

Open to Change, part 11 of the BF&M
May 14, 2017

I have stressed several times during this sermon series that Baptists are not a creedal people. We do not use creeds. Let me remind you of the definition I used for a creed. **Creed = "a statement of religious belief accepted as authoritative by a church."**

I am working our way through the Baptist Faith and Message, a statement of religious belief that describes what most Southern Baptists generally believe. But we do not call it a creed. It has no authority over anyone. You do not have to sign a statement that says you believe everything in the Baptist Faith and Message in order to become a member of our church. We do not use the Baptist Faith and Message that way.

There are churches of other denominations that require you to sign a statement of beliefs in order to become a member of those churches. I know of Presbyterian churches that operate that way.

There are also Christian organizations that do so. There used to be a Bible college in the Washington DC area that I considered attending. But they had such a statement of beliefs that you had to sign stating that you were in agreement with them. I could not agree to their belief statement and so did not apply to that school.

The problem with such statements as a creed, something you have to agree to, is that they tend to be set in stone. That means they are never questioned, never challenged, and never changed.

Instead of a creed, the Bible is our source of authority. We look to the Bible, not the Baptist Faith and Message for our understanding of spiritual truth. We do not teach the BF&M in our Sunday School. We teach the Bible. And we believe it is important that every Christian be free to study God's word for himself or herself, aided by the Holy Spirit.

While the Baptist Faith and Message statement reflects one view of the major Christian teachings of the Bible, it is not the final word on any subject. Manmade statements of belief on the Bible may very well be flawed. Manmade statements of belief are likely to reflect personal prejudices, desires, and misinterpretations of Bible truth. Let me give you an example.

My Sunday morning Bible study group has been doing an overview of church history. We have learned that as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, God allowed the church, as a whole, to believe false teachings about baptism and the Lord's Supper. And those false teachings were perpetuated in the church for over a thousand years.

If God allowed His people to be so wrong for so long a time, we have reason to believe that our statements of belief can be flawed. God will allow us to believe things that are not true. **We must continue to carefully study the New Testament and be willing to change what we believe in light of our study.**

Today's article in the BF&M reveals how statements of belief can be flawed.

VIII. The Lord's Day

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, work of necessity and mercy only being excepted.

Ex. 20:8-11; Matt. 12:1-12; Matt. 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; John 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Col. 2:16; Col. 3:16; Rev. 1:10;

This sounds like an ordinance for Christians and the Church. It sounds like a command. It is written as if Jesus commanded us to treat Sundays different from the rest of the week. But last Sunday I taught that there are only two ordinances from Jesus, those being baptism and the Lord's Supper. The statement above states that the Lord's Day is a Christian institution. That is true if it means a regular practice. It is not true if it means a command to so observe the day. There is no such command in the Bible. That is why this article was changed in the latest version. In the 2000 version, the last sentence was replaced. Look at them side by side.

1963 = "... and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, work of necessity and mercy only being excepted."

2000 = "Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

The new version is very different from the first. It goes from "don't do these things on Sunday" to YOU get to decide what is okay to do on Sunday. Yet the first was written, and accepted, because so many Southern Baptists at the time believed it to be so. God allowed them to think this, even though He did not command them to do so.

As I said a few minutes ago, the Christians in the early centuries of the church misconstrued the teaching of the New Testament concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper. They changed these symbolic rites into actions through which God mediated salvation and grace. They believed you had to be baptized in order to be saved. This was a travesty and led to further false teachings.

The Reformation of the 16th century brought many people back to the truth of salvation in Christ alone by faith alone. But not everything that needed to be corrected in the Reformation, was corrected. Many Christians were still locked into the belief that followers of Jesus were expected by God to gather for worship every Sunday. This belief is not taught anywhere in the New Testament.

Even today, there are some followers of Jesus who make weekly church gatherings an expectation for Christians. They do so even though there is NO command by Jesus or apostles ordering Christians to gather together for any reason every single week on any specific day. Yet, I know many pastors who have made the mistake of thinking it is their job to get everyone to attend a church gathering every Sunday. But this is a mistake in belief. Such an expectation is not commanded in the new covenant. That brings us to our next point.

Don't convert the Jewish Sabbath into a command for Christians.

