

Report: Fellowship of Huntsville Church's Statement of Faith

On Sunday, April 21, 2024, a duly convened assembly of the Fellowship of Huntsville Church (FOHC) constituted a committee to review FOHC's "Statement of Faith" and directed said committee to provide a corresponding report to the assembly.

This report reviews the origin of FOHC's Statement of Faith; its historical applications; recent events, decisions and actions centering around that document; and resolutions submitted to the assembly, regarding the future existence, form and use of an FOHC Statement of Faith.

Origin

The FOHC Statement of Faith (SoF) was adopted as this church's "Doctrinal Statement" on February 10, 2008, as reported by Elder meeting minutes of that date. According to several currently serving FOHC elders (some holding office during that 2008 meeting; some only recently appointed), this SoF was based on the 1963 Baptist Statement of Faith, and modified as the then-sitting elders deemed appropriate.

The SoF was adopted by vote of the elder board and was not submitted to the congregation for review, amendment or other considerations prior to adoption. Though adopted by the elder board, on behalf of the FOHC congregation, minutes of that meeting record that

"Eschatology (the doctrine of last things) was discussed. There are varying views within our Elder body. The Elders agreed (Richard [Ohendalski] submitted by consensus) to include a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial view."

This is important to note, not because of the eschatological views of the board or the corresponding content of the SoF, but because it reminds us there was a time when the FOHC elder board (and perhaps the congregation as a whole) was seemingly united in purpose, though neither monolithic in their understanding of scripture nor uniform in every belief.

Historical Use and Application

According to the minutes of the February 10, 2008 elder meeting, a single elder dissented from the majority on certain points. As noted, those minutes state the dissenting elder "submitted by consensus." He was not, however, removed from the entitled office of elder, nor was he forbidden from teaching, facilitating communion services, or any other such function. Indeed, he continued to serve in all these capacities for the next fifteen years.

During those ensuing years, a similar tolerance, whether tacit or intentional, was accorded the congregation as a whole. As the FOHC body has grown to include hundreds of Christ-followers, there are myriad views and understandings of scripture, on a litany of issues. Many of these views, some of which diverge significantly from those espoused by the FOHC Statement of Faith and church

leadership, have been taught in Sunday schools, men's groups and other ministries, and even from the pulpit. Despite these divergent views, the body has apparently remained united in the proclaimed mission of FOHC - *"...to equip the saints for the work of the ministry until we obtain the unity of the faith"* - without rancor, though some may disagree with elements of the SoF, while others have stated they were unaware of the existence of this Statement of Faith or had never read it.

Recent Events, Decisions and Actions

During the 2023 selection of new elders, some candidates raised concerns regarding what they considered the impropriety of holding to a Statement of Faith which claims, "We believe..." while some elders, teachers, or other "leadership" did not, in fact, believe and profess all points of that Statement. Accordingly, some expressed support for a review of the FOHC Statement of Faith. Subsequent to the appointment of additional elders, the elder board discussed how the SoF should be reviewed and who would be permitted to take part in such review. With the exception of a single, dissenting voice, the board determined that, as FOHC is "elder-ruled," those elders, alone, have authority to review, modify and approve the SoF and to determine how it will be applied to the life and government of the FOHC community.

In the November 12, 2023 elder meeting, the board voted, 7-to-1, in favor of reaffirming the "doctrinal statement" and also determined to require all elders, teachers and other "leadership" to express like affirmation of all points of the FOHC SoF. This was first reported to the congregation at the end of the first service, the following Sunday – November 19, 2023.

Following this "reaffirming" of the SoF, some of the actions taken include:

- 1) The removal of a single elder, following more than thirty years of service in that position
- 2) The requirement that all deacons proclaim agreement with "all points" of the SoF or to be forbidden from serving the body of FOHC [Emailed to all deacons on November 28, 2023]
- 3) Forced removal of two deacons and voluntary departure of another (representing a total of some 30+ years of deacon service)
- 4) Removal of the third & fourth grade Sunday school teacher
- 5) Removal of an adult Sunday school class, including the removal of all recordings and related artifacts from the church website
- 6) Removal of a single small group from the church website
- 7) Locking of all Sunday school rooms, following an attempt by several worshipers to follow the pastor's instructions (of November 19, 2023) to "study" the Statement of Faith
- 8) Cessation of a long-standing Men's Group (because those facilitating could not affirm all points of the SoF)

In previous years, the Fellowship of Huntsville Church has experienced sweet and peaceable fellowship, amicable study and discourse, and the joint edification of the body as iron sharpened iron. By the Lord's good pleasure, during the COVID pandemic this congregation thrived, and even grew, through those years that witnessed the dissolution of so many churches; this, despite the fact that new members hailed from a multitude of denominations, bringing with them a broad spectrum of beliefs, many of which stand in contrast to the existing FOHC Statement of Faith. Surely this was a blessed state, that bore well the name of God, saw many come to know Him, effectively carried out the directives given us by our Lord, and proved a blessing to communities far and wide.

This was surely more God-honoring than the state of affairs arising at FOHC since the determination to wield the FOHC Statement of Faith as a tool for stifling open and honest study and coercing uniform and unquestioning belief among members.

