

THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE | SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION AND SCRIPTURE

IS A CONFSSIONAL STATEMENT A NECESSITY?

- The development of confessional statements among Baptists was controversial (and for good reason).
- Baptists have always struggled with being “confessional” or “non-confessional.”
 - Non-denominational, local-church oriented Baptists have been non-confessional: *no creed but the Bible*.
 - John Leland, the famous Baptist pastor of colonial days, said, “Confessions of faith often check any farther pursuit after truth, confine the mind into a particular way of reasoning, and give rise to frequent separations.
 - Denominational Baptists have almost always been confessional, to varying degrees.
 - All Baptist confessions prior to 1833 were strongly Calvinist and accepted only by “particular Baptists,” which were pseudo-denominational in structure and ministry.
 - The *Triennial Convention* of Baptists was perhaps the first denominational Baptist organization in the USA. This organization brought about *The New Hampshire Confession of Faith* in 1833.
- A better approach: deal with the issue Biblically.
 - A confession is always an attempt to deal with an issue in succinct form but creates an extra-Biblical guide that supplants healthy study.
 - A confession is always an attempt to avoid direct confrontation, typically current, possibly future.
 - A confession gives the unfounded comfort that an organization is secure from future theological drift. It can (and often does) cause the organization to have a dangerous sense of peace.
 - Organizations and movements that have stayed true to their founding principles have almost completely been “non-confessional.”
 - The Roman Catholic church has only the most basic creeds, and yet is largely unchanged over the centuries.
 - The Churches of Christ are strongly anti-confessional, and strongly anti-denominational, and yet almost exclusively untainted by changed thinking from their founders.
 - The Independent Fundamentalist Baptists shout, “No Creed but the Bible!” They are also amazingly uniform across the movement and consistently hold to their local church founder’s vision.
 - Other non-confessional groups: Bible churches, Brethren churches,

THE HISTORY OF THE BF&M

- The BF&M was built upon the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1833.
 - The New Hampshire Confession was built as the confessional statement of the Triennial Convention of Baptists.
 - Written chiefly by J. Newton Brown, it was “mildly Calvinistic,” while other Baptist confessions were strongly Calvinist.

- The Triennial Convention split in 1845, and the Southern Baptist Convention was formed.
- The SBC did not adopt a confession for its mission boards, though its seminaries adopted a confession upon their founding (the SWBTS in Fort Worth adopted the New Hampshire Confession at its founding in 1908, for example).
- In 1925, due to modernism, the SBC adopted the BF&M. It was modified in 1963, 1998, and 2000.
 - Each modification was due to controversy.
 - Only after 2000 did the signing of the confession become commonplace, along with statements like “We adhere to the BF&M, 2000”).

THE STATEMENT ON THE SCRIPTURES

- Part 1:
 - New Hampshire and 1925: We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction
 - 1963: The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.
 - 2000: 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
 - Commentary:
 - The SBC believes that the Bible was written **by men divinely inspired**.
 - In actuality, the *words* are inspired (2 Tim. 3:16).
 - The men were **moved by the Holy Ghost** (2 Peter 1:19). The word **moved** is φέρω [phero], “to be carried.”
 - It is a slight but significant difference to speak of *inspired men -vs- inspired words*. Consider John 11:51.
 - Note that the 1963 was weakened to “the record of God’s revelation” and strengthened in 2000 to “is God’s revelation.”
- Part 2:
 - NH and 1925, 1963, 2000: It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.
 - This famous saying is so pithy that it has been kept intact and is known by many Baptists.
 - God is the author and the content is without “mixture of error.”
 - Does the Bible have “salvation for its end”?
 - The only passage of Scripture that tells what the scriptures are for and why scripture is written is 2 Timothy 3:17, **that the man of God may be perfect...**
 - Baptists have long had an evangelistic zeal which is commendable. However, when we make “salvation” the “end” of scripture, it sets the groundwork for churches that are salvation oriented but not “thoroughly equipped” oriented.
- Part 3:
 - 2000 (and similar in previous versions): “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.”
 - The words “all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy” were added in 2000.
 - The SBC (and evangelical) position is that Scripture is “the supreme standard.” While this is commendable, it opens the door to receiving visions, prophecies, etc.

- Part 4:
 - 1963 only: “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”
 - This is a loophole for spiritualization of Scripture as a hermeneutical method, and was often used by liberals within the convention.
 - The statement was rightly removed in 2000.
- Part 5:
 - 2000 only: “All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”
 - The “Christological” approach of the 1963 statement was removed, but not adequately replaced with a literal hermeneutic.
 - When “All Scripture is testimony to Christ,” then Christ is seen where He is not. This does not do Christ any favors.
- What is missing?
 - A statement of what the Scriptures are. –“Sixty-six books of the Bible.”
 - A statement of the sufficiency of Scripture (thus the teaching of dreams and visions abounds in the SBC).
 - An interpretive guide: a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic and instruction on rightly dividing the Word.
 - A commitment to preaching and teaching the content of the Word.
- Is the statement on Scripture dangerous?
 - Yes, in that it gives Southern Baptists the sense that they are a “people of the Book.”
 - Yes, in that it gives a false sense of security about their seminaries and colleges.