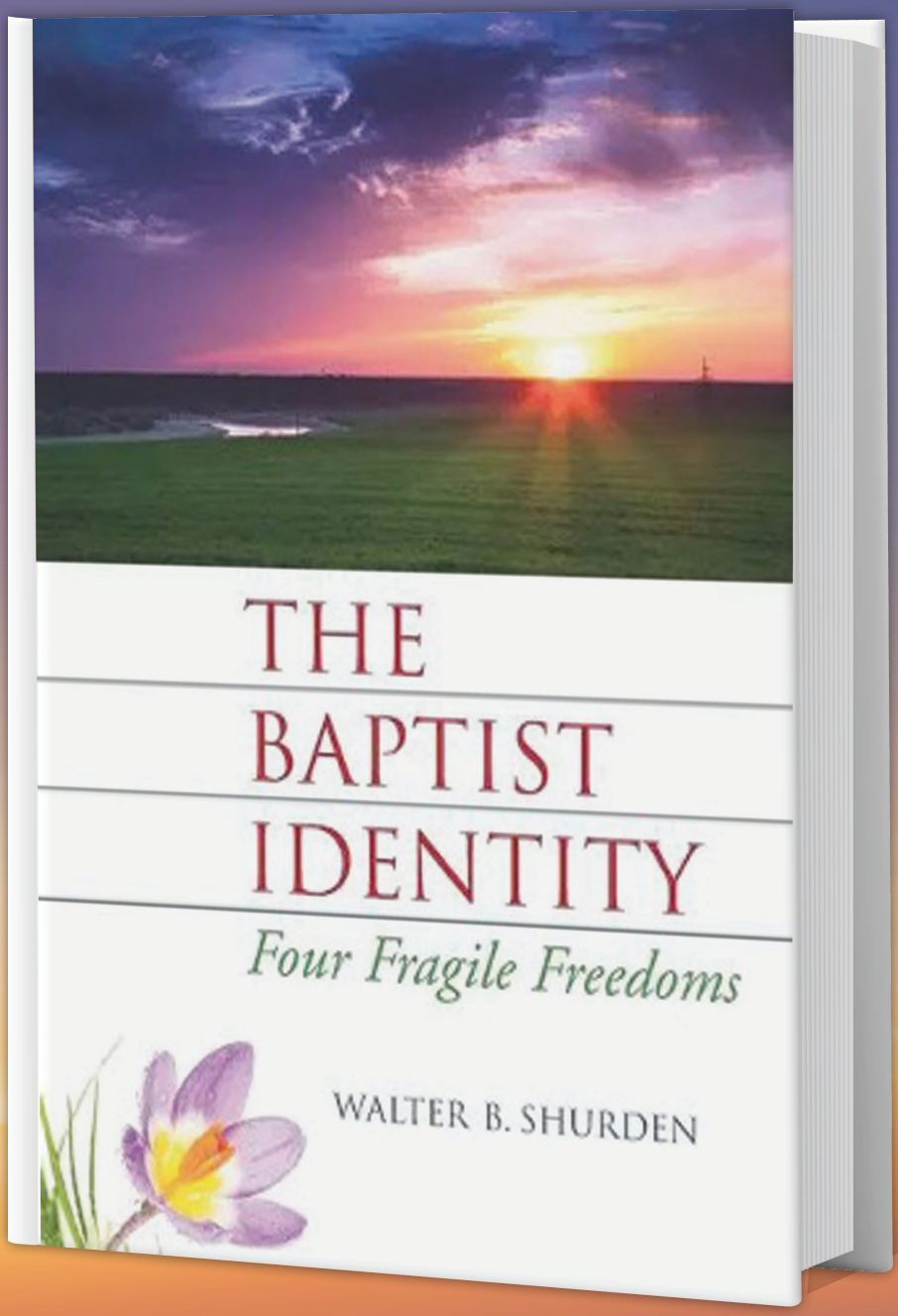
THE BAPTIST IDENTITY: FOUR FRAGILE FREEDOMS

STUDY GUIDE

By Bill Bryan, PhD, DMin



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STUDY GUIDE

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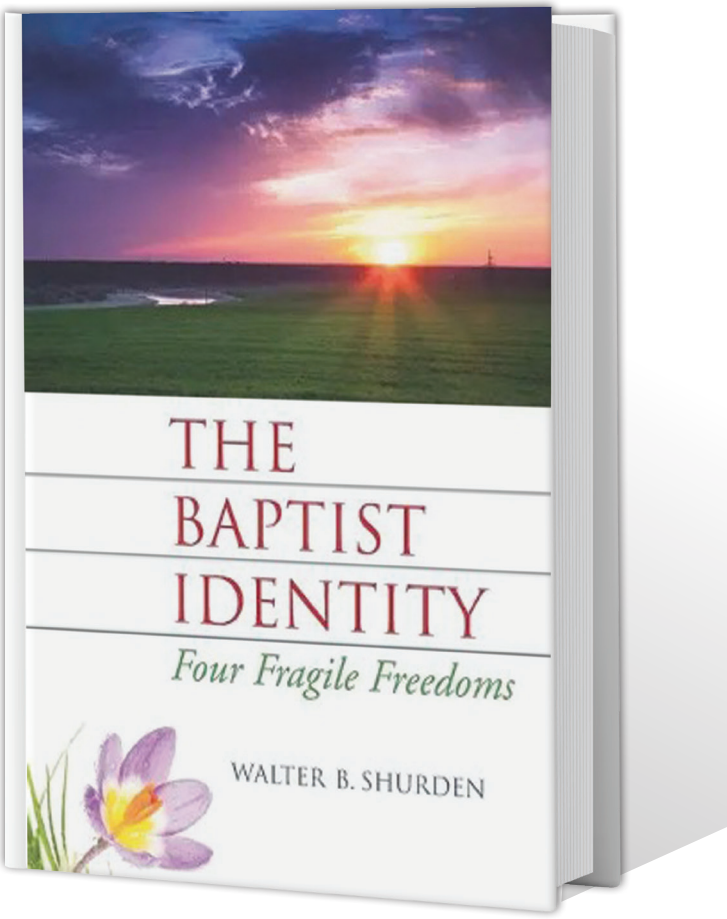

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Bryan has served as senior pastor of Abingdon Baptist Church in Abingdon, Virginia, since July 2018. A pastor and educator, he has taught seminary courses in the United States and overseas since 1998 and teaches in the master's and doctoral programs at B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary at East Texas Baptist University. Bryan holds Master of Divinity, Doctor of Ministry, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees and has served on BGAV's Religious Liberty Committee, bringing both congregational experience and theological scholarship to this resource.

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY GARY LONG

Religious liberty is a living trust, handed down to us and entrusted to our care. As the United States marks 250 years, Virginia Baptists have good reason to revisit the convictions that have shaped our witness.

This original BGAV resource is a study guide, meant for small groups to use alongside Walter Shurden's *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Both the study guide and the book invite congregations into thoughtful conversation about Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom, and religious freedom.

I first read Shurden's work in college and knew, even as a twenty-something, that I was holding an instant classic. It has stood the test of time, speaking as clearly to our present questions as it did amid the "unpleasantness" of the Southern Baptist Convention's divisions in the 1990s.

I am grateful to Bill for his work on this study guide and to our Religious Liberty Committee for helping churches bring this heritage into today's questions. May these pages deepen our faith, encourage gracious dialogue, and strengthen our commitment to religious liberty for every neighbor.

Special thanks goes to Shelton Miles, the driving force behind this project, a longstanding champion of religious liberty, and a faithful leader in BGAV life. Shelton has helped keep these convictions before us, reminding us that an inheritance worth receiving is also worth tending.

This resource is provided in part by funding from EverBless Foundation, Micah 6:8 Fund, and the many participating churches who make up BGAV and whose generous support of Cooperative Missions sustains our shared ministry.

Rev. Gary M. Long, Jr.
Chief Marketing Officer, BGAV

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FOREWORD

BY WYATT SHELTON MILES III

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation's birth, it is worth reflecting on how Baptists in the U.S. interacted with our nation's founding principles. The American Revolution was in many respects a civil war, with Patriots and Loyalists squaring off in the 13 colonies.

Families and neighborhoods were often divided right down the middle. This was especially demonstrated at the Battle of King's Mountain, where all combatants save one were American. This same division extended to the various religious groups. But among Baptists, there appears to have been near unanimity for the Patriot side. Only one of the more prominent Baptist ministers of the era was a Loyalist (his son was a career British officer). A few more examples may be found, but it appears that the vast majority of Baptists in the colonies sided with the Patriot cause.

The reasons are fairly simple: Here in Virginia, Baptists suffered well-documented persecution at the hands of the Anglican establishment, a church that ultimately claimed the King of England as its head. In addition to this practical and pragmatic religious liberty consideration, Baptist principles tended to dovetail more naturally with the Patriot inclinations. Baptists are non-hierarchal, eschewing top-down authoritarian structures.

The late James Dunn famously said, "We Baptists have no creed, but if we did, it would simply be 'Ain't nobody but Jesus gonna tell me what to do.'"

Baptist governance has always been congregational—much more analogous to a constitutional democratic republic than to a monarchy. Our radical emphasis on the priesthood of the believer translated into a rejection of the authoritarianism of popes, cardinals, bishops, and councils. It was a fairly short step to also reject the authority of a distant king and parliament, especially one that reflected a stratified English society with a House of Lords. And the Baptist emphasis upon soul liberty is essentially libertarianism with an added transcendent dimension. The language of liberty flows easily in Baptist thought.

So when the revolution came, the Baptist calculus was fairly simple. An intrinsic predisposition towards liberty required only a bit of reassurance before Baptists chose sides. Baptists wanted to be sure we were not trading one despot for another. Once satisfied that the prospect of greater liberty rested on the revolutionary side, Baptists overwhelmingly opted for the Patriot cause. "A free church in a free state" is a motto that fell naturally upon Baptist ears.

