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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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# A Mixed-Methods Study of the Variables that Influence Southern Baptists' Affirmation of the Inerrancy of the Bible

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## Introduction

### **The Inerrancy Debate within the Southern Baptist Convention**

In 1999, at the annual Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Atlanta, Georgia, T.C. Pinckney of Virginia made a motion to incoming president Paige Patterson to revisit the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message (Wooddell, 2007). The result was the formation of the Baptist Faith and Message Committee. The committee at the annual SBC of 2000 in Orlando, Florida recommended changes that would reflect more accurately the historic theological position of the Southern Baptist denomination.

One of the historical positions of Southern Baptists, as stated by Bush and Nettles in their book *The Baptists and the Bible*, is the prominence of the Bible. They explored the history of Southern Baptists' belief in the authority, inspiration, and infallibility of the Bible and concluded that the Bible is and also has been the highest authority for Southern Baptists (Bush & Nettles, 1999, p. p.355). When Crawford Toy, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 19th century, taught that the early chapters of Genesis were historically inaccurate (Bush & Nettles, 1999, p. p.211) and Elliot's commentary, published in 1969, questioned the historical accuracy of Genesis (James, 1986, p. p.68), Southern Baptists overwhelmingly rejected their views and continued to elevate the Scriptures as infallible.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the SBC was in the midst of a political struggle over the Bible. Within the denomination were two groups – conservatives and moderates (Williams, 2000, p. p.66). Conservatives believed in biblical inerrancy namely the Bible was without error while moderates were strong Bible believers, but allowed more leeway for biblical interpretation. In 1979, led by Paige Patterson and Judge Paul Pressler, the conservatives sought to elect Southern Baptist presidents who would affirm inerrancy of the Bible (James, 1986, p. 69). In order to affect a change throughout the entire SBC, these presidents appointed trustees who had the responsibility of electing seminary trustees. The seminary trustees choose seminary presidents who were conservative and they, in turn, appointed faculty who embraced inerrancy (Bush & Nettles, 1999, p. 322). The other group was composed of moderates and liberals, who affirmed the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, but did not believe inerrancy should be a doctrinal affirmation for Southern Baptists (James, 1986, p. 77).

At the annual SBC of 1985, a Peace Committee was formed to see if tensions between both groups could be resolved. The findings of the Peace Committee at the 1987 convention confirmed that there was a division of conservatives and moderates. They discovered that not all leaders within the six seminaries maintained a belief in the direct creation of and historicity of Adam and Eve. Additionally, not all of them affirmed the historicity of the Scriptures, nor did they accept the traditional

authorship of the various books, and many denied the authenticity of the miracles mentioned in the Bible (Bush & Nettles, 1999, p. 385). The SBC had drifted from its roots in the supremacy of the Bible and conservatives wanted to reclaim the historical position. Accordingly, beginning in 1979, the SBC elected presidents who affirmed inerrancy and eventually new conservative leaders were appointed to overhaul the six seminaries and leadership with the convention. As a result of the 1987 International Council of Bible Inerrancy's (ICBI) declaration of the inerrancy of Scripture, the SBC "spawned a similar movement among Southern Baptists at Ridgecrest called 'The Conference on Biblical Inerrancy'" (Geisler & Roach, 2011, p. p.36). The inerrancy movement continued within the SBC and, by 1999, a majority of the Southern Baptist messengers were not satisfied with the complete wording of the Baptist Faith and Message 1963. They asked for a blue ribbon panel to review and make recommendations (Garrett, 2009, p. p.506). The committee returned the following year at the annual convention in Orlando and their recommendations formed the basis for the changes that created the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (BFM 2000).

Major changes were made in the topics of scripture, trinity, omniscience of God, humanity and deity of Jesus, exclusivity of the Gospel, and the role of men and women. Within the area of scripture, the phrase, "*therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy and all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation*" (Wooddell, 2007, sec. 467) was added and the phrase, "*the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ*" (2007, sec. 467) was removed. A conservative resurgence had taken place and articulated what historic Southern Baptists had collectively affirmed since their inception and what moderate and liberals desired to erode - the supreme authority in the error-free Word of God called the Bible. However, this raises the question of the researcher to ascertain how has this firm commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible, as affirmed by the leadership, translated to the general membership of the SBC?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The extant literature reveals a gap in the research. That is, the general membership within the SBC had not been surveyed to determine the degree to which they affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Thus, *the primary purpose of this study* was to understand to what degree Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. *A secondary purpose of this study* was to discover to what degree Florida Southern Baptists affirm the supernatural events of Genesis 1-11. The results are shared in this article.

### **Research Process: Overview of Research Method and Design**

In order to accomplish this research, a mixed-method study called *Sequential Explanatory Strategy* was implemented to explore the belief structure of Florida Southern Baptist members' affirmation in the doctrine of inerrancy. *Sequential Explanatory Strategy* "is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative

data in the first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results” (Creswell, 2009, p. p.209). Because quantitative research “captures a fleeting moment in time” and at best can extrapolate from conjecture “the state of affairs over a longer timer period” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004, p. p.184), interjected throughout the survey instrument there was a series of qualitative opened-ended questions to probe in-depth. These open-ended questions allowed the respondents to express the reasons for their current belief in the degree to which they affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy.

