

Maranatha Commitment Statements

Maranatha's Doctrinal Statement originated in the very first year of Maranatha's existence. During the summer of 2009, the college Bible faculty and the seminary faculty created an expansion of the doctrinal statement and set forth the following declaration of its commitment to biblical truth and its application of that truth to the lives of its students, staff, and faculty. The purpose of this statement was to make clear to the Board of Trustees, as they commenced the search for the fifth president of Maranatha Baptist Bible College, the commitment of the Bible faculty to biblical truth and the positions that Maranatha has historically held.

1. **Education:** The Bible Department is committed to a God-centered education. We acknowledge that "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever." We seek to follow the curriculum of the psalmist who sought to proclaim the praises, power, and providential work of God to the generations to come. Our ultimate goal is that students would "set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." We trust that this goal will permeate all of our courses and thus produce a humble dependence and passionate desire for the person of God in both professors and students.
2. **Exegesis:** The Bible Department is committed to biblical exegesis. Systems of theology are always subservient to and to be sourced out of the authority of the text of Scripture. The ultimate responsibility of the Bible Department is to teach individuals to be workmen in the text who strive for an accurate understanding of the Author's/authors' intent. Studies in the original languages and employment of hermeneutical tools are encouraged. We seek to equip the students with exegetical skills which the Holy Spirit, the supreme Helper, can then use to illuminate His Word to the minds and hearts of the students as they prayerfully submit to the authority of the text. We are concerned for those individuals who embrace systems of theology without first obtaining the exegetical skills necessary to evaluate those systems.
3. **Personal Evangelism and Missions:** The Bible Department is committed to personal evangelism and global missions. Regardless of vocational calling, all believers are to recognize that life is ministry and ministry is global. Fulfillment of the Great Commission is the expected behavior of all believers at all ages in all geographical settings. Our desire is to instill within students the joy of sharing the

transforming message of the gospel. This will be accomplished through teaching Scripture in the classroom, modeling evangelism in our personal lives, providing structured opportunities for students to be mentored in witnessing, and encouraging our students to be involved in evangelistic outreaches in the local church. We affirm that the gospel must be shared through the verbal communication of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not merely by the living of a morally upright life. We also rejoice that the chief end of sharing the gospel is the glorification of God as His name is exalted among the nations.

4. **Leadership:** The Bible Department is committed to education that produces individuals who evidence courageous, compassionate, and convictional leadership. We are convinced that the Word of God is relevant for every age and adequately equips students to lead in this contemporary milieu. Christian leadership must be distinctively different from worldly leadership that is characterized by personality, power, and politics. Our task is to prepare servant leaders who have strong, biblically-based convictions; who demonstrate grace and Christlike compassion as they live and communicate those convictions; and who stand with resolute courage when the truths of Scripture are mocked and attacked by the post-Christian world.
5. **Baptist Heritage and Polity:** The Bible Department is committed to Baptist polity and to our heritage as Baptists. The Bible is the sole authority for our faith and practice. From the New Testament in particular, we derive the following distinctives: churches are constituted solely of regenerated and immersed believers. Local churches are autonomous and self-governing. In association with this distinctive, we teach that each local church should have pastors to lead and deacons to serve the congregation, and that the ultimate earthly authority is the congregation itself. Every believer is a priest before God, and all humans enjoy soul liberty. Immersion and the Lord's Supper are the only New Testament ordinances and do not convey justifying grace (i.e., they are not sacraments). Finally, we as Baptists hold to separation of church and state as well as both personal and ecclesiastical separation.

We believe that various religious groups throughout church history have held to key Baptist distinctives and are therefore an important part of our Baptist heritage. We reject the liberal notion that Baptists invented the doctrines that distinguish them, believing rather that Baptists express New Testament teachings that have always been present in some form in church history. Modern Baptists acknowledge their early heritage and from the early seventeenth century have a continuous

documented history. We reject the idea that Baptists are the only true Christians or that Baptist churches are the only true churches; therefore we reject the Landmark Church History theory that underlies these notions. The heritage of Baptists, as defenders of soul liberty and separation of church and state, should be known and valued by all Baptists.

6. **Dispensationalism:** The Bible Department is committed to a dispensational hermeneutic. In every Bible course we teach and demonstrate a normal, historical, grammatical interpretation of the text of Scripture that is the foundation of dispensationalism. This hermeneutic does not preclude or exclude correct understanding of types, illustrations, apocalypses, and other genres within the basic framework of literal interpretation. It does acknowledge the progressive revelation of God's divine plan through time. Though various stewardships of revelation are acknowledged, the unifying salvific factor for all people for all time is the necessity of responding by faith to the special revelation given. The consequence of this consistent hermeneutic is a distinction between ethnic Israel and the New Testament church. Covenants established between God and ethnic Israel will be fulfilled in the literal sense in which they were given and received. The unique relationship between Christ and His Bride, the church, is acknowledged and preserved. Throughout all of eternity, the ultimate purpose of His universal plan is that of glorifying Himself.

