

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Baptist Beliefs

Topic: BF&M (2000): Preamble

Fall 2025

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and his Word for the sake of living rightly before God in his world. The topic this week is the Preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message (2000).

The Preamble

The 1999 session of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, adopted the following motion addressed to the President of the Convention:

"I move that in your capacity as Southern Baptist Convention chairman, you appoint a blue ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith and Message statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

President Paige Patterson appointed the committee as follows: Max Barnett (OK), Steve Gaines (AL), Susie Hawkins (TX), Rudy A. Hernandez (TX), Charles S. Kelley, Jr. (LA), Heather King (IN), Richard D. Land (TN), Fred Luter (LA), R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (KY), T. C. Pinckney (VA), Nelson Price (GA), Adrian Rogers (TN), Roger Spradlin (CA), Simon Tsoi (AZ), Jerry Vines (FL). Adrian Rogers (TN) was appointed chairman.

Your committee thus constituted begs leave to present its report as follows:

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.

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.

Exposition of the Preamble

Creation and Composition

The Preamble speaks to the origins of the BF&M (2000). A messenger to the 1999 SBC Annual Meeting made a motion from the floor, which was adopted. This meant SBC President Paige Patterson was instructed by the messengers to take a particular action: "appoint a blue ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith and Message statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

The committee was broadly representative geographically and generationally. Most committee members were pastors, but two were women, both of whom were respected leaders among Baptist women. Three of the committee members were scholars, including two presidents of SBC seminaries and the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The chair, Adrian Rogers, had served three terms as President of the SBC (1979-80, 1986-1988) and was arguably the most widely respected pastor in the convention.

Historical Context

The committee acknowledges they were aiming for historical continuity with the earlier editions of the BF&M. Instead of completely rewriting a new confessional statement, they revised the existing statement. The template is still the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833), "revised at certain points and with some additional articles growing out of certain needs"

Like the 1963 committee, the 2000 committee had two goals. First, to focus on "certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified." The purpose was to draft a consensus statement of historic Baptist beliefs which continue to be widely held, not to offer an exhaustive summary of every Christian doctrine or to push Southern Baptists in some new direction theologically. The confession was intended to demonstrate **continuity** with the Baptist tradition.

The second goal was to offer revisions that were **contextual** to the particular moment. Darwinism and theological modernism provided the context for the first BF&M in 1925. Neo-Orthodoxy was the context for the 1963 revision. In the same way, various challenges at the turn of the twenty-first century provided the context for a new revision "to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us."

Five Key Claims

- 1) Confessions are consensus statements, adopted by a group of Baptists, that offer general instruction and guidance. Confessions have no salvific authority.
- 2) Confessions are always incomplete, fallible, and revisable.
- 3) Confessions can be adopted by any group of Baptists, whenever they see fit.
- 4) Confessions are interpretive guides, do not bind one's conscience, and do not replace in any way the authority of Scripture.
- 5) Confessions do not hinder one's liberty of conscience in areas not addressed by the confession, nor does any state or denomination have the right to impose a confession on a church or group of churches. Baptists value individual freedom.

Over the years, progressives appealed to these five themes to undermine any sort of meaningful authority for confessions. They argued confessions are merely descriptive of a doctrinal consensus, but they should never be used prescriptively to enforce particular beliefs. Such use of confessions is inherently coercive because it violates liberty of conscience. Conservatives raised concerns that the progressive understanding made confessions meaningless as anything other than historical documents that summarized the beliefs of a group of Baptists at a particular moment in time.

For this reason, the committee also added an important statement that clarified how to understand the five historic claims.

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.

The phrase "doctrinal accountability" suggested that, while confessions are never equal to Scripture, they may be used prescriptively in some contexts. This statement empowered the Southern Baptist Convention to require voluntary affirmation of the BF&M (2000) for key entity employees (professors, missionaries, curriculum writers) and various elected and appointed convention leaders as a condition of service, while maintaining that the confession should not be imposed on individuals or churches. The desire was to balance liberty of conscience and doctrinal accountability.