

“Back to Basics”

Part 1: Overview/History of Articles of Faith

Introduction:

In any area of life, mastery of the basics in that area is crucial for success. I ask you, how long will a basketball player make it in the NBA if he forgets how to dribble a ball and starts dribbling it off his foot? Or, what will happen to the salesman who is condescending rather than kind to his clients? Or, what about the marriage in which communication breaks down and stops? Or, what about the utility worker who forgets the basics of safety and starts handling power lines with his bare hands? Whenever basics in any area of life weaken or are forgotten, bad things happen. Careers are ruined, relationships disintegrate or in some cases lives are lost. It does not matter how strong we may see ourselves in any area of life, it's always crucial to revisit, reinforce and learn afresh the basics for that particular area.

Why is it that NBA players still practice the basics over and over – dribbling, shooting, passing? Because they want to so fine-tune the basics they don't even have to think about them. They want to play based on muscle memory. Similarly, salesmen have ongoing training to improve their skills, and most of this is just refreshing themselves on the basics. Couples who want a good marriage keep coming back to the basics, like communication. And those who deal with dangerous objects at work (like power lines) are required to refresh themselves on the basics of safety.

Likewise, in the life of a Church, it is critical periodically for us to revisit, reinforce and learn afresh the basics. Why? So that we will succeed in our objective, which is to glorify God. In a church, the basics are doctrine. In a day in which many say doctrine doesn't matter, I want to say theology means everything. If our view of God is wrong or we forget the biblical view of God we will do the spiritual equivalent of dribbling the ball off our feet or electrocuting ourselves. But, if we keep coming back to the basics of the Gospel and build on that foundation we will be elevated to breathtaking heights and new vistas from which we will behold the glory of the Lord.

This evening I want to start a series I am entitling: “*Back to the Basics.*” In this series I want us to work our way through our church's Articles of Faith. Starting next week we're going to dive into our statement of faith and just go through it line by line. We will take some more time on certain parts.

Tonight I want to give you an introduction to the series. I will cover 4 questions: 1. Why do churches need confessions of faith?; 2. What does it mean to subscribe to our Articles of Faith; 3. What is it that distinguishes Baptists from other Christians?; 4. How can our confession of faith be summarized/categorized?

As you came in this evening you should have received a copy of our Articles of Faith.¹ Also, you should have received a second document. It is a comparative chart. It compares our Articles of Faith and *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith of 1833*. The purpose of this comparison chart is to show you how our Articles of Faith are drawn largely from the historic *New Hampshire Baptist Confession*. I'll talk more about this throughout this series. But bottom line, I want us to see and appreciate our connection to this historic and widely used confession of faith. It is one of, if not, “the” most widely used Baptist confession among English speaking Baptists.

I. WHY DO CHURCHES NEED STATEMENTS OF FAITH?

You may be wondering, do churches really need a statement of faith? Do churches really use them anymore? Aren't they a bit antiquated? Aren't they useful for theologians, but irrelevant for our every day Christian lives? The simple answer to these questions is, “No.” The single most important thing about a church is what it believes. The only reason this church exists is because our statement of faith reflects truth. What we believe matters. Thus, the main reason we need statements of faith is because what we believe is, in fact, a matter of life and death.

¹The Articles of Faith of Calvary Baptist Church are available at www.thecalvarybaptist.net.

Some Christians are opposed to statements of faith. Doctrines like the Trinity and the person of Christ, they say, are too great to be reduced to mere mechanical formulas. And, in one sense they are right. No statement of faith can perfectly plumb the depths of God's person, knowledge and purposes. And yet, the good news of Jesus Christ is nonetheless "news." The Gospel is comprised of truths - propositional truths about God, ourselves, and Christ. What's more, these truths must be understood, believed, and lived out if we are to have any hope in this life and the life to come. So what we want to do in our time tonight and coming weeks is consider what we believe as a church.

