

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Baptist Beliefs

Topic: BF&M (2000): Article XII: Education

Spring 2026

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 Article XII in the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), which is on education.

Article XII

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7,11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.

Key Biblical Texts

¹ "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ²that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deut. 6:1-9)

²⁸ "And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28)

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Psa. 19:7)

¹³ Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding (Prov. 3:13)

¹⁴ The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly. (Prov. 15:14)

¹⁹ Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. (Ecc. 7:19)

^{5:2} And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.... ^{7:24} "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matt. 5:2; 7:24)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil 4:8)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8)

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5)

Observations

Exposition of Article XII

Historical Context

All three edition of the Baptist Faith and Message have included an article on education. The inclusion of the article highlights the value that the Southern Baptist tradition places on education. The three versions of the article communicate the same basic ideas, though each revision included a considerable expansion of the article. The BF&M (2000) added the first four sentences in the first paragraph, which enhances the biblical and theological rationale for Christian education. The revision was approved without debate.

Key Ideas

Christianity values the importance of knowledge, and faithful learning is an important part of the Christian tradition

All wisdom and knowledge are ultimately found in Jesus

The new birth results in redeemed thinking and the godly pursuit of knowledge

Churches should support education generously in the same way as they support missions and benevolence

Our pursuit of Christian education should be intentional and systematic at all levels

In Christian education, academic freedom (like all freedoms) is not an end unto itself but must be rightly ordered

In the case of academic freedom, it is rightly ordered by academic responsibility

Christian educational institutions and the teachers they employ are responsible to Jesus, the Scriptures, and the mission of those institutions—in that order

Baptists and Education, Then and Now

The earliest Baptist educational institution was Bristol Baptist College (est. 1679) in England. In North America, the first Baptist college was Brown University (RI, est. 1764). In the South, the earliest Baptist colleges include Georgetown College (KY, est. 1787), Union University (TN, est. 1823), Furman University (SC, est. 1826), University of Richmond (VA, 1832), Mercer University (GA, 1833), and Wake Forest University (NC, 1834). The first Baptist seminary in the USA was Newton Theological Institution (MA, 1825). The first Baptist seminary in the South was Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SC, 1859).

By the time the BF&M (1925) was adopted, there were dozens of Baptist colleges and universities across the South, two seminaries Southern and Southwestern (TX, est. 1908), and a Bible college that would later become a seminary (New Orleans, est. 1917). Growth continued through the 1960s as new state colleges were founded and three new seminaries opened: Golden Gate Seminary (CA, est. 1944), Southeastern Seminary (NC, est. 1950), and Midwestern Seminary (MO, est. 1957). All these institutions were linked through the Southern Baptist Education Commission, which was founded in 1915 to promote common educational standards. Beginning in 1924 the SBC also partnered with the National Baptist Convention to fund

American Baptist Seminary in Nashville, TN, which was a school for training African American Baptist ministers.

Baptists in South Carolina have always been pioneers in higher education. As far back as 1751, the Charleston Baptist Association established a fund to help future ministers attend college. FBC Charleston pastors Oliver Hart (served 1750-1780) and Richard Furman (served 1787-1825) were two of the leading advocates for ministerial education among all Baptists in America. Jonathan Maxcy, the founding president of University of South Carolina (served 1804-1820) was a Baptist minister who previously served as president of Brown University. William Bullein Johnson, who was the first president of both the SCBC (1825-1852) and the SBC (1845-1851) was chaplain at USC early in his career (served 1809-1810). Johnson was also the founding pastor of both FBC Columbia (est. 1809) and FBC Greenville (est. 1822).

Furman Academy and Theological Institution was founded in Edgefield in 1826 and moved to Greenville in 1851. James Furman, a SC Baptist pastor and the son of Richard Furman, served as president of Furman from 1859 to 1879. From 1867 to 1870, James Furman was also pastor of Chick Springs Baptist Church, which relocated and was renamed Taylors Baptist Church in 1885.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was founded in Greenville by a Furman theology professor named James P. Boyce in 1859. Boyce had previously pastored FBC Columbia, SC. Southern's first building was the former sanctuary of Greenville First Baptist Church. Southern moved to Louisville, KY in 1877 during Reconstruction.

SC Baptists have founded several other colleges and universities, including Limestone College (est. 1845), Johnson Female Seminary (est. 1848), Greenville Woman's College (est. 1854), North Greenville Baptist Academy (est. 1892), and Anderson College (est. 1911). Johnson Female Seminary died out during the Civil War but was a forerunner of Anderson. Greenville Woman's College merged with Furman in 1937, and in 1941 Limestone became non-denominational. The Baptist College of Charleston was founded in 1964 and became Charleston Southern University in 1990. For most of their respective histories, North Greenville and Anderson were junior colleges, though both became four-year schools the early 1990s (Anderson 1991, NGU 1992) and achieved university status in 2006.

By the mid-1970s, the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools included 71 institutions. Then, during the Inerrancy Controversy (1979-2000), higher education became a flashpoint. Following World War II, many Baptist-related schools began drifting to the left theologically. While not all schools were fully theologically liberal, almost none were consistently conservative. After conservatives

gained first control of the SBC in the mid-1980s, progressive academics looked for ways to break ties with Southern Baptists. In 1989, a group of former Southeastern Seminary professors founded the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond to serve moderate Baptist ministerial students. By the turn of the century, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship supported over a dozen seminaries and divinity schools. Some were pre-existing divinity schools affiliated with other denominations that started Baptist programs like Duke University Divinity School, Candler School of Theology (Emory), and Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian). Others were new graduate ministry programs at Baptist universities like Baylor, Wake Forest, Mercer, Campbell, and Gardner-Webb.

Beginning In the mid-1980s, many of the oldest and most prestigious state Baptist colleges and universities broke ties with their sponsoring state conventions. In 1990, Furman's trustees voted to break with the SCBC because the latter had become too conservative. The break became official in 1992. Both Anderson and North Greenville became four-year institutions in direct response to the Furman break. Similar moves were made at Wake Forest (NC, 1986), Stetson (FL, 1995), Richmond (VA, 1999), Mercer (GA, 2005), Georgetown (KY, 2006), and Belmont (TN, 2007).

In 1997, the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries adopted a statement called "One Faith, One Task, One Sacred Trust," which they signed publicly at the SBC Annual Meeting. The statement affirmed unequivocally the "authority, inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible," the primacy of the gospel, and the seminaries' accountability to the churches of the SBC. After the adoption of the BF&M (2000), all six seminaries changed their policies to require faculty affirmation of the confession as a condition of employment. Most of the seminaries have also adopted additional documents like the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1979), the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1987), and the Nashville Statement on Biblical Sexuality (2017) to clarify their commitment to orthodox theology and ethics.

State Baptist schools have taken a variety of different approaches, in part because not all faculty are Southern Baptists at most colleges and universities. At NGU, the senior administration and faculty in the College of Christian Studies affirm their agreement with the BF&M (2000), the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the Manhattan Declaration (2005), and the university's Statement on Human Flourishing (2019). All faculty affirm the Statement on Human Flourishing and agree to "affirm an understanding of and willingness not to advocate or teach contrary to the Baptist Faith & Message, 2000."

Join us for a public lecture and hear from well-known theologian and church historian as he shares insights from his latest works.

Dr. Carl Trueman



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