Rev. Wyatt Shelton Miles III

SESSION 1
THE BAPTIST IDENTITY INTRODUCTION

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Bible of your choice
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
- Pre-order a sufficient number of copies of *The Baptist Identity* so that each student may receive a copy at the end of Session 1. Bibliographic information is provided above so that you can order this book directly from Smyth & Helwys or from your preferred bookseller.
- Make a copy of the "Session 1 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A). Also make a copy of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) for each learner (see Appendix A).

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 1 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and allow them to introduce themselves, if you are not already familiar with one another.
- Ask participants to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for His blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Inform your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be Baptist. To aid this study of our Baptist identity and the freedoms that we have in Christ Jesus, we will examine four fragile freedoms identified by Walter Shurden in his book *The Baptist Identity*: *Four Fragile Freedoms*. The four freedoms identified by Shurden are Bible Freedom, Soul Freedom, Church Freedom, and Religious Freedom.

Devotion (20 minutes)

- Read Galatians 3:1-14. Lead your fellow learners in a discussion of this passage using the following notes and questions as a guide.

- Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians to warn them of the danger of falling under the influence of the Judaizers. The Judaizers were Jewish Christians who believed that true Christians must not only believe in Jesus by faith but also legalistically follow the Old Testament Law regarding male circumcision, diet, and other beliefs and practices. Paul told the Galatians that they had been "bewitched" (1), that is deceived, by the Judaizers and were "foolish" (3) if they allowed themselves to fall under their legalistic influence. Paul reminded them that they, like Abraham (see Genesis 15:6), had been saved by faith alone and nothing else (6). Legalism adds requirements to God's grace and seeks to control others by works and fear. Works of the law are dead. The righteous live by faith (11) and not by legalistic works.
- **What part do correct doctrinal beliefs play in our salvation?** Help learners see that correct doctrinal beliefs are important to help us understand who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.
- **What are the core Christian doctrinal beliefs?** Students might suggest: God's incarnation as Jesus, who had a fully human body but was also fully divine; the death of Jesus on the cross for all human sin; and the resurrection of Jesus by the power of God on the third day.
- **Are we saved by intellectual assent to a set of doctrinal beliefs or by a personal faith in Christ Jesus alone?** Help learners understand that it is not intellectual assent to a set of doctrinal beliefs that saves us. We must each personally place faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord (see Romans 10:9-10). While our minds must accept doctrinal truths, our salvation comes not from knowing those truths but from placing faith in Jesus as personal Savior and Lord.
- **Do Christians agree on every point of doctrine?** The obvious answer is no. Help learners see that Christians have a variety of doctrinal differences as evidenced, for example, by the multitude of Christian denominations. There are differing views on many Christian doctrines. While not allowing this discussion to become a doctrinal debate, point out that Christians disagree on the nature of God's sovereignty related to human salvation. Calvinist Christians believe that humans have no or at least very little role in their salvation, while Arminian Christians believe that they do have a role by believing. There is also disagreement among Christians over the nature of the elements of the Lord's Supper. Roman Catholics believe that the elements are transubstantiated in essence during the Mass into the body and blood of Jesus. Lutherans and others believe that the Spirit of God is present with the elements (i.e., consubstantiation). Baptists believe that the elements are only symbolic of Jesus' body and blood. Of course, there are many more examples of Christian doctrinal differences.
- **How might a particular set of Christian doctrinal beliefs become a legalistic burden when imposed by one group of Christians on another?** Help learners see that some Christian groups today attempt to apply their particular set of Christian beliefs upon other Christians as a test of faith and fellowship. In essence, they are saying, "If you don't believe exactly as we do and practice your faith exactly as we do, then you are not a Christian and are not welcome to be part of our fellowship." Help learners see that, like the Judaizers, such Christians impose a legalistic burden on other believers that is not required by God. Salvation is by faith alone. So says Paul. More importantly, so says God. We have great freedom through our faith in Christ Jesus. It was bought at a great price. We must not surrender our freedom in Christ or allow anyone to take it away.

Discussion (30 minutes)

- Lead your fellow learners in a discussion using the following questions as a guide.
- **Who are some Baptist leaders that you have known or heard about from the past or present?** These may be famous leaders from the past (e.g., Charles Spurgeon, Herschel Hobbs, Billy Graham, and Charles Stanley), the present (e.g., Greg Laurie, J.D. Greear, Rick Warren, and David Platt), or not so famous leaders that they have known personally in the local church.
- **What made or makes the leaders that you identified unique as Baptists?** Note that it is our beliefs and the actions that come from those beliefs that make us unique. Note that a uniqueness of Baptists is the fact that, unlike most other Christian denominations, we do not have a creed or confession of faith to which all Baptists must subscribe.
- **What is the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), and why is it valuable?** Ask any student(s) who are familiar with it to describe their understanding of it and its usefulness to us as Baptists. Note that the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) is not a creed but a statement of general doctrinal positions upon which most Baptists agree.
- Distribute copies of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) to each learner. Review the five points below that were made by the committee that prepared it in their "Report of Committee on Baptist Faith and Message" on the first two pages of the document. As you review each point, ask students to share their understanding of the point, questions they may have, and what these points mean to us as Baptists.
    1. "That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
    2. That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.
    3. That any group of Baptists, large or small have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so.
    4. That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.
    5. That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life."
- Does your church affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), another version, or does your church have a unique statement of faith that the church has adopted?
- Why is having a statement of faith such as the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) important? How can it be dangerous?

Assignment (1 minute)

- Distribute a copy of Shurden's *The Baptist Identity* to each learner. Ask them to:
- Read *The Baptist Identity* Introduction (pp. 1–7) and chapter 1, Bible Freedom (pp. 9–21), before the next session; and
- Come prepared to discuss Bible Freedom.

Closing (2 minutes)

- Close the session by:
  - Asking for and answering any questions learners may have as this session draws to a close;
  - Reminding everyone of the next meeting day, time, and location; and
  - Closing with a prayer asking for God to draw your group together, to give wisdom and insight based on your study, and to respond with God's will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

SESSION 2
BIBLE FREEDOM

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Bible of your choice
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
  - Video "Being Baptist: The Authority of the Bible" with Dr. Gary Parker (21 minutes)
- Make a copy of the "Session 2 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A). Also make a copy of "Felix Manz Martyrdom" for each learner (see Appendix A).

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 2 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants, especially any new ones. Allow new participants to introduce themselves briefly and to share why they have joined the class.
- Ask participants to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for his blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Remind your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be a Baptist.
- This session will focus on Bible Freedom. You will also view and discuss a video related to Bible Freedom during this session.

Devotion (10 minutes)

Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Lead your fellow learners in a discussion using the following notes and questions as a guide.

- Bible Freedom is an important part of our Baptist identity. Baptists are often called "a people of the book" and that book is the Bible. Instruction manuals are prepared by manufacturers to help us use their products. One of the purposes of the Bible is to give us our Maker's

instructions for living our lives. The B-I-B-L-E can be viewed as an acronym for Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth" or maybe even better as "Basic Instructions (for) Believers Living Eternally."

- **What does the statement "All scripture is God-breathed" mean to you?** Help learners understand that the term "God-breathed" means "filled with God's Spirit." Each believer is free to read and interpret Scripture under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and with the direction of His Holy Spirit. Jesus is preeminent over scripture, and Scripture points us to Jesus. Jesus is our ultimate source of Christian authority; the norm by which we interpret; and the Truth upon whom we build and live our lives and serve together in our churches. Jesus is the Living Lord who guides and directs His people through Scripture interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- **What is the purpose of Bible Freedom?** Facilitate discussion to help learners realize that our lives are transformed as we read and apply Scripture under the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Bible is the final authority on moral responsibility, theological beliefs, and human relationships. However, our understanding of the Bible is never final or complete or finished. It is ever new as we grow in the Lord. In particular, Paul noted that Scripture is useful for:
  - "teaching" – Scripture gives instruction and encouragement that reveals God's purpose for life (see Ecclesiastes 12:13).
  - "training in righteousness" – Scripture gives practical training that leads to holy living (see Galatians 5:22-23).
  - "rebuking" – Scripture points out errors, failures, mistakes, and reveals wrong turns that we take (see 2 Samuel 12:1-15). Also, note that the two words of correction are sandwiched between two words of positive instruction.
  - "correcting" – Scripture gives practical training that leads to repentance, forgiveness, and the road back to God's will (see Romans 6:23).
- Paul concluded that our individual access to God-breathed Scripture is "...so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (17). We must live with an attitude of openness and ongoing study of the Bible under the guidance of the Lord Jesus by His Holy Spirit. We must live with a dynamic and not a static faith as we grow in both understanding and applying God's Truth in Scripture to better live our lives for Him.

Discussion (15 minutes)

- Note that the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms Bible freedom for all. The "Report of Committee on Baptist Faith and Message" says "that the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience" (BF&M, 1963).
  - Read Section "I. The Scriptures" from the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963).
  - Note that one of the scriptural references for this statement is 2 Timothy 3:15-17, the devotion text.
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of Bible Freedom based on their reading in *The Baptist Identity* and their own study of this freedom. Use the following questions as a guide.

- What is the source of Baptist doctrinal beliefs? (see Shurden, 9–10)
- Bible Freedom means freedom "under" what or whom? (see Shurden, 10–12)
- Bible Freedom means freedom "for" what purpose? (see Shurden, 12–14)
- Bible Freedom means freedom "from" what? (see Shurden, 14–17)
- Bible Freedom means freedom "of" what? (see Shurden, 17–20)
- Ask learners how is Bible Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

Video (30 minutes)

- Watch the video "Being Baptist: The Authority of the Bible" with Dr. Gary Parker. Encourage learners to take notes on their "Session 2 Handout" regarding answers to the video discussion questions.
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of the video using as many of the following questions as time allows.
  - **What groups add other books as equal to the Bible for faith and practice?** An example would be the *Book of Mormon*, which Mormons believe is equal with the Bible.
  - **What is the Baptist view of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*?** Baptists support the Reformation principle that Scripture is the sole authority for belief and practice.
  - **How did the Holy Spirit "inspire" the Bible?** Some believers propose a Dictation Theory, that the Bible was inspired word-for-word through God's direct dictation to the writers. Other believers propose a Verbal Plenary Theory, that the Bible is both authentically human and fully divine as it preserves the writers' unique voices while safeguarding God's truth.
  - **Should God's means of inspiration of Scripture be a test of orthodoxy?** No. Differing beliefs about the inspiration of the Bible should not lead to disfellowship and disunity among believers who have a high view of Scripture, regardless of which theory of divine inspiration they hold.
  - **What are some potential dangers that may arise with the practice of Bible freedom?** One potential danger is that individuals may develop radical interpretations of Scripture that other Christians do not accept. This danger will be addressed as part of the examination of Soul Freedom in the next session.
  - **What is the key that Baptists must use to interpret the Bible?** The key to interpretation of the Bible is Jesus Christ.
  - **Do you agree with this statement: "No Lord but Christ. No creed but the Bible?" Why or why not?** While this is an opinion question, hopefully, students will see that the standard for Baptists in all matters is God's revelation through Scripture as interpreted under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and with Him as the key to that interpretation.

