

On August 9, 2005 the Council of Elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church approved the following motion (23 yes, 1 no): “*The Elders recommend to the church that the Constitution and By-Laws be amended in accordance with revision 08-09-05 as amended by the Elders (on 08/09/05), of the document entitled Baptism and Church Membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church*”. That document follows below.

## **Baptism and Church Membership**

### **At Bethlehem Baptist Church**

#### **Eight Recommendations for Constitutional Revision**

Prepared by  
John Piper with Alex Chediak and Tom Steller

Final revisions by the Council of Elders  
August 9, 2005

**All Changes to the Constitution and By-Laws  
are noted with strikethrough (for deletions)  
and with underlining (for additions).**

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## How to Use this Document

1. This document is several years in the making. Therefore it has historical parts that go back several years. If you read those parts do not confuse them with what is being proposed today in 2005.
2. Pray earnestly for wisdom and patience and energy and farseeing vision for the cause of Christ.
3. Keep your eyes on both Bethlehem and the larger issues of the church around the world. We are a tiny thread in the great mosaic of Christ-exalting history that God is governing.
4. You do *not* need to read all of this paper. The historical parts are for those who need them. There is some overlap between the parts since the same material occurs in more than one context. The historical documents preserved in Appendices A, B, and C are crucial for providing the rationale for why we have come to this point in the history of our church.
5. The heart of the document is the *Eight Recommendations* (pp. 8-12). These recommendations are keyed to the Appendices for fuller treatment.
6. The summary of all recommended changes can be found in Appendix M, The Entire Constitution with All Proposed Amendments. Additions are underlined and deletions are printed as strikethrough.

### A Personal Word

It is a high and holy and joyful privilege to serve this church with you. I feel keenly the weight of the truth that in just a few years I will give an account to Jesus Christ face to face for how I have shared in the leadership of this church. I am deeply gratified with what we are doing here and believe it is pleasing to the Lord. I am sure what you find here can be improved. But I am also glad to present you what I think is constitutionally clear and workable. I believe all the expressed concerns can be answered and have been addressed. May the Lord give you spiritual insight as you join in the hard and joyful work of thinking clearly and biblically for God's people "which he bought with his own blood." I am deeply thankful to Alex Chediak for his careful reading of this document and his many useful suggestions. Tom Steller has been moved with me arm in arm for 25 years and we are happy to draft this document as with one mind.

Pastor John

## Background

On January 18, 2002 John Piper presented a paper to the elders called, “**Twelve Theses On Baptism and Its Relationship to Church Membership, Church Leadership, and Wider Affiliations and Partnerships of Bethlehem Baptist Church.**” This is attached as **Appendix A.**

The crucial paragraph concerning the issue of baptism and membership was as follows:

*10. Therefore, where the belief in the Biblical validity of infant baptism does not involve baptismal regeneration or the guarantee of saving grace, this belief is not viewed by the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church as a weighty or central enough departure from Biblical teaching to exclude a person from membership, if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and a clear conscience that his baptism is valid. In such a case we would not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership but would teach and pray toward a change of mind that would lead such members eventually to such a baptism.*

We should make it clear from the outset that the discussion of baptism and church membership has always proceeded on the common conviction of all the elders that *baptismal regeneration* is not an acceptable way for us to view or to practice baptism. No person will be admitted to membership at Bethlehem who does not affirm the following sentence taken from the proposed MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: “We believe that [the Holy Spirit’s] work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual.” On this the Council of Elders remains united.

Furthermore, we are all agreed that no one will be admitted to membership who has not been baptized in any mode or time at all. Whatever differences there are in how Christians view the timing and mode of baptism, *the fact of Christ’s command to be baptized* is so clear we agree that the repudiation of it is serious enough to keep a person from membership.

On March 29, 2002 John Piper presented to the elders a recommendation and rationale that our constitution be amended to allow some exceptions to the present baptism requirement for church membership. See **Appendix B** for the entire recommendation and rationale. The exception wording proposed at that time was as follows:

*Exceptions may be made to the requirement for believer’s baptism by immersion in cases where, after significant study, thought, discussion, and prayer, a candidate sincerely and humbly believes that it would be contrary to Scripture and conscience -- and not just contrary to family tradition or desires -- to be baptized by immersion and thus to count his infant “baptism” or his adult sprinkling as improper or invalid. In such cases the candidate will give evidence*

*that there is a humble, teachable openness to more light under the teaching and leadership of the Elders.*

In the following months there was serious discussion of the issue of baptism and church membership and writings were exchanged among the elders. Notably Paul Dreblow posed significant questions in June, 2002, which John Piper attempted to answer. See **Appendix C** for this sample of elder discussion.

On July 15, 2002 the following motion was passed by the elders. The point of it was to create a span of time for an elder to believe something that appears to be out of compliance with the present Affirmation of Faith which is part of our church constitution. During this time the matter would be studied, and disciplinary action would be delayed. Thus the effort was made to be above board in setting in motion a time of study and discussion that could not last indefinitely. This motion passed with one dissenting vote. Moved:

*that the elders continue to endorse as a requirement for admission into membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church believer's baptism by immersion, and, at the same time, that we find it is acceptable for an elder to hold to this standard of teaching and practice while also allowing for the possibility of certain exceptions to it.*

The reason this seems out of compliance to the constitution is that our present constitutional Affirmation of Faith (included in the constitution) defines the church as baptized believers and defines baptism as the immersion of believers (not infants and not sprinkling). Therefore joining the church without being immersed as a believer seems to be ruled out by our present constitutional Affirmation of Faith. So the exception which was allowed in the motion of July 15, 2002 cannot be allowed indefinitely. That motion simply created a time for study and resolution.

On Saturday, April 3, 2004 the elders spent an extended time seeking to come to one mind on the issue of baptism and church membership. The next Tuesday, April 6, 2004 the following motion was passed with two dissenting votes.

A Motion for the Elders  
Regarding the Requirements for Church Membership  
Including the Question of the Mode and Time of Baptism

Revised  
4-3-04

What follows is a revised motion for action on April 6, 2004 by the elders. It is the result of four hours of discussion by the elders on Saturday, April 3. It attempts to make explicit that baptismal regeneration and no baptism at all are not compatible with membership at Bethlehem. It also proposes pursuing a process of constitutional revision, rather than proposing the final wording of what that process will yield. The **CHURCH COVENANT** with suggested changes [see Appendix E], and the new **MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** [see Appendix D] are included to show one possible way that the constitutional changes could be implemented. Passing this motion would not mandate the wording of these documents if a better way could be found to accomplish the aim of the motion. The idea is that once this Motion is passed, a constitutional revision committee would be established who would work out the details of an implementation and bring the elders proposals for exact wording for constitutional changes in a set amount of time. Please notice the new suggested changes in the **CHURCH COVENANT**.

**Motion:**

1. **Whereas** all of the elders of Bethlehem are required to affirm the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith (formerly TBI Affirmation of Faith), thus providing strong doctrinal safeguards for the future of the church, and
2. **Whereas** this affirmation ensures that the eldership of Bethlehem holds firmly to the conviction that believer's baptism by immersion (not infant baptism or adult baptism by sprinkling) is what the New Testament teaches, and
3. **Whereas** Bethlehem will therefore practice only believer's baptism, and
4. **Whereas** we agree that the belief in baptismal regeneration, and not experiencing any form of baptism at all, are not compatible with membership in Bethlehem Baptist Church, and
5. **Whereas** we believe that the door to local church membership should be roughly the same size as the door to membership in the universal body of Christ, and

6. **Whereas** we believe that excluding someone from membership in the local church is very serious and usually implies a warranted doubt about the validity of someone's faith,

**Therefore** we, the Council of Elders of Bethlehem Baptist church, will pursue a process of constitutional change which, in principle, implements the following:

The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who, in the judgment of Christian charity,

- (1) profess faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure of their lives, and
- (2) affirm the Bethlehem Baptist Church MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH [see **Appendix D** which includes a repudiation of baptismal regeneration and no baptism at all], and
- (3) engage to live consistently with their profession of faith in Jesus, according to our CHURCH COVENANT [see **Appendix E**], and
- (4) are willing to receive instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church in accord with the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith.

This motion passed with two dissenting votes. At that point the pressures of other aspects of ministry pushed the baptism question to the background until now, summer, 2005. The following eight recommendations are an attempt to move us forward in accord with this motion.

\* \* \*

**Eight Recommendations**  
**Approved by the Council of Elders**  
**August, 2005**

**1. Make the BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH an integral part of the Church Constitution and By-Laws.**

This has already been accomplished in December, 2003 when the church voted to include the following statements in Article II, Section 4, paragraph b of the By-Laws of the Church: *“Elders are also required to be in agreement with the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Council of Elders to the church, following the same procedure to amend the By-Laws.”*

In the present proposal the amendment of the Constitution, Article II, Section 4 will read, *“The doctrinal standards of what is believed and taught by the Council of Elders of this church is expressed in The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. This Affirmation, attached as Appendix A of the Constitution, shall be deemed a part of the Constitution of this church. (Cf. By-Laws Article II, Section 4, paragraph b)”*

**2. Create a minimal MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH that all members would have to affirm. (Appendix D)**

The aim here is to make the doctrinal qualifications for membership in the local church similar to those of the universal church. The approach was to start with the BGC Affirmation of Faith and keep as much of it as seemed doctrinally essential to being a Christian. That is, what affirmations could not be denied without providing credible warrant to question the genuineness of an individual’s claim to have saving faith? This MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is being proposed for inclusion in Article II, Section 5. a. of the Constitution. It is included as Appendix D of this paper.

**3. Remove the BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH from the Constitution and affirm it conditionally, by action of the Council of Elders, in a MEMORANDUM OF CONDITIONAL AFFIRMATION OF THE BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. (Appendix H)**



The aim here is to remain a part of the Baptist General Conference if they will accept our interpretation of the BGC AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. The reason for removing it from the Constitution is that we now require more doctrinal fullness among the elders than this Affirmation provides, and we would require less fullness among members if these proposals pass. We have raised the doctrinal standards for becoming an elder and we are proposing to lower them for becoming a member. New believers should be able to join the church with less doctrinal understanding. And there are non-essentials affirmed in the BGC AFFIRMATION OF FAITH that should not prevent a person from membership.

The proposal is that the Council of Elders affirms the BGC AFFIRMATION OF FAITH with eight conditions (i.e., interpretations). The BGC AFFIRMATION OF FAITH would then be on record in the minutes of the Council of Elders as thus affirmed but not part of the governing documents of the church. The MEMORANDUM OF CONDITIONAL AFFIRMATION OF THE BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is found in **Appendix H** of this paper.

**4. Amend the wording of the CHURCH COVENANT to reflect the changes being proposed and to improve a few minor infelicities of wording. (Appendix E)**

The Covenant and the notes which explain each of the proposed changes is found in **Appendix E**.

**5. Amend Article II of the Constitution as found in Appendix J of this paper.**

The essential changes are:

1. The addition of our Mission statement to Article II, paragraph 3. *“Thus Bethlehem Baptist Church exists to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.”*

2. The addition of paragraph 4: *“The doctrinal standards of what is believed and taught by the Council of Elders of this church are expressed in THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. This AFFIRMATION, attached as Appendix A of the Constitution, shall be deemed a part of the Constitution of this church. (Cf. By-Laws, Article II, Section 4, paragraph b)”*

3. The addition of paragraph 5: *“The minimum doctrinal and life standards for membership in Bethlehem Baptist Church are expressed in the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH and the CHURCH COVENANT.”* These two documents then follow in the Constitution as paragraphs 5. a. and 5. b. (See Appendix J for the whole Article with all amendments.)

4. The removal of the BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH in accord with proposal 3 above.

## 6. Amend Article III of the Constitution concerning membership (Appendix K).

The entire change is seen below as well as in Appendix K. The aim here is to state the qualifications for membership and refer the reader to the By-Laws Article I, Section 2 in order to deal with the baptism question more fully. In what follows additions are underlined and deletions are strikethrough.

### ARTICLE III, Membership

~~The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who give evidence of regeneration by a living consistent with their profession and with the views of faith, doctrine and practice of this Church, who have been baptized by immersion and who have been received into its membership according to the By-Laws of this Church.~~

Reception into membership of this church shall be in accord with Article 1, Section 1 of the By-Laws of the church. Persons being received into membership in this Church shall have given evidence of regeneration by a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure of their lives—a faith that expresses itself in

- a) sincerely affirming the foundational MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, (Article II, Section 5. a.)
- b) embracing and living consistently with our CHURCH COVENANT (Article II, Section 5. b.)
- c) being baptized in accord with Article I, Section 2 of the By-Laws of this Church.

## 7. Amend Article 1 of the By-Laws on Membership (Appendix G).

The essential changes are:

1. We add the requirement that elders interview candidates for membership to discern their fitness for membership.
2. We add the requirement that candidates for membership be introduced to the BBC ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH so that they are aware what the leadership of the church believes and teaches and that, upon joining the church, they affirm the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH and embrace the CHURCH COVENANT.
3. We add a substantial new section, Section 2, BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. This is the heart of the change as regards baptism. It is the section that defines how baptism relates to membership at Bethlehem. The new section of the By-Laws is as follows:

***Section 2, BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP***

1. The teaching and practice of baptism at Bethlehem Baptist Church is defined in Section 12 of the BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. The key paragraph states:

*We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.*

2. Thus the official position of Bethlehem Baptist Church is that only baptism by immersion of believers will be taught and practiced by the church. Customarily, therefore, all members of the church will have been baptized by immersion as believers.

3. However, we believe it is fitting that membership in the local church (distinct from *leadership* in the local church) should have prerequisites similar to the prerequisites for membership in the universal church. In other words, we believe it is unfitting to deny membership to a person who, by faith in Christ, gives evidence of regeneration.

4. Therefore, our aim is not to elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership. This implies that Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.

5. Since we believe that the New Testament teaches and demonstrates that the mode of baptism is only the immersion of a believer in water, we therefore regard all other practices of baptism as misguided, defective, and illegitimate. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential. Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a *violation* of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership, as expressed in the Church Covenant.

6. We will not admit into membership persons who refuse to practice any form of baptism at all, or who believe that their water baptism caused their regeneration. The former is a serious rejection of the Lord's commandment, and the latter is a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH states, "We believe that [the Holy Spirit's] work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual."

7. In the words of our CHURCH COVENANT, the members shall all be committed to "welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth."

**8. Amend the Constitution (VI, 1, c) and By-Laws (VIII) to ensure that proposed amendments regarding the membership and doctrinal parts of the constitution and by-laws are introduced by the Council of Elders and approved by the people. (Appendix L)**

The aim of this proposal is to maintain a biblical balance between the responsibility of the elders, on the one hand, to lead the church and to guard her from doctrinal error, and the responsibility of the people, on the other hand, to test and affirm the call and the recommendations of the elders. See **Appendix L** for a full rationale and for the details of the amendments. Here are the two relevant paragraphs.

Amendment to the Constitution, Section VI (addition underlined): Add subsection 3.

3. Amendments to Article II, (2), (3), (4), (5), and Article III of this Constitution, and Appendix A of this Constitution (THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH) may be introduced only by the Council of Elders.

Amendment to the By-Laws VIII (addition underlined):

Amendment to By-Laws Article I, Sections 1 or 2, may be introduced only by the Council of Elders. Amendments to other By-Laws may be introduced by members through written motion at any quarterly meeting, but shall not be acted on until the following quarterly or annual meeting, at which time an affirmative vote of the majority of the membership of the Church, or a two-thirds majority of those members present at the meeting and voting shall be required for acceptance; provided, however, that at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church be present at such meeting, and that notice of the proposed change or amendment be given from the pulpit on at least two Sundays and in writing to the resident membership in the interim period between the meetings.

