

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL APPLICATION

This statement is the third and final in a trilogy of Summits sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.

Summit I (October 26-28, 1978) produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Summit II (November 10-13, 1982) resulted in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics.

This last conference, Summit III (December 10-13, 1986), drafted the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application. With this statement the proposed scholarly work of ICBI has been completed, for the doctrine of inerrancy has thus been defined, interpreted, and applied by many of the leading evangelical scholars of our day.

NOTE

The participants at Summit III signed the following Statement of Affirmations and Denials with the following preface:

"As a participant in Summit III of ICBI, I subscribe to these articles as an expression of my agreement of their overall thrust."

ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

Article I: The Living God

We affirm that the one true and living God is the creator and sustainer of all things.

We affirm that this God can be known through His revelation of Himself in His inerrant written Word.

We affirm that this one God exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom is fully God.

We affirm that this living, acting, speaking God entered into history through the Son Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the human race.

We affirm that the revealed character and will of God are the foundation of all morality.

We deny that the human language of Scripture is inadequate to inform us who God is or what He is like.

We deny that the doctrine of the Trinity is a contradiction or is based upon an unacceptable ontology.

We deny that the notion of God should be accommodated to modern thought which has no place for the concepts of sin and salvation.

Article II: The Savior and His Work

We affirm that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten from the Father from all eternity, and also true man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

We affirm that the indivisible union of full deity with full humanity in the one person of Jesus Christ is essential for His saving work.

We affirm that Jesus Christ, through His vicarious suffering, death, and resurrection, is the only Savior and Redeemer of the world.

We affirm that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

We affirm that Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture, is the supreme model of the godly life that is ours in and through Him.

We deny that Scripture warrants any proclamation or offer of salvation except on the basis of the saving work of the crucified and risen Christ.

We deny that those who die without Christ can be saved in the life to come.

We deny that persons capable of rational choice can be saved without personal faith in the biblical Christ.

We deny that presenting Jesus Christ as a moral example without reference to His deity and substitutionary atonement does justice to the teaching of Scripture.

We deny that a proper understanding of the love and justice of God warrants the hope of universal salvation.

Article III: The Holy Spirit and His Work

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune Godhead and that His work is essential for the salvation of sinners.

We affirm that true and saving knowledge of God is given by the Spirit of God as He authenticates and illuminates the Word of canonical Scripture, of which He is the primary author.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit guides the people of God, giving them wisdom to apply Scripture to modern issues and everyday life.

We affirm that the church's vitality in worship and fellowship, its faithfulness in confession, its fruitfulness in witness, and its power in mission, depend directly on the power of the Holy Spirit.

We deny that any view that disputes the essential tripersonality of the one God is compatible with the gospel.

We deny that any person can say from the heart that Jesus is Lord apart from the Holy Spirit.

We deny that the Holy Spirit, since the apostolic age, has ever given, or does now give, new normative revelation to the church.

We deny that the name of renewal should be given to any movement in the church that does not involve a deepened sense of God's judgment and mercy in Christ.

Article IV: The Church and Its Mission

We affirm that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives the Bible its canonical authority, and the role of the church was and is to recognize and affirm this authority.

We affirm that Christ the Lord has established his church on earth and rules it by His Word and Spirit.

We affirm that the church is apostolic as it receives and is established upon the doctrine of the apostles recorded in Scripture and continues to proclaim the apostolic gospel.

We affirm that identifying marks of local churches are faithful confession and proclamation of the Word of God, and responsible administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We affirm that churches are subject to the Word of Christ in their order as in their doctrine.

We affirm that in addition to their commitment to a local church, Christians may properly involve themselves in parachurch organizations for specialized ministry.

We affirm that Christ calls the church to serve Him by its worship, nurture, and witness as His people in the world.

We affirm that Christ sends the church into the whole world to summon sinful humanity to faith, repentance, and righteousness.