Assignment (1 minute)

Ask learners to:

- Read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 2, Soul Freedom (pp. 23–32), before the next session; and
- Come prepared to discuss Soul Freedom.

Closing (2 minutes)

Close the session by:

- Asking for and answering any questions learners may have as this session draws to a close;
- Reminding everyone of the next meeting day, time, and location; and
- Closing with a prayer asking for God to draw your group together, to help you protect and live out your freedom to access the Bible for yourself, and to respond with His will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

SESSION 3
SOUL FREEDOM

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Bible of your choice
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
  - Video "Being Baptist: The Priesthood of All Believers" with Dr. Bill Leonard (24 minutes)
- Make a copy of the "Session 3 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A). Also make a copy of "Felix Manz Martyrdom" for each learner (see Appendix A).

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 3 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants and ask them to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for His blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Remind your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be a Baptist.
- This session will focus on Soul Freedom. You will also view and discuss a video related to Soul Freedom during this session.

Devotion (5 minutes)

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10. Lead your fellow learners in a discussion using the following notes and questions as a guide.

- Soul Freedom is rooted in the fact that every human being is created in the image of God and competent to make moral, spiritual, and religious decisions and to be accountable to God for those decisions (see Genesis 1:26). God delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. At Mt. Sinai, God called the Israelites to obey Him fully and keep His covenant. He promised if they did that "...then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). In 1 Peter 2:4-10, God expanded this promise to include all New Testament believers and declared that we "...are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (9).

- **What does it mean to be God's "chosen people?"** Just as God graciously chose Israel as His people under the Old Covenant, so He graciously chooses New Covenant believers in Jesus Christ to be His people, the New Testament church.
- **What does it mean to be "a royal priesthood?"** Israel's priests offered sacrifices. New Testament believers offer themselves as living sacrifices (see Romans 12:1) by loving and serving others in Jesus' name and by teaching and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus with their words and actions.
- **What does it mean to be a "holy nation?"** New Testament believers are to be separate and set apart from the world while remaining in the world as aliens and strangers giving a living witness for the Lord.

Discussion (10 minutes)

- Note that the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms soul freedom. The "Report of Committee on the Baptist Faith and Message" states that "Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom of religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified."
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of Soul Freedom based on their reading in *The Baptist Identity* and their own study of this freedom. Use the following questions as a guide.
  - What other terms do Baptists use to describe the concept of soul freedom? (see Shurden, 23)
  - How does soul freedom affirm the importance and the sacredness of individual choice? (see Shurden, 23–24)
  - How is the voluntary nature of faith related to soul freedom? (see Shurden, 26–29)
  - How is believer's baptism related to the priesthood of all believers? (see Shurden, 29–30)
  - Was the mode or the subject of baptism more important to early Baptists? (see Shurden, 29)
- Ask, "Why might leaders of both government and established churches view soul freedom as a dangerous belief whose exercise would be worthy of serious persecution?"
  - Note that believers who have practiced soul freedom have been persecuted by both Roman Catholics (e.g., Jan Huss) and Protestants (e.g., Felix Manz).
  - Hand out and review "Felix Manz Martyrdom" pointing out the high cost that Manz paid for exercising soul freedom regarding his belief in believer's baptism.
- Ask learners, how is Soul Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

Video (35 minutes)

- Watch the video "Being Baptist: The Priesthood of All Believers" with Dr. Bill Leonard. Encourage learners to take notes on their "Session 3 Handout" regarding answers to the video discussion questions.
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of the video using as many of the following questions as time allows.
  - **What does the radical freedom of the priesthood of all believers require?** With radical freedom comes radical responsibility. While each believer is free to interpret Scripture, he or she does so not in isolation but in community. Individual interpretation must be confirmed within the priesthood of all believers.
  - **How does one become a priest in the priesthood of all believers?** When an individual accepts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by personal faith, that individual becomes a member of the New Testament priesthood of all believers.
  - **Where does ordination of pastors fit within the priesthood of all believers?** Pastors and laypersons are on level ground as priests within the priesthood of all believers. All believers are called to be priests. Pastors are ordained—set apart—for the occupation of leading God's people. Some pastors minister full time, while others are bi-vocational, having both a secular and sacred occupation.
  - **What is the priesthood of all believers?** The priesthood of all believers IS: 1) focused on serving those in need and each other; 2) a radical trust in God's people; 3) the possibility of different views and dissent; 4) an opportunity for growth by listening to others; 5) freedom in tension with responsibility; 6) an opportunity to show humility.
  - **What is the priesthood of all believers *not*?** The priesthood of believers IS NOT: 1) carte blanche to believe anything a lone individual or group wants to believe; 2) a denial of the importance of community; 3) a lone concept but held in balance with Bible freedom, religious freedom, church freedom, and cooperation with others; 4) a means to lift up one's understanding of particular Scriptures as the only possible interpretation.

Assignment (1 minute)

Ask learners to:

- Read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 3, Church Freedom (pp. 33–44), before the next session; and
- Come prepared to discuss Church Freedom.

Closing (2 minutes)

Close the session by:

- Asking for and answering any questions learners may have as this session draws to a close;
- Reminding everyone of the next meeting day, time, and location; and
- Closing with a prayer asking for God to draw your group together, to help you protect and live out your freedom to interpret the Bible within the priesthood of all believers, and to respond with His will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

SESSION 4
CHURCH FREEDOM

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Bible of your choice
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
  - Video "Being Baptist: The Autonomy of the Local Church" with Rev. Dr. Loyd Allen (17 minutes)
- Make a copy of the "Session 4 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A).

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 4 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants and ask them to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for His blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Remind your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be a Baptist.
- This session will focus on Church Freedom. You will also view and discuss a video related to Church Freedom during this session.

Devotion (5 minutes)

- Note that in last week's devotion from 1 Peter 2:4-10, we were reminded that the church is a spiritual house made up of "living stones." There is one kingdom of God—one spiritual house made up of all people from all times and places who have placed faith in Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. Historically, the term "gathered church" has been used by Baptists to describe a local body of baptized believers who have made a free, voluntary commitment to worship and serve Christ together. There are no Lone Ranger Christians. We live in community as the body of Christ in which every member of the body is a priest, a minister, a servant.

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-14. Lead your fellow learners in a discussion using the following notes and questions as a guide.
  - Paul described how the body of Christ is gifted and fits together for ministry.
  - Spiritual gifts are more than natural talents. They are supernatural empowerments from God to enable believers for worship and ministry.
  - **What are some of the spiritual gifts given to members of the body?** See vv. 8-10. Note this is only a partial list of spiritual gifts. God provides many grace gifts to His body in accordance with the needs of the body for service in His kingdom (see 1 Peter 4:10).
  - **How many spiritual gifts do members of the body receive?** Each believer receives at least one gift as a manifestation of God's Spirit (vv. 7a, 11). Believers often receive multiple spiritual gifts.
  - Note that there are different spiritual gifts, different types of service, and different empowerments, but spiritual gifts are given by the same Spirit for service to the same Lord and are empowered by the same Father (vv. 4-6).
  - Do you know your spiritual gifts? What are they?
  - How have you used your spiritual gifts for the "common good" of the body? (v. 7)

Discussion (10 minutes)

- Note that the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms church freedom. Read section "VI. The Church" from the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963).
- What insights did you gain from your reading in *The Baptist Identity* about Church Freedom? Allow participants to respond and use the following questions to help guide the discussion.
  - What tensions result from church freedom? (see Shurden, 34 - individual vs. community; freedom vs. responsibility)
  - What are the two keys for the formation of the "gathered church?" (see Shurden, 35)
  - What are the three types of church government? Which one do Baptists favor and why? (see Shurden, 37)
  - What two threats exist to congregational church government? (see Shurden, 38)
  - What three freedoms should a local Baptist church exercise? (see Shurden, 36–43)
- Ask learners, how is Church Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

Video (30 minutes)

- Watch the video "Being Baptist: The Autonomy of the Local Church" with Rev. Dr. Loyd Allen. Encourage learners to take notes on their "Session 4 Handout" regarding answers to the video discussion questions.
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of the video using as many of the following questions as time allows.
  - **What are three core affirmations supporting the autonomy of the local church?** 1) God is at work in our world today; 2) Each and every Christian is called to partnership in

God's word; and 3) God created and lives in the local church as a base of operations for that partnership.

- **What is the inward mark of an autonomous church?** Every voice within the congregation is heard.
- **What is the outward mark of an autonomous church?** The congregation voluntarily associates with other churches and groups.
- **Can local church autonomy be lost or surrendered?** If so, how? Church autonomy can be lost by becoming strictly inward focused and self-centered. Church autonomy can be surrendered to a larger organization, body, association, or convention.

Assignment (1 minute)

Ask learners to:

- Read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 4, Religious Freedom (pp. 45–54), before the next session; and
- Come prepared to discuss Religious Freedom.