**Appendix A**

**Twelve Theses**

On Baptism and Its Relationship to  
Church Membership, Church Leadership, and  
Wider Affiliations and Partnerships  
of Bethlehem Baptist Church

John Piper

January 18, 2002

Revised January 26, 2002

1. Faithfulness to Biblical doctrine is crucial. It helps preserve the honor of Christ, promote the good of the church, and spread the gospel.
2. Not all doctrines are of equal weight in saving the soul or shaping Christlike holiness and love.
3. Doctrinal unity in the teaching authority (the elders) of the local church is more crucial and more realistic than doctrinal unity among the newest members and most recent or immature converts.
4. Different convictions about the proper mode of baptizing believers (sprinkling, pouring, immersing), and different backgrounds with respect to the mode of baptism a person has experienced, are not weighty or central enough matters to exclude a person from membership in the local church if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and clear conscience that his baptism is valid. Baptismal regeneration is so serious an error that it calls salvation by faith into question and is not an acceptable understanding or practice of baptism.
5. The office or denominational affiliation of the Christian person who has performed someone's baptism is not a weighty or central enough matter to exclude a person from membership in the local church if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and clear conscience that his baptism is valid.
6. Infant baptism is not explicitly commanded or clearly taught in the New Testament; but believer's baptism is uniformly practiced with nothing explicitly said concerning the baptism of infants born to believing families.
7. The Biblical case for infant baptism of children belonging to believing parents has some measure of plausibility, if this baptism is treated not as an instrument or evidence of an infant's regeneration, but as an expression of hope that in a Christian family the child

will be the beneficiary of the means of saving grace by word and prayer and all forms of Christian nurture.

8. However, the Biblical case for infant baptism is not the most compelling position, in view of Thesis #6 above, and in view of the apparent intention of God that the newness of the new covenant, and its hoped-for regenerate community, be signified by a new ordinance (baptism rather than circumcision) (1) that includes both men and women; (2) that occurs at a new point in life, namely, at new birth (which is evidenced by personal faith), not at natural birth (which evidences descent from covenant parents); and (3) that always in the New Testament signifies the reasonable belief that regeneration has already occurred, not the hope of a child's future regeneration.

9. Yet, since the best defense of infant baptism admits that circumcision was no sure sign of belonging to the believing remnant of true Israel, but rather was a sign of hope that a child would prove to be a "child of promise" and not just a "child of the flesh," the alleged continuity between old covenant infant circumcision and new covenant infant baptism need not contradict the *essence* of the newness of the new covenant, since no claim is made that either the old sign of the covenant (circumcision) or the new sign of the covenant (baptism) secured the saving blessing. In other words the importance of voluntary membership in the *regenerate* people of God is not at issue between Baptists and the best defenders of the Reformed view of infant baptism. What is at issue is whether membership in the *visible* New Covenant Community should include infants who do not profess faith which is the outward mark of the New Covenant Community. (For a fuller treatment of this issue see John Piper's "Infant Baptism and the New Covenant Community," dated 2-14-93.)

10. Therefore, where the belief in the Biblical validity of infant baptism does not involve baptismal regeneration or the guarantee of saving grace, this belief is not viewed by the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church as a weighty or central enough departure from Biblical teaching to exclude a person from membership, if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and a clear conscience that his baptism is valid. In such a case we would not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership but would teach and pray toward a change of mind that would lead such members eventually to such a baptism.

11. It is fitting that the teaching authority of the church (the Council of Elders) be unified in its conviction concerning the proper administration of baptism, believing in and practicing what appears most clearly to be the practice and conviction of the early church, namely, believer's baptism by immersion.

12. Bethlehem Baptist Church may support and form partnerships with Christians and Christian ministries which fall within #10 above and which are qualified morally and doctrinally in all other relevant matters.

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**Appendix B**

Should We Require Agreement of All Members  
On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism?

3-29-02  
John Piper

*“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”*  
Romans 15:7

**1. Our Position and Proposal [NOTE! This proposal is NOT the one being proposed in the fall of 2005. This is here simply for historical reasons.]**

I start by affirming the *TBI Affirmation of Faith*, Article 12.3:

12.3 We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith<sup>1</sup> express their union with Christ<sup>2</sup> in His death and resurrection,<sup>3</sup> by being immersed in water<sup>4</sup> in the name of the Father and the

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<sup>1</sup> [You have] been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:12). Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21). For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized (Acts 18:8). They were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins (Matthew 3:6).

<sup>2</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

<sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel,<sup>6</sup> and an emblem of burial<sup>7</sup> and cleansing,<sup>8</sup> signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.

The question we are raising in this proposal is not whether that is true. We believe it is. Rather we are asking how our church should relate to those who may be deeply committed to the Bible and to Christ, but are not yet persuaded that their infant baptism is invalid or that their adult sprinkling as a believer is invalid. The question here is not whether we change our conviction about what the Bible teaches about Baptism and how we will practice it at Bethlehem. We will continue to believe and practice only baptism by immersion of believers. The question is whether we should make exceptions to our requirement for membership in cases where the problem is not intentional disobedience but honest and humble difference of understanding about what the Bible teaches.

We are proposing that Article III of the Church Constitution read as follows:

(1) The membership of this Church shall consist of persons 1) who profess faith in Jesus Christ as the Lord, Savior, and Chief Treasure of their lives, 2) who give evidence of regeneration by living consistently with their profession, 3) who affirm the "Affirmation of Faith" as contained in Article III of the "Bylaws of the

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<sup>4</sup> As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" . . . And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:36-39). John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there (John 3:23). We have been buried with Him through baptism into death (Romans 6:4).

<sup>5</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

<sup>6</sup> For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (Romans 2:28-29). For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Romans 4:16). Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins (Mark 1:4-5).

<sup>7</sup> See note 258 [in the Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith].

<sup>8</sup> Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).



Baptist General Conference,” and appended to this Constitution in Appendix One, and interpreted in the footnotes of the Appendix 4) who show a glad and humble willingness to grow in grace and knowledge through the teaching and leadership of the Elders, 5) who have been baptized in obedience to Christ’s command as an expression of personal faith\*, 6) who are willing to enter into covenant relationship with other members as expressed in the CHURCH COVENANT, and 7) and who have been received into membership according to the By-laws of this Church (Article I, Membership).

\* Exceptions may be made to the requirement for believer’s baptism by immersion in cases where, after significant study, thought, discussion, and prayer, a candidate sincerely and humbly believes that it would be contrary to Scripture and conscience -- and not just contrary to family tradition or desires -- to be baptized by immersion and thus to count his infant “baptism” or his adult sprinkling as improper or invalid. In such cases the candidate will give evidence that there is a humble, teachable openness to more light under the teaching and leadership of the Elders.

(2) Our understanding is that membership does not imply spiritual or doctrinal maturity. Membership in a local church is a visible, outward act, with the fundamental prerequisite being membership in the spiritual body of Christ. Spiritual or doctrinal maturity is the *goal* of membership, not the *starting point*. Therefore full agreement with every part of The Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith is not assumed for membership, but is assumed for the primary teaching office of the church, the Eldership. The aim of the leadership is, by the ministry of the Word and prayer, to bring the membership to a glad, free understanding and embrace of the whole counsel of God in the service of worship and love.

## ***2. Some Background***

In the past we have generally defended our practice of limiting membership to those who agree with our views of Baptism by saying that, while it does jeopardize one dimension of Christian unity, it may, in the long run, strengthen true Christian unity by preserving the high value of truth and doctrine in a wishy-washy culture. We argued that love can be shown better, perhaps, *across* boundaries between churches than by *removing* boundaries. If we chose to make no exceptions in this matter, that would still be our rationale. It is a judgment call on what is the wisest and most church-strengthening, Christ-exalting, missions-advancing, Bible-honoring thing to do. It is not, in our judgment, a clear Biblical command that the church govern its membership in this way.

For several years, some of us have been troubled by several things that give us increasing misgivings that this is, in fact, the wisest way to define our membership. For example,

2.1. I have been troubled by the fact that many of the saints that we admire most and learn most from and feel most kinship with could not be a member of this church: John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, Sinclair Ferguson, etc.

2.2. On the other hand, we admit people to membership without insisting on agreement with doctrinal matters that are much weightier than the doctrine of baptism. We do not require a Reformed view of election, or depravity, or effectual calling, or perseverance. We do not require a complementarian view of manhood and womanhood. It seems that we have elevated the doctrine of baptism in practice to a level of importance that I find increasingly hard to justify.

2.3. Over the years, the increasing doctrinal thoughtfulness and unanimity of the elders at Bethlehem have created a new and stronger safeguard for the future faithfulness of our church. In other words, it seems to us that if we make the elders' individual endorsement of the *TBI Affirmation of Faith* constitutionally official, then we can be more secure in having a membership that is (at least initially) more diverse in their doctrinal understanding and convictions.

The assumptions here are that (1) membership includes the newest and least instructed Christian; and that (2) the calling of the elders is to so teach and preach and structure groups for nurture and accountability that all members grow into "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

### ***3. Some Arguments for the Proposal***

There are at least two kinds of arguments that move us toward not requiring agreement on baptism for church membership. One has to do with the nature of the church; The other has to do with the relative importance of baptism among Christian doctrines.

#### ***3.1. An Argument Relating to the Nature of the Church***

Our conscience is troubled that, on the one hand, we cannot receive into membership some genuine Christians only because of their different views of baptism, nevertheless we rejoice that there are other churches who will receive them so that we don't have to view our rejection as excommunication. We have grown so accustomed to the diversity of denominations, that we do not pause to think of the implications of saying "no" to a genuine Christian who wants to be a member of the visible manifestation of Christ's body called Bethlehem. We do not often feel what John Bunyan felt on this matter, "What greater contempt can be thrown upon the saints than for their brethren to cast them off, or to debar them from church-communion?"<sup>9</sup>

This raises for us the question of whether we would make the doctrine of baptism a criterion for membership if Bethlehem were the only church in the region. Would we, if

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<sup>9</sup> John Bunyan, *On the Terms of Communion and Fellowship of Christians at the Table of the Lord*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991, orig. 1854), p. 614.

there were no other churches for people to be a part of, exclude true Christians from membership over disagreements about baptism? This would be tantamount to excluding them from the visible church on earth. It would be the same as a church excommunication that left them to be treated “as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17). This is troubling.

It seems to imply that, in principle, we have made agreement on baptism higher on the scale of values than having genuine Christians be members of a church. If we say, no, we are not turning people away to *no* church, but to *other* churches, then we are, in effect, justifying our standards by the very practice (in other churches) that we disagree with. We are glad others will do what we will not do so that we can feel okay about not doing it.

We don't want to be in that situation. The local church, it seems to us, should have a front door about as wide as the door Christ has built for his own invisible church. As Paul says in Romans 15:7, “Receive one another as Christ has received you, for the glory of God.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***3.2. Arguments Relating to the Importance of the Doctrine in Relation to Other Doctrines***

3.2.1. It is troubling that we require agreement on the doctrine of baptism but not on more important matters like the nature of God's sovereign grace, the way of salvation by effectual calling, the gift of faith, the nature and power of depravity, the freedom of the will, the work of God in the perseverance of the saints, etc. We understand that people are at different levels of understanding and commitment on these various matters. We do not require that people have understanding of these matters before membership, but that they be willing to learn and grow in grace and knowledge.

Why then do we elevate the doctrine of baptism above these important matters by making it a criterion of church membership? One might say we do not require full understanding or agreement with all of the *doctrine*, but only compliance with the *act* of believer's baptism. The fact is we have indeed made agreement with the doctrine (not just compliance with the act) a criterion of membership, because we require agreement with our Affirmation of Faith, which includes the doctrine. But even if we did not require this, but only compliance with the act, we would be in another difficulty.

This would mean that we either expect everyone to agree with the doctrine of believer's baptism by immersion as the basis of their act of baptism, or that we encourage some to perform the act, even though their mind and heart do not believe that what they are doing

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<sup>10</sup> Similarly Paul reasons from God's reception to our reception in Romans 14:1-3: “As for the one who is weak in faith, receive him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has received him.”

is right or proper. Such a baptism would not be, to use the words of the apostle Peter, an “appeal to God from [or for] a good conscience,” which is what, he says, baptism should be (1 Peter 3:21).

Therefore, in requiring such a one to be baptized by immersion as a believer would be tantamount to requiring either 1) a doctrinal commitment that is less essential than other doctrines we do not require (which is inconsistent), or 2) requiring a contradiction of conscience (which is dangerous). “For that which is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).<sup>11</sup>

3.2.2. Accepting different understandings of the command to baptize is not the same as accepting disobedience. Some may argue that way: Baptize means immerse as a believer; therefore those sprinkled as infants or adults are not baptized; therefore their decision not to be immersed is disobedience to Christ.

In a sense this is true – the same way we all are disobeying if we misinterpret the proper application of any command of the Bible. Thus, if the Bible says, “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14), one may say love is speaking firm, strong words to an erring brother, and another may say, in the same situation, no, love is speaking tender winsome words to a brother. It is likely that both of them will make a mistake in applying this command from time to time, failing to demonstrate perfect love. Our solution to this failure is ongoing teaching and prayer and admonition and growth in grace. Which is exactly what we would be doing with regard to the doctrine of baptism.

Another example might be the argument that in the Lord’s Supper wine and a single loaf must be used, since that is probably what was used in New Testament times, “Because there is *one* bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). In fact, Paul seems to see some significance in the single loaf, in so far as it relates to the one body of Christ. On the other hand, others would argue that grape juice and fragments are also valid. It may be that an imperfect understanding of a command results in “unintentional disobedience.” But surely it is wise to put “unintentional disobedience” in ceremonial matters in a different category from, say, sexual immorality or stealing.

It is not as though we are indifferent to disobedience. It is a question of how much lenience is granted to those who really believe they are obeying when they understand the command of baptism to include the children of believers, and sprinkling as well as

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<sup>11</sup> We don’t imply by this section that we cannot baptize people who have only a little doctrinal understanding after their conversion, and who may wonder why there is such a requirement as water baptism attached to the gospel of justification by faith alone. We believe we should explain, as best we can, its Biblical fitness. But Christ did not tell us why he gave it. We may see many good meanings in it, without knowing finally why he imposed this on the believer. So it is not wrong for a new believer – or old believer – to say, “I do not understand all the reasons for this, but Christ said it and I will do it, in childlike obedience out of trust in Christ’s wisdom and goodness.” That is very different from the person who sincerely believes that this command has already been fulfilled in his infancy and believes that it was done properly and validly and Biblically.

immersing. We are persuaded that in the New Testament “baptize” means “immerse,” and is meant for believers. Therefore we will teach that and practice that. But it does not follow that those who interpret obedience to the same command another way are so seriously imperfect that they should be excluded from the visible body of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

John Bunyan expresses this conviction well concerning his allowance for disagreement on baptism when he says, “I speak not this, because I would teach men to break the least of the commandments of God; but to persuade my brethren of the baptized way, not to hold too much thereupon, not to make it an essential of the gospel of Christ, nor yet of communion of saints.”<sup>13</sup> Then later he adds, “God also doth thus with respect to his worship in the church, he commands all and every whit of his will to be done, but beareth with our coming short in this and that, and another duty.”<sup>14</sup>

#### ***4. Implications for the Admission of Members***

This proposal to make some exceptions in regard the requirement of baptism does not mean we are indifferent to the importance of doctrine or obedience. Rather it means we believe that membership is where the youngest, simplest, least educated, most unsure disciple of Jesus is to grow in grace and truth. It is also the place where more mature

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<sup>12</sup> Nowhere in the NT is there a clear *commandment* that baptism is a necessary prerequisite to church membership. It is *assumed* that believers will be baptized. Paul indeed supposes that *all* are as he writes to the Romans. And, therefore, believers *should* indeed be baptized by immersion, which is the mode we will practice at Bethlehem. Nevertheless, a falling short is not unlike other things we should do in the Christian life which our understanding and maturity and insight do not yet bring forth as fruit. O how many duties we fall short of! Some from repeated stubbornness, some from negligence, some from blind spots in our own assessment of what wisdom or precept require. This last category does not signify so much rebellion as finiteness, although sin is always mingled with our failure to see clearly.

If we do not make room for error in behavior and thought that flows from a redeemed, Spirit-indwelt, but imperfect and limited heart, then we will be always pushing every error and every short-coming to the same level of seriousness as more grievous transgressions, and then find ourselves disciplining a wife for burned toast (since here husband asked that it not be burned, and she should be submissive), and a husband for gaining weight (since his body belongs to her also, and she does not like it that way). This is a sign of an absolutizing, perfectionistic personality type that is unhealthy in its inability to make distinctions in levels of importance and seriousness.