But, before going any further, let me give a few general words about statements of faith. First, statements of faith are biblical. We see them in Scripture. In Scripture we see individuals making confessions (i.e. Nathanael's, Peter's, Thomas' confessions). Then there are creedal or confessional statements like the Matt 28:19 baptismal formula. Philippians 2:5-11 is often called "The Hymn to Christ" because it is thought to be an early church confession of faith. Also, there is the saving confession of Romans 10:9: "That if you shall confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in your heart that God hath raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." Further, the 1 Tim 3:16 "mystery of godliness" is a confession of faith. That verse reads this way: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: 'He was manifested In the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.'" Other New Testament confessions are found in 1 Cor 8:6; 1 Cor 12:3; Heb 6:1-2; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:22; 5:1. Confessions help us to carry out the admonitions of the writer of Hebrews: "Hold fast our profession (also translated) confession" and "the confession of our hope" (Heb 4:14; 10:23; 3:1). Confessions help us to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). They also help us to "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13) and "Stand fast with one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel" (Phil 1:27). Statements of faith are also biblical in an obvious secondary sense: they are summaries of biblical teaching.

Besides being biblical, statements of faith are historical. That is to say, they've been used widely by the church since the first century to clarify the Bible's teaching and thereby build unity and guard against heresy. One example is the Apostles Creed. It was written in the first century to guard the church against the false teaching that says, "Jesus was not truly human and did not have a body." The Apostles Creed clearly teaches the humanity and bodily/physical existence of Christ. Now, you might be surprised to learn that Baptists have produced many statements of faith – as many if not more than any other group. That is because Baptists through the centuries have proved to be some of the most zealous proponents of orthodox doctrine.

Let me give one final, general comment about confessions of faith. Confessions of faith are governed by Scripture. The Bible always governs the content of a statement of faith, not the other way around. Our statement of faith reflects what we believe are the clear teachings of Scripture, but they do not take the place of Scripture. They are not meant to be exhaustive statements of doctrine, but rather summaries of some essential elements of the Christian faith set forth in Scripture. So, while I hope you believe our statement of faith, I hope it's not all that you believe. In this sense, confessions are minimalist documents. They are thorough enough to establish clarity and therefore build unity around our common faith, and yet not so specific that they would cause unnecessary division over tertiary matters. Confessions of faith are authoritative only insofar as they accurately reflect the teaching of the Bible.

So understand, though we should find creeds and confessions to be important, they are not infallible like Scripture. Confessions of faith, unlike Scripture, need tweaking over time to give more faithful expression to new issues that arise. Sometimes they are missing certain areas of doctrine. So, in order to strengthen their biblical accuracy, it's necessary to adjust or add to what they say on occasion. We see this reflected in our own Articles of Faith. As I said earlier, our Articles of Faith are based largely on the *1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith*. The 1833 is a great and biblically faithful confession. It's been a tried and true confession and I'm very thankful this document has been a part of our past and present. Our statement of faith in its current form was adopted back in the mid 1980s and it leans heavily on the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833*. At any rate, back to the point I was making a moment ago, confessions of faith over time need revisions and additions. And you see this in some of the best historic confessions of faith. So, as good as *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833* is, our confession of faith has some additional details at certain points. For example, we have an article on creation in our confession, but that's not in *The 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession*. Can you guess why? Because in 1833 a biblical view of creation was a given in most

churches. It was not debated much. But, what happened later in that century? Darwin and evolutionary theory came along. So, as new controversies pop up, it becomes necessary for confessions of faith to tweak and add details.

In sum, confessions of faith are important because they are biblical, historical and essential vehicles by which churches declare what they believe the Scriptures say. It's great to say we believe the Bible. But, what do we believe the Bible teaches? A confession of faith is the way we go on record and say, "This is what we as a corporate body believe." This public declaration is critical for the sake of unity, consistency and as a way to avoid pragmatism. Mark it down, when a church does not constantly keep before its people what it actually believes, the Gospel will be substituted with pragmatism in some form. Whatever it takes to get more people in pews and have larger offerings will become more important than the Gospel. When this kind of pragmatism takes over, doctrine (especially more controversial doctrine) will be avoided. Church unity will be based on pragmatism and a certain subculture, rather than the truth. In time, such a church will get to the point where it no longer even knows what it officially believes and inevitably disunity will occur. In other words, theology no longer gives identity to the church, but peripheral sub-culture issues do.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR ARTICLES OF FAITH?