Resolutions Submitted to the Assembly

In order to honor our God and restore right fellowship among the body; protect all members from undue influence and abuse of authority; foster an environment conducive to the encouragement of believers to deeply study His Word; and for our posterity, we submit the following to the entire body of the Fellowship of Huntsville Church:

Whereas the FOHC elder board has required that all elders, deacons, teachers and all positions of “leadership” affirm “all points” of the FOHC Statement of Faith,

And whereas certain of these elders have openly testified (in Sunday school classes, group discussions and one-on-one conversations) that they do not adhere to all points of the Statement of Faith;

Whereas certain elders have assured some members that some disagreement with the FOHC SoF is acceptable, and equivalent to “going 4 miles per hour over the speed limit”;

Whereas elders have had individuals removed from positions of service under the guise of the FOHC SoF, for issues not addressed by that SoF;

Whereas certain elders have declared, “We need a standard” (other than scripture) [elder meeting and candidate interview - August 6, 2023],

And whereas it has been declared, from the FOHC pulpit, that the Bible is the Word of God, the “plumb line,” the “canon,” the “metric,” the “standard,”

And whereas we concur with the teaching from the FOHC pulpit – that the presence of a definite article excludes any alternatives;

Whereas the Apostle Paul (in Acts 17) lauds the Bereans for subjecting even the words of an apostle to the scrutiny of the scriptures, “to see if these things were so”

And whereas all then-sitting elders affirmed, on August 6, 2023, that none of them could claim a complete and perfect understanding of all God's Word, His wisdom, His will or His ways,

And whereas all these elders have confessed to changing certain views over their lifetime and

acknowledging that some views may change again,

And whereas we believe that in the new covenant, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all God's people, without partiality, indwelling preachers, pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, and every member of the body, in like manner;

Whereas both senior and associate pastors have, from the FOHC pulpit, espoused views diametrically opposed to some clauses in the FOHC SoF,

And whereas some members earnestly believe some clauses in the FOHC SoF are likewise opposed to specific scriptures,

And whereas these apparent divergences from the FOHC SoF involve even the fundamentals of soteriology;

Whereas certain elders have attempted to validate the rectitude of the FOHC Statement of Faith by virtue of its being based on the 1963 Baptist Statement of Faith,

And whereas even the biblical and protestant belief in “justification by faith” was most prominently reasserted, notwithstanding almost one thousand five hundred years of broad teaching to the contrary,

And whereas we submit the longevity of a view does nothing to establish the legitimacy of a view, and that the truth of the Word of God stands wholly sufficient and unassailable, regardless of the arguments of men,

And whereas we concur with the first clause (i.e., “The Scriptures”) of the FOHC Statement of Faith – that “[b]ecause the Bible is inspired by God **it is the supreme and final authority for our faith and conduct.**”

Whereas we hold that all men are fallible and that the surest and most faithful method of determining truth is a collective, open, honest and vigorous study of the Word of God and discussion of the same;

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the duly convened Assembly of the Fellowship of Huntsville Church calls on all FOHC worshipers, including the elder board, to

- I. Schedule and convene one or more assemblies, as necessary, for the entire body of FOHC to review the current FOHC Statement of Faith, to include consideration of
 - A. The proper purpose and intent of a Statement of Faith
 - B. The proper use and application of such a Statement
 1. Should it be used as an instrument for culling volunteers and other servants?
 2. Should uniform belief be required among all elders, or is there benefit in a diversity of beliefs among fallible men?
 - C. The proper content of a Statement of Faith
 1. Should it include topics deemed “not fundamental?”
 2. Who defines which scriptures are or are not “fundamental?”
 - D. What to do when someone in “leadership” changes their mind or comes to a new understanding of certain scripture(s)?
 1. Should the body, at large, have a voice in determining what will be claimed as to what “we” believe?
 2. Are our Lord and FOHC better served with or without a creed written by men?
- II. Schedule the first such assembly no later than Sunday, July 14, 2024 and make public notice of said assembly no later than Sunday, June 30, 2024.
- III. Suspend the current FOHC Statement of Faith in favor of the first clause of that Statement, until such time as the body of Fellowship of Huntsville Church collectively addresses the aforementioned concerns.
 - Said first clause reading: *“We believe the Bible consists of the 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books; that every word has been inspired by God and thus, in the original manuscripts, the Bible is without error. Because the Bible is inspired by God it is the supreme and final authority for our faith and conduct. There are no other writings similarly inspired by God.”*

Appendix A: FOHC Statement of Faith

The Scriptures

We believe the Bible consists of the 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books; that every word has been inspired by God and thus, in the original manuscripts, the Bible is without error. Because the Bible is inspired by God it is the supreme and final authority for our faith and conduct. There are no other writings similarly inspired by God. ([II Timothy 3:16-17](#); [II Peter 1:20-21](#))

The Trinity

We believe in one God eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who have the same nature and attributes but who are distinct in office and activity, and who are worthy of the same homage, confidence and obedience. ([Matthew 28:19](#); [II Corinthians 13:14](#))

The Person and Work of God:

