



General Baptist Ministries

Social Principles of General Baptist



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INTRODUCTION

The Social Issues Commission of the General Association of General Baptists is charged with assisting General Baptists in the consideration of vital issues within our society. This commission developed “The Social Principles of General Baptists” as approved by the 1975 General Association. This booklet represents editorial modifications and clarifications (1988) to the 1975 version. Section II D was approved by the 1993 General Association Delegates. Additional editorial modifications and clarifications were made in 1998, 2001, 2003, 2014, & 2017.

PREAMBLE

We, the people of the General Association of General Baptists, pledge our faith in God, our Father; in Jesus Christ, our Savior; and in the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and Guide.

We acknowledge the divine call of the Holy Spirit, which has made us new creatures in Christ Jesus. Being grateful to God for His forgiving and redeeming love, we commit our lives as faithful stewards over all things left in our charge. Secure in His love and leadership, we continually seek His will and guidance as we respond to the many social problems before us. As we face these problems and issues that threaten the basic values of our society, it is our desire to promote the use of the Scriptures and the example provided by the earthly life of Christ. We are aware that deviation from the requirements of God places us in jeopardy before His judgment. Each one of us is forced to make decisions as to the “shoulds” and “should nots” in our total behavior in all activities within our society.

There are three basic approaches to decision making that have been used by humanity. They are legalism, relativism, and principled choice.

Legalism. The legalist holds law to be the greatest good. He or she obeys rules blindly. If the legalist is taking a critically ill person to the hospital at 2:00 a.m. and comes to a red stoplight, he or she will wait until the light turns green before proceeding, even if there is no cross traffic. Why? Because the rule says wait.

Relativism. The relativist believes that love is the only guide to determine what is right. There is no objective guide to what is right (Bible or otherwise). Only each individual’s understanding of what is loving in each situation can determine how one should act. If a relativist comes to a red stoplight at 2:00 a.m. he or she will look both ways and check for police in the rearview mirror. If all is clear, the relativist will run the light – even if it is not an emergency.

Principled choice. The person who practices principled choice relies on rules to guide decisions, but is motivated to action by the reason behind the rule. If the principled person comes to a red stoplight at 2:00 a.m. he

or she will, under ordinary circumstances, stop until the light changes. Why? Because the rule of law is good. The reason for this specific law is to protect people and property. If people run stoplights at will – even in the wee hours – eventually a wreck with injury will happen. If the principled person is taking a critically ill person to the hospital under the above circumstances, he or she will look both ways and if all is clear proceed through the intersection. Why? The purpose of the rule of law is to do good. The purpose of this specific law is kept because the sick person is protected. The higher principle of loving your neighbor as yourself is kept.

Principled choice is clearly the morally superior way of making decisions. How can one be sure that he or she is truly being principled and not simply being a relativist with a rationalization? One should compare his or her opinion with Scripture. To properly interpret a passage of Scripture ask the following:

- *Who wrote this book of the Bible?*
- *To whom was it written?*
- *When was it written?*
- *Why was it written?*
- *What kind of literature is it?*

Compare Scripture with Scripture. Do passages of Scripture written later show a specific passage's application to be limited to a certain time in history (e.g. dietary laws)? Is an ethical principle repeatedly and consistently addressed in various ways throughout Scripture (e.g. the Ten Commandments)? Note that as biblical history progresses morality gets higher and compassion greater (e.g. treatment of enemies). Relying on biblical authority, the principled person does not think the situation determines what is loving, but rather what is loving determines what to do in a specific situation. The highest love, according to Scripture, is the love of Jesus in the cross and resurrection (John 15: 12-14, Philippians 3:10-11). The Christian should ask if the cross is being revealed in his or her attitude and actions. Am I being sacrificial? Am I being redemptive? Does the consequence of my attitude and action reflect the resurrection? Does my behavior reflect or give hope? Am I affirming life? Am I on the side of – not only right – but of righteousness?

Our Southern Baptist friends offer this less reflective but quick test to determine principles of right and wrong.

Ask three questions:

- *How will this affect me?*
- *How will this affect others?*
- *How will this affect the cause of Christ?*

Apply three tests:

- *The test of secrecy : Would you mind if others knew?*
- *The test of universality : Would you be willing for others to do the same thing?*
- *The test of prayer : Could you pray to God about this matter?*

Turn to three sources of light:

- *Light from within : A sensitized Christian conscience*
- *Light from without : Wise counselors*
- *Light from above : God*

Christian social concern is based on the truth of God, the Father, revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son, in the outgoing work of the Holy Spirit, and in the Bible. Christian social action is the outworking of authentic Christian experience.

The statements of truth and basic precepts found in this document have been prepared to help all concerned persons in making intelligent decisions on many moral, physical, economic, political, and spiritual issues of our day. The following statements represent principles that guide our ministries together.

Being published in the United States, this booklet at times refers to "America." In these instances, non-American General Baptists should read the names of their nation into the text when it is applicable.

I. GOD'S UNIVERSE

We firmly believe that God created the world and all things therein. We accept the Genesis account of creation. This creation thus belongs to God; all people are His stewards.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1–2

A. Humanity

God created humanity both “male and female” (*Genesis 1:27*). People are patterned after their Maker and are the crowning achievement of God’s creation. Humans are the only beings made in God’s image. Human beings are endowed with physical, intellectual, and spiritual attributes. They have been granted freedom of choice between good and evil. People are held responsible for all their decisions and have been instructed that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (*Romans 6:23*).

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:26–27; Psalm 139; Romans 6:23; Joshua 24:14–15, states people have been given a free will.

B. Ecology

We believe that people must continue to observe the Biblical concepts of stewardship of the earth’s resources. We are responsible for the earth and to God, Who created all things. We must seek information concerning the serious state of our environmental deterioration. We support laws and social action designed to prevent the pollution of the air, water, and land. We oppose further desecration of natural resources vital to health, food, natural beauty, and survival of life. We deplore the exploitation of the earth through the misuse of nuclear power, greed, and warfare. We support the research, development, and the wise use of the natural resources God has given us.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:20–31; Genesis 9:1–3; Deuteronomy 20:19; Psalm 104

C. Animal Life

Animal life is God’s creation given to humanity in accordance with His plan and therefore, should be respected and protected. We support conservation agencies that protect wild life, particularly those species threatened with extinction. We also support the humane treatment of pets and domestic animals and the painless slaughtering of marketing animals, fish, and fowl.

Scripture Texts: Deuteronomy 22:1–4, 6–7; Psalm 104

D. Space

God created the heavens and the earth; therefore, our respect, appreciation, and concern reach into outer space. The moon, planets, stars, and vast regions between declare the glory of God. We support the efforts of space exploration to gain knowledge of God’s universe in order to bring glory to God and add to the welfare of humanity.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1; Psalm 8:3; Psalm 19:1; Psalm 33:6; Psalm 50:6; Psalm 97:6; Psalm 102:25; Psalm 103:11; Psalm 115:15–16; Psalm 148:4; Isaiah 40:22; Isaiah 42:5; Isaiah 45:12; Jeremiah 10:12; Jeremiah 32:17; Jeremiah 51:15; Hebrews 1:10

II. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Every community has definite responsibilities in providing the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of life. The fact that all persons are part of God's highest creation calls for a social climate conducive to every man, woman, and child developing to his or her fullest potential. Therefore, we support social action to maintain and strengthen laws, principles and practices to this end.