I hope after this series, you'll have a greater appreciation and understanding for our statement of faith. Also, I hope you will have a renewed sense of commitment to it. In other words, I hope you will sense how important it is to you and the life of our church. I want you to know tonight, your pastor takes our Articles of Faith seriously. It is why I've tried to elevate its importance in my pastorate here. It's why I preached a series a couple years ago on Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms. It's why in our Sunday morning services we have systematically read through *The 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith* (again because it is the historic confession upon which our is based) and why we are currently working through our Articles of Faith. I don't want us to hide from our Articles of Faith or be ignorant of it. Point is, as a church I want us to elevate its importance. Before coming to this church as your pastor I scoured this document and carefully scrutinized every word of it. And I will just bluntly say, if this document was imprecise or voiced beliefs contrary to what I believe on certain key doctrinal areas, I would not have come here. And it's why I can say in good conscience, I have not preached one thing in my pastorate here that contradicts the historic doctrinal position of this church. Instead, everything I've preached has supported the Articles of Faith.

All right, back on track. What does it mean to subscribe to our confession of faith? In other words, what are you saying when you join our church? To subscribe to our confessions of faith means 1. you affirm all of the fundamental, first order doctrines taught in our confessions; 2. you agree not to cause division or strife over any of the doctrines in our confessions (Rom 16:17); 3. you agree not to teach against anything in the confessions; and 4. you agree to sit under and learn from those who teach everything in our confessions.

First-order, fundamental doctrines would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith. These are doctrines that one cannot deny and be a Christian. Included, among these most crucial doctrines would be doctrines such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ, justification by faith alone, and the absolute authority of Scripture. These first-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith. And thus, a denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than a denial of Christianity itself.

The set of second-order doctrines is distinguished from the first-order set by the fact that genuine believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues, though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers. Second order doctrines are matters of biblical truth related to Christian health. Healthy Christians are Christians who correctly understand and apply the Bible's second order doctrines, while unhealthy Christians deny, misunderstand, or misapply the Bible's second order doctrines. Second-order issues include issues like the meaning and mode of baptism. Baptists and Presbyterians, for example, fervently disagree over the most basic understanding of Christian baptism. The practice of infant baptism is inconceivable to the Baptist mind, while Presbyterians trace infant baptism to their most basic understanding of the covenant. Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians. Fact is, Baptists have much in doctrinal commonality with Presbyterians

since early Baptists were very closely allied with them in most major doctrinal areas. For example, the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, the key early confession for English speaking Baptists and certainly Baptists in America, is virtually word for word from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, except in a few places like the area of baptism. At any rate, Baptists and Presbyterians recognize that disagreement on important issues like baptism will prevent fellowship within the same congregation. This doesn't mean enjoyable fellowship is impossible in other ways. But obviously, they won't be members of the same church. Why? Because both believe strongly their own distinctive view is biblical and healthiest. Other second-order doctrines would include issues like tongues speaking (and other charismatic gifts), predestination, whether you can lose your salvation, etc. Christians across a vast denominational range can stand together on first-order doctrines and recognize each other as authentic Christians. However, the existence of second-order disagreements will prevent organic fellowship. For examples, a church either will recognize infant baptism or it will not. That choice immediately creates a second-order conflict with those who take the other position.

Third-order issues are doctrines over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations. Most of the debates over eschatology, for example, fall in this category. Calvary Baptist holds to pre-millennial position. However, a believer would be allowed to join this church so long as they would not cause division over or teach against this position. This is why the signed membership agreement I give new members says, "I _____ substantively subscribe to Calvary Baptist Church's Constitution (including its Covenant and Articles of Faith)." The word "substantively" is a key word. This word allows for minor disagreement on third-order issues. Using the example of eschatology, Christians who affirm the bodily, historical, and victorious return of Christ may differ over the timetable without rupturing the fellowship of the church. Christians may find themselves in disagreement over any number of issues related to the interpretation of difficult texts or the understanding of matters of common disagreement. Numerous other practical issues also fall into this category: worship styles, church building architecture, the order of events in worship, administrative practices, etc. Nevertheless, standing together on issues of more urgent importance, believers are able to accept one another and defer to one another when third-order issues are in question.

III. WHAT DISTINGUISHES BAPTISTS FROM EVERYONE ELSE?

Having considered the need for confessions of faith and affirmation of a confession of faith, let's now consider some Baptist history and Baptist distinctives. As we look at the New Testament, and particularly the book of Acts, we see that the first Christian churches adhered closely to the teachings of Christ and His apostles and thus practiced believer's baptism by immersion. Therefore, New Testament churches in this sense were Baptist churches. However, the distinctive biblical practice of believer's baptism and strict adherence to apostolic doctrine was largely lost by 400 A.D. This happened once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. At that time, the Church entered the "Dark" Ages, or the Middle Ages, as Roman Catholic Dogma generally ruled Christendom. Therefore, modern Baptists can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, some Baptists have tried to trace an unbroken line of Baptists back to John the Baptist. However, this is suspect. Frankly, it's inaccurate scholarship. It's untrue historical revisionism.

