

THE
BAPTIST
FAITH &
MESSAGE

Charles S. Kelley Jr.
Richard Land
R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Learning Activities, Leader Guide, and Vignettes
of Past and Present Baptist Leaders
by Art Criscoe

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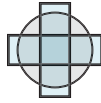
We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. The 2000 statement of *The Baptist Faith and Message* is our doctrinal guideline.

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DEDICATION

Adrian Rogers, 1931–2005

*Chairman, The Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee,
1999–2000*

President, Southern Baptist Convention, 1979–80, 1986–88



Adrian Rogers, denominational statesman, defender of the faith, beloved pastor, and prince among preachers is now in the presence of the Prince of Peace, having heard, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, NIV). The world—and now heaven—will never be the same for his presence.

INTRODUCTION

Baptists are a people of deep beliefs. From the very beginning of the Baptist movement, Baptist churches and associations of churches have adopted statements of belief to teach, defend, and perpetuate the faith “that was delivered to the saints once for all” (Jude 3). These statements, most commonly known as confessions of faith, are intended to clarify and publish the most basic beliefs that frame our faith, our witness, and our worship. In the beginning years of the organized Baptist movement, these statements were often intended to demonstrate that Baptists were fully orthodox as Christian believers. Later, such statements were used to establish identity, confront false teaching, and instruct Christians in the faith.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) first adopted a comprehensive statement of faith in 1925, when a committee led by E. Y. Mullins presented *The Baptist Faith and Message* to the Convention. The statement was a revised edition of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, then commonly used by Baptists in both the North and the South.

The 1925 committee brought its report during an era of controversy in Baptist life. The fundamentalist/modernist controversy raged in northern denominations, and a growing climate of antisupernaturalism in the larger culture fueled Southern Baptist concern. Another period of controversy emerged in the early 1960s over the nature and authority of Scripture, and Southern Baptists revised

The Baptist Faith and Message in 1963 at the recommendation of a committee led by Herschel Hobbs.

That committee revised the 1925 statement considerably, though it also explained, “In no case [have we] sought to delete from or to add to the basic contents of the 1925 Statement.” The 1963 statement added new articles and revised the language and content of the 1925 statement in significant areas. New concerns and emerging challenges led the Southern Baptists of that era to revise *The Baptist Faith and Message* and to clarify our common beliefs.

The SBC affirmed *The Baptist Faith and Message* in subsequent conventions, and in 1969 it adopted a motion encouraging the agencies, boards, and institutions of the Convention to use *The Baptist Faith and Message* as a guideline in employment, editorial content, and policy.

The Baptist Faith and Message was next revised in 1998, when the SBC adopted “Article 18: The Family” at its meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the midst of widespread societal concern about the breakdown of the family. The next year the SBC adopted a motion calling on the president of the Convention to appoint a committee to review *The Baptist Faith and Message* and to bring a report and any recommendations to the Convention meeting the following year.¹

The Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee, with Adrian Rogers as the chairman, brought its report and recommendations to the SBC meeting in Orlando, Florida, in June 2000. During that meeting the Convention adopted the report, including a revised version of *The Baptist Faith and Message*.

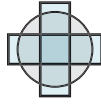
Looking back to the 1925 statement, Herschel Hobbs remarked, “This statement served in large measure to anchor Southern Baptists to their traditional theological moorings for a generation.” In reality, each new generation must reclaim the priceless doctrinal heritage. At the dawn of a new millennium, *The Baptist Faith and Message* now serves to anchor this generation of Baptists to those same theological moorings.

We were honored to serve on *The Baptist Faith and Message* Study Committee, and we are honored to present this commentary to our fellow Southern Baptists. Our prayer is that God will lead this generation of Southern Baptists into a bold new era of missions, evangelism, ministry, and vision and that God will bless our witness to His truth through *The Baptist Faith and Message*.

