
The Gospel Proclamation

Christadelphian Unamended First Principles

First Principles & the Statement of Faith

By Bro. Tanner Hawkins

As discussed in the introduction episode, this podcast is dedicated to explaining the first principles of God's truth as outlined in the Christadelphian Unamended Statement of Faith. We recommend that you obtain one of these for reference, and there are multiple places you can find it. **Hard copies** are best, and these are available on *The Christadelphian Advocate* website for less than a dollar ([Christadelphian Advocate](#)). For a **digital copy**, we've placed a link in the description of this episode ([here](#)). The entire Statement of Faith can also be found on *The Gospel Proclamation* website.

Before we begin looking at the Statement of Faith itself or any of the doctrines in it, it's necessary that we first understand the concept of "first principles" and why they're important in the first place. What are "first principles"? Where do we get this term, and why does God say that they matter - or does He? The answers to these questions will naturally lead us to the Statement of Faith, and we'll examine what this document is, briefly cover its history, and explain why it matters.

Does it Matter What We Believe?

Yet the first thing we need to do is address the question that all of this centers upon: Does it really matter what we believe? Many churches today teach that *it does not matter* what we believe - one must simply "accept God in their heart" and they can be saved. Some churches are even teaching that one doesn't have to believe in God at all to obtain salvation, and those who take God's Word seriously are considered "extremists". So does it matter what we believe?

It depends. If our goal is to please ourselves and live however we want, then no - it does *not* matter. We can live our lives as we please, and when we die we'll return to dust and cease to exist forever. As we're told in Psalm 146:4, when man dies, "*His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*" God has given man freewill, and while He's said that He's "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*", He won't force man to do so (1 Peter 3:9). This is part of the beauty of His plan. But if it is *salvation* that we seek and a relationship with our Creator that we want, then what we believe is critical. It's critical because *God has revealed* in His Word that it's critical. It's written in

Hebrews 11:6 – *without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

If we're to approach God, we must both acknowledge Him *and* diligently seek Him. But how do we seek Him? The Apostle Paul sums up both the problem mankind faces and its solution in

Romans 10:13-14, 17 – *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (14) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?... (17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

The faith that's pleasing and acceptable to God is one that's founded on what He's revealed in His Word. The Bible is therefore indispensable if we seek our Creator.

People often have their own personal ideas of who God is or what He would or would not do, but these are just theories. God has explicitly revealed who He is and what He will do, and He's done so only through His Word. That the Bible is God-breathed and is God's Word is told to us in

2 Timothy 3:16 – *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

God has recorded everything we need to know about Him, His plan, and ourselves in this book that we called the Bible, and it's therefore essential that our understanding of Him is based on what He's declared and revealed Himself to be – not what we want Him to be.

The reason most of us are initially interested in God is because we're mortal. Man is a fallen, dying race, and as we'll see in later segments, it was not always like this. God created man "very good", but because of man's sin in the garden, the race became estranged from God and mortal. They became destined to return to the dust of the earth that man was formed from (Genesis 2:17, 3:19). But in the garden, God instituted a plan which allowed for mankind to be restored to Him and escape eternal death (Genesis 3:15). Salvation is possible, but only on God's terms, and He has defined those terms for us in Scripture. The Apostle Paul shows this in Romans 1:16 in saying,

Romans 1:16 – *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it (the Gospel) is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...*

The Gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*". The word "Gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings", and it's God's message of salvation. It's a call to the race of man to separate himself from the ways of the world and associate himself with God's plan and purpose. **God has chosen to save man by means of His message.** The Bible itself is therefore called "*the word of life*" as we see in Philippians 2:16. But again, man must hear and believe this message to receive any of its benefits. Before Christ ascended to the right hand of God, he gave his apostles specific commandments on how man can attach himself to this hope. He told them in

Mark 16:15-16 – *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. (16) He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (condemned).*

The word of life is preached, but it's on the individual to respond to it. For those who hear and respond to His message and follow His requirements, they're reconciled to God and have fellowship with Him. They're made heirs of the promises He's made, and these promises are the foundation for eternal life.

The change man undergoes in baptism is explained by Paul in Ephesians 2. In verse 12, he describes the state man is born in, saying that "*at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*" This is not just separation from God, but separation from His plan and purpose with the earth, for He's revealed this plan through the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise. Unless man can become related to these promises God has made, his only destiny is to return to the dust.