Closing (2 minutes)

Close the session by:

- Asking for and answering any questions learners may have as this session draws to a close;
- Reminding everyone of the next meeting day, time, and location; and
- Closing with a prayer asking for God to draw your group together, to help you protect and live out your church freedom with responsibility in your local church, and to respond with His will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

SESSION 5
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Bible of your choice
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
  - Video "Being Baptist: Religious Liberty" with Carolyn Blevins (22 minutes)
- Make a copy of the "Session 5 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A). Also make a copy of "Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution" (see Appendix A) for each learner.

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 5 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants and ask them to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for His blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Remind your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be a Baptist.
- This session will focus on Religious Freedom. You will also view and discuss a video related to Religious Freedom during this session.

Devotion (5 minutes)

- Jesus addressed the question of the relationship of the church and earthly governments in His response to a question from the Jewish leaders.
- Read Matthew 22:15-22. Lead your fellow learners in a discussion using the following notes and questions as a guide.
  - **What trap did the Jewish leaders set for Jesus?** If Jesus answered no, then He could be charged with sedition against Rome, which could lead to a death sentence. If he

answered yes, then some of the Jewish people would turn against Him due to their hatred of the Romans.

- **What relationship between church and state did Jesus suggest in His answer to the Jewish leaders?** He called for appropriate but separate allegiance to both God and the state.
- **To whom do we owe ultimate allegiance?** Jesus recognized not only the legitimacy but also the limitations of the state. Our ultimate allegiance is to God, who establishes the authority of the state (see Romans 13:1).

Discussion (20 minutes)

- In 2026 the United States celebrated the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The Preamble to the Declaration reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are *endowed by their Creator* with *certain unalienable rights*, that *among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness*" (italics mine).
  - **What, specifically are the "certain unalienable rights" or freedoms that were claimed in the Declaration of Independence?** Help learners see that a critical, unalienable right was and still is freedom of religion for all people.
  - Freedom of religion, not only for Baptists but for all people, has been an important Baptist belief from our beginning. In the words of Baptist forefather Thomas Helwys, "Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertaines not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure." (From 1612, *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity*).
- Our *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms religious freedom for all. Read section "XVII. Religious Liberty" from the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963).
- Distribute and discuss "Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution" using the following questions to guide the discussion.
  - **What protection of religious liberty is included in Article VI, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution?** There is "no religious test" requirement to qualify for any U.S. office or public trust.
  - **What two key religious protections are part of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution?** The two protections are that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" and that there shall be no prohibition of "the free exercise" of religion. These are known as the establishment clause and the free exercise clause.
  - **What religious protection is afforded under the Fourteenth Amendment?** This amendment forbids any state from making or enforcing a law that "shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." In other words, states must abide by the religious freedom protections enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment.

- **What insights did you gain from your reading in *The Baptist Identity* about Religious Freedom?** Allow participants to respond and use the following questions to help guide the discussion.
  - What are three anchors of Baptist passion for religious liberty? (see Shurden, 49)
  - What does religious freedom mean to Baptists? (see Shurden, 49–51)
  - What are the major threats to religious freedom in the U.S. today? (see Shurden, 51–53)
- Ask learners, how is Religious Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

Video (30 minutes)

- Watch the video "Being Baptist: Religious Liberty" with Carolyn Blevins. Encourage learners to take notes on their "Session 5 Handout" regarding answers to the video discussion questions.
- Lead fellow learners in a discussion of the video using as many of the following questions as time allows.
  - What historical roots do Baptists have as advocates for religious liberty? What price have they paid?
  - Are we guarding our religious freedom or letting it slip away in America today?
  - How can we guard religious liberty by asking, "If I were in the minority, would I like this law?"

Assignment (1 minute)

Ask learners to:

- Read *The Baptist Identity* Summary and Conclusions (pp. 55–59) and Appendix II (pp. 69–83), before the next session; and
- Come prepared to discuss how our four Baptist freedoms are fragile and how we can best guard and exercise them.

Closing (2 minutes)

Close the session by:

- Asking for and answering any questions learners may have as this session draws to a close;
- Reminding everyone of the next meeting day, time, and location; and
- Closing with a prayer asking for God to draw your group together, to help you protect and live out your commitment to religious freedom for all people, and to respond with His will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

SESSION 6
EXERCISING OUR FREEDOMS

FACILITATION NOTES

Materials

- You will need the following materials as you lead this session.
  - Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207
  - *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) (see Appendix A)
- Make a copy of the "Session 6 Handout" for each learner (see Appendix A).

Welcome (5 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of "Session 6 Handout" to each learner.
- Welcome participants and ask them to share briefly any prayer needs. Record them to help you as you pray.
- Pray together. Give thanks to God for His blessings. Ask for God's help with any needs identified. Conclude by asking for His wisdom and understanding to be with you as you study together.

Purpose (2 minutes)

- Remind your fellow learners that you are a facilitator for this study and not a teacher. We study together to gain insights from one another about what it means to be a Baptist.
- This session focuses on how we exercise, protect, and properly exercise our four fragile freedoms.

Four Freedoms (3 minutes)

Remind learners of the four fragile freedoms of our Baptist identity.

- Bible Freedom: "BIBLE FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church and that Christians, with the best and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey the Scripture" (Shurden, 9).
- Soul Freedom: "SOUL FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government" (Shurden, 23).
- Church Freedom: "CHURCH FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to

order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ, of whose unity and mission Baptists are proudly a part" (Shurden, 33).

- Religious Freedom: "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar" (Shurden, 45).

Baptist Distinctives (15 minutes)

Guide learners in a discussion of how the four fragile freedoms relate to the Baptist distinctives of Authority, Christian Experience, The Church, Freedom, and Mission based on their reading of Shurden's Appendix II, pp. 68–73.

- Authority - Christ is the authority over both the individual Christian exercising Soul Freedom and over the church exercising Church Freedom. Both individuals and the church ultimately must submit to the authority of Jesus Christ.
- Christian Experience - Using Bible Freedom we learn that the way to become a member of God's family is by exercising our Soul Freedom to profess personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- The Church - Bible Freedom allows us to gain an understanding of how God forms His church. The church is composed of those who, using Soul Freedom, have professed personal faith in Jesus Christ and have freely joined the church fellowship by believer's baptism. Church Freedom is exercised by the gathered church through observance of the ordinances of baptism and Lord's Supper, directing her work and ministry democratically under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, ordaining and calling clergy, and associating freely with other Christian churches and organizations.
- Freedom - Religious Freedom means freedom for all people to practice the religion of their choice or no religion at all. It also means that the church should be separate from the state and free to proclaim the Gospel and carry out her mission as God directs. Soul Freedom allows every individual to become a follower of Jesus Christ without the mediation of a priestly class.
- Mission - Church Freedom means that each local body of believers is free to proclaim the gospel and to carry out her missionary work under the direction of Jesus Christ alone.

Disagreements and Differences (20 minutes)

Ask learners to share their insights from reading Shurden's Appendix II (pp. 73–78) related to how the four fragile freedoms can enable Baptists to better manage their disagreements and differences. Use the questions below to start the discussion. It is not necessary to discuss every question and every item. Allow the learners to guide the discussion to areas of experience or interest. Do not allow the discussion to devolve into a debate. Use the four freedoms to keep the discussion civil.

- What are some of the disagreements and differences among Baptists you have observed?
- How can the four freedoms be used to deal with theological differences such as: 1) The

Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, 2) Millennialism, 3) Salvation for all or for Some Only, and 4) The Sabbath Day?

- How can the four freedoms be used to deal with differences of judgment concerning the nature of the church such as: 1) The Autonomy of the Local Church, 2) The Theological Status of Associations and Conventions, 3) Baptism and Church Membership, 4) Separation of Church and State, and 5) The Ecumenical movement?
- How can the four freedoms be used to deal with differences over the Christian gospel in relation to social problems such as: 1) Social Justice, 2) Race Problems, 3) War and Peace, and 4) Worship and Evangelism?

Summary and Conclusions (15 minutes)

Ask learners to share their insights from reading Shurden's "Summary and Conclusions" (pp. 55–59). Learners may mention some of the following concepts:

- Our freedoms are very, very fragile. (p. 56)
- Freedom is undermined by irresponsibility, and every freedom comes with a corresponding responsibility. (p. 56)
- Bible Freedom is undermined by failing to study the Bible and by ignoring tradition and community in interpreting the Bible. (p. 56)
- Soul Freedom means taking responsibility for one's moral and religious decisions and expressing an authentic faith by confessing and obeying Jesus Christ. (pp. 56–57)
- Church Freedom requires each member of the church to be responsible for his/her growth in spiritual maturity and for freely and responsibly participating in church life. (p. 57)
- Religious Freedom requires the church to be responsible for giving moral/spiritual reinforcement for law and order, for making a clear proclamation of the truths undergirding justice/peace, and for declaring God's judgments related to government, responsible citizenship, and the rights of all people. (p. 57)
- Freedom is always a dangerous and threatening idea. (pp. 57–58)
- Our Baptist freedoms all depend on the centrality of Christ and His Lordship over the Bible, individual lives, churches, and the church's relationship with government. (pp. 58–59)
- Baptists are at their best when they pursue each freedom passionately and responsibly. (p. 59)

Closing (2 minutes)

Close the session by:

- Asking if learners have any final thoughts on our Baptist identity and the four fragile freedoms;
- Thanking everyone for their participation in this important study; and
- Closing with a prayer thanking God for His help and guidance, to help you protect and exercise your God-given freedoms, and to respond with His will for each need identified in the opening prayer.

FACILITATION & PROMOTION

Six-Session Format

This study is designed for presentation in six one-hour sessions. You will notice a suggested time in parentheses after each section header in each session. These times are based on one-hour sessions. However, depending on the level of participant discussion, sessions could last longer than an hour. As facilitator, be aware of time constraints. You may not be able to address every question in every section of each session. Let the interests of the group guide the discussion and where to pause or move on in each session. If participants agree, each session can be lengthened to allow for more discussion.

Begin advertising the study several weeks in advance in your church newsletter and bulletin as well as with posters and pulpit announcements. A sample poster that you may copy and use is provided on the next page. Consider having a sign-up list or other means to track interest in the study and to aid in pre-ordering enough copies of *The Baptist Identity*.