The researcher developed an assessment tool called the Biblical Inerrancy Test (BIT) consisting of 68 questions, 46 were Likert-scale (quantitative) and 22 were open-ended (qualitative). The validity and reliability of the BIT was determined by an expert panel comprised of faculty<sup>i</sup> and a research firm. There were 502 randomly selected participants representing the Southern Baptist Churches of Florida. The phone calls were made by America’s Research Group (ARG). Britt Beemer began ARG in 1979 as a research and strategic consulting firm. The list of ARG’s clients includes many of the nation’s top retailers, leading brands, investors, and entrepreneurial companies. ARG consumer telephone surveys are conducted by a dedicated, well-trained group of researchers with frequent monitoring and quality-assurance procedures. Results are compiled by their staff of market research professionals (Beemer, 2011). ARG has produced statistical research for *Answers in Genesis* in two books: *Already Gone* and *Already Compromised*.

### Six Research Questions

The main research question was to understand to what degree Florida Southern Baptists (FSB) affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. However, there were six sub-research questions that revealed their range of understanding of inerrancy

- RQ1: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the deity of Jesus Christ and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?
- RQ2: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of the Trinity and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?
- RQ3: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?
- RQ4: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the miracles reported in the Bible and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?
- RQ5: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the supernatural events reported in Genesis and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?
- RQ6: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the authority of Bible in their personal lives and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

### **Delimitations of the Study and Research Assumptions**

1. This study was delimited to those participants who answered ARG's randomized phone call and/or had a phone number that was not restricted.
2. This study was delimited to those participants who were able to answer the survey in English.
3. The participants voluntarily answered the questions, provided insight and opinions, and did so honestly.
4. Although not every aspect of inerrancy was explored, the researcher believes the results provided valuable and valid information that can be used for the improvement of the proclamation of the doctrine of inerrancy.
5. The belief structure of denominational leadership tends to influence the general membership.
6. Florida Southern Baptists are influenced by the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.
7. The results may be transferable to evangelical congregates in so much as the church members share similar characteristics and theological beliefs with Florida Southern Baptist members.

### **Rationale and Importance of the Research**

Since the year 2000, the leadership of the SBC as expressed in the BFM 2000, has sought to clearly reaffirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Additionally, all six SBC seminaries affirm inerrancy and have been producing pastors for the last 13 years who should be preaching this same truth. Nevertheless, does the average church member affirm this belief and to what degree? To affirm a belief that the Bible is inerrant maybe easy to state, but when examined with more in-depth questions, the results may not be as conclusive. For example, to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy but deny the supernatural events of Genesis 1-11, would that be cognitive dissonance, denial of inerrancy, or affirmation of inerrancy?

The assumption is that SBC members affirm the doctrine of inerrancy, but to-date limited research has been provided to substantiate the validity of this assumption. For FSB pastors to know if their congregation is affirming inerrancy and to what degree is important. For example, this would allow the pastors to either continue to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy as expressed in the BFM 2000 through their preaching or to instruct their congregation in a correct understanding of this core belief. The doctrine of inerrancy is a foundational belief to the SBC. Bush and Nettles concluded, after reviewing the history of the SBC, that the Bible is and has been the highest authority (1999, p. 355). To know if this doctrine continues to be affirmed by the average church member is important for this generation of Southern Baptist leadership and the evangelical leadership who share similar characteristics.

### Data Analysis

The results of the data were organized around six sub-research questions. Data was collected and analyzed to reveal the degree to which FSB church membership affirmed the inerrancy of the Bible. The answers listed below give a glimpse into the belief structure of a segment of the Southern Baptist Convention – namely the Florida Baptist church members. There were a total of 502 participants who completed the 68-question survey. Not all of the questions are listed<sup>ii</sup>, however, this researcher believes those questions listed are accurate and represent fairly the participant's degree of belief in the doctrine of inerrancy.

### Primary Research Question

To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 1

Affirmation of Inerrancy of the Bible

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q1) Do you feel all the accounts/stories in Bible are true?	61.0%	31.5%	5.2%	2.3%
(Q2) Do you feel all the books of the Bible are true?	69.5%	28.9%	0.8%	0.8%
(Q3) Do you feel other “holy” books also inspired?	9.4%	9.2%	40.0%	41.4%
(Q4) Do you feel Bible is true and trustworthy in all matters?	62.5%	30.1%	5.2%	2.0%
(Q7) Do you feel Bible contains errors?	6.4%	8.4%	34.7%	50.6%

Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 92.5% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that all the accounts/stories of the Bible are true. There are 98.4% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that all of the books of the Bible are true and 81.4% who either *Disagree* or *Totally Disagree* that other “holy” books are inspired. There are 92.6% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that the Bible is

trustworthy in all matters and 85.3% who either *Disagree* or *Totally Disagree* that the Bible contains errors. The results seem to indicate that a significantly large segment of FSB church members do affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Although, with 14.8% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q7) believing that the Bible contains errors is concerning.

### Sub-Research Question 1

RQ1: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the deity of Jesus Christ and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 2

#### Affirmation of the Deity of Jesus Christ

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q8) Do you feel Jesus was born of a virgin?	74.5%	23.5%	0.4%	1.4%
(Q11) Do you feel Jesus is God?	62.9%	17.3%	11.8%	8.0%
(Q14) Do you feel Jesus was a man and fully God?	67.9%	25.1%	4.8%	2.0%

Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 98.0% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jesus was born of a virgin, 80.2% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jesus is God, and 93.2% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jesus was a man and fully God. One of surprising results of this question was that 19.8% (adding *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* from Q11) denied the deity of Jesus. However, when asked differently (Q14) only about 6.8% (adding *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* from Q14) denied the deity of Jesus. At minimum, there are at least 6.8% (but maybe more) of FSB church members whose affirmation in the doctrine of inerrancy has to be questioned due their denial of the deity of Jesus.