But by believing the Gospel and being baptized into Christ, man has hope because he now associates himself with Christ and these promises. Paul continues in verse 13, explaining, "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*" We go from being far off and without God to being "made nigh" to Him, and as Paul says in verse 19, "*therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.*"

The word “household” is important. It’s not a house as in a building, but a *household* – a family. By entering into covenant relationship through Christ, we become part of God’s spiritual family that He is building, and we’re given the titles “sons and daughters” of God.

Christ is God’s “only begotten son”, and being baptized into Christ makes him our brother. This is why he refers to us as “brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). **This is why people who are baptized are able to call each other brothers and sisters of Christ – it’s because of our shared relationship with God.** Each of us *individually* has entered into fellowship with God, and since we each have fellowship with God, we therefore have fellowship with one another. If God is my Father and Christ is my brother and God is your Father and Christ is your brother, then we are siblings. Everyone who has been baptized into Christ has been grafted (or adopted) into God’s family and made heirs of the promises of eternal life. It was for this very reason that Christ was sent – to make this very thing possible. It’s all summed up for us by Paul in

Galatians 4:4-7 – *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (5) To redeem them that were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption of sons.** (6) And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, **Abba, Father.** (7) Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but **a son**; and if **a son, then an heir of God through Christ.***

This is the Gospel – the “good news”. It’s a great blessing to have this opportunity, but again, man must submit to God’s process of redemption if he wants to participate in His plan. **Baptism** is what brings us “into Christ” and brings us into God’s family, but as we’ve seen, man must first understand and believe the Gospel before he can be baptized and have fellowship with God.

Belief in the Gospel is therefore essential to salvation, but we can’t believe in something that we don’t know. So what is it that we must know and believe in? What is the “good news” of the Gospel about? We gain more information about it in Acts 8 where we see a man named Philip teaching people about the Gospel, and we note in verse 12 that it says,

Acts 8:12 – *But when they (the people) **believed** Philip preaching **the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ,** they were baptized, both men and women.*

This verse gives us the Scriptural definition of the Gospel. Philip was to preach the Gospel, and we see him preaching about two things: the things concerning **the Kingdom of God** and **the name of Jesus Christ**. Philip taught the people about these subjects, they believed what he was saying about them, and they responded by being baptized just as Christ commanded. Before we can be baptized, we must know and understand the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. We don’t have to know everything, but we must have an understanding and belief in the Gospel’s *basic parts and principles* as these relate to God’s plan and what He requires of us. This is where first principles come in.

What are First Principles?

What are first principles and where do we get this term from? The term “first principles” was not coined by Christadelphians. It is a Scriptural term and is used by the apostle Paul in the same way that we use it today. In Hebrews 5, Paul writes to a group of believers who were slacking their understanding. When they should have been advanced enough to teach about more complex aspects of God’s Word, they needed the basics taught to them again. Paul says

Hebrews 5:12 – *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be **the first principles of the oracles of God**; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

The full title is “the first principles of the oracles of God”. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the Greek word translated “**first**” means “commencement, chief, beginning, corner” (Strong’s). “**Principles**” means “*orderly* in arrangement, proposition, element” (Strong’s). “**First principles**” therefore means “**basic, fundamental elements**” or “**chief, beginning principles**”. Paul also refers to them in Hebrews 6:1 as “*the principles of the doctrine of Christ*” and as “*the foundation*”.

There are first principles to every subject. Whenever we learn something new – whether it be carpentry, chemistry, cooking – we are first taught *the basics*. We first set a solid foundation of general principles, and only then we can build upon it. The fundamentals that we’re talking about relate to “*the oracles of God*”. “**Oracle**” simply means “utterance” and refers to what God has spoken in His Word, so these are fundamental principles of the Word of God. These are the essential basics that man must understand and believe about the Gospel in order to enter into covenant with God through baptism. They are our foundation and are the first things we should learn, and just like a baby needs milk because they can’t digest strong meat, believers must learn the first principles of the truth before learning more advanced things.

Which Doctrines are First Principles?

Seeing that some teachings of the Bible are essential milk and others are strong meat, the question arises – how do we know what is milk and what is meat? What are these essential basics, and what are not?

