

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

A Summarization written by Dr. Murray Baker

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ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

ARTICLE I

We affirm that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

We deny the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.

SUMMARY: The authority by which the Bible is able to instruct us on how to live rightly is God's authority. Jesus demonstrates this and so the authority of Christ and the Bible cannot be separated.

ARTICLE II

We affirm that as Christ is God and Man in one Person, so Scripture is, indivisible, God's Word in human language.

We deny that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin.

SUMMARY: Just as Jesus is fully God (divine) and fully man (human) in one person, so too the Bible is God's Word (divine) in human language (human). In a similar way, just as Jesus being human does not mean he sinned, so too the Bible being written in human language does not mean it has errors.

ARTICLE III

We affirm that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.

We deny that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct.

SUMMARY: The person and work of Jesus Christ is the central focus of the Bible. A method of interpreting the Bible which rejects or obscures this is incorrect.

ARTICLE IV

We affirm that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message. We deny that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to anyone anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

SUMMARY: The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible also uses the Bible to bring faith in its message. The Holy Spirit never teaches anything contrary to the Bible.

ARTICLE V

We affirm that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives. We deny that the natural man is able to discern spiritually the Biblical message apart from the Holy Spirit.

SUMMARY: The Holy Spirit enables believers to apply the Bible in their lives. Without the Holy Spirit people, in and of themselves, cannot spiritually understand the Bible's message.

ARTICLE VI

We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that Biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts. We deny that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, Biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives.

SUMMARY: In the Bible God's truth is found in statements that could be seen to be true or false and the truth in the Bible is absolute and objective. A statement is true if it corresponds to reality and in error if it is not factual.

This does not state that *all* the Bible is propositional statements (statements that can be seen to be true or false as they are) or that the message of the Bible is restricted to propositional truth claims. Some genres (forms) of the Bible do not necessarily use propositional statements (for example, poetry or prophecy are not all propositions - the prophet Joel stating that 'the moon will be turned to blood' [Joel 2:31] is not using a propositional statement). Stories may also lead to understanding a truth without explicitly giving a propositional statement (for example, parables). The Biblical *concept* of truth includes factuality, faithfulness and completeness.

ARTICLE VII

We affirm that the meaning expressed in each Biblical text is single, definite and fixed. We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application.

SUMMARY: Each biblical text has one meaning but may have multiple applications.

ARTICLE VIII

We affirm that the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations.

We deny that the distinction between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative.

SUMMARY: Some teachings and commands of the Bible apply in all cultures and situations; some apply only in particular situations. The distinction between universal and particular teachings is not determined from current situations.

ARTICLE IX

We affirm that the term hermeneutics, which historically signified the rules of exegesis, may properly be extended to cover all that is involved in the process of perceiving what the Biblical revelation means and how it bears on our lives.

We deny that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the "horizons" of the Biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly "fuse" in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture.

SUMMARY: 'Hermeneutics' can be taken to mean not only finding out what a passage in the Bible meant when it was written but also what it should mean now and how it should be applied. What a passage of the Bible originally meant controls how it should be applied.

ARTICLE X

We affirm that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms.

We deny that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message.

SUMMARY: Truth in the Bible comes through words in a wide variety of forms (genres). The limits of human language do not make the Bible unable to express God's message.

ARTICLE XI

We affirm that translations of the text of Scripture can communicate knowledge of God across all temporal and cultural boundaries.

We deny that the meaning of Biblical texts is so tied to the culture out of which they came that understanding of the same meaning in other cultures is impossible.

SUMMARY: Various translations of the Bible can adequately communicate knowledge of God throughout the centuries and across cultures. Bible texts are not so embedded in their own culture that their meaning cannot be understood in other cultures.

ARTICLE XII

We affirm that in the task of translating the Bible and teaching it in the context of each culture, only those functional equivalents which are faithful to the content of Biblical teaching should be employed. We deny the legitimacy of methods which either are insensitive to the demands of cross-cultural communication or distort Biblical meaning in the process.

SUMMARY: When translating or teaching the Bible, the translation or teaching should intend to bring about the same response in the current reader/hearer as was intended for the original reader/hearer of the Bible passage (that is functional equivalency). The Bible's meaning should not be distorted in translating or teaching.

