

ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS EVANGELICALS?

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In this essay I will answer the question by comparing the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) 2000 to the 1990 edited volume *Evangelical Affirmations* (EA).¹ While that book is dated, it offers eight basic doctrines and nine broad evangelical affirmations that serve as a basis for comparison with the most recent BFM, which followed it by a decade. I will not include any interaction with the historical backgrounds of these two documents. Neither will I concern myself with the heated debate about whether the term “evangelical” has any meaning and advantage today.² Rather, these affirmations will serve as a standard-bearer/historical expression of evangelical theology for comparison purposes only.³

I. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

EA includes a statement about evangelical identity.⁴ If our question is to be answered, lining up this statement about evangelical identity with Southern Baptist identity is a good place to start.

As EA offers: “Evangelicals are to be identified by what is sometimes called the material or content principle of evangelicalism. They hold to all of the most basic doctrines of the Bible.” What immediately follows is a list of those eight doctrines (*italicized*), all of which correspond to

¹Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

²For further discussion see “What Does ‘Evangelical’ Mean?” *Christianity Today*, January 2020, with links to earlier discussions; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/evangelical-distinctives.html>.

³To orient readers to my theological and denominational identity, and moving from broader to narrower categories, I identify myself as a Christian, a Protestant (affirming the early ecumenical creeds and the principles of Protestantism), an evangelical, baptistic, and a Southern Baptist.

⁴EA articulates its nine affirmations then offers three areas of “evangelical identity”: belief in the gospel, or gospel centeredness; the material principle of evangelicalism, which consists of the basic doctrines that I discuss next; and the formal principle of evangelicalism, which is the truthfulness (inerrancy) and authority of Scripture.

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articles that appear in the BFM (which I cite for comparison purposes).⁵

1. *The triuneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit*: “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being” (BFM 2). Moreover, this article extends the treatment of trinitarian doctrine into three detailed sections titled “A. God the Father,” “B. God the Son,” and “C. God the Holy Spirit.”
2. *The pre-existence, incarnation, full deity and humanity of Christ united in one person*: “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. . . . He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man” (BFM 2 B first part).
3. *His [Christ’s] sinless life, his authoritative teaching; his substitutionary atonement*: “Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin” (BFM 2 B second part).
4. *His [Christ’s] bodily resurrection from the dead, his second coming to judge the living and the dead*: “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. . . . He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission” (BFM 2 B third part).
5. *The necessity of holy living*: “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 maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life” (BFM 4 C).

⁵In citations of these two documents, the numbers correspond to the respective BFM and EA numbering of the doctrinal *loci*. For the sake of clarity, the BFM’s Roman numerals have been changed to Arabic numerals (e.g., IV to 4). Also, the BFM’s “Saviour” has been rendered “Savior” for an American audience.

6. *The imperative of witnessing to others about the gospel:* “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. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (BFM 11).
7. *The necessity of a life of service to God and humankind:* “All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives 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 Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. 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” (BFM 15).
8. *And the hope in a life to come:* “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 dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord” (BFM 10).

This EA statement about evangelical identity concludes with warrant for these eight basic beliefs: “These doctrines emerge from the Bible and are summarized in the Apostles’ Creed and the historic confessions of evangelical churches.” The BFM demonstrates its agreement with the biblical foundation for these beliefs by the fact that for each doctrinal *locus* articulated, it furnishes a lengthy list of biblical passages in support. As for the EA’s appeal to the Apostles’ Creed and historical evangelical confessions, the committee responsible for writing the BFM 2000 acknowledged its indebtedness to “the confession history” of the Southern Baptist Convention, with specific reliance on the two earlier versions of the BFM: the BFM 1925 and the BFM 1963.⁶ Moreover, a quick glance at the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* (1853), upon which the BFM 1925 was based, reveals that the series of BFMs significantly mirrors the order and content of (most of) the doctrinal *loci* of that earlier confession.⁷

From these EA examples of basic evangelical doctrines, it becomes immediately apparent that the doctrinal commitment of Southern Baptists aligns extensively, if not completely, with “the material or content principle of evangelicalism.” Thus, an initial answer to our question is “yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals.”