A. The Family

The family in the Bible was an extended one, including the parents, children, grandparents, and other kinsmen, as well as servants. The solidarity of this family had its source in the religious and economic ties which bound its members together. Today's families face bewildering sociological changes and complex problems to an extent never known before. We believe the hope for our world lies in the solid structure of the home. We believe the family is still the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We urge social, economic, academic, and Christian training for every family member. We believe the Bible offers guidance to the answers for problems and circumstances that beset modern family life. Parents must assist children in their preparation for life and for responding to stewardship opportunities.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 2; Genesis 3; Exodus 20:5, 6, 12, 14; Deuteronomy 6:1–9; Proverbs; Ephesians 5:21–6:4; 1 Peter 3:1–7; Hebrews 13:4; II Timothy 1:5; Luke 8:19–21

Deuteronomy 6:1-15, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4 are Scriptures that instruct parents of their obligation for proper training for their children. That may mean sending them to a Christian school, a private school, home schooling, or public schools. Parents should have the right to choose the school or mode of education that will reinforce the children's home and church training. Parents need to protect their children from the teachings of atheism, humanism, secularism, New Age, or whatever teachings they may be exposed to in some school systems. The information above would apply specifically to the United States, however the principles involved should be used to govern all church and state relationships.

Scripture Texts: Ezekiel 33:7; Romans 13:1–7

B. Marriage:

We believe in the divine sanctity of the marriage covenant, which is the union between one naturally born man and one naturally born woman only. This is God's plan for a continued moral civilization. We reject a "marriage" between two persons of the same sex and count such an act in violation of God's ordained plan for human beings. We believe the blessings of God are upon families who bear children and also upon those who do not. We believe God's blessings are upon those who choose to live in society as single persons and feel society should value them and their contribution

to God's work. Marriage is a partnership between husband and wife and accomplishes its full purpose through unity, loyalty, and love.

The General Association of General Baptists and its churches will only recognize marriages, weddings and/or vow renewals between a biological man and a biological woman (1 Cor. 6:18, 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4). Further, in accordance with the mandate by God referenced above, all pastors, ministers, and/or clergy of all General Baptist churches shall only officiate, participate and/or solemnize marriages, weddings and/or vow renewals exclusively between one man and one woman. Finally, the facilities and properties of all General Baptist churches shall host events celebrating the wedding, marriage and/or vow renewals which are exclusively between one man and one woman.

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. (1 Cor. 6:18, 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4) We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God. (Matt. 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.) These subjects are dealt with elsewhere in this booklet.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the General Association of General Baptists and its local General Baptist churches as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to all General Baptist members and the community, it is mandated that any and all candidates ordained by the General Association of General Baptists, a local Presbytery, local Association, and/or local church, to serve in any ministry capacity, complies with, agrees to, and abides by the General Baptist Statements of Faith and the Social Principles of General Baptists. (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 5:22.)

Marriage is, however, more than just a partnership between one man and one woman. To be married in a Christian ceremony is to promise the Church – and call the Church, family and friends, to bear witness – that the marriage is based on Christian values and commitments. To be married includes:

- A couple calling upon God to join them together and to bear witness to their promises to be mutually loyal.
- Reflecting the mutual and total commitment between Christ and the Church.
- Promising society that the couple is providing a continuing home
 - the basic unit of society – by obtaining legal standing.
- Promising future children a stable and enduring home.

Merely moving in together without legal marriage is not full commitment, and is, therefore, fornication. Indeed, reliable research shows that the overwhelming majority of non-marital, co-habitive relationships fail precisely because the parties involved established the relationship with less than full commitment. Men and women who are living together without benefit of marriage should not, therefore, be taken into Church membership. Church members living in such a relationship should not teach or hold office and are properly subject to Church discipline. We reject social mores that advocate different standards for women and men. The Church has a special role in preparing persons for married life. It must help train people both before and after the exchanging of marriage vows in the plan of God for the establishment of those relationships that build and maintain happy homes.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:27–28; Genesis 2:22–25; Genesis 4:1; Genesis 26:6–11; Deuteronomy 24:5; Proverbs 1–9, *speaks of wisdom*; Proverbs 5:18–21, *King Solomon specifically warns his son how to best control his sexual appetites*; Ecclesiastes 3:1; Song of Songs (Song of Solomon); I Corinthians 6:9–20; I Corinthians 7; I Corinthians 11:11–12; Ephesians 5:21–33; Hebrews 13:4; I Peter 3:7

C. Divorce and Remarriage:

God has planned that those who enter the marriage covenant should become inseparably united and husband and wife should fulfill His holy purpose in this union. Husband and wife are “one flesh,” a condition that continues under the ordinance of God until death parts them or until unfaithfulness destroys the marriage union (*Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:3-12, Romans 7:2-3*). Since the Bible gives no other (universally understood) just cause for annulling and dissolving that which God has joined together, we urge each married couple to consider closely the seriousness of marriage and to refrain from separation or divorce. Statistics verify that the majority of second marriages fail and nearly all marriages beyond the second fail. The catastrophic effect of divorce on children -even into adulthood- is well documented. It is not without cause that God hates divorce and we should too. We recognize that separation or divorce may have to be considered in extreme cases where a marriage dies at the heart and the union becomes intolerable due to unfaithfulness or to the failings of one or both parties (*I Corinthians 7:15 and its implications*.) When victims of unjust circumstances come to problems beyond reconciliation and are forced to a decision relative to divorce and possible remarriage, we urge the use of fervent prayer, seeking the will of God in their lives, pursuing Christian marriage counseling and trusting the Holy Spirit to guide in the whole matter. We sympathize with persons who find themselves between two decisions, either of which may have adverse spiritual and moral consequences. We admire those who have maintained their Christian faith although their marriage has ended in divorce. We believe, in keeping with the redemptive Gospel of Christ, that when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident and a firm purpose and sincere effort for Christian marriage are manifested, the Christian Church can accept remarriages as profitable unto the Lord. We believe the Church has the commission to direct persons into rehabilitation

and to help establish them in such a way as to allow them the potential for a rich and full Christian life. We give no support to persons who seek divorce for the sake of divorce or for the excitement of another marriage.

Scripture Texts: --*God's Ideal*-- Genesis 2:24–25, Matthew 19:4–6, Mark 10: 1–9, Romans 7:2–3;

--*God Hates Divorce*-- Malachi 2:14–16, Matthew 5:31–32, Mark 10:11, Mark 12, Luke 16:18;

– **Circumstances Where Divorce Is Allowed** –

--*Sexual Sin*-- Matthew 5:31–32, Matthew 19:8–12, in light of Deuteronomy 24:1-4;

--*Desertion*-- 1 Corinthians 7:10–15, in light of Exodus 21:10-11;

--*Some Consider Extreme Cruelty To Be Desertion*-- Exodus 21:10–11, Exodus 21:26–27, Proverbs 17:1, Proverbs 21:9 & 19, Proverbs 27:15,

--*Remarriage*-- Deuteronomy 24:1–4, Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:8-12, Romans 7:3, 1 Corinthians 7:15

D. The Divorce or Divorce and Remarriage of Those Seeking Ordination or Those Who Are Ordained as Pastors:

In light of the fact that divorce in pastoral families is, unfortunately, happening with greater frequency, the issue of the divorce or divorce and remarriage of their current spouses needs to be addressed.

1. Guiding Principle:

In light of Genesis 2:21-25; Deuteronomy 2:1-4; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-11; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; and 1 Corinthians 7:1-15, divorce or divorce and remarriage is never desirable, but may be, at times the best alternative available. In all situations, forgiveness is possible.

Whatever the original context of the teachings of *1 Timothy 3:2ff* and *Titus 1:6* remain the same, i.e.: the pastor's marriage and family life should, as nearly as possible, model the Christian home for the people he or she serves.