1. Members of the committee included Max Barnett (OK), Steve Gaines (AL), Susie Hawkins (TX), Rudy A. Hernandez (TX), Charles S. Kelley Jr. (LA), Heather King (IN), Richard Land (TN), Fred Luter (LA), R. Albert Mohler Jr. (KY), T. C. Pinckney (VA), Nelson Price (GA), Adrian Rogers (chairman, TN), Roger Spradlin (CA), Simon Tsoi (AZ), and Jerry Vines (FL).

CHAPTER 1

THE SCRIPTURES



Article 1

The Scriptures

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is 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. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. 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. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”¹

Memory Verses

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Southern Baptists are known as a people of the Book. That Book is the Bible. We come from all walks of life. With more than 16 million members, our churches number more than 43,000 and dot the landscape. Spread from sea to sea, we are found in every state. Some of us worship in small country churches, and some of us meet in large city churches. Included in our number are churches that meet in huge, arena-type settings and churches that meet in portable buildings. Common to all of us, however, is our love for the Bible.

God's Revelation

When we speak of the Bible or the Holy Scriptures, we are talking about 66 books divided into the Old and New Testaments. This Book is different from any other book, for it is not a collection of human opinions about God but is in fact God's own Word. Baptists love and respect the Bible as the Word of God.

As God's written revelation of Himself to humankind, the Bible is one of God's most precious gifts to us. In His written Word God has spoken to His people, taking the initiative to reveal Himself to us and to disclose Himself in a very real and understandable way. Without this divine self-disclosure we would have no certain knowledge of God, and all humanity would be left groping for answers in the dark. Each individual would have his or her own idea about God's existence, character, and expectations of us. God's revelation is a beautiful demonstration of His love for us. He did not leave us in the dark.

The Bible acknowledges that God has revealed Himself to all humanity through creation itself. As the psalmist reminds us,

▨ The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky proclaims the work of His hands.
[Psalm 19:1](#)

Every atom and molecule of creation reveals the wonder of God's marvelous design. The intricate balance of creation, the beauty of the earth and its varied landscapes, the wonder of a sunset—all these declare God's greatness and glory. Beyond this, God reveals Himself to all persons through the moral faculty we call conscience. Our undeniable

General Revelation

God's making
known His nature
and purpose
through nature
and history

Special Revelation

God's making
known His nature
and purpose
through the written
Word and His Son
Jesus Christ

knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong, points us to the perfect moral character of our Creator. These types of revelation, which God gave to all people who have ever lived, are called general revelation or natural revelation. God’s revelation of Himself through the Bible and through His Son Jesus Christ is called special revelation.

Identify each item as special revelation (S) or general revelation (G) by placing the correct letter in each blank.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ___ 1. The beauty of creation | ___ 4. The Book of Isaiah |
| ___ 2. The conscience within | ___ 5. Mountains, rivers |
| ___ 3. The Bible | ___ 6. John 3:16 |

Read Romans 1:20 in the margin. Check below two things we can learn about God from what He has created.

- God’s love through Christ God’s divine nature
 God’s power of God The work of the Holy Spirit

Items 1, 2, and 5 are general revelation, while 3, 4, and 6 are special revelation. God’s creation reveals His power and divine nature.

If general revelation is available to all people, why do we need the Bible? The Apostle Paul answered this question by explaining that our sin blinds us to a full understanding of God’s revelation of Himself in nature and in our conscience. As he wrote to the Christians in Rome, human beings “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). Our sin so distorts our spiritual vision that we love the lie and hate the truth. God graciously provided humankind special revelation through His divine Word to teach us more about His nature, His redemptive purpose, and His will for our lives.

“From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.”