We reject covenant theology, its hermeneutic, and the eschatology of amillennialism and post-millennialism. Furthermore, we reject the progressive concept that Christ is already reigning on the Davidic throne.

7. **The Church:** The Bible Department is committed to the primacy and autonomy of the local church. God's principal work in the world today is the building of the church. In the first four chapters of Ephesians, God reveals to believers that His primary interest in this dispensation is the church. Ephesians describes the work of the triune God as He blesses, chooses, predestines, adopts, redeems, forgives, empowers, and enlightens a people for His name to the praise of His glorious grace. The result of these actions is the creation of a body and the construction of a building called the church. Believers are not to live independently of each other, but are to be joined together as one new body functioning as a single household of God. The accomplishment of the task of bringing together this redeemed group of strangers into a unified body has a single intent: that all earthly and heavenly powers would know the "manifold wisdom of God."

The local body of Christ, “the pillar and ground of the truth,” is under the authority of the Redeemer and Chief Shepherd. As such she functions in an autonomous fashion. Her members alone are responsible for the safeguarding of their doctrine, the working of their governance, and the choices of their ecclesiastical practice. The role of the Bible Department is to serve local assemblies, not by establishing dictums to follow or practices to uphold, but by equipping individuals for leadership in the local church through biblical instruction.

8. **Fundamentalism:** The Bible Department is committed to Fundamentalism. The fundamentals of the faith have historically been defined as those beliefs that are necessary to the biblical doctrine of salvation combined with a high doctrine of Scripture, so that we have an inerrant record of those doctrines. Fundamentalism as an idea is absolute allegiance to those doctrines united to a willingness to defend those doctrines and to separate from those who deny or contradict them. Fundamentalism as a modern American movement emerged in the late nineteenth century when theological liberalism began to infiltrate and overwhelm the mainline denominations, and a generation rose up to defend the faith against those onslaughts. The movement has gradually taken shape over the last century as a separatist wing of conservative Christianity, consisting primarily, but not exclusively, of premillennarians and Baptists.

Maranatha’s origin lies squarely within the fundamental Baptist movement. As such, we have self-consciously identified ourselves as a separatist institution serving primarily independent and separatist Baptist churches. We reject the evangelical mindset towards culture and the tendencies to develop strategies for ecumenical evangelism and to cooperate with non-evangelical theologies. We see our mission as militant defense of the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. We regard separation from disobedient brethren a sometimes necessary step in order to maintain fidelity to Scripture. In general, we believe that cooperation is possible in proportion to agreement, and separation is necessary in proportion to disagreement. We also reject the attitudes and actions of fundamentalists who elevate tangential and eccentric teachings to the level of the fundamentals of the faith and separate over them. With our fundamentalist forefathers, we believe that unity should be enjoyed when possible, separation practiced when necessary.

9. **Expositional Preaching:** The Bible Department is committed to expository preaching. Because we acknowledge both the authority and the sufficiency of

Scripture and because we accept the literal, grammatical, historical, and contextual hermeneutic, we believe that the natural outcome of an exegetical approach to the study of the Scripture is expository preaching. Each book, chapter, and verse exists within a communicative framework designed to convey truth that is germane to that particular pericope, a dynamic that no other form of preaching fully captures. Even when students present a topical sermon (e.g., doctrinal sermon), we believe they should present a text or texts in an expository style, systematically unpacking the meaning of a particular text with reference to that topic in its context.

Furthermore, based upon Paul's instructions to Timothy, we strive for a balance between teaching and exhortation (distinguishing the sermon from either a mere lecture or a purely persuasive speech). We also distinguish between exegesis and homiletics (the study of God's Word and the communication of God's Word). The expository sermon engages all the elements of human response—intellect, emotion, and will. We endeavor to demonstrate through our preaching the deliberate movement from the text (exegesis), to theology (the canonical context), to application (the contemporary significance of the text), faithfully demonstrating both the authoritative meaning of the text and the authoritative relevance of the text to today's Christian. We, therefore, acknowledge that the effectiveness of preaching does not come from the personality of the preacher or the delivery of the sermon, but from the intentional exposure of the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit who uses it in the lives of the hearers.

We appreciate that God uses preachers who are not expositors, but we strive to teach and model the expository method. We reject anthro-centric (health and wealth, positive thinking) and socio-centric (social gospel) sermons. We choose rather a theo-centric focus. Biblical preaching, therefore, imparts specific truths of a particular pericope so that an individual may know and trust the Savior more.

