

First Baptist Church of New Sweden, Maine, Statement on Conscience

As a congregation of believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, First Baptist Church of New Sweden firmly declares our primary allegiance, love, obedience, and honor is due to Jesus Christ. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; the Eternal Sovereign of this creation, this nation, and our very lives. (Revelation 5:12-13; 19:11-16) Further, we affirm that the Bible, as constituted in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and twenty-seven books of the New Testament, is God's holy word (2 Timothy 3:16), the only and complete infallible message for faith and practice, sufficient for direction for all areas of life. (2 Peter 1:3)

We recognize that the Bible speaks clearly on many areas of life, especially regarding issues of salvation in Jesus Christ, revelations of God's character, and moral obligations of all people as image-bearers of God. However, there are areas where the Bible is not as direct in its teaching. In these areas, Christians are to study the Bible for wisdom, direction, insight, and examples. The Christian is to live in light of this more general wisdom from the Bible under the leading of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:13)

Likewise, we recognize that God has created spheres of authority and responsibility in His great wisdom. These spheres include individuals, families, churches, and civil magistrates (of various levels and types). These various spheres are addressed within the Bible regarding both their authority and their responsibilities, which define their freedoms and rights as well as their limits and duties.

Further, we likewise recognize the value of all humanity as image-bearers of God (Genesis 1:26-28) and the unique position of believers in Jesus Christ as adopted children of God. (Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1-12) The value of all humans results in the Christian protection of liberty of choices and conscience for all humans. The position of believers as adopted children of God results in boldly living in the liberty of service to God as defined and inferred by the Bible. Believers are members of the priesthood of God, thereby removing human authority over their service to God in all areas of life since obedience is seen in loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. (Luke 10:27) Believers are members of a community of fellow priests – truly a holy nation, thereby requiring that obedience to our King, Jesus, is found in living out our lives as believers within a local community together: a living out of our faith that is seen in our actively loving one another. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; John 13:34-35; Philippians 2:1-11) Believers are ambassadors to this world for our great King (2 Corinthians 5:16-21), thereby resulting in proclamation, exaltation, and proselytization in obedience to Jesus, Who has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), whether any other authority recognizes or supports such actions by Christians as heavenly ambassadors.

Understanding these Biblical foundations, First Baptist Church of New Sweden makes the following affirmations:

1. We affirm that no person is to bind another's conscience outside of what the Bible itself binds directly. Where the Bible is clear, it is the duty of believers to declare these truths and bind consciences that sin may be repented of and salvation in Jesus may be obtained.
Example 1: Adultery is stated clearly to be sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), thus it is good to let those who are in adultery know of this, binding their conscience, opening the opportunity for salvation. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Example 2: The Old Testament had a specific sabbath day, but the New Testament does not because Jesus is our true sabbath rest. (Hebrews 4:8-11) Some may believe Sundays or Saturdays are the correct day, but they are not to bind another's conscience on this, just as one who does not have a preference is not to bind the conscience of the one who does. (Romans 14:5-6)

2. We affirm that conscience for a Christian is specifically grounded in the truth of the Bible. As Martin Luther stated: "God wants our conscience to be certain and sure that it is pleasing to Him. This cannot be done if the conscience is led by its own feelings, but only if it relies on the Word of God." The Word of God is our only rule for faith and practice, which includes our only rule for our conscience.
3. We affirm that Christians acting according to their Biblically discerned conscience are acting in faith. Therefore, a Christian who knowingly acts against their conscience, not having been convinced in their conscience and reason that their view is unbiblical, is acting in sin. (Romans 14:23b)
4. We affirm that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is applied directly to individual Christians studying the Bible for themselves and reaching conclusions based upon the objective rule of the Bible and the overarching principles of the Bible. As such, any authority (home, church, workplace, or civil) which denies a Christian the ability to act according to conscience as revealed through careful study of the Bible is denying the Christian in his or her role as a priest of Jesus Christ.
5. We affirm that Christian love for our brothers and sisters in Christ requires us to study the Scripture to ascertain areas where true Christians can faithfully disagree – even strongly disagree. This includes studying to determine statements and beliefs which are of primary importance, thus determining whether a person is truly believing in the Jesus of the Bible, leading to salvation and true Christianity; those which are of secondary importance, thus determining a fellow believer who has significant differences in understanding while no less a Christian; and those which are of tertiary importance (or even less significant), thus determining those Christians we could easily have fellowship in the same church while agreeing to disagree on minor differences.
6. We affirm our responsibility to uphold the free exercise of conscience for fellow believers. This does not require that we join them in their pursuit of expressing their conscience. It does require us to uphold and protect their freedom to express their conscience. It also requires us to do so even at the expense of offending and ostracizing unbelievers as we support our brothers and sisters in Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:23-30; 8:4-13)
7. We affirm that holding to and expressing conscience is never to be contrary to God's law and character. Christian love requires us to confront and admonish a brother or sister who is attempting to use conscience to justify sinful conduct as part of healthy Christian church discipline resulting in repentance and life. (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-12)
8. We reaffirm the Converge (formerly Baptist General Conference) statements on Religious Liberty (1968) and The Christian and Freedom (1976). These are appended to the following page.

