

Frequently Asked Questions

Our church has adopted the Baptist Faith and Message of the Southern Baptist Convention (2000) as our statement of faith. Here is a summary of six primary doctrines.

Frequently Asked Questions

On Baptism

Question: Why do you baptize by immersion?

Answer: Here's a little Greek trivia- the word "Baptism" in our English versions of the Scripture is a transliteration, not translation of the word used in Scripture, "Baptizo." The literal translation of this word means to "put under" or to "submerge." At First Baptist we only practice this Biblical form of baptism, immersion. We do not recognize other methods (sprinkling, pouring, etc.) as Biblical methods of baptism. This method is the historic method of the New Testament church and best pictures the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Question: To be a member of First Baptist, do I have to get baptized again?

Answer: Only if you were baptized as a child or infant before you actually came to know Christ in a personal decision and commitment. This is something parents do for children and is not a personal declaration of a commitment to Christ. In some cases, we may ask someone to be baptized if they come from a church in which the teaching about salvation and baptism differs greatly from what the Bible says. For instance, there are some churches that teach you can be baptized for someone else in order to secure their salvation or that you must be baptized again and again in order to keep your salvation. In these cases, even though someone may have been baptized as an adult, we would encourage them to be baptized again to make a declaration of their belief and trust in God's word at this point. We would not ask someone to be baptized again if they were recommitting their lives after they had fallen away from a lifestyle of faith. There are some people who choose to be baptized after falling away, but we do not believe that the Bible teaches that this is necessary.

Question: Will First Baptist Church baptize a person who is having sex outside of marriage? What if it is in a monogamous relationship?

Answer: You may be surprised, but the answer is "yes." Baptism is a public declaration of our commitment to follow Christ. None of us are perfect before or after coming to Christ. God's free gift of salvation is exactly that. Our faith journey is about our becoming all that God calls us to be. We don't need to change our behavior before accepting God's gift of salvation.

However, there are limitations for those continuing in habitual sin. Habitual sin is where we know that God has commanded us not to do something and we still make a conscious decision to continue engaging in this particular sin. Once we surrender to Christ and give our life to him, this behavior is an act of rebellion against God. As long as those in habitual sin continue their behavior, they would not be able to join the church as a member. And if a person is already a church member, he would be asked to remove himself from ministry leadership until his life reflects Biblical behavior.

On Church Membership

Question: What does it mean to be a member of First Baptist?

Answer: When Christ ascended back to heaven, he left us with the responsibility of spreading his Word and leading people to discover their true purpose in relationship with Christ. We call this the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, we believe the local church is the hope of the world. Membership is your agreement to partner with the global church by becoming an active participant and stakeholder in this local body of believers to accomplish the mission of Christ in the world.

Question: What is required to join First Baptist as a member?

Answer: We require these four things to become a member of First Baptist:

You have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of your life
You have been baptized by immersion after asking Jesus to be Lord
You have attended First Look (You have signed our Membership Covenant where you agree with our structure, strategies and statements and commit to:

Protecting the Unity of Our Church
Sharing in the Responsibility of Our Church
Serving in Ministry of Our Church
Supporting the Testimony of Our Church

On the Lord's Supper (Communion)

Question: What do you believe about The Lord's Supper?

Answer: Jesus never asked his disciples to remember his birth. But he did instruct them to remember his death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols (called "ordinances") as reminders of his death. These two ordinances are: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a regular reminder of the price he paid for us to have a personal relationship with God.

Question: How often do you take the Lord's Supper?

Answer: Jesus never said how often to observe this reminder of his body and blood given for us. The scripture simply says "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Some churches practice this every week, others monthly and still others annually. We try to strike a balance between doing this so often that it loses its power and become routine and so seldom that we lose the benefit it brings of reminding us in a dynamic spiritual way about our Lord's sacrifice and our covenant relationship with Him. We observe the supper once every three months, usually when the month has five Sundays.