**Sub-Research Question 2**

RQ2: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of the Trinity and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 3

## Affirmation of the Trinity

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q12) Do you feel the doctrine of the Trinity is taught in the Bible?	69.1%	23.9%	3.2%	3.8%

Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 93.0% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that the doctrine of the Trinity is taught in the Bible. The results seem to strongly indicate a consistent belief in inerrancy.

**Sub-Research Question 3**

RQ3: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 4

Affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q17) Do you feel Jesus died by crucifixion on a cross?	82.7%	15.9%	0.4%	1.0%
(Q18) Do you feel Jesus' dead body was laid in a Tomb?	80.7%	18.9%	0.0%	0.4%
(Q19) Do you feel there were eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after his resurrection?	76.9%	19.9%	1.4%	0.8%
(Q20) Do you feel Jesus arose from the dead after three days in the grave?	78.3%	16.9%	2.6%	1.8%

Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 98.6% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that the Jesus died by crucifixion and 99.6% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jesus' dead body was laid in a tomb. There are 96.8% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that there were eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after His resurrection, and 95.2% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jesus arose from the dead after three days in the grave. The results seem to strongly indicate a consistent belief in inerrancy.

**Sub-Research Question 4**

RQ4: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the miracles reported in the Bible and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 5

Affirmation of the miracles reported in the Bible

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q24) Do you feel God, through Moses, changed the Nile River into blood?	66.9%	25.9%	3.8%	3.4%
(Q25) Do you feel Jonah was inside of a whale/fish for three days?	69.9%	23.7%	4.6%	1.8%
(Q26) Do you feel Daniel was thrown into a pit with lions and was not hurt?	70.3%	24.1%	3.4%	2.2%
(Q27) Do you feel David killed a giant named Goliath?	71.9%	23.7%	2.8%	1.6%
(Q28) Do you feel Moses crossed the Red Sea and Israel walked on dry ground?	67.1%	25.7%	4.8%	2.2%

Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 92.8% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that God through Moses changed the Nile River into blood and 93.6% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Jonah was inside of a fish/whale for three days. There are 94.4% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Daniel was thrown in a pit with lions and was not hurt, and 92.8% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Israel walked on dry ground after Moses parted the Red Sea. Compared to the responses of Q8 and Q20 there is some increase in the response percentages of *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* in Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, and Q28. However, those increases don't seem to show significant erosion in the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. On the contrary, the results seem to strongly indicate a consistent belief in inerrancy.

**Sub-Research Question 5**

RQ5: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the supernatural events reported in Genesis and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 6

Affirmation of the supernatural events reported in Genesis

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q31) Do you feel the earth is less than 12,000 years old?	29.1%	19.1%	33.9%	17.7%
(Q32) Do you feel Adam and Eve were created about 12,000 years ago or less?	39.0%	35.9%	13.1%	12.0%
(Q33) Do you feel God created the earth in six literal 24-hour days?	61.8%	28.9%	9.0%	0.4%
(Q34) Do you feel Adam and Eve were real people?	73.1%	24.5%	0.6%	1.8%
(Q35) Do you feel dinosaurs lived on the earth millions of years ago?	34.3%	27.9%	25.7%	12.2%
(Q36) Do you feel dinosaurs lived with Adam and Eve??	26.3%	18.7%	40.8%	14.1%
(Q37) Do you feel evolution is the process that God used to create humans?	13.9%	4.0%	31.7%	50.2%
(Q38) Do you feel God use evolution to change one kind of animal to another kind?	16.3%	9.0%	36.3%	38.4%

(Q39) Do you feel dinosaurs died out before there were people on the planet?	24.1%	23.5%	32.1%	20.3%
(Q40) Do you feel humans evolved from ape-like creatures?	13.9%	1.2%	28.5%	56.4%
(Q41) Do you feel because of science, the earth is millions/billions of years old?	16.3%	25.5%	38.2%	19.7%
(Q44) Do you feel there was a global flood during the days of Noah?	63.5%	28.9%	3.6%	3.8%
(Q45) Do you feel Noah and his family/the only humans to survive the flood?	62.5%	31.7%	3.8%	1.6%
(Q46) Do you feel Noah's flood was a local flood?	5.0%	4.2%	40.2%	50.4%

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Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 51.6% either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that believe the earth is less than 12,000 years old, 74.9% *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Adam and Eve were created about 12,000 years ago or less, and 90.6% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that God created the earth in six literal 24-hour days. There are 97.6% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that Adam and Eve were real people, 62.2% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that dinosaurs lived on the earth millions of years ago, and 54.9% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that dinosaurs lived with Adam and Eve. There are 81.9% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that evolution is the process that God used to create humans, 74.7% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that God used evolution to change one kind of animal to another kind of animal, and 52.4% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that dinosaurs died before there were people on the planet. There are 84.9% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that humans evolved from ape-like creatures, 57.9% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that because of scientific evidence that the earth is millions/billions years old, and 92.4% either

*Totally Agree* or *Agree* that there was a global flood during the days of Noah. There are 94.2% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that believe only Noah and his family survived the flood and 90.6% who either *Disagree* or *Totally Disagree* that Noah's flood was a local flood.