We affirm that the unity and clarity of Scripture encourage us to seek to resolve doctrinal differences among Christians, and so to manifest the oneness of the church in Christ.

We deny that the church can grant canonical authority to Scripture.

We deny that the church is constituted by the will and traditions of men.

We deny that the church can bind the conscience apart from the Word of God.

We deny that the church can free itself from the authority of the written Word of God and still exercise valid discipline in Christ's name.

We deny that the church can accommodate itself to the demands of a particular culture if those demands conflict with scriptural revelation, or if they restrain the liberty of Christian conscience.

We deny that differing cultural situations invalidate the biblical principle of male-female equality or the biblical requirements for their roles in the church.

Article V: Sanctity of Human Life

We affirm that God the Creator is sovereign over all human life and mankind is responsible under God to preserve and protect it.

We affirm that the sanctity of human life is based on the creation of mankind in the image and likeness of God.

We affirm that the life of a human being begins at conception (fertilization) and continues until biological death; thus, abortion (except where the continuance of the pregnancy imminently threatens the mother's physical life), infanticide, suicide, and euthanasia are forms of murder.

We affirm that the penal view of social justice is compatible with the sanctity of human life.

We affirm that withholding food or water in order to cause or hasten death is a violation of the sanctity of life.

We affirm that because advancing medical technology has obscured the distinction between life and death, it is essential to evaluate each terminal case with the greatest care so as to preserve the sanctity of human life.

We deny that the quality of human life has priority over its sanctity.

We deny that the sanctity of pre-natal life negates the propriety of necessary medical procedures to preserve the life of the pregnant mother.

We deny that killing in self-defense, in state-administered capital punishment, or in wars justly fought, is necessarily a violation of the sanctity of human life.

We deny that those who reject a divine basis for moral law are exempt from the ethical and social obligation to preserve and protect innocent human life.

We deny that allowing death without medical intervention to prolong life is always a violation of the sanctity of human life.

Article VI: Marriage and the Family

We affirm that the purpose of marriage is to glorify God and extend His Kingdom on earth in an institution that provides for chastity, companionship, procreation and Christian upbringing of children.

We affirm that since marriage is a sacred covenant under God uniting a man and a woman as one flesh, church and state should require faithfulness to God's intention that it be a permanent bond.

We affirm that in the marriage pattern ordained by God, the husband as head is the loving servant-leader of his wife, and the wife as helper in submissive companionship is a full partner with her husband.

We affirm that loving nurture and discipline of children is a God-ordained duty of parents, and God-ordained obedience to parents is a duty of children.

We affirm that the church has the responsibility to nurture the family.

We affirm that honor to parents is a life-long duty of all persons and includes responsibility for the care of the aged.

We affirm that the family should perform many services now commonly assumed by the state.

We deny that pleasure and self-fulfillment are the basis of marriage and that hardships are justifiable cause for breaking the marriage covenant.

We deny that the biblical ideal of marriage can be fulfilled either by a couple living together without a lawful marriage covenant or by any form of same-sex or group cohabitation.

We deny that the state has the right to legitimize views of marriage and the family unit that contravene biblical standards.

We deny that changing social conditions ever make God-ordained marriage or family roles obsolete or irrelevant.

We deny that the state has the right to usurp biblically designated parental responsibility.

Article VII: Divorce and Remarriage

We affirm that the marriage of Adam and Eve as a lifelong monogamous relationship is the pattern for all marriages within the human race.

We affirm that God unites husband and wife in every covenanted and consummated marriage, and will hold covenant-breakers morally accountable.

We affirm that since the essence of the marriage covenant is life-long commitment to the covenant partner, action in relation to a marital breakdown should at least initially aim at the reconciliation of the partners and restoration of the marriage.

We affirm that God hates divorce, however motivated.

We affirm that although God hates divorce, in a sinful world separation is sometimes advisable and divorce is sometimes inevitable.

We affirm that God forgives repentant sinners, even those who have sinned by sundering their marriages.

