

# *The Baptist Faith and Message:*

## **XII. Education**

**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.**

The chapter on "Education" has existed as a single chapter in each version of the BF&M. The overall intent of the chapter is to address Christian education rather than secular education. Yet, it assumes that Christian education involves both the spiritual learning and general learning (i.e., reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic) necessary to be a productive Kingdom citizen equipped to serve God and others. The paragraph on academic freedom was added in 1963.

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The 1925 BF&M opened with the same wording except that "faith" has since replaced "religion." Most likely, faith was substituted for religion in the current version to emphasize that Christianity is unique among the religions of the world. By 1925, Darwinism had bloomed into full blown modernity and the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures were under serious attack. Great colleges and seminaries which were founded on Christian principles and primarily for theological education were viewing the Bible more as fiction than fact. Application of "higher criticism" to interpret the Scriptures led Christian theologians to deny foundational Christian beliefs, for example, the virgin birth. Colleges became "universities," that embraced a more broad minded education in all manners of inquiry, but particularly in the sciences. To literally believe in the Bible was tantamount to proven ignorance and stupidity. So, the BF&M opened this chapter with a clear rejoinder. To the modernists, we Southern Baptists say, "Not knowing the Scriptures ye do err. Only in Christianity can true enlightenment and intelligence be realized. For all of your professed higher learning and scientific discoveries, it is you, not us, who are unenlightened." And, we are still fighting the same misconception: Bible believers are ignorant.

The next two sentences are bit difficult to interpret, particularly the basing of all "sound" learning on the Colossians 2:3 reference, which says, "In Whom [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The idea might be that because all knowledge and wisdom reside in Christ, learning should not be limited to spiritual knowledge. Presumably, the soundness of the learning is dependent on the degree to which it is in harmony with the Scriptures. While the Colossians reference speaks to wisdom and knowledge, it may not have been the most appropriate verse for the point that the BF&M was making because Colossians 2:3 is referring to spiritual wisdom and knowledge, not all wisdom and knowledge generally. We know this because Paul follows it with "I say this lest any man beguile you with enticing words," by which he means worldly philosophies. The connection between the Colossians reference and "our Christian heritage" is also difficult to understand. When one considers that for many centuries most Christians were illiterate, it is probably not appropriate to say that sound learning (i.e., an education) is part of our Christian heritage. Nevertheless, Southern Baptists have always been committed to literacy because it is essential to reading and studying the Word of God.

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**The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge.**

True enlightenment can only occur with a regenerate heart and a renewed mind. People can go to Christian academies and colleges, get straight A's, graduate Summa Cum Laude, and leave without a true Christian education unless they are born again by the Spirit of God. Regeneration is essential to being a Christian and to receiving a Christian education. Without the new birth, the faculty of spiritual discernment is closed by spiritual death. "But, the natural man [unregenerate] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14) Regeneration of the heart produces a hunger that is initially fed with the sincere milk of the Word and matures to consuming strong meat (i.e., the deeper things of God). While the thirst for knowledge is primarily for spiritual growth and sustenance, it extends to knowledge of God's creation as well. There is great pleasure in understanding the workings of His hands. If only church folk were more thirsty. It seems to take very little to satisfy their thirst for learning.

**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.**

This language has remained from the 1925 BF&M although the sequence of the two sentences has been reversed. The term "cause" is used here in the sense of "purpose" or "duty" and Southern Baptists have taken on many "causes" throughout our history. Basically, the BF&M is saying that education is important and should be supported in the same way we support missions and general benevolence. Presently, the Southern Baptist Convention supports six seminaries scattered across the nation. There are many more SB affiliated colleges and universities. The SBC also provides a vast array of Sunday school and discipleship materials. It is interesting to note that the concept of an "adequate system" has changed as times have changed. The 1925 version said "adequate system of schools" suggesting that Christian-based education was implicit (i.e., a given) in that day. The 1963 version had to be more explicit and said "adequate system of Christian schools." The BF&M 2000 removed "school" replacing it with "Christian education," which likely reflects the large home school movement in our day. A Christian education does not require a public school building or formally trained teachers. In fact, whether "home-schooled" or not, the Bible teaches us that Christian teaching is the responsibility of the parents and church family. Centralized places of learning outside the home are fine, but they should not replace or displace Christian teaching in the home. Parents should teach their children the Bible, Christian doctrine, and Christian history. Of course, this necessitates that the parents know these things.

The BF&M never makes clear what it means by Christian education. In reading the whole chapter, the overall sense is a combination of Christian doctrine and secular subject matter. The meaning of Christian education can be very subjective. Also, there is something unsettling in the phrase "complete spiritual program for Christ's people." Having an education and having honed study habits can improve one's ability to study the Bible and read the great theologians; however, education is not essential to spiritual growth. Sanctification is not necessarily coextensive with education. In fact, education can, in some cases, be an impediment to spiritual growth. If I were to define Christian education, I would say, "learning to think Biblically about everything."

The state having assumed responsibility for educating our children has caused an ever increasing emphasis on the importance of secular education. We are completely reconciled to study and testing when it comes to secular subjects. However, try suggesting the testing for Biblical or

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doctrinal knowledge in church. Watch out! There is little resolve in the membership to study and less to test. It is very sad. Moving on...

**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 second paragraph was added in 1963 and was left untouched in the BF&M 2000. By the 1960's, liberalism had crept into the SB seminaries. The liberalism that required Professor Crawford Toy's resignation from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1879 was commonplace by 1963. Once again, what is meant by academic freedom is not made clear. Is it referring to what subjects can be taught, what issues can be addressed, different interpretations of Scripture or simply anything? The overall sense seems to give some room for unbiblical or secular views, but there is a line that should not be crossed. Certainly, there were SB proponents in those days (and probably more now) that wanted to see evolution accepted as God's means of creation and admit that the creation account was mythical. However, they apparently do not realize the implications of their desire. Evolution would introduce centuries, if not millennia, of death and corruption before the fall. This would contradict that death was the result of Adam's sin. Besides being bad science (speaking as a biochemist), evolution is a frontal attack on the redemptive purpose of God and the Gospel.

**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.**

The final sentence draws the line. The BF&M holds that the Christian teacher is bound by Christ not to teach in opposition to His Word or teach things that would violate the purpose for which the school exists. It is unfortunate that it did not say "inerrant, infallible, and authoritative." Without the first two, the third has less force and is open to interpretation. Scripture misinterpretation with the force of Scriptural authority is a dangerous combination. Sadly, during the sixties and seventies, professors in Southern Baptist Seminaries regularly crossed the line. Some still do.