#### Core Seminar

#### Membership Matters

**Session 1: What is our Statement of Faith?**

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***Teaching Suggestions from Jamie:***

*This teaching guide has four pieces: a description of what to do with the Introduction to the class; a section of Background on our statement of faith; a high-level overview of how to work your way through the Statement; and a more detailed, manuscript-form model of how the class might be taught.*

*The biggest challenge in teaching the Statement of Faith class is the ability to clearly explain the Statement without spending so much time on the first articles that you have to rush past the two on congregationalism and baptism that will be least familiar to most attendees. What I’ve tried to do in this document is to suggest where additional explanation is helpful to help you manage your time through the class. That means that this document is not intended as a manuscript that you would read through word-for-word but rather as a model that you can use as a guide. Time markers are included to help you through the class at a good pace. The bold time indicates what time you should pass the marker in the Sunday morning version; the non-bolded time is for use in the weekender edition of the class.*

*Here’s how I would suggest that you use this teaching guide: read through it two or three times before the class so you can familiarize yourself with my suggested approach. Then, when you’re actually teaching, use the “Background” section as a regular core seminar manuscript and then the high-level overview to guide yourself through the Statement of Faith.*

*One last resource will be useful: the Google Document shared with all the elders that is a “living” body of frequently asked questions. This is a good document to familiarize yourself with as part of your preparation. And if you encounter difficult questions during the class that aren’t on this FAQ document, please e-mail the membership pastoral assistant so he can add the question and a good answer to the Google Doc.*

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first name, religious upbringing in one word (e.g. Baptist, Buddhist, Non-Religious, etc.). Be strict on the two word intros as you don’t have a lot of time in this class.

**9:50** / 0:00

**Background**

The most important thing about a church is what it believes—and so we begin our Membership Matters class with our church’s statement of faith. I’ll start with some brief background and then we’ll dive into the actual document together. I’ll stop a few times for questions—but for the most part, if you have a question, just flag me down so we can get to it while it’s on your mind.

So first, some brief background. **Quick show of hands: How many of you have been in a church before that uses a statement of faith?** (insert suitable comment here) Basically, a statement of faith is a summary of the Bible’s most important teachings. We don’t think this document is inspired by God—but we think it’s useful to summarize words that *are* inspired so that as a church we can all agree that we’re reading Scripture the same way about the most important things. Part of joining this church is agreeing with the rest of the congregation on the most important teachings in the Bible. So if you want to join, you’ll need to sign the statement of faith. Today’s class is designed to help you understand the statement of faith so you can determine if you really do believe these things.

Our church’s statement of faith was adopted when our congregation first formed in 1878—and has basically[[1]](#footnote-1) remained unchanged. It, in turn, was taken from the New Hampshire Confession of Faith that was written in 1833. The New Hampshire confession was assembled as a statement of faith that could accommodate more and less Calvinistic Baptists[[2]](#footnote-2). If those theological terms don’t mean anything to you—don’t worry. This statement of faith remains one of the most commonly used statements of faith in the world—if not *the* most commonly used Protestant statement of faith.

Now, what makes the cut to get into a statement like this? Well, there are a lot of important things in the Bible that we can *disagree* on and still charitably and happily be members of the same church. But there are some things we *do* need to agree on if we’re going to be a church together. And it’s that list that makes up our statement of faith. Really of all the truths in Scripture, there are just two categories of statements that make it into a document like this: things that are essential to the message of the gospel. And things that, frankly, we’ve got to decide one way or another as a church—like what day we should meet on, article 15. In that sense, this statement is as simple and concise as possible. Since everyone needs to agree with this statement to join our church, we don’t want to hold out any unnecessary impediments to church membership.

Now, as we get into our statement of faith, we’re not going to go through strictly in order. Instead, we’ll work from the statements that are most commonly believed by Christians to those that are more unique to Baptist churches like ours. In your study guide, you’ll see four categories. We’ll start with those articles that are *Historically Christian*. That is, for most of the last 2000 years, pretty much any church calling itself Christian would affirm these. Next, we’ll look at some articles that are *Evangelical*. These are the articles that mark us out as a Protestant church—over and against our Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox friends.

And then we’re down to just two articles that would separate us from other Protestants. These would be our one *Baptist* article, on who should be baptized. And our article on who is finally responsible for making decisions in our church—that marks us out as a *Congregational* church. Because of these two, we gather in separate churches from non-Baptist Christian brothers and sisters. But we share great unity with them on the gospel and other matters. So we’ll let a Presbyterian preach for us on a Sunday morning, or partner with an Anglican church for evangelism. And when we show that kind of unity in the gospel despite these differences, I think it brings great glory to the gospel.