We affirm that the local church has the responsibility to discipline those who violate the biblical standards for marriage, compassionately restore those who repent, and faithfully minister God's grace to those whose lives have been scarred by marital disruption.

We deny that any contradiction exists within Scripture on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

We deny that it is sinful to separate or live apart from a promiscuous or abusive spouse.

Article VIII: Sexual Deviations

We affirm that Scripture reveals God's standards for sexual relationships, deviation from which is sinful.

We affirm that sexual intercourse is legitimate only in a heterosexual marriage relationship.

We affirm that God's grace in Christ can deliver men and women from bondage to deviant sexual practice, be they heterosexual or homosexual, and the church must assume responsibility for restoring such members to a life that honors God.

We affirm that God loves homosexuals as well as other sinners, and that homosexual temptations can be resisted in the power of Christ to the glory of His grace, just as other temptations can.

We affirm that Christians must exercise a compassion, kindness, and forgiveness in the ministry of God's grace to those whose lives have been scarred by sexual deviations.

We affirm that human fulfillment does not depend on satisfying sexual drives; hedonism and related philosophies encouraging promiscuous sexuality are wrong and lead to ruin.

We affirm that pornography threatens the well-being of individuals, families, and entire societies, and that it is incumbent upon Christians to seek to check its production and distribution.

We deny that homosexual practice can ever please God.

We deny that heredity, childhood conditioning, or other environmental influences can excuse deviant sexual behavior.

We deny that the sexual molestation or exploitation of children in general and incestuous relationships in particular can ever be justified.

We deny that it is hopeless to look for deliverance from homosexual practices or other forms of sexual deviancy.

We deny that the healing of sexual deviancy is aided by condemnation without compassion or by compassion without the application of Scriptural truth, in confident hope.

Article IX: The State Under God

We affirm that God established civil government as an instrument of His common grace, to restrain sin, to maintain order, and to promote civil justice and general well-being.

We affirm that God gives civil governments the right to use coercive force for the defense and encouragement of those who do good and for the just punishment of those who do evil.

We affirm that it is proper and desirable that Christians take part in civil government and advocate the enactment of laws for the common good in accordance with God's moral law.

We affirm that it is the duty of Christian people to pray for civil authorities and to obey them, except when such obedience would involve the violation of God's moral law or neglect the God-ordained responsibilities of Christian witness.

We affirm that governments have a responsibility before God to establish and enforce laws that accord with God's moral law as it pertains to human relations.

We affirm that Christ's rule of the church through His Word must not be confused with the power He grants to civil governments; such confusion will compromise the purity of the gospel and will violate the conscience of individuals.

We affirm that when families or churches neglect their biblically defined duties, thus jeopardizing the well-being of their members, the state may rightfully intervene.

We deny that the state has the right to usurp authority of other God-given spheres of life, especially in the church and in the family.

We deny that the Kingdom of God can be established by the coercive power of civil governments.

We deny that the state has the right to forbid voluntary prayer and other voluntary religious exercises at an appropriate time in the public school.

We deny that God's providential establishment of a particular government confers special blessing, apart from the government's just and faithful execution of its duties.

We deny that religious belief is an essential prerequisite to service in civil government, or that its absence invalidates the legal authority of those who govern.

We deny the Kingdom of God can be established by the power of civil governments.

We deny that the government has the right to prescribe specific prayers or forms of religious exercise for its citizens.

Article X: Law and Justice

We affirm that the Scriptures are the only infallible record of unchanging moral principles basic to a sound jurisprudence and an adequate philosophy of human rights.

We affirm that God has impressed His image on the hearts of all people so that they are morally accountable to Him for their actions as individuals and as members of society.

We affirm that God's revealed law, the moral nature of mankind, and human legislation serve to restrain the fallen political order from chaos and anarchy and to point humankind to the need for redemption in Jesus Christ.

We affirm that the Gospel cannot be legislated and the Law cannot save sinners.