<sup>13</sup> Bunyan, *On the Terms of Communion and Fellowship of Christians at the Table of the Lord*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, Vol. 2, p. 613,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 636.

disciples, with honest differences on less essential matters, have room and time to study and grow and, perhaps, change.

The importance of obedience to doctrinal truth is reflected most clearly in what the elders of the church must hold dear and teach the people. That is why we are proposing that the elders all believe and affirm *The TBI Affirmation of Faith* (renamed: The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith). Our aim is not to keep doctrinally defective people out of membership, but to be so in love with each other and so in love with the truth that every member will be happy to grow in love and truth under the faithful leadership and teaching and preaching of the elders of the church.

The implication of these thoughts seems to be that the elders, in interviewing a candidate for membership, will seek to discern if, when, and by what mode a person has been baptized. If they find out that their baptism or views are out of step with the Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith, an inquiry will be made as to what the person believes about the Biblical teaching on baptism. If there is disagreement, then the elders would suggest a series of readings and study.

Then at a subsequent follow-up session by one or more of the elders (or a representative) there could be further discussion. If the attitude of the person is one of humility and teachability and longing to be Biblical, but there are still significant misgivings about a “rebaptism,” then exception may be made at the discretion of the elders in commending the person for membership, with the expectation that there would be ongoing study and openness to more light from the Scriptures.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, we will not be indifferent to whether a person is baptized by immersion as a believer. We will expect it and encourage it. But we will keep open the possibility of receiving a person who on other counts proves to be a humble, teachable, Spiritually-alive lover of Christ and the Scriptures.

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<sup>15</sup> This would essentially be in agreement with part of what Wayne Grudem suggested in his *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 983, “This would mean that Baptist churches would have to be willing to allow into membership those who had been baptized as infants and whose conviction of conscience, after careful consideration, is that their infant baptism was valid and should not be repeated. Of course, Baptist churches could be free to teach and to attempt to persuade prospective church members that they should be baptized as believers, but if some, after careful consideration, are simply not persuaded, it does not seem appropriate to make this a barrier to membership.”

## Appendix C

### Six Points of Concern for consideration of the proposal to create an exception to the Baptism by immersion requirement at BBC Paul Dreblow 6-4-02

(WITH RESPONSES BY PASTOR JOHN IN ALL CAPS)

After reading through the document presented by John again and continuing to interact with a few people on this issue and with roots of conviction and past shepherding going back many years; I must still admit I am struggling deeply (in my conscience) regarding this proposal. I am grateful for the thinking it has stimulated and the presentation of ideas that we may have taken for granted. I respectfully submit the following six items of concern for our thinking and continued clarification, together with a heartfelt desire for my own continued correction, teaching and instruction.

1. **We have not really studied this issue through together and individually as elders.** This issue is huge and precedent setting not only for BBC and the BGC but also within the larger evangelical world which no doubt will be looking in on this decision. If we are to seriously pursue this course of action it seems that each of us must take some time as individuals to really wrestle through texts, church history and present day writings on this area etc. before attempting to make any sort of informed decision.

I REALLY WANT US TO BE BIBLICALLY INFORMED AND GUIDED. IT IS WISE TO READ SOME GOOD DEFENSES OF WORTHY VIEWS. WE SHOULD NOT BE PARALYZED, HOWEVER, BY THE IMMENSITY OF THE LITERATURE AND THE HISTORY. ALMOST EVERY LINE OF THE TBI AFFIRMATION OF FAITH COULD TAKE A YEAR OF STUDY. THAT WOULD EFFECTIVELY IMMOBILIZE THE COUNCIL. SO, YES, BUT LET'S MAKE IT MANAGEABLE FOR THE ELDERS. PERHAPS JDL AND I COULD COME UP WITH A LIST OF READINGS AND TEXTS.

2. **Baptism by immersion of born again believers *is the only standard and practice described and taught in the New Testament.*** We can't let this realization slip by. We are people of the Word, taught by and under its authority. I think we have all studied and read on this topic but a thorough summary is given by W. Grudem in the text we use (in TBI) for Systematic theology, pgs. 966-971.<sup>16</sup> Any appeal to any other standard or doctrine (either to paedobaptism, or sprinkling<sup>17</sup> etc.) is simply an appeal to either :

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<sup>16</sup> See texts such as Mark 1.5, 10; John. 3.23; Acts 2.38, 8.36ff.... and not forgetting that at the heart of the Great Commission- Matt. 28.19 is the command to baptize (by immersion).

<sup>17</sup> Though I have wrestled with this issue in the past in relationship to adult believers who have been sprinkled and it does not seem as serious as baptismal regeneration or the covenant theology view/practice of infant baptism, yet for the sake of unity it would seem wise to still require immersion baptism.

A: an argument from silence. I.e. - As in Acts 16.15,33 and 1 Cor.1.16. However, as far as I know there is nothing in the meaning of the words used that would allow us to assume that in fact “infants” were somehow included in this group- any suggestion otherwise is simply reading into the text what is not clearly stated.

I AGREE THAT THIS ARGUMENT FROM THE HOUSEHOLDS IS WEAK.

B: a theological system (covenant theology) argument which seems to function by way of reading into the New Testament a practice (namely infant baptism) which in fact, does not seem to exist in any way that can be defended by literal, grammatical, historical exegesis. Many of us are familiar with the covenant argument and in my mind aside from the issue of baptism itself it raises serious questions regarding one’s understanding of election and sovereignty of God if in fact these “covenant children” are candidates for (possible? probable?) future regeneration. Does baptism then make them more “predisposed” to God’s sovereign saving grace? If that were true then by all means we should all seek to have our children baptized.

I DON’T THINK THE REFORMED ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM “RAISE SERIOUS QUESTIONS REGARDING . . . ELECTION AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.” ONLY A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ARGUMENTS WOULD LEAD TO THAT CONCLUSION. AND THEN THE CRITICISM CUTS BOTH WAYS. FOR EXAMPLE, GEOFFREY BROMILEY, IN HIS BOOK DEFENDING INFANT BAPTISM, ARGUES THAT BAPTISTS ARE THE ONES WHO CALL UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION INTO QUESTION. HE ARGUES THAT NOTHING PORTRAYS MORE CLEARLY THE UNCONDITIONALITY OF ELECTION THAN BAPTIZING BABIES WHO CAN MEET NO CONDITIONS. THAT IS NOT A COMPELLING ARGUMENT. AND NEITHER IS THE ARGUMENT THAT BAPTIZING INFANTS COMPROMISES UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION.

C. Related to this but of a far more *serious doctrinal* nature is the fact that infant baptism is so closely related (at least to the “layman”) to the false teaching of Roman Catholicism and the sacramental understanding of baptism (i.e. baptismal regeneration). While some protestant infant baptizers would not see salvation occurring in the act of baptism others would and as pointed out above it would be *very confusing to the average observer*. Given these tendencies this then would pose a *direct assault on the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ’s work alone*. We can ill-afford to create any question in people’s minds as to the problems with this human doctrine and practice by the creation of exceptions which would only serve to weaken their understanding of the meaning of salvation and the place or role of baptism.

FIRST, I DON’T WANT TO DETERMINE OUR DOCTRINAL COMMITMENTS OR PRACTICES ON THE BASIS OF WHAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS IT MIGHT GENERATE. WONDERFUL TRUTHS TAUGHT BY JESUS AND THE APOSTLES WERE DISTORTED AND MISUNDERSTOOD, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE.

SECOND, CREATING A MEMBERSHIP EXCEPTION FOR A GENUINE, WELL-INFORMED, WELL-STUDIED, BIBLICALLY-DEFENDED (MISTAKEN) VIEW OF BAPTISM WOULD PROBABLY INCREASE, NOT DECREASE, OUR PERSONAL AND CONGREGATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE TRUE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON BAPTISM. IT WOULD NOT REDUCE OUR VIGILANCE BUT INCREASE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT DIFFERENTIATES ONE BAPTISM FROM ANOTHER. IT WOULD BRING TO THE FORE THAT WE MAKE CRUCIAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN BAPTISMAL REGENERATION AND INFANT BAPTISM THAT DOES NOT CLAIM TO EFFECT REGENERATION.



THIRD, KEEP IN MIND THAT THIS MOVEMENT TOWARD A WIDER FRONT DOOR IS PARALLELED BY A MOVEMENT TOWARD A NARROWER ELDER DOOR, WHICH MEANS THE CHURCH WILL BE MORE CAREFULLY PROTECTED FROM ROMAN ERRORS THAN IN THE PAST BECAUSE OF THE DOCTRINAL DEPTH AND BREADTH OF THE ELDERS.

3. **Concern over the timing of this issue in relationship to the campus evangelism group.** This came up at our May meeting. I wonder if we are not moving ahead on this issue due (in part) to a tremendous opportunity that some sense in the campus outreach group. Yet there is a serious doctrinal issue at hand. I do not question the giftedness or desire of Ken Currie or others in the group. Nor do I deny that the model raises some exciting possibilities for spreading a passion of the supremacy of God. But to compromise on this issue could send just the opposite message that we wish to convey to the very group of collegiates (and others) we wish to serve; namely *that you can believe multiple ways on this and call any one of them "truth."* I fear this would play into the rampant relativistic mindset prevalent on today's college campuses.

NOBODY IS SUGGESTING THAT WE CALL MORE THAN ONE MODE OR TIMING OF BAPTISM "TRUTH." WE ARE SUGGESTING THAT SOME ERRORS ARE NOT NEAR ENOUGH TO THE CENTER OR THE ESSENTIAL TO WARRANT EXCLUSION FROM THE LOCAL BODY OF BELIEVERS. WE DO NOT CALL ARMINIANISM "TRUTH," OR PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE "TRUTH" OR POST-MILLENNIALISM "TRUTH" OR CESSATIONISM "TRUTH" (DEPENDING ON WHICH SIDE YOU ARE ON), EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE NO MEMBERSHIP STIPULATIONS ON THESE ISSUES.

AGAIN, WITH THE TBI AFFIRMATION OF FAITH BEING EMBRACED, IT CAN HARDLY BE SAID THAT THIS MOVE ON BAPTISM IS A MOVE TOWARD DOCTRINAL LOOSENESS.

KEN CURRIE'S POSITION ON BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS, AS FAR AS I CAN SEE, ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS MINE. SO I SEE NO COMPROMISE. I AM TRYING TO BRING THE ELDERS AND THE CHURCH TO WHERE I THINK WE SHOULD BE IN THE EVANGELICAL WORLD OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.

4. **Saints of the past argument.** It is troubling in my mind to appeal to 'great saints' of the past (Edwards, Owen, etc.) and present (Sproul, Packer etc.) with arguments such as they *"could not be members or elders in our church...."* For me this argument is driven mostly by respect for great thinkers (which is good!) and seems to appeal more to the emotional attachment we may or may not feel towards them. From this reasoning one could ask:

A. Are we dealing with concern for a *form* of unity? Admittedly the whole area of unity within a diverse body of Christ is a growth point for me and I am weak both in understanding and application at times. I sense in the argument the deep desire to bridge gaps which may exist for less than scriptural grounds. Yet, when we interview people who say "I struggle with the baptism issue esp. in light of my prior sprinkling or my parent's reaction or etc...." we must be careful to *shepherd by truth* which alone sets people free. At the above point we have a discipleship issue and we must tenderly, yet with the firmness of a shepherd's hand "carefully and patiently instruct them...." (2 Tim. 4.2). This is not the time to compromise.

WHEN YOU SAY "THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO COMPROMISE," DO YOU MEAN THAT ALL THE OTHER ISSUES THAT WE DO COMPROMISE ON WE SHOULD NOT: ALL THE CALVINISTIC DISTINCTIVES THAT WE DO NOT INSIST ON, AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES, AND THE CHARISMATIC DISTINCTIVES. THE CALL NOT TO COMPROMISE

HAS A NOBLE RING. BUT THERE IS ALSO SOMETHING BIBLICAL AND NOBLE IN NOT INSISTING ON MORE AGREEMENT THAN IS ESSENTIAL FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH. DON'T MINIMIZE THIS ISSUE: TO EXCLUDE SOMEONE FROM THE BODY OF CHRIST IS A HUGE ISSUE. AND WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL LIVED WITH PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH WHO WERE NOT DOCTRINALLY OR ETHICALLY WHERE HE WANTED THEM TO BE. PHILIPPIANS 3:15, "LET THOSE OF US WHO ARE MATURE THINK THIS WAY, AND IF IN ANYTHING YOU THINK OTHERWISE, GOD WILL REVEAL THAT ALSO TO YOU."

B. On a related note, if we move this direction are we allowing (or helping) people to back away from what has been historically and still is often a point of departure from the old ways of world and its entangling allegiances as one walks with "the cross before them and the world behind them..." to the waters of baptism? Historically, we know that many in the Anabaptist movement paid with *blood* for the honor to be immersed in the waters of baptism as believers. This is still true today I'm sure in parts of the world where any outward/public sign of following Jesus is met with persecution. In fact this is the way it was for some people who we saw come out of Roman Catholicism in the Philippines. Is this not the outworking of the reality that Jesus pointed to when he said:" Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace, but a sword....a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (Matt. 10:16-23; 33-36).

I DON'T AGREE WITH THIS. THERE IS NO CORRELATION IN MY MIND OR EXPERIENCE OR HISTORY THAT SUGGESTS THAT BAPTISTS WHO AFFIRM THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD ARE LESS WORLDLY THAN PRESBYTERIANS WHO AFFIRM THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD.

AS A BAPTIST, JOHN BUNYAN SPENT 12 YEARS IN PRISON FOR THE RIGHT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL, BUT WOULD NOT DEMAND THAT A PERSON BE RE-BAPTIZED TO JOIN HIS CHURCH IF HE HAD BEEN BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT. IF WE ARE TO CHOOSE OUR SUFFERING HEROES, HE IS A GOOD CANDIDATE TOO.

C. If we follow this "but so/so is/was such a wonderful and doctrinally sound Christian....certainly they must be able to be a part of us....." line of reasoning/concern then we must ultimately ask, "where does it end or lead us?" I have been in situations where this way of thinking carried the day, but often at the expense of truth or wise thinking/decision making.

In other words does this reasoning bring about a way of thinking that allows emotion to lead our understanding of truth instead of vice-versa as it should be? This is not the mode of thinking I have grown accustomed to at BBC. If we make exceptions to stated doctrinal agreement and practice here, then where else? And if enough people become members this way then, under congregational polity a group of like-minded people could "vote in" substantial change along these lines.

LET'S BE AWARE THAT THIS HOLE IN THE DIKE ARGUMENT (ALL WILL FALL APART OF WE MAKE THIS EXCEPTION) CAN BE USED TO IMPEDE VIRTUALLY ALL CHANGE AND ALL GROWTH IN UNDERSTANDING. THE REASONING BEHIND THE PROPOSED EXCEPTION IS NOT EMOTIONAL. IT IS BASED ON REASONING ABOUT THE RELATIVE CENTRALITY OF CERTAIN DOCTRINES. I HAVE WRITTEN 8 PAGES TO GIVE FOUNDATION FOR THE MOVE. THESE PAGES ARE NOT BASED ON EMOTION. WHERE DOES IT END? IT ENDS WHERE THE ELDERS AND THE CHURCH JUDGE A CENTRAL TRUTH TO BE TRANSGRESSED OR JEOPARDIZED. WHETHER THAT IS HAPPENING HERE, IS WHAT THE DEBATE IS ABOUT. I DON'T THINK THIS IS ABOUT SOMETHING CENTRAL AND ESSENTIAL.

THE LAST POINT ABOUT CONGREGATIONAL GOVERNANCE ALLOWING FOR PEOPLE TO VOTE AGAINST GOOD DOCTRINE, IS VALID AND A LEGITIMATE CONCERN. TO SOLVE IT WE SHOULD EITHER MAKE ALL THE MEMBERS SIGN THE TBI AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, OR RETHINK SOME OF THE ASPECTS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT. SHORT OF THAT, IT IS A VERY REMOTE PROSPECT THAT, WITH ELDERS WHO EMBRACE THE TBI AFFIRMATION OF FAITH AND WITH FAITHFUL TEACHING OVER THE YEARS, THE CONGREGATION WOULD EVER VOTE OUT AN ESSENTIAL ARTICLE OF FAITH.