At any rate, the Reformation is most often associated with Martin Luther and his "protest" of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholics in 1517 A.D. He wasn't the first or the only person to have perceived the problems with Roman Catholic teaching. Similar reformers were popping up all over Europe: Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, Bucer in Strasbourg, and Cranmer in England. And before them, and throughout the Middle Ages, voices had risen which sought to recover the gospel of grace. We could point to John Wycliffe in the 14th century or John Hus in the 15th century or even a medieval peasant who lay his head on his pillow at night trusting in Christ and not his own efforts for his salvation. Certainly, God never left his church without a faithful witness. But, it was Luther that God used in a unique way to recover the faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel so that the church would never be the same again. There were five clear theological statements that developed during the Reformation that formed the heart of the theological battle against Roman Catholicism. They are:

Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone is the authority for the church's belief and practice.

Solus Christus – Christ alone is the basis of our salvation, not any other.

Sola Gratia – Salvation is not a matter of man's will, but of God's grace alone.

Sola Fide – Justification is by grace alone through the gift of faith alone, not by works.

Soli Deo Gloria – Salvation is for the glory of God alone.

In short, a rebirth of biblical theology took place during the Protestant Reformation. At the heart of this rebirth was a recovered understanding of biblical soteriology (the study of salvation). Whereas the Roman Catholic system had degenerated into salvation by works, the reformers recovered the biblical teachings of God's sovereignty in salvation, salvation by God's grace alone and the absolute authority of Scripture. I've pointed this out before, but it bears repeating, the conflict between Luther and Catholic-supporting Erasmus was at the theological epicenter of the Reformation. What was the conflict? Basically, Catholics held to an optimistic view of man's will, which meant he could achieve salvation on his own; whereas Luther's view, the biblical view, said salvation must be of God. Tragically, many Baptists and other Protestants have never read Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and have unknowingly backslidden into more of a Catholic view on man's will than a biblical one.

Anyway, out of the Reformation came several strands of Protestants, or those who protested against the abuse and heresy of Rome. Of course, there were the Lutherans, who affirmed a biblical understanding of the Gospel, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. But sadly, they didn't shake loose of some Catholic errors, especially in their understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Their views in those areas were not identical to Catholicism, yet very close.

Also, there were Anabaptists, whose main distinctive was the rejection of infant baptism for believer's baptism. That's good, however, Anabaptists questioned original sin, rejected civil authority, embraced pacifism, and even in some extreme cases, polygamy and anarchy. So, please don't confuse Baptists with Anabaptists. They are very different theologically. The Amish and Mennonites are the modern heirs of Anabaptists.

Another grouping from the Reformation are what are called the "Reformed" churches. Presbyterians, Congregationalists and the Church of England fall in this category. They emphasized free grace and God's sovereignty in salvation, a Protestant view of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and God's ongoing work in making each believer's life more holy. Out of this last group (the Reformed churches) came the Baptists. So our closest theological cousins aren't Catholics or Anabaptists or even Lutherans, but Reformed churches.

As early as 1608, some in the Church of England, such as John Smyth, were rejecting infant baptism. By the middle of the 1600s, a small but growing number of Congregationalists in England were becoming Baptists. Many of these Congregationalists were also known as Puritans, and it is out of this Reformed stream, rather than the Anabaptist stream, that Baptists in America came. Fact is, colonial America was Puritan/Reformed. Thus, early Baptists in America were overwhelmingly reformed in their theology. Many Christians and Baptists today don't like to admit this, but it is indisputable, historical fact.

Well, what are the beliefs of Baptists that distinguish them from other Christian groups? Baptist distinctives include the following:

1. The baptism of believers by immersion. Only believers who give a credible profession of faith are to be baptized.
2. Regenerate church membership. The local church should aim to have a membership composed only of those who are genuinely regenerate. Therefore, Baptists do not include in their membership: infants, people from the wider society without a credible profession of faith, or persons who persist in unrepentant sin.
3. Separation of church and state. This involves an emphasis on the principle of religious liberty. The state (governmental authority) may favor no creed or church. The "separation of church and state" does not mean that Christians, God, and the Bible should have no influence on the government. Rather, it means that the government may not legislate the human conscience. God alone is the Lord of conscience. The government may not establish or favor any religious organization.

