

On Defending Religious Liberty

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus Christ drew a clear distinction between his church and the governments of this world (Matthew 22:15-22) and reserved the judgment between believers and unbelievers for himself alone (Matthew 13:36-43); the Apostle Paul urged Timothy to pray for religious liberty (1 Timothy 2:1-5) and demonstrated that religious belief is subject to personal persuasion (Acts 17:22-31); and the Apostle John revealed “each one” will be judged “according to their works” (Revelation 20:12-13); and

WHEREAS, Baptists in America have consistently championed Constitutional protections against the establishment of state religion and for the free exercise of religion, believing the importance of religious liberty necessarily made it the “first freedom” to be articulated in the Bill of Rights; and

WHEREAS, Messengers to the meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention, from its inception in 1845, have adopted numerous resolutions advocating religious liberty and recognized that true faith cannot be legislated, coerced, or inherited; and

WHEREAS, When adopting the Baptist Faith and Message in 1925, Southern Baptists saw a need to emphasize religious liberty by adding Article XVIII on “Religious Liberty” (subsequently Article XVII in the 1963 and 2000 editions), thereby affirming the lordship of Christ, the separation of church and state, that “a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal,” and that “the state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind”; and

WHEREAS, Through nature and conscience, others have come to recognize that our natural rights and responsibilities derive from our Creator, an open truth that the founders of the American nation also explicitly recognized; and

WHEREAS, Baptists have historically affirmed that nothing in the public square is truly neutral and have promoted active and holistic participation in society which should reflect biblical values as outlined in Article XV of the Baptist Faith and Message, “The Christian and the Social Order”; and

WHEREAS, Our Christian witness is better preserved by the separation of church and state, and Scripture and history have shown that true revival comes through the Spirit of God by means of fervent prayer, gospel evangelism, and biblical discipleship; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 11-12, 2024, boldly affirm that God has endowed every human with religious liberty, for “God alone is Lord of the conscience” (Article XVII); and that “Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God” (Article XVII); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage and support robust Christian engagement in the public square, including individual Christians who pursue elected or appointed office in order to influence government by living out their Christian worldview while advocating Christian morals with respect for the consciences of all people; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we reaffirm the 2023 resolution “On Christ’s Sole Lordship over Every Human Conscience” in its declaration that “we decry any effort which seeks to supplant the sole lordship of Christ over consciences through confusing the separate covenants and responsibilities of the church and the state”; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we reaffirm Article XVII of the Baptist Faith and Message, which states that “the gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends” and “the state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind,” along with numerous Southern Baptist resolutions throughout our history which reject government restriction of religious opinion and limit government infringement of religious expression; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose any effort to establish a state religion of any nation, including the United States of America; that we refute the idea that God has commanded any state to establish any religion or any denomination; and we reject any government coercion or enforcement of religious belief, including blasphemy laws; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose any effort to use the people and the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention to establish Christianity as the state religion of the United States of America; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we object to any suggestion that our historic, God-given distinctive of religious liberty should be abandoned in favor of a state-mandated religion.