D. Is it fair or accurate to say, “We would be rejecting people such as these great saints of the past or present?” I don’t think so yet this is what the quote of Bunyan seems to indicate. Yet in the quote and following footnote there seems to be confusion regarding the “visible body of Christ” and local church membership. They are two different (though inter-connected) things. To which I would respond, I am rejecting no one from the visible body of Christ (that decision is totally the Lord’s). Regarding the local church, they are welcome to be part of us but if they want to be members, they in fact are rejecting themselves based upon their failure to submit to a doctrinal practice clearly taught and to which we have determined is necessary and foundational to membership.<sup>18</sup>

WE HAVE CHOSE NOT TO MAKE MANY THINGS THAT ARE CLEARLY TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE, NECESSARY FOR MEMBERSHIP. SO IT IS WE WHO ARE DECIDING THE CRITERIA OF MEMBERSHIP AND WHO IS IN AND WHO IS OUT.

I THINK YOU ARE WRONG ABOUT THE VISIBLE BODY OF CHRIST. IT IS NOT MERELY THE LORD WHO DECIDES MEMBERSHIP IN THE VISIBLE BODY OF CHRIST. IT IS THE CHURCH BY MEANS OF ADMISSION AND EXCOMMUNICATION. THAT’S WHAT VISIBLE MEANS. THE LORD DECIDES WHO IS PART OF THE INVISIBLE, TRUE CHURCH. BUT CHURCHES DECIDE WHO IS PART OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH. IF WE TURN A PERSON AWAY, WE EITHER REJECT THEM FROM THE VISIBLE CHURCH WITH SADNESS OR WE REJOICE THAT OTHER CHURCHES HAVE DIFFERENT STANDARDS THAN WE DO FOR MEMBERSHIP.

5. **Whose conscience is at stake?** We discussed people whose conscience forbids them from proceeding in the New Testament pattern of baptism. We discussed whether it is right to ask them to do this. But what about the hundreds (thousands?) at BBC whose consciences are so inclined in the current stance on this topic, what will we do to their conscience if we begin to make exceptions? Specifically what might we do to their concept of biblical authority? Furthermore regarding the question of conscience we must ask, is it really a matter of “conscience”? I would suggest that in fact it may be (for more than a few) more a question of obedience, of coming under the authority of scripture (and the Elder’s teaching) in their belief and practice.

IF WE MOVE AHEAD WITH THE PROPOSAL PERSONS WHO FEEL THEIR CONSCIENCES COMPROMISED BY BELONGING TO A CHURCH WHICH MAKES THIS EXCEPTION WOULD PROBABLY MOVE TO ANOTHER CHURCH. MY PRAYER WOULD BE THAT IN THE PROCESS THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN BECAUSE PEOPLE WOULD COME TO SEE THAT THIS A GOOD THING TO DO AND DOES NOT COMPROMISE THEIR CONSCIENCES.

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<sup>18</sup> In my mind maybe the real question this is pushing us to struggle with is, “**is membership a biblical concept?**” Could it be that we need to back up one more step in this whole discussion? If membership is biblical then certainly there may be more to it than obedience to immersion baptism but *it does not seem like there would be less to it given the above mentioned NT passages.*

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY WOULD NOT BE CALLED INTO QUESTION BECAUSE THE WHOLE CHANGE WOULD BE EXPLAINED FROM WITHIN A BIBLICAL CONTEXT THAT HELPS PEOPLE MAKE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN TRUTHS THAT ARE MORE ESSENTIAL AND TRUTHS THAT ARE LESS ESSENTIAL. IF WE ARE CHURCH THAT CANNOT MAKE THESE DISTINCTIONS THIS FAILURE WILL DO MORE HARM TO OUR COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL AUTHORITY THAN ANY EXCEPTION ON BAPTISM. DEMANDING AGREEMENT ON ALL ISSUES, EVEN THE LESS ESSENTIAL ONES LOSES CREDIBILITY BECAUSE IT FAILS TO DEAL WITH THE REALITY OF OUR FINITENESS AND FALLENNESS AS TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE.

- 6. The Creation of confusion and disunity within the body of Christ.** We have an atmosphere of being “truth- driven” and a default mode of raising the standard higher, not lower (such as with a predominately “no remarriage” approach to divorce remarriage even though the evangelical community is far from consensus on this). THIS IS NOT THE CHURCH’S VIEW. IT IS MINE. THE CHURCH’S STATEMENT IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW WE LIVE WITH COMPROMISE. If this is in fact our default mode (which seems appropriate in a culture that runs from any standard of “absolute”) then why are we going the opposite direction in this proposal (as in defaulting to a lower standard)? THE ANSWER IS GIVEN IN MY 8 PAGE PAPER AT THE END OF THE PACKET GIVEN TO THE ELDERS. AND WE ARE NOT GOING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION BECAUSE IN TANDEM WITH THIS SMALL EXCEPTION ON BAPTISM I AM ASKING THE ELDERS TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO MASSIVE DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES (TBI AFFIRMATION OF FAITH) THAT WE HAVE NEVER ASKED FOR BEFORE. Most certainly this fact, combined with the fact that we have both a history and current doctrinal commitment (which we are being asked to sign off on with the TBI statement) to teaching and practicing baptism by immersion as a requirement for membership could lead to a great deal of misunderstanding, confusion<sup>19</sup> and problematic precedent setting and potentially great disunity where before there has been agreement and single-mindedness of purpose and doctrine (1 Cor. 1.10).

THE POTENTIAL CONFUSION IS NOT GREATER THAN THE POTENTIAL CONFUSION THAT EXISTS ON MANY ISSUES THAT WE DO NOT REQUIRE FOR MEMBERSHIP, AND EVEN SOME THAT WE DO. WE DO NOT MAKE CHOICES ON THESE MATTERS TO AVOID POSSIBLE CONFUSION. WE MAKE OUR CHOICES TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT AND THEN CARRY THEM THROUGH IN A WAY THAT WILL WORK TOWARD LESS AND LESS CONFUSION. THIS IS WHAT WE DO IN REGARD TO ALL THE CONFUSION THERE IS ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH, ROLES OF PROPHECY AND TONGUES AND WORDS OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE, MILLENNIALISM, ETC. IF OUR GOAL WERE TO AVOID ALL POSSIBLE CONFUSION WE WOULD BE THE MOST IMPOSSIBLY TIGHT (AND SMALL) CHURCH AROUND.

THE EXPECTATION THAT ELDERS WHO HELP A PERSON BE SINCERE IN THEIR STUDY OF BAPTISM AND WILL JUDGE THEIR EARNESTNESS IS NOT AN UNUSUAL TASK FOR ELDERS AND SHOULD NOT SCARE US AWAY. WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE THESE KINDS OF JUDGMENTS ALL THE TIME.

May God help, and direct us in this important issue. Thank you for allowing me to express this and for any feedback there might be.

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, how would the elders actually shepherd someone through the process of discerning whether there is “humble, teachable openness to more light under the teaching and leadership of the elders” p.3. Pastorally this sounds very cumbersome at best, and maybe worse.

Gratefully,  
Paul

\* \* \*

## Appendix D

### Proposed Bethlehem Baptist Church MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

The purpose of the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is to express what we believe a person must not deny (or, preferably, would affirm) so as not to call the genuineness of his faith into question. It is not meant to represent all that a Christian *should* believe, but the essential truths that a Christian *must not deny*.

#### I. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; and that these are the same divine essence and are equal in every divine perfection, but that they have different roles. (Genesis 1:1,26; John 1:1,3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19,20; Ephesians 4:5,6)

#### II. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6)

#### III. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16)

#### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit sent into the world by God to glorify the Son of God. We believe that without his work no one would come to faith. We believe that His work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual. We believe He indwells everyone who trusts in Christ, and helps them make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus Christ in thought, deed, and love for God the Father.

(John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26)

## V. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts. We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture. (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20,21; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; Mark 13:31; John 8:31,32; 14:26; 16:13-14; 17:17; 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 22:29, 43-44; 24:35; Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6; Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)

## VI. THE HUMAN CONDITION AND SALVATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image and for his glory; but that man sinned and fell short of God's glory, and thus incurred physical, spiritual, and eternal separation from God. We believe that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and so are under divine condemnation. We reject justification by works of the law, and we believe that only those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, submitting to him as Lord, and embracing Him as supreme Treasure of their lives, are justified, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life. We believe that this faith leads to a heartfelt turning from sin. The Christian life involves growth in grace through persevering, Holy Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. (Genesis. 1:26-7; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; Matt 13:44; John 1:13; John 3:14; 3:16; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; 17:3; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Phil 3:7-8; I John 1:9; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:11; 8:1; I Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:39; Rom 3:28)

## VII. THE CHURCH:

We believe in one holy, universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and supreme Treasure of their lives. We believe that God calls us to unite with other believers in local churches to help each other to value Christ above all, to praise Him together, to grow in our love and knowledge of Him, to stir each other up to good works, and to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. We believe that Christians should be baptized and regularly eat the Lord's Supper. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11; Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

## VIII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of all people, leading to the eternal happiness of the righteous in the Lord's presence, and the eternal separation of the wicked from the presence of the Lord. (Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15-8; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20: 11-15)

\* \* \*



## Appendix E

### CHURCH COVENANT

With proposed changes and explanations in the footnotes  
(Additions underlined and deletions strikethrough)

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive ~~the Lord~~ Jesus Christ as ~~our~~ the Lord, Savior, and, supreme Treasure of our lives,<sup>1</sup> and having affirmed the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH,<sup>2</sup> ~~and on the profession of our faith,~~ having been baptized<sup>3</sup> in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness and peace ~~comfort~~;<sup>4</sup> to promote its ~~prosperity and~~ spirituality and fruitfulness<sup>5</sup>; to sustain its worship, ordinances, and discipline; to welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth; ~~and doctrines~~;<sup>6</sup> to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and ~~secret~~ personal<sup>7</sup> devotions; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to support the efforts of the church to prepare the next generations to put their confidence in God; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment, to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will, if possible, unite with a likeminded<sup>8</sup> church where we can carry out ~~the articles of this confession and~~ the spirit of this covenant.

\* \* \*

#### Notes which explain the changes.

<sup>1</sup> This change is intended to broaden our confession of faith from faith in Jesus as Savior to Jesus as Lord and supreme Treasure. We believe that embracing Jesus as the Lord and supreme Treasure of our lives is essential to salvation.

<sup>2</sup> Since agreeing with the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is necessary for membership, it seems fitting to lay it down as part of the foundation of the covenant. It falls under the reasons in the first paragraph why a person is joyfully ready and willing to enter into covenant. It is not technically part of the covenant but the doctrinal foundation of agreement to enter covenant.

<sup>3</sup> Even though a minority of the membership will mean by this word “baptized” something different from the meaning intended by the elders, we do not believe this implies that readers can make the wording of the Covenant mean whatever they wish. There are explanations in the church By-Laws (Article I, Section 2) of our position on baptism and covenant membership which justify different intentions at this point when reading the covenant.

<sup>4</sup> The word “comfort” today implies most immediately the physical condition of being well-to-do and healthy and physically fit. Secondly, it implies what you need in the midst of grief. The first of these is not what we pledge to pursue, and the second is too narrow for what the meaning of comfort originally carried. The corporate nature of “comfort,” as originally intended, seems more fully carried by the word “peace”. When a church has corporate, spiritual comfort it has peace. It is “comfortable” with God and with each other.

<sup>5</sup> The replacement of “prosperity” with “fruitfulness” is intended to avoid the implication of pursuing wealth. Prosperity has come to have immediate connotations of material riches. The original intention was spiritual prosperity. That seems better expressed by the word “fruitfulness.”

<sup>6</sup> This change deletes the promise that members will “sustain the doctrines” of the church, and replaces it with a promise to welcome and test biblically what the elders teach from Scripture. The reason for the deletion is that the phrase “the doctrines of the church” does not refer to anything definite that the members are required to believe. The doctrines of the elders are found in the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith, but the membership is not required to believe all of this. The only other statement of doctrine is the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, and believing this is required of covenant members apart from the CHURCH COVENANT. What is vital in covenant community beyond the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is that members want to be taught by elders who are faithful to the scriptures. That is what is being promised here.

<sup>7</sup> The change is from “secret” devotions to “personal” devotions. “Secret” implies in our language that no one knows you are having them. That is not the point. The point is that we all cultivate a personal walk with God that is individual and not only corporate.

<sup>8</sup> The deletion of the words, “the articles of this confession,” is owing to the fact that it does not refer to anything in particular. It is not clear what “confession” is being referred to. Adding the term “likeminded” along with the present phrase, “the spirit of this covenant” accomplishes what is intended, namely, that people will not drift without a church when leaving this area, but will seek out a church similar in life and doctrine.

## Appendix F

## Proposed New Section in the By-Laws on Membership and Baptism (Article I, Section 2)

### **Baptism and Church Membership**

1) The teaching and practice of baptism at Bethlehem Baptist Church is defined in Section 12 of the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. The key paragraph states:

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.

2) Thus the official position of Bethlehem Baptist Church is that only baptism by immersion of believers will be taught and practiced by the church. Customarily, therefore, all members of the church will have been baptized by immersion as believers.

3) However, we believe it is fitting that membership in the local church (distinct from *leadership* in the local church) should have prerequisites similar to the prerequisites for membership in the universal church. In other words, we believe it is unfitting to deny membership to a person who, by faith in Christ, gives evidence of regeneration.

4) Therefore, our aim is not to elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership. This implies that Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.

5) Since we believe that the New Testament teaches and demonstrates that the mode of baptism is only the immersion of a believer in water, we therefore regard all other practices of baptism as misguided, defective, and illegitimate. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential. Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a *violation* of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership, as expressed in the Church Covenant.

6) We will not admit into membership persons who refuse to practice any form of baptismal ritual, or who believe that their water baptism caused their regeneration. The former is a serious rejection of the Lord's commandment, and the latter is a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH states, "We believe that [the Holy Spirit's] work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual."

7) In the words of our CHURCH COVENANT we the members shall all be committed to "welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth."

\* \* \*

## Appendix G

### Proposed Amendments to Article I of the By-Laws, (Additions underlined, deletions strikethrough)

#### ARTICLE I, Membership

##### *Section 1, GENERAL PROCEDURE*

The requirements for membership are found in Article III of the Constitution. The elders shall interview all candidates for membership to discern if they fulfill the requirements. All actions regarding membership, either of admission or dismissal, shall be by vote of the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders. At any of the regular meetings for worship, the Church may, without special notice, act upon the reception of members, or upon transfer of members to other churches. Reception of members may, without special notice, be acted on by groups, within the Church, more limited than the full membership of the Church, using procedures specifically authorized by vote of the Church at a regular business meeting upon recommendation of the Council of Elders.

All persons uniting with this Church ~~in any of the ways set forth in Sections 2 through 4 above~~ shall previously, by the Council of Elders, be made acquainted with the CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. Appropriate instruction will be provided to ensure, as much as possible, that new members understand these documents. Member candidates will also be introduced to the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith, so that each new member is aware of what the leadership of the church believes and teaches. Then, upon joining the church, new members shall publicly affirm the CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service, and giving, when they make public profession of faith and join the church.

##### **Section 2, BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

1. The teaching and practice of baptism at Bethlehem Baptist Church is defined in Section 12 of the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. The key paragraph states:

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.

2. Thus the official position of Bethlehem Baptist Church is that only baptism by immersion of believers will be taught and practiced by the church. Customarily, therefore, all members of the church will have been baptized by immersion as believers.

3. However, we believe it is fitting that membership in the local church (distinct from leadership in the local church) should have prerequisites similar to the prerequisites for membership in the universal church. In other words, we believe it is unfitting to deny membership to a person who, by faith in Christ, gives evidence of regeneration.

4. Therefore, our aim is not to elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership. This implies that Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.

5. Since we believe that the New Testament teaches and demonstrates that the mode of baptism is only the immersion of a believer in water, we therefore regard all other practices of baptism as misguided, defective, and illegitimate. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential. Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a violation of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership, as expressed in the Church Covenant.

6. We will not admit into membership persons who refuse to practice any form of baptism at all, or who believe that their water baptism caused their regeneration. The former is a serious rejection of the Lord's commandment, and the latter is a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH states, "We believe that [the Holy Spirit's] work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual."

