

Creeds, Confessions and The Scriptures

(Preface and Article I of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000)

I. 3 Versions Historically of the Baptist Faith and Message

1925 – Controversy: evolution and the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate.

1963 – Controversy: the authority of the Bible.

2000 – Controversy: numerous theological issues including the authority of the Bible, open theism, substitutionary atonement, exclusivity of the gospel, the Lord's Day, abortion, homosexuality, and the role of women.

II. Significant Aspects in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 Preface

Baptists are a people of deep beliefs and cherished doctrines. Throughout our history we have been a confessional people, adopting statements of faith as a witness to our beliefs and a pledge of our faithfulness to the doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture.

Our confessions of faith are rooted in historical precedent, as the church in every age has been called upon to define and defend its beliefs. Each generation of Christians bears the responsibility of guarding the treasury of truth that has been entrusted to us [2 Timothy 1:14]. Facing a new century, Southern Baptists must meet the demands and duties of the present hour.

New challenges to faith appear in every age. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the *Baptist Faith and Message* was first adopted by this Convention. In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The Convention added an article on "The Family" in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now, faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal truths of the Christian faith.

Your committee respects and celebrates the heritage of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, and affirms the decision of the Convention in 1925 to adopt the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, "revised at certain points and with some additional articles growing out of certain needs . . ." We also respect the important contributions of the 1925 and 1963 editions of the *Baptist Faith and Message*.

With the 1963 committee, we have been guided in our work by the 1925 "statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life" It is, therefore, quoted in full as a part of this report to the Convention:

(1) That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

(2) That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future, Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.

(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small, have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so.

(4) That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.

(5) That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.

Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches. We honor the principles of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God.

Baptist churches, associations, and general bodies have adopted confessions of faith as a witness to the world, and as instruments of doctrinal accountability. We are not embarrassed to state before the world that these are doctrines we hold precious and as essential to the Baptist tradition of faith and practice.

Article One

I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

Key Text:

Psalm 19:7-10: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”

Matt 5:17-18: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

John 17:17: “Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.”

2 Timothy 3:15-17: “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Peter 1:19-21: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, than no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Major Theological Observation: The Baptist Faith and Message highlights the source, nature, purpose, and sufficiency of Scripture.

1. **The Bible is a divine-human book.** The *BF&M* states, “the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man.” The Bible is the inspired revelation of God. Inspiration is a biblical concept; the term occurs once in the Bible: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). The term “Scripture” comes from the Greek term *graphe* and means “writing.” The Greek term translated as “inspired” in our English Bibles is *theopneustos*, a compound term comprised of “God” (*theos*) and “breath” (*pneo*). The term describes the Scriptures as “breathed-out by God.” The *BF&M* also affirms the human nature of Scripture. According to 2 Peter 1:19-21, the Holy Spirit operated on men to direct them towards a goal. Peter focused on three ideas in relation to the Bible. First, Scripture did not originate in the will of the human author. Second, the human authors spoke for God. Third, the Spirit “moved” upon the human agents. The word “moved” indicates that the power of the mover (the Spirit) carried the human agent to a goal.

2. **The Bible is a purposive book.** According to the *BF&M*, the Bible has “salvation for its end.” Because the Bible purposes to bring humans into a salvation relationship with God, the Bible testifies to Jesus Christ, the agent of salvation. This was not clear in the 1963 statement. There is said Jesus was the “criterion for interpreting the Bible.” This phrase could unnaturally and unintentionally result in an erroneous bifurcation: Jesus vs. the Scriptures. As Al Mohler, one of the committee members of the *BF&M 2000* noted, “We stated clearly that “all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is himself the focus of divine revelation.” This replaces the language stating that Jesus Christ is “the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted.” Why? Simply

- put, because 30 years of abuses and attacks upon the integrity of the Bible made clear that some were using this language to deny the truthfulness and authority of the Word of God. Some who have taught in our seminaries over the past several decades claimed that this allowed them to deny the truthfulness of whatever biblical passages did not rise to their standard of Jesus' intention. Professors and pastors have denied that God ordered the conquest of Canaan, tested Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac or inspired the Apostle Paul when he wrote about the family or roles in the church."
- 3. The Bible is a truthful book.** The *BF&M* affirms, "All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy." This is equivalent to affirming the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility. Every direct affirmation of the Bible is truthful. The truth of the Bible is not limited to the religious sphere. While neither a textbook of science nor history, all biblical affirmations related to science, history or any other area of reality are true. Two major arguments support the truthfulness of Scripture: the nature of God and Jesus' understanding of Scripture. First, God is not a god of error. Second, Jesus treated the Scripture as trustworthy. A follower of Christ should adopt the same attitude toward Scripture as Jesus. Jesus affirmed as true portions of Scripture liberal scholars accept as mythological; for example, a literal Adam, the Noahic flood, the destruction of a city called Sodom, and Jonah.
- 4. The Bible is an authoritative book.** The *BF&M* affirms, "It [The Bible] reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore, is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried." Some who claim to be Christians deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture by elevating other religious

authorities above the Bible. Liberal “Christians” elevate human reason to a place of authority and judgment over the Bible. Catholics deny the sufficiency of Scripture by placing ecclesiastical authority over Scripture. According to Catholic teachings, the church gave birth to the Scripture and correctly interprets the Word of God. Some Quakers, Pentecostals, charismatics, and even Baptists exalt subjective experience to a position of supreme authority over the Bible. For the faithful follower of Jesus, the Word of God is the final arbitrator and authority in all matters.

Summary

Baptists historically described the Bible in strong language that affirmed the inspiration and total trustworthiness of the Bible. James Frost, the first president of the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay), wrote in 1900, “We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice, and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the Word of God. We recognize at this point no room for division either, of practice or belief, or sentiment.”

*Portions of this study were taken from “BF&M Commentary 1: The Scriptures,” by Dr. Mark Rathel (Florida Baptist Witness, 1-17-08).