On Gifts and the Holy Spirit

Question: What are your beliefs regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Answer: The Bible teaches that, at the moment you believe in Jesus, you are baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This is a one time experience that comes at the moment of salvation. The Bible also teaches us that we must be filled with the Spirit on a continual basis as believers. You receive all of God's Spirit the moment you are saved, and throughout your life you will learn to trust more and more of yourself to Him.

Question: What do you believe about speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit?

Answer: People have always been more impressed with the more spectacular spiritual gifts (healing, tongues, etc) but God tells us in 1 Corinthians 12-14 that He is more impressed with the less noticeable gifts, and that He is most impressed with love. These chapters are filled with warnings about using the more spectacular gifts in ways that draw attention to ourselves rather than to the Lord. Paul says that he would rather speak in a few words that people would understand than in thousands of words in tongues. That is why we don't speak in tongues in our worship services - we want to speak in ways that people understand.

Question: How do you feel about healing at First Baptist Church?

Answer: We believe in God's power to heal. We do not make a public show of our praying for healing. It is a private time, usually of prayer and faith, with those who are facing the struggle and suffering in their lives. We believe that, when it comes to healing, there are times when God says "yes" and times when God says "no" to a physical healing on this earth. Obviously, even death is something Christ has already overcome, and we will spend eternity with Him in heaven. There will come a day for all of us when there will be something that he won't heal us of and we will go to spend eternity with him (unless the Lord comes again first). We need to have the humility to realize that we do not always know what God's answer is going to be on the question of healing. He has told us to put faith in him and to trust him for our heart's desires.

On Financial Support of First Baptist Church

What are the financial expectations of members?

Answer: We encourage members to give a voluntary, systematic contribution of financial support to the church. It is voluntary, meaning it comes out of love and gratitude for all God gives you, as an expression of worship and a way to meet practical needs. It is also systematic, which means giving a predetermined portion of your income as you receive it.

How much of their income are members expected to give?

Answer: The biblical standard is generosity and sacrifice (2 Corinthians 9:7-8). We trust members to seriously and personally decide what that means for them in their life situation. The woman at the temple gave less than two cents, yet Jesus (who was watching the giving) said she gave more than all the others combined because they gave out of their excess, but she gave all she had (Mark 12:41-44). The question needs to move from what can I afford and still maintain all I want for myself, to what will require adjustments on my part to do this because He is worthy of this?

What about tithing? Aren't church members supposed to give 10% of their income?

Answer: Tithing was part of the "IRS" of the Old Testament nation of Israel. It provided for the worship and for the welfare system. Actually, there were two annual tithes and every third year an additional tithe, so the actual amount was much more than 10%. Some simply transfer the Old Testament concept from the Nation of Israel under the law into the New Testament under grace without thinking about what this really means. Giving of offerings has always been an expression of worship to God, giving of tithes was rooted in pragmatic needs of maintaining a system of worship and benevolence.

Bible describes giving God your first and your best in everything including our finances. This is part of our life stewardship and management responsibilities God gives us for participating in what He is doing on earth. We believe this is an issue of God's blessing being on those who have learned to give cheerfully, but it is not an issue of God cursing those who don't.

We recommend using the 10% guide and a benchmark to determine how to even start thinking about generosity. Some at their current station of life could not even think of 10% (way too generous) but with adjustments they could do 5%. Then do 5%. This is not an all or nothing issue. Others might say I could do over 10% and not even really feel it. Then that person really needs to do over 10% to reach a level of generosity and sacrifice.

Question: Is my giving between me and the Lord, or between me and the church? Can I give my offering to another organization?

Answer: The short answer is it's between you and God. God does direct people in different ways about their giving. However, even most para-church organizations agree: first give to the church, and then give any gifts beyond that to meet other needs. One reason is that there was only one place to give in New Testament times...the church. All mission work, benevolence, etc. came through the church. Today, we believe giving to the church first because it is the Christ-ordained body for doing His work in the world. Also, to think practically, the healthier the church, the more people the church reaches, the more people there will be to give to outside ministries.

