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THE FAMILY

EDITORIAL

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The Family: A Baptist Doctrine

Opponents of Baptist identity and of the Conservative Resurgence have periodically complained when the Southern Baptist Convention changes its confession, or even that it changes its confession. Historically and theologically, however, altering a confession should not be seen as unusual, although it has been and ought to be done with the utmost of care. Drawing upon the widely accepted *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* written in 1833, Edgar Young Mullins led the Southern Baptist Convention to affirm its first *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925. In 1963, under the leadership of Herschel Harold Hobbs, the convention revised its earlier confession, issuing it under the same name. In 2000, L. Paige Patterson led in the adoption of yet another revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, primarily in order to reaffirm the truthfulness and inerrancy of Scripture. Thus, every forty years or so, the convention has seen fit to engage in a systemic review of their confession.

In the various preambles of their confession, the Southern Baptist Convention appealed to three principles regarding the practice of confessional change. First, they affirmed that the biblical deposit of truth does not change: “Each generation of Christians bears the responsibility of guarding the treasury of truth that has been entrusted to us (2 Timothy 1:14).”¹ Second, they affirmed that the unchanging Scripture, about which we are ever learning, must be applied to dynamic fluctuations in human society: “A living faith must experience a growing understanding of truth and must be continually interpreted and related to the needs of each new generation.”² Third, because Baptists consider confessions derivative of Scripture, they are revisable according to need: “That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility.” As a result, the convention concluded, “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

Thus, as the messengers of the free churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have engaged in the proclamation of Scripture within a

¹From the 2000 revision.

²From the 1963 revision.

³From the 1925 confession.

fallen culture, they have been led to address their formal confession more specifically to major issues as they feel led by the Spirit “at any time.” For instance, in response to radical cultural challenges to the biblical definition of marriage and the family, Southern Baptists added an entirely new article, entitled, “The Family,” to its confession in 1998.⁴ Divided into four paragraphs, the article considers the definition of the family, marriage, the husband and the wife, and children.

This is not the first time a Baptist confession has addressed the biblical doctrines of marriage and family.⁵ With a pedigree stretching back to at least the seventeenth century and a need to witness to a corrupt culture, Southern Baptists at the turn of the twenty-first century rose to the challenge of teaching the family from a biblical perspective. In appreciation, the Riley Center at Southwestern, directed by Evan Lenow, in cooperation with the Center for Theological Research, hosted a conference entitled “The Baptist Distinctive of the Family” at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in September 2007. The following essays were delivered during that conference and are printed here, *inter alia*, for use within our local churches and in the “The Christian Home” course required of students at Southwestern.

In this issue, Russell D. Moore challenges believers to be biblically faithful rather than culturally captive in their sexual morality. Evan Lenow deepens that challenge by reviewing hermeneutical tactics used by various errant readings of Romans 1:26–27, where Paul condemns homosexuality. This editor delivers a passionate piece regarding the theology, history, and practice of bringing the Word of God daily into the home. John M. Yeats, an adoptive parent, offers an appealing theological rationale for Christian couples to practice the adoption of children. Finally, Thomas White issues a compelling call for men to overcome various falsehoods and recover the biblical model of male leadership. The editors hope that current and future church leaders find these essays valuable as they address crises challenging the integrity of the family in our churches and communities.

⁴Dorothy Kelley Patterson, “Article XVIII: The Family,” in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America’s Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 183–91.

⁵*An Orthodox Creed*, Art. XLIII, in *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 48.2 (2006): 175–76; *Second London Confession*, Art. XXV, in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 284–85.