Appendix 1

The Christian and Freedom – Adopted 1976

Inasmuch as the political and social patterns of the world in which we live are undermining the worth of the individual, depriving him of his freedoms,

And, inasmuch as the institutional church of which we are a part often reflects the patterns of our society,

And, inasmuch as each person is of infinite worth, having been created in the image of God and is the object of Christ's redeeming love,

And, inasmuch as the people of God are to be the light of the world, and not a reflection of its patterns,

Therefore be it resolved:

That we encourage our churches to resist conformity to those patterns of the world which are detrimental or prohibitive to individual worth and freedom,

And be it further resolved that our churches be encouraged to recognize, cherish and demonstrate the biblical teaching of the worth of the individual by:

Reaffirming the biblical teaching of the priesthood of the believer, in which each individual has personal access to God and is privileged and responsible to share in the ministry of the church.

Providing opportunities whereby the God-given gifts of the individual can be discovered, developed, and employed.

1. Recognizing the freedom of the individual to be led by the Holy Spirit in the making of decisions in areas wherein the Scriptures are either silent or not specific.
2. Informing our people that there are brethren in Christ who differ from us in their interpretation and application of some portions of the Word of God, and that we are responsible before God to live them too.

Inasmuch as we live in a society in which the uniqueness of the person and work of Jesus Christ is being compromised. Therefore, be it resolved that our churches reaffirm that authentic freedom is realized only in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ (John 8:36; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16).

And be it further resolved that in the total life and ministry of our churches we will express our submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ through obedience to the Written Word of God.

Inasmuch as we also live in a society in which the exercise of individual freedom often interferes with the equal rights of other individuals.

Therefore, be it resolved that in Christian love we shall limit the exercise of our personal freedoms whenever it infringes upon the rights and well-being of others.

And be it further resolved that as concerned Christians we will also work through governmental structures to insure that individual freedoms are protected from those who demonstrate a disregard for the equal rights of others.

Appendix 2

Religious Liberty – Adopted 1968

In accordance with Article X, “Religious Liberty,” in the Baptist General Conference Affirmation of Faith, the following amplification is made:

We believe that God created man in His own image and endowed him with the freedom to respond to His redemptive love; that man is responsible to God for his Christian convictions and practices; and that Christian commitment and participation must be voluntary to be real.

Therefore we maintain that it is a human right as well as a prerogative of Divine grace that man be free to worship God; that the state should guarantee the right of all citizens to believe, to worship, to teach, to evangelize, to change their religious affiliations, and to serve their God as their consciences dictate; that this is best effected when state and church are separate in program, administration and support.

Furthermore we believe that the Christian citizen has a responsibility to his government in defending and promoting human liberties and rights by opposing discriminatory practices based on religion, race, economic or social status; by resisting any forms of totalitarianism, such as communism or fascism, that deny these basic rights; and by positively fulfilling the goals of religious liberty by being obedient to the first and great commandment: To love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves.

Accessed April 2022 - https://converge.org/docs/librariesprovider12/document-policies/resolutions--doctrine-baptist-distinctives.pdf?sfvrsn=bbd52f12_2