Also, it's important to know that as a church we give 10% of our budget to organizations and ministries outside of our church to the Southern Baptist Cooperative program that field one of the largest evangelical mission forces in the world as well as hospitals, colleges, seminaries and disaster relief. Your generous giving to First Baptist Church is going to all of these ministries

Question: Should I pay off all of my debts before I begin to give?

Answer: The Bible encourages us to do both, not one or the other. In fact, one of the keys to paying off debts is beginning to manage your finances well so you can give. It not only brings God's blessing to a person's finances, it also helps them to begin to think more sacrificially, to plan more carefully and to see God's direction more clearly.

Question: My husband is not a believer. Should giving be a family decision?

Answer: Finances are always a family issue and involve the decision of the whole family. Giving to the Lord is no different. Often when people have explained to their spouse that this is a commitment they have made out of a real genuine love for the Lord and not a feeling of requirement of by the church, most spouses are responsive and understand in a better way why this commitment is so important.

Try this: sit down and talk with your husband and see if he would be willing to give. Even though he is not a believer, who knows what God might do in his heart. God may use the fact that you are sharing your desire, to speak to his heart about what your commitment to Christ really means in your life. If he has some feeling against charitable giving, the next step is to ask if he might be willing for you to give on a certain portion of your income. We've found that most people are willing, at least at this point, to say, "Yes, I would consider that because that is something on your heart." You might even encourage him by saying, "Let's try this, and see what God does." This could be a way God can prove that he is real not only to you but to your entire family.

Hot Button or Controversial Issues

On Drinking Alcohol

Question: What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol?

Answer: In Bible times everyone drank a watered down wine. Without refrigeration, there was no way to keep fruit juice without it fermenting. There is nothing biblically wrong with drinking alcohol, as long as it's not as a means of escape or you don't struggle with becoming drunk. The biggest problem is that we live in a society where alcohol is the chosen "drug of escape" for many people.

The Bible encourages us, "...be careful that your freedom does not cause those who are weak in the faith to fall." 1 Corinthians 8:9 This is where we get into the area of social responsibility. What kind of example does drinking set for my children, for my neighbors who are watching my Christian witness.

It is this area of social responsibility that some don't consider when they simply say, "People drank in bible time, so it is OK." In Bible times if a man went to a wedding and had too much wine, he might pass out while walking home and sleep it off, or fall off his donkey. He might go to work and be a little slow at his job, but it didn't really impact anyone else. Today it is a far different to go to work with slowed responses and fly an airplane or to leave a party and drive a 4000 pound lethal weapon.

Our staff willingly takes a total abstinence stance for leaders, recognizing this is "extra-biblical" but believing it is socially responsible. Paul talks of his willingness to give up certain freedoms because of his love for the people for whom Jesus died.

On Divorce

Question: What does First Baptist believe about divorce?

Answer: While the Bible does not say that it is okay for us to leave our spouse for just any reason, it does tell us it is acceptable in cases of adultery or desertion. God's intention is not to trap us, but to help us to see the importance of marriage and the great pain that comes with a marriage break up.

God wants us to grow in our relationships, and He wants to grow us even through painful relationships. The most important thing for struggling couples to do is to get into counseling together. It is not enough for one spouse to go, both need to go. This is a problem that can't be dealt with alone or by having someone "fix" our spouse. There is nothing wrong with getting help, God has built us to need other people.

There is a third condition we believe makes separation advisable- physical abuse. Although the Bible does not specifically tell us to divorce if this is the case, our advice would STRONGLY be to separate from a spouse who is physically abusive. It is not God's will for you to allow your spouse (or anyone else) to physically abuse you. Hopefully, separation will be the wake up call that causes them to get counseling to rid their lives of this terrible sin. If you are in this situation, please get in touch with our staff and let us help you.

Finally, if you are a person who has had a divorce and are feeling far from God due to fear or guilt, our Heavenly Father offers both grace and forgiveness. The Bible says God hates divorce because it hurts so much, but He does not hate divorced people.

On Women's Roles in the Church

Question: What do you believe about women teaching in the church?

