

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

## A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

### INTRODUCTION

#### GOALS OF THIS STUDY

1. To Attain Assurance of Eternal Life
  - a. and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15).<sup>1</sup>
  - b. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11-13).
2. To Grow in the Knowledge of God
  - a. Now if I have indeed found favor in Your sight, please teach me Your ways, and I will know You and find favor in Your sight. Now consider that this nation is Your people (Exod 33:13).
  - b. This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent--Jesus Christ (John 17:3).
3. To Strengthen Our Love for God's Word
  - a. 97 How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long. 98 Your command makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers because Your decrees are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the elders because I obey Your precepts. 101 I have kept my feet from every evil path to follow Your word. 102 I have not turned from Your judgments, for You Yourself have instructed me. 103 How sweet Your word is to my taste-[sweeter] than honey to my mouth. 104 I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every false way (Ps 119:97-104)
  - b. 7 The instruction of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the commandment of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. 9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous. 10 They are more desirable than gold--than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey--than honey dripping from the comb. 11 In addition, Your servant is warned by them; there is great reward in keeping them (Ps 19:7-11).
  - c. 1 How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of sinners, or join a group of mockers! 2 Instead, his delight is in the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (Ps 1:1-3).

4. To Be Equipped for Ministry
  - a. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).
  - b. 11 And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ (Eph 4:11-15).
5. To Be Able to Share and Defend our Faith
  - a. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15, NIV).

#### WHAT IS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY/DOCTRINE?

1. We all do Systematic Theology.
  - a. Any time you say, "The Bible teaches . . ." you are doing systematic theology.
2. Systematic Theology should be done right (i.e., biblically).
  - a. It's possible to have bad/unbiblical theology.
  - b. When someone says, "I think God would never send anyone to hell," that is a person who has bad/unbiblical theology.
3. What is Systematic Theology? What is Doctrine?
  - a. The word "theology" comes from two Greek words—theos meaning "God" and logos meaning "study"—theology then is "the study of God."
  - b. Systematic Theology answers the question, "What does the whole Bible teach about a particular topic?"
  - c. The biblical teaching of a topic is a "doctrine."
    - i. The word "doctrine" means "teaching."
  - d. Anyone who thinks about God is a theologian. The question is, "Is our theology biblical and true?"
4. We must be careful to base our theology on God's Word.
  - a. All theology must find its basis in a careful study of the Bible.
    - i. The Bible is our source of authority for learning about God because it is God's revelation of Himself to mankind.
    - ii. The Bible contains God's redemptive acts and the inspired interpretation of those acts.
    - iii. If God did not reveal Himself to us, we could never know Him.

- b. We can also refine our understanding of theology by reading/hearing the teaching of those theologians and teachers God has given to the church.
  - i. You could and should try to develop your theology from a personal study of Scripture, but it would take you many years of diligent study. We can benefit from the study of others who have gone before us.
  - ii. Someone said, "Christian theology is entering into a 2,000 year old conversation."
  - iii. "Consequently, if you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean you have a lot of wrong ones."  
–C. S. Lewis
- c. Theology and doctrine must be written down for clarity and correction.
  - i. The church has always written down its beliefs to clarify teaching and protect the church from error.
  - ii. The early creeds were written in response to heresy.
  - iii. Confessions of faith also clarify the doctrine of the church.

### The Baptist Faith and Message

1. The Baptist Faith and Message is the statement of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention.
2. Who are Southern Baptists?
  - a. Since its organization in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has grown to over 16 million members who worship in more than 42,000 churches in the United States. Southern Baptists sponsor about 5,000 home missionaries . . . [and] . . . more than 5,000 foreign missionaries in 153 nations of the world.  
The term "Southern Baptist Convention" refers to both the denomination and its annual meeting. Working through 1,200 local associations and 41 state conventions and fellowships, Southern Baptists share a common bond of basic Biblical beliefs and a commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world.<sup>2</sup>
3. What is the purpose of the Baptist Faith and Message?
  - a. On June 14th, 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a revised summary of our faith. The committee's report says in part:
    - i. "Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches. We honor the principles of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God. Baptist churches, associations, and general bodies have adopted confessions of faith as a witness to the world, and as instruments of doctrinal accountability. We are not embarrassed to

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<sup>2</sup> From the official SBC web site under "About Us," <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/>.

state before the world that these are doctrines we hold precious and as essential to the Baptist tradition of faith and practice. As a committee, we have been charged to address the "certain needs" of our own generation. In an age increasingly hostile to Christian truth, our challenge is to express the truth as revealed in Scripture, and to bear witness to Jesus Christ, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

The 1963 committee rightly sought to identify and affirm "certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified." Our living faith is established upon eternal truths. "Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us."

It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe."<sup>3</sup>

4. The fact that the SBC has an official confession of faith demonstrates that Southern Baptists are a doctrinal people and what we believe matters.
  - a. The BF&M demonstrates that we hold essential doctrines in common with other Christians and denominations, thus testifying to our basic unity.
  - b. The use of such confessions is voluntary and in no way should be imposed upon believers or churches against their consent.
  - c. Confessions are used to testify to the world our basic beliefs.
  - d. Confessions also are to be used to prevent false brethren from entering the fellowship of a church and thus pollute and destroy the fellowship and to discipline those who have erred in their doctrine.
5. As a church and denomination, we must know, defend, and pass on the deposit of divine truth that has been entrusted to us. A study of doctrine helps us do that.
  - a. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding irreverent, empty speech and contradictions from the "knowledge" that falsely bears that name (1 Tim 6:20).
  - b. 13 Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who lives in us, that good thing entrusted to you (2 Tim 1:13-14).
  - c. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).
  - d. Contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all (Jude 3).
6. Throughout this study your theology will be clarified, challenged, and possibly corrected.
  - a. We must remain teachable. Our theology should be "corrigible."
    - i. Dictionary definition of corrigible: "subject to being revised, improved, or made more accurate."

<sup>3</sup> From the Preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 found at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmpreamble.asp>.

## APPLICATION

1. What would be the gradual result in a church that did away with or neglected their confession of faith?
2. What would be the gradual result in a church that affirmed, taught, and utilized their confession of faith?
3. Read Matthew 28:18-20. How does a study of theology help us fulfill the Great Commission (note the following "...teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you...")?
4. Think of a jigsaw puzzle. If you have ever tried to complete a jigsaw puzzle you know that in the beginning it is hard to put the pieces together. But the more pieces you have put together, the easier it becomes to put the remaining pieces together. In what way is systematic theology like doing a jigsaw puzzle?
5. How would a better knowledge of all that the Bible teaches benefit your life?