It is important to pre-order enough copies of Shurden's *The Baptist Identity* so that every student can receive a copy during the first session. You may have each student pay for a copy or provide it at no cost, if your church budget allows. Pre-order a few extra copies for those who sign up at the last minute or attend the first session without having signed up. Most booksellers will allow you to return unused copies within a certain period of time. You may also want to place a copy in your church library.

As facilitator, complete the reading assignment from *The Baptist Identity* before each session. Look through the facilitation notes for the session. Gather your thoughts as you prepare to facilitate both the devotion and other session elements. Ensure that you have the necessary computer or audio-visual equipment for viewing any videos that are part of the session. It would be good to preview the video as you prepare to facilitate discussion questions related to it. Pray for yourself and other participants to grow in understanding and exercise of the four fragile freedoms.

Four-Session Format

While completing all six sessions is recommended, this study can also be presented in four one-hour sessions. This is accomplished by omitting Session 1 and Session 6. In order to accomplish this short format, it will be necessary to provide copies of *The Baptist Identity* and the Session 2 reading assignment (i.e., *The Baptist Identity*, pp. 1–21) to participants before the session so that they can come prepared. Otherwise, advertisement and facilitation of the four-session format will be the same as given above for the six-session format.

Sermon Series

Outlines for sermons on each of the four fragile freedoms are provided in Appendix B. These sermons can be used as a standalone series or in conjunction with the six or four session study. Each of the four sermons could be presented on the Sunday following the study of Sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5. This would allow for reinforcement of learning from each session.

THE BAPTIST IDENTITY: FOUR FRAGILE FREEDOMS

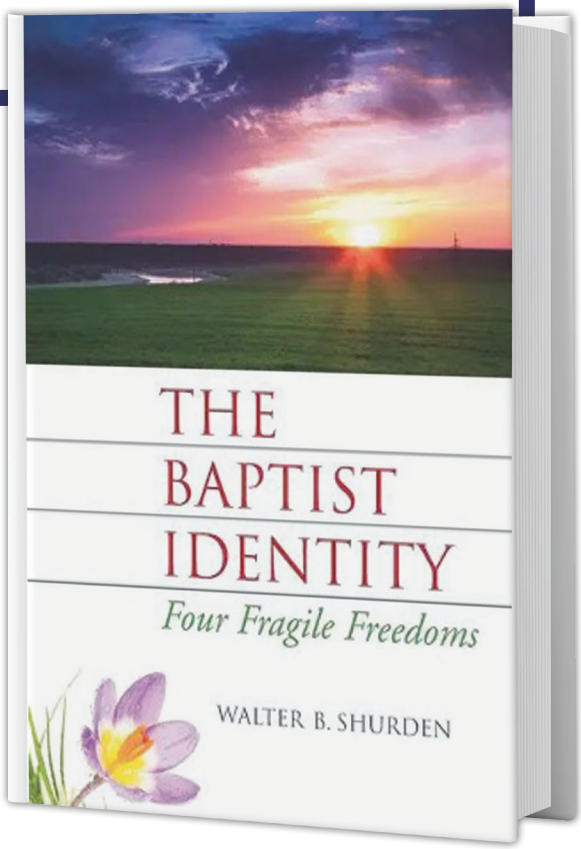
BOOK STUDY

DATE/TIME:

LOCATION:

SIGN-UP:

Join us for a study of our Baptist identity and the four fragile freedoms of Bible Freedom, Soul Freedom, Church Freedom, and Religious Freedom.



RESOURCES

ACCESS THIS TEACHING GUIDE AND VIDEOS ONLINE!

BGAV.org/TheBaptistIdentity

TEXTBOOKS

Shurden, Walter B., *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms.* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993. ISBN 978-1880837207 - Available to order online at *https://www.helwys.com/the-baptist-identity*

Baptist Faith and Message (1963) - Available online at *https://www.baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/baptist-faith-message-1963.pdf* and also provided in Appendix A

"BEING BAPTIST" CBF VIDEO SERIES

"Being Baptist: The Priesthood of All Believers" with Dr. Bill Leonard - Part 1 of 5

"Being Baptist: The Authority of the Bible" with Dr. Gary Parker - Part 2 of 5

"Being Baptist: Religious Liberty" with Carolyn Blevins - Part 3 of 5

"Being Baptist: The Autonomy of the Local Church" with Rev. Dr. Loyd Allen - Part 4 of 5

"Being Baptist: Believer's Baptism" with Charles Wade - Part 5 of 5 *(This video is not used in this study.)*

Video series from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Media Collection. Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA. Used with permission from the publisher.

BGAV RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMITTEE VIDEOS

"John Weatherford" with Wyatt Shelton Miles III, Yellow Hat Films, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= pamJ7bPAUoI*

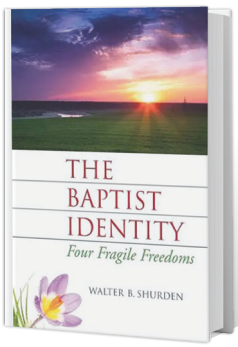
"Thomas Woolsey" with Bill Bryan, Yellow Hat Films, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk3M95XHftY*

"James Madison and John Leland" with Ken Pruitt, Yellow Hat Films, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= pKyiX-jEkds*

APPENDIX A
HANDOUTS

SESSION 1 HANDOUT

THE BAPTIST IDENTITY INTRODUCTION



WELCOME

Record some interesting information about your fellow learners.

Record prayer needs here.

PURPOSE

What is the purpose of this course?

What do you hope to learn?

DEVOTION - GALATIANS 3:1-14

What part do correct doctrinal beliefs play in our salvation?

What are the core Christian doctrinal beliefs?

Are we saved by intellectual assent to a set of doctrinal beliefs or by a personal faith in Christ Jesus alone?

Do Christians agree on every point of doctrine?

How might a particular set of Christian doctrinal beliefs become a legalistic burden when imposed by one group of Christians on another?

_____

_____

DISCUSSION

Who are some Baptist leaders that you have known or heard about from the past or present?

_____

_____

What made or makes the leaders that you identified unique as Baptists?

_____

_____

What is the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), and why is it valuable?

_____

_____

Does your church affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), another version, or does your church have a unique statement of faith that the church has adopted?

_____

_____

Why is having a statement of faith such as the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) important? How can it be dangerous?

_____

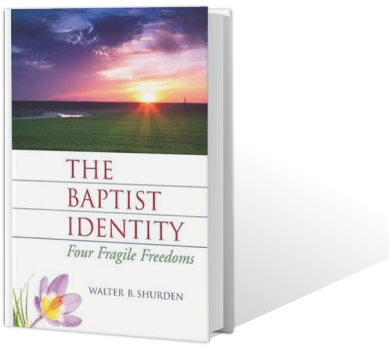
_____

ASSIGNMENT

- Please read *The Baptist Identity* Introduction (pp. 1–7) and chapter 1, "Bible Freedom" (pp. 9–21), before the next session.
- Please come prepared to discuss Bible Freedom.

SESSION 2 HANDOUT

BIBLE FREEDOM



WELCOME

Record prayer needs here.

DEVOTION - 2 TIMOTHY 3:15-17

What does the statement "All scripture is God-breathed" mean to you?

What is the purpose of Bible Freedom?

DISCUSSION

What is the source of Baptist doctrinal beliefs?

Bible Freedom means freedom "under" what or whom?

Bible Freedom means freedom "for" what purpose?

Bible Freedom means freedom "from" what?

Bible Freedom means freedom "of" what?

How is Bible Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

_____

_____

VIDEO - "BEING BAPTIST: THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE"

What groups add other books as equal to the Bible for faith and practice?

_____

_____

What is the Baptist view of the Reformation principle of sola scriptura?

_____

_____

How did the Holy Spirit "inspire" the Bible?

_____

_____

Should God's means of inspiration of Scripture be a test of orthodoxy?

_____

_____

What are some potential dangers that may arise with the practice of Bible freedom?

_____

_____

What is the key that Baptists must use to interpret the Bible?

_____

_____

Do you agree with this statement: "No Lord but Christ. No creed but the Bible"? Why or why not?

_____

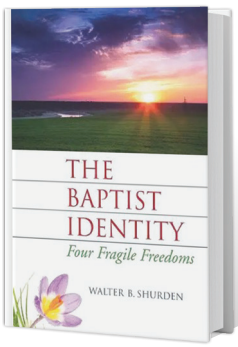
_____

ASSIGNMENT

- Please read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 2, "Soul Freedom" (pp. 23–32), before the next session; and
- Please come prepared to discuss Soul Freedom.

SESSION 3 HANDOUT

SOUL FREEDOM



WELCOME

Record prayer needs here.

DEVOTION - 1 PETER 2:4-10

What does it mean to be God's "chosen people?"

What does it mean to be "a royal priesthood?"

What does it mean to be "a holy nation?"

DISCUSSION

What other terms do Baptists use to describe the concept of soul freedom?

How does soul freedom affirm the importance and the sacredness of individual choice?

How is the voluntary nature of faith related to soul freedom?

How is believer's baptism related to the priesthood of all believers?

Was the mode or the subject of baptism more important to early Baptists?

Why might leaders of both government and established churches view soul freedom as a dangerous belief whose exercise would be worthy of serious persecution?

How is Soul Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

VIDEO - "BEING BAPTIST: THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS"

What does the radical freedom of the priesthood of all believers require?

How does one become a priest in the priesthood of all believers?

Where does ordination of pastors fit within the priesthood of all believers?

What is the priesthood of all believers?

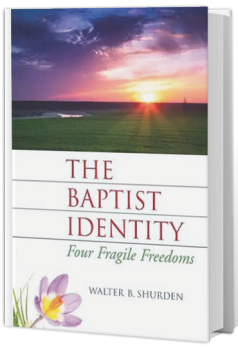
What is the priesthood of all believers ***not***?

ASSIGNMENT

- Please read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 3, "Church Freedom" (pp. 33–44), before the next session; and
- Please come prepared to discuss Church Freedom.

SESSION 4 HANDOUT

CHURCH FREEDOM



WELCOME

Record prayer needs here.