2. The Dilemma:

There are some instances of pastoral divorce or divorce and remarriage where it is evident that the pastor has so failed as a Christian model that his or her ordination must be revoked (e.g., when a pastor deserts a spouse for another). Other cases are more perplexing. There are instances where a person's divorce or divorce and remarriage took place before conversion. He or she now feels a call to the ministry, possesses the gifts and graces for it, and lives an exemplary Christian life. There are other instances when a pastor is deserted by his or her spouse, or is subjected to unfaithfulness or extreme cruelty. As the result of another's behavior, the pastor may be faced not only with the ordeal of a broken family, but with the disaster of simultaneously losing his or her career. If the career is not destroyed by the divorce, he or she is often called upon to make a sometimes difficult choice between remaining single or forfeiting the calling to the ministry. Churches and presbyteries, on the other hand, must be concerned that pastors model the Christian life as well as with showing compassion to the innocent victims of pastoral divorce.

3. The Right to Local Solutions:

Some local churches and presbyteries hold that, due to the nature of their marital circumstances, a divorced or divorced and remarried person

cannot model the Christian home clearly enough to serve as pastor of a congregation. These churches and presbyteries will neither employ nor ordain any pastor who divorces or divorces and remarries.

Some hold that any exception of the standard is or may lead to a practical abandonment of the standard. They question whether an increase in divorced or divorced and remarried pastors reflects scriptural understanding or a mere accommodation to social pressure. If one standard regarding marriage is sacrificed, what other standard will be compromised next?

Other local churches and presbyteries hold that marital status must be considered as only one of many qualifications for ministers recorded in *1 Timothy and Titus*. They maintain that few, if any, completely meet all of the qualifications noted in these passages. They hold that one must ask; if a candidate realistically measures up to the scriptural standards. As marital history and status are obvious, one must ask on a case-by-case basis, "Can this person model a Christian home well enough to be an effective pastor?"

We recognize the legitimacy of all of the concerns among us regarding the divorce or divorce and remarriage of pastors. We affirm the right of each local church and presbytery to develop its own policies on this subject.

4. A Suggested Approach for Those Who Categorically Disallow Divorced or Divorced and Remarried Pastors or Pastoral Spouses:

If a pastor is asked to forego ordination or forfeit credentials due to a divorce or divorce and remarriage circumstance, certain issues should be addressed:

- a.** Is there scandal involved that would eliminate any form of Christian leadership? If so, how can the church or presbytery help restore the former pastor and/or spouse to Christ and, perhaps, to productive service as a layperson.
- b.** If there is no scandal, it would be appropriate to ask what form of ministry the former pastor might yet perform. If a church or presbytery is going to ask an innocent person who has been traumatized by divorce to undergo the further trauma of losing his or her identifying role, career, and livelihood, it is the church's or presbytery's redemptive obligation to help the person so asked to reestablish identity, role, career and livelihood.

5. A Suggested Approach for Those Who Consider Divorce, or Divorce and Remarriage, and Pastoral Ministry on a Case-by-Case-Basis:

If a divorced person is presented to a presbytery for ordination or approaches a church as a pastoral candidate, it would be assumed that he or she, having been married, will eventually remarry. This assumption will result in fair treatment in the future for all concerned. Likewise, a divorced pastor whose standing may not be affected by divorce alone needs to

know in advance what the response by the church and presbytery will be in the event of remarriage. This knowledge can thereby become a given in the making of future plans. If a single or widowed pastor is contemplating marrying a divorced person, he or she might for the same reason seek to know in advance the response of the church or presbytery to this course of action.

a. When a divorced or divorced and remarried person is presented for ordination, or to a church as a pastoral candidate, the following questions should be asked.

- *Did the divorce or divorce and remarriage happen before or after conversion?*
- *Did the divorce or divorce and remarriage happen before or after the person answered a call to ministry?*
- *Given the particular circumstances of the divorce or divorce and remarriage and his or her qualification, can this person model a Christian home well enough to serve as pastor among us and thereby bring glory to God?*

b. When there is a divorce or divorce and remarriage in a resident pastoral family, the following questions should be asked:

- *Who initiated the divorce and why?*
- *Is there clearly identifiable sin, and if so, on whose part?*
- *Is there scandal and, if so, on whose part?*
- *Given the particular circumstances of the divorce or divorce and remarriage, can this person model a Christian home well enough to continue serving as pastor in any place, or under any circumstances?*
- *Even if he or she can continue modeling a Christian home well enough to serve as pastor, can it realistically be done in the present pastorate?*

a.) Is the pastor's spouse so clearly in the wrong that the entire church and/or Community is united behind the pastor (e.g., the pastor's spouse deserted him or her for another)?

b.) Is the church divided in its loyalty to the pastor and his or her former spouse?

c.) Will the close-up view of divorce or divorce and remarriage in the parsonage undermine the sanctity of marriage in the minds of some in the church and community? Will it possibly encourage them to see divorce as a morally- acceptable option?

- *If the pastor can serve elsewhere, but not in the current pastorate, how long will he or she be given to relocate considering the trauma already undergone by the pastor, the pastor's family, and the church?*

c. In no case should the divorce or divorce and remarriage of a pastor simply be ignored by either the local church or presbytery. Approval for continued ministry by those divorced or divorced and remarried should never be assumed. Genuine prayer and research should determine the outcome of each case. Those involved in research should show discretion, always being careful to reveal only the necessary details publicly. Whether or not discipline is in order, Christian love, support and help are always needed for all parties involved. It is the redemptive

obligation of the local church and presbytery to meet these needs. Once a presbytery has authorized a pastor's continued ministry, future churches and presbyteries, which are willing in principle to accept divorced or divorced and remarried pastors, should accept them without question unless their marital history would clearly and directly affect their ministry among them, or unless new and pertinent information arises.

Scripture Texts: *See all texts on Divorce and Remarriage above and* 1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 1:6

E. Human Sexuality:

We recognize that sexuality is a good gift of God which, in all instances, is to be disciplined in such a manner as to bring two persons to its true fulfillment. We are to be good stewards of this divine gift. We believe that society as a whole has fallen far below God's standards of sexual morality. We believe the Bible teaches that sexual relations should be practiced only within the marriage bond. We oppose premarital and extramarital sex. Sex may also become exploitative within as well as outside marriage. Therefore, Christians must take care to insure that deep affection and respect be maintained in all marriage relations.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:27–28; Genesis 2:22–25; Genesis 4:1; Genesis 26:6–11; Deuteronomy 24:5; Proverbs 1-9, *speak of wisdom, but King David specifically warns his son how to best control his sexual appetites.* Proverbs 5:18–21; Ecclesiastes 3:1; Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) 2:3–17; Song of Songs 4:1–7; 1 Corinthians 11:11–12; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7

F. Deviant Sexuality:

Deviant sexual behaviors are often presented as lifestyle choices that should not only be tolerated, but also affirmed in a pluralistic society. In truth, these practices pose a danger to mental and physical health. These practices are public health not civil rights concerns. Christians need to know the truth concerning these activities in order to be informed proponents of Christian morality.

Studies of identical twins separated at birth indicate that people are not born homosexual. Psychological studies show that homosexuals usually have similarly troubled backgrounds and sexual experiences. Behaviors are, however, evaluated by their consequences, not their causes. The problems that result from homosexual activities must be treated psychologically, medically or surgically. They can result in death. This is why the Bible says of homosexuals that they "received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (*Romans 1:27 NIV*)."

Some homosexual activities can be practiced in heterosexual relationships. Any activity that can result in physical or psychological harm is wrong.

Sexual activity between adults and children or between children and children is always spiritually, psychologically and often physically harmful. Adults that practice or facilitate such activity should be liable to criminal penalties. Bestiality is harmful and cruel. It is an abuse of our God-given

humanity and our stewardship of the created order. As Christians we must oppose these activities and the political agendas of those who seek to normalize them.