[Romans 1:20](#)

God for Its Author

The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to humanity, and God is rightly known as the Author of all Scripture. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92), one of the greatest preachers in Christian history, said in a sermon in 1855, “This volume is the writing of the living God. ... everywhere I find God speaking: it is God’s voice, not man’s;

Inspiration

The breathing of God's Spirit on human speech and writing to produce the text of the Bible

the words are God's words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of this earth. This Bible is God's Bible; and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying, 'I am the book of God: man, read me.'"²

As *The Baptist Faith and Message* affirms, the Bible was written by men divinely inspired. What does this mean? We commonly hear that a particular human author like William Shakespeare was inspired. After an especially moving musical performance, someone may remark that the composer or performer was inspired. Is the Bible inspired in this same way?

Of course not. If the Bible were merely a collection of particularly insightful writings about God, we would not stake our lives on its truth. Some have erroneously taught that the Bible is merely the product of an elevated human consciousness. Others have suggested that the Bible is unevenly inspired. Some parts, they argue, are more inspired than other parts. This view places the human reader over Scripture as judge, deciding what parts are most inspired and what parts can be ignored or denied.

Other people have argued that God merely inspired the ideas contained in the Bible, not the words of Scripture itself. This *dynamic* theory of the Bible's inspiration holds that God gave the human authors basic ideas that they developed in their own ways. At the other extreme is the *dictation* theory, which sees the human authors as passive instruments of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, simply taking down divine dictation for the record.

Like today, more than one hundred years ago Baptists were confronted with such theories of biblical inspiration. Basil Manly Jr. (1825–92) was one of the four founding faculty members of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859 and taught at the seminary for many years.³ Manly's seminary colleagues asked him to respond to dangerous theories that were infecting some churches, seminaries, and denominations. After reviewing the false theories of inspiration, Manly summarized an understanding of the full inspiration of the Scriptures with these words: "The Bible as a whole is the Word of God, so that in every part of Scripture there is both infallible truth and divine authority."⁴ This is the conclusion of the *verbal plenary* theory of

the Bible's inspiration. Put simply, this means that the Bible's inspiration is *verbal*—extending to the very words themselves—and *plenary*, or full. Thus, we affirm that *every* word of the Bible is inspired and that every word is *fully* inspired.

Match each theory of inspiration with its definition by placing the correct letter in each blank.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. The dynamic theory | a. The authors were passive instruments who recorded divine dictation. |
| ___ 2. The verbal plenary theory | b. Every word of the Bible is fully inspired. |
| ___ 3. The dictation theory | c. God gave human authors basic ideas that they developed in their own ways. |

The answers are 1. c, 2. b, 3. a.

We believe the verbal plenary theory expresses the way the Bible describes its own inspiration. The Bible's word for its inspiration is *God-breathed* (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit breathed this Word through human authors divinely chosen for this task. God used their personalities, writing styles, and personal experiences to accomplish His perfect purpose. These human authors were not passive stenographers; rather, the Holy Spirit worked through them, inspiring them so thoroughly that they were moved to write exactly what God intended—right down to the very words. As the Bible records, the will and initiative were God's own, "because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21). The result of divine inspiration is that we have exactly the Bible God intends for us to have. Nothing is missing. Nothing is included that should not be there. For this reason we affirm that the Bible is the very Word of God and does not merely contain the Word

"It [the Bible] is a great revelation of the will of God. It is divinely inspired, every book and chapter and verse and word of it."⁵

M. E. Dodd

1878–1952

Pastor, First Baptist Church; Shreveport, Louisiana; president, Southern Baptist Convention, 1934–35

"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."

2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV

*“When God supernaturally directed the writers of Scripture, He did not suspend their personalities, literary styles, or emotions. But He communicated His truth by guiding their thoughts, guarding them from error, and producing a totally reliable message. Thus, every word of the original manuscripts bears the authority of divine authorship. This means that the Bible is accurate in all it says, and it does not deceive its readers theologically, historically, chronologically, geographically, or scientifically.”*⁷

James T. Draper Jr.
1935–
President emeritus,
LifeWay Christian
Resources; president,
Southern Baptist
Convention, 1982–84

of God. God speaks to us through His Word, and where the Scripture speaks, God speaks.

