

Proposed Changes to the GARBC Articles of Faith

The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches is considering a minor revision to our Articles of Faith, the doctrinal statement that each church affirms when joining our fellowship of churches. The GARBC has held remarkably consistent theological views during its 75-year history. Our Articles of Faith were drafted in 1932, remained unchanged until they were clarified in 1975 and 76, and were again clarified with a brief revision in 2003.

“The GARBC was not interested in ‘changing’ the Articles of Faith, only in ‘clarifying’ them,” was the way Paul Tassell put it when he served as

GARBC national representative (1979–1994).

The suggested changes should not be viewed as a revision of our *beliefs*. Rather, the changes will clarify the way we describe long-held views among our churches on the doctrine of eschatology—what we believe about future events. In particular, the proposed language emphasizes that the rapture of the church is imminent (could occur at any moment) and will occur before the Tribulation. And the proposals clarify that the Tribulation will be followed by the return of Christ (His Second Advent) and then a Millennium, when Christ will reign for a literal 1,000 years on earth.

Our Articles of Faith do not live in a vacuum. The theological landscape around us progressively changes in ways that demand our continued clarity. Pastor Tom Alexander, a Council of Eighteen member who serves on the policy committee, described a problem he was having in his new members’ Bible study. “I found myself going over the wording of our doctrinal statement very carefully with the new members because it was hard for them to understand,” Alexander says. “Every time we got to that section, I had to do a lot of explaining. I needed to clarify the difference between the Rapture, which we believe could happen at any time, and the Second Advent, which we believe could *not* happen at any moment (because it occurs after the Tribulation).”

Tom Alexander points out that the newly proposed language does not change what our churches have historically believed. “The current Articles of Faith actually said this, if you read it in its entirety, but the new version will be much clearer to the reader,” Alexander says.

The proposed clarifications to the Articles of Faith were first discussed when the policy committee met during the November 2007 Council of Eighteen meetings. The committee had two later phone meetings; then the final wording for the amendment was approved by the entire Council prior to the 2008 GARBC Conference in Ankeny, Iowa. The proposed changes were then formally read during the business session.

This process—the same as used for the revisions in 1975, 1976, and 2003—gives each church a year to discuss the

proposal. Each church in fellowship with the GARBC has the privilege of sending six voting messengers to the 2009 GARBC Conference in Elryia, Ohio (June 22–26), where the proposed clarifications to the Articles of Faith will be discussed and voted on during the annual business meeting. The changes require a two-thirds majority vote. **B**

In the March/April issue of the Baptist Bulletin, noted historian Robert Delnay will review the history of our GARBC Articles of Faith.

Proposed Clarification to the GARBC Articles of Faith

Section XIX. Rapture and Subsequent Events (Recommended changes in **bold print**)

Current:

We believe in the **premillennial return of Christ**, an event which can occur at any moment, and that at that moment the dead in Christ shall be raised in glorified bodies, and the living in Christ shall be given glorified bodies without tasting death, and all shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the seven years of the Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–54; Philippians 3:20, 21; Revelation 3:10

We believe that the Tribulation, which follows the Rapture of the Church, will be culminated by **the revelation of Christ** in power and great glory to sit upon the throne of David and to establish **the millennial kingdom**.

Daniel 9:25–27; Matthew 24:29–31; Luke 1:30–33; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1–9; Acts 2:29, 30; Revelation 20:1–4, 6

Proposed change:

We believe in the **pretribulational rapture of the church**, an event that can occur at any moment, and that at that moment the dead in Christ shall be raised in glorified bodies, and the living in Christ shall be given glorified bodies without tasting death, and all shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the seven years of the Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–54; Philippians 3:20, 21; Revelation 3:10

We believe that the Tribulation, which follows the rapture of the church, will be culminated by the **premillennial return of Christ** in power and great glory to sit upon the throne of David and to establish **His kingdom upon this earth**.

Daniel 9:25–27; Matthew 24:29–31; Luke 1:30–33; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1–9; Acts 2:29, 30; Revelation 20:1–4, 6