We deny that legal positivism, or any other humanistic philosophy of law, is able to satisfy the need for absolute standards of law and justice.

We deny that any person or any society fulfills God's standards so as to justify himself, herself, or itself before the tribunal of God's absolute justice.

We deny that any political, economic, or social order is free from the deadly consequences of original sin or capable of offering a utopian solution or substitute for the perfect society which Christ alone will establish at His Second Coming.

Article XI: War

We affirm that God desires peace and righteousness among nations and condemns wars of aggression.

We affirm that lawful states have the right and duty to defend their territories and citizens against aggression and oppression by other powers, including the provision for an adequate civil defense of the population.

We affirm that in rightful defense of their territories and citizens governments should only use just means of warfare.

We affirm that warring states should strive by every means possible to minimize civilian casualties.

We deny that the cause of Christ can be defended with earthly weapons.

We deny that Christians are forbidden to use weapons in the defense of lawful states.

We deny that the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians can be a moral form of warfare.

We deny that the circumstances of modern warfare destroy the right and duty of the civil government to defend its territories and citizens.

Article XII: Discrimination and Human Rights

We affirm that God, who created man and woman in His image, has granted to all human beings fundamental rights which are to be protected, sustained, and fostered on the natural and spiritual levels.

We affirm that all human beings are ultimately accountable to God for their use of these rights.

We affirm that Christians must uphold and defend the rights of others while being willing to relinquish their own rights for the good of others.

We affirm that Christians are admonished to follow the compassionate example of Jesus by helping to bear the burdens of those whose human rights have been diminished.

We deny that any so-called human right which violates the teaching of Scripture is legitimate.

We deny that any act is acceptable that would harm or diminish another person's natural or spiritual life by violating that person's human rights.

We deny that age, disability, economic disadvantage, race, religion, or sex used as a basis for discrimination can ever justify denial of the exercise or enjoyment of human rights.

We deny that elitism or grasping for power are compatible with Christ's call to dedicate our rights to His service.

Article XIII: Economics

We affirm that valid economic principles can be found in Scripture and should form an integral part of a Christian world and life view.

We affirm that material resources are a blessing from God, to be enjoyed with thanksgiving, and are to be earned, managed, and shared as a stewardship under God.

We affirm that Christians should give sacrificially of their resources to support the work of God's church.

We affirm that the use of personal and material resources for the proclamation of the gospel is necessary both for the salvation of lost mankind and to overcome poverty where that is fostered by adherence to non-Christian religious systems.

We affirm that active compassion for the poor and oppressed is an obligation that God places upon all human beings, especially on those with resources.

We affirm that the possession of wealth imposes obligations upon its possessors.

We affirm that the love of money is a source of great evil.

We affirm that human depravity, greed, and the will to power foster economic injustice and subvert concern for the poor.

We affirm that the Bible affirms the right of private ownership as a stewardship under God.

We deny that Scripture directly teaches any science of economics, although there are principles of economics that can be derived from Scripture.

We deny that Scripture teaches that compassion for the poor must be expressed exclusively through one particular economic system.

We deny that the Scripture teaches that money or wealth is inherently evil.

We deny that Scripture endorses economic collectivism or economic individualism.

We deny that Scripture forbids the use of capital resources to produce income.

We deny that the proper focus of a Christian's hope is material prosperity.

We deny that Christians should use their resources primarily for self-gratification.

We deny that salvation from sin necessarily involves economic or political liberation.

Article XIV: Work and Leisure

We affirm that God created humankind in His image and graciously fitted them for both work and leisure.

We affirm that in all honorable work, however menial, God works with and through the worker.

We affirm that work is the divinely ordained means whereby we glorify God and supply both our own needs and the needs of others.

We affirm that Christians should work to the best of their ability so as to please God.

We affirm that people should both humbly submit to and righteously exercise whatever authority operates in their sphere of work.

We affirm that in their work people should seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, depending on Him to supply their material needs.