Belief in the Bible as the very Word of God has been the conviction of Baptists through the years. John L. Dagg (1794–1884), a pastor, teacher, and administrator, wrote, “The men who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost were the instruments that God used to speak and write His word. Their peculiarities of thought, feeling, and style, had no more effect to prevent what they spoke and wrote from being the word of God, than their peculiarities of voice or of chirography [penmanship]. The question, whether inspiration extended to the very words of revelation, as well as to the thoughts and reasonings, is answered by Paul: ‘We preach, not in the *words* which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.’”⁶

Mark each statement T (true) or F (false).

- 1. We have exactly the Bible God intends for us to have.
- 2. God guided the writers of Scripture to produce His truth.
- 3. Some parts of the Bible are more inspired than other parts.
- 4. God gave the writers of Scripture basic ideas that they developed in their own ways.
- 5. The Bible does not deceive us in any way.
- 6. God used the personalities, writing styles, and life experiences of the authors of Scripture to accomplish His perfect purpose.

Statements 1, 2, 5, and 6 are true; statements 3 and 4 are false.

A lifelong trust in the Bible as the Word of God characterized the life of W. A. Criswell (1909–2002). When he was a student at Baylor University, he had a friend who withdrew from the Christian faith and became a skeptic. He told Criswell that the Bible was just another book. Criswell said to his friend, “I know the Bible isn’t always easy to understand, but I will never end up treating the Bible like any other book. It is the Word of God. The universe is sustained by His Word.

We are convicted and converted through it. The Word keeps us from sin. We walk by it, live by it and one day we'll die by it. Our assurance of heaven is only through the Word. Understand it all or not, like it all or not, the Word is the foundation of life, and without it our souls wither up and die."⁸


Criswell eventually became the pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, which grew to 28,000 members under his preaching. After a lifetime in the ministry, Criswell wrote at 90 years of age, "This I believe and this I proclaim: God's Word is perfect, literal, inerrant, infallible, and totally trustworthy."⁹

Salvation for Its End

Because the Bible is the uniquely inspired Word of God, it is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. Every word is to be trusted and obeyed. Time and time again, God reminded His people that He gave us this Word so that we could have life and be faithful to Him.

Speaking through Moses, God repeatedly instructed the children of Israel that His Word was to be obeyed for their good and that disobedience would lead to death and disaster. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-2 in the margin. The formula presented in these verses is very easy to understand: obedience to God's Word leads to life and blessing; disobedience leads to catastrophe.

The Bible is our authoritative guide to God's truth and is the sure foundation on which to build our lives and stake our hopes. As the psalmist declared,

 Your word is a lamp for my feet
and a light on my path.
[Psalm 119:105](#)

A Christian loves the Word of God and demonstrates this love by obeying it and by being faithful in personal Bible study. A church demonstrates a hunger for the Bible by its desire and support for true biblical preaching and teaching. Nothing less will do; no substitute can satisfy our hunger for the Word of God.

"This is the command—the statutes and ordinances—the Lord your God has instructed me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. Do this so that you may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life by keeping all His statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life."

[Deuteronomy 6:1-2](#)

State at least three ways believers can demonstrate a love for the Word of God.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

*"I have been studying, preaching, teaching, and writing about the New Testament for over fifty years. But I never open my Greek New Testament without finding something I had never before seen in it."*¹⁰

A. T. Robertson

1863–1934
 Professor, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

We can show our love for God’s Word by diligently studying it, by obeying it, by listening to biblical preaching and teaching, by sharing its truths, and other ways.

As God’s Word, the Bible is fully able to accomplish all God intends for it to do. In Hebrews the Bible is described as “living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword” (4:12). Through the prophet Isaiah God declared that

My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and will prosper in what I send it to do.
Isaiah 55:11

Paul reminded Timothy that “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Thus, God promises to work through His Word to accomplish these good things in us, both individually and corporately in the church. Furthermore, this text promises that Christians are shaped into maturity by the power of the Word so that we are equipped for every good work.