7. In the words of our CHURCH COVENANT, the members shall all be committed to "welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth."

### ***Section 2 ADMISSION BY BAPTISM***

~~Any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of change of heart, and having accepted the faith, aims and ideals of this Church as expressed in the affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant, may be received into membership by baptism, upon recommendation of the Council of Elders~~

***Section 3 ADMISSION BY LETTER***

~~Members from other Baptist churches holding like faith may be received as members with us upon presentation of letters of transfer from such churches, and upon acceptance of the faith, aims and ideals of this Church as expressed in the Affirmation of Faith and the Church Covenant. If such credentials be of older date than six months prior to their presentation, the applicant may be required to furnish additional information.~~

***Section 4 ADMISSION BY EXPERIENCE OR RESTORATION***

~~All applicants for membership other than by baptism or by letter of transfer, that is by Christian experience if previously baptized, or by restoration, shall be received into the church in the same way as those by baptism, except the ordinance shall not be administered.~~

***Section 5 INSTRUCTION TO NEW MEMBERS***

~~All persons uniting with this Church in any of the ways set forth in Sections 2 through 4 above shall previously, by the Council of Elders, be made acquainted with the Church Covenant and the Affirmation of Faith. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service, and giving, when they make public profession of faith and join the church.~~

***Section 3 ~~6~~, DISMISSAL OF MEMBERS***

a. Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the Church, or satisfactorily arranged the same with the Elders, ~~shall~~ may upon request be granted a letter of transfer to unite with such likeminded church as they may designate. Such letter of transfer shall be sent to ~~the~~ a pastor or the Clerk of the Church the member intends to join and shall be valid only for six months, but may be renewed after that time by vote of the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders if satisfactory reasons be given for the non-use. These limitations of time shall be included in the letter of transfer. Members who shall unite with another church without such letter shall be dropped from the Church roll.

Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the Church, or satisfactorily arranged the same with the Elders, and who desire to unite with a church of another denomination, shall receive a certificate of character and be dismissed.

b. Members who move from this city shall supply the Church with their new address and apply for a letter of dismissal within one year provided there be a church of the same faith and order in the place to which they move. If necessary, it shall be the duty of the Council of Elders to remind such member of their duties in this respect. In case there is no such church in the place, or there are circumstances which render it inadvisable to change membership, the member shall report to the Church as often as once a year at

least, in person or by letter and by contribution. All non-resident members who do not so report shall be subject to dismissal by the Church after appropriate efforts have been made to contact the member and remind them of their duties.

\* \* \*

Rationale:

1. The present By-Laws distinguish three ways of joining the church: by baptism (for new believers not part of another church), by letter (for those who are members in good standing at another church), and by experience (for those who are baptized but for some reason are not transferring from another church). The distinctions are irrelevant to the way we admit members now. We require all members to take a class (ASK) and to give evidence of new birth by a profession of faith in Christ, by doctrinal affirmations, and by a covenant commitment. Whether a person has been a member of another church, or which church they were a part of does not change these steps. Therefore this part of the By-Laws has become obsolete.

2. These changes make explicit that the elders instruct and interview the candidates to ensure their fitness for membership. It also makes explicit that member candidates will read and understand the foundational documents for membership, The CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. And it ensures that the candidates will at least be aware of the Elder Affirmation of Faith so that they are not surprised by what the leaders believe.

\* \* \*



## Appendix H

### Memorandum of Conditional Affirmation of THE BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH by the Elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church

*Note: This Memorandum describes the interpretation of some parts of the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith by the Council of Elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church. With these interpretations, the Council of Elders embraces the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith as true.*

Approved by the Council of Elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church  
August 9, 2005

#### Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith with Notes Presenting the Interpretation of the Bethlehem Baptist Church Council of Elders

##### I. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

##### II. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons; that these are equal in every divine perfection<sup>1</sup>, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption.

<sup>1</sup> **Interpretation: We believe that one of the perfections of God is his exhaustive, definite foreknowledge of all that shall come to pass.**

##### III. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

##### IV. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His

substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth.

## V. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide.

**<sup>1</sup> Interpretation:** Our official position (believed and affirmed by all the elders, though not required of all members) is a joyful affirmation that regeneration by the Holy Spirit precedes and enables faith (Matthew 11:27; 16:17; Acts 16:14; John 1:12-13, 3:3-8; 6:37, 44, 65; Acts 13:48; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 John 5:1). Therefore it is important to all of us as a church body that such an understanding not be denied or excluded by this Article of the BGC Affirmation of Faith. Hence we, as a church body, affirm the words “. . . the Holy Spirit . . . came forth . . . to regenerate . . . all who believe in Jesus Christ” with the understanding that “all who believe in Jesus Christ” may refer to those who have been previously regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We do not insist that others in the Baptist General Conference or that all of our own members agree with this historic Reformed viewpoint. We are simply saying by this qualification that we understand the intention of the Baptist General Conference to be that those who hold to a historic Calvinistic understanding of regeneration are not excluded by this article.

## VI. REGENERATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical, spiritual and eternal death, which is separation from God; that as a consequence, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners by choice and therefore under condemnation. We believe that those who repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated<sup>1</sup> by the Holy Spirit and become new creatures, delivered from condemnation and receive eternal life.

**<sup>1</sup> Interpretation:** As in the note on the Holy Spirit above, we affirm Article VI on Regeneration with the understanding that “are regenerated” may mean “have been previously regenerated by the Holy Spirit and thus brought to faith.” Thus we affirm “that those who repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and become new creatures.”

## VII. THE CHURCH

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a

company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith,<sup>1</sup> and associated for worship, work, and fellowship. We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local church the primary task of giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

**<sup>1</sup> Interpretation:** We believe this is what the ideal, Biblical church would look like. We believe that Gospel-based, Christ-exalting, Bible-believing churches which do not hold to the exclusive practice of believer's baptism are still valid, if not ideal, churches. We believe that exceptions for membership may be made to the requirement for believer's baptism by immersion, in cases where, after significant study, thought, discussion, and prayer, a candidate sincerely and humbly believes that it would be contrary to scripture and conscience to be baptized by immersion and thus to count his infant "baptism" or his adult sprinkling or pouring as improper or invalid. In such cases the candidate should give evidence that there is a humble, teachable openness to more light under the teaching and leadership of the church leaders who hold to the position that baptism is ideally the immersion of believers in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

#### VIII. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the well-being of his fellow men; that his conduct should be blameless before the world; that he should be a faithful steward of his possessions; and that he should seek to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ.

#### IX. THE ORDINANCES

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water into the name of the triune God.<sup>1</sup> We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**<sup>1</sup> Interpretation:** We affirm this truth about baptism without drawing out the possible implication that all other understandings and practices of baptism necessarily disqualify a person from membership in Bethlehem Baptist church. Some do. For example, the view or practice of baptism that understands it in terms of baptismal regeneration would compromise the nature of the gospel of grace through faith, and would disqualify a person from membership. We teach and practice only baptism of believers by immersion. But, in accordance with what was said above, we do not elevate one's understanding and practice of the time and mode of baptism to such a level that sincere, Bible-affirming, teachable disagreement must exclude one from membership.

## X. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone<sup>1</sup> in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference<sup>2</sup> by any ecclesiastical or political authority; that therefore Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other.

<sup>1</sup> **Interpretation: We affirm this with the assumption that it means “responsible [ultimately] to God alone [whose authority is expressed in the inspired scriptures].” We do not take it to mean that we have no earthly responsibility to give an account of our doctrine to appropriately authorized church leaders.**

<sup>2</sup> **Interpretation: We understand “interference” in terms of the “dictation and patronage” referred to in the following words of this article. We do not understand this to mean, for example, that denominational officials may not hold a church accountable to fulfill the expectations agreed to upon freely joining the denomination.**

## XI. CHURCH COOPERATION

We believe that local churches can best<sup>1</sup> promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether a regional or district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Churches may likewise cooperate with interdenominational fellowships on a voluntary independent basis.

<sup>1</sup> **Interpretation: We do not take the word “best” to mean that “denominational organization[s]” as we know them are a universal and cross cultural Biblical mandate or that they should exist in all times and places where Christian churches flourish. We affirm the wisdom of church partnerships, and we believe participation in the Baptist General Conference is what would be “best” for us at this point in history.**

## XII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked. Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:4-6,11-15

## Appendix J

(There is no Appendix I.)

### Proposed Amendments to Article II of the Constitution, (Additions underlined, deletions strikethrough)

#### ARTICLE II, Foundation, Object and Priorities of Ministry

1. The foundation of this Church is the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:11), and its code of guidance in all its affairs, the Word of God, and this Church does here affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of Almighty God (Mark 13:31).
2. The object of this Church shall be to worship God according to the teaching of His Word, to practice the precepts and examples of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament, to sustain its ordinances and doctrines and to preach and propagate among all peoples the Gospel of Salvation which is by personal faith on Jesus Christ as Savior ~~and Lord,~~ and supreme Treasure of life.
3. The priorities of ministry of this church flow from the vision of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist to savor this vision in worship (John 4:23), strengthen the vision in nurture and education (I Corinthians 14:26; II Peter 3:18), and spread the vision in evangelism, missions, and loving deeds (I Peter 2:9; 3:15; Matthew 28:18-20; 5:16). Thus Bethlehem Baptist Church exists to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.
4. The doctrinal standards of what is believed and taught by the Council of Elders of this church is expressed in THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. This Affirmation attached as Appendix A of the Constitution, shall be deemed a part of the Constitution of this church. (Cf. By-Laws, Article II, Section 4, paragraph b)
5. The essential doctrinal and life standards for membership in Bethlehem Baptist Church are expressed in the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH and the CHURCH COVENANT, respectively.

#### 5. a. MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

The purpose of the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is to express what we believe a person must not deny (or, preferably, would affirm) so as not to call the genuineness of his faith into question. It is not meant to represent all that a Christian *should* believe, but the essential truths that a Christian *must not deny*.

#### I. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; and that these are the same divine essence and are equal in every divine perfection, but that they have different roles. (Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1, 3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:5, 6)

## II. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6)

## III. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16)

## IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit sent into the world by God to glorify the Son of God. We believe that without his work no one would come to faith. We believe that His work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual. We believe He indwells everyone who trusts in Christ, and helps them make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus Christ in thought, deed, and love for God the Father. (John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26)

## V. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts. We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture. (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20,21; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; Mark 13:31; John 8:31,32; 14:26; 16:13-14; 17:17; 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 22:29, 43-44; 24:35; Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6; Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)

## VI. THE HUMAN CONDITION AND SALVATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image and for his glory; but that man sinned and fell short of God's glory, and thus incurred physical, spiritual, and eternal separation from God. We believe that all human beings are born with a sinful nature, and so are under divine condemnation. We reject justification by works of the law, and we believe that only those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, submitting to him as Lord, and embracing Him as supreme Treasure of their lives, are justified, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life. We believe that this faith leads to a heartfelt turning from sin. The Christian life involves growth in grace through persevering, Holy Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ everyday. (Genesis 1:26-7; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; Matt 13:44; John 1:13; John 3:14; 3:16; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; 17:3; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Phil 3:7-8; I John 1:9; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:11; 8:1; I Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:39; Rom 3:28)

## VII. THE CHURCH:

We believe in one holy, universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and supreme Treasure of their lives. We believe that God calls us to unite with other believers in local churches to help each other to value Christ above all, to praise Him together, to grow in our love and knowledge of Him, to stir each other up to good works, and to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. We believe that Christians should be baptized and regularly eat the Lord's Supper. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11; Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

## VIII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of all people, leading to the eternal happiness of the righteous in the Lord's presence, and the eternal separation of the wicked from the presence of the Lord. (Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15-8; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20: 11-15)

### 5. b. CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive ~~the Lord~~ Jesus Christ as ~~our~~ the Lord, Savior, and, supreme Treasure of our lives, and having affirmed the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in

the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness and peace ~~comfort~~; to promote its ~~prosperity and~~ spirituality and fruitfulness; to sustain its worship, ordinances, and discipline; to welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth; and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and ~~secret~~ personal<sup>7</sup> devotions; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to support the efforts of the church to prepare the next generations to put their confidence in God; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment, to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will, if possible, unite with a likeminded church where we can carry out ~~the articles of this confession and~~ the spirit of this covenant.

## AFFIRMATION OF OUR FAITH

### ***~~I. THE WORD OF GOD~~***

~~We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20, 21; Mark 13:31; John 8:31, 32; John 20:31; Acts 20:32~~

### ***~~II. THE TRINITY~~***

~~We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons; that these are equal in every divine perfection, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption. Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1, 3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:5, 6~~



### ***III. GOD THE FATHER***

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass, that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6

### ***IV. JESUS CHRIST***

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16

### ***V. THE HOLY SPIRIT***

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide. John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26

### ***VI. REGENERATION***

We believe that man was created by God in His own image; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical, spiritual and eternal death, which is separation from God; that as a consequence, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners by choice and therefore under condemnation. We believe that those who repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and become new creatures, delivered from condemnation and receive eternal life. Genesis 1:26; 5:2; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; John 3:14; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; Romans 9:22; II Thessalonians 1:9; Rev. 19:3,20; 20:10,14,15; 21:18; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9; John 3:16; John 1:13; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1

### ***VII. THE CHURCH***

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith, and associated for worship, work, and fellowship. We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local church the primary task of giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. Ephesians 2:19-22; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:19-21; Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23-25

### ***VIII. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT***

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the well being of his fellow men; that his conduct should be blameless before the world; that he should be a faithful steward of his possessions; and that he should seek to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ. I Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-3; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 14:15,23-24; I John 2:3-6; II Corinthians 9:6-9; I Corinthians 4:2; Col. 1:9-10

### ***IX. THE ORDINANCES***

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water into the name of the triune God. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-5; I Corinthians 11:23-26

### ***X. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY***

We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority; that therefore Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other. I Timothy 2:5; Romans 14:7-9, 12

### ***XI. CHURCH COOPERATION***

We believe that local churches can best promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether a regional or district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Acts 15:36,41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11. This church is affiliated with the Minnesota Baptist Conference and the Baptist General Conference, and may likewise cooperate with interdenominational fellowships on a voluntary independent basis.

### ***XII. THE LAST THINGS***

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked. Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:4-6,11-15

\* \* \*

## Appendix K

### Proposed Amendments to Article III of the Constitution (Additions underlined, deletions strikethrough)

#### ARTICLE III, Membership

~~The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who give evidence of regeneration by a living consistent with their profession and with the views of faith, doctrine and practice of this Church, who have been baptized by immersion and who have been received into its membership according to the By-Laws of this Church.~~

Reception into membership of this church shall be in accord with Article 1, Section 1 of the By-Laws of the church. Persons being received into membership in this Church shall have given evidence of regeneration by a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure of their lives—a faith that expresses itself in

- a) sincerely affirming the foundational MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, (Article II, Section 5. a.)
- b) embracing and living consistently with our CHURCH COVENANT (Article II, Section 5. b.)
- c) being baptized in accord with Article I, Section 2 of the By-Laws of this Church.

\* \* \*

## Appendix L

### Proposed Amendments to Article VI of the Constitution and Article VIII of the By-Laws with Rationale on Safeguarding Orthodoxy (One addition underlined in each article, one deletion struck through)

#### Proposed Constitutional Amendment (addition of subsection 3 underlined):

##### ARTICLE VI, Revisions, Additions and Amendments

1. Revisions, additions or amendments of this constitution may be made only in the following manner:

- a. at the annual meeting; and
- b. by a majority vote of the membership, or a two-thirds majority of those members present and voting at such meeting, provided at least ten percent (10%) of the resident membership of the Church is present at such meeting; and
- c. after presentation by written motion at a quarterly or special business meeting held at least three months before the annual meeting; and
- d. if notice of the proposed change or addition has been given, in writing and from the pulpit on at least two Sundays in the interim period between said meetings.

2. Article II (1) and VI (2) of this constitution shall not be repealed, amended or revised.

3. Amendments to Article II, (2), (3), (4), (5), and Article III of this Constitution, and Appendix A of this Constitution (THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH) may be introduced only by the Council of Elders.

