



CBF and the Bible

A Conversation with CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal

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What does CBF believe about the Bible?

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a fellowship of Bible-believing Christians. Our Mission Statement includes a clear, confessional statement about our love of Scripture, our confidence in Scripture, and our belief in and commitment to Scripture as the authority for our faith and practice.

The Mission Statement spells out our shared commitment to core principles that have shaped our heritage and polity as Baptists. Borrowing from the work of Baptist historian Walter B. Shurden, these “four fragile freedoms” include soul freedom, church freedom, religious freedom and Bible freedom. Let me quote the paragraph on 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.

The Mission Statement also expresses our shared commitment to *biblically-based* global missions. This section includes the following statements:

All Christians are called to be co-laborers in the task of fulfilling our Lord's Great Commission. We believe that the Bible teaches:

- *God is the one triune God, Creator of all people in God's own image.*
- *All people are separated from God by sin.*
- *Christ is the savior and redeemer for all peoples.*
- *The Holy Spirit convicts and converts all who believe in Christ, teaches the church in the voice of the Living Christ, and empowers the church and all believers for the mission of Christ in the world.*
- *Christ calls us to minister redemptively to the spiritual, physical, and social needs of individuals and communities.*
- *Every believer and every church is responsible for sharing the Gospel with all people.*

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Some of your critics have argued that the Mission Statement is inadequate. Why doesn't CBF develop a statement of faith that would give expression to your beliefs about the Bible?

First, and most importantly, as Baptists, we are a confessional, non-creedal people, choosing to place our confidence in the Bible itself rather than in human-made statements about the Bible. Church history is replete with examples of ways in which the Kingdom of God has been wounded through the misuse of creedal statements. Recent events in Southern Baptist life show clearly how confessions of faith can be used as creedal documents to enforce conformity and to codify particular interpretations of Scripture.

Second, it is important to understand that CBF is not a denomination or a convention but a resource network for Baptist Christians and churches. As I indicated earlier, we are guided by a Mission Statement that articulates our core values and shared priorities, including an unwavering commitment to the authority of Scripture. To suggest, as some have done, that CBF's leaders “don't believe the Bible” is an outlandish and harmful

accusation. It not only misrepresents the individuals and churches of the Fellowship but also uses Holy Scripture as a political weapon.

As a Fellowship, we try to honor the truths of Scripture in our life together. While we are far from perfect I do believe our partnering churches and our cooperative ministries reflect our love of God and love of neighbor. Of course, the real evidence of our belief in the Bible is not in pledges of allegiance to creedal statements about the Bible, but in our obedience to the Bible and in our willingness to follow Jesus.

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.

– For a free introductory packet about the mission and ministries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, call the CBF Resource Link at 1-888-801-4CBF (4223). Or visit our Web site at www.cbfonline.org



COOPERATIVE BAPTIST
FELLOWSHIP

*Serving Christians
and churches
as they discover
and fulfill their
God-given mission*