

The Baptist Faith and Message:

I. The Scriptures

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. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. 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. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Every confession of faith of which I am aware begins with a statement on the Scriptures in order to lay a foundation for everything that follows in the confession. The *BF&M* follows the traditional course, framing all of its doctrine from the Scriptures. As Southern Baptists, we look to the Scriptures as the **ONLY** basis for our faith and how we should live. While we may increase in our understanding of the Scriptures, and thereby grow in our faith and love for God, we deny that God inspires any person with revelation equivalent to the Scriptures. Any structure built upon a flawed foundation is in jeopardy of eventual collapse. Praise God, we have a perfect foundation, having no flaws, and one that cannot be broken.

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The first sentence of the *BF&M* immediately makes clear that the Holy Bible (implicitly understood as only the 66 books, not including the “Apocrypha” as some do), although written by men, was inspired by God. As mentioned above, we believe in a closed Canon. Even supposing that an authentic apostolic scroll were discovered today, we would cherish it and learn from it, but we would not add it to the Bible.

It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.

This little sentence affirms that anything inspired by God must be perfect, that it has great inherent value, and that what He says is always instructive. The 1925 version used “heavenly instruction.” In 1963, it was changed to “divine instruction.” In theological terms, “divine” always connotes perfection and cannot be misunderstood.

It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.

In stating that it has God for its author, the orthodox understanding of inspiration of Scripture is revealed. Biblical inspiration is not God elevating human capability to write great and inspiring human expressions. Scripture inspiration is God using fallible men, within their normal capability and consciousness, to express in their writing infallibly what He breaths into them and moves them to write.

Theologians refer to the Scriptures as special revelation because, although God reveals Himself in the created order, it is only in the Scriptures that God reveals our fallen condition and condemnation, our need for salvation, and our only hope, Jesus Christ.

In the anti-supernatural sentiment (modernity) that arose due to scientific advancement and the technological explosion of the late 1800's and early 1900s, science staked its claim on “truth” with an iron grip, which has just continued to tighten. In response, all

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three versions of the *BF&M* state that the Bible has “no mixture of errors.” It is inerrant. Just to be clear, when we say that the Bible is inerrant, we are referring to the original manuscripts, not translations. I mention this because there are a few King-James-only folks who claim that the 1611 KJV was also inspired and error free. The 2000 *BF&M* further emphasized the Bible’s inerrancy by adding that the Bible 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.

This part of the statement addresses the Southern Baptist belief that the Scriptures hold all essential knowledge for man. The Bible is simply all sufficient for life and Godliness. The Bible may not teach quantum mechanics, but it explains the how the universe began, how man came into existence, how the universe shall end, and everything in between. All of the fundamental questions that humans have pondered from the beginning, for example, the meaning of life, are answered. Sometimes the answers may cause us to want to put our hands over our ears and hum. Yet, deep down, the Bible makes sense and resonates with our inner being. The statement rightly points out that the Bible is the true center of Christian union. In other words, belief in the Bible is essential to true Christianity. It is notable that the denominations that have adopted more liberal views of Scripture have lost their moral compass. The liberal factions of some mainline protestant denominations have embraced homosexuality among their members and even in their pastorate.

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

This last sentence was not in the 1925 or 1963 version. In 1963, the following sentence ended the section on the Scriptures: “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.” This sentence caused no small controversy because some discerning Southern Baptists recognized that it opened the door to justify liberal interpretation of Scripture and mysticism. By the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the Southern Baptist seminaries had drifted away from the sound doctrine of the founders and become liberal in their theology. For example, many professors taught their students that creation, the virgin birth, essentially anything miraculous, was just figurative. A professor could say that Jesus had led him to that conclusion. The sentence never set well with Bible expositors because it appeared to replace the whole discipline of Bible interpretation, involving the application of many well accepted criteria to the particular text to be interpreted, with a single criterion, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it was unclear how to apply the person of Jesus Christ as a criterion or rule. In his commentary on the 1963 *BF&M*, Herschel Hobbs had little to say about it. He states “The Bible is the written Word about the living Word. Therefore, any interpretation of a given passage must be made in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and His teaching and His redemptive work.” Our 2000 version has attempted to better express the intent of the sentence in 1963 version.

When the Southern Baptist founders formed our first seminary in Greenville, SC in the late 1850s, Basil Manly, Jr., one of the four original faculty members, wrote what is known as the “Abstract of Principles”, which was included in the Fundamental Laws of

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the Seminary as part of its charter. From that time forward, every professor at Southern Seminary has been required to sign the Fundamental Laws and “teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the Abstract of Principles.” During the liberal years at Southern Seminary, many faculty signed it knowing that they would not teach in accordance with it. I only say that to point out that a confession of faith is only as strong as the integrity of its adherents. Manly’s first principle follows:

“The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.”