

## IN CONCLUSION ...

I was sitting at a table in a hotel in Tiberias waiting for our evening meal, ... with a Roman Catholic priest and two other Baptist pastors from England. The Roman priest was tremendously sincere about his faith ... and he asked us what Baptists believed. He wanted to genuinely find out what we believed. I can remember very clearly how these two older men in the ministry turned *to me* to answer the question (!)

... *What does a Baptist believe?* I trust our studies through the Baptist Confession of Faith have helped you understand that we do have a very clear identity. Spurgeon told his congregation, “This ancient document is the most excellent epitome of the things most surely believed among us. It is not issued as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby you may be fettered, but as a means of edification in righteousness. It is an excellent, though not inspired, expression of the teaching of those Holy Scriptures by which all confessions are to be measured. We hold to the humbling truths of God’s sovereign grace in the salvation of lost sinners. Salvation is through Christ alone and by faith alone.”

In the early centuries of the Church all types of heresies and errors raised their ugly heads, for example, there were many views concerning the Person of Christ. Some of these robbed Christ of His deity (e.g. adoptionism), while others robbed Him of His humanity (e.g. both Gnosticism and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Docetism believed all matter was evil). There were also differences about which writings should be included in the canon of Scripture, differences about church government and many other things. As a consequence, councils of the Church met to define the faith; their conclusions have been written down for us in documents such as the Apostolic Creed, Nicene Creed.

Such tried and tested creeds help us to guard against the prevailing tide of man-made doctrines of the type that pervaded in the days of the Judges when (21:25), [every man did that which was right in his own eyes](#).

However, it is not fashionable nowadays to be too ‘rigid’ and to ‘tie oneself down’ ... and many Christians don’t like to be told what to believe ... even when it is pure Biblical truth. When you mention the creeds or doctrines of the church someone inevitably says, “Why do we need any doctrine at all? Why don’t we just love Jesus?” ... Well ...

- \* Who is this Jesus you say you love? ... Is He just a nice person that went round doing nice things and helping people who were badly off? Was He basically some kind of ‘social crusader’?
- \* You say, “I believe what the Bible says” ... but you can ‘make’ the Bible say anything you like!
- \* You say, “I believe in the whole matter of salvation” ... but *what* do you actually believe about it? Is God sitting up in Heaven pleading pathetically for someone to give Him a chance and believe in Him that He might be able to improve their life and save them?
- \* There was a British monk called Pelagius who lived c.354-c.420/40. He caused one of the greatest stirs in the early Church. He denied predestination, original sin and the doctrines of grace. He maintained that humans are not tainted by the sin of Adam and Eve to the degree the Church taught, - he believed babies are born pure and without sin. He furthered argued that humans have a free will to choose to live sinless lives. These, however, are similar views of many “Christians” today; do you know what happened to Pelagius in 418AD? ... He was excommunicated by the Church ... and declared a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in 432AD.
- \* Pelagianism is a heresy; its weaker brother semi-Pelagianism (Arminianism) is a heresy, - it teaches basically the same errors Pelagius taught. ... We need to believe truths that are in accordance with [the whole counsel of God](#) and what the Bible teaches!
- \* Sadly, many people believe *sincerely*, - like Nicodemus when he met Jesus; but many people, - like Nicodemus, - believe *sincerely wrongly*!

We are living in days of confusion and double-meaning; words can be taken and reshaped to mean basically anything. We need to be sure about our terms, otherwise we are in danger of having a basis of doctrine that is homemade and shallow. (It is only what “I” think and what “I” feel).

How do we sort the problem out regarding what a Christian should believe? Is it a personal thing and ought it to be left to the individual? ... Would you like me to come and wire your house? I *do* know that the brown wire goes into the live, the blue goes into the neutral and the green and yellow goes into the earth ... based on that knowledge, would you like me to come and wire your house? No, of course you wouldn’t ... and yet many people unfamiliar are willing to put together doctrines that are lacking in substance and that have no solid basis in Scripture and are leading many people astray towards the great abyss into Hell, - that is how serious it is!

Indeed, *what is more important than having a sound basis of faith upon which your life and witness for Christ is established!*

In all of his letters Paul concluded with a list of practical duties that were based upon the doctrines he had discussed (e.g. Rom. 1-11 were doctrinal, chs. 12-16 were generally practical; Eph. 1-3 were doctrinal, chs. 4-6 were generally practical). In the Christian life, doctrine and practice/duty are two inseparable 'twins', - what we believe determines how we behave. ... And it is not enough for us to *understand* the great doctrines of the Word of God, - we must translate our *learning* into *living* and demonstrate by how we live that we trust what the Bible teaches.

The Epistle to the Romans is often considered to be Paul's *Systematic Theology*. In the first two verses of chapter twelve he writes, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* Underlying this statement is the fact that God is the Foundation and Giver of our faith, - therefore, what we believe develops from what we believe about God. In these two verses Paul described Christian dedication and devotion in three steps. ...

### **I. YOU GIVE GOD YOUR BODY**      *ye present your bodies a living sacrifice*

\* Before we trusted Christ we were *the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22)*. We used our bodies to violate God's law.

\* But when He saved us through grace we were 'bought' (redeemed) by Him, - He 'owns' us and now we want to use our body to His glory. The Christian's body is God's temple (I Cor. 6:19,20) because the Spirit of God dwells within (Rom. 8:9).

\* Consider the concept of the Tabernacle and the Temple throughout the Old Testament ... We wouldn't want to defile God's temple, so therefore we have a responsibility to keep it clean and worthy of Him. Rom. 6:13 instructs us to *yield yourselves unto God, ... and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

\* Remember the young boy who walked up the mountain with his old father, and he asked the question, *Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? (Gen. 22:7)*.