The Christian should react with abhorrence to the above activities. Remember, however, that God abhors all sin including ours! It behooves us, therefore, to reach out in healing and redemptive ministry to those who struggle with these desires and behaviors. Some Christian counselors are discovering that many are finding release from homosexuality through learning how to be genuinely masculine men or feminine women, and through learning to develop healthy relations with those of the same sex. As *1 Corinthians 6:9-11* affirms, even if one struggles with harmful sexual desires, holy and healthy behavior is possible in the power of Christ and with the loving acceptance and support of the Christian community.

Scripture Texts: --*Condemned*-- Genesis 19:5–33; Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:20; Leviticus 10:22; Deuteronomy 22:5; Romans 1:24–27; Jude 8; --*Hope for Healing*-- 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

G. Birth Control and Population:

The long controversy over the morality of birth control presents no small issue. Three very important factors must be considered: the health of the mother, the health and welfare of the expected child, and the ability of the parents to provide for this child. God's institution of marriage provided fellowship and companionship between husband and wife, which involved physical gratification along with the power of reproduction. To consider whether birth control is right or wrong is also to determine the responsibilities God requires of the couple bringing a child into the world. The responsibilities include the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development of the child to be born. God has planned for the "replenishing of the earth" to be a responsible act. Parenthood is a responsible act subject to the will and plan of God.

Each potential set of parents must make decisions relative to birth control, whether it is right or wrong in their particular situation. However, in whatever decision they make, they must be able to justify their choice in the sight of God. These considerations have a worldwide outreach. When we look at our over populated world and see the poverty stricken homes, the inherited deformities, the overly crowded conditions, and other critical conditions it appears that people have left God out of their plans for their family life. Our sympathy is with the millions who have come into this world only to be forced into trying to make the best of a bad situation. Our Christian love and concern should go out to all those who are disadvantaged by state of birth. A couple must not only choose whether to use birth control, but also choose morally acceptable means of birth control. To do this it is important to understand that conception (i.e., fertilization), the union of sperm and ova, happens in one of the fallopian tubes. This is the beginning of a unique human life. From this point on, no new genetic material is added. The resulting new life is then implanted in the lining of the uterus. A contraceptive prevents conception. This is

morally acceptable. Post-contraceptive birth control either prevents the newly formed child from implanting in the uterus or dislodges it shortly after it has attached itself to the uterine wall. These latter methods are in effect abortion and are morally unacceptable.

Scripture Texts: --*Relational Purpose of Sexual Relations*-- Genesis 2:20–25; I Corinthians 7:1–15; I Peter 3:7; Song of Songs (Song of Solomon); --*Procreative Purpose of Sexual Relations*-- Psalm 127:3; Psalm 128:3; --*Replenish the Earth*-- Genesis 1:28; --*Proper Care of Children*-- Proverbs 4:1–4; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 5:8; --*Blessings of Parenthood*-- Genesis 1:28; Psalm 128:3; I Corinthians 7:1–15; I Peter 3:7

H. Abortion:

In accordance with Biblical references and research by reliable authorities, we acknowledge the sanctity of unborn human life and believe that the act of deliberate abortion in the case of unwanted pregnancy to be an act of murder. Terms such as “zygote”, “embryo”, and “fetus” are helpful when describing the developmental stage of an unborn child, just as “early childhood” or “adolescence”, describe later stages of development. In general conversation, however, it is good to affirm the humanity of the unborn by using the language of the Bible and speaking of “the baby”, “the child”, and using personal pronouns. When giving to charitable organizations one should be diligent to find out whether any of the organizations’ funds provide for or support abortion.

The penalty and consequences of taking a human life rest upon the consenting parent or parents, the medical staff involved and any others who encourage or otherwise facilitate abortion. We are equally bound to acknowledge the sacredness of the life and well being of the mother to whom devastating damage or death may result from giving birth. We oppose comprehensive legalized abortion, whether by law or judicial mandate, but fully support medical ethics and laws that permit therapeutic abortion when the mother’s life is in danger. While recognizing the moral dilemma created, most of us are in troubled sympathy with medical ethics and laws that permit therapeutic abortion in cases of forcible rape (the forced creation of life) and incest (the unlawful creation of life). We also acknowledge that many wonderful children have come into the world through these unfortunate circumstances and respect those women who chose to make this sacrificial commitment. Many would add permanent damage to the mother’s physical health (perceived to be an unchosen and unexpected greater disaster) to the list of exceptions. We are well aware that the term “mental health” includes even the slightest emotional discomfort.

We, therefore, always avoid using this broad term as a justification for abortion. Some General Baptists would, however, support abortion in those rare cases when (supported by evidence upon which the majority of mental health professionals would agree) the pregnancy would result in permanent psychosis for the mother. Such cases would almost always

include verifiable evidence of emotional problems that pre-dated the pregnancy. These exceptions provoke words of caution: Who has the ability or right to declare a continued pregnancy to be physically harmful to the mother? Indeed, as of this writing, research indicates that one in four women who had legal abortions became infertile. Moreover, rather than relieving mental illness, mental health professionals now speak of post-abortion stress syndrome. Evidence shows that many women who have abortions suffer from depression and/or feelings of guilt. Indeed, some women became suicidal after an abortion. Any exceptions to our opposition to abortion, including the “morning after pill,” are supported with grave reservations and with stipulations and qualifications pertinent to each case.

The physical or mental disability of the unborn child is never justification for abortion. The value of each life is not determined by one’s capacity to perform (works), but rather by the love of God (grace) for each individual who is made in His image from the moment he or she receives individual identity at conception. Indeed, it is worth noting that many physically limited and mentally handicapped individuals lead fulfilling and happy lives within the limits of their ability. Some who have good health and high intelligence lead miserable lives.

Under no circumstance can it be argued that because abuse might happen later, one is justified in committing the sure and ultimate abuse of killing the innocent unborn now. Also worthy of note is the fact that whether a pregnancy is initially wanted or unwanted is rarely if ever a factor in whether a child will later be neglected or abused.

Most unwanted pregnancies happen because two people exercised the right to choose and chose poorly. They could have abstained, but did not. They could have chosen effective birth control, but did not. The right to choose ends where the new child’s life begins.

The fact is that most abortions happen because the unborn child is perceived to be an emotional, social, or financial burden on others. We simply cannot solve these problems by killing people. It is incumbent upon Christian people to provide alternatives to abortion, such as adoption, parenting classes, and establishing mentoring friendships with young or struggling parents.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 25:21–22; Psalm 51:5; Psalm 139:13–16; Isaiah 7:14; Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:39–44; Exodus 20:13

I. Reproductive Technology and Human Genetic Engineering:

1. Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive after unprotected intercourse for a period of at least one year or the inability to carry a conception past the first trimester of pregnancy. Infertility does not necessarily carry moral implications and may result from medical factors beyond the patient’s control. Many godly people in Scripture were infertile. On the other hand, some sexually transmitted diseases

can cause infertility. Abortion can result in infertility. In these cases, spiritual restoration is always available whether fertility is or not. In all cases, grace and mercy dictate that all ethical and financially reasonable means to facilitate the bearing of children should be available. Remember, however, that ultimately the fruit of the womb is in the hand of God not technology.

- 2.** When the gamete (sperm and/or ova) donors are married to one another, in vitro fertilization (IVF), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), and zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT) are ethically acceptable means of facilitating conception. The same holds true for artificial insemination when the donor and recipient are married to each other. Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (CISI), assisted hatching and round spermatid nuclear injection (ROSNI) are also acceptable for married couples. They affirm the unitive (enjoyment and relationship building) purpose of sexual relations in marriage and facilitate the procreative (having children) purpose of sexual relations in marriage.

Gamete donation between persons who are not married to one another is ethically problematic. Granted, it could lessen the possibility of genetic disease in some cases. In the case of ova donation the child would be biologically related to the father and the mother might become emotionally linked through pregnancy. Sperm donation is considerably cheaper than many other technically aided methods. Nevertheless, the emotional issues involved when a third party (even an anonymous one) is involved in creating a child are complex. Difficult marital or parent/child bonding issues could arise. Gamete donation can carry with it at least the possibility of sexually transmitted disease. Some people believe that the Biblical teaching of a husband and wife procreating as a consequence of becoming one flesh could be considered a prohibition of this practice.