#### Proposed By-Law Amendment

##### ARTICLE VIII, Amendments

~~GENERAL~~

Amendments to By-Laws Article 1, Sections 1 and 2 may be introduced only by the Council of Elders. Amendments to other By-Laws may be introduced by members through written motion at any quarterly meeting, but shall not be acted on until the following quarterly or annual meeting, at which time an affirmative vote of the majority of the membership of the Church, or a two-thirds majority of those members present at the meeting and voting shall be required for acceptance; provided, however, that at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church be present at such meeting, and that notice of the proposed change or amendment be given from the pulpit on at least two Sundays and in writing to the resident membership in the interim period between the meetings.

## Rationale Reflections on Congregational Church Government and the Safeguarding of Orthodoxy

John Piper

If the concern arises over the possibility of immature or mistaken members exerting undue influence in the church, the following thoughts may help remove any undue fear.

Congregational church government as we practice it is a healthy combination of elder leadership and congregational affirmation. The New Testament clearly teaches that elders are to “rule well” (1 Timothy 5:17) and manage the church on the analogy of the way a father manages his household (1 Timothy 3:4-5). They are called “overseers” (Titus 1:7) and “leaders” (Hebrews 13:17). They are said to be “over you in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). So it is plain that leadership by the elders is expected by God, and that the elders will have to give an account to the Lord (Hebrews 13:17).

On the other hand, it is also apparent that the people of the church, acting as a body, have role in all church decision making. For example, this appears to be the case in Matthew 18:17 where “the church” is the final court of appeal in the discipline of an unrepentant church member (“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”).

Therefore, in safeguarding the orthodoxy of the church there is a combined role for the elders and the church as a whole. The elders test and propose to the people candidates for the eldership. The people assess and affirm or withhold affirmation. In theory, therefore, over time the people could unseat all the elders by withholding approval as they come up for reaffirmation. This is an extremely remote possibility, but should be kept in mind if the question arises, how shall the people remedy a corrupt eldership?

On the other hand, the elders are charged with teaching and with the oversight of doctrinal faithfulness: “He [the elder/overseer] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Thus the elders bear more responsibility than the people for the doctrinal safeguarding of the church.

In accord with this greater responsibility it is fitting that the elders be charged with the responsibility to bring to the church amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws, which involve the ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH and the CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. According to our present Constitution and By-Laws any proposed amendments would have to be affirmed by two-thirds of the gathered people with at least 10% of the membership present, or by 50% of the entire membership.

In this way Elders bear a special responsibility to test and present changes in matters of doctrine and Christian living, and the people bear the responsibility to assess them and affirm them or withhold affirmation. We believe that the proposed amendments above

provide for this biblical balance of leadership. Thus we propose the above amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws as spelled out in Appendix L.

## Appendix M

# Entire Constitution with All Proposed Amendments

(additions underlined, deletions strikethrough)

## CONSTITUTION and BY-LAWS

BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH

of

Minneapolis Inc.

1965

Revised - 1982, 1990

Amended - January 26, 2000 and December 10, 2003

Proposed Amendments as Marked

7-12-05

## CONSTITUTION

### ARTICLE I, Name

The name of this church shall be

BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH OF MINNEAPOLIS INC.

### ARTICLE II, Foundation, Object and Priorities of Ministry

1. The foundation of this Church is the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:11), and its code of guidance in all its affairs, the Word of God, and this Church does here affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of Almighty God (Mark 13:31).

2. The object of this Church shall be to worship God according to the teaching of His Word, to practice the precepts and examples of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament, to sustain its ordinances and doctrines and to preach and propagate among all peoples the Gospel of Salvation which is by personal faith on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

3. The priorities of ministry of this church flow from the vision of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist to savor this vision in worship (John 4:23), strengthen the vision in nurture and education (I Corinthians 14:26; II Peter 3:18), and spread the vision in evangelism, missions, and loving deeds (I Peter 2:9; 3:15; Matthew 28:18-20; 5:16). Thus



Bethlehem Baptist Church exists to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

4. The doctrinal standards of what is believed and taught by the Council of Elders of this church is expressed in THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. This Affirmation, attached as Appendix A of the Constitution, shall be deemed a part of the Constitution of this church. (Cf. By-Laws, Article II, Section 4, paragraph b)

5. The essential doctrinal and life standards for membership in Bethlehem Baptist Church are expressed in the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH and the CHURCH COVENANT, respectively.

## 5. a. MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

4-3-04

<p><u>The purpose of the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH is to express what we believe a person must not deny (or, preferably, would affirm) so as not to call the genuineness of his faith into question. It is not meant to represent all that a Christian <i>should</i> believe, but the essential truths that a Christian <i>must not deny</i>.</u></p>
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### I. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; and that these are the same divine essence and are equal in every divine perfection, but that they have different roles. (Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1, 3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:5, 6)

### II. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6)

### III. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16)

#### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit sent into the world by God to glorify the Son of God. We believe that without his work no one would come to faith. We believe that His work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual. We believe He indwells everyone who trusts in Christ, and helps them make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus Christ in thought, deed, and love for God the Father. (John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26)

#### V. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts. We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture. (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20,21; 3:16; I Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; Mark 13:31; John 8:31,32; 14:26; 16:13-14; 17:17; 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 22:29, 43-44; 24:35; Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6; Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)

#### VI. THE HUMAN CONDITION AND SALVATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image and for his glory; but that man sinned and fell short of God's glory, and thus incurred physical, spiritual, and eternal separation from God. We believe that all human beings are born with a sinful nature, and so are under divine condemnation. We reject justification by works of the law, and we believe that only those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, submitting to him as Lord, and embracing Him as supreme Treasure of their lives, are justified, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life. We believe that this faith leads to a heartfelt turning from sin. The Christian life involves growth in grace through persevering, Holy Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ everyday. (Genesis. 1:26-7; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; Matt 13:44; John 1:13; John 3:14; 3:16; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; 17:3; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Phil 3:7-8; I John 1:9; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:11; 8:1; I Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:39; Rom 3:28)

#### VII. THE CHURCH:

We believe in one holy, universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and supreme Treasure of their lives. We believe that God calls us to unite with other believers in local churches to help each other to value Christ above all, to praise Him together, to grow in our love and knowledge of Him, to stir each other up to good works, and to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples

through Jesus Christ. We believe that Christians should be baptized and regularly eat the Lord's supper. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11; Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)  
VIII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of all people, leading to the eternal happiness of the righteous in the Lord's presence, and the eternal separation of the wicked from the presence of the Lord. (Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15-8; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20: 11-15)

## AFFIRMATION OF OUR FAITH

### ***I. THE WORD OF GOD***

~~We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20, 21; Mark 13:31; John 8:31, 32; John 20:31; Acts 20:32~~

### ***II. THE TRINITY***

~~We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons; that these are equal in every divine perfection, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption. Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1, 3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:5, 6~~

### ***III. GOD THE FATHER***

~~We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass, that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6~~

### ***IV. JESUS CHRIST***

~~We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16~~

#### ***V. THE HOLY SPIRIT***

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide. John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26

#### ***VI. REGENERATION***

We believe that man was created by God in His own image; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical, spiritual and eternal death, which is separation from God; that as a consequence, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners by choice and therefore under condemnation. We believe that those who repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and become new creatures, delivered from condemnation and receive eternal life. Genesis 1:26; 5:2; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; John 3:14; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; Romans 9:22; II Thessalonians 1:9; Rev. 19:3,20; 20:10,14,15; 21:18; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9; John 3:16; John 1:13; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1

#### ***VII. THE CHURCH***

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith, and associated for worship, work, and fellowship. We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local church the primary task of giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. Ephesians 2:19-22; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:19-21; Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23-25

#### ***VIII. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT***

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the well-being of his fellow men; that his conduct should be blameless before the world; that he should be a faithful steward of his possessions; and that he should seek to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ. I Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-3; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 14:15,23-24; I John 2:3-6; II Corinthians 9:6-9; I Corinthians 4:2; Col. 1:9-10

#### ***IX. THE ORDINANCES***

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water into the name of the triune God. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two

~~ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-5; I Corinthians 11:23-26~~

### ~~**X. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**~~

~~We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority; that therefore Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other. I Timothy 2:5; Romans 14:7-9, 12~~

### ~~**XI. CHURCH COOPERATION**~~

~~We believe that local churches can best promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether a regional or district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Acts 15:36,41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11. This church is affiliated with the Minnesota Baptist Conference and the Baptist General Conference, and may likewise cooperate with interdenominational fellowships on a voluntary independent basis.~~

### ~~**XII. THE LAST THINGS**~~

~~We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked. Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:4-6,11-15~~

## 5. b. CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive ~~the Lord Jesus Christ as our~~ the Lord, Savior, and, supreme Treasure of our lives, and having affirmed the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness and peace ~~comfort~~; to promote its ~~prosperity~~ and spirituality and fruitfulness; to sustain its worship, ordinances, and discipline; to welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow

toward Biblical unity in the truth; and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and ~~secret~~ personal<sup>7</sup> devotions; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to support the efforts of the church to prepare the next generations to put their confidence in God; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment, to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will, if possible, unite with a likeminded church where we can carry out ~~the articles of this confession and~~ the spirit of this covenant.

### ARTICLE III, Membership

~~The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who give evidence of regeneration by a living consistent with their profession and with the views of faith, doctrine and practice of this Church, who have been baptized by immersion and who have been received into its membership according to the By-Laws of this Church.~~

Reception into membership of this church shall be in accord with Article 1, Section 1 of the By-Laws of the church. Persons being received into membership in this Church shall have given evidence of regeneration by a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure of their lives—a faith that expresses itself in

- a) sincerely affirming the foundational MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH, (Article II, Section 5. a.)
- b) embracing and living consistently with our CHURCH COVENANT (Article II, Section 5. b.)
- c) being baptized in accord with Article I, Section 2 of the By-Laws of this Church.

### ARTICLE IV, Leadership and Organization

1. Under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, the Congregation of the Church is the final authority within this local Church. This authority is normally exercised through the election of officers to govern the Church. However, the vote of the membership of this Church at a properly called meeting, as provided in the By-Laws, shall be required to effect the following actions:

- a. Accept members into the Church, give letters of transfer or recommendation to members, or drop members from the Church roll;
- b. Elect officers of the Church;
- c. Discipline members by dismissing them and discipline officers by removing them from office;
- d. Approve annual budgets of the Church, authorize any expenditure of the funds of the Church when such expenditure is not covered by an approved budget, and approve any transactions regarding real property;
- e. Accept, reject, or otherwise dispose of any matter submitted to the membership of the Church by the Council of Elders, or raised by motion at a business meeting;
- f. Adopt, amend, or repeal the Constitution or By-Laws of this church;
- g. Approve the call, job description and initial salary of Vocational Pastors and Ministers.

2. The offices of the Church shall be Elder and Deacon. The purpose of the officers of the Church is to lovingly govern, care for, and equip the membership to do the work of the ministry.

3. The leadership of the Church shall be vested in the Council of Elders which is responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function.

4. Deacons shall assist the Council of Elders by performing services of advice, administration and implementation.

#### ARTICLE V, The Church Property

1. In the event of a division of this Church, from which may God in His mercy save us, the property of this Church shall belong to that group of such division as represents the largest portion of the Church membership before recognizing a division therein provided such group is loyal to this constitution; otherwise it shall belong to the group remaining loyal to this constitution though it may not be the largest group in such division. Should

any controversy arise as to whether such loyalty exists, the question shall be submitted to the Ruling Board of the Minnesota Baptist Conference, and their decision shall be final.

2. Should a condition arise at any time in the future when for any reason, the Church work cannot continue, the Church property shall be transferred to the Minnesota Baptist Conference or its successor.

3. Should conditions arise where a consolidation with another church of the same denomination be advisable, the Council of Elders shall be authorized by the Church to negotiate the terms of such consolidation in so far as the property of this Church is concerned.

#### ARTICLE VI, Revisions, Additions and Amendments

1. Revisions, additions or amendments of this constitution may be made only in the following manner:

- a. at the annual meeting; and
- b. by a majority vote of the membership, or a two-thirds majority of those members present and voting at such meeting, provided at least ten percent (10%) of the resident membership of the Church is present at such meeting; and
- c. after presentation by written motion at a quarterly or special business meeting held at least three months before the annual meeting; and
- d. if notice of the proposed change or addition has been given, in writing and from the pulpit on at least two Sundays in the interim period between said meetings.

2. Article II (1) and VI (2) of this constitution shall not be repealed, amended or revised.

3. Amendments to Article II, (2), (3), (4), (5), and Article III of this Constitution, and Appendix A of this Constitution (The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith) may be introduced only by the Council of Elders.

## By-Laws

### **ARTICLE I, Membership**

#### *Section 1, GENERAL PROCEDURE*

The requirements for membership are found in Article III of the Constitution. The elders shall interview all candidates for membership to discern if they fulfill the requirements.



All actions regarding membership, either of admission or dismissal, shall be by vote of the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders. At any of the regular meetings for worship, the Church may, without special notice, act upon the reception of members, or upon transfer of members to other churches. Reception of members may, without special notice, be acted on by groups, within the Church, more limited than the full membership of the Church, using procedures specifically authorized by vote of the Church at a regular business meeting upon recommendation of the Council of Elders.

All persons uniting with this Church ~~in any of the ways set forth in Sections 2 through 4 above~~ shall previously, by the Council of Elders, be made acquainted with the CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. Appropriate instruction will be provided to ensure, as much as possible, that new members understand these documents. Member candidates will also be introduced to the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith, so that each new member is aware of what the leadership of the church believes and teaches. Then, upon joining the church, new members shall publicly affirm the CHURCH COVENANT and the MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service, and giving, when they make public profession of faith and join the church.

### **Section 2, BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

1. The teaching and practice of baptism at Bethlehem Baptist Church is defined in Section 12 of the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. The key paragraph states:

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.

2. Thus the official position of Bethlehem Baptist Church is that only baptism by immersion of believers will be taught and practiced by the church. Customarily, therefore, all members of the church will have been baptized by immersion as believers.

3. However, we believe it is fitting that membership in the local church (distinct from leadership in the local church) should have prerequisites similar to the prerequisites for membership in the universal church. In other words, we believe it is unfitting to deny membership to a person who, by faith in Christ, gives evidence of regeneration...

4. Therefore, our aim is not to elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership. This implies that Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.

5. Since we believe that the New Testament teaches and demonstrates that the mode of baptism is only the immersion of a believer in water, we therefore regard all other practices of baptism as misguided, defective, and illegitimate. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential. Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a *violation* of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to the church leadership, as expressed in the Church Covenant.

6. We will not admit into membership persons who refuse to practice any form of baptism at all, or who believe that their water baptism caused their regeneration. The former is a serious rejection of the Lord's commandment, and the latter is a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our MEMBERSHIP AFFIRMATION OF FAITH states, "We believe that [the Holy Spirit's] work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual."

7. In the words of our CHURCH COVENANT, the members shall all be committed to "welcome, and test biblically, instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Affirmation of Faith, seeking to grow toward Biblical unity in the truth."

### ***Section 2 ~~ADMISSION BY BAPTISM~~***

~~Any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of change of heart, and having accepted the faith, aims and ideals of this Church as expressed in the affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant, may be received into membership by baptism, upon recommendation of the Council of Elders~~

### ***Section 3 ~~ADMISSION BY LETTER~~***

~~Members from other Baptist churches holding like faith may be received as members with us upon presentation of letters of transfer from such churches, and upon acceptance of the faith, aims and ideals of this Church as expressed in the Affirmation of Faith and the Church Covenant. If such credentials be of older date than six months prior to their presentation, the applicant may be required to furnish additional information.~~

### ***Section 4 ~~ADMISSION BY EXPERIENCE OR RESTORATION~~***

~~All applicants for membership other than by baptism or by letter of transfer, that is by Christian experience if previously baptized, or by restoration, shall be received into the~~

church in the same way as those by baptism, except the ordinance shall not be administered.

***Section 5 INSTRUCTION TO NEW MEMBERS***

All persons uniting with this Church in any of the ways set forth in Sections 2 through 4 above shall previously, by the Council of Elders, be made acquainted with the Church Covenant and the Affirmation of Faith. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service, and giving, when they make public profession of faith and join the church.