10. **Versions:** The Bible Department is committed to a position on the text of the Scriptures that honors textual truths, historical discovery and local church leadership. We believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament canon, which, being inspired and inerrant in the original manuscripts, is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. We believe that the Bible teaches the complete preservation of the verbal revelation of God, yet no passage of Scripture specifies the manner in which God preserved His Word. Thus, we hold that God has providentially preserved His Word in the many manuscripts, fragments, and copies of the Scriptures. We hold that the reliability of

any text, text type, translation, version, or copy of the Scriptures is to be judged by the autographs only. Thus any translation or version of Scripture in any language is the Word of God if it accurately reproduces what is in the original languages. We believe that the translation of the Word of God from the original languages into the language of common people is a necessary activity and essential for the spread of the Gospel.

We are thankful that the KJV of the Bible is an accurate translation of the original languages. This version is the preference of multiple churches within our constituency. We use the King James Version in the Maranatha pulpit and classroom. We reject versions that reflect liberal or cultic bias. We reject preservation positions that elevate any version to the level of the autographs.

11. **Soteriology:** The Bible Department is committed to teaching a biblically balanced soteriology. We believe in the divine source of salvation, that all of salvation flows from God's free and unmerited grace. We also affirm the responsibility of all people to repent of their sins and believe the gospel. We recognize that good men have differed throughout church history regarding the difficult questions of election and predestination. While believing that it is essential that every student of the Word work through the numerous passages that touch on these difficult issues, we grant both our faculty and students the liberty to investigate the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man in various ways. We reject theology that denies the responsibility of all people to repent and believe, or the responsibility of all believers to evangelize everyone they can. We do not support positions that attribute the source of evil to God or that limit the extent of Christ's atonement to the elect. We also reject man-centered theologies that depreciate human depravity, emphasizing free will to the extent that they depend upon methodologies and strategies as the crucial components in evangelism and revival. We uphold the biblical doctrine of eternal security. The Bible Department believes that carelessly disparaging men as Calvinists or Arminians is unhelpful and intellectually chilling. At Maranatha the great doctrines relating to God's gracious work are treated with reverence and respect and believers are evaluated according to their obedience and faithfulness to the Word regardless of the labels men ascribe to them. Both scholarship and truth require accuracy and grace when evaluating men and ministries. We believe professors and students ought to be able to interact thoughtfully and respectfully on this issue, bringing all of their theological formulations to the bar of careful biblical exegesis.

12. **Sanctification:** The Bible Department is committed to the progressive nature of sanctification. At salvation, believers are made positionally holy in Christ and await the perfected holiness of heaven. Until that time, an individual must wage war with the flesh by a Spirit-empowered putting off of the old manner of life and putting on of the new life as he or she is being renewed in the Spirit of holiness. This progressive battle is won as the man of God utilizes the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God to become like the Son of God. Because it is an individual battle, we recognize that each believer grows at a different pace and that this growth is manifested in various ways. We also recognize that this growth toward Christlikeness is initially an internal transformation of the heart that results in external indications of biblical change. We acknowledge that individual growth involves an active mortification of the flesh that is enabled by God's divine power rather than a passive quietism. The nature of this work is an active dependence upon God's Spirit as we walk in daily fellowship with Him. Because there are a variety of positions on sanctification, we, therefore, foster a spirit of grace toward those believers who are inclined towards alternative views.
13. **Christian Liberty:** The Bible Department is committed to the biblical practice of Christian liberty. We acknowledge that Scripture binds believers together around non-negotiables such as the gospel, fundamental doctrines, and clear biblical mandates, but allows for a variety of applications of biblical principles to areas not specifically enumerated in Scripture. We encourage all believers through their study of Scripture to establish personal convictions that glorify God in all areas of life and promote unity with fellow believers.

Paul clearly defines in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10 that believers are neither to be “despising” nor “judging” others because of different practices in “doubtful things,” but rather are to receive one another as fellow-servants. We reject all attempts to elevate extra-biblical standards to the level of scriptural authority; such attempts often divide the Body of Christ and/or endeavor to establish one's holiness apart from the work of Christ. Such practices lead to spiritual elitism, pride, and inauthentic holiness that stress the external over the internal. Believers must, therefore, be convinced in their own faith of the rightness or wrongness of a practice through their personal study of the Scriptures and stand before God in assurance of their faith while biblically loving those of differing persuasions. We also recognize the need for submission to institutional standards but acknowledge these do not produce holiness in and of themselves, but can be helpful prior to the formation of personal convictions.

14. **Contemporary Issues:** The Bible Department is committed to transparent interaction with students on contemporary issues. Discernment is a character quality and acquired skill that is necessary for spiritual success. The ability to practice keen insight and judgment in contemporary issues cannot be developed in an environment that limits discussion and hinders transparency. At the same time, open discussion without progression toward biblical answers does not meet the standard of a valid education. It is our desire to provide students a forum for communication so that education in critical thinking and biblical discretion can take place. In particular, we recognize that our students are being impacted by many conservative evangelicals via their writings, speaking, and internet communication. We acknowledge that many of these men and women have made positive contributions to the Body of Christ. We also note that aspects of their teaching and practices fall outside of the boundaries that we believe are biblical. We seek to instruct and model for students to “prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”