A secondary purpose of this study was to discover to what degree Florida Southern Baptists affirm the supernatural events of Genesis 1-11. The results are mixed. In some of the questions, the responses do not seem to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy while other responses do affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. For example, 51.6% (adding *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* from Q31) believe the earth is over 12,000 years old, 62.2% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q35) believe dinosaurs lived on the earth millions of years ago, and 41.8% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q41) believe because of science the earth is millions/billions years old. This would be contradictory to the upper limits of the timeframe within Genesis 1-11 and weakly indicate a consistent belief in inerrancy. However, there is encouragement. For example, 91.6% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q33) believe God created the earth in six literal 24-hour days, 96.6% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q34) believe Adam and Eve were real people, and 92.6% (adding *Totally Agree* and *Agree* from Q44) believe Noah's Flood was global. These positive results would seem to strongly indicate a consistent belief in inerrancy.

### Sub-Research Question 6

RQ6: To what degree, if any, do Florida Southern Baptists affirm the authority of Bible in their personal lives and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible?

Table 7

Affirmation of the authority of the Bible in their personal lives

	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
(Q13) Do you feel the only way to God is through Jesus?	73.9%	24.1%	1.4%	0.6%
(Q23) Do you feel Jesus is coming back?	80.5%	18.9%	0.4%	0.2%
(Q49) Do you feel Bible is the final authority in my life when I make decisions?	54.4%	36.3%	7.2%	2.2%
(Q50) Do you feel homosexual marriage is a biblically acceptable lifestyle?	4.2%	4.0%	27.9%	63.9%

(Q53) Do you feel abortion is acceptable?	4.8 %	4.8 %	36.7 %	53.8 %
(Q57) Do you feel living with your boy/girlfriend before marriage is acceptable?	5.2%	19.7%	39.2%	35.7%
(Q58) Do you feel Christian marrying a non-Christian is acceptable to the Bible?	10.8%	26.1%	41.2%	21.9%
(Q59) Do you feel husband is the head of the household?	42.0%	41.2%	11.2%	5.0%
(Q62) Do you feel Bible permits women to be pastors just like men?	22.7 %	21.9%	37.3 %	17.7 %
(Q54) Is there ever a time when abortion is acceptable?	Yes 17.9%	No 51.8%	Idk 20.7%	

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Of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed 98.0% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that the only way to God is through Jesus, 99.4% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that believe Jesus is coming back, and 90.6% either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that the Bible is the final authority to make decisions. There are 91.8% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that homosexual marriage is a biblically acceptable lifestyle, 90.4% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that abortion is acceptable and when asked “Is there ever a time when abortion is acceptable?” 51.8% said “no”. There are 74.9% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that living with a boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage is acceptable and 63.1% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that a Christian marrying a non-Christian is acceptable to the Bible. There are 83.3% who either *Totally Agree* or *Agree* that a husband is the head of the household, and 55.0% who either *Disagree* or *Totally disagree* that the Bible permits women to be pastors just like men.

### Open-ended Questions

Within the survey there were 22 open-ended-questions. These qualitative questions were designed to allow the respondents to express the reasons for their current belief in the degree to which they affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy. The result will be that qualitative data “can be used to shed light on the quantitative data” and “generate a rather rich and comprehensive picture” of the researched topic (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008, pp. 109–110). Not all of the open-ended questions are listed, however, this researcher believes those questions listed are accurate and represent fairly the participant’s degree of belief in the doctrine of inerrancy. The purpose in sharing a sample of the open-ended questions is to reveal in greater detail the thought process of the participants.

Table 8

Q6. Why do you believe the entire Bible is true?

	Frequency	Percent
My Christian belief/faith	121	24.1
It is the Word of God/Scripture	105	20.9
It was inspired or instructed by God	52	10.4
What I was taught	44	8.8
Various other responses	146	29.1
Total	468	93.2

Question six was open-ended, thus the Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed could give fuller responses. There were 468 responses. The most frequently cited responses were listed. The highest response rate was *My Christian belief/faith* at 24.1%. The second highest response rate was *it is the Word of God/Scripture* at 20.9%. This was followed by *It was inspired or instructed by God* at 10.4%, and then *What I was taught* at 8.8%. The *Various other responses* accounted for 29.1%. The 468 responses accounted for 93.2% of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed who do believe the entire Bible is true.



Table 9

Q22. Why do you believe that Jesus arose from the dead?

	Frequency	Percent
Bible says/It is written/Bible is True	190	37.8
There were witnesses	62	12.4
My faith/belief/trust	61	12.2
Jesus predicted it	56	11.2
Various other responses	104	20.7
Total	473	94.2

Question 22 was open-ended, thus the Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed could give fuller responses. There were 473 responses. The most frequently cited responses were listed. The highest response rate was *Bible says/It is written/Bible is True* at 37.8%. The second highest response rate was *There were witnesses* at 12.4%. This was followed by *My faith/belief/trust* at 12.2%, and then *Jesus predicted it* at 11.2%. The *Various other responses* accounted for 20.7%. The 473 responses accounted for 94.2% of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed who do believe that Jesus arose from the dead.

Table 10

Q30. Why do you believe that stories/accounts like Jonah and whale/fish or Daniel in the lion's den are true?

	Frequency	Percent
Bible says/It is written/Bible is True	221	44.0
God's miraculous power	25	5.0
Taught by parents or church leaders	24	4.8
Eye witnessed testimony	16	3.2
Various other responses	62	12.4
Total	348	69.3

Question 29 was open-ended, thus the Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed could give fuller responses. There were 348 responses. The most frequently cited responses were listed. The highest response rate was Bible says/It is written/Bible is True at 44.0%. The second highest response rate was God's miraculous power at 5.0%. This was followed by Taught by parents or church leaders at 4.8%, and then Eye witnessed testimony at 3.2%. The Various other responses accounted for 12.4%. The 348 responses accounted for 69.3% of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed who do believe that stories/accounts like Jonah and whale/fish or Daniel in the lion's den are true.