We saw with Philip in Acts 8 that the essentials can be summarized as the things relating to the kingdom of God and the name of Christ. First principles therefore relate to these two things. But what are the things relating to the Kingdom and to the name of Christ? What are their details? Paul lists some of them for us in the next chapter in Hebrews in

Hebrews 6:1-2 – *Therefore leaving **the principles of the doctrine of Christ**, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again **the foundation** of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, (2) Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

Paul calls out six subjects which are first principles, but each has a lot involved in it. Take baptism for example: what is baptism? what does it do? why is it necessary? and many other things. Each of these first principles which Paul lists requires *defining*, and that is what the Statement of Faith is intended to do. Our Statement of Faith breaks these foundational subjects down into 31 concepts, which we call “propositions”.

These are easiest to see through a chart or diagram which we have linked in the description of this episode and copied here (*right*). At the top we have “The Gospel”. As we go down the diagram, we get a more detailed definition of what the Gospel is, so underneath “The Gospel” we have the two things which comprise “the Gospel” – the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Underneath those two things, we have the six subjects which Paul lists in Hebrews 6 because those define the things concerning the Kingdom and the name of Christ. Then, underneath those six things, we have the propositions and doctrines of our Statement of Faith, for they are the basic nuts and bolts of the Gospel.

“THE GOSPEL”

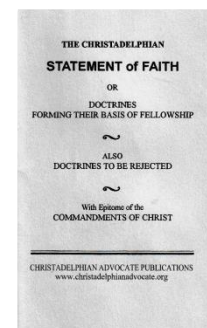
the things concerning

The Kingdom of God & The name of Jesus Christ

These include

- Repentance from dead works
 - Faith toward God
 - Baptisms
- Laying on of hands
- Resurrection of the dead
- Eternal judgment

These are summarized and defined in



The Statement of Faith is simply what we believe is the comprehensive list of first principles. “The Gospel” is summarized and defined by these 31 doctrines, so if these things are understood and believed, men and women can be baptized into Christ, become part of God’s spiritual family, and run the race for eternal life. This project is dedicated to expounding those very things, so if someone hears, understands and believes the things taught in this podcast *once it has been completed*, they are ready to be examined for baptism into Christ. If so, please connect with a local brother or reach out to us and we can help connect you. It’s therefore our fervent prayer that the Lord will bless this effort and help us see it through to the end.

How to Tell a First Principle

As we’ve seen, a first principle is an essential element of the Gospel. If understanding of one of those principles is incorrect, then, in the words of Paul in Galatians 1:7, it “*perverts the gospel of Christ*” and makes it of “*none effect*”. Sometimes a doctrine’s impact on the Gospel is quickly discernible like the immortality of the soul, for example. If we believe in an immortal soul, then we must believe in a hell that is full of undying immortals, because if we have a group of wicked people who can never truly die because their soul is immortal, then there must be a place for them to go. We cannot isolate our understanding of the soul from our understanding of “hell” because they are interconnected.

This is one way to test whether something is a first principle. Not all first principles have such an obvious effect as the example we just used, and there are some which require more discernment. Nevertheless, a first principle has a domino effect on other doctrines. Other non-essential teachings don’t have a significant domino effect.

Because these principles are all inter-connected, you will notice throughout these episodes that teachers will often refer to subjects that are discussed in different propositions. This is actually a good thing and testifies to the fundamental nature of these doctrines, but we do try to be as focused as we can on each proposition for clarity’s sake.

The Statement of Faith – Its Purpose & Use

Let us now look at the Statement of Faith itself, specifically its purpose and use. Bro. Thomas Williams was the founder and editor of *The Christadelphian Advocate*, and he wrote, “If a man’s faith is worth having, it is worth publishing in a well-defined form; so that others may examine it, accept it or reject it; fellowship it or repudiate it” (October 1891 *Advocate*, pg. 256).

We saw earlier how the word “principle” has the meaning of “orderly arrangement”, and **this is what the Statement of Faith is – a concise, numbered, organized summary of what we believe are the first principles of the truth. Each proposition is followed by a list of Scriptural testimonies to substantiate each point.** The support passages are essential. In truth, the proposition itself is merely a summarization of what the passages below it teach. That is the purpose of this project – to explain what each of these principles are and mean, and to allow Scripture to show their importance.