The absence or neglect of God’s Word is a scandal in any generation, but we can see the devastating loss that comes to churches, denominations, families, and individual lives when God’s Word is ignored, distorted, or disobeyed. The absence of God’s Word leads to death.

This truth serves as a powerful reminder that the primary purpose of the Bible is to tell how to be saved. This is what *The Baptist Faith and Message* means in saying that the Bible has “salvation for its end.” The Apostle John insisted on this purpose when he told his readers,

“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 5:13).

The Bible—God’s written Word—fulfills God’s redemptive goal by pointing us to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. Jesus is the ultimate focus of every verse of Scripture, and as He explained, “You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me” (John 5:39). The Scriptures find their fulfillment in Christ and reveal the salvation that comes by faith in Him.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God, but we would have no authoritative knowledge of Him apart from the Bible. The written Word and the incarnate Word must never be seen in contradiction or competition with each other. A division between Christ and the Bible is a sure sign of false teaching. Christ is honored when the Bible is taught, preached, and believed.

Jesus is the ultimate focus of every verse of Scripture.

The primary purpose of the Bible is to—

- teach us the Golden Rule;
- warn us about false religions;
- tell us how to be saved;
- help us face the problems of life.

In the previous paragraphs underline at least three other purposes of Scripture.

The main purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus Christ and to tell us how to be saved. Other purposes include teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness, and equipping for good works.

Truth Without Any Mixture of Error

Can we really trust the Bible? If the Bible contained error, how could we trust it? We would be left in an endless debate about which parts of the Bible are true and trustworthy and which parts are not. How could we stake our lives on a fallible revelation?

Early in Billy Graham’s ministry he became troubled when a close friend and coworker turned away from belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God. The friend ridiculed Graham for believing the

“If you read the Old Testament, you will find phrases like ‘the Word of the Lord’ or ‘the Word of God’ or ‘God spoke’ or ‘the Lord said’ used 3,808 times. If the Bible is not the Word of God, it’s the biggest bundle of lies that has ever come to planet Earth. The Bible is truth, absolutely.”¹⁴

Adrian Rogers

1931–2005

Pastor, Bellevue Baptist Church; Memphis, Tennessee; president, Southern Baptist Convention, 1979–80, 1986–88

Bible. The question, Is the Bible completely true? constantly nagged Graham until it reached a crisis point at a retreat center in the San Bernardino Mountains in August 1949. He walked into the woods one night with his Bible, opened it and placed it on a tree stump, knelt before it, and poured out his thoughts to God. He concluded his prayer by saying, “Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by *faith!* I’m going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.”¹¹ As he returned to his room, he sensed God’s presence and power in a new way. The experience was a turning point for young Graham. “In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.”¹²

The Los Angeles crusade began in a few weeks, and Graham began a lifelong ministry of worldwide evangelism. As he preached in crowded stadiums around the world, his sermons were punctuated with “The Bible says. . .” He never veered from his experience with God in the mountains of California. Graham wrote in 2006 at 87 years of age, “As I grow older, my confidence in the inspiration and authority of the Bible has grown even stronger.”¹³

The Baptist Faith and Message has always stated that the Bible is “truth, without any mixture of error,” affirming without qualification the absolute perfection of the Holy Scriptures. Just as God is perfect, His Word is perfect. The psalmist put this conviction to song:

||| The instruction of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
making the inexperienced wise.
Psalm 19:7

We should give careful attention to five specific ways Baptists affirm that the Bible is “truth, without any mixture of error.” The Bible is authoritative, infallible, inerrant, sufficient, and eternal.

The Bible is authoritative. The essential meaning of this word is found in its root. We recognize the Bible’s authority because we recognize God as its author. If God is the author of the Scriptures, every word of the

Bible bears God’s own authority. Christians have no right to dismiss or question any biblical text, for all Scripture is God-breathed.