ARTICLE XIII

We affirm that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of Biblical study.

We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on Biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.

SUMMARY: An awareness of genre (the forms of literature) is important for studying the Bible. However, the use of genre should not deny the historical reality of a Biblical story (narrative), if it presents itself as factual.

ARTICLE XIV

We affirm that the Biblical record of events, discourses and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, corresponds to historical fact.

We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the Biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.

SUMMARY: The biblical record of events, speeches and sayings, though presented in various forms, are historical fact and were not invented by the biblical writers.

ARTICLE XV

We affirm the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed.

Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.

We deny the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.

SUMMARY: The Bible should be interpreted in the literal, or normal sense; that is, the sense which takes into account the grammatical (the meaning of the words and grammar), literary (the context of the passage), canonical (the whole Bible context) and historical context of the passage.

ARTICLE XVI

We affirm that legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning.

We deny the legitimacy of allowing any method of Biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the writer's expressed meaning, or of any other Scriptural teaching.

SUMMARY: Various techniques (for example, looking for the best original text [text criticism]; examining various literary forms [literary criticism]; using knowledge of ancient letter forms [epistolary criticism]; and so on) should be used to examine the Bible. These techniques, however, should not be used if they bring into question the truth of the Bible.

ARTICLE XVII

We affirm the unity, harmony and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter. We deny that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.

SUMMARY: The Bible is totally consistent. One part does not contradict or correct another. New Testament writers do not misinterpret the Old Testament.

New Testament writers use the Old Testament in a variety of ways ranging from simple illustration of a point to direct prophecy of an event. This variety of approaches does not constitute misinterpretation.

ARTICLE XVIII

We affirm that the Bible's own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text. The single meaning of a prophet's words includes, but is not restricted to, the understanding of those words by the prophet and necessarily involves the intention of God evidenced in the fulfillment of those words.

We deny that the writers of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words.

SUMMARY: When the Bible interprets an earlier passage from the Bible, the interpretation is correct. There is just one meaning of the earlier passage which the original writer may or may not have fully understood – the Bible's later interpretation shows what God intended.

ARTICLE XIX

We affirm that any pre-understandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with Scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.

We deny that Scripture should be required to fit alien pre-understandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.

SUMMARY: Every interpreter comes with certain views, ways of looking at things, theology, and so on (that is, pre-understandings) when approaching the Bible. These views need to be in harmony with the Bible and the interpreter needs to be willing to change his/her views if the Bible teaches otherwise.

ARTICLE XX

We affirm that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, Biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and cohere, and that the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.

We deny that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.

SUMMARY: All truth is God's truth. The Bible speaks truth when it touches on history, nature and anything else. Information from outside the Bible can help in making clear what the Bible teaches and in correcting wrong interpretations of the Bible. However, information from outside the Bible does not disprove the Bible.

Interpretations of the Bible should not be confused with the Bible itself. Outside information often does disprove certain interpretations of the Bible.

ARTICLE XXI

We affirm the harmony of special with general revelation and therefore of Biblical teaching with the facts of nature.

We deny that any genuine scientific facts are inconsistent with the true meaning of any passage of Scripture.

SUMMARY: What God shows everyone in the natural world around us (general revelation) and what is shown in the Bible (special revelation) are in harmony. Thus genuine scientific facts are not inconsistent with the actual meaning of any passage in the Bible.

ARTICLE XXII

We affirm that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book.

We deny that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.

SUMMARY: All of Genesis is factual including the creation, the flood, and the tower of Babel accounts. Even when current scientific views of earth and human origins contradict the Bible, they do not overthrow the Bible.

ARTICLE XXIII

We affirm the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin.

We deny that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption.

SUMMARY: The Bible is clear in its message about salvation. This doesn't mean that all passages of the Bible are clear or that they all talk about salvation.

ARTICLE XXIV

We affirm that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of Biblical scholars.

We deny that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by Biblical scholars.

SUMMARY: To understand the Bible one does not need to be a Biblical scholar. However, Biblical scholars can give fruitful insights into the Bible.

ARTICLE XXV

We affirm that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God.

We deny that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.

SUMMARY: Only when the Bible is taken as the word of God does preaching give God's message and the proper life-application. Preaching provides a message from God only when it is based on the text of the Bible.