Answer: It's our belief that the Bible clearly teaches that only men should be the Lead Pastor of a church. By lead Pastor we mean the one who sets the pace, direction and climate of the church. In some settings this is known as the Sr. Pastor or even Head Pastor. We also believe that the Bible does not prohibit women from teaching in the church under the authority of the pastor and elders of that church. We have women in both pastoral and teaching roles at First Baptist. They lead ministries and teach first and foremost under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but they also are also under the authority of our Lead Pastor.

Question: Aren't there verses that say women should not speak, let alone teach, in church?

Answer: The verses most commonly associated with this question are these:

"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." 1 Timothy 2:12 and "...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home..." 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Historical perspective really helps put these into context. In New Testament times, men and women sat on different sides of the church. For a woman to ask her husband a question, she would have had to shout it to the other side of the church or disrupt the church service by getting up and walking over to him. Apparently, this is exactly what was happening in the Corinthian church, and their worship services were becoming disrupted and chaotic. Paul is saying, "Listen during the worship service, and talk about your questions on the way home."

On Abortion and Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Question: What does the Bible say about abortion?

Answer: The Bible clearly teaches that life begins at conception and therefore abortion is wrong.

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe." Psalm 139:13-16

If you are a woman who has had an abortion, and are feeling far from God due to fear or guilt, our Heavenly Father offers both grace and forgiveness. We encourage you to contact the church office for more information on Post Abortion Support Groups, and come to receive the love, forgiveness and compassion of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us "God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us." 2 Corinthians 1:2-4

The Bible is also full of examples on the principles of adoption- after all; believers are adopted into the family of God! We believe that adoption is not only the best option for an undesired pregnancy, but it is the spiritual picture of how God chose us when we didn't know him and made us fully co-heirs with his son Jesus Christ.

Question: What do you believe about Embryonic Stem Cell Research?

Answer: This is a simple but deceptive question. Who wouldn't want to improve the quality of life by discovering a cure for cancer, or a way to grow a new heart or a new kidney? The deception lies in the implication that the only source of stem cell research is from embryos, which simply isn't true. Embryonic stem cell potential remains theoretical, while adult stem cell treatments are already being used to successfully treat many diseases. The critical point here is the production of adult stem cells does not require the destruction of an embryo. Also, adult stem cells pose no medical dangers to the patient.

As with the above question, the Bible tells us life begins at the moment of conception. Since that is true, an embryo is no less life because it is out of the womb, and should be protected as such.

On Homosexuality

Question: What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Answer: The Bible very clearly says that homosexuality is a sin. Leviticus 18:22 says, "Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin." However, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 warns us, "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders... will inherit the kingdom of God." This scripture includes not only homosexuality, but all sexual immorality: adultery, sex without marriage, and pornography. We must not act as if homosexuality is the only serious sexual sin, and we must not act as if homosexuality is not a serious sexual sin.

Question: Isn't being homosexual something that a person is physically born with?

Answer: There is absolutely no scientific data, regardless of some studies hypotheses, that link sexual orientation to biology. Secondly, even if some physical difference were discovered, it would be no excuse for sin. All of us are born with certain weaknesses. Many are born with susceptibilities to certain addictions, such as alcoholism. However, it is obviously still not an excuse for living an alcoholic lifestyle.

Also, a word about being judgmental. It's not judgmental to say that what the Bible calls a sin is a sin. That is simply speaking the truth. However, there is no excuse for not being willing to talk to someone caught up in sin (unless you are tempted by that sin), not believing that they can be forgiven, or thinking that you are not just as much in need of Jesus as they are. Sin has no distinction to God. It all separates us from him.

Question: Can homosexuals attend First Baptist Church? And can they be members?

Answer: Absolutely they can attend First Baptist. In fact, we know that some do. Christ desires that all come to him, no exceptions! However, there are limitations for those caught in habitual sin. Habitual sin is where we know that God has commanded us not to do something and we still make a conscious decision to continue engaging in that particular sin. Once we surrender to Christ and give our life to him, this behavior is an act of rebellion against God. As long as those in habitual sin continue their behavior, they would not be able to join the church as a member. And if a person is already a church member, he would be asked to remove himself from ministry leadership until his life reflects Biblical behavior.