



December 31, 2012

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## Statement on Calvinism draws approval, criticism

Posted on May 31, 2012 | by Michael Foust

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*Updated June 1, 11:50 p.m. Eastern*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) -- A group of current and former Southern Baptist leaders has signed a statement affirming what they call the "traditional Southern Baptist" understanding of the doctrine of salvation, with the goal of drawing a distinction with the beliefs of "New Calvinism."

The statement was posted May 31 at SBCToday.com and includes a preamble and 10 articles, along with signatures from two entity presidents (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Paige Patterson and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Chuck Kelley), five state executive directors (Georgia's Bob White, Florida's John Sullivan, Mississippi's Jim Futral, Louisiana's David Hankins, Alaska's Mike Procter), and in addition to Patterson, five other former SBC presidents (Bailey Smith, Jimmy Draper, Jerry Vines, Morris Chapman and Bobby Welch).

The document was titled, "A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation." (Read the entire document at the bottom of this story.)

"For the most part, Southern Baptists have been glad to relegate disagreements over Calvinism to secondary status along with other important but 'non-essential' theological matters," the document reads in the preamble. "The Southern Baptist majority has fellowshiped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself. And, to their credit, most Southern Baptist Calvinists have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard. We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this long-standing arrangement."

The document further asserts that the "vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life."

"We believe it is time to move beyond Calvinism as a reference point for Baptist soteriology," the statement reads. Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation.

Each of the 10 articles includes a statement of what the signers affirm and what they deny. For instance, on the article about the Grace of God, the document says:

"We affirm that grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith."

The statement then adds:

"We deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation."

Eric Hankins, pastor of First Baptist Church in Oxford, Miss., wrote an introduction to the statement

at SBCToday.com. He is a signer of the statement.

"The concern of the developers of this statement was that the viewpoint of this majority was not well-represented by the term 'non-Calvinist' and that an instrument was needed by which that majority might articulate positively what they believe vis-à-vis Calvinism," Hankins wrote. "... Its purpose is to engender a much needed Convention-wide discussion about the place of Calvinism in Southern Baptist life."

Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, said he chose not to sign the statement.

"Southern Baptists have always found a way to work together, within the framework of historical Christian faith and Baptist doctrine, to support and promote our cooperative enterprises of global missions, theological education and benevolent ministries," Page said. "While I fully affirm any group of Southern Baptists to express their deeply held convictions about doctrinal matters, especially a matter as important as the doctrine of salvation, I would prefer that any collective document to which I affix my signature be a consensus statement, developed jointly with those of various soteriological persuasions, that expresses our core commitments to those matters we hold in common. The Baptist Faith and Message is such a document."

At the same time, Page also said he believes the convention needs a "consensus accord," and said he will announce at the SBC annual meeting in June plans for putting one together.

"Given the depth of the fracture lines around the issue of soteriology across the Convention," Page said, "I sense a need to assemble a representative group of Southern Baptists who can hammer out such a consensus 'accord' that will enable the majority of Southern Baptists to work together for the Kingdom purposes which initially bound us together, an initiative I plan to announce at this year's annual meeting."

The "Traditional Southern Baptist" document was widely discussed on Baptist-centric blogs in the hours after it was released. A post at SBCVoices.com quickly collected more than 100 comments. The comments section at SBCToday.com surged past 200.

Brent Hobbs, pastor of Severn Baptist Church in Severn, N.C., wrote at SBCVoices.com, "As a Calvinist, I barely recognize the theology they claim is Calvinism."

David Rogers, son of the late Adrian Rogers and senior editor at the Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute, wrote at SBCVoice.com that he doesn't know which group he'd fit in and that Southern Baptists are "likely never going to come to full agreement" on these issues.

"For the good of the work, the glory of the Lord, and the edification of the Body of Christ, though, I believe we need to agree to disagree over some issues, while constantly affirming that our agreement on the essentials trumps whatever disagreement we may have on more secondary (or tertiary) issues," Rogers wrote.

Others, though, applauded the statement.

"Eric, thank you for your leadership, thoughtfulness and wisdom," Brad Whitt, co-pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga., wrote at SBCToday.com. Whitt signed it. "This statement clearly expresses what I, and many other Southern Baptists, believe about the doctrine of salvation."

David Worley, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Greenfield, Tenn., also signed the statement.

"I love my Calvinists, Reformed Brothers and Sisters in Christ," he wrote at SBCToday.com. "I can work alongside of them, and worship with them, in the SBC. I do not want them to be kicked out, or left out of SBC life. But, I do agree with this document, and I think it's a step in the right direction for SBC life."