Fertility drugs as a means to restore one to a more healthy, functional state and improve fertility are good per se. There is, however, the possibility of multiple pregnancies and subsequent financial hardship and other stress for the family that must be considered before choosing some of these means of facilitating conception. Abortion as a means of reducing the number of children carried in a multiple pregnancy either to enhance the chances of survival for the remaining children or for the convenience of the family is morally unacceptable.

- 3.** The freezing of any number of gametes presents no moral problem since human life has not been created. A couple should, however, never create or preserve more embryos than they are willing to have children since the embryos are living persons in embryonic form. Embryos or fetal tissue should never be used for research unless the benefit to the individual embryo or fetus is greater than the risk. The genetic testing procedure amniocentesis should only be used for the

benefit of the unborn child. Genetic abnormalities are no reason to destroy a person at any stage of life.

4. Surrogate pregnancy can be moral if the child produced has been conceived in vitro by the parents who will raise the child and transplanted into the uterus of the surrogate. A woman who volunteers her womb to save a frozen embryo from destruction should be commended not condemned. Indeed, all surrogacy must be done without desire for personal gain. The surrogate must not be a donor of the ova, thus bringing a third party into the one-flesh relationship of procreation. Neither should donor sperm from one other than the husband be used. The surrogate must not benefit financially. A womb should not be rented any more than an organ should be sold. This commercializes what should never be bought or sold. Impoverished women could be pressured to make their wombs available. Embryos, young people, could be bought. Buying people is slavery.
5. Having examined reproductive technologies per se, we must consider their cost. Some might be opposed, not in an absolute sense, but because they use resources that could be used for more needed treatments. More cost-effective solutions, such as adoption, are available. This position is debatable.
6. Human genetic engineering is the new frontier of medical science. There are things that are acceptable in agriculture and animal husbandry that are unacceptable for humans, who are created in the image of God, having infinite worth and eternal significance. Positive good may come from gene manipulation that may some day prevent or cure hereditary disease and what are universally recognized as birth defects. Procedures that destroy young life, or that risk creating birth defects are immoral. The destruction of embryos or fetuses to obtain tissue to benefit the health of another is immoral. Stem cell research (and perhaps some day treatment) that uses stem cells from the umbilical cord or from adults is acceptable. The possibility of being able to clone humans poses grave moral dangers. If this technology becomes feasible, can it be used to create organ donors, to replace people identical to those lost in death, or used to create a supposed "super race"? Genetic engineering should never be used to create one normative genotype or phenotype. Determining intelligence, looks, and developing classes of people to perform certain tasks are unacceptable uses of medical science.

Scripture texts: --*Saving Children from Destruction*-- Exodus 2:1–10; Matthew 3:13–15; Amos 1:13;
--*Problems of Surrogate Parenthood*-- Genesis 16:1–16; Genesis 21:1–21; Genesis 29:15–30:24;
--*Life Before Birth as a Unique and Sacred Gift*-- Genesis 1:27; Genesis 25:21–23; Psalm 139:13–16;

Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:39–44; --*Purposes of Human Sexuality*-- Song of Songs (Song of Solomon); Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:20–25; Ephesians 5:31–33; Hebrews 13:4;

– **Ultimate Goals of Human Development** –

--*Partial Fulfillment Now*-- Philippians 3:12–16; I John 5:14–15

J. Pornography:

Writing and pictures produced to arouse sexual desire should be classed as obscene media. Such media has a direct relationship in increased immoral and criminal behavior in our society. In this present-day flood of obscene and pornographic materials we urge parents, teachers, and Christian workers to endeavor earnestly to know the kind of media adults and youths have in their care. It is our belief that such materials influence those who find a sense of satisfaction in using them to become victims of criminal behavior, including homicide. Suggestive stories, lewd pictures from all types of media, poison minds, disrupt behavior, and destroy character.

Christians must help to protect society from the influence toward deviance that obscene media foists upon it. It is our social and Christian duty to demand the enforcement of laws against the production and sale of pornographic materials. It is a responsibility of both the home and the church to encourage the development of a taste for constructive reading materials in each age group.

Scripture Tests: --*Thoughts and Behavior*-- Matthew 5:27–30; Philippians 4:8–9; Romans 13:11–14; II Peter 3:1; --*Exclusiveness of Marriage*-- Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:20–25; Song of Songs (Song of Solomon), Ephesians 5:31–33; Hebrews 13:4

K. Amusements:

We believe every Christian should be conscious of the spiritual problems that fall upon our society by way of worldly amusements. Every home should closely monitor the Internet, computer games, and the TV programs selected for viewing. They should carefully select motion pictures and other amusements to be attended, and use caution in participating in social activity planned for both private and public gatherings. We believe lewd songs and sexually provocative dance have nothing good to offer a Christian and should be avoided. Most General Baptists believe that music per se is a function of culture, and that songs receive their moral content from their lyrics. A few among us believe that some types of music are inherently wrong. We show charity toward one another in this matter. We believe the Christian life is basically a matter of growth in one's relationship to God. Therefore, we encourage every Christian to seek for wholesome and constructive amusement activities that allow them to participate with a clear conscience while glorifying God.

Scripture Tests: Matthew 5:27–30 to be read in light of Genesis 1:2–28; Genesis 2:22–25; Genesis 4:1; Genesis 26:6–11; Deuteronomy 24:5; Proverbs Chapter 1–9 *speaks of wisdom, but King David specifically warns his son how to best control his sexual appetites.* Proverbs 5:18–19,21; Ecclesiastes 3:1; Songs of Songs (Song of Solomon); I Corinthians 7:1–9; I Corinthians 11:11–12; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4; I Peter 3:7

III. THE COMMUNITY IN SOCIAL ACTION

General Baptists believe Christians should be committed to social improvement. It is our view that local churches should cooperate with social agencies in the communities that have as their objective the betterment of mankind, so long as the organizations do not transgress the policy of separation of church and state.

A. Rights of Others:

We affirm the principle that all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God and believe that the recognition of each person's value to God and society must be maintained and strengthened. We oppose racism in every form as well as the social deprivation of ethnic minorities. We believe members of minorities should have equal opportunities in the area of employment, education, vocational training, public accommodations, public office, and leadership in all areas of life.

Religious freedom means to us that every religious group has the right to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions as long as the group does not infringe upon the rights of others. Christian love, tolerance, and understanding are vital so that society may progress in meeting the basic needs of mankind. We oppose persecution of religious minorities.

Scripture Texts: --*Equality and Value of People*-- Genesis 3:20; Job 31:13-15; Psalm 33:13-15; Proverbs 22:2; Zephaniah 3:9-10; Matthew 15:21-18; Mark 7:24-30; Acts 10:28; Acts 17:25-28; Galatians 3:28; I Peter 1:20; II Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9; --*Fairness and Equal Opportunity*-- Exodus 22:22-24; Leviticus 25:8-55; Amos 2:6-7; Micah 6:8; Malachi 2:10; James 2:14-18; --*Religious Freedom*-- Acts 5:17-29; Acts 19:24-41; I Timothy 2:1-4

B. Personal Rights:

The total society is composed of human beings of all ages, each having individual rights along with corresponding responsibilities.

We acknowledge the rights of children and recognize the obligations of parents and guardians toward the welfare of each child. These obligations include the adequate provision of the necessities and comforts of the home, formal education, spiritual and church life opportunities, and the personal care necessary for the full development of the child. We view each child to be God's creation given to the stewardship of parents in particular and society in general. Orphan children and homeless people merit proper care and equal opportunity which society has an obligation to provide.

