

Baptist Faith and Message, part 1, The Scriptures
February 12, 2017

We're starting a new series of sermons this morning. This series will follow the pattern of a particular document. That document is called The Baptist Faith & Message. The Baptist Faith & Message is a summary of what we, as Southern Baptists, pretty much agree on. I say pretty much agree on because we are not in full agreement. The old joke goes that if you ask three Baptists their opinion about something you will get four answers.

The reason we are not in full agreement with each other is that... **Southern Baptists are not a creedal people.** The word creed comes from the Latin, *credo*, meaning "I believe". As I am using the word creed, it is... **Creed = "a statement of religious belief accepted as authoritative by a church."**

Some might argue that our Baptist Faith and Message is a creed. But it is only a statement of general beliefs, not required beliefs. Creeds are used by some groups as a litmus test for membership. In-other-words, you have to agree that you believe everything in the creed in order to be a member. Southern Baptists do not use the Baptist Faith & Message that way.

The first Baptist Faith & Message was formed in 1925. It was enlarged and modified in 1963, added to in 1998, and modified again in 2000. Our church constitution states that Emmanuel Baptist Church "is in essential accord with the doctrinal statement of "The Baptist Faith and Message" as adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963."

In order to join our church, we expect you to read the Baptist Faith and Message, but we do not require you to affirm it. We assume that you would not choose to become a member if you were in major disagreement with much of the Baptist Faith & Message. In-other-words, if you were not of the Baptist understanding of the major teachings of the Bible, you would join a different church.

Let's turn now to the first article of the Baptist Faith & Message. It will be on the screen, or it is at the end of the sermon notes insert in your bulletin.

1963 Baptist Faith and Message Statement

Article I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of 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. 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. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

I cannot address everything in this article in one sermon. I'm going to address mainly the first sentence. **"The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man."**

Note the word "revelation" in that sentence. This word means something uncovered or laid bare, a revealing. And in this sentence what is being revealed is God Himself.

Two weeks ago I illustrated how God reveals Himself through nature. In nature we recognize that there is an intelligent, powerful, God who created the world. **The revealing of God through nature is called Natural Revelation.** It is reported that journalist, Hendrick Van Loon, on his first visit to the Grand Canyon exclaimed, "I came an atheist; I leave a believer." From nature we learn that there is an intelligent, powerful God, the creator. That isn't a lot of information about God, but it is a tremendous start.

Learning more about God requires special revelation from God. We need God to give us further truth about Himself. There is no way we can learn more about God through nature. There is no way we can learn our purpose unless God gives us revelation beyond nature itself.

I believe that God has done exactly that. I believe this collection (the Bible) of writings is God's revelation to us of Himself. It reveals what He is like. It reveals His goal in creating us. It reveals our purpose. If you want to know why you exist, you must become a student of the Bible.

I can understand if you have doubts that the Bible is God's special revelation to us. It is not the kind of revelation people want. Maybe you, or a friend, has complained, "I wish God would give us a sign from heaven telling us what to believe. If God appeared to me and told me to believe the Bible, I would."

Some other religions teach that their god has done something like that for them. The Mormons teach that their religion was given by an angel visiting a teenager named Joseph Smith, in New York state, in 1819. That is pretty specific and involves a miracle, if only a miracle witnessed by one person. The religion of Islam claims that its source was a series of messages from an angel to a man named Mohammed beginning in the year 610 AD. That one too is pretty specific and miraculous, again to just one person.

More clear would be God showing up and telling the whole world at one time, "Hey, I'm real, and the Bible is my word to you." That's the kind of revelation man wants to get from God.

But the Bible did not come to us like that. **God did not give us the Bible through a big miracle.** There is no record of such an event in our history. There is the record that God gave 613 commands to the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai. And Jesus appeared to the apostle John and dictated some letters and appeared in visions for John to record and send to the churches. But none of the books of the Bible were handed down by God as completed manuscripts for us to read. None of the books of the Bible were given in that way. All of these writings (the Bible) have been written and edited by men, different men, many men.

God inspired many different people at different times. Hebrews 1:1 testifies to this.

Hebrews 1:1 (NIV) In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

Let me suggest a reason God did not use a big miracle to give us the Bible. Let me suggest a reason God did not say, "Of all the religions on earth, this is the right one." It may be that God did not do so because... **Not having a big miracle revelation requires**

us to search for God. It requires us to show that we want to know Him. I believe this is what God is looking for from us. Look at this statement about faith.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Note that last part, "those who earnestly seek him." All through the Bible we see God looking for this kind of faith from humans. God is looking for those who want to know Him enough to search out the truth about Him.

Think about this. If God appeared in the sky to everyone on the planet at the same time, showed us a Bible, and said, "Here is the book for you to follow", it would not be hard to believe in God. In fact, if God did that every 5, 10, or even every 20 years, it would be hard NOT to believe in Him.

Instead of doing that, God has given us just enough information to know He exists. It is then up to us to decide if we want to know more. **People of faith are seeking Him.**

If you really want to know Him, He will reveal Himself to you. He created you for relationship and very much desires a relationship with you. That is why He reveals Himself to us. He does so through these writings, His special revelation to us.