***Any questions so far?***

**High-Level Overview**

Articles in **bold** deserve the most time. Articles in *italics* can generally be passed over without further explanation. Articles in regular type require minimal explanation—often defining a few unfamiliar words or phrases.

***9:56*** */ 0:06*

*Historically Christian*

*II. Of the True God: define Jehovah*

III. Of the Fall of Man: summarize briefly

IV. Of the Way of Salvation: explain “wholly of grace” and the idea of “full atonement”

*VI. Of the Freeness of Salvation.*

VII. Of Grace in Regeneration: explain how rebirth inevitably results in a changed life

(turn your page over)

XII. Of the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel: explain that our “Mediator” is Jesus and “visible church” means the local church

*XIV(b). Of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*: start reading with “[baptism] is pre-requisite . . .” in the middle of the third line.

XV. Of the Christian Sabbath: explain what we do/don’t believe about Sunday.

XVI. Of Civil Government: we’re not anarchists.

XVIII. Of the World to Come: the end is coming; heaven and hell are real.

***Any questions so far?***

***10:07*** */ 0:17*

*Evangelical*

*I. Of the Scriptures.*

**V. Of Justification.** Explain the difference between a Protestant and Roman Catholic understanding of justification by defining the term “imputation.” Good to reference 2 Cor. 5:21.

VIII. Of Repentance and Faith. Not that God’s grace *cooperates* with our good works—but we’re saved by faith alone.

IX. **Of God’s Purpose of Grace**. The Bible clearly teaches election (Eph 1:4) *and* the free agency of man. Christians have attempted to reconcile those in different ways over time, but our church doesn’t take a stand on how they fit together—only that they are both Biblical ideas. Define the “use of means” as basically meaning evangelism (Rom 10:14).

*X. Of Sanctification.*

XI. Of the Perseverance of Saints: Define “superficial professor”

XVII. *Of the Righteous and the Wicked*.

**Any questions?**

***10:17*** */ 0:27*

*Congregational*

**XIII. Of a Gospel Church**: what makes us congregational is the phrase “governed by His laws.” As opposed to governed by our elders, a denominational official, presbytery, etc. A few things to point out:

* Final authority under Christ over issues of discipline and doctrine is the congregation.
* In the NT, when questions of discipline/doctrine arise in a local church[[3]](#footnote-3), the *congregation* is appealed to, rather than the pastor, elders, or even the apostles.
* That’s why we vote on important matters at our members’ meetings.
* We also see here that we have elders (“bishops/pastors”) who lead the church.
* In class #6 we’ll look at how the authority of elders fits with the authority of the congregation.

*Baptist*

**XIV(a). Of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**: our statement of faith defines baptism as something done *to a believer*. A few things to point out:

* We believe Jesus’ command to baptize applies to believers only—not to their infant children.
* To join our church, you must have been baptized as a believer *and* sign this statement, which means that you also believe that baptism is for believers only.
* If you’re thinking through this question, see me after class and I’ll direct you to some helpful resources[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Any last questions? Close in prayer.**

**Word-for-Word Model**

[For each article read the summary below, and then read the article itself (except where noted). Stop for questions where indicated.]

***9:56*** */ 0:06*

*Historically Christian*

II. Of the True God: We’ll start with article 2 where we state what we believe about God. “Jehovah,” by the way, is just the early 19th century way to translate God’s covenant name, “YHWH” that in your Bible is probably translated “The Lord.”

III. Of the Fall of Man: basically, we’ve all sinned. Not because God forced us to but because that’s who we are. We love sin more than God.

IV. Of the Way of Salvation: But, entirely by God’s grace, he’s provided a Savior for us—Jesus Christ—who lived a perfect life and died in our place, bearing the punishment we deserved for our sins.

[Read article IV] Key phrases here are “wholly of grace”—that is, we do nothing to earn our salvation. And “his death made a full atonement for our sins”—that is, Christ offered himself at the cross not merely as an example for us, but as our substitute, to take the punishment from God that we deserved.

VI. Then skip to article 6, Of the Freeness of Salvation[[5]](#footnote-5).

VII. Of Grace in Regeneration: [read it first] In other words, when we’re saved, we’re born again. And that new birth will inevitably result in a changed life. Not ‘cause we have to but because now, we *want* to obey God.

XII. Now turn your page over and look at article 12, “Of the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel.” [read it first] Our Mediator is Jesus Christ; the “visible church” simply means the institution of the local church.

XIV(b). Now skip to the second half of article 14. We’ll get to baptism in a minute, but starting in the middle of the third line: baptism “is pre-requisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord’s Supper, in which the members of the church by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination.” In other words, you need to be baptized to join a local church and to take the Lord’s supper there. Something pretty much all Christians have agreed on.