We value the rights of youth, who make up a large portion of today's population. In this time of development, adjustment, and transition, it is imperative that Christian assistance be given to all youths in their development of character and personality, in their process of decision making, in their commitment to Christ, and in their developing of other objectives essential to a successful life.

Society must assume women and men to be equal in every aspect of our common life. However, people do have certain physical and natural capabilities to perform in certain jobs or professions. We support the equal treatment of women and men in employment, compensation, and promotion in public and private businesses, and on boards, agencies and commissions affecting our society. We believe that such positions should be filled on a qualification basis, and never through discriminatory measures.

The aging have rights to the necessities of life; sufficient income, adequate medical care, proper housing, respect, and dignity. We support social policies and programs that help to keep the senior members of our society from being isolated from the mainstream of social life.

Scripture Texts: --*Children's Value, Rights, Training*-- Exodus 13:8-16; Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Psalm 27:10; Psalm 127:3-5; Proverbs 1:8; Proverbs 4:1-22; Proverbs 17:6; Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 6:20-25; Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 31:10-31 Matthew 19:13-15; Matthew 21:16; Mark 9:37; Mark 10:14-16; Luke 18:16; Ephesians 6:1-4; Titus 2:2-4; --*Equality of Sexes*-- Genesis 2:20-25; Proverbs 31:10-31; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-42; John 4:27; John 20:1-18; Acts 1:13-14; Acts 18:18-19; Romans 16:1-15; Galatians 3:28; --*The Elderly's Value and Rights*-- Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:32; Deuteronomy 5:16; Job 12:12; Psalm 71:9; Proverbs 16:31; Proverbs 17:6; Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:9-13; I Timothy 5:1-16; Titus 2:2-4

C. Physical Welfare:

The physical well being of every person in the world is of Christian concern. Therefore, we believe the church should pledge support to those local, state, and federal agencies and programs whose objectives are to assist human beings in the area of general health, mental illness, mental retardation, physical handicaps, and other adverse physical circumstances. We urge the church to share its message and personal concern with those less fortunate persons who need love, kindness and understanding.

Scripture Texts: --*Caring for the Poor*-- Exodus 23:3-11; Leviticus 19:9-10; Leviticus 23:22; Leviticus 25:1-54; Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Deuteronomy 24:12-15; I Samuel 2:8; Job 31:13-22; Psalm 22:26; Psalm 34:6; Psalm 35:10; Proverbs 22:9; Jeremiah 22:16-17; Amos 2:6-7; Amos 4:1-3; Amos 5:11-12; Amos 8:4-8; Zechariah 7:10; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 4:18-19; Luke 7:18-23; Luke 11:39-42; Luke 12:27-34; Luke 14:12-14; Luke 21:1-4; Acts 9:36; Acts 10:4; Acts 10:31; Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-26; II Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Philippians 4:10-19; James 2:1-9; James 2:14-18; --*Caring for Sickness and Disability*-- Matthew 4:23; Matthew 8:14-17; Matthew 9:21-22; Matthew 10:7-8; Matthew 11:5; Matthew 12:15; Matthew 12:22; Matthew 14:14; Matthew 14:36; Matthew 15:28-31; Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 1:34; Mark 3:10-11; Mark 5:28-29; Mark 6:13; Mark 6:56; Mark 8:22; Mark 10:49-52; Luke 4:18-19; Luke 4:40-41; Luke 5:12-14; Luke 6:18-19; Luke 7:1-9; Luke 7:21-22; Luke 8:47-50; Luke 9:11; Luke 9:42; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 17:11-14; Luke 18:35; Luke 18:42; Luke 9; John 5:1-8; John 9:1-9; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 14:8-10; --*Compassion*-- I Corinthians 13; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12; I Peter 3:8; --*Responsible*-- Matthew 25:31-45; Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 3:16-17; Galatians 5:16-26; --*Ultimate Permanent Care*-- Revelation 21; Revelation 22

D. Drug Use:

The misuse and abuse of drugs have become problems of tremendous proportions in the United States and around the world. We have become a drug-oriented society, and people, for various reasons, are using more drugs while disregarding their effects upon life. We must become aware of the physical and moral deterioration of large numbers of

persons because of their misuse of drugs. Youths and adults alike are being brainwashed through the pressures of misinformation by all types of media, through glamorization, social pressure and public acceptance of the chemical approach to life. Society as a whole must become informed from valid sources in order to make intelligent decisions concerning the use of drugs. We urge that drugs be used only as prescribed or directed by reliable physicians. Due to widespread drug abuse, we must note that this is especially true of mood altering drugs, including alcohol and drugs used in mental health treatment. The medical purpose of mood altering drugs is to restore people to a rational and normally functioning condition. They should never be used to induce an irrational or dysfunctional condition. We urge that adults be proper examples for children in their relationship to all drugs. We encourage local churches or associations to implement preventive education for their constituencies. We oppose any form of promotion for the sale or distribution of dangerous drugs or any legislation that releases harmful drugs to society. We call for proper law enforcement relative to all drugs.

1. Alcohol:

Available information shows that alcohol is the most widely used mindaltering drug. We believe it constitutes our biggest drug problem in that it kills, destroys brain tissues, and makes people psychotic more than all other drugs, because it has wider public acceptance than any other drug. Therefore we as Christians, take a stand endorsing total abstinence from all alcoholic beverages, including wine and beer. This is not a matter of dueling Bible passages — pro-drinking versus anti-drinking proof texts — but rather a matter of spiritual maturity and Christian love. Jewish society, in the time of Jesus' s earthly ministry, had commonly held standards to prevent alcohol abuse. Wine was always diluted with at least 3 parts water to 1 part wine. Cups of wine were blessed with prayer (e.g. *In the Mishnah see Berakoth 6:1,5,6. Also see primary sources referred to in The Full Life Study Bible King James Version, articles on p. 1538ff and p. 1594ff, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan 49530 U.S.A., 1992*). In today's American society with its lack of common standards regarding alcohol use, almost all people who drink have at some time committed the sin of drunkenness. It logically follows that for their own sakes as well as for the example they set for those who are weaker, mature Christians should avoid the use of alcohol. All Christians should seek to be mature. Our influence and Christian witness should be free from the moral, mental, and physically destructive forces emanating from such use. We urge every pastor to take advantage of seminars and teaching programs designed for those who desire to help people with alcoholic problems. We ask our churches to be kind and sympathetic to those with alcoholic conditions and to draw them to God through love and understanding. We encourage the use of qualified speakers in church services to inform the church family about this national problem.

2. Tobacco:

Studies have shown a definite link between heavy tobacco use and the occurrence of cancer and other diseases. Many agencies warn of the ill affects that tobacco has upon the human body. The use of tobacco is known to be harmful to child development. Therefore, we recommend that health, psychological, and moral values be considered in the use of tobacco by all children, youths, and adults. The principal found in *I Corinthians 6:19,20* should be used in the search for the whole story on tobacco. The influence users may have upon others and the pollution of the air, which others breathe, are points for consideration. We believe that since tobacco has nothing good to offer either body or soul, we should oppose its advertising and use by all.

3. Other Drugs:

There should be respect and appreciation for the use of amphetamines, depressants, and certain narcotics and other drugs when used for medical purposes under the direction of a physician. The potential for dependency and the chances for overdose and the endangering of life must be considered in taking drugs. We oppose all use of psychedelic drugs as well as the use and legalization of marijuana. Our churches are urged to use all authentic educational materials available to point out the existing dangers of drugs so that children, youths, and adults may be spared the emotional, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual problems that haunt our world today. We urge our churches to prepare and offer help to people who have become victims of drug use. We are aware of the social pressures that induce drug use: the adverse home conditions, the search for a means of escape from certain situations, and many more reasons for taking the chemical approach to life. We believe the church has the real answer to human problems and that all Christians must share the gift of God with those in trouble. We support law enforcement to protect our society from all illegal aspects of drug use.