The Statement of Faith is important and practical in our day not only because it summarizes our beliefs, but it acts as an effective, efficient way to express our understanding to others. We could easily summarize our understanding by saying, “We believe what the Bible teaches.” The trouble is that this isn’t really saying anything, particularly since every sect of christianity makes this claim. Two Christians can say that they believe in the Bible but hold very different views on every subject. It is therefore necessary to *define* our understanding and convey it in the simplest, clearest way possible. By associating ourselves with a particular Statement – and others knowing what it teaches – we can more easily fellowship with those of like precious faith. That is what the Statement of Faith is for.

Limitations of the Statement of Faith

There are, however, two specific limitations to the Statement of Faith, and we would do well to recognize them. Both are the result of it being penned by man. **The first** relates to word choice. Wording can sometimes be open to interpretation, and so various views can potentially arise depending on word choice. That being said, the Statement of Faith was carefully crafted to avoid this as much as possible, and the Statement most of us use today underwent light editing by Bro. Thomas Williams to clarify any ambiguous statements and remove these issues.

The other limitation lies in the fact that man has compiled this list. To the very best of our ability, we have narrowed down what we believe the Bible teaches to be the *minimum* understanding of fundamentals sufficient for one to enter covenant through baptism, but God is the ultimate judge. Have we included too many principles, or not enough?. We must work according to the Scriptures, and in this age of corruption and imperfection, this is all we can do. That being said, we believe what we have is as correct as we can attain, for we've let the Scriptures emphasize the essentials. What we have has withstood the scrutiny of decades of questioners and remains standing to this day.

A Short History of the Statement of Faith

Let's now look at a brief history of the Statement of Faith. Some may think that history is boring, but it's important here. We're basing this project upon the Christadelphian Unamended Statement of Faith, and it's important to at least briefly explain why we are using *this* version and why other versions exist. Various titles have been given to different statements, but it is the doctrines therein which matter, not the title on the cover.

The word "unamended" is critical, and it's unfortunate that it's even necessary. "Unamended" means "unchanged", "unaltered". The teachings in this document have *not* changed from the original statement of faith. Others in the past have changed their beliefs and therefore *amended*, or changed, some of the teachings in it. Because of the fundamental nature of these principles, this is important to understand to ensure that we're using a Statement of Faith that reflects true Bible teaching.

The first official arrangement of beliefs was written by Bro. John Thomas in 1867, and it was called ***The Synopsis of the One Faith Taught by the Apostles***. It was not a "Statement of Faith" as we think of it, and it was not necessarily intended to act as a basis of fellowship because it is quite brief. Bro. Thomas's goal with it was merely to illustrate what the truth was *as compared to* the corrupted teachings of modern Christianity. It is just 22 brief statements and was more of a comparison document than a comprehensive list of first principles.

A decade later in 1877, these concepts were compiled along with the remainder of the essential doctrines in what we now refer to as the original ***Statement of the One Faith***, or ***Statement of Faith***. It was also called ***The Birmingham Statement of Faith*** because it arose out of the ecclesia in Birmingham, England. As it states on the first page, this document was intended to form "the basis of fellowship among Christadelphians" and was therefore more comprehensive than *The Synopsis* that Bro. Thomas wrote. This was drafted to include *all* of the things we believe to be first principles and was therefore the first official "Statement of Faith" as we use it today. It's comprised of doctrines to be believed and those to be denied, and newer additions include the commandments of Christ as well.

This was the Statement of Faith of essentially all Christadelphians until the late 1890s. At that time, a certain group began to teach and enforce the doctrine that anyone who is "enlightened" by hearing and knowing the Word will be resurrected to stand before the judgment seat of Christ right alongside those who entered into covenant. These *unbaptized* persons were not included in the original statement and there was always a clear

distinction between those in covenant and those out of covenant. They group called this unbaptized class the called the “enlightened rejector” because they had been enlightened by the Word, but they rejected it.

This is a subject best discussed in a later episode where more focus can be given to it, but let it be said that the original Christadelphian position regarding this “Gospel rejector” class was that it was an “open question”. God has not said that He will raise them for judgment and, in clear terms, only indicates that He won’t, but we will not limit Him in saying that He *cannot* raise them for any reason at all. If He does raise them, it would be on a different basis than those in covenant.