Still, a deeper look can be taken at the nine affirmations and the BFM 2000: Scripture, God, humankind and sin, salvation, the church, last things, the pursuit of justice, religious liberty, and the family. For each entry, I cite the BFM’s articulation, followed by the EA’s articulation (along with statements in the EA’s discussion of evangelical identity), concluding with a few brief observations about commonalities and differences between the two articulations.

⁶Adrian Rogers, “Message from the Chairman of the Committee,” Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000, <https://bfm.sbc.net/message-from-the-chairman-of-the-committee/>.

⁷In terms of historic baptistic confessions of faith, the *Second London Confession* of 1689 was modified slightly and renamed the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742). All of the founders of the Southern Baptist Confession (1845) adhered to the *Philadelphia Confession*. The *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* (1833; revised 1853) was the basis for the development of the BFM 1925, the first official confession of faith for the Southern Baptist Convention. The BFM 1925 was modified in 1963 and 2000.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

BFM 1. *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is 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. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. 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. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

EA 4. *Holy Scripture*

We affirm the complete truthfulness and the full and final authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God written. The appropriate response to it is humble assent and obedience. The Word of God becomes effective by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through it. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit creates faith and provides a sufficient doctrinal and moral guide for the church. Just as God's self-giving love to us in the gospel provides the supreme motive for the Christian life, so the teaching of Holy Scripture informs us of what are truly acts of love. Attempts to limit the truthfulness of inspired Scripture to "faith and practice," viewed as less than the whole of Scripture, or worse, to assert that it errs in such matters as history or the world of nature, depart not only from the Bible's representation of its own veracity, but also from the central tradition of the Christian churches. [hermeneutical principles follow but are not reproduced here]

EA 3. *Evangelical Identity*

Evangelicals have a third distinguishing mark. In accordance with the teaching of their Lord they believe the Bible to be the final and authoritative source of all doctrine. This is often called the formative or forming principle of evangelicalism. Evangelicals hold the Bible to be God's Word and, therefore, completely true and trustworthy (and this is what we mean by the words infallible and inerrant). It is the authority by which they seek to guide their thoughts and their lives.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of the doctrine of Scripture are quite evident. Both documents affirm:

1. the inspiration of Scripture
2. the complete truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture
3. (put differently) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture
4. the full and final authority of Scripture for doctrine, moral conduct, and ecclesial practice
5. the Holy Spirit's illumination of Scripture so that it becomes transformative.⁸

Differences between the BFM and EA include:

1. more details about inerrancy in the EA, which chastises contemporary perspectives that limit Scripture's truthfulness to salvific matters and/or affirm errors in matters of history and the natural sciences⁹
2. an EA articulation of how to interpret Scripture.¹⁰

Though the BFM does not address these two matters, Southern Baptists mirror the EA's reprimand of aberrant contemporary views of Scripture's

⁸Though not cited in this section, the BFM underscores the Spirit's illumination of Scripture: "The Holy Spirit inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth" (BFM 2 C. God the Holy Spirit).

⁹Paul Feinberg's classic evangelical essay on the inerrancy of Scripture treats in detail these disconcerting viewpoints. Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 267-304.

¹⁰EA 4 continues: "The meaning of Scripture must neither be divorced from its words nor dictated by reader response. The inspired author's intention is essential to our understanding of the text. No Scripture must be interpreted in isolation from other passages of Scripture. All Scripture is true and profitable, but Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. The truth of any single passage must be understood in light of the truth of all passages of Scripture. Our Lord has been pleased to give us the whole corpus of Scripture to instruct and guide his church." The final statement in BFM 1—"All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation"—provides an interpretive principle regarding a Christocentric hermeneutic.

truthfulness/inerrancy and affirm its hermeneutical principles.¹¹

If the inerrancy and full authority of Scripture is the formal principle of evangelicalism, then Southern Baptists are clearly evangelicals on this foundation matter.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

As this doctrinal locus is oriented in completely different directions in the BFM (a classic definition of God; e.g., his being, works, infinite perfections, and revelation as triune) and EA (e.g., the truthfulness of God's revelation, the rejection of irrational theologies that deny objective truth), any comparison would not be fruitful.