We affirm that compensation should be a fair return for the work done without discrimination.

We affirm that leisure, in proper balance with work, is ordained by God and should be enjoyed to His glory.
We affirm that work and its product have not only temporal but also eternal value when done and used for God's glory.

We deny that persons should pursue their work to fulfill and gratify themselves rather than to serve and please God.

We deny that the rich have more right to leisure than the poor.

We deny that certain types of work give persons greater value in God's eyes than other persons have.

We deny that the Christian should either depreciate leisure or make a goal of it.

Article XV: Wealth and Poverty

We affirm that God, who is just and loving, has a special concern for the poor in their plight.

We affirm that God calls for responsible stewardship by His people of both their lives and resources.

We affirm that sacrificial effort to relieve the poverty, oppression, and suffering of others is a hallmark of Christian discipleship.

We affirm that just as the wealthy ought not be greedy so the poor ought not to be covetous.

We deny that we may rightly call ourselves disciples of Christ if we lack active concern for the poor, oppressed, and suffering, especially those of the household of faith.

We deny that we may always regard prosperity or poverty as the measure of our faithfulness to Christ.

We deny that it is necessarily wrong for Christians to be wealthy or for some persons to possess more than others.

Article XVI: Stewardship of the Environment

We affirm that God created the physical environment for His own glory and for the good of His human creatures.

We affirm that God deputized humanity to govern the creation.

We affirm that mankind has more value than the rest of creation.

We affirm that mankind's dominion over the earth imposes a responsibility to protect and tend its life and resources.

We affirm that Christians should embrace responsible scientific investigation and its application in technology.

We affirm that stewardship of the Lord's earth includes the productive use of its resources which must always be replenished as far as possible.

We affirm that avoidable pollution of the earth, air, water, or space is irresponsible.

We deny that the cosmos is valueless apart from mankind.

We deny that the biblical view authorizes or encourages wasteful exploitation of nature.

We deny that Christians should embrace the countercultural repudiation of science or the mistaken belief that science is the hope of mankind.

We deny that individuals or societies should exploit the universe's resources for their own advantage at the expense of other people and societies.

We deny that a materialistic world view can provide an adequate basis for recognizing environmental values.

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL APPLICATION

Introduction

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was founded in 1977, with a planned life-span of ten years. Its goal, under God, was to seek by means of scholarly writing and teaching to restore the ebbing confidence of Christian people in the total trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Because this loss of confidence leads both to loss of clarity in stating the absolutes of authentic Christianity and to loss of muscle in maintaining them, the task was felt to be urgent. Ten years of special effort to turn the tide of uncertainty about the Bible did not seem to be too much to pledge, nor to ask the Christian public to support. In its tenth year, the Council sees what has been accomplished as cause for profound thanksgiving to God, from every point of view.

The three scholars' Summits that the Council has mounted were conceived as a logically connected series, each having a unitive as well as a consultative purpose. The 1978 Summit achieved a major restatement for our time of the historic Christian view of Holy Scripture as canonical revelation from God given in the form of composite human testimony in God's will, works and ways. The 1982 Summit reached a wide-ranging consensus on hermeneutical guidelines and controls for biblical interpretation. The 1986 Summit seeks to show the relevance of a rightly interpreted Bible to some key areas of confusion and dispute in North American culture today. The need for the second and third Summits was always clear, for confessing belief in an inerrant Bible does us little good till we know how to interpret it, and interpretation involves applying biblical truth to the realities of contemporary life.