4. Liberty of conscience. This is connected to the previous distinctive. It means that the human conscience is free from all external force of coercion. The government may not command the consciences of the public.

Now, at the time that some Puritans in England were becoming Baptists, in the new World of America, Roger Williams and eleven others in Providence, Rhode Island founded the first Baptist church in America in 1639. The Congregational authorities in Massachusetts had exiled them for their beliefs, and Williams sought a charter for the colony of Rhode Island that would specifically grant religious toleration. More and more Baptists began emerging in England, and many immigrated to America. Almost all of these late 17th and 18th century Baptists shared a Reformed, confessional understanding of the faith: A sovereign God saves us not through our good works or even our wise choice, but through His grace realized in Christ's work on the cross. These early American Baptists played significant roles in the founding of the United States of America. They were influential in the development of many of the governing principles set forth in our constitution.

Baptists also pioneered the world missions movement. For example, Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice were among the first missionaries ever sent out from America in 1812, then as Congregationalists. On their trip to India to work with William Carey, who was already a Baptist, they became convinced of believer's baptism. Rice returned to America to raise funds for missions. He founded what is now George Washington University, and also helped form the Baptist General Convention for Foreign Missions, which was the precursor to the Southern Baptist Convention. Also known as the Triennial convention (because it met once every 3 years), it was intended to help churches cooperate in financing and sending missionaries.

Baptists in America grew at an astonishing rate, particularly during times of revival and during the First and Second Great Awakenings. In 1790, there were only 3,100 Baptists in Kentucky in 42 churches. Thirty years later, the population of Kentucky had grown sevenfold. But the number of Baptists and their churches had grown by over a factor of ten. Because of their emphasis on personal conversion, the simplicity of the Gospel, relatively informal worship services, individual conscience, and the egalitarianism of congregational church governance, Baptists had a particular appeal to people in the new democratic nation.

Religious liberty did not mean religious anarchy, however. Most Baptists continued to hold to reformed confessional standards, exemplified by the widespread embrace of *The 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith* – again a version of which is used by our church today.

In 1845, the American Baptists, and the Baptist General Convention they founded, split over 3 issues:

- (1) Should a central sending board, or local sending boards, send missionaries? The South wanted a central board.
- (2) Could slaveholders be sent as missionaries? The South said the convention didn't have the authority to decide.
- (3) The South wanted to meet more often than every three years.

At about this time, and a little later, almost all of the major Protestant denominations would split on north/south lines. Baptist churches in the South split off in 1845, and formed the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), founding at the same time two sending boards: the Foreign Mission Board, known today as the International Mission Board; and the Home Mission Board, known today as the North American Mission Board. Following World War II the Southerners expanded into northern areas and built a large missionary outreach overseas. In the 1980's the perception of theological drift led conservative Southern Baptists to take over the leadership of the convention and remold it in what has been termed "The Conservative Resurgence." Such a recovery of historic, conservative doctrine is the first time this has happened in a major American Protestant denomination. They now number 16 million, the largest Baptist group.

Baptist churches in the North split from ones in the South over the issue of slavery and formed their own denominations. One prominent northern denomination that eventually arose in 1933 out of the Northern Baptist denomination was the General Association of Regular Baptists (G.A.R.B.). This denomination formed as a break-off from the theological liberalism which had sadly infiltrated various Baptist seminaries and the Northern Baptist Convention (post-World War II known as "American Baptist"). This theological turmoil continued into the 1940's among Northern Baptists and created problems in the area of missions. The issue of liberalism in missions led to the establishment of Conservative

Baptists in 1947. Further, many theologically conservative Baptists, both in the North and the South, became totally independent. This is where our church comes in. Calvary Baptist Church at one time belonged to the G.A.R.B.C. before becoming an Independent Church.

I give you this brief history lesson to make this simple point: Since the time of the Reformation, our Baptist theology has formed the heart of who we are as Baptists. With this background in mind, we can now turn our attention in this series to the biblical doctrines that define us in our Articles of Faith.