IV. THE DOCTRINES OF HUMANKIND AND SIN

BFM 3. *Man*

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's 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. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill 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 person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

¹¹On the matter of Scripture's truthfulness from a Southern Baptist perspective, see R. Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classical Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views of Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 29-58.

EA 2. *Creation and Fall*

We affirm that the triune God created heaven and earth, and made human beings, both male and female, in his own image. In his providence God upholds all things and reveals himself through creation and history. Because of Adam's fall, all became sinners and stand under God's righteous judgment. Human rebellion against God shows itself today in many ways: such as in atheistic denials of God's existence; in functional atheism that concedes God's existence but denies his relevance to personal conduct; in oppression of the poor and helpless; in occult concepts of reality; in the abuse of earth's resources; and in theories of an accidental naturalistic evolutionary origin of the universe and human life; and in many other ways. As a result of the fall of the race into sin, human beings must be born again to new life in Christ. They can be pardoned and redeemed by faith in Christ alone.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of the doctrine of humanity and the fall into sin are again evident. Both documents affirm:

1. God's creation of human beings in his image and, more specifically, as male-gendered image bearers and female-gendered image bearers¹²
2. the originating sin that resulted in the fall
3. the fall's tragic consequence that all human beings become sinners and are liable to God's righteous judgment, that is, divine condemnation
4. the only hope of rescue from this condition of fallenness and liability to suffer punishment is for God by his grace to regenerate sinners, pardoning them, redeeming them, and giving them new life in Christ whom they embrace by faith alone.

Differences between the two documents include:

1. the BFM's emphasis on (a) the sacredness of God's special act of creating human beings in his image and (b) Christ's redemptive

¹²The word "gender" here is used as a synonym for "sex" or, more specifically, "biological sex," a reference to the genetic, physiological, and anatomical aspects of maleness and femaleness. For further discussion see Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), ch. 2.

- work for all, both of which underscore that human beings of all races are full of dignity and worthy of respect and love
2. the details of the originating sin, with the BFM ascribing it to the generic “man” who transgressed through the temptation of Satan, and EA specifying it to be the sin of Adam without mention of Satanic enticement
 3. the particulars of the consequence of the fall for human posterity: (a) the BFM offers details about people’s inheritance of a sinful nature and “an environment inclined toward sin” and affirms that “as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation;” (b) EA describes several lines of evidence of human sinfulness, including atheism, oppression of other human beings, occultism, environmental waste, and evolutionary worldviews.

Southern Baptists are in significant agreement with the evangelical articulation of the doctrines of humankind and sin, with the differences being primarily modes of emphasis and expression.

V. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

BFM 4. *Salvation*

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

[This opening statement is followed by four definitions of regeneration (along with the human responses of repentance and faith), justification, sanctification, and glorification.]

BFM 5. *God’s Purposes of Grace* [a summary, not a citation]

This section treats two divine purposes of grace: election, which is defined as “the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies

sinner”; and perseverance of the saints, which affirms that “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.”

EA 1. *Jesus Christ and the Gospel* [a summary, not a citation]

This affirmation focuses on the person and work of Christ, underscoring classical Christological truths about his deity, incarnation, humanity, substitutionary death, and resurrection. These truths “are essential to the gospel,” which EA compares with contemporary false gospels that cannot save. For fallen human beings to know the redemption offered in Christ, his followers must bear witness by sharing the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and so “accomplish Christ’s work in the world.”