Baptists recognize the Bible’s authority by drawing all we do and teach and preach directly from the biblical text. Christ rules in His church through the ministry of the Word. We find all true doctrine in the Word of God, decide all doctrinal controversies by the Bible, and discover what it means to be a disciple of Christ by living the teachings of the Bible. We do not base our teachings on mere human tradition, nor do we base our faith on human wisdom. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule for our faith and life.

The Bible is infallible. God never fails, nor does His Word. We can trust that the Bible will always accomplish God’s purposes (see Isa. 55:11). It is the strongest weapon in the hands of a believer (see Eph. 6:17). Human wisdom will fail, as will human witnesses, but the Word of God never fails.

Some have used the concept of the Bible’s infallibility to limit the reach of its truthfulness. They argue that the Bible is infallible only in that it accomplishes its purpose of telling us of salvation. On that matter it is to be trusted, they say, but not when the Bible speaks of other issues. This notion of limited infallibility is seductive but very dangerous. If the Bible cannot be trusted in all it teaches, how can we have confidence that it can be trusted in any of its teachings?

The Bible is inerrant. The Bible is truth—all truth—and contains no error of any kind. In a hallway at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee, hangs a plaque with this inscription: “We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice, and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the Word of God.”¹⁵ The author of these words, J. M. Frost (1848–1916), led the denomination to establish the Sunday School Board in 1891 to provide biblically sound literature for churches to use in teaching and training, and he served as the agency’s first general secretary.

Inerrancy has been a controversial word in some circles, and some Baptists have argued that this word is unnecessary and divisive. Why is it so important to affirm that the Bible is “truth, without any mixture

“Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.”
Ephesians 6:17

“When I was a boy I thought I had found a thousand contradictions in the Bible. ... I do not see them now; they are not there. There are perhaps a half dozen in the Bible that I cannot explain satisfactorily to myself. ... Since I have seen nine hundred and ninety-four out of the thousand coalesce and harmonize like two streams mingling, I am disposed to think that if I had more sense I could harmonize those other six.”¹⁶

B. H. Carroll

1843–1914

Founder, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

of error”? The real issue is not the word but the concept it conveys. To reject the inerrancy of the Bible is to assert that some error must be present. What kind of error? Where is it found? The affirmation of the Bible’s inerrancy is directly connected to its inspiration, infallibility, and authority. We can be confident that the Holy Spirit fully inspired every word of the Bible in its original text. Because God is the Bible’s ultimate Author, a denial of inerrancy denies His perfection and undermines the Bible’s authority. It is also inconsistent to claim that the Bible can be infallible in its purpose while containing errors, no matter how small.

One of the simplest and most profound statements of the Bible’s perfection came from Jesus Himself. On the night of His betrayal, He prayed to the Father for His church with these words:

Sanctify them by the truth;
Your word is truth.
John 17:17

One of the first messages the resurrected Christ spoke to His disciples on the road to Emmaus was to believe “all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25).

The Bible is sufficient. We are not to add to the Bible or to subtract from it. God warned His people in unmistakable terms, “You must not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, so that you may keep the commands of the LORD your God I am giving you” (Deut. 4:2). Relying on the wisdom of God found in the Bible, we are warned not to turn to the wisdom of the world. Our minds are to be captive to the Word of God, deciding all issues from biblical wisdom. This means that a Christian worldview based on the Bible will necessarily conflict with worldviews based on human wisdom.

As *The Baptist Faith and Message* explains, this is why the Bible is “the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.” Where else would we turn?

The Bible is eternal. This is true simply because God is eternal. Peter explained this truth by quoting the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (see 1 Pet. 1:24-25 in the margin). This truth was vividly illustrated during the time of Jeremiah. The prophet lived and preached during the final days before his nation was overthrown by Babylon. Around 604 B.C. God commanded the prophet to write His words on a scroll. When king Jehoiakim learned about the scroll, he ordered that it be brought and read before him. The king was seated before an open fire as the servant read God’s Word. “As soon as Jehudi would read three or four columns, Jehoiakim would cut the scroll with a scribe’s knife and throw the columns into the blazing fire until the entire scroll was consumed by the fire in the brazier” (Jer. 36:23).