Table 11

Q43. Why do you NOT believe that the earth is less than 12,000 years old?

	Frequency	Percent
Science/Scientific Proof/Evidence	102	20.3
Biblical Timeline maybe different	17	3.4
Believe the earth is more than...	15	3.0
Shown Different	10	2.0
Various other responses	38	7.6
Total	182	36.3

Question 43 was open-ended, thus the Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed could give fuller responses. There were 182 responses. The most frequently cited responses were listed. The highest response rate was *Science/Scientific Proof/Evidence* at 20.3%. The second highest response rate was *Biblical Timeline maybe different* at 3.4%. This was followed by *Believe the earth is more than...* at 3.0%, and then *Shown Different* at 2.0%. The *Various other responses* accounted for 7.6%. The 182 responses accounted for 36.3% of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed who do not believe that the earth is less than 12,000 years old.

Table 12  
Q56. Why do you believe abortion is acceptable?

	Frequency	Percent
Save the mother's life	28	5.6
Rape victim	23	4.6
Choice	17	3.4
Things happen	10	2.0
Various other responses	21	4.2
Total	99	19.7

Question 56 was open-ended, thus the Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed could give fuller responses. There were 99 responses. The most frequently cited responses were listed. The highest response rate was *Save the mother's life* at 23.1%. The second highest response rate was *Rape victim* at 4.6%. This was followed by *Choice* at 3.4%, and then *Things happen* at 2.0%. The *Various other responses* accounted for 4.2%. The 99 responses accounted for 19.7% of the 502 Florida Southern Baptists church members surveyed who do believe that abortion is acceptable.

### Findings of the Expert Panel

The purpose of gathering an expert panel was to “generate a rather rich and comprehensive picture” of the researched topic (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008, pp. 109–110). Because the type of mixed-method research implemented was the *Sequential Explanatory Strategy*, quantitative research was implemented first with the BIT and then followed by qualitative research of the expert panel. Quantitative research “is used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena” while qualitative research is “used to answer questions about the complex nature of the phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004, p. 94). Thus, the expert panel provided interpretative guidance to the results of the responses from BIT survey.

The expert panel met for two hours. There were nine participants composed of pastors, theologians, and lay leaders. There were two audio/video professionals,

and one moderator (the researcher). The expert panel was professionally recorded for 90 minutes (video and audio), professionally transcribed into a 21-page document, and then finally analyzed by using NVivo – leading qualitative research software.

### **Questions for the Expert Panel**

Prior to participating in the expert panel the researcher asked each member to come prepared to discuss the subsequent questions based upon the highlights of the BIT. The researcher believed that the following questions would provide ample opportunity for the expert panel to summarize in a commentary form the degree to which Florida Southern Baptists affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy.

1. 19.8% of FSB disagreed that Jesus is God (Q11); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
2. 51.6% of FSB did not believe that earth is less than 12,000 (Q31); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
3. 17.9% of FSB believed that evolution was the process that God used to create humans (Q37); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
4. 15.1% of FSB believed that humans evolved from ape-like creatures (Q40); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
5. 18% of FSB believed there was a time when abortion is acceptable (Q54); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
6. 24.9% of FSB believed living with one's boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage is acceptable (Q57); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
7. 46.6% of FSB believed that the Bible permits a woman to be a pastor just like a man (Q62); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?
8. To what degree would you say Florida Southern Baptists (FSB) affirm the doctrine of inerrancy? Scale of 1 to 10. 10 = Maximum or 1 = Minimum.

The purpose of asking each member of the expert panel to answer these questions was to determine if the expert panel believed the doctrine of inerrancy was being eroded based upon the highlighted results, even though over 90% of FSB affirmed a belief in the doctrine of inerrancy.

### **Results of the Expert Panel**

Opening comments were made by the moderator to highlight that FSB expressed the following responses: 92.5% believe the accounts of the Bible are true (Q1), 98.4% believe all the books of the Bible are true (Q2), 92.6% believe the Bible is true and trustworthy in all matters (Q4), 85.3% believe the Bible did not contain errors (Q7), and 90.6% believe the Bible is the final authority in one's life when making decisions (Q49).

The moderator concluded that these results showed that FSB affirmed a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible while simultaneously some of the other highlights indicated that a percentage of FSB had beliefs that could be interpreted in contrary to their belief in the doctrine of inerrancy. The subsequent questions were presented and the responses were listed, however, the respondents remained anonymous, as agreed upon for purpose of confidentiality.

#### **Question #1: 19.8% of FSB disagreed that Jesus is God (Q11); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

When asked to respond to this question there was concern of the initial percentage, but respondent #8 expressed a sentiment that others seemed to embrace, "the thing I noted was phrasing of the question 14 [which] asked the question was Jesus a man and fully God and it was 7% roughly disagreed with that, so it was a dramatically lower number. There may have been some confusion regarding the question. So I think the number is lower probably than that 19.8%." Respondent #2 concurred and added, "I think to be alarmed by the 19.8% is to misread the full survey. In our parlance, we don't say Jesus is God. Most of the time, we say Jesus is the son of God. So the verbiage in this statement is different than the way people are used to hearing the statement. So I'm not sure that disagreeing with the statement Jesus is God is tantamount to saying we don't believe Jesus is deity and I think that question 14 - was Jesus a man and fully God - I think clarifies what the genuine perspective is of Florida Baptists." Respondent #1 wondered, "My first question was do they think this is saying that Jesus is God the Father, because in Christendom we don't distinguish well between God and God the Father."