EA 1. *Evangelical Identity*

Evangelicals believe, first of all, the gospel as it is set forth in the Bible. The word evangelical is derived from the biblical term *euangelion* meaning “good news.” It is the Good News that God became man in Jesus Christ to live and die and rise again from the dead in order to save us from our sin and all its consequences. The Savior’s benefits and his salvation are bestowed upon us freely and graciously and are received through personal faith in Christ. They are not conditioned on our merit or personal goodness but are based wholly on the mercy of God.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of this doctrine are again evident in terms of both the accomplishment of salvation, the application of salvation, and the announcement of salvation.

1. the accomplishment of salvation: the Son’s incarnation and earthly life, Christ’s substitutionary death involving the shedding of his blood, and his resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and eternal redemption
2. the application of salvation: (a) regarding the divine initiative,

God's mighty acts to save are free, unconditioned, gracious, and merciful; (b) regarding the human response to appropriate these divine benefits: repentance and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, apart from any human merit or personal goodness

3. the announcement of salvation: believers are obligated to share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit so fallen human beings may be saved.

The one major difference between the two documents is the BFM's detailing of the mighty acts of God to save: election, regeneration, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Though most of these divine benefits are points of discussion among both Southern Baptists and evangelicals—for example, the conditional or unconditional nature of election, the *ordo salutis*, the perseverance of the saints—these are intramural debates and not points of division between the two traditions.

As with earlier doctrines, Southern Baptists share much in common with the evangelical formulation of salvation.

VI. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

BFM 6. *The Church*

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

BFM 7. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the

ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

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 Savior, 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's 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.

BFM 14. *Cooperation*

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation 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 cooperate 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 cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

EA 5. *The Church*

We affirm that the church is a worshiping and witnessing community of Christians who profess faith in Christ and submit to his authority. Christ is building his church where his Word is preached and his name confessed. He sustains his church by the power of the Holy Spirit. We affirm that the church is to provide for corporate worship on the part of believers, the instruction of the faithful in the Word of God and its application, and the fellowship, comfort, exhortation, rebuke, and sharing in the needs of the entire body of Christ. In a day of lax doctrine and even more lax discipline, we specially affirm that Scripture requires the defense of sound doctrine, the practice of church discipline, and a call for renewal.

We affirm the mission of the church to be, primarily, that of evangelism of the lost through witness to the gospel by life and by word; and secondarily, to be salt and light to the whole world as we seek to alleviate the burdens and injustices of a suffering world. Though some are specially called to one ministry or another, no believer is exonerated from the duty of bearing witness to the gospel or of providing help to those in need. We distance ourselves from any movement that seeks to establish a world church on the premise of a religious pluralism that denies normative Christian doctrines. Rather we encourage efforts that help believers and faithful churches move toward fellowship and unity with one another in the name of Christ, the Lord of the church.

These two documents give evidence of what I refer to elsewhere as *mere ecclesiology* and *more ecclesiology*. As for the first category, “a *mere ecclesiology* is not an approach that trivializes this doctrine or is reductionistic or minimizes differences of perspective on ecclesiology. As I use it, *mere* indicates ‘common ground,’ in the sense of that which is central to the subject matter.” As for the second category, *more ecclesiology* engages “the task of addressing specific beliefs and practices of different churches and denominations. . . . The essential nature of the church, its core ministries,

its principal leadership framework, and the like that represent the common ground shared by all churches are expressed in different characteristics, functions, and structures in particular churches and denominations.”¹³ Within this framework, then, EA represents *mere ecclesiology* and the BFM represents *more ecclesiology*.

In terms of *mere ecclesiology*, EA emphasizes the church as “a worshiping and witnessing community” composed of Christians under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As a worshiping community, the church provides believers with corporate worship services, instruction in and application of Scripture, and opportunities for fellowship among its members. In terms of being a witnessing community, the missional church engages primarily in evangelism (a duty incumbent upon all its members) and secondarily in acts of good works.

In keeping with a *more ecclesiology* approach, the BFM goes into detail about church government (Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and congregational), covenant membership (baptized believers) and its duties (congregational Southern Baptist churches employ democratic processes in, for example, voting on budgets and officers), the ordinances/sacraments (Southern Baptist churches practice believer’s baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper as a memorial rite), and church officers (many Southern Baptist churches have both pastors and deacons) within a complementarian framework (the application of which is a growing point of debate among Southern Baptist churches). Interestingly, only EA mentions church discipline, which is gaining more and more attention in Southern Baptist churches.