I call them writings because that is what they are. The Bible is actually not one document, but a collection of many different documents.

We often use the word scriptures to refer to the Bible. The word "scripture" is not a religious word. The word scripture comes from the Latin, *scriptura*, meaning "something written". It is not a religious word. It could be any writing. It could be a grocery list, a court document, a book report, or a letter. Nor is the Greek word in the New Testament, *graphé*, a religious word. It too simply means writings.

To determine the kind of writing being discussed, you have to look at the context in which the word is used. Usually, the word "writings" in the New Testament refers to the Old Testament writings. For example, in...

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In this context, scripture refers to the old testament writings. So you might ask the question, how did they come together into one book. The Bible means the book.

How did that list of Old Testament scriptures or writings come about? Well, at one point in their history, the Jews had to determine which books available to them were special revelation from God. They came up with the 39 writings of our Old Testament. We don't know the process they used, or how they evaluated the different writings because they had. We do know they had some determining factors because we know they did not pick everything available to them. One example are the apocrypha writings. Those were not included. Nor did their collection include other, more ancient documents. Look at 1 Kings 14:29.

1 Kings 14:29 (NIV) As for the other events of (king) Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

This is an ancient document, familiar to the original readers of 1 Kings, but the Jews did not consider this book, The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah, as being special revelation from God. So it was not included in their collection.

In much the same way, Christians, much later in time, had to determine what writings were further special revelation from God. They eventually decided on the 27 books in our New Testament. But they had many other books available to them. You may have heard of some of them if you have read Dan Brown's bestselling novel.

So how did the church decide which writings were special revelation from God and which were not? The process of deciding was centuries long and very complicated. We can simplify it by saying there were two basic criteria that were used.

1. Each had to be connected in some way to an apostle of Jesus Christ.
2. Each must be a writing that was being used by most of the churches. All of the documents we have, plus others were being read in some churches. The church leaders looked at the books that were most used in most churches. These were the books that centered on the gospel and Jesus as Savior and Lord. They could see from experience that the Holy Spirit was working in the lives of the churches mostly through these writings. We see this belief in the Holy Spirit's work in Peter's letter.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV) Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The church firmly believed that the Holy Spirit was accomplishing the will of Jesus in Christians and the churches. They saw this on a regular basis. It was a logical conclusion, then, to assume that the writings that were most meaningful to the churches were the special revelation of God for the generations to come.

I believe this is the miracle God used to give us the Bible. **God affirmed His special revelation through thousands of small miracles.** It was the miracle of an individual Christian being moved by the Holy Spirit speaking through these writings. That is the same miracle I look for today as your pastor. I am listening for signs that you are being changed, not through my preaching, but through you meeting God in the Bible. That is a pretty significant miracle.

Today, people take different approaches to the Bible. The following joke that appeared in Readers Digest gives one approach, though I do not recommend it.

When the preacher's car broke down on a country road, he walked to a nearby roadhouse to use the phone. After calling for a tow truck, he spotted his old friend, Frank, drunk and shabbily dressed at the bar. "What happened to you, Frank?" asked the good reverend. "You used to be rich."

Frank told a sad tale of bad investments that had led to his downfall. "Go home," the preacher said. "Open your Bible at random, stick your finger on the page and there will be God's answer."

Some time later, the preacher bumped into Frank, who was wearing a Gucci suit, sporting a Rolex watch and had just stepped out of a Mercedes. "Frank!" said the preacher, "I am glad to see things really turned around for you."

"Yes, preacher, and I owe it all to you," said Frank. "I opened my Bible, put my finger down on the page and there was the answer -- Chapter 11."

(Reader's Digest, March, 1993, p. 71)

People choose different approaches to the Bible. Some read the Bible looking for magic and don't find it. Others read the Bible just to learn facts, gather information. Others read the Bible looking for clues about how to live a successful life.

But if this is really God's special revelation to us about Himself, and I believe it is, then we should read the Bible to meet God. Just as the Holy Spirit spoke through these words to people in the past, He speaks today.

Read the Bible to meet God. If it is HIM you want to know, you will find Him.

Many people have found Him in these writings even without looking for Him.

Gaylord Kambarami, the General Secretary of the Bible Society in Zimbabwe, tried to give a New Testament to a very belligerent man. The man insisted he would roll the pages and use them to make cigarettes. Mr. Kambarami said, "I understand that, but at least promise to read the page of the New Testament before you smoke it." The man agreed, and the two went their separate ways.

Fifteen years later, the two men met at a convention in Zimbabwe. The Scripture-smoking pagan had been saved and was now a full-time evangelist. He told the audience, "I smoked Matthew, and I smoked Mark, and I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. My life was changed from that moment."

Source: American Bible Society Record, March 1990

If you want to know God, give Him a chance to reveal Himself to you through these words.

The most significant revelation from Him is that He has sent us the Savior we need. If you are ready to put your life into the hands of Jesus, our Savior, this morning, then do so as we pray.

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Ex. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isa. 34:16; 40:8; Jer. 15:16; 36; Matt. 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.