have no harmful features. (See 2 Pet. 3:12-13 and Rev. 21:4)

Central Passage: Revelation 21:1

D. Eternity: Christians will live with God forever.

Jesus will reign in absolute righteousness, Only goodness and beauty will exist. Believers will rule with Him forever as vice-regents. They will govern angelic beings. They will be beings of beauty and power who will participate in glorious celestial ceremonies. Believers themselves will receive much personal glory by the grace and goodness of God, as well as spend generous time worshiping and praising God. Intellect, beauty, power, and talent will be virtually limitless as believers both serve Jesus the King and rule with Him in a world that progressively glorifies God and brings great joy and individual satisfaction.

Central Passages: John 14:2-3 and Revelation 22:5