DEVOTION - 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-14

What are some of the spiritual gifts given to members of the body?

How many spiritual gifts do members of the body receive?

Do you know your spiritual gifts? What are they?

How have you used your spiritual gifts for the "common good" of the body?

DISCUSSION

What tensions result from church freedom?

What are the two keys for the formation of the "gathered church?"

What are the three types of church government? Which one do Baptists favor and why?

What two threats exist to congregational church government?

_____

_____

What three freedoms should a local Baptist church exercise?

_____

_____

How is Church Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

_____

_____

VIDEO - "BEING BAPTIST: THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH"
What are three core affirmations supporting the autonomy of the local church?

_____

_____

What is the inward mark of an autonomous church?

_____

_____

What is the outward mark of an autonomous church?

_____

_____

Can local church autonomy be lost or surrendered? If so, how?

_____

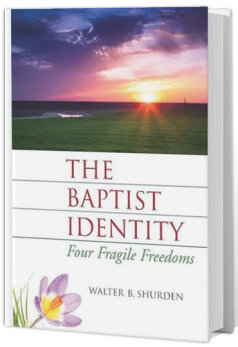
_____

ASSIGNMENT

- Please read *The Baptist Identity* chapter 4, "Religious Freedom" (pp. 45–54), before the next session; and
- Please come prepared to discuss Religious Freedom.

SESSION 5 HANDOUT

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



WELCOME

Record prayer needs here.

DEVOTION - MATTHEW 22:15-22

What trap did the Jewish leaders set for Jesus?

What relationship between church and state did Jesus suggest in His answer to the Jewish leaders?

To whom do we owe ultimate allegiance?

DISCUSSION

What, specifically are the "certain unalienable rights" or freedoms that were claimed in the Declaration of Independence?

What protection of religious liberty is included in Article VI, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution?

What two key religious protections are part of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution?

What religious protection is afforded under the Fourteenth Amendment?

_____

_____

What are three anchors of Baptist passion for religious liberty?

_____

_____

What does religious freedom mean to Baptists?

_____

_____

How is Religious Freedom fragile in our churches and world today?

_____

_____

VIDEO - "BEING BAPTIST: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY"
What historical roots do Baptists have as advocates for religious liberty? What price have they paid?

_____

_____

Are we guarding our religious freedom or letting it slip away in America today?

_____

_____

How can we guard religious liberty by asking, "If I were in the minority, would I like this law?"

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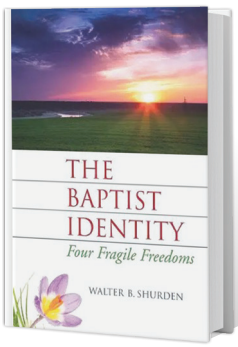
ASSIGNMENT

- Please read *The Baptist Identity* "Summary and Conclusions" (pp. 55–59) and Appendix II (pp. 69–83) before the next session; and
- Please come prepared to discuss all four Baptist freedoms.

SESSION 6 HANDOUT

EXERCISING OUR FREEDOMS



WELCOME

Record prayer needs here.

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FOUR FRAGILE FREEDOMS

- Bible Freedom: "BIBLE FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church and that Christians, with the best and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey the Scripture" (Shurden, 9).
- Soul Freedom: "SOUL FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government" (Shurden, 23).
- Church Freedom: "CHURCH FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ, of whose unity and mission Baptists are proudly a part" (Shurden, 33).
- Religious Freedom: "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar" (Shurden, 45).

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

How do the four fragile freedoms relate to the following Baptist distinctives? (see Shurden 68–73)

Authority: _____

_____

Christian Experience: _____

_____

The Church: _____

_____

Freedom: _____

_____

Mission: _____

_____

DISAGREEMENTS AND DIFFERENCES

Discuss how the four fragile freedoms can enable Baptists to better manage their disagreements and differences. (see Shurden, 73–78)

What are some of the disagreements and differences among Baptists that you have observed?

_____

_____

How can the four freedoms be used to deal with theological differences such as: 1) The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, 2) Millennialism, 3) Salvation for all or for Some Only, and 4) The Sabbath Day?

_____

_____

How can the four freedoms be used to deal with differences of judgment concerning the nature of the church such as: 1) The Autonomy of the Local Church, 2) The Theological Status of Associations and Conventions, 3) Baptism and Church Membership, 4) Separation of Church and State, and 5) The Ecumenical Movement?

_____

_____

How can the four freedoms be used to deal with differences over the Christian gospel in relation to social problems such as: 1) Social Justice, 2) Race Problems, 3) War and Peace, and 4) Worship and Evangelism?

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What are your insights from reading Shurden's "Summary and Conclusions?" (see Shurden, 55–59)

_____

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BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE (1963)

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE

The 1962 session of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in San Francisco, California, adopted the following motion:

"Since the report of the Committee on Statement of Baptist Faith and Message was adopted in 1925, there have been various statements from time to time which have been made, but no overall statement which might be helpful at this time as suggested in Section 2 of that report, or introductory statement which might be used as an interpretation of the 1925 Statement.

"We recommend, therefore, that the president of this Convention be requested to call a meeting of the men now serving as presidents of the various state Conventions that would qualify as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Committee under Bylaw 18 to present to the Convention in Kansas City some similar statement which shall serve as information to the churches, and which may serve as guidelines to the various agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is understood that any group or individuals may approach this committee to be of service. The expenses of this committee shall be borne by the Convention Operating Budget."

Your committee thus constituted begs leave to present its report as follows:

Throughout its work your committee has been conscious of the contribution made by the statement of "The Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. It quotes with approval its affirmation that "Christianity is supernatural in its origin and history. We repudiate every theory of religion which denies the supernatural elements of our faith."

Furthermore, it concurs in the introductory "statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life." It is, therefore, quoted in full as part of this report to the Convention:

"(1) That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. 1 THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE

"(2) That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.

"(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so.

"(4) That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.

"(5) That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life."

The 1925 Statement recommended "the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, revised at certain points, and with some additional articles growing out of certain needs . . ." Your present committee has adopted the same pattern. It has sought to build upon the structure of the 1925 Statement, keeping in mind the "certain needs" of our generation. At times it has reproduced sections of that Statement without change. In with instances it has substituted words for clarity or added sentences for emphasis. At certain points it has combined articles, other minor changes in wording, to endeavor to relate certain doctrines to each other. In still others (e.g., "God" and "Salvation" (it has sought to bring together certain truths contained throughout the 1925 Statement in order to relate them more clearly and concisely. In no case has it sought to delete from or to add to the basic contents of the 1925 Statement.

Baptists are a people who profess a living faith. This faith is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Therefore, the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is Jesus Christ whose will is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

A living faith must experience a growing understanding of truth and must be continually interpreted and related to the needs of each new generation. Throughout their history Baptist bodies, both large and small, have issued statements of faith which comprise a consensus of their beliefs. Such statements have never been regarded as complete, infallible statements of faith, nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority. Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us.

Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified. It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe.

1963 STATEMENT

I. THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

Ex. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isa. 34:16; 40:8; Jer. 15:16; 36; Matt. 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

II. GOD

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Gen. 1:1; 2:7; Ex. 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Levit. 22:2; Deut. 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chron. 29:10; Psalms 19:1-3; Isa. 43:3; 15; 64:8; Jer. 10:10; 17:13; Matt. 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Rom. 8:14-15; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself the demands and necessities of human nature and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, partaking of the nature of God and of man, and in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Gen. 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isa. 7:14; 53; Matt. 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16, 27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6, 19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18, 29; 10:30, 38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16, 28; 17:1-5; 21-22; 20:1-20, 28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5, 20; Rom. 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21;

8:1-3, 34; 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8, 24-28; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Heb. 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15, 24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Rev. 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God though His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer into the fulness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Gen. 1:2; Judg. 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isa. 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matt. 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10, 12; Luke 1:35; 4:1, 18-19; 11:13; 12;12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17, 39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Rom. 8:9-11, 14-16, 26-27; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19; 1 Tim. 3:16; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:14; 3:16; Heb. 9:8, 14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Rev. 1:10; 22:17.

III. MAN

Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is the crowning work of His creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence; whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin, and as soon as they are capable of moral action become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfil the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore every man possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Gen. 1:26-30; 2:5, 7, 18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 17:5; Matt. 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:10-18, 23; 5:6, 12, 19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18, 29; 1 Cor. 1:21-31; 15:19, 21-22; Eph. 2:1-22; Col. 1:21-22; 3:9-11.

IV. SALVATION

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

1. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine

turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

2. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.
3. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

Gen. 3:15; Ex. 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matt. 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14, 29; 3:3-21, 36; 5:24; 10:9, 28-29; 15:1-6; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Rom 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18, 29-39; 10:9-10, 13; 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 1:18, 30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12, 8, 14; James 2:14-26; I Peter 1:2-23; 1 John 1:6-2:11; Rev. 3:20; 21:1-22:5.

V. GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is a glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the cause of Christ, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-8; 1 Sam. 8:4-7, 19-22; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 31:31ff.; Matt. 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22, 31; 25:34: Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45, 65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6, 12, 17-18; Acts 20:32; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7, 26-36; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Eph. 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Col. 1:12-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2:10, 19; Heb. 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 1:2-5, 13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.

VI. THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.

Matt. 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42, 47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23, 27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11, 21; 5:22-32; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:1-15; 4:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Rev. 2-3; 21:2-3.

VII. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord' Supper. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matt. 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; Acts 20:7; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21; 11:23-29; Col. 2:12.

VIII. THE LORD'S DAY

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, work of necessity and mercy only being excepted.

Ex. 20:8-11; Matt. 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3, 33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1, 19-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Col. 2:16; 3:16; Rev. 1:10.

IX. THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Gen. 1:1; Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 3:2; 4:8-10, 23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Rom. 5:17; 8:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 1:13; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Rev. 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 21:22.

X. LAST THINGS

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will be dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Isa. 2:4; 11:9; Matt. 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thess. 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Rev. 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.