Scripture Texts: --*Proper Medical Use (Including mental Health Use)*-- Proverbs 31:6-7; I Timothy 5:23;

--*Teaching About Drugs*-- Deuteronomy 6:5-9;

--*Negative Consequences of Misusing Drugs*-- Proverbs 23:21; Proverbs 23:29-35; Isaiah 5:11-12;

I Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 5:18; --*Other Scriptures on Drink and Drunkenness*-- Proverbs 20:1;

Proverbs 21:17; Proverbs 23:20-21; Isaiah 5:22; Habakkuk 2:15; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 5:11;

I Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21

E. Termination of Life:

We believe life and death belong in the hands of God. Regardless of circumstances that befall people, they must know that God gave them existence and He holds them responsible for their stewardship of life. We are thankful to medical science for efforts and accomplishments made in preventing disease and illness and for the great advances in treatment which extend the life and usefulness of those affected.

It is of deep Christian concern, however, when people suffer from incurable diseases to the point where the wisdom of God is questioned in continuing life. Questions arise as to whether a person has the right to die if it means release from suffering. The truth is that people in extreme physical stress are incapable of making rational decisions. People who are clinically depressed are by definition incapable of a rational decision. Research shows that when these three conditions exist, terminally ill people almost universally want to live. First, when pain is controlled they want to live. Today pain can almost always be controlled. Most people remain lucid on pain control medicine. Unless one has a history of substance abuse, there is little risk of addiction with properly administered pain control medication. Physical dependence – not the same as addiction – is usually not a problem if one goes off medication gradually. Second, most people do not want to die when they have a support group. Christian fellowship is made for this role. Third, people usually do not want to die if they have faith in God. The deliberate termination of life is wrong, whether it is done by the person, a friend or by the physician. We affirm the right of every person to die with dignity. We reject efforts to prolong terminal illness merely because the technology is available to do so. At the same time we endorse the work and discoveries made by medical science through scientific experimentation based upon accepted procedures. However, the physician has the responsibility to insure that every precaution is taken so the patient is in no way victimized by such experimentation or its products.

Scripture Texts: --*Value of Each Human Life*-- Genesis 1:26–27; Genesis 9:5–6; John 3:16; II Peter 3:9;

--*Murder*-- Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17;

--*Relation of Sin and Rationally Chosen Suicide*-- *Abimelech*, Judges 9;

Saul I, Samuel 15:22–23; I Samuel 18:6–12, I Samuel 28:4–20, I Samuel 31:1–6, *Judas*, John 13:23–30;

Matthew 26:47–50; Matthew 27:3–10;

--*Assisted Suicide*-- *David, Saul, and the Amalekite*, II Samuel 1:1–16;

--*Compassion*-- Leviticus 19:32; Deuteronomy 28:49–50; Luke 10:25–37;

--*Respect*-- Exodus 22:22–24; James 1:27

IV. ECONOMIC CONCERNS

The economic system of any society is of Christian concern and requires Christian responsibility. There must be a balance between the roles of government, business, religion, charitable organizations, and individual responsibility in providing the essentials for the economic life of all persons. We support the structures by governments which hold to the principles of everyone paying their fair share for the benefit of society.

A. Property:

Property, given by God who owns all wealth, is a trusteeship of all our possessions. We believe society holds a grave responsibility in performing its moral, ethical, and legal right to put all property to its best use. Human beings are stewards of what God has placed in their charge.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:26–28; Leviticus 25:8–55; Deuteronomy 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:17; I Corinthians 16:2; II Corinthians 9:6–7; James 2:15–16

B. Labor/Management Relation:

We support collective bargaining, the negotiation between organized workers and their employers for reaching an agreement on wages, hours, and working conditions. This demands that such bargaining be done in good faith and fairness within the framework of public interest and the rights of all parties involved.

Scripture Texts: --*Good Employee*-- Matthew 24:45–51; I Corinthians 4:2; I Peter 2:18; Matthew 7:12;
--*Good Employer*-- Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Jeremiah 22:13; Matthew 10:10b; Matthew 7:12;
--*Fair Labor Relations*-- I Timothy 5:18; Ephesians 6:5-9; Philemon 1-25; Matthew 7:12

C. Work and Leisure:

The Biblical concept of a community's livelihood is that of individual responsibility to work. Rather than being a burden on society, work is an opportunity for economic security, social acceptance, personal health, and satisfaction. We also support agencies and programs that provide positive recreational opportunities for the use of one's leisure time. Leisure time and recreational opportunities should be used wisely to avoid neglecting God's purpose for worship on the Lord's Day and other Christian services in the Kingdom of God. We urge each family to work out a schedule of activities giving proper time and determination for work and leisure balanced with spiritual involvements.

Scripture Texts: --*Work*-- Genesis 2:15; Genesis 3:19; Proverbs 12:22; Proverbs 14:23; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Romans 12:11; I Timothy 5:8; II Thessalonians 3:10-12; --*Leisure (worship and restoration)*-- Exodus 20:9–11; Exodus 23:12; Exodus 35:2; Deuteronomy 5:13–15; Proverbs 17:22a; Mark 6:31–32;
--*Balance Between Work and Leisure*-- Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

D. Poverty:

Reports indicate that 1 in 7 people of the world's population live in perpetual hunger. The 2012 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics report by World Hunger Education Service reports: In round numbers there are 7 billion people in the world. Thus, with an estimated 625 million hungry people in the world, 13.1 percent are hungry. Every day thousands of human beings die of starvation or malnutrition. There are widespread areas of poverty even in the world's most affluent nations. In order to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, and other necessities, ways must be found to creatively use wealth effectively. Poverty often strikes through no fault of the people involved. It is a Christian's duty to share his wealth with those suffering from economic poverty. We support studies and research which attempts to discover ways the earth can be made more productive. We believe industries should be developed to help eliminate poverty in stricken areas. We support such policies as effective welfare/workfare programs, employment opportunities and job training, proper education, decent housing, medical and hospital care, etc.

Scripture Texts: Proverbs 19:17; Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 25:40; Luke 10:30-37; Acts 6:1-6; Matthew 7:12

E. Economic Systems:

We affirm those aspects of economic systems that promote individual initiative, basic democratic freedoms and the infinite worth of every individual under God. We affirm the right of every individual to work for an acceptable standard of living. We stand opposed to those tenets of communism (or any other system) which deny God, ignore the worth of the individual, practice hatred rather than love, and determine right and wrong entirely on the basis of what behavior advances their agenda.

We oppose those aspects of capitalism (or other systems) which exploit some individuals for financial enrichment of others. Biblical principles should guide the global economy.

Scripture Texts: --*Work*-- Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:5; Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 28:19; Hebrews 6:12;

--*Opportunity*-- Leviticus 25; --*Economic Justice*-- Amos 2:6; Amos 8:4-7; Micah 2:1-3; Micah 6:8;

--*Investment/Saving*-- Proverbs 6:6; Ecclesiastes 11:1-6; Luke 19:11-27;

--*True Riches*-- Matthew 6:19-34; --*Motive*-- Matthew 7:12

F. Dishonest Gain:

There are many facts about the nature of gambling, its criminal associations, and its profound impact on government and business which every citizen should know. Documented information is available. Gambling is a major source of income-producing activity in the underworld. Illegal gambling and crime increases when governments legalize lotteries, pari-mutuel (a system of betting using electronic machines), casinos or other forms of betting. Gambling costs exceed gambling revenues. Stripped of its glamour, gambling is simply seeking to gain the property of others through the operation of chance. It appeals to our materialism and selfishness rather than to our concern for others. Because this evil

is a growing social problem of vast dimensions, we urge every Christian citizen to work diligently to rid their nation, states, and communities of this blight. We should promote a program of education about the destructive force of gambling upon the well-being of children, youths, adults, and families. It is imperative that Christians be ever watchful for legislation that in any way promotes gambling interests and, when such proposed legislation is to be acted upon, make our strong opposition known to the proper authorities.