IV. OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH

As I've said a few times already, our statement of faith is historically based on *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith of 1833*. Much of the wording is identical. Some changes (mostly additions) were necessary to provide further doctrinal detail for refuting contemporary heresies and to set forth a biblical response to developing cultural issues. Nevertheless, the doctrinal core of *The 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession* is still present in our Articles of Faith. This is why I've provided a side-by-side presentation of both statements so you can see the similarities. In coming weeks we're going to walk through the content of our statement of faith. And I'll just say, I'm not going to get as detailed as I'd like because this series would end up taking decades if we really did it justice by probing the depths of the doctrines. I'm not going to do that. Like I said, we're going to try and keep it basic. But, I do feel it important for us to know what it says and why.

Well quickly, here is a chart² that shows broadly where our statement of faith and *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith* fall in comparison to the beliefs of broad Christendom. I've marked if the articles are found only in our Articles of Faith or in *The 1833 New Hampshire Confession*.

First, our Articles of Faith have articles that can be classified as *Historically Christian*. These are articles that would be affirmed by any historic Christian creed. I say "*Historically Christian*" because there have been two great divides in Christianity in the past 1,000 years. The first was the Reformation in the 1500s, which led to the recovery of the gospel and a split between Protestant churches and the Roman Catholics. The second was a liberal/conservative or liberal/fundamentalist divide - not liberal/conservative in a political sense, but in regards to Scripture and authority. During the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries there was a move away from traditional beliefs that the Bible is God's inerrant and sufficient Word in all its teachings. In its place people began to believe and teach that our final authority is not Scripture, but human reason. This divide affected almost every Christian church. So, whereas in 1700 no Christian church would deny that Christ was born of a virgin, by 1900 many denied it. In America, the battle really exploded in the 1920s and 1930s between Liberals (also called Modernists) and Fundamentalists. Liberals denied the fundamentals of the Faith (like the Trinity) whereas Fundamentalists said fundamental doctrines must be believed to be a Christian.

The next classification on the chart is labeled *Reformation Recovery*. These are the articles that mark us out as a Protestant church in the tradition of the Reformation, over and against Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy. We believe we should love and care for Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox folks. However, we feel these religions have made crucial errors in these specific matters, such as justification, that cannot be overlooked.

Then on the chart you'll notice one *Baptist* article that distinguishes us from the rest of our Protestant brethren, such as Presbyterians, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, etc. We love them and have unity on the Gospel in other matters. For example, we're happy to have a Presbyterian preach in our pulpit and affirm there are many wonderful and godly men and women in such denominations. Yet, we believe they are incorrect in their understanding of baptism. We wish it weren't the case, and yet because it affects the very nature of the visible church - who is part of that visible body of Christ and who is not - we cannot ignore the teaching of Scripture. Jesus and the Apostles clearly taught that baptism is for believers only, not believers and their infants.

²See Below.

Lastly, we are a *Congregational* church in our polity – our government that is. Again, we have to divide with our other Protestant brethren because we think that the final authority in matters of life in doctrine is not a bishop or priest somewhere (Episcopal), or a General Assembly (Presbyterian), but the local congregation gathered under the Lordship of Christ, unified by the Holy Spirit, and submitted to God’s holy Word.

Therefore, the doctrinal statement of Calvary Baptist could be summarized as historically Christian, in the tradition of the Reformation, Baptist, and Congregational in polity.

Doctrine is central to who we are. And starting next week we’ll explore it. Let’s pray.

Article	Historically Christian	Reformation Recovery	Baptist	Congregational
Of the Scriptures		•		
Of God	•			
Of Creation (Only CBC)		•		
Of the Fall of Man	•			
Of the Virgin Birth (Only CBC)	•			
Of the Way of Salvation		•		
Of Justification		•		
Of the Freeness of Salvation	•			
Of Grace in Regeneration		•		
Of Repentance and Faith		•		
Of God’s Purpose of Grace		•		
Of Sanctification (Only NH 1833)		•		
Of Perseverance of the Saints		•		
Of the Harmony of the Law and Gospel (Only NH 1833)		•		
Of the Church				•
Of Baptism (a)			•	
Of the Lord’s Supper (b)		•		
Of the Lord’s Day	•			
Of Satan and Spirit Beings (Only CBC)	•			
Of Civil Government	•			
Of the Righteous and the Wicked		•		
Of Future Events	•			
Of Stewardship	•			
Of Marriage	•			
Of Separation		•		