Jehoiakim soon learned what enemies of Bible have discovered through the centuries: God’s Word cannot be destroyed. “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘Take another scroll, and once again write on it the very words that were on the original scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned’ ” (Jer. 36:27-28).

The Bible is not a passing deposit of divine revelation. It cannot be superseded by another word or revelation. Ultimately, it is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, and its truth endures forever.

“All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower drops off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

[1 Peter 1:24-25](#)

Following are five terms used to describe the Bible.

Match each term with the correct definition.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Authoritative | a. The Bible is all truth and contains no errors of any kind. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Infallible | b. God’s Word will endure forever. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Inerrant | c. Every word of the Bible bears God’s own authority. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Sufficient | d. God’s Word never fails. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Eternal | e. We are to rely on God’s wisdom found in the Bible rather than the world’s wisdom. |

The correct answers are 1. c, 2. d, 3. a, 4. e, 5. b.

The Baptist Faith and Message does not begin with the Scriptures by mere accident or custom. Where else would we begin? God has spoken, and He has given us His Word in the Bible. All of the other doctrines we will study in this book are truths found in God's Word.

"Dear God, I commit to reading a portion of Your Word each day. Please help me keep this commitment and learn what You want to teach me through Your Word. In Jesus' name."

SIGNED

DATE

One way to show appreciation for and trust in the Bible as God's Word is to read it each day. Consider signing the prayer in the margin as an affirmation to God that you will begin or continue reading the Bible each day.

God has promised to bless us when we meditate on His Word. Consider meditating on your memory verses for this chapter, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, each day this week.

Here are suggestions for meditating.

1. Commit to 15 minutes each day.
2. Select a special place and time to meet with God.
3. Begin by praying Psalm 19:14.
4. Slowly read the verses in an open, humble, and loving manner. Read them audibly and repeatedly, letting the verses speak to your mind and heart.
5. Meditate on the passage. Think of the meaning of each word and each phrase. Let the passage saturate your being. Acknowledge in your heart the greatness and holiness of the loving God who gave His Word.
6. Pray, thanking God for the truths in the passage. Pray the verse back to God. Your prayer may include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication or petition. Periods of silence are appropriate.
7. Write the verses on a small card and carry it with you. Read them and reflect on them during the week.¹⁷

LEADER GUIDE



This guide provides suggestions for leading a small-group study of this book. After completing this study, participants should be able to—

- articulate basic Baptist beliefs;
- give the biblical foundation for these beliefs;
- apply the beliefs to their Christian walks.

The teaching suggestions call for a high degree of member involvement. Participants will share their experiences, study Scriptures together, and complete a variety of learning activities to help them understand the doctrines being studied and apply biblical truth to their lives. Your job is to serve as a guide and facilitator.

Advance Planning

1. Schedule a minimum of six 1½-hour sessions for this study.
2. Promote the study.
3. Order a copy of this book (item 005035536) for each participant. Distribute the books in advance and ask members to read chapter 1 and to complete the learning activities before the first group session.
4. Order a supply of *The Baptist Faith and Message* tract (item 001146686).
5. Read the entire leader guide several weeks before the first session. Many sentence strips, placards, signs, and teaching posters are called for. You can make the visuals by hand, using poster board or large sheets of paper and felt-tip markers. Paper adding-machine tape makes excellent sentence strips. You can make PowerPoint® slides of all visuals to project during the sessions. Or you can make overhead cels of the visuals and use an overhead projector.
6. Gather all of the resources you will need. In addition to the visuals, you will need three-by-five-inch cards; masking tape; copies of *The Baptist Hymnal*; a dictionary; a large, light-colored ball about 15 inches in diameter; 15 to 20 boxes of various sizes to represent spiritual gifts; gift-wrapping paper and ribbon; a saltshaker; a candle; and matches.