We believe that in the beginning God created out of nothing the universe and all that is in it, thus manifesting the glory of His power, wisdom and goodness. By this sovereign power He continues to sustain His creation and by His providence He orders the affairs of men and nations according to His own wise, eternal plan. ([Genesis 1:1](#); [Colossians 1:15-17](#))

The Person and the Work of Christ:

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man without ceasing to be God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in order to reveal God to man and redeem sinful man. We believe that He accomplished our redemption through His death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice. We believe that our redemption and salvation is guaranteed by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead. ([John.1:1](#); [Romans 3:24-26](#); [4:25](#))

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is now in heaven, exalted to the right hand of God, where as High Priest, He fulfills the ministry of intercession and advocacy for His people. ([Hebrews 1:3](#); [3:1](#); [I John 2:1-2](#))

The Person and the Work of the Holy Spirit:

We believe that God, the Holy Spirit, is that person of the Trinity who restrains evil in the world and convicts men of sin. He also regenerates, baptizes believers into the church (the Body of Christ), indwells them permanently, seals them unto the day of redemption, bestows one or more spiritual gifts on each believer, and empowers those yielded to Him. ([John. 16:8](#); [14:16-17](#); [I Corinthians 12:7,13](#); [Ephesians.1:13](#))

We believe some gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and prophecy, were temporary and foundational in nature. Though we deny that the gift of healing exists today as it did in the early church, we nonetheless believe God still works in miraculous ways, including sovereignly healing the sick through our prayers.

The Nature of Man:

We believe that man was created innocent and in the image of God, but that he sinned, bringing both physical and spiritual death to himself and his posterity. We believe that man has inherited a sinful nature, is alienated from God, and thus unable by his own efforts to please God and is in need of salvation. ([Genesis 1:27](#), [Romans 5:12](#); [Ephesians 2:1-3](#))

Salvation:

We believe that salvation is a gift of God and is received by man by personally trusting in the death of Jesus Christ as an adequate substitute for the penalty of sin. We believe that man is justified by grace through faith apart from works. We believe that to accomplish salvation God elected some prior to creation, sent Jesus Christ to purchase their redemption through a substitutionary death, and draws the elect unto belief through the working of the Holy Spirit. ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [John. 1:12](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [John 3:16](#)). Those who have been justified will spend eternity in heaven, while the unregenerate will suffer doom in the lake of fire.

Eternal Security:

We believe that all who have received Christ as Savior are kept secure forever. ([Romans 8:38-39](#); [John 10:27-30](#))

Sanctification:

We believe that sanctification is progressive which is a setting apart unto God's glorification.

Since the believer retains his sinful nature, however, there is need for progressive sanctification whereby the Christian grows in grace by the power of the Holy Spirit. ([Romans 12:1, 2](#); [Philippians 2:2](#))

The Church:

We believe that the universal church, the Body and Bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism, made up of all born-again persons of this present age. We believe the church began at Pentecost and that a believer is placed into the church by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#); [5:25-27](#); [I Corinthians 12:13](#))

We believe that the local church is an assembly of professed believers in Jesus Christ who are voluntarily joined together in one locality for the purpose of worship, study of the Word of God, observance of the ordinances, Christian fellowship, and to be equipped for Christian service. ([Acts 2:42](#); [Ephesians 4:11-13](#))

We believe there are two offices within the church—elders and deacons. Elders are charged to attend to the spiritual needs of the body, while the deacons are charged to attend to the physical needs of the body. The church is not congregationally ruled but is led by the elder body. (I Tim. 3, [Acts 6:1-4](#))

The Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper:

We believe that Christ instituted the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper which are to be observed by believers until He returns. ([Matthew 28:19-20](#); [I Corinthians 11:23-26](#))

We believe that water baptism publicly identifies a believer with his Savior.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a memorial of Christ's death, the elements being symbols of His body and blood. We feel every Christian has a right to partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper but that participation should always be preceded by solemn self-examination. Each parent has the responsibility to determine the qualifications of his own children to participate. ([I Corinthians 11:23-24](#))

Last Things:

We believe in Jesus' personal return prior to a literal 1,000 year kingdom on earth and in the resurrection of the dead—some to eternal life and others to eternal punishment. We believe that those who are redeemed are completely forgiven of all sin, past, present and future, and that they shall never be held accountable for it. Yet we believe that God shall some day call believers to account for the way that they have lived their lives and invested their talents, and that He shall reward them for their faithful service. ([II Corinthians 3:11-15](#); [II Corinthians 5:9-10](#); [II Timothy 4:7-8](#))

Marriage:

We believe that marriages are a union between one man and one woman.

Appendix B: November 28, 2023 Email to Deacons

Morning Gentlemen,

The Elders are enforcing the Church's Statement of Faith, which can be found at [What We Believe... – Fellowship of Huntsville Church \(fohc.org\)](https://www.fohc.org) in order to serve. I will need a Yes or No response from each of you. Yes, if you believe all points, No if you do not. A No response will not allow you to serve as a Deacon or Deacon Candidate.

Please response by noon Wednesday, 29th 2023. This information will be forwarded to the Elders.

Thank you Gentlemen