Summit III is concerned with applying eternal truth to late twentieth-century situations. It does not highlight the evangelistic and pastoral task of ensuring that known truth is internalized and lived by, but concentrates rather on seeing what it means to live out that truth in our present-day milieu. The Summit does not center its attention on the disciplines of personal discipleship, for much good material on these exists already, and it is not here that the acutest crises of application are felt. Rather, Summit III focuses, first, on the Trinitarian foundations that must give shape to all the church's life and witness, and then on a number of community concerns that come under the heading of Christian social ethics. These themes were chosen partly for their intrinsic importance and partly because there is need to dispel doubts as to whether Bible-believers can ever agree on how to respond to them. As the consensus of Summit I dispelled doubts as to whether agreement is possible on the nature of Scrip-

ture, and the consensus of Summit II dispelled doubts as to whether inerrantists can agree on principles for interpreting the inspired text, so now Summit III offers a high degree of consensus as to how a trusted Bible directs prayer, planning and action in today's drifting society. We thank God for all these agreements, which we believe to be of great significance for our time.

Approaching Contemporary Problems

The process of supernatural divine action that produced the canonical Scriptures gave us, not a student's textbook of theology and ethics, but something richer and more instructive - a book of life. In this book, consisting as it does of sixty-six separate books, many different kinds of material are brought together. The backbone of the Bible is a collection of historical narratives spanning some thousands of years and telling how God the Creator became God the Redeemer after sin had entered His world and spoiled humanity. All the didactic, doctrinal, devotional, moral and liturgical material, whether in the form of sermons, letters, hymns, prayers, laws, rubrics, proverbs, philosophical and practical reflections, or any other type of writing, has the character of occasional applicatory exposition addressed to specific people, in their historical and theological location at one particular point in God's unfolding plan of revelation and redemption. Because this is so, and in light of the massive cultural distance between the ancient Near Eastern civilizations out of which the Bible came, and the community life of the modern West, seeing the truest and wisest application of biblical principles to life today is often a task of some difficulty. Universal truths about God and men in relation to each other have to be unshelled from the applications in which we find them encased when first we meet them, and reapplied in cultural contexts and within a flow of history quite different from anything exhibited by the biblical text. In applying Scripture to this changed and changing milieu of our own times, the following principles must ever be borne in mind.

First, since all Scripture is authenticated to us as the permanently authoritative Word of God by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (our Old Testament by His attestation and use of it, our New Testament by His promise of the Spirit to its apostolic and prophetic writers), it ought to be viewed in its entirety as the organ and channel of Christ's own authority. Thus, faithful discipleship to Christ must be held to involve conscientious acceptance of all that Scripture teaches, whether in the indicative or the imperative mood, and the common idea that loyalty to Christ can consist with sceptical or selec-

tive approaches to Scripture must be dismissed as a perverse and indefensible fancy. The authority of Scripture and the authority of Christ are one.

Second, since all Scripture is ultimately the product of a single mind, that of God the Holy Spirit, there is real consistency in its teaching on every subject which it touches. Any appearance of self-contradiction or confusion should therefore be judged illusory, and it should be understood that part of the exegete's task is to seek ways of dispelling any such appearance. How far we can succeed in this in particular cases will vary, but the goal must be aimed at always. The internal harmony of Scripture is axiomatic, being entailed by the certainty that the God of truth, from whom all biblical teaching derives, always knows his own mind, and never fudges facts. So, inasmuch as it is God's nature to speak only what is true and trustworthy, all that Scripture is found to teach on any subject is to be received as reliable. (Fuller justification for this assumption of authoritative biblical inerrancy and definitive instruction from our Creator Himself was set out in the findings of the first two Summits.)

Third, the differences between the successive stages of God's revelatory program must be kept in view, and we must be alert to the fact that some of God's requirements of His people in pre-New Testament times were temporary only. In recognizing this, however, we must also seek to discern the abiding moral and spiritual principles which these requirements were applying and expressing, and we must press the question of how these same principles bear on our lives today.

