

The Gathering

of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina

Bringing Baptists of North Carolina Together for Christ-Centered Ministry

Volume 12, Issue 1

February 2007

Four Fragile Freedoms by Larry Hovis

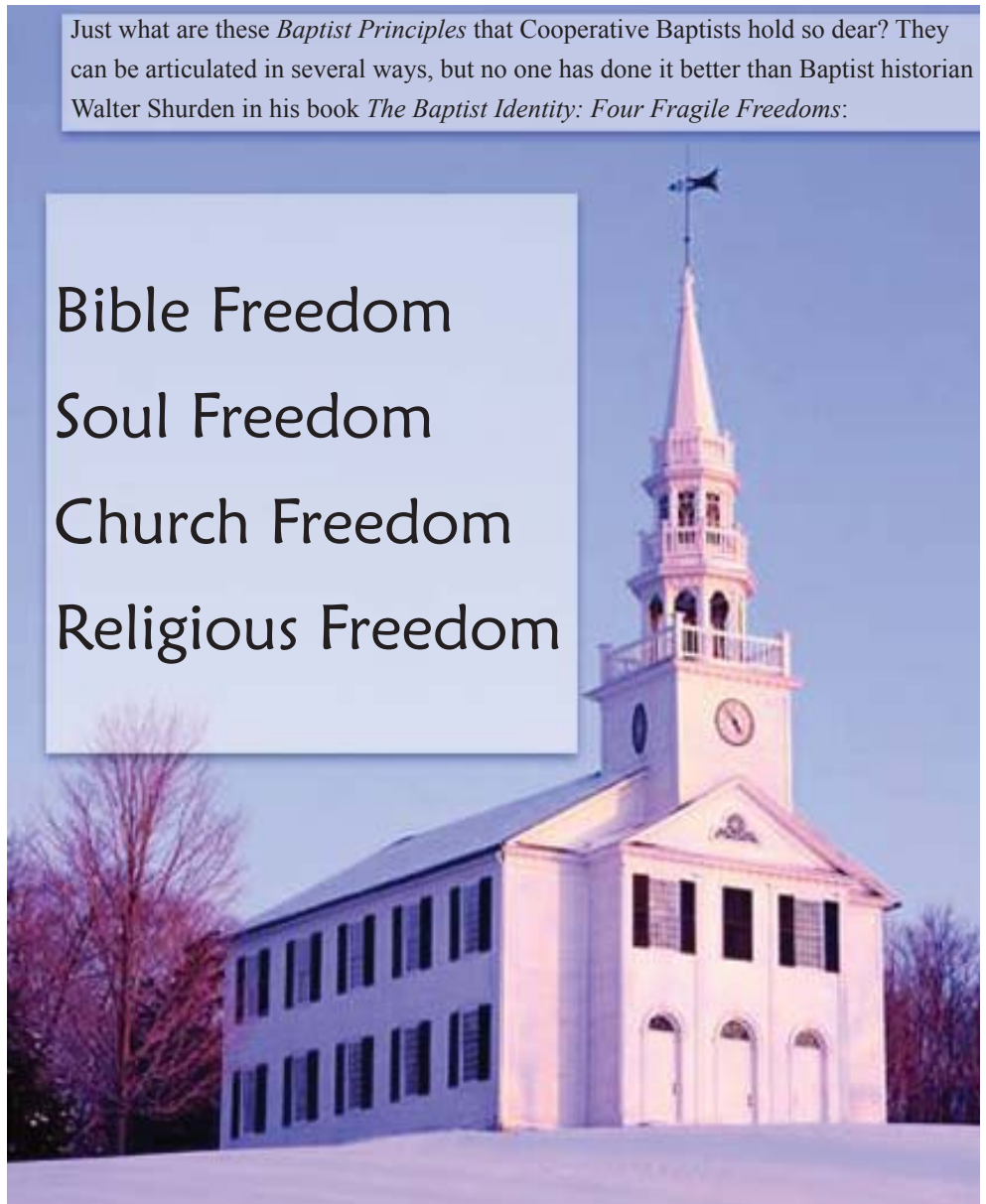
Why was the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship movement started in Atlanta over fifteen years ago? Because “moderates” were tired of losing elections at the SBC? Because “free and faithful” Baptists wanted to develop a new way of supporting missions around the world? Because those same Baptists saw the need to support new avenues to produce the kind of theological education we valued and to which we were accustomed? Because we needed ways to connect and support one another in the face of losing our place in the denominational family we held so dear?