There is no command in the New Testament that Christians are to rest and/or gather for worship on the first day of the week, the seventh day, or any day. Let me show you what we DO see.

The church began 50 days after the resurrection. It began on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. There were Jews in Jerusalem who had traveled there for this feast. The city was crowded with people, both locals, people who lived in the area, and the out-of-towners.

I referenced this in last week's sermon. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first followers of Jesus. This created a loud commotion that spilled out of the room they were in, onto the street outside. The people on the crowded street were attracted to this noise and it created an opportunity for Peter, a follower of Jesus, to preach to the crowd.

He tells them that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah and raised Him from the dead. Many in the crowd are suddenly convicted of their sin and ask Peter what they should do. And this is what Peter said.

Acts 2:38-41 (NIV) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Note that there is nothing here about gathering to worship. There is nothing here about a Sabbath day, or Sunday, or any day. There is nothing about getting together in groups to study Jesus' commands. And yet, look at what they did afterwards.

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

None of these marvelous things they were doing were they commanded to do. Instead, out of the abundance of their joy and their desire to know Jesus, to serve Jesus, they did these things as the Spirit stirred them. They had experienced something wonderful together and were drawn to each other in the Spirit of God.

There was great excitement and joy at what God was doing and they all wanted to be in on it. Likely some of the locals gathered with the out-of-towners during the day, but many of them after the Feast days had to get back to work. Yet they still wanted to be a part and probably gathered in the evenings with other Christians, both in the temple and in their homes.

After the Feast the out-of-towners had to eventually leave town and go back to their homes scattered around the Mediterranean Sea. That left only the locals, who still had jobs they had to do. So the daily gatherings became more sparse, at least during the day. Eventually they met less often, but usually on Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

Now when they did this, Sunday was not the weekend. Sunday was their first day of the work week. Their Sunday was our Monday, the first work day of the week. So when they gathered on Sunday for worship and the Lord's Supper, it was likely Sunday evening that they gathered.

They did so out of a desire for mutual support and encouragement. They worshipped. They prayed. They shared the Lord's Supper. The apostles taught them. There is no hint anywhere that they were commanded by Jesus or the apostles to gather like this.

We must guard against adding any expectations to what Jesus commands us to do.

The closest we get to such a command about coming together as a church for any reason is in Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...

You will note the two expectations for coming together as Christians. The first is to encourage each other to love one another. This is Jesus' primary command to His followers. It is stated dozens of times in the New Testament.

The other reason is, I believe, the second most important command to His followers. We are to encourage each other in the doing of good deeds towards people out in the community. There are a number of passages in the New Testament that speak to this second one. (below) This speaks to our life in the church and outside of the church.

(Good deeds/works: Matthew 5:16; Acts 10:38; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:10; 1 Timothy 5:10; 1 Timothy 6:18; Titus 2:6; 1 Peter 2:12;)

We live in a nation that used to be predominantly Christian. As when Christians were in the majority, they passed blue laws, also known as Sunday laws. These were laws that restricted certain activities on Sundays, including what could be bought and sold on Sundays. Many states and countries still have such laws. These laws were religiously motivated, based on a wrong assumption about what Christians should or should not do on Sundays.

I know that some of you were raised to believe that God expected you to be in a church every Sunday. The people who taught you this were very godly people. But they were wrong. There is no such command in the New Testament.

Now if God tells you to gather with other Christians every Sunday you can, then you better do so. But God telling YOU to do so is not the same as God telling everyone to

do so. There are ample Bible examples of God telling one person to do something that only applied to that person.

Having said all of that, I believe there is great benefit to gathering together with other Christians regularly. It is beneficial for the reasons stated in Hebrews 10, but also to worship together and to study the Bible together. I believe there is great benefit in what we do Sunday to Sunday. But we must not make the mistake of believing it is commanded that we be here every Sunday, or even Sundays in particular. By practice, Christians have made Sunday special, but Jesus did not command us to do so.

The world is so attractive to us that it is good to make these Sunday gatherings a habit, but out of necessity, not duty.

Invitation

What God DOES command us to do is to first believe. God expects us to humble ourselves and admit we are sinners against Him, in need of a Savior, and to believe that Jesus is the savior we need.

Following that, God expects us to receive Jesus as our Savior and turn our lives over to Him as our Lord.

This morning He calls you to respond to Him in this way.