#### **Question #2: 51.6% of FSB did not believe that earth is less than 12,000(Q31); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

The expert panel was divided into three groups regarding the age of the earth. The first group affirmed that the earth was no more than 12,000 years old and belief in an older earth erodes the doctrine of inerrancy. Respondent #1 expressed "I know some lovely wonderful people who do not affirm that the earth is 12,000 years old, but would hold a high view of inerrancy. I disagree with them heartily. I can't say they're not accepting the text, just that they're in my opinion adding to it. Which may be a question of inerrancy, [that is] envisioning things that I don't really see there, big old gaps." Respondent #6 remarked "I'm a young-earthier. I think the data is very

pristine and powerful. The reason why that other 50% exists is because the opposition teaching the religion of atheism which mandates evolution requires these long period of times. We do not have evidence of long periods of time. We have presumptions of such things.”

The second group believed one could believe in an older earth and affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Respondent #8 stated, “William Dembski believes [past Professor of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary] the universe is billions of years old and Paige Patterson [president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary], [said] he fell within the bounds of the Baptist faith and message so I'm gonna go with Paige and say it has no bearing on inerrancy of scripture.” Respondent #9 added, “I will say for the record, I am not a young earth creationist. And I'm not pushed away from young earth creationists because of the science. I'm not a science guy. I have a Ph.D. in Old and New Testament. I'm convinced because of my reading of Genesis 1 and 2. I give genre a great amount of weight. I look at ancient cosmology language and it makes sense to me when put into Mesopotamian language.”

The third group believed the Bible taught a young earth, but that the doctrine of inerrancy was not being eroded by an older earth belief. Respondent #4 remarked, “I do not believe it affects the doctrine of inerrancy. I do not believe the person who answered that question is looking himself at scripture whether it's infallible or the full Word of God. I do believe a young earth is there in book of Genesis. I also believe that if you go with the old earth, you have people dying before sin. Scripture teaches us that death came as a result of sin. Respondent #5 elaborated, “I wouldn't say it's an inerrant type issue. I think there are some godly guys that are “gappers” also. I'd read it as Adam to Abraham as 2000 [years] and I'd read it from Abraham another 4000 [years], I'd still see it as some age as a young earth. Here's the issue to me. To me it's a trust issue. Trusting what God says.”

**Question #3: 17.9% of FSB believed that evolution was the process that God used to create humans (Q37); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

**Question #4: 15.1% of FSB believed that humans evolved from ape-like creatures (Q40); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

Both of these questions were combined and the panel was encouraged to respond to each question either individually or collectively. Although there is a distinction between the topics of each question, the researcher believed there was not a significant enough difference in the percentages to warrant additional time for each question. Collectively the responses seemed to overlap enough that both questions could be combined.

Most of expert panel concluded that the belief that God used the evolutionary process to create humans did begin to erode the doctrine of inerrancy. Respondent #9 stated, “There are plenty of positions where a person can hold to an old earth and reject evolution as a process. They're related but not the same question.” Respondent

#8 added, “I would say without a doubt that begins to undermine clearly the inerrancy of scripture.” He expounded “You’ve got pastors teaching that. You sit under the authority of a pastor and he teaches an evolutionary process, people are going to believe that.” Respondent #6 warned against interjecting “science” that undermined the scriptures and illustrated, “I think it’s an error to say I believe all the scriptures, maybe not the Jonah stuff. And as soon as we let the Jonah stuff get that level of qualification, then we might say well, the resurrection too.”

**Question #5: 18.0% of FSB believed there was a time when abortion is acceptable (Q54); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

**Question #6: 24.9% of FSB believed living with one’s boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage is acceptable (Q57); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

Due to time restraints, the panel was asked to comment on both questions. Since both questions touched upon the issue of authority of the Bible in the daily lives of FSB, they were combined as well. The respondents seemed to be collectively against abortion personally, as expressed by respondent #5. He summarized “We’re gonna start with the assumption that we are not for abortion. Psalm 130 for example, you knitted me together in my mother’s womb, I’ll praise you because I am remarkably wonderfully made.” They were also against a boyfriend or girlfriend living together before marriage, as expressed by respondent #2. He stated, “I believe it’s inappropriate for a boy and girl to live together before marriage. It is a shame that we have this trend that’s so out of line with the scriptures.”

Some of the panel members seemed to look for ways to justify the 18.0% who stated that abortion was acceptable. Respondent #4 exclaimed, “I can see the person taking a survey and I could be one that would think about the endangering of the mother with the child. And so I could see where 18.0% would say that is acceptable.” Respondent #3 added, “Probably if we knew this 18.0% they’re probably talking about situations that are difficult where the mother is warned that her life is in danger.” One panel member, respondent #8 did not believe inerrancy was being eroded. He stated clearly, “Answer to question 5 is no. Up through 1991, we had an exception in Southern Baptist resolutions regarding abortion for health of a woman.”