\* On the top of the mountain he prepared the altar of sacrifice along with his father ... and the moment came when his dad had to tell him he was to be the sacrifice.

\* This young boy could easily have escaped from his father ... but what did Isaac do? He willingly put himself on the altar and he willingly would have died in obedience to God's will.

\* Yes, we know that God provided a ram ... but when Isaac climbed off that altar Isaac was a [living sacrifice](#) to the glory of God. He had been prepared to give God his body!

## II. YOU GIVE GOD YOUR MIND

\* The world wants to control your mind; sadly, the world has *devastated* many areas of Christian belief. Many professing Christians are totally opposed to committing themselves to the great foundations of truth upon which the Lord has brought great blessing to the Church.

\* What has happened to churches in these days when confessions of faith and creeds founded upon the Bible have been discarded? Answer ... we have returned to the days when [every man did that which was right in his own eyes](#) ... and we put together doctrines to justify what we are doing and believing!

\* Homosexuality is not a sin, it is not even an illness ... it is normal and acceptable!

\* Gambling and the Lottery is acceptable by some churches as a means to keep God's work going, when the giving to the offering plate is falling away.

\* Marriage is no longer the issue, commitment is the keyword!

\* ... And we are happy to stand alongside those whose doctrines are in complete contempt of Biblical doctrine and teaching.

\* Yes, the world wants to capture the mind of the believer ... and all too often the Christian is so willing to accommodate the spirit of the age, ("we need to keep up ... this is what the world believes, we should set out our creeds in a way that might be attractive to them *to win them*").

\* *But* the Bible says the world is at enmity with God (James 4:4). The world can neither understand nor appreciate the great truths that we hold dear. The Bible says also that we must be separate from the world. ... *Never* will the truths of God's Word be attractive to the world!

\* When Christ comes into your life He changes your mind, - you are sitting in this meeting tonight because God has changed your mind! You wouldn't be here otherwise ... what would attract you?! Things you used to do, you don't do any longer because God changes your mind!

\* God transforms your mind by using His Word ([Ps. 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.](#))

- \* As you spend time reading His Word, and studying it and making it a part of you God will continue His process of transforming you.
- \* ... the material you take in will affect what you believe. You read the *Dandy* and the *Beano* and it will hinder your growth in maturity. ... You read some of the material that passes for “Christian” nowadays and it will do very little to cause you to grow in Biblical maturity.
- \* That is why it is important to hold to a basis of doctrine that God has used and blessed in the ministries of mighty men, - it has been tried and tested. Its fundamentals are the great doctrines of the Bible taught since the inception of the Church:
  - \* Justification by faith *alone*.
  - \* Salvation by God’s grace *alone*.
  - \* Redemption through Christ *alone*.
  - \* The Bible *alone* is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.
  - \* All glory to God *alone*!
- \* ... and the Bible tells us to (Jude 3) [earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints](#).
- \* When you become a Christian, you don’t argue with God ... **you give God your mind ...**

### III. YOU GIVE GOD YOUR WILL

- \* Your mind controls your body, your will controls your mind. When God saves you, you are no longer in bondage to the fallen will, - the Holy Spirit is within you and His purpose is for you to yield your will to God ... and therein lies success in the Christian life.
- \* When the Master of our will is God, - as the Psalmist says, [Ps. 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.](#)
- \* We have the example of the Saviour in this, [Lk. 22:42 not my will, but thine, be done](#).
- \* Lord, I don’t always understand the doctrines You teach in Your Word ... but even if I can’t understand them ... You say them, and therefore I believe them! (If we could understand everything the Bible says we would be as God Himself!)

\* You see, when your body, your mind, and your will are given to God you are a *changed* person. You no longer live by the rules of the world; you no longer *think* like them.

\* *They* teach you that in order to have, you take; but that which Jesus gives you is a gift ... and even to understand it is because the Holy Spirit opens your heart, your mind and your eyes to these things, - that is why such a *Confession of Faith* as ours ought to be so precious.

**Conclusion** These great doctrines have been expressed by men faithful to the Word of God. I hope I haven't wasted your time studying through the *Baptist Confession of Faith*. I hope you will take it as your standard. I hope you can point to it and say, "This is what I believe".

\* We need to be clear it is not perfect, - it is not the Bible! It doesn't cover all angles of our faith ... but for over three hundred years it has been used and those who have stood by it have known God's blessing.

\* Since it is merely a work of man it is not perfect, whole, or complete. It doesn't address every matter relating to our faith ... but it is a standard Baptist churches ought to have, - it would guard against abuse of the pulpit by preaching unBiblical doctrines. It would ensure continuity when future Ministers are called ... so that the truth of God is not made to become disjointed or contradictory.

\* I'm grateful to God for the burden He gave these men; I'm grateful to God that He has stirred me to believe the same doctrines Spurgeon believed in, and Carey ... and all the people whom I look up to.

\* Our *Confession* helps us to be faithful to the doctrines of Scripture. They are clear enough to keep us on an unwavering course.

\* It joins us up with a church worldwide ... it brings true unity in Christ and it transcends denominational barriers because at its very centre is the Sovereign Grace of God towards a helpless, hopeless lost world.

\* Let's conclude our study with the words of Moses, - the first occasion the word 'doctrine' is mentioned in Scripture, [Dt. 31:30](#) *And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. 32:1 Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. 2 My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: 3 Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. 4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. ... 9 For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. 10 He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. ... All glory unto our God!*