



CBF and the Baptist Faith and Message Statement

A Conversation with CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal

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At its 2000 meeting in Orlando, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted controversial revisions to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement. What is your opinion of the new Faith and Message?

A

I have two primary concerns about the revised Baptist Faith & Message statement. My first concern relates specifically to some of the changes in the 2000 statement, including some important language in the 1963 statement that was deleted in the revised version. I am particularly disturbed by the revision that altered the phrase in the 1963 document from “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,” to “All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.” As my friend Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, has noted, this change effectively “elevates the Bible above Christ.” Every method of interpreting the Bible needs a guiding principle, and Baptists have always emphasized that this guiding principle is Jesus Christ. I am also concerned that the effect of several other changes in the statement is a heightened emphasis on “doctrinal accountability” while de-emphasizing our historic Baptist doctrines of soul competency and the priesthood of every believer.

A second concern, based on the events in Southern Baptist life over the past two decades, relates to the ways in which this confession of faith will be used to enforce conformity in the Southern Baptist Convention. This has already had a dramatic impact on persons employed in the convention’s agencies and institutions. But I believe it also has serious implications for local congregations who are affiliated with the SBC.

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What has CBF done to help churches and congregational leaders understand the changes in the Baptist Faith and Message statement and their implications?

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Because of the intense interest in the new statement, CBF’s Resource Center developed a variety of resources for individuals and churches. These included dozens of commentaries on our Web site from both clergy and laypersons. A workshop on this subject at our 2000 General Assembly was one of the most popular sessions. We also provided an analysis of the new Baptist Faith and Message prepared by Gary Parker, who served at the time as our coordinator for Baptist life and leadership. The eight-page analysis, offered in print and as a downloadable file on our Web site, has been among our most-requested resources.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is committed to basic Baptist principles. As Christians, the tie that binds us is our common faith in Jesus Christ. As Baptist Christians, we also share a commitment to those principles that have shaped our unique Baptist heritage and policy. These include:

- **Soul Freedom** – We believe in the priesthood of all believers. We affirm the freedom and responsibility of every person to relate directly to God without the imposition of creed or the control of clergy or government.
- **Bible Freedom** – We believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, is central to the life of the individual and the church. We affirm the freedom and right of every Christian to interpret and apply scripture under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

- **Church Freedom** – We believe in the autonomy of every local church. We believe Baptist churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whomever they perceive as gifted for ministry, and to participate as they deem appropriate in the larger Body of Christ.
- **Religious Freedom** – We believe in freedom *of* religion, freedom *for* religion, and freedom *from* religion. We support the separation of church and state.

– “*What’s All the Fuss About? An Analysis of the New Baptist Faith & Message Statement and What It Could Mean for You and Your Church*” can be downloaded from CBF’s Web site at www.cbfonline.org. Multiple copies are also available from the CBF Resource Link at 1-888-801-4223



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