**Questions 7: 46.6% of FSB believed that the Bible permits a woman to be a pastor just like a man (Q62); does this affect the doctrine of inerrancy? If so, how?**

The moderator allowed an open forum for all panels members to comment on this question rather than asking each participant to respond individually and in an order of sequence. Two members responded to this question. Respondent #3 stated, “They’ll have a problem with 1Timothy 3. A pastor has to be the husband of one wife. So how does a woman become the husband of one wife? That’s a problem.”



A more fully developed response came from respondent #6. He expounded, "But I'm fascinated that half of people would say, sure, that's ok, what's wrong with having a woman pastor? We would say there's nothing wrong with that, they want to serve God, let's go do that. But in same sense, my picture of this is in the Old Testament. What's wrong with having a non-Levite make a sacrifice? Everything! Penalty- death! And it's because the picture is owned by God. And it comes back to this inerrancy and authority. It's not our picture." He added, "It's like saying we're gonna hire some Buddhists, they make pretty good Christian pastors. They don't believe, but they're effective. Doesn't matter if it works, doesn't matter what the numbers are, I think it ultimately matters what the Book says."

**Question 8: To what degree would you say Florida Southern Baptists (FSB) affirm the doctrine of inerrancy? Scale of 1 to 10. 10 = Maximum or 1 = Minimum.**

The moderator asked the final question. The purpose of this question was to elicit a numerical value from each panel member on the degree to which each panel member believe the 500 FSB affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Ten would equal full affirmation while one would equal almost no affirmation.

Respondent#1: "On an intellectual level, I think the Southern Baptists interviewed hold a high view of inerrancy. On a level of practice... I'm thinking more like 6 or 5."

Respondent#2: "I'd be optimistic and give it a 9. I would think the primary issue isn't their view of the scripture but their ability to handle or understand it or their knowledge of it."

Respondent#3: "Theoretically 10 and practically 6."

Respondent#4: "I would also give a theoretical and realistic. I would also add to that 98% I believe really do believe, so I would say about 9.78, but I would also say there's some ignorance in what inerrancy actually means by their very lifestyles so I'm probably a 9.8 and a 7."

Respondent#5: "I felt that however you live your life practically is what you really believe. So I went straight to question 4, is the Bible true and trustworthy in all matters and I saw 60% and I gave them a 6."

Respondent#6: "I think they think they're at 9. 90% believe these things, say they believe them, but put into practical situation of the heart or situational ethics, they function at a 5 to 6."

Respondent#7: "Their answers to those direct questions at the top of the page, they're 8.5, 9.5. Then we got down to the practical, the cultural things where it gets down to a 5 or 6."

Respondent#8: "I'd probably put it up at around an 8 or 9. I think there's a lot of lack of education. So if they were to be educated and the real question becomes are those people even Christians let alone Southern Baptists...so anyway, I think what I'm gonna say is an 8."

Respondent#9: “I would give the same reasons for all the same logic there, same explanation. And based on this third point on page four, 85.3% believe the Bible did not contain errors, I'd give it an 8.5”

### **Theological Implications of the Results**

Several theological implications can be made from the present research study concerning the degree to which Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. The review of the literature revealed the historical importance that the Bible has had within the SBC and the resurgence that took place in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to reaffirm with clarity the SBC affirmation in the inerrancy of the Bible. The results of BIT within the FSB membership uncovered several implications for Christian educators, pastors, professors, and lay leadership.

### **Significance of Orthodox Doctrine**

The data from the BIT survey (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 and Q7) shows with an overwhelming affirmation that Florida Southern Baptists do affirm this doctrine. Although this research did not ask how often the participants heard sermons on the doctrine of inerrancy, the results reveal a strong commitment of this belief. The Southern Baptist Convention wanted to ensure that the doctrine of inerrancy was declared with clarity within their convention. Thus, they formulated the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 with an updated understanding of their definition of inerrancy. This would also give the impression that SB pastors have diligently preached messages that uphold this doctrine either explicitly or implicitly. The research also indicates that SBC leadership has ensured that their seminaries and colleges are training future pastors and leaders who will affirm that the Word of God is their final authority. Like Paul, who wanted Timothy to pass on his apostolic teaching to the next generation of leaders, so also is it necessary for present-day leadership to teach correct doctrine to the future leaders to ensure orthodoxy continues. In his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2), Paul reminds him, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Paul believed sound doctrine was essential to the advancement of the Christian faith. The teaching of orthodox doctrine prepares men (and women) to accomplish the good works that God desires for each believer. One of those good works will be to affirm the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

### **Prominence of Christian Education**

In the book, *A Theology for Christian Education*, Estep suggests that orthodox teaching could be in crisis if the church does not value Christian education (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, 2008, pp. 27–28). He argues that Christian education is “the integration of evangelical theology and the social sciences” (p. 29). Within the BIT survey, one of the top responses to explain why FSB members affirmed various

orthodox positions was their teaching at home or at church (Q6, Q22, and Q30). Almost 9% of responses attributed either their training at home or at church. However, the number one response was their Christian belief/faith or belief in what the Bible says (Q6, Q22, and Q30). One could argue that the training FSB members received at home and at church (via Sunday school hours, pastoral messages, and other educational settings) could be the strongest influence upon a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

### **Importance of Foundational Teaching**

A large percentage of Florida Southern Baptist members affirm the doctrine of inerrancy, but when this belief was dissected the results were concerning. The most shocking data to come from the BIT survey were the beliefs about the supernatural events in Genesis and personal views on moral living. In the 1880s, when Crawford Toy, professor at Southern Baptist Seminary, taught that the early chapters of Genesis (1-11) were historically inaccurate, (Bush & Nettles, 1999, p. p.211) and Elliot's commentary, published in 1969, questioned the historical accuracy of Genesis (James, 1986, p. 68), Southern Baptists overwhelmingly rejected their views and continued to elevate the Scriptures as infallible. With over half (51.7%) believing that the earth is older than 12,000 years, over one-sixth (17.9%) believing God used evolution to create humans, almost one-in-seven (15.1%) believing humans evolved from ape-like creatures, this researcher has serious doubts that these types of beliefs, first affirm inerrancy, and second should be accepted within the SBC. This form of thinking would have been rejected within the SBC in 1880s. Yet the results from the BIT (Q33, Q35, Q36, Q39, Q40, Q41,) indicate that there is slippage on the understanding of Genesis 1-11; or worse - the SBC has not taken seriously the foundational aspect of Genesis.