Fourth, the church is neither a source of infallible information about God apart from Scripture, nor is it in any of its modes or means of self-expression an infallible interpreter of Scripture. The church is under the Bible, not over it. The historic claims of the Roman Catholic *magisterium* are neither biblically warranted nor intrinsically plausible; nor are claims by Protestant bodies to be led and taught by God's Spirit plausible when the positions taken are not supported by biblical teaching. But centuries of biblical study have shown over and over again that canonical Scripture interprets itself from within on all matters of significance for the life of faith, hope, obedience, love and salvation. The virtual unanimity on these essentials of Bible-believing expositors since the Reformation powerfully confirms the Reformers' contention that Scripture as we have it is both *sufficient* and *perspicuous* - in other words, is *complete* as a revelation of God and *clear* in its meaning and message to all who through the grace of the Holy Spirit have eyes to see what lies open before them. Yet, because the intellectual sanctification of Christians, like other aspects of their sanctification, is still imperfect, some differences of opinion on secondary issues are only to be expected among Bible-

believers; nor should these be thought to throw doubt on the intrinsic clarity of the Scriptures that all seek to expound and apply.

Fifth, it is a mistake of method to relativize biblical teaching to the cultural axioms, assumptions and paradigms of this or any age. Scripture discloses the work, ways and will of the unchanging Creator in relation to mankind as such, and all human opinion regarding values, priorities, and duties must be judged and where necessary corrected by reference to this disclosure. Every culture, being an expression of the corporate goals of fallen mankind, has a distorting, smothering, and blunting effect on the biblical truths which, if applied, would change it, and to keep those truths in shape, free from compromising assimilation to the cultural status quo, is never easy. Mainstream Protestantism over the past two centuries provides a cautionary tale in this regard, for it has erred in a radical way by acquiring the habit of regularly relativizing biblical teaching to current secular fashion, whether rationalist, historicist, evolutionist, existentialist, Marxist, or whatever. But this is to forget how sin darkens and misdirects the human intellect in relation to all that ultimately matters, and to forget too that Scripture was given us to lighten our mental and spiritual darkness by showing us where the concepts and conceits of secular culture in this and every other age fall short. With regard to God and human living, secular culture is always astray (see Rom. 1:18-32), and only the contents of the biblical revelation can bring about the needed correction. Our calling, therefore, is not to set the Bible straight, but to allow Scripture to set us straight. Only as we let Bible teaching, in its character as God's absolute truth, amend assumptions concerning God and the best way of living that society around us takes for granted, shall we handle Scripture as we should. For the right way to handle Scripture is to allow it to handle us intellectually, morally, and spiritually. This was the Reformers' point when they spoke of the necessity of Scripture: none will ever think rightly about God, nor therefore live or act as they should, without the guidance of the Bible.

The proper way to pose the hermeneutical question that is central in contemporary debate is to ask what it is in us, and in our culture, that keeps us from hearing God's unchanging Word of judgment, mercy, repentance and righteousness, as it applies to us and to our own situation. When the question is posed in this way, the door is opened to the Word of God making its proper impact on us, which otherwise it could hardly do. The form of this impact will vary from one time and place to another, for it is right that the Word should indigenize itself in every distinct culture that the human family produces; but the substance of the impact, that is, the demand for repentance and faith in Christ, worship and holiness before God, and love and justice

towards our fellow-men, will be always and everywhere the same.

Sixth, application of biblical principles to life is always conditioned by the limits of our factual knowledge about the situation in which it is being made. Where there is dispute about matters of fact, or about the likely consequences, direct or indirect, of alternative lines of action, the long-term effects, for instance, of particular industrial developments, or economic procedures, or military strategies, disagreement about the best and wisest way to move ahead is likely to follow and such disagreement may well be found disturbing, since the production of the best lawful consequences for others is part of the duty of loving our neighbour which Scripture imposes on us all. But disagreement of this kind will not necessarily imply uncertainty about the principles to be applied, and may not therefore be appealed to uncritically as evidence of different understandings of the teaching of the inerrant Scriptures.