Jon Akin, pastor of Fairview Church in Lebanon, Tenn., wrote at BaptistTwentyOne.com that he does not consider himself part of the "New Calvinism" and that he agrees with much in the statement. But Akin said the document is fighting "straw men," such as implying that "'New Calvinists' believe that a person can be saved apart from personal repentance and faith." He did not sign it.

"I don't know a single Calvinist in the SBC alive who would argue that a person can be saved apart from repentance and faith," wrote Akin, who added he believes the statement is divisive.

The statement, he wrote, "inaccurately and unfairly describes the theology of the 'New Calvinists.'" It implies that double predestination is the standard Calvinist position when it is "in reality" a minority position, Akin wrote.

"The SBC is big enough to include Calvinists and non-Calvinists," Akin wrote. "We agree on far more than we disagree on, so let's unite and fight a common enemy."

Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board, and Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, released a joint statement about the document. It read:

"As the heads of the two SBC mission boards (IMB and NAMB), we and all our personnel have already affirmed the BF&M 2000 as prerequisites for employment. We do understand the sentiment behind the proposed statement, but we believe the BF&M 2000 effectively conveys the doctrinal positions traditionally held by Southern Baptists. While alternate doctrinal statements may occasionally arise, it is both our role and our intention to consistently lead in a manner that reflects those doctrines approved by the convention we serve."

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Michael Foust is associate editor of Baptist Press. Get Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter (@BaptistPress), Facebook (Facebook.com/BaptistPress) and in your email (baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp).

Following is the full text of the statement, as posted at [www.SBCToday.com](http://www.SBCToday.com):

### **A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation**

#### **Preamble**

Every generation of Southern Baptists has the duty to articulate the truths of its faith with particular attention to the issues that are impacting contemporary mission and ministry. The precipitating issue for this statement is the rise of a movement called "New Calvinism" among Southern Baptists. This movement is committed to advancing in the churches an exclusively Calvinistic understanding of salvation, characterized by an aggressive insistence on the "Doctrines of Grace" ("TULIP"), and to the goal of making Calvinism the central Southern Baptist position on God's plan of salvation.

While Calvinists have been present in Southern Baptist life from its earliest days and have made very important contributions to our history and theology, the majority of Southern Baptists do not embrace Calvinism. Even the minority of Southern Baptists who have identified themselves as Calvinists generally modify its teachings in order to mitigate certain unacceptable conclusions (e.g., anti-missionism, hyper-Calvinism, double predestination, limited atonement, etc.). The very fact that there

is a plurality of views on Calvinism designed to deal with these weaknesses (variously described as "3-point," "4-point," "moderate," etc.) would seem to call for circumspection and humility with respect to the system and to those who disagree with it. For the most part, Southern Baptists have been glad to relegate disagreements over Calvinism to secondary status along with other important but "non-essential" theological matters. The Southern Baptist majority has fellowshiped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself. And, to their credit, most Southern Baptist Calvinists have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard. We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this long-standing arrangement.

We propose that what most Southern Baptists believe about salvation can rightly be called "Traditional" Southern Baptist soteriology, which should be understood in distinction to "Calvinist" soteriology. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is articulated in a general way in the Baptist Faith and Message, "Article IV." While some earlier Baptist confessions were shaped by Calvinism, the clear trajectory of the BF&M since 1925 is away from Calvinism. For almost a century, Southern Baptists have found that a sound, biblical soteriology can be taught, maintained, and defended without subscribing to Calvinism. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is grounded in the conviction that every person can and must be saved by a personal and free decision to respond to the Gospel by trusting in Christ Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. Without ascribing to Calvinism, Southern Baptists have reached around the world with the Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Baptists have been well-served by a straightforward soteriology rooted in the fact that Christ is willing and able to save any and every sinner.

New Calvinism presents us with a duty and an opportunity to more carefully express what is generally believed by Southern Baptists about salvation. It is no longer helpful to identify ourselves by how many points of convergence we have with Calvinism. While we are not insisting that every Southern Baptist affirm the soteriological statement below in order to have a place in the Southern Baptist family, we are asserting that the vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life. We believe it is time to move beyond Calvinism as a reference point for Baptist soteriology.

Below is what we believe to be the essence of a "Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation." We believe that most Southern Baptists, regardless of how they have described their personal understanding of the doctrine of salvation, will find the following statement consistent with what the Bible teaches and what Southern Baptists have generally believed about the nature of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **Articles of Affirmation and Denial**

##### **Article One: The Gospel**

We affirm that the Gospel is the good news that God has made a way of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for any person. This is in keeping with God's desire for every person to be saved.

We deny that only a select few are capable of responding to the Gospel while the rest are predestined to an eternity in hell.

Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2:1-12; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; Luke 19:10; Luke 24:45-49; John 1:1-18, 3:16; Romans 1:1-6, 5:8; 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 4:4-7; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-16; 2 Peter 3:9

## **Article Two: The Sinfulness of Man**

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will or rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned. While no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, we deny that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15-24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5, 7:15-16;53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9, 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 5:12, 6:23; 7:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 6:9-10;15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-15

## **Article Three: The Atonement of Christ**

We affirm that the penal substitution of Christ is the only available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

We deny that this atonement results in salvation without a person's free response of repentance and faith. We deny that God imposes or withholds this atonement without respect to an act of the person's free will. We deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved.

Psalms 22:1-31; Isaiah 53:1-12; John 12:32, 14:6; Acts 10:39-43; Acts 16:30-32; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10-14; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-20; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:12-15, 24-28; 10:1-18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2

## **Article Four: The Grace of God**

We affirm that grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.

We deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation.

Ezra 9:8; Proverbs 3:34; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 19:16-30, 23:37; Luke 10:1-12; Acts 15:11; 20:24; Romans 3:24, 27-28; 5:6, 8, 15-21; Galatians 1:6; 2:21; 5; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 3:2-9; Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 4:16; 9:28; 1 John 4:19

## **Article Five: The Regeneration of the Sinner**

We affirm that any person who responds to the Gospel with repentance and faith is born again through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a new creation in Christ and enters, at the moment he believes, into eternal life.

We deny that any person is regenerated prior to or apart from hearing and responding to the Gospel.

Luke 15:24; John 3:3; 7:37-39; 10:10; 16:7-14; Acts 2:37-39; Romans 6:4-11; 10:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; 6:15; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 3:18

#### **Article Six: The Election to Salvation**

We affirm that, in reference to salvation, election speaks of God's eternal, gracious, and certain plan in Christ to have a people who are His by repentance and faith.

We deny that election means that, from eternity, God predestined certain people for salvation and others for condemnation.

Genesis 1:26-28; 12:1-3; Exodus 19:6; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Matthew 24:31; 25:34; John 6:70; 15:16; Romans 8:29-30, 33:9:6-8; 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Ephesians 1:4-6; 2:11-22; 3:1-11; 4:4-13; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9-10

#### **Article Seven: The Sovereignty of God**

We affirm God's eternal knowledge of and sovereignty over every person's salvation or condemnation.

We deny that God's sovereignty and knowledge require Him to cause a person's acceptance or rejection of faith in Christ.

Genesis 1:1; 6:5-8; 18:16-33; 22; 2 Samuel 24:13-14; 1 Chronicles 29:10-20; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Joel 2:32; Psalm 23; 51:4; 139:1-6; Proverbs 15:3; John 6:44; Romans 11:3; Titus 3:3-7; James 1:13-15; Hebrews 11:6, 12:28; 1 Peter 1:17

#### **Article Eight: The Free Will of Man**

We affirm that God, as an expression of His sovereignty, endows each person with actual free will (the ability to choose between two options), which must be exercised in accepting or rejecting God's gracious call to salvation by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

We deny that the decision of faith is an act of God rather than a response of the person. We deny that there is an "effectual call" for certain people that is different from a "general call" to any person who hears and understands the Gospel.

Genesis 1:26-28; Numbers 21:8-9; Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 2 Samuel 24:13-14; Esther 3:12-14; Matthew 7:13-14; 11:20-24; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 9:23-24; 13:34; 15:17-20; Romans 10:9-10; Titus 2:12; Revelation 22:17

#### **Article Nine: The Security of the Believer**

We affirm that when a person responds in faith to the Gospel, God promises to complete the process of salvation in the believer into eternity. This process begins with justification, whereby the sinner is immediately acquitted of all sin and granted peace with God; continues in sanctification, whereby the saved are progressively conformed to the image of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit; and concludes in glorification, whereby the saint enjoys life with Christ in heaven forever.

We deny that this Holy Spirit-sealed relationship can ever be broken. We deny even the possibility of apostasy.

John 10:28-29; 14:1-4; 16:12-14; Philippians 1:6; Romans 3:21-26; 8:29,30; 35-39; 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:19; 3:2; 5:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 13:5; James 1:12; Jude 24-25

#### **Article Ten: The Great Commission**

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news of salvation to all people to the ends of the earth. We affirm that the proclamation of the Gospel is God's means of bringing any person to salvation.

We deny that salvation is possible outside of a faith response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 51:13; Proverbs 11:30; Isaiah 52:7; Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:6; Acts 1:8; 4:12; 10:42-43; Romans 1:16, 10:13-15; 1 Corinthians 1:17-21; Ephesians 3:7-9; 6:19-20; Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

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