Despite these two different approaches to ecclesiology, both documents express some commonalities:

1. the essential identity of the church as a worshiping, Worded (centered on both the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and the inspired Word, Scripture),¹⁴ and witnessing community
2. the crucial importance of evangelism
3. submission of the church and its members to the Lordship of Christ
4. the importance of fellowship and unity among Christians and their churches, expressed at the end of EA and featured in a

¹³Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 15-18.

¹⁴For further discussion see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 110-17.

well-developed separate article (14) in the BFM.¹⁵

I posit that most Southern Baptists would fully approve of the mere ecclesiology of EA, and that a significant swath of baptistic evangelicals would fully approve of the more ecclesiology of the BFM.

VII. THE DOCTRINE OF THE LAST THINGS

BFM 10. *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 dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

EA 9. *Second Coming and Judgment*

We affirm that Christ will return in power and glory to bring full and eternal salvation to his people and to judge the world. This prospect of the Lord's return to vindicate his holiness and subjugate all evil should accelerate our witness and mission in the world. We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism). We affirm the preaching of ultimate hope in and through Christ. In an age of anxiety and despair, the

¹⁵“Christ’s people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation 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 cooperate 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 cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ’s people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament” (BFM 14).

blessed hope of God's ultimate victory is not only a warning of divine judgment, but a wonderful hope that gives light and meaning to the human heart.

As noted above, one of the essential doctrines embraced by evangelicals is eschatology. EA underscores its basic contours, which share much in common with the BFM:

1. the powerful and glorious return of Jesus Christ who, according to the divine promise, will return personally and visibly to the earth
2. Christ's return will vindicate his holiness, subjugate all evil, and manifest God's ultimate victory by bringing the world to its proper consummation
3. the bestowal of full and eternal salvation upon the righteous who, having been saved only through the work of Christ and resurrected in their glorified bodies, will receive their eternal reward
4. the meeting out of God's righteous judgment upon the unrighteous, who will experience eternal separation from God.

Points of difference include:

1. the BFM gives locational details of the final state of the righteous—eternity in heaven with Christ—and that of the unrighteous—hell, the place of everlasting punishment
2. EA underscores that the blessed hope of Christ's return should accelerate Christian witness and mission to the world; such evangelistic fervor should not be mitigated by the false hope of universal salvation.

Southern Baptists share much overlap with evangelicals in eschatology. Indeed, the two articulations are virtually identical but for the inclusion of particular details.

VIII. PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

BFM 16. *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. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

BFM 15 (cited above, repeated here in part)

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

EA 7. *Human Rights and Righteousness* (first paragraph)

We affirm that God commands us to seek justice in human affairs whether in the church or in society. In accord with the biblical call for righteousness, God's people should model justice in social relationships and should protest, confront, and strive to alleviate injustice. We must respond to the plight of the destitute, hungry, and homeless; of victims of political oppression and gender or race discrimination, including apartheid; and of all others deprived of rightful protection under the law. We confess our own persistent sin of racism, which ignores the divine image in humankind.

Whereas the issue of a "Christian" approach to justice in society has reached a boiling point in our contemporary setting, both the BFM and EA articulate a brief posture toward its pursuit. Their commonalities include:

1. a divine command, and thus a Christian duty, to seek peace/justice (alternatively, to strive for the alleviation of injustice) for all human beings both in the church and in society
2. such pursuit is in accordance with (a) the biblical call for, or principle of, righteousness, and (b) the spirit and teachings of Christ

3. an extensive list of many injustices that Christians should oppose: war (unique to BFM), all forms of self-centeredness and evil, all forms of sexual immorality, marginalization, political oppression, discrimination, violation of human rights, and (in particular) deeply entrenched racism (with EA giving special attention to apartheid, a key evil at the time of EA's publication)
4. specific steps to pursue peace include (a) modeling justice in social relationships; (b) protesting, confronting, and striving to alleviate injustice; (c) accepting Christ's teachings and his law of love as set forth in the gospel; and (d) praying for Christ's coming reign of peace.

