

What is the BF&M?

The Baptist Faith and Message is a statement of faith, or a summary of doctrinal beliefs.

“Christians in the early church benefited from the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creeds (AD 325, 381), and the Chalcedonian Creed (451). These brief and simple statements reflected the common, Christian faith in God and the gospel he delivered to us.”¹

“A flurry of statements in the Reformation era unified Protestant churches in the gospel even as they articulated key differences over church government and baptism. The Augsburg Confession (1530), Westminster Confession (1546), Savoy Declaration (1658), and Second London Confession (1689) spelled out the doctrinal convictions of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, respectively.”²

“A statement of faith is a gift to the church, and it’s a gift to visitors who want to know what your church believes. Furthermore, visitors will be more inclined to trust you if you are straightforward about your doctrine. It’s also a gift to teachers longing to faithfully handle the Word.”³

“A statement of faith is a gift to every church member because it highlights the doctrines that bind us together. After all, shared fellowship is only as deep as shared beliefs.”⁴

The Preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 states:

“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.”

¹ <https://www.9marks.org/article/do-we-really-need-church-documents/>

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

“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.”⁵

At this point, some 21 years later, I will say that we require further clarification regarding the family, gender, and sexuality. I don't know when it will come as a denomination. Still, as an autonomous church, I believe it would be good to consider adding to existing articles or adding new articles to confess what we believe to be accurate and hold fast to the sound doctrine of the church.

However, to do that apart from the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 would be to develop our Harrisburg Statement of Faith, which sounds wonderful to me, but also daunting!

⁵ <https://bfm.sbc.net>

History of the BF&M

The first BF&M was in 1925, it was updated in 1963, added too in 1998, and again updated in 2000.

In 1925 the committee presented the following to the convention:

“In pursuance of the instructions of the Convention, and in consideration of the general denominational situation, your committee have decided to recommend the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, revised at certain points, and with some additional articles growing out of present needs, for approval by the Convention, in the event a statement of the Baptist faith and message is deemed necessary at this time.”⁶

In introducing the concepts and nature of confessions the 1925 Committee said:

“As introductory to the doctrinal articles, we recommend the adoption by the Convention of the following statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life, believing that some such statement will clarify the atmosphere and remove some causes of misunderstanding, friction, and apprehension. Baptists approve and circulate confessions of faith with the following understanding, namely:”⁷

According to the 1925 introductions...

The goal of the BF&M is to

- 1. Bring clarity to who we are as Southern Baptists**
- 2. Remove misunderstandings, friction, apprehensions for the sake of unity.**

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

The following five statements regarding the purpose of confessions of faith in Baptist life:

(These are given to provide an understanding of the nature and function of this confession in the life of Southern Baptists:)

- 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.⁸**

The doctrines contained in the BF&M are meant to provide instruction and guidance concerning the essentials of the Christian faith.

This confession is meant to provide unity and clarity regarding the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

- 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.⁹**

Confessions are good, but they are not exhaustive.

Not only are they not exhaustive, but they also are not infallible. This means that there may be a need to revise and edit a confession over time. However, editing a confession of faith is not the same thing as editing the Bible.

A confession of faith is not authoritative over a church or its people. Instead, a statement of faith is meant to provide clarity and unity for said church or denomination.

- 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.¹⁰**

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

As Baptists, we believe in the autonomy of each local church. This means that each church is individually responsible to the Lord for everything it does. Because of this, we believe that each church has the right to develop its statement of faith based on the Word of God. I think we as Baptists would say that we believe that it is good for us to do this.

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.¹¹

This is of utmost importance. The sole authority and practice among Baptists are supposed to be the Scriptures.

This means that even our constitutions and by-laws are secondary to the Word of God.

It also means that ultimately the pastors and leaders of the church must follow Scripture first. We must make that adjustment when we find that our constitutions and by-laws are not in line with Scripture.

Consider this; if we know something in our documents isn't in line with Scripture, and we don't adjust it, we are demonstrating a low view of the Word. One of the things that I have experienced in my ministry is a deep commitment to the church's documents without the same level of commitment to the Word.

But, as the 5th statement reminds us, our statements of faith and our church documents should result from our convictions that flow directly from the Scriptures. Unfortunately, however, I think the fact that many churches have simply copied and pasted documents over time from other churches has resulted in a watered-down understanding of what we should believe and how we should operate.

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.¹²

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

Our statements of faith flow from Scripture and provide a set of beliefs for us to unify around in the local church. But, as we mentioned earlier, they are not exhaustive, nor are they infallible.

The limits of our statements of faith are meant to provide the basis for unity rather than inclusion.

In the spirit of the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message, the Southern Baptist Convention updated and edited the Baptist Faith and Message in 2000. As the chairman of the committee that edited and presented the Baptist Faith and Message, Dr. Adrian Rogers wrote:

“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.

As a committee, we have been charged to address the “certain needs” of our own generation. In an age increasingly hostile to Christian truth, our challenge is to express the truth as revealed in Scripture, and to bear witness to Jesus Christ, who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

The 1963 committee rightly sought to identify and affirm “certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.” Our living faith is established upon eternal truths. “Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us.”

It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe.”¹³

¹³ *ibid*

Scripture:

2 Timothy 1:12–14 (ESV)

12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. **13** Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **14** By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

1. God is guarding the gospel

This means that it will never be gone from the world. But it also doesn't negate our responsibility to guard the Gospel in our own lives and pass it on from one generation to another.

2. We are charged with guarding the Gospel in our lives

With the power of the Holy Spirit

In the life of the church a good statement of faith guards and guides the teaching of the gospel.

“Using a good statement of faith is like bowling with bumpers. Just as the bumpers keep the bowling ball on the lane, the statement of faith keeps us in line with truth so we don't veer too far in the wrong direction. The Bible alone is our authority. After Scripture, a quality statement of faith is an important tool to protect and encourage sound doctrine” - Aaron Menikof

1. Guarding the gospel

By developing a statement of faith, the church provides a concrete summary of beliefs that each member should believe.

The statement of faith serves the church by interpreting and articulating the essentials of the faith.

A statement of faith provides a shared set of beliefs that allow members to exercise unity in the essentials and charity in the non-essentials.

2. Guiding the church by the gospel

It helps teachers know the boundaries of what to say and what not to say.

It provides clarity on issues of faith and practice.

When someone wants to know what we believe about an issue like marriage, gender, family, salvation, etc., the statement of faith serves as a resource on what the church believes and teaches. And, when there is an issue that isn't addressed, the statement of faith provides a starting point or may need to be edited to address the situation of the day.

In a culture that is constantly dividing and arguing over what we think or believe, a good statement of faith aims the church toward unity and peace.

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” - Rupert Meldenius, c. 1627¹⁴

My hope for us as we study through the Baptist Faith and Message is that we will grow deeper in our understanding of what we believe and that we will be unified and grow in our peace with another and God.

¹⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/essentials-unity-non-essentials-liberty-all-things>