Seventh, application of biblical principles to life requires awareness that within the limits set by the moral laws of God are areas of liberty within which we have responsibility to choose the options that seem to us most fruitful for the glory of God and the welfare of humankind, ourselves included. Never to let the good become the enemy of the best, or to prefer what seems "not bad" over what is clearly better, is one of the rules of Christian wisdom and obedience. Here again, however, Christians whose theologies agree in substance may have differences due to personal or cultural factors that rightly affect their scale of values and priorities, and once more it will be a mistake to appeal to such differences as indicating disagreement on what the Bible has to say.

Eighth, application of Scripture to life requires the unction of the Holy Spirit. Without his aid the spiritual realities of which Scripture speaks will not be perceived, nor will the scope, thrust, and searching power of biblical teaching be truly grasped, nor will the range and depth of biblical visions, pleas, challenges, rebukes, and calls to faith and amendment be properly understood. Humble recognition that there is always more to be learned, and that one's present knowledge is incomplete, and constant crying to God for more light and wisdom, is the only healthy frame of mind for those who would set forth the relevance of the divine Word. And that frame of mind will only become reality in those who are savingly related to Jesus Christ, having felt the blindness and folly of their own natural reason and thus been taught by the Lord himself not to lean to their own understanding.

Summit III assumes these eight principles as common ground, and its findings reflect an honest attempt to follow their lead rationally and self-critically in bringing scriptural teaching to bear on the world around us.

New Vistas Along Old Paths

The task to which Summit III addressed itself is to apply the teaching of a trusted Bible to some of the most confused areas of modern life. This task could not in principle be tackled by Western secular society itself; for our secular society insists on judging itself, not by the revelation of the Creator that the Bible sets forth, but by evolutionary, permissive, materialistic, hedonistic, and this-worldly yardsticks for thought. The Summit's findings embody the view that the belief and value-system that such judging reflects is in fact tragically mistaken, and the findings as a whole constitute a radical challenge to it. There is no doubt, however, that in the Western world secular perspectives everywhere ride high, and it will take a great deal more than the critique and challenge of any one conference to unseat them.

Nor could the task that Summit III undertakes be discharged by any form of liberal or modernist theology. These nominally Christian infidelities also ride high at present in certain circles. But such theology calls in question the divinity, adequacy, and binding force of much biblical teaching, and is thus methodologically incapable of operating under the authority of Scripture. The assumptions of liberalism relativize the Bible by absolutizing positions that run counter to biblical teaching (e.g., the essential goodness of man, or the essential oneness of all religions), and then rearranging biblical priorities in light of present-day secular prejudices and preoccupations (e.g., redefining mission so as to give political, social, and economic causes priority over church-planting evangelism). The Summit distances itself explicitly from the arbitrariness of any such method and the wrong-headedness of any such conclusions.

The Summit findings turn their back on all forms of that modern Athenianism that seeks only to speak or hear some new thing. Instead of pursuing novelty, they offer updated applications of an older, more stable, arguably wiser and demonstrably more biblical heritage of belief. Thus to swim against the stream of current thought is a gesture, not of timidity, but of boldness, and not of eccentricity, but of conscience. The Summit members are united in the belief that the only good way for church and community today lies along the old paths. Thus, on historic questions like the sanctity of life, of sex, and of the family, and the God-given role of the state, in its regulating of political, judicial, and economic aspects of community life, as also on questions with new late-twentieth-century angles, like the legitimacy of nuclear war and the stewardship of the natural order, the continuing validity of standpoints maintained in the Christian past is constantly asserted. By the same token, modern statism, with its worship of centralization, its pervasively paternalist ethos, and its ready sanctioning of objectionable

views on all the topics mentioned, is constantly viewed as a development to regret, whether in its fascist or Marxist form or in any other. Whether this is political prejudice or prophetic vision is a question to which different people will no doubt give different answers, but it is one on which the Summit members have a fairly united mind. The two hundred and fifty of us who have

met at the Summit believe that anyone who allows Scripture to deliver its own message on these matters will end up approximately where we stand ourselves. We now offer our findings and papers to the public as testimony to what we believe we have heard God say, and we shall welcome every opportunity to elaborate and confirm this testimony in wider discussions.