Scripture Texts: Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 25:13–16; Psalm 37:21; Psalm 125:5; Proverbs 3:27; Proverbs 11:1; Proverbs 21:6; Isaiah 59:8; Jeremiah 22:13; Mark 10:19; I Thessalonians 4:6

V. POLITICAL LIFE

A. Citizenship:

Matthew 5:13-14 states that Christians are to be 'salt and light.' Therefore, Christians should join with others in assuming an active citizenship role in their local community, region, and nation. We confirm that our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any other power (*Acts 5:29*). Citizenship rights and responsibilities require one's best judgment in all social and political activities, all of which are accountable to God. Thus, we believe good, dedicated Christian citizenship is the vital principle for good government. Christians should commit themselves to political participation, voting faithfully in all elections. We urge our people to consider moral character and integrity over and above political parties. A study of the Word, as well as a study of the issues and candidates from reliable informational sources, is vital for making the best decisions.

"On the Sunday nearest your country's most patriotic holiday, we urge the churches to have a patriotic emphasis relative to their love for their respective country, their respective flag, and for the freedoms that they have. Example: In the U.S. that would be July 4."

Scripture Texts: 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Proverbs 8:15-16; Job 34:30; Proverbs 29:2; Romans 13:1-7

B. Basic Freedoms:

We believe that our government holds the power for the protection of the rights of the people to the freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, and communications: to the right of privacy, and to the guarantee of the rights to adequate food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. We urge all General Baptists to promote a government having these basic freedoms for the welfare of all.

1. Race Relations:

We affirm the policy of the General Association of General Baptists to welcome into its body and delegation from a recognized General Baptist association or church regardless of the racial background of its membership. We remind our churches that Christ calls us to seek people, regardless of race, color or nationality, and lead them to Him and to the fellowship of any of our local churches.

Scripture Texts: Genesis 10; Genesis 12:1-3; Numbers 12:1-5; Ruth; Jonah; Zephaniah 3:9-10; Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 2:30-32; Luke 4:16-30; Luke 7:1-10; Acts 10:27-47; Colossians 3:11; Revelation 7:9

1. Separation of Church and State:

We endorse the principle of the separation of church and state. However, the words 'Separation of Church and State' are NOT found in the U.S. Constitution or the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment states: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' It says nothing about what the Church can or cannot do: neither does it say what a Christian citizen should or should not do. The Founding Fathers' interpretation and intention was that the federal

government would be forbidden from restricting religion in any manner. The words 'Church and State' came from a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 to a Baptist Association assuring them that they had no fear of the federal government establishing a national church such as the Church of England. The words 'wall of separation' came from a statement from Roger Williams emphasizing the importance of the world keeping out of the church but never intended to keep the church out of the world.

C. Civil Obedience:

We believe that all citizens have an obligation to obey the laws duly adopted by orderly and just process of government and that government and laws are to be servants of God and work to the benefit of all humans, both born and unborn. Laws and individuals are subject to the judgment of God. Therefore, civil disobedience, including acceptance of governmental punishment, may sometimes be required, for Christians owe their ultimate allegiance not to government (*Daniel 6:6-10*) but to God (*Acts 4:18-20*). We urge Christians to pray for those who serve the public by enacting laws, by enforcing laws, and by attempting to afford the citizenry protection, justice, and equal opportunity.

Scripture Texts: --*Appropriate Obedience to Authorities*-- Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Daniel 6:6-10; --*Appropriate Civil Disobedience*-- Daniel 3:13-18; Daniel 6:6-10; Acts 4:18-20; Acts 5:29

D. Military Service:

War has been an ever-present reality in the history of mankind. While we abhor the occurrence of war, we recognize its inevitability. We appreciate the legacy of those who have fought, and even died, for the cause of freedom. We recognize the necessity to maintain a military force for the protection of freedom and our nation. We also recognize the right of individuals who conscientiously oppose war and refuse military service; however, as citizens of the country, these individuals should commit time to social and/or community service in a non-military way. We ought to pray for peace and the handling of conflict in international relations through compromise and reconciliation. We urge the churches to teach patriotism, love for country, respect for the flag, and appreciation for citizenship rights. We believe homosexuals in the military threaten the military's morale, unity, and overall effectiveness. Our military is a unique community unto itself that has thrived due to the trust and unity of each service, which has been built on a strict code of ethics. We believe that admitting open homosexuals would destroy the unity and morale within units at home and stationed abroad. The Bible clearly instructs us not to practice such immorality.

Scripture Texts: --*War: Sometimes necessary*-- Proverbs 20:18; Proverbs 21:22; Proverbs 24:6; Ecclesiastes 3:8; Luke 22:36-38; Luke 22:49-51; Acts 10; Hebrews 11:32-34;

--*War: Moral Principle*-- Matthew 5:38-48; Matthew 7:12;

--*War: Repugnant to God*-- 1 Chronicles 22:8; Psalm 68:30; --*Homosexuality*-- Genesis 1:27; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

E. Crime and Punishment:

We believe that it is the duty of governmental agencies to establish and maintain police forces, courts, and facilities for the correction of offenders. Citizens should be protected from those who would encroach upon personal and property rights. We respect the basic freedom and right of persons convicted of crimes, but demand their just penalties directed by impartial jury and law. Even young people need correction to learn respect for the laws of our land. We support government objectives to prevent or reduce crime. We strongly oppose social conditions that induce crime, such as use of alcohol, prostitution, gambling, drug dealing, and drug use. We assert that it is the Christian social concern and objective to develop effective means of rehabilitation for those involved in crime. We believe that a part of the mission of the church is to share the message of Christ with those people so they may be restored, rescued, reinstated, and rehabilitated as persons profitable to God and society. Views differ among us and laws differ among states concerning the death penalty. Christians must use prayer and the word of God to arrive at a decision on the rightness or wrongness of the death penalty. Government is ordained of God to reward good and punish evil. We believe that the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools as well as courtrooms and other places can serve to deter crime.

Scripture Texts: Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1–7

SOCIAL PRACTICES SUMMARY STATEMENT

We believe in God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit. God, the Father, is Creator of the world and is its controlling force; Jesus Christ, the Son, is the Redeemer of humanity; The Holy Spirit is the revealer of God's gifts to people and is God's agent in the world.

We acknowledge the ownership of God over all His creation and dedicate ourselves as His stewards to preserve, increase and faithfully use all natural resources according to His plan and for His glory.

We treasure for ourselves and for others God's blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and family life, both in the home and in the community.

We dedicate the powers invested in us to respect the rights of all other persons. We seek to improve the quality of life for all people, giving proper place to the rights and dignity of ethnic and religious minorities.

We endorse welfare agencies that give special help to people in poverty, the mentally ill and challenged, as well as to physically handicapped, and those that provide beneficial health improvement programs.

We believe it to be the duty of every citizen to protect communities from problems that arise from dangerous substances consumed by members of society. Life in every respect must be considered sacred and accepted to be in God's hands, including the continuation of life.

We believe in the right and duty of a person to work, the right to hold and own property as a trust from God, the social and economic right to collective bargaining, the duty to be responsible in the consumption of goods and wealth, and the individual's role in protecting society from economic and political stress.

We dedicate ourselves to responsible citizenship, peace throughout the world, the acceptance of all races, obedience to civil law, and national patriotism. We believe in just penalty for crimes committed as well as diligent efforts to rehabilitate the criminal.

We strongly believe in the validity of God's word and its importance to human affairs; therefore, we gladly accept His commission to share the gospel with all the world.

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