

Sessional Task Force Report and Motion

The General Assembly voted on some controversial issues during the session of 2001. The most controversial issue approved was an overture to remove amendment b (the fidelity and chastity clause G-6.0106b) on ordination standards from the Book of Order. A second important issue that was debated on the floor concerned the nature of Jesus Christ and whether He is the only way of salvation.

We feel strongly that this General Assembly has thrust upon us the necessity to clarify what we, as the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Norfolk, believe concerning these matters. These include specifically, the nature of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture and the standards of behavior of believers, especially leaders.

These are important matters. How these questions are ultimately settled will determine the future of the denomination. We might well identify with the words of Mordecai when he told Esther, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

The Sessional Task Force presents a motion that the Session of 2001 stand in continuity with the prior motions adopted by the Sessions of 1978 and 1996 and adopt the following statement concerning these major issues outlined above that were brought out by the latest General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church:

We affirm that:

- 1. Jesus Christ is Lord God of all and the only way of salvation.**
 - a. Jesus and God are One. (John 10:30, John 8:58, Phil 2:5-7, Mark 2:7, Col 2:9, John 20:28)
 - b. Christ is supreme over all things (Col 1:15-20, Matt. 28:18))
 - c. Salvation can be attained only through Jesus' atoning sacrifice. (John 1:29, Rom. 3:23-25, Heb. 7:23-25, 9:15, 10:10-18, John 4:14-15)
 - d. One cannot have a relationship with God outside of Jesus Christ. (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, John 6:40, 45-48, 1 Tim 2:5-6, 1 John 4:14-15)

- 2. The Holy Scripture is God's revealed Word, the only infallible rule for faith and life.**
 - a. The entire Bible is God's revealed message to the entire human race. (2 Tim 3:15-17, Psalm 119)
 - b. The Bible is neither a science text nor a secular history text, but is infallible in all that it teaches. (John 20:31)
 - c. Scripture is the two edge sword separating truth from falsehood. (Heb 4:12, Rev 1:16, Eph. 6:17)
 - d. The authority of Scripture is the bedrock of the reformed faith. We are reformed and we continue to reform but only consistent with the authority of Scripture. (John 5:37-40, Rev 22:18-19)
 - e. Understanding comes from God, not by our own wisdom. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

- 3. God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life. This includes honoring the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, the only relationship in which sexual activity is appropriate.**
 - a. We are called to lead pure and blameless lives(1 Peter 1:14-16, James, Phil 2:14-15, Titus 2:11-14)
 - b. Specifically we are called to lead sexually pure lives:
 - Jesus explicitly states that God's model is the marriage between a man and a woman. (Matthew 19:5, Mark 7:21, Eph. 5:31)
 - All forms of sexual activity outside of marriage of a man and a women are condemned. (Lev. 18:22, Matt. 15:19, Rom. 1:27, 1 Cor. 5:9-11, Prov. 5:18-21, Deut. 23:17, 22:22, 27:20-23)
 - c. Leaders of the church are expected to be modelers of Christian living. (1 Cor. 4:15-17, 1 Tim 3:1-12, Titus 1:5-9)

Please see the attached Addendum for Scriptures noted as well as many others.

Scripture References:

All quotations are from the New International Version.

1a: Jesus and God are One

^{John 10:29}My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all^o; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

^{John 8:58}"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

^{John 1:1}In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood^o it.

^{Phil 2:5}Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^o God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷ but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature^o of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

^{Mark 2:7}"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

^{Col 2:9}For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

^{John 20:28} Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

1b Christ is supreme over all things

^{Col 1:15}He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

^{Matt 28:18}Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^o the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

1c Salvation can be attained only through Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

^{John 1:29}The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

There is no difference, ^{Romans 3:23} for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,^o through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

^{Hebrews 7:23} Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely^o those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

^{Hebrews 9:15} For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”^o

¹⁷Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more.”^o

¹⁸And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1d. One cannot have a relationship with God outside of Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really knew me, you would know^o my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹He is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the capstone.”^{o•o}

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

John 6:40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:45 It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’^o Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life.

¹ Tim 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

¹ John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

And...

John 4:41 And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴²They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
 and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
 each of us has turned to his own way;
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
 I will take hold of your hand.
 I will keep you and will make you
 to be a covenant for the people
 and a light for the Gentiles,
 7 to open eyes that are blind,
 to free captives from prison
 and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

2a The entire Bible is God's revealed message to the entire human race.

²Tim 3:15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2b The Bible is neither a science text nor a secular history text, but is infallible in all that it teaches.

John 20:30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.
³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

2c Scripture is the two edge sword separating truth from falsehood.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
 Rev 1:16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.
 Eph 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

2d The authority of Scripture is the bedrock of the reformed faith. We are reformed and we continue to reform but only consistent with the authority of Scripture.

John 5:37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Rev 22:18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

2e Understanding comes from God, not by our own wisdom.

²Peter 1:20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And...

Romans 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Luke 4:21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

John 17:12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

John 2:22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Luke 8:32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”^o

34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Gal 3:8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Gal 3:21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.²² But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

3a We are called to lead pure and blameless lives

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Philemon 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

3b Jesus explicitly states that God’s model is the marriage between a man and a woman.

All forms of sexual activity outside of marriage of a man and a woman are condemned.

Matt 19:4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’^{o 5} and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’

Mark 7:20 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

Eph 5:31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”^{o 32} This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Leviticus 18:22 “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

Matt 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.²⁰ These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’”

Romans 1:27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

1 Cor 5:9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

Proverbs 5:18 May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

Deut. 23:17 No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. ¹⁸You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute^o into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.

Deut 22:22 If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.

3c Leaders of the church are expected to be modelers of Christian living.

¹ Cor 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. ¹⁵Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹⁷For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

¹ Timothy 3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer,^o he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹In the same way, their wives^o are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint^o elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer^o is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

And...

¹ John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Psalms 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.

Isaiah 52:11 Depart, depart, go out from there!
Touch no unclean thing!
Come out from it and be pure,
you who carry the vessels of the LORD.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Matt 5:27 You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'^o ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

^{Philemon 1:9} And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,
¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with
the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

^{Hebrews 12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that
hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix
our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its
shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful
men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

And Finally.....

^{Matt 22:37} Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your
mind.” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰
All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

^{Hebrews 5:11} We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹² In fact, though by
this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over
again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the
teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to
distinguish good from evil. ^{Heb 6:1} Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,