### **Significance of Genesis Apologetics**

This leads the researcher to wonder how often creation apologetics is taught within the FSB churches. Within the researcher's church, at least once every couple of years a creation conference is promoted. Is that happening in other FSB churches? The need for a Genesis curriculum is essential for the church. Within Genesis 1-11, the church learns about God the origins of the universe, the earth, of life, of death, of sin, of pain, of suffering, of evil, of God's character, and the seed form of a coming Messiah. The opening chapters of Genesis are the church's foundation. The doctrine of inerrancy rises or falls upon how one understands Genesis. Therefore, there is a need within the church to intentionally teaching Genesis 1-11 and all its theological implications. Starting with a pre-school and ending with senior adults, a church would be wise to incorporate a creation apologetics curriculum every couple of years. Otherwise, in the end, death does not make sense unless Genesis 1-3 is properly interpreted, salvation does not have the same significance unless Genesis 1-

3 is properly interpreted, and the fullness of return of Christ is not realized unless Genesis 1-3 is properly interpreted.

Pastors and leaders of the church sadly do not see the significance of Genesis 1-11. It is her foundation and to dismiss it is done at a great cost. Thus, the researcher would recommend Pastors teach annually Genesis 1-11 and if they do not have a proper understanding of it, then begin with organizations like *Answers in Genesis* or *Institute of Creation Research* to solidify this foundational teaching.

Seminary professors and college faculty should be questioned on their beliefs just like Troy Crawford in the 1880s and should also remove themselves when they no longer can affirm a Biblical understanding of Genesis. This would mean affirming a young earth position on the earth and the universe, six 24-hour creation day week, rejection of evolution, no ape-like creatures formed before humanity, no death and destruction prior to Adam's sin, and an affirmation of a global flood during the days of Noah. Anything less begins to undermine the doctrine of inerrancy and could lead to an erosion of the SBC resurgence's efforts in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Incongruence of Immoral Living and the Affirmation of Inerrancy**

In the area of living arrangements, almost 25% believe living with a girl/boyfriend is acceptable, and almost 37% believe the Bible permits a Christian to marry a non-Christian. In contrast, Moses forbade the marrying of foreign wives because their hearts would turn them from Yahweh (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Ezra rebuked his post exilic people for marrying pagan wives (Ezra 9:3ff). And Paul warned in 2 Corinthians 6:14 about believers not partnering with non-believers. Contextually in 1 Corinthians this might be speaking to the business relationship of believers and non-believers, and if so, this would reinforce how much more God would *not* want His children to marry a non-believer. James (4:4) chastises those who have close bonds with the world. How much more should a believer guard his or her heart with a non-believer in marriage?

In the area of living together before marriage, Hebrews 13:4 states, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Nothing could be clearer. God commands against these types of decisions, yet a significant number of FSB believe to the contrary.

In a time when judging others is not acceptable culturally and more types of lifestyles are permitted (and often celebrated), the church can shine brighter by declaring that God's way in marriage is the most enjoyable. Christians, who marry believers, wait until they are married to have sexual fulfillment, and keep the marriage bed between only one another, will be blessed by God. The church must speak to these issues, through clear preaching, loving accountability, and when necessary, in-house confrontation that follows the Matthew 18 guidelines. This type of internal cleaning could be painful and might reduce church membership, but in the

end, what is most important is that each local church aligns more with the heart of Yahweh and His teachings.

### **Summary**

The SBC had discovered in the 1970s and 1980s that belief in the inerrancy of the Bible was not being affirmed by their leadership, particularly within their six seminaries. After a twenty plus year battle, the SBC attempted to affirm in more precise language the inerrancy of the Bible through the BFM 2000. This research examined the degree to which, if any, Florida Southern Baptists affirm the doctrine of inerrancy. Six research questions investigated the relationship that exists between FSB affirmations in the doctrine of inerrancy, the deity of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, resurrection of Jesus Christ, miracles reported in the Bible, supernatural events reported in Genesis, and their affirmation of the authority of the Bible in their personal lives. A quantitative and qualitative analysis was conducted by surveying 502 FSB church members with a 68-question survey instrument. The expert panel provided interpretative guidance to the results of the responses from BIT survey. The results of the study revealed that a large percentage of FSB church members affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy, but the underlining beliefs were not always consistently acknowledged. The importance of continual Christian education of the Bible through foundational teaching will ensure that future generations will affirm a correct understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy.

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<sup>i</sup> All of the faculty are associated with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC and the research firm was America's Research Group, Inc.

<sup>ii</sup> The complete results of the 68-question survey can be found in the dissertation "A Mixed-Method Study of the Variables that Influence Florida Southern Baptists' Affirmation of the Inerrancy of the Bible" by David A. McGee. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3581139)