CBF was started for all of these reasons and more. But the common denominator at the base of all these reasons can be summed up in two words: *Baptist Principles*. The Baptists who started CBF shared a common understanding of what it means to be a Baptist Christian, and they believed that the only way to preserve these principles for themselves, for their children, for the larger Christian Church, and for the world, was to start a new network of Baptist Christians, churches, schools and ministry agencies that we now call Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Continued on page 7.

Just what are these *Baptist Principles* that Cooperative Baptists hold so dear? They can be articulated in several ways, but no one has done it better than Baptist historian Walter Shurden in his book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*:

Bible Freedom
Soul Freedom
Church Freedom
Religious Freedom



Inside Out: *From Spiritual Formation to Missional Engagement*

CBFNC General Assembly **March 16 - 17, 2007** FBC Hickory
See page 3 for more information

Four Fragile Freedoms, by Larry Hovis, Coordinator, Continued from page 1



Larry Hovis

“Bible Freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the church and individual and that Christians, with the best

and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey the Scripture.

Soul Freedom is the historic affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government.

Church Freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ, of whose unity and mission

Baptists are proudly a part.

Religious Freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar.” (Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, 1993)

George Santayana observed that those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it. In CBFNC, we desire to move beyond the hurt of the past into the bright, healthy future God has in store for us. But it will be a future built on the solid foundation of Baptist principles that our early Baptist ancestors struggled and suffered for, and our CBF pioneers were unwilling to forget.

In the nine remaining issues of the 2007 volume of *The Gathering*, we will be highlighting these vital Baptist freedoms, through both opinion articles and by showing the connection between these freedoms and the ongoing ministries of the CBF movement, especially in North

Carolina. If you would like to submit an article about these freedoms, or some aspect of Baptist principles, please email your ideas to naho@cbfnc.org.

“The Baptists who started CBF shared an understanding of what it means to be a Baptist Christian and believed the only way to preserve their principles for themselves, their children, the larger Christian Church, and the world was to start a new network that we now call Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.”

CBF’s Church Benefits Board: An Alternative for Ministers’ Benefits, by Sue H. Poss

It seems more and more North Carolina churches are looking at various alternative providers for their employees’ benefits packages. One option is the [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s Church Benefits Board \(CBB\)](#).

CBB offers the same type of services, including retirement benefits and various insurance, that most churches have traditionally received through other sources. “Churches as employers typically provide some level of employee benefits like retirement, life insurance coverage, disability benefits and medical coverage to various staff members,” said Gary Skeen, director of the Church Benefits Board for CBF in Atlanta. “They have historically looked to their particular faith group leadership to help them provide benefits to staff members.”

But North Carolina CBF Coordinator Larry Hovis said that is changing. “Some churches are having to make hard decisions

about their relationship with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, which is the portal through which they access benefits,” he said. “Many of them are looking for new ways to get their benefits and we want them to know that the Church Benefits Board is available.”

Hovis said he frequently refers churches to Skeen for detailed information about what CBB offers. “[Baptist churches in North Carolina have both the privilege and responsibility of providing benefits for the staff](#),” Hovis said. “[We are blessed by the Church Benefits Board which can not only provide these needed services but can also advise church leaders on navigating these important but difficult waters](#).”

“Ministers’ benefits packages help provide a secure environment for ministry and church-sponsored plans provide a tax advantage to ministers,” Skeen said. “As churches begin to review relationships with related state and regional affiliations,

caring for staff through employee benefits quickly become a point of concern.”

Skeen said CBB offers high quality options for staff benefits. “Many churches also have local and regional commercial options for benefits providers, and CBF through its CBB staff is ready to help churches evaluate their best options for employee benefits and explore alternatives,” he said.

Skeen said some churches have not evaluated their benefits plans or funding levels in many years. So looking at alternative plans can be a healthy process for both the church and the staff. CBB staff can help church leadership evaluate coverage levels and cost factors, integrate benefits coverage, and provide education for leadership and staff.

For more information, contact Gary Skeen at (800) 352-8741 or visit www.thefellowship.info/CBB.