***Section 3 6, DISMISSAL OF MEMBERS***

a. Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the Church, or satisfactorily arranged the same with the Elders, shall may upon request be granted a letter of transfer to unite with such likeminded church as they may designate. Such letter of transfer shall be sent to ~~the~~ a pastor or the Clerk of the Church the member intends to join and shall be valid only for six months, but may be renewed after that time by vote of the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders if satisfactory reasons be given for the non-use. These limitations of time shall be included in the letter of transfer. Members who shall unite with another church without such letter shall be dropped from the Church roll.

Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the Church, or satisfactorily arranged the same with the Elders, and who desire to unite with a church of another denomination, shall receive a certificate of character and be dismissed.

b. Members who move from this city shall supply the Church with their new address and apply for a letter of dismissal within one year provided there be a church of the same faith and order in the place to which they move. If necessary, it shall be the duty of the Council of Elders to remind such member of their duties in this respect. In case there is no such church in the place, or there are circumstances which render it inadvisable to change membership, the member shall report to the Church as often as once a year at least, in person or by letter and by contribution. All non-resident members who do not so report shall be subject to dismissal by the Church after appropriate efforts have been made to contact the member and remind them of their duties.

**ARTICLE II Church Government**

*Section 1 GENERAL STATEMENT*

a. Officers. The Officers of the Church shall be a Council of Elders and the Deacons. Officers shall be called to office by vote of the membership of the Church as provided for in Article II, Section 2 and Section 3 of these By-Laws. All officers of the Church shall be members of the Church in good and regular standing. The Council of Elders shall be

composed of men; the Deacons shall be composed of both men and women. Except as provided in paragraphs (b) and (c) below, the Council of Elders and the Deacons are the only bodies and positions created by these By-Laws.

b. Clerk, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary. The Church, upon nomination by the Council of Elders shall elect at the annual meeting, members to the positions of Church Clerk, Treasurer and Financial Secretary. The functions of Treasurer and Financial Secretary shall not be performed by one member. The Treasurer and Financial Secretary shall be bonded by the Church in a suitable amount. The Elders shall provide a written description of duties to the Clerk, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary.

c. Committees and Appointees. The Council of Elders has the authority to create committees and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. The Council of Elders has the authority to dissolve any committee or position which it created. The Council of Elders also has the authority to appoint Elders, Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such committees and to act as its agents in such positions. The Deacons may nominate candidates for any committee or position, with appointment by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate to the Deacons the authority to appoint Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such committees and as agents of the Council of Elders in such positions. Every committee shall have a chairperson, responsible for the overall operation of the committee, who shall be appointed by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to the Deacons or to the committee. (For example, such committees and positions may include a Missions Committee and a Christian Education Committee, among others.)

### *Section 2 VOCATIONAL PASTORS AND MINISTERS*

a. Definition. Vocational Pastors are the ordained Elders of the church, who in response to God's call, have devoted their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word and prayer in the service of the church of Christ. Vocational Ministers are the non-ordained ministers of the church who, in response to God's call, serve the church of Christ as their primary vocation. Both Vocational Pastors and Vocational Ministers are supported financially by the church in return for their vocational labors.

b. Duties. In addition to the duties of their office as described in Sections 4 and 5 below, Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall perform the duties determined by the Council of Elders and approved by the congregation. The duties shall be in writing at the time of the call to service, and substantial changes shall be approved by the church. The church's call of a Vocational Pastor is a call to the Eldership of the church. Therefore Vocational Pastors shall be members of the Council of Elders and have all the Biblical qualifications of an Elder. Vocational Ministers are not necessarily called to the Eldership, but as assisting partners in the ministry. Therefore, Vocational Ministers shall be Deacons. Vocational Ministers may, when appropriate, be called by the church to the Council of Elders from the Deacons.

c. Vocational Call by the Church. The members shall call Vocational Pastors and Ministers (1) by ballot upon recommendation of the Council of Elders and (2) by at least a two-thirds majority of those members voting at the meeting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church present. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting. Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall stand for reaffirmation not later than the third annual meeting following their call or previous reaffirmation. Reaffirmation of a Vocational Pastor or Minister shall be by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at the meeting.

d. Termination of Vocational Call by the Church.

1. By resignation. The question of terminating the vocational call of a Vocational Pastor or Minister shall be considered at any time by the church upon the presentation of the Pastor's or Minister's resignation.

2. Grievance. Where a grievance exists against a Pastor or Minister, either due to his preaching or teaching contrary to the beliefs of the Church as set forth in Article II of its Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an Elder or Deacon, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedure prescribed in Article V of these By-Laws. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the vocational call of the Pastor or Minister may be terminated at any business meeting upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders when supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the church present at such meeting. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on two successive Sundays next preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting.

3. Lack of reaffirmation. If a Vocational Pastor or Minister fails to be reaffirmed to the office of Elder or Deacon as provided in paragraph (c) above, a special business meeting shall be called to consider the question of terminating the vocational call with that Pastor or Minister. The vocational call shall be terminated only if supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the church present. Public notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given on two successive Sundays next preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the membership at least one week before the meeting. Removal from office and termination of the vocational call by this means shall not be considered disciplinary action.

e. Licensing and Ordination. In the matter of licensing and ordaining any person to the Gospel Ministry, the church shall follow, as far as possible, the procedure recommended by the Baptist General Conference.

*Section 3 LAY OFFICERS*

a. Definition. Lay officers are the non-Vocational Elders and Deacons of the Church.

b. Duties. Lay Elders and Deacons shall have the duties of their offices as described in Sections 4 and 5 below.

c. Calling. The Council of Elders shall recognize, interview, and investigate candidates for lay Elder and Deacon. The Council shall provide for individual members of the Church either to nominate candidates or to present themselves to the Council as candidates for office and for the Council's further investigation. In no instances shall any individual be considered a nominee for the office without the nominee's consent. In those cases where the Council of Elders concludes that a nominee is not qualified for office they shall so inform the nominee stating the reasons for this conclusion.

The Council of Elders shall present a ballot of candidates for calling or reaffirmation as Elders or Deacons to the congregation at the annual meeting. The Council of Elders may also nominate candidates for election to office at any quarterly or special meeting, provided that the written ballot of nominees is available for review in the church office at least ten days in advance of the meeting - and is announced publicly to the church by mail to its members or in the Sunday morning worship at least ten days in advance of the meeting.

Lay Elders and Deacons shall be called by the Church for a normal term of three years. They shall stand for reaffirmation not later than the third annual meeting of the church following their call or previous reaffirmation. Calling or reaffirmation of a lay Elder or Deacons shall be by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at the meeting. Lay Elders and Deacons shall serve no more than two consecutive terms. Following two consecutive terms the Elder or Deacon will not serve actively in office for a period of one year. Following this period they are again eligible for nomination as Elder or Deacon. For purposes of this provision a term during which an Elder or Deacon serves not more than one year shall not be considered a term in office.

d. Removal.

1. Resignation. An officer may resign his office at any time if he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of the office.

2. Grievance. Where a grievance exists against an officer of the Church either due to the adherence to and propagation of beliefs contrary to the beliefs of the Church as set forth in Article II, Sections 1 and 2 of its Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an Elder or Deacon, such grievance may be brought

before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedures prescribed in Article V of the By-Laws of this Church. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the officer may be removed from office upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders when supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting at any annual, quarterly, or special meeting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the church present at such meeting. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on two successive Sundays next preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting.

3. Lack of reaffirmation. If a Lay Elder or Deacon stands for reaffirmation and fails to be reaffirmed, the Elder or Deacon shall be removed from office. Removal from office by this means shall not be considered disciplinary action.

#### *Section 4 COUNCIL OF ELDERS*

a. Composition, Term, and Calling. The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, both Lay Elders and Vocational Elders. The Council of Elders shall be composed of at least seven members, with the number of Elders at any time determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church. There shall be at least twice as many Lay Elders as Vocational Elders. Each Elder shall be called by the membership of the Church to a term of three years. That call and any reaffirmation(s) shall be conducted as provided in Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of these By-Laws.

b. Qualifications. Elders and nominees for Elder shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and I Peter 5:1-4. Elders are also required to be in agreement with the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith. THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Council of Elders to the church, following the same procedure to amend the Constitution.

c. Responsibilities. The fundamental responsibility of the Elders is to devote themselves to prayer and the Word. The Elders are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church.

The responsibilities of the Elders shall include: examining prospective members and acquainting them with the Affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant, overseeing the process of Church discipline, examining prospective candidates for office, scheduling and providing a moderator for business meetings, providing for reporting and recording of official Church business, overseeing the work of the Deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conducting worship services, administering the ordinances of the Gospel, equipping the membership of the Church for the work of the ministry, teaching the whole counsel of God both formally and informally, correcting error, overseeing,

coordinating and promoting the ministries of the Church, and mobilizing the Church for world mission.

d. **Organization.** The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to be best to achieve the mission of the Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The Elders must meet at least once per month. Meetings of the Elders may be held at any location and may be conducted by means of electronic communication through which the Elders may simultaneously hear each other. Unless the Council provides otherwise, meetings of the Council may be held immediately upon notice. A quorum for meetings of the Elders is defined as at least one-half of the Lay Elders plus at least one-half of the Vocational Elders, except for matters on which only Lay Elders are entitled to vote in which case a majority of the Lay Elders shall constitute a quorum. The Council shall annually select its Chairman and Vice-Chairman from among its Lay Elders.

#### *Section 5, DEACONS*

a. **Composition, Term, and Calling.** The Deacons shall be both men and women, both Vocational Ministers and Lay Deacons. The number of Deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men and women in the church. Each Deacon shall be called by the membership of the Church to a normal term of three years. The call and any reaffirmation shall be conducted as provided in Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of these By-Laws.

b. **Qualifications.** Deacons and nominees for Deacon shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:8-12.

c. **Responsibilities.** The Deacons shall advise and be ready to assist the Elders in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the Word, new and existing ministries of the Church, and the care for the members of the congregation. Their responsibilities may include:

1. administering a fund to assist the poor and needy and otherwise providing aid in times of crisis or distress;
2. the greeting and welcoming ministries of the church;
3. assisting in administering the ordinances of the Gospel;
4. assisting at fellowship gatherings of the church;
5. caring for and maintaining the Church properties;
6. administering the business affairs of the Church that pertain to its material assets.



d. Organization. The Deacons shall organize themselves however they determine to be best to achieve the mission of the church. The Elders or the Deacons may designate any specific Deacon or group of Deacons to specialize in some particular Diaconal function. Meetings of the Deacons or subcommittees thereof shall be held as needed to best fulfill the responsibilities of the Deacons.

### **ARTICLE III, Church Employees**

In addition to Vocational Pastors and Ministers, the church may employ additional personnel. The moneys for such personnel must be approved by the congregation at a properly called business meeting. The Council of Elders shall be responsible for determining the duties of and hiring such personnel.

### **ARTICLE IV, Church Finances**

#### ***Section 1, IN GENERAL***

No method of raising funds shall be entertained which is in conflict with the Scriptural ideals of the Church. All funds donated for missions by the societies and organizations of the Church shall pass through the Church Finance Secretary and the Treasurer in order that due record may be made and credit given to the Church. The Deacons shall provide assistants for the Financial Secretary in accounting for funds donated.

#### ***Section 2, CONTRIBUTIONS***

It is understood that membership in this church involves financial obligations to support the Church and its causes with regular and proportionate giving. Each member shall be encouraged in Scriptural giving, with tithing as the ideal minimum. Special offerings may be sought by the Church, or by any of its organizations, with the approval of the Council of Elders. This shall not preclude individuals from making special offerings or designated gifts at any time as the Spirit of God may move them.

#### ***Section 3, FINANCIAL PLANNING***

The financial planning of the Church shall be carried out through the medium of annual budgets for carrying out of the various programs of its work. Annual budgets shall be adopted by the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders, or, if authorized by the Council, the Deacons or other committee. Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the lay members of the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate this responsibility provided such delegation is to lay Deacons or other lay members of the Church.

#### ***Section 4, ACCOUNTS***

Financial receipts from all sources shall be accounted for by the Finance Secretary according to the purposes for which contributions are designated. The Treasurer of the Church shall disburse these funds promptly according to the financial program of the Church as detailed in the Budgets or other authorized designations. All moneys for missions shall be remitted in accordance with the Mission Budget of the Church or otherwise designated, preferably each month and not less than each quarter.

*Section 5, INDEBTEDNESS*

No note or contract exceeding 1% of the total annual budget whereby the credit of the Church is pledged shall be made except by recommendation of the Council of Elders and approved by the Church.

*Section 6, AUTHORITY TO BIND THE CHURCH*

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council of Elders are the only officers who have authority, in accordance with these By-Laws, the Church Constitution, and any applicable laws, to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property, and church finances.

**ARTICLE V, Meetings**

*Section 1, FOR WORSHIP*

Public services shall be held on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month or at such other times as the Council of Elders may determine. Other religious services may be appointed as the advancement of the work of the Church may require.

*Section 2, FOR BUSINESS*

- a. The Annual Meeting. The annual meeting shall be held some time during the last month of the fiscal year of the Church for the purpose of calling and reaffirming the officers, reviewing proposed budgets and other business. Officers called at the annual meeting shall assume their duties at the beginning of the new fiscal year.
- b. Quarterly Meetings. Quarterly meetings of the Church shall be held within the first month of each quarter of the fiscal year.
- c. Special Meetings. The Council of Elders or any ten members in good standing may call for a special meeting. Notice of the meeting shall be given from the pulpit or by other notification, the particular object of such meeting being clearly stated in the notice. In the calling of special meetings for purposes where an interval after advance notice is required by provision in these By-Laws or according to law, such provisions shall be observed.

Notice shall be given at least one week in advance for meetings on especially important matters not otherwise provided for.

d. Quorum. Any number of members shall constitute a quorum at any ordinary meeting of the Church. At meetings dealing with particular matters stipulated in these By-Laws, the quorums prescribed shall apply.

e. Rules Governing Business Meetings. Robert's Rules of Order shall be recognized as the general pattern for the conduct of the business meetings of the Church. Seeking the Lord's wisdom and blessing through thankful prayer shall be a part of every meeting.

f. Notice Provisions. Unless specifically defined in other sections of these By-Laws or the Constitution, "resident membership" means those members who reside within 75 miles driving distance from the church building, "notice . . . in writing" means a written announcement sent by regular U.S. mail, and "notice . . . from the pulpit" means an oral announcement at each of the Sunday morning services.

#### **ARTICLE VI, Organization of Members for Ministry**

Members of this church shall have the liberty to participate in and organize themselves for ministry, provided that such participation and organization does not conflict with Article II of the Constitution. Any such organization may seek church sanction from the Council of Elders as an official ministry of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Such sanction shall be granted provided that 1) the object, purpose, belief and conduct of the organization and its members are consistent with Article II of the Constitution, and 2) the primary officers of the organization are: members of the church or other regular attenders of the church who have been approved under guidelines established by the Council of Elders. Sanction by the Council of Elders does not necessarily imply support of the organization by the church with personnel, finances, or facilities. Such support may be requested as provided by the leadership of the church.

#### **ARTICLE VII, Discipline**

The discipline of members shall be a responsibility of the Council of Elders under such rules and procedures as the Elders may from time to time establish on the basis of Scripture. All such proceedings shall be guided by a spirit of prayer mingling Christian kindness, forbearance, and holy firmness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### **ARTICLE VIII, Amendments**

#### **GENERAL**

Amendments to By-Laws Article 1, Sections 1 and 2 may be introduced only by the Council of Elders. Amendments to other By-Laws may be introduced by members of the church through written motion at any quarterly meeting, but shall not be acted on until the following quarterly or annual meeting, at which time an affirmative vote of the majority of the membership of the Church, or a two-thirds majority of those members present at the meeting and voting shall be required for acceptance; provided, however, that at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church be present at such meeting, and that notice of the proposed change or amendment be given from the pulpit on at least two Sundays and in writing to the resident membership in the interim period between the meetings.

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## Appendix A To the Constitution of Bethlehem Baptist Church

### **THE BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH ELDER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

#### ***1. Scripture, the Word of God Written***

1.1 We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts.

1.2 We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

1.3 We believe God's intentions are revealed through the intentions of inspired human authors, even when the authors' intention was to express divine meaning of which they were not fully aware, as, for example, in the case of some Old Testament prophecies. Thus the meaning of Biblical texts is a fixed historical reality, rooted in the historical, unchangeable intentions of its divine and human authors. However, while meaning does not change, the application of that meaning may change in various situations. Nevertheless it is not legitimate to infer a meaning from a Biblical text that is not demonstrably carried by the words which God inspired.