The only difference between the two documents is BFM's details about positive steps to which Christians are called in their pursuit of justice/peace: (1) providing for the needs of the marginalized, abuse victims, the elderly, and the like; and (2) advocating for the unborn and contending for the sanctity of all human life. Certainly, EA's statement about the protection of individual rights, such as the right to life, reflects the same positive concerns (EA 8).

Southern Baptists and evangelicals sound a similar call to pursue justice/peace and to fight against injustice.

IX. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

BFM 17. *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.

EA 8. *Religious Liberty*

We affirm the duty of state and society to provide religious liberty as a basic human right. We deplore any oppression to maintain or elicit religious commitments. We hold that civil government should not arbitrate spiritual differences, and that neither church nor mosque nor temple nor synagogue should use political power to enforce its own sectarian doctrines or practices. We do not consider laws to protect individual rights, such as the right to life or the freedom of anyone to confess his or her faith openly in society, to be a sectarian position.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulations of religious liberty are quite evident. Both documents affirm:

1. the separation of church and state is a basic principle
2. the state should provide and protect religious liberty; by this basic human right, churches, mosques, temples and synagogues are free to pursue their religious ends unencumbered by (a) state oppression (e.g., penalization of religious convictions, hinderances to full access to God), (b) preferential treatment of one religious expression over another, (c) imposition of taxes to support any form of religion, (d) arbitration of spiritual matters, and (e) interference in forming and proliferating religious convictions
3. because the state/civil government is ordained by God, the church should obey its laws insofar as they do not contradict the divine law; moreover, the church should avail itself only of spiritual means to carry on its work and never resort to the use of political power to enforce its own religious views
4. the only hope of rescue from this condition of fallenness and liability to suffer punishment is for God by his grace to regenerate sinners, pardoning them, redeeming them, and giving them new

life in Christ whom they embrace by faith alone.

Differences include:

1. the BFM's statement on the freedom of conscience, which cannot be constrained or coerced to accept anti-biblical or extra-biblical doctrines and rules
2. EA's denial that church advocacy of laws protective of individual rights (e.g., the right to life, religious freedom) should be considered a sectarian enterprise and thus forbidden by other principles of religious liberty.

Southern Baptists and evangelicals are a united voice on the issue of religious liberty.

X. THE FAMILY

BFM 18. *The Family*

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and

nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

EA 7. *Human Rights and Righteousness* (second paragraph)

We affirm the integrity of marriage, the permanence of the wife-husband relationship, the importance of the family for the care and nourishment of children, and the primary responsibility of parents for the instruction of their children.

This final doctrinal section may underscore two key points: (1) the rapid pace of the demise of the family from the time that EA articulated its position (1990) and when BFM expressed its view, and (2) the broad-tent nature of evangelicalism and the denominationally narrowed nature of the Southern Baptist Convention. In the first case, EA formulated a concise and context-appropriate statement that summarized the overall biblical picture of marriage and the family, while the BFM provided greater detail about key issues affecting those two institutions. In the second case, the BFM affirmed its denominational position of complementarianism, while EA did not take a stand because evangelicalism as a whole embraces both complementarianism and egalitarianism. It may be the case that a sizeable swath of evangelicals affirms the complementarianism of the BFM.

Again, there is widespread agreement between Southern Baptists and evangelicals when it comes to the institution of marriage and the family.

XI. CONCLUSION

A comparison of *Evangelical Affirmations* and the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 leads me to answer our opening question with "yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals." Visually, I see them as the two circles of a Venn diagram, with significant commonality. Having come from a solidly evangelical background (M.Div. and Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical

Divinity School) and being a twenty-year veteran of the Southern Baptist Convention, I am cheered by this common ground between the two traditions that I dearly love.