This new group, however, insisted that all agree that these will be raised right alongside the saints, and they therefore *amended* the Statement of Faith in January of 1898 to include this as a first principle. This new document was therefore titled ***The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith*** (BASF). But as we’ve seen, first principles are interconnected, and so what originally was intended to be only one change ended up affecting other principles, and what ensued was the splitting of the Christadelphians. There are therefore different kinds of Christadelphians today – Unamended, Amended, and others.

After this split, there were two Statements in circulation: the original Birmingham Statement of Faith and the Birmingham Amended Statement. It seems this was the case until 1909. The unamended group – that which held fast to the original position – felt it necessary to optimize the original Statement of Faith for two basic reasons. Bro. Thomas Williams was editor of *The Christadelphian Advocate*, and he helped lead the discussion amongst the body and shared these reasons with group.

The first suggestion related to word choice. Bro. Williams recommended using more specific terminology to clarify teaching and prevent further confusion in the future. These updates did not change the *teaching* of any proposition – they clarified it by removing any ambiguity which could arise from word choice. For transparency, each change that was made is listed in the very front of the Statement for all to see. If you look at the first page of our Statement of Faith, you can see exactly what changes were made from the original version.

Secondly, Bro. Williams recommended dropping the name “Birmingham” because the faith was not restricted to that location. More importantly, Birmingham was the ecclesia that made the amendment, and they now held very different views. To show that these two were not on the same foundation, they felt it necessary to remove the word “Birmingham”.

The Unamended ecclesias agreed to these suggestions, and what followed was the refined version which we have today. It’s called ***The Christadelphian Statement of Faith*** (CSF) or ***Christadelphian Unamended Statement of Faith*** (CUSF). Because it’s teachings have not change from the original, the word “unamended” isn’t strictly necessary, but some like having it there simply to make the point more clearly. Some editions still have the word “Birmingham”, so it is also sometimes called ***The Birmingham Unamended Statement of Faith*** (BUSF) because its teaching had not changed from the original Birmingham Statement. The doctrines in all of these three versions are exactly the same.

This is why we are basing this project upon what is entitled the *Christadelphian Statement of Faith* (Unamended). It is the teaching of the original Statement of Faith with more precise wording, and it represents the original faith of the Christadelphians. There is more that is worth explaining on this subject, so if anyone would like more information on the differences that exist today, please reach out to us at editor@thegospelproclamation.com.

Seeking God’s Guidance Through This Project

With this basic foundation and tone set, we present this project to you with the prayerful hope that it will help teach others about God's saving truth and do so in a way that's simple, clear, and concise. God's truth was designed to save any who truly desire it, and we therefore aim to make this as clear as possible. Christ thanked his Father in

Luke 10:21 – *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

Much time, effort, and planning have gone into this project, and while it will take time to work through the entire Statement of Faith, we will work to this end in good faith, Lord willing, and we invite all honest hearts to walk with us in this project and pray for wisdom and understanding, for we're told that any who ask and seek will find it. As our Lord says in

Revelation 3:22 – *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith...*

The next segment dives into Proposition 1 of the Statement of Faith, and we will be uploading new segments on an infrequent basis until the entire Statement of Faith has been covered.

If you have questions about anything in this project or would like assistance, please reach out to us at editor@thegospelproclamation.com. I'm serious – please connect with us.

There are also a number of other resources which we highly recommend on these subjects – both hard copy books and digital copies. We have links to the PDFs and links to obtain hard copies in the description of this segment (and below). For more on first principles, visit thegospelproclamation.com. May the Lord bless each of us in our endeavor to learn His Word and seek Him out.

Christadelphian Statement of Faith (Unamended)

PDF - [PDF Version - Christadelphian Statement of Faith](#)

Physical copy - [Christadelphian Unamended Statement of Faith | The Advocate](#)

Online version - [Unamended Christadelphian Beliefs | Gospel Proclamation](#)

Resources

Bible Truth - D.W. Bughman - [Bible Truth - DW Bughman](#)

Key to Bible Understanding - O.L. Dunaway - [Key to Bible Understanding - OL Dunaway](#)

Things Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ - Jim Millay - [Things Concerning | The Advocate](#)

The Great Salvation - Thomas Williams - [The Great Salvation | The Advocate](#)

The World's Redemption - Thomas Williams - [The World's Redemption, 7th edition | The Advocate](#)

See more at www.thegospelproclamation.com.