XV. Of the Christian Sabbath: we don’t believe that it’s sinful to work on Sunday (though some in our church do believe that)—but we do believe that Sunday is set apart for the worship of God, which is why we meet on Sunday, just as Christians have always have.

XVI. Of Civil Government: [read it first] In other words, we’re not anarchists. We believe that government is established by God—and we will pray for whoever is in power as the New Testament instructs us to.

XVIII. Of the World to Come: the last article tell us of the reality of a coming final judgment. No statement in here about the chronology of the end times—simply that the end *is* coming. But in order to join this church, you must believe with us in the reality of heaven and hell.

***Any questions so far?***

***10:07*** */ 0:17*

OK, moving to those statements that are Evangelical:

I. Of the Scriptures.

V. Of Justification. We believe that God declares sinners righteous—that is, he justifies them. And, while the Roman Catholic church teaches that we are only justified once we *become* perfect[[6]](#footnote-6), Protestants understand that the righteousness by which we’re justified is the perfect righteous of Jesus. Through faith, his perfect righteousness is given to us—or, more precisely, as this article states, is *imputed* to us. Think of 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

VIII. Of Repentance and Faith. And here’s another very crucial disagreement with the Roman church. It’s not that God’s grace *cooperates* with our own good works to “finish the job” so to speak. But we are saved by faith alone.

IX. Of God’s Purpose of Grace. The next article describes the Biblical idea of election. And you’ll see it exploring the apparent tension between God’s election—that he chose us before time began (Eph 1:4)—and what this article calls the “free agency of man” and the “use of means”—that is, evangelism. People have a choice to believe—and that they need to hear the word of Christ in order to believe (Rom 10:14).

X. Of Sanctification.

XI. Of the Perseverance of Saints. [read it first] In other words, how do we identify someone as a true follower of Christ as opposed to a “superficial professor” who professes Christ in name only? True believers “endure unto the end.”

XVII. Of the Righteous and the Wicked. The “righteous” are those who are declared righteous through faith in Christ; the “wicked is everyone else.” So, article 17: [read it now]

**Any questions?**

**10:17** / 0:27

And then let’s look at that congregational article, article 13. [read it first]

The phrase that makes us congregational is that phrase “governed by His laws.” In other words, we’re not finally governed by our elders or a denominational official or a presbytery. The final authority before Christ for what happens in this church is the congregation itself. That’s why we ask *all* of our members—and not just the elders—to agree to our statement of faith and our church covenant. That’s why the congregation votes on who the elders should be and votes on all membership additions, resignations, and cases of church discipline. We see in Scripture that in the local church, whenever there are disputes over discipline—that is, who should be a church member—or doctrine—that is, what the church believes—the apostles appeal not to the elders or even to the other apostles, but to the local church itself.

And yet you also see here that a church should have elders—which is the more modern word for bishop. We’ll look more in-depth at how the authority of the congregation and the elders fit together in class #6.

Finally, let’s look at the first part of article 14 that we passed over earlier. [read it first]

So when Jesus commanded his followers to baptize, we understand him to have meant the baptism of Christians, not Christians and their infant children. And to sign this statement, you need to agree with us on that. If you haven’t been baptized as a believer, you need to be baptized before joining our church. And every member of our church must share this understanding that baptism is for believers only. If this is a point you’ve not thought about before—or something you’re wrestling through—please see me after the class and I’ll point you to some helpful resources4.

**Any last questions?**

OK. So that’s our statement of faith. I’d encourage you to keep looking through it and let Nick or me know if you have any further questions. Let’s pray.

1. The words “by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations” were removed from article XV (Of the Christian Sabbath). The original wording could be interpreted in today’s language as suggesting that “sinful” things can be done on days other than Sunday—something with which we obviously would not agree. In its original context, “sinful recreations” likely meant any kind of activity deemed ill-suited to a Sunday. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The phrase “in the local church” is used here to separate out the Jerusalem Council—a one-time event in salvation history when the core nature of the gospel was still being settled. See 2 Corinthians 2:6 for an example of what was likely voting in a NT church. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Here are three suggested resources:

   Shortest: *A String of Pearls Unstrung* by Fred Malone which details Malone’s own journey from paedobaptism to believer’s baptism. Available on the bookstall.

   Best “all-around” resource: Steve Wellum’s chapter in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Tom Schreiner and Shawn Wright. Copies of this chapter are in the podium in the membership matters classroom.

   Most in-depth: *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* by Paul Jewett or the full book listed above by Schreiner and Wright. Both available on the bookstall. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Important to note that it simply makes clear that from our human perspective, the gospel is offered to all, in a John 3:16 sense. You do not have to believe in limited atonement to join CHBC—but our statement of faith in no way denies it. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Roman Catholic church teaches that we are only declared righteous once we become righteous (i.e. in purgatory). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)