XI. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by personal effort and by all other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6; Isa. 6:1-8; Matt. 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8, 16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Rom. 10:13-15; Eph. 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Rev. 22:17.

XII. EDUCATION

The cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian schools is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people. In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

Deut. 4:1, 5, 9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Neh. 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Prov. 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7, 11; 15:14; Eccl. 7:19; Matt. 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 4:8; Col. 2:3, 8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:14-17; Heb. 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.

XIII. STEWARDSHIP

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Gen. 14:20; Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 8:18; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21, 42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Rom. 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; 12:15; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

XIV. CO-OPERATION

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure co-operation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should co-operate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary co-operation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Co-operation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such co-operation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Ex. 17:12; 18:17ff.; Judg. 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Neh. 4; 8:1-5; Matt. 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1-ff.; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 1:6-10; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 1:15-18.

XV. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in his own life and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian should oppose in the spirit of Christ every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. He should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

Ex. 20:3-17; Lev. 6:2-5; Deut. 10:12; 27:17; Psalms 101:5; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 8:16; Matt. 5:13-16, 43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Rom. 12-14; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

XVI. PEACE AND WAR

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war. The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love.

Isa. 2:4; Matt. 5:9, 38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36, 38; Rom. 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Heb. 12:14; James 4:1-2.

XVII. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

Gen. 1:27; 2:7; Matt. 6:6-7, 24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Rom. 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Gal. 5:1, 13; Phil. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.

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FELIX MANZ
MARTYRDOM

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Felix Manz was born around 1498. He was the son of a senior Catholic clergyman in the Grossmünster Church in Zürich, Switzerland. As such, he received a classical education including instruction in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. He became part of a group of scholars influenced by the Reformation leader, Ulrich Zwingli. However, Manz and others in his circle soon became disaffected by the limited extent and pace of Zwingli's reforms and also by the strong political influence of the Zürich City Council upon Zwingli.

Manz along with others disagreed with Zwingli on the issue of believer's baptism. Zwingli accepted infant baptism while Manz did not. Manz believed that baptism was only for those who expressed personal faith in Jesus Christ. For him, infant baptism was meaningless, and those who had been baptized as infants must be re-baptized as believers in Jesus Christ. Manz and those advocating for rebaptism were given the label Anabaptists. In 1525, Manz took part in forming the Swiss Brethren, an early Anabaptist movement. This group insisted upon voluntary church membership, believer's baptism, and separation of the church from state control.

Zwingli and the Zürich City Council cooperated to suppress the Anabaptist movement, which they believed was a threat to both religious unity and to the overall social order. Manz was one of the most visible leaders of the movement and continued to preach and teach in favor of believer's baptism and against infant baptism. Furthermore, he and others in the group refused to have their infant children baptized, which violated the law.

In March 1526, the Zürich City Council decreed that anyone convicted of rebaptizing would be executed by drowning. This penalty became known as the third baptism. Manz was repeatedly warned, arrested, and imprisoned for his teaching and practices related to rebaptism. Finally, he was condemned to death by the Council. On January 5, 1527, Manz was executed by drowning. As he was led from Zurich's Wellenburg Prison to his death, he preached and praised God. His brother and mother along with other supporters encouraged him to hold fast to his beliefs. His executioners rowed him out to a fishing pier in the middle of the Limmat River, tied his hands behind his knees, and pushed him overboard. His last words are believed to have been, "Into thy hands, O God, I commend my spirit." He was buried in St. Jakobs cemetery in Zürich.

Felix Manz's death did not extinguish the Anabaptist movement but strengthened it. Others followed in his footsteps of both believer's baptism and martyrdom. A memorial plaque on the Limmat River wall in Zürich commemorates Manz and other Anabaptists executed in the early 16th century by the Zürich city government. It reads:

> *Here, in the middle of the Limmat, from a fishing platform, Felix Manz and five other brothers were drowned during the Reformation period between 1527 and 1532. Hans Landis was the last brother executed in Zurich in 1614.*

EXCERPTS FROM THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

Article VI, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution

"The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."[1]

The Bill of Rights: Article 3 (Origin of the First Amendment)

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."[2]

First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."[3]

Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 to the U.S. Constitution

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."[4]

Religious Freedom and the Constitution

The religious freedoms found in the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution owe much to both the Enlightenment thinking of the framers of the Constitution and the influence of Virginia Baptists. John Leland, one of the most popular preachers in Virginia, advocated religious freedom for all. The proposed U.S. Constitution did not contain a clear statement guaranteeing religious freedom. So, Leland prepared and circulated a document opposing the proposed Constitution. A friend of James Madison encouraged him to meet with Leland to discuss his concerns. As a result of that meeting in 1788, Leland promised to sway the significant Virginia Baptist vote to elect Madison to the Virginia Convention if Madison would promise to add a Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution

[1] Congressional Research Service, Constitution of the United States Article VI clause 3, Constitution Annotated, *https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/article-6/#article-6-clause-3* (last visited September 3, 2026).

[2] The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, The Bill of Rights: A Transcription, National Archives, *https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript* (last visited September 3, 2026).

[3] Congressional Research Service, Constitution of the United States Amendment 1, Constitution Annotated, *https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/* (last visited September 3, 2026).

[4] The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Amendment XIV Section 1, National Archives, *https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27#xiv1* (last visited September 3, 2026).

that would guarantee religious freedom. Madison agreed and was elected. However, he faced fierce opposition from the Anti-Federalists led by Patrick Henry. Ultimately, Madison succeeded in adding Article 3 to The Bill of Rights which subsequently became the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Thus, religious liberty, including both the free exercise of religion and the prohibition of the establishment of religion, was enshrined within the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

U.S. Constitution, Article VI: Religious Tests

Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." This article provides important protection against the requirement of particular religious beliefs or even of non-belief as a condition for holding public office. Faith cannot be used as a test for holding any public office.

The First Amendment's Establishment Clause

The first clause of the First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...." This is known as the Establishment Clause. This important protection bars the government from establishing a national religion or even favoring one religion over others. This clause has been tested in the courts and upheld consistently by the U.S. Supreme Court. Laws that endorse or coerce religion have been struck down. The Supreme Court has permitted limited, historically grounded practices that acknowledge religion as part of public life. For example, opening government meetings with prayer is acceptable by tradition as long as one religion is not favored over others. Also, the courts have allowed government aid to be given to religious schools if that aid is distributed on neutral terms. However, this later action remains controversial.

The First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause

The second clause of the First Amendment states: "...or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...." This is known as the Free Exercise Clause. This clause grants the freedom not only to hold religious beliefs but also, within reasonable limits, to exercise those beliefs. While the government cannot target or suppress religious practice, certain laws, which are religiously neutral, may incidentally restrict it. In 1993, Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This act requires that federal laws substantially burdening religious exercise must have a compelling governmental interest and be narrowly tailored to achieve it.

The Fourteenth Amendment

Originally, the First Amendment restricted only the federal government from infringing religious liberty. Through the Fourteenth Amendment, both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment must be applied to the laws and actions of both state and local governments.

APPENDIX B
SERMON OUTLINES

SERMON OUTLINE
BIBLE FREEDOM

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

Introduction

1. Instruction Manuals are prepared by manufacturers to help us use their products.
2. The B-I-B-L-E (Basic Instructions (for) Believers Living Eternally) has been prepared by our Maker to help us find eternal life in Him and live it to His glory.
3. Baptists are people of the book, the Bible. It defines who we are, what we believe, and what we do.
4. The *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms Bible freedom. Read BF&M "I. - The Scriptures."
5. A key scripture for understanding Bible Freedom is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Read passage.
6. Every believer is free to interpret the Bible under the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the purpose of growing in obedience to God.

A. Free to Interpret

1. Baptists do not hold creeds or doctrines set by ecclesiastical bodies, councils, or even denominations.
2. Historically, Baptists have proclaimed that they have "no creed but the Bible, and no Lord but Jesus."
3. Even the BF&M is not a creed as its framers made clear when they wrote, "...the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience" (BF&M, 1963).
4. No pope, king, bishop, or pastor can specify, restrain, or forbid individual interpretation of Scripture.

B. Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ

1. "All Scripture is God-breathed (Gk., – theopneustos "inspired" – filled with God's Spirit)." (16a)
2. While each believer is free to interpret Scripture, it is interpreted under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
    - Jesus is preeminent over Scripture, and Scripture points us to Jesus.
    - Jesus is our ultimate source of Christian authority; the norm by which we interpret; and the Truth upon whom we build and live our lives and serve together in our churches.

- Jesus is the Living Lord who guides and directs His people through Scripture interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus Christ, God in flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters of Christian faith and practice.

C. For the Purpose of Growing Obedience to God

1. Our lives are transformed as we read and apply Scripture under the Holy Spirit's guidance.
2. The Bible is the final authority on moral responsibility, theological beliefs, and human relationships. However, our understanding of the Bible is never final, complete, or finished but is ever new as we grow!
3. Scripture is useful (Gk., ophelimos - "profitable") for positive instruction. (16b)
   - "teaching" – teaching/encouragement; revealing God's purpose for life (see Ecclesiastes 12:13)
   - "training in righteousness" – practical training that leads to holy living (see Galatians 5:22-23)
4. Scripture is useful for correction when needed. (16b) - Note that these words of correction are sandwiched between the positive instruction of "teaching" and "training in righteousness."
   - "rebuking" – points out errors, failures, mistakes; shows wrong turns taken (see 2 Samuel 12:1-15)
   - "correcting" – practical training that leads to forgiveness and a return to God's will (see Romans 6:23)
5. Goal: "...so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (17)
   - "thoroughly equipped" (Gk., artios...eksertismenos) - "ready, prepared, perfect" for doing good

b. Live with an attitude of openness and ongoing study of the Bible under the Lord's guidance.

c. Live a dynamic not a static faith! Grow in both understanding and application of God's Truth.

D. Maintaining Bible Freedom

Are we guarding Bible freedom for all or letting it slip away?