1.4 Therefore, the process of discovering the intention of God in the Bible (which is its fullest meaning) is a humble and careful effort to find in the language of Scripture what the human authors intended to communicate. Limited abilities, traditional biases, personal sin, and cultural assumptions often obscure Biblical texts. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is essential for right understanding of the Bible, and prayer for His assistance belongs to a proper effort to understand and apply God's Word.

## ***2. The Trinity, One God as Three Persons***

2.1 We believe in one living, sovereign, and all-glorious God, eternally existing in three infinitely excellent and admirable Persons: God the Father, fountain of all being; God the Son, eternally begotten, not made, without beginning, being of one essence with the Father; and God the Holy Spirit, proceeding in the full, divine essence, as a Person, eternally from the Father and the Son. Thus each Person in the Godhead is fully and completely God.

2.2 We believe that God is supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity, each Person beholding and expressing His eternal and unsurpassed delight in the all-satisfying perfections of the triune God.

## ***3. God's Eternal Purpose and Election***

3.1 We believe that God, from all eternity, in order to display the full extent of His glory for the eternal and ever-increasing enjoyment of all who love Him, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow whatever comes to pass.

3.2 We believe that God upholds and governs all things – from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons – all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image.

3.3 We believe that God's election is an unconditional act of free grace which was given through His Son Christ Jesus before the world began. By this act God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in His Son Christ Jesus.

## ***4. God's Creation of the Universe and Man***

4.1 We believe that God created the universe, and everything in it, out of nothing, by the Word of His power. Having no deficiency in Himself, nor moved by any incompleteness in His joyful self-sufficiency, God was pleased in creation to display His glory for the everlasting joy of the redeemed, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

4.2 We believe that God directly created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from his side. We believe that Adam and Eve were the historical parents of the entire human race; that they were created male and female equally in the image of God, without sin; that they were created to glorify their Maker, Ruler, Provider, and Friend by trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and

obeying His all-wise counsel; and that, in God's love and wisdom, they were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the church.

### ***5. Man's Sin and Fall from Fellowship with God***

5.1 We believe that, although God created man morally upright, he was led astray from God's Word and wisdom by the subtlety of Satan's deceit, and chose to take what was forbidden, and thus declare his independence from, distrust for, and disobedience toward his all-good and gracious Creator. Thus, our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original innocence and communion with God.

5.2 We believe that, as the head of the human race, Adam's fall became the fall of all his posterity, in such a way that corruption, guilt, death, and condemnation belong properly to every person. All persons are thus corrupt by nature, enslaved to sin, and morally unable to delight in God and overcome their own proud preference for the fleeting pleasures of self-rule.

5.3 We believe God has subjected the creation to futility, and the entire human family is made justly liable to untold miseries of sickness, decay, calamity, and loss. Thus all the adversity and suffering in the world is an echo and a witness of the exceedingly great evil of moral depravity in the heart of mankind; and every new day of life is a God-given, merciful reprieve from imminent judgment, pointing to repentance.

### ***6. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God***

6.1 We believe that in the fullness of time God sent forth His eternal Son as Jesus the Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. We believe that, when the eternal Son became flesh, He took on a fully human nature, so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one Person, without confusion or mixture. Thus the Person, Jesus Christ, was and is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ and the only Mediator between God and man.

6.2 We believe that Jesus Christ lived without sin, though He endured the common infirmities and temptations of human life. He preached and taught with truth and authority unparalleled in human history. He worked miracles, demonstrating His divine right and power over all creation: dispatching demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the storm, walking on water, multiplying loaves, and foreknowing what would befall Him and His disciples, including the betrayal of Judas and the denial, restoration, and eventual martyrdom of Peter.

6.3 We believe that His life was governed by His Father's providence with a view to fulfilling all Old Testament prophecies concerning the One who was to come, such as the Seed of the woman, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, and the Suffering Servant.

6.4 We believe that Jesus Christ suffered voluntarily in fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, that He died, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead to vindicate the saving work of His life and death and to take His place as the invincible, everlasting Lord of glory. During forty days after His resurrection, He gave many compelling evidences of His bodily resurrection and then ascended bodily into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His people on the basis of His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and reigning until He puts all His enemies under His feet.

## ***7. The Saving Work of Christ***

7.1 We believe that by His perfect obedience to God and by His suffering and death as the immaculate Lamb of God, Jesus Christ obtained forgiveness of sins and the gift of perfect righteousness for all who trusted in God prior to the cross and all who would trust in Christ thereafter. Through living a perfect life and dying in our place, the just for the unjust, Christ absorbed our punishment, appeased the wrath of God against us, vindicated the righteousness of God in our justification, and removed the condemnation of the law against us.

7.2 We believe that the atonement of Christ for sin warrants and impels a universal offering of the gospel to all persons, so that to every person it may be truly said, "God gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life." Whosoever will may come for cleansing at this fountain, and whoever does come, Jesus will not cast out.

7.3 We believe, moreover, that the death of Christ did obtain more than the bona fide offer of the gospel for all; it also obtained the omnipotent New Covenant mercy of repentance and faith for God's elect. Christ died for all, but not for all in the same way. In His death, Christ expressed a special covenant love to His friends, His sheep, His bride. For them He obtained the infallible and effectual working of the Spirit to triumph over their resistance and bring them to saving faith.

## ***8. The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit***

8.1 We believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation, awakening faith in the remnant of God's people, performing signs and wonders, giving triumphs in battle, empowering the preaching of prophets and inspiring the writing of Scripture. Yet, when Christ had made atonement for sin, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, He inaugurated a new era of the Spirit by pouring out the promise of the Father on His Church.

8.2 We believe that the newness of this era is marked by the unprecedented mission of the Spirit to glorify the crucified and risen Christ. This He does by giving the disciples of Jesus greater power to preach the gospel of the glory of Christ, by opening the hearts of hearers that they might see Christ and believe, by revealing the beauty of Christ in His

Word and transforming His people from glory to glory, by manifesting Himself in spiritual gifts (being sovereignly free to dispense, as he wills, all the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) for the upbuilding of the body of Christ and the confirmation of His Word, by calling all the nations into the sway of the gospel of Christ, and, in all this, thus fulfilling the New Covenant promise to create and preserve a purified people for the everlasting habitation of God.

8.3 We believe that, apart from the effectual work of the Spirit, no one would come to faith, because all are dead in trespasses and sins; that they are hostile to God, and morally unable to submit to God or please Him, because the pleasures of sin appear greater than the pleasures of God. Thus, for God's elect, the Spirit triumphs over all resistance, wakens the dead, removes blindness, and manifests Christ in such a compellingly beautiful way through the Gospel that He becomes irresistibly attractive to the regenerate heart.

8.4 We believe the Holy Spirit does this saving work in connection with the presentation of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Thus neither the work of the Father in election, nor the work of the Son in atonement, nor the work of the Spirit in regeneration is a hindrance or discouragement to the proclamation of the gospel to all peoples and persons everywhere. On the contrary, this divine saving work of the Trinity is the warrant and the ground of our hope that our evangelization is not in vain in the Lord. The Spirit binds His saving work to the gospel of Christ, because His aim is to glorify the Christ of the Gospel. Therefore we do not believe that there is salvation through any other means than through receiving the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, except that infants and severely retarded persons with minds physically incapable of comprehending the gospel may be saved.

## ***9. The Justifying Act of God***

9.1 We believe that in a free act of righteous grace God justifies the ungodly by faith alone apart from works, pardoning their sins, and reckoning them as righteous and acceptable in His presence. Faith is thus the sole instrument by which we, as sinners, are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God. This acceptance happens fully and permanently at the first instant of justification. Thus the righteousness by which we come into right standing with God is not anything worked in us by God, neither imparted to us at baptism nor over time, but rather is accomplished for us, outside ourselves, and is imputed to us.

9.2 We believe, nevertheless, that the faith, which alone receives the gift of justification, does not remain alone in the person so justified, but produces, by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of love and leads necessarily to sanctification. This necessary relation between justifying faith and the fruit of good works gives rise to some Biblical expressions which seem to make works the ground or means of justification, but in fact simply express the crucial truth that faith that does not yield the fruit of good works is dead, being no true faith.



## ***10. God's Work in Faith and Sanctification***

10.1 We believe that justification and sanctification are both brought about by God through faith, but not in the same way. Justification is an act of God's imputing and reckoning; sanctification is an act of God's imparting and transforming. Thus the function of faith in regard to each is different. In regard to justification, faith is not the channel through which power or transformation flows to the soul of the believer, but rather faith is the occasion of God's forgiving, acquitting, and reckoning as righteous. But in regard to sanctification, faith is indeed the channel through which divine power and transformation flow to the soul; and the sanctifying work of God through faith does indeed touch the soul and change it into the likeness of Christ.

10.2 We believe that the reason justifying faith necessarily sanctifies in this way is fourfold:

*First*, justifying faith is a persevering, that is, continuing, kind of faith. Even though we are justified at the first instant of saving faith, yet this faith justifies only because it is the kind of faith that will surely persevere. The extension of this faith into the future is, as it were, contained in the first seed of faith, as the oak in the acorn. Thus the moral effects of persevering faith may be rightly described as the effects of justifying faith.

*Second*, we believe that justifying faith trusts in Christ not only for the gift of imputed righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, but also for the fulfillment of all His promises to us based on that reconciliation. Justifying faith magnifies the finished work of Christ's atonement, by resting securely in all the promises of God obtained and guaranteed by that all-sufficient work.

*Third*, we believe that justifying faith embraces Christ in all His roles: Creator, Sustainer, Savior, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Helper, Friend, Advocate, Protector, and Lord. Justifying faith does not divide Christ, accepting part of Him and rejecting the rest. All of Christ is embraced by justifying faith, even before we are fully aware of, or fully understand, all that He will be for us. As more of Christ is truly revealed to us in His Word, genuine faith recognizes Christ and embraces Him more fully.

*Fourth*, we believe that this embracing of all of Christ is not a mere intellectual assent, or a mere decision of the will, but is also a heartfelt, Spirit-given (yet imperfect) satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, the change of mind and heart that turns from the moral ugliness and danger of sin, and is sometimes called "repentance," is included in the very nature of saving faith.

10.3 We believe that this persevering, future-oriented, Christ-embracing, heart-satisfying faith is life-transforming, and therefore renders intelligible the teaching of the Scripture that final salvation in the age to come depends on the transformation of life, and yet does not contradict justification by faith alone. The faith which alone justifies, cannot remain alone, but works through love.

10.4 We believe that this simple, powerful reality of justifying faith is God's gift which He gives unconditionally in accord with God's electing love, so that no one can boast in himself, but only give all glory to God for every part of salvation. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the decisive agent in this life-transformation, but that He is supplied to us and works holiness in us through our daily faith in the Son of God whose trustworthiness He loves to glorify.

10.5 We believe that the sanctification, which comes by the Spirit through faith, is imperfect and incomplete in this life. Although slavery to sin is broken, and sinful desires are progressively weakened by the power of a superior satisfaction in the glory of Christ, yet there remain remnants of corruption in every heart that give rise to irreconcilable war, and call for vigilance in the lifelong fight of faith.

10.6 We believe that all who are justified will win this fight. They will persevere in faith and never surrender to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the New Covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God Himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage, our vigilance; so that we may say in the end, I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

### ***11. Living God's Word by Meditation and Prayer***

11.1 We believe that faith is awakened and sustained by God's Spirit through His Word and prayer. The good fight of faith is fought mainly by meditating on the Scriptures and praying that God would apply them to our souls.

11.2 We believe that the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures are suited to save us from the deception of sin by displaying for us, and holding out to us, superior pleasures in the protection, provision, and presence of God. Therefore, reading, understanding, pondering, memorizing, and savoring the promises of all that God will be for us in Jesus are primary means of the Holy Spirit to break the power of sin's deceitful promises in our lives. Therefore it is needful that we give ourselves to such meditation day and night.

11.3 We believe that God has ordained to bless and use His people for His glory through the means of prayer, offered in Jesus' name by faith. All prayer should seek ultimately that God's name be hallowed, and that His kingdom come, and that His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. God's sovereignty over all things is not a hindrance to prayer, but a reason for hope that our prayers will succeed.

11.4 We believe that prayer is the indispensable handmaid of meditation, as we cry out to God for the inclination to turn from the world to the Word, and for the spiritual ability to see the glory of God in His testimonies, and for a soul-satisfying sight of the love of God, and for strength in the inner man to do the will of God. By prayer God sanctifies His people, sends gospel laborers into the world, and causes the Word of God to spread and triumph over Satan and unbelief.

## ***12. Christ's Church and Her Ordinances***

12.1 We believe in the one universal Church, composed of all those, in every time and place, who are chosen in Christ and united to Him through faith by the Spirit in one Body, with Christ Himself as the all-supplying, all-sustaining, all-supreme, and all-authoritative Head. We believe that the ultimate purpose of the Church is to glorify God in the everlasting and ever-increasing gladness of worship.

12.2 We believe it is God's will that the universal Church find expression in local churches in which believers agree together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the manifold ministries of love, to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline, and to engage in local and world evangelization. The Church is a body in which each member should find a suitable ministry for His gifts; it is the household of God in which the Spirit dwells; it is the pillar and bulwark of God's truth in a truth-denying world; and it is a city set on a hill so that men may see the light of its good deeds – especially to the poor – and give glory to the Father in heaven.

12.3 We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.

12.4 We believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord, and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace.

12.5 We believe that each local church should recognize and affirm the divine calling of spiritually qualified men to give leadership to the church through the role of pastor-elder in the ministry of the Word and prayer. Women are not to fill the role of pastor-elder in the local church, but are encouraged to use their gifts in appropriate roles that edify the body of Christ and spread the gospel.

## ***13. Christ's Commission to Make Disciples of All Nations***

We believe that the commission given by the Lord Jesus to make disciples of all nations is binding on His Church to the end of the age. This task is to proclaim the Gospel to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, baptizing them, teaching them the words

and ways of the Lord, and gathering them into churches able to fulfill their Christian calling among their own people. The ultimate aim of world missions is that God would create, by His Word, worshippers who glorify His name through glad-hearted faith and obedience. Missions exists because worship doesn't. When the time of ingathering is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal of missions.

#### ***14. Death, Resurrection, and the Coming of the Lord***

14.1 We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, and are taken consciously into the presence of Christ, which is more glorious and more satisfying than any experience on earth.

14.2 We believe in the blessed hope that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will gather His elect, raise the dead, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery.

14.3 We believe that the end of all things in this age will be the beginning of a never-ending, ever-increasing happiness in the hearts of the redeemed, as God displays more and more of His infinite and inexhaustible greatness and glory for the enjoyment of His people.

#### ***15. The Spirit of This Affirmation and the Unity of the Church***

15.1 We do not believe that all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for one to be saved.

15.2 Our aim is not to discover how little can be believed, but rather to embrace and teach "the whole counsel of God." Our aim is to encourage a hearty adherence to the Bible, the fullness of its truth, and the glory of its Author. We believe Biblical doctrine stabilizes saints in the winds of confusion and strengthens the church in her mission to meet the great systems of false religion and secularism. We believe that the supreme virtue of love is nourished by the strong meat of God-centered doctrine. And we believe that a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ is sustained in an atmosphere of deep and joyful knowledge of God and His wonderful works.

15.3 We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of church or school or mission or

ministry, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders.

15.4 We do not claim infallibility for this affirmation and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture. Yet we do hold firmly to these truths as we see them and call on others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. As conversation and debate take place, it may be that we will learn from each other, and the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding formerly disagreeing groups into closer fellowship.

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NOTE: The many Biblical descriptions of God's work in salvation are diverse. Therefore, similar or identical terms may be used differently in different contexts. Our aim in this affirmation of faith is not to limit how Biblical writers can use the terms we use here, or to say that the terms of this affirmation may not be used differently by the Biblical writers in various contexts, but rather our aim is to claim that the reality described here is in fact Biblical reality.

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