

FOUNDATIONS OF OUR FAITH

THROUGH THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE 2000

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Defining and Defending Our Faith

Introduction

I. The **Versions** 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.

From the Preface of the **Baptist Faith and Message 2000**:

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.

II. The Value of Creeds/Confessions in Church History

Creeds and confessions help guide the church doctrinally. They summarize core Christian beliefs in clear, concise statements.

- Apostles' Creed (2nd century AD) confesses faith in triune God and Jesus' life, death, resurrection
- Nicene Creed (325 AD) confronted Arian heresy, affirmed deity of Christ
- Heidelberg Catechism (1563) aimed to disciple believers in Reformation theology based on Scriptures.
- Westminster Confession (1646) states "holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation."

III. The Verses to Support

- Jude 3 - "beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend **earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints."
 - 1 Corinthians 1:10 - "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **you all speak the same thing**, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."
 - Galatians 1:6-9 - "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, **to a different gospel**, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.**"
 - 2 Timothy 1:13-14 - "**Hold fast the pattern of sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us."
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "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." Well-formulated creeds/confessions systematically organize the doctrine contained in Scripture.
 - Ephesians 4:11-16 - "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." Ministers are called to equip saints for works of service. Creeds/confessions have proven effective teaching tools for discipleship.
 - 2 Peter 1:12-15 - "For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth." We must continue reminding people of God's truth. Creeds/confessions serve as concise reminders of fundamental Christian doctrines.
 - Deuteronomy 6:6-9 - "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." God's people are called to diligently teach his commandments. Creeds/confessions concisely summarize Bible teachings for memorization.
- Confessions Do Not Replace Bible But Serve It
 - Confessional Stance Guards Against Error
 - Should not be "absolute" but "regulative" to safeguard preaching and teaching.

The BF&M is best described as **a confession** – a statement of how Southern Baptists understand Scripture and all it reveals about life and godliness. 1 Timothy 6:12 says, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you have **made a good confession** in the presence of many witnesses."

We don't consider the BF&M **a creed** because we don't want to leave the impression it is somehow binding on Southern Baptists, or that it stands alongside, or above, Scripture. As Herschel Hobbs, chairman of the BF&M 1963 committee writes, "**Baptists have always shied away from anything that resembled a creed or a statement of beliefs to which their people were forced to subscribe.**"