1. Are you reading your Bible? - Read God's word by yourself and/or with your family each day.
2. Are you growing in your understanding of God's word, allowing it to teach/train you and rebuke/correct you when needed?
3. Are you growing in your application of God's word by producing good works to the glory of God?
4. Are you gathering with others to study God's word each week?
5. Exercise your Bible freedom each day and guard it fiercely for all people.

SERMON OUTLINE
SOUL FREEDOM

1 PETER 2:4-10

Introduction

1. How far are you willing to go to hold onto your beliefs? Lose a friend? Lose job? Prison? Execution?
2. How important is believer's baptism to you? Felix Manz died for this belief (see Appendix A).
3. "SOUL FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government" (Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*, 23).
4. Soul Freedom, aka Priesthood of Believers, is "the sacredness of individual choice" (Shurden, 23).

A. Scriptural Basis for Priesthood of Believers

1. Every human is created in the image of God and competent to make moral, spiritual, and religious decisions and to be accountable to God (see Genesis 1:26).
2. The priesthood of all believers is the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (see Exodus 19:5-6).
3. The priesthood of all believers is God's promise to each believer who trusts Jesus. Read 1 Peter 2:4-10.
    - "a chosen (Gk., elekton) people" (9) - As God graciously chose Israel in the Old Testament, so He graciously chooses each believer to be part of His people, the New Testament church.
    - "a royal priesthood" (9) - Israel's priests offered sacrifices. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) by doing the good work of loving others, teaching, serving, listening, proclaiming the gospel.
    - "a holy (Gk., agion) nation" - We are separate/set apart as aliens/strangers, witnesses for the Lord.

B. Being a Priest

1. Interpreting God's Word
    - We are each free to interpret scripture under the Lordship of Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit.
    - We do not interpret in isolation by ourselves but with responsibility in the community of believers.

2. Dr. Bill Leonard says the priesthood of believers IS: 1) Focused on serving those in need and each other; 2) A radical trust in God's people; 3) the possibility of different views and dissent; 4) An opportunity for growth by listening to others; 5) Freedom in tension with responsibility; 6) An opportunity to show humility. (From video "Being Baptist: The Priesthood of All Believers" with Bill Leonard)
3. Dr. Leonard also says the priesthood of believers IS NOT: 1) carte blanche to believe anything a lone individual/group wants to believe; 2) a denial of the importance of community; 3) a lone concept but held in balance with Bible freedom, religious freedom, church freedom, cooperation with others; 4) a means to lift up one's understanding of particular scriptures as the only possible interpretation.

C. The Price of the Priesthood

1. Radical freedom demands radical responsibility.
2. Uniformity of belief has been and often still is enforced by church powers.
   - In 1415 Protestant reformer Jan Huss was burned at the stake by the Catholic Church.
   - Protestants also killed those with different beliefs. Ulrich Zwingli condoned Felix Manz's execution.
   - In early Virginia, John Weatherford, a Baptist minister, was persecuted by Anglicans.
   - Show BGAV Religious Liberty Committee video: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pamJ7bPAUoI.*
   - Persecution of Christians by other Christians with different beliefs continues today.
3. The Bible is open to all believers who are free to interpret it under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
   - The absence of any single, final, or official interpretation of many Scriptures has created diversity, consternation, and conflict between Baptists. That is part of our Baptist identity like it or not!
   - With great freedom comes the need for great responsibility, humility, and grace for others.

D. Maintaining Soul Freedom

Are we guarding Soul freedom for all or letting it slip away?

1. Shurden writes, "Legalistic creedalism often interprets differences of interpretation as destruction of the Bible itself." (Shurden, Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms, 20).
2. Don't let someone else interpret Scripture for you or tell you what you must believe. Study, understand, and apply it for yourself under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
3. Exercising your Soul Freedom begins with becoming a priest in the priesthood of believers by receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord.

SERMON OUTLINE
CHURCH FREEDOM

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-14

Introduction

1. What is the church? Is it a beautiful building, a cathedral? NO! The church is people.
2. Jesus said of Peter's confession of Him as Christ, "...on this rock I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18). Jesus said "church" singular. There is one kingdom of God, one universal church, one spiritual house made up of all who believe in Jesus Christ, the redeemed of all ages both living on earth and in heaven.
3. The church is a spiritual house made up of living stones (see 1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10a).
4. Of course, we form local bodies of believers, local churches like ours.
5. Here is the definition of the church from the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message*. Read "VI. The Church."

A. Who is the Church?

1. Historically, the "gathered church" has been comprised of a local body of individuals who each have:
    - a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and have been baptized by immersion as believers.
    - made a free, voluntary commitment to serve Christ as a member of a local body of believers.
2. The church is the body of Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-14.
    - There are no "Lone Ranger" Christians in the church. We live in community as the body of Christ in which every member is a priest, a minister, a servant.
    - Each believer in the body receives a manifestation of the Spirit, at least one spiritual gift (7a, 11).
        - » Different gifts; Different service; Different empowerment. (4-6); Partial gift list (vv 8-10)
        - » Same Spirit distributes; Same Lord is served; Same Father empowers gifts. (4-6)
        - » Our gifts and service using them are for the "common good" of the body (7).
        - » Each member of the body must know his/her part and fulfill that part within the body.
    - The body is an amazing creation of God. If one part is ill/not functioning, the whole body suffers.

- We commit to love you (individual/part focus) and to allow you to love us (community/body focus).

3. Two healthy marks of the church as a cooperative community of faith are:
   - the inward mark of everyone having a voice, and
   - the outward mark of voluntary association with other churches and groups. Share examples of how your church cooperates with other churches and Christian organizations.

B. How Does the Local Church Exercise Her Freedom?

1. Each local church is free to govern obediently under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
   - Local Baptist churches practice congregational polity where each member has an equal voice.
   - We govern ourselves in obedience to our one true head, The Lord Jesus Christ and no other person, group, or denominational authority.
   - We determine our course of ministry together as a free, local body ultimately responsible to Jesus.
     - » Ideal goal is a Christocracy which knows the mind of Christ and is obedient to His will.
     - » Practical goal is a Democracy. However, the voice of the majority is not always the voice of God!
2. Each church is free to worship the Lord together creatively as God directs and equips her to worship Him.
3. Each church is free to serve together responsibly with focus on extending the gospel to the ends of the earth.
4. God is at work in our world and every Christian is called to partner with the Lord and other believers in that work. The local church is the primary base of operations for God's kingdom work.

C. Exercising and Protecting Our Church Freedom

1. Church freedom can be lost or surrendered.
   - It can be lost if a local body becomes inward focused and self-centered.
   - It can be surrendered by indifference/passivity to a larger organization, association, or convention.
2. Church freedom is important today. Our forebears fought for us to have it!
   - Show BGAV Religious Liberty Committee video: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk3M95XHftY.*
   - We must not surrender any of our Baptist freedoms: Religious, Bible, Soul, and Church Freedoms.
   - We must exercise these freedoms freely but with responsibility to the glory of God.
3. Today, exercise your freedom by receiving Jesus Christ by faith; Join our local church body; and Help us discern God's will, worship the Lord, and serve Him as He leads us TOGETHER.

SERMON OUTLINE
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

MATTHEW 22:15-22

Introduction

1. "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM is the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar" (Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*, 45).
2. In 2026 the USA celebrated the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.
   - Preamble: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness." (italics mine)
   - What, specifically are these "certain unalienable rights" or freedoms that we claim?

A. Religious Freedom: An Unalienable Right

1. For Baptists, a critical, unalienable right was and still is freedom of religion for all people.
   - Freedom of religion not only for Baptists but for all people has been an important Baptist belief from our beginning. In the words of Baptist forefather Thomas Helwys, "Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertaines not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure." (From 1612, *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity*).
   - Our *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) affirms religious freedom. Read "XVII. Religious Liberty."
2. Each person's faith in God is a personal matter between themselves and God. Faith cannot be forced.

B. Scriptural Support for Religious Freedom

1. Three general principles drawn from scripture anchor our Baptist passion for religious freedom.
   - Nature of God: God creates humans as free beings, and God liberates the oppressed.
   - Nature of Humanity: Humans are created in the image/likeness of God, are free, and love liberty.
   - Nature of Faith: Authentic faith must be freely given and can never be forced.
2. Teaching of Jesus: Read Matthew 22:15-22.
   - In context, the Jewish leaders tried to "trap" Jesus with a tricky question. (15)
   - The question: "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" (17)

- » If Jesus answered no, then He could be charged with sedition against Rome—a death sentence.
- » If he answered yes, then some of the people (e.g., Zealots, merchants) would turn against Him.

– Jesus knew the Jewish leaders' evil intent and hypocrisy. He asked them for a coin, a denarius.

- » He asked, "'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'" (20) They replied, "'Caesar's'" (21a)
- » Jesus concluded, "'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'" (21b)

– In saying this, Jesus not only recognized the legitimacy but also the limitations of the state.

- » He called for appropriate but separate allegiance to both God and the state.
- » Our ultimate allegiance is to God, who establishes the authority of the state (see Romans 13:1).

C. Gaining and Maintaining Religious Freedom

1. Baptists in colonial America did not have religious freedom.
   – Each state set its favored religion. Other religions were sometimes tolerated and sometimes not.
   – Rhode Island, founded by Roger Williams, a Baptist, was the only state to welcome all religions.
   – In Virginia, the Church of England was the favored religion, and Baptists were often persecuted.
2. Gaining Religious Freedom: John Leland, a leading Baptist in colonial VA, worked to ensure religious freedom became a part of the U.S. Constitution.
   – Show BGAV Religious Liberty Committee video: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKyiX-jEkds.*
   – Thanks to the work of Leland and Madison we have the First Amendment which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise...."
3. Maintaining Religious Freedom: Are we guarding religious freedom for all or letting it slip away?
   – We can guard religious liberty by asking, "If I were in the minority, would I like this law?"
   – We must work hard to maintain religious freedom for ALL people of every religion or no religion.
   – We must work harder to proclaim the truth of faith in Jesus Christ as THE way to salvation.
   – What do we owe our government? What do we owe our God? Which debt is greater?
   – Exercise your religious freedom each day and guard it fiercely for all people.

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