7. Prepare a course poster to use in each session:

Session 1: The Scriptures

Session 2: God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

Session 3: Man, Salvation, God's Purpose of Grace

Session 4: The Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, The Lord's Day, The Kingdom, Last Things

Session 5: Evangelism and Missions, Education, Stewardship, Cooperation

Session 6: The Christian and the Social Order, Peace and War, Religious Liberty, The Family

8. There is no substitute for prayerful, intensive study and preparation. Reading the entire book several times will give you a good foundation for teaching. Read all of the Scripture references in the book and complete all of the learning activities. Jot down teaching ideas. This preparation will allow you to lead and teach from an overflow of knowledge.

Planning for Each Session

1. Study in detail the chapter or chapters for the session, along with the teaching plans. You will probably find more teaching suggestions than you will have time to use during the session. Select the activities that will best meet the needs of your group.

2. Prepare visual aids and other materials you will need for the session.
3. The teaching posters for each session create an attractive room environment, allow learning to begin as soon as the first person arrives, reinforce learning, and provide review. Mount the posters in random order and at various angles around the room to attract attention.
4. Arrange seating in a circle or a semicircle so that members can see one another.

Leading Each Session

1. Arrive early to greet members as they arrive. Start and stop on time. Begin and close each session with prayer.
2. Encourage members to read the assigned chapters and to complete the learning activities before each group session.
3. Suggestions in this guide call for dividing into five small groups from time to time. The ideal small-group size for this study is three persons. If there are not enough members for five groups, combine some of the assignments. If there are more than enough members for five groups, divide into more groups and give duplicate assignments.
4. Be sensitive to the needs of the group. Be flexible and adapt your teaching plans as needed. However, do not allow the discussion to wander. Keep the focus on the subject at hand.
5. Do not talk too much. Involve members in the learning process by encouraging

them to share their insights, questions, and feelings. Do not be afraid of silence.

6. Magnify the Bible as our source of authority.

Session 1

The Scriptures

Before the Session

1. Study chapter 1. Complete the activities.
2. Prepare teaching posters and display them around the room: *The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us. The Bible is to be trusted and obeyed. The Bible is the sure foundation on which to build our lives. God always has something fresh for us in His Word. Jesus is the ultimate focus of every verse of Scripture.*
3. Prepare placards with the terms *general revelation* and *special revelation*.
4. Write agree/disagree statements on a large sheet of paper:
 1. *God's revelation of Himself is confined to the Bible.*
 2. *The revelation of God we have in nature is sufficient to save people if they are obedient.*
 3. *God dictated the exact words He wanted recorded in Scripture.*
 4. *Some parts of the Bible are more inspired than others.*
 5. *The Bible contains no errors of any kind.*
5. Prepare sentence strips: *God is its Author. Salvation is its purpose. It is truth without any mixture of error.*
6. Write the following Scripture references on separate three-by-five-inch cards: Card 1: *Psalm 19:7-10.* Card 2: *Psalm 119:11,89,105,140.* Card 3: *2 Timothy*

3:16-17. Card 4: *1 Peter 1:24-25.* Card 5: *2 Peter 1:19-21.*

7. Prepare placards: *Theories of Inspiration, Dynamic Theory, Dictation Theory, Verbal Plenary Theory.*
8. Write the following questions on separate three-by-five-inch cards: *How can we be sure the Bible is God's Word? How can we be sure God inspired the Bible? What does it mean to say the Bible is inspired? How would you explain to a person who has never seen the Bible that it is God's Word? What are some ways we can demonstrate our love for the Bible?*
9. Provide a dictionary and copies of *The Baptist Hymnal*.

During the Session

1. Greet everyone. Make sure everyone has a copy of the book.
2. Write the word *doctrine* on the board. Ask: *What do you think of when you hear this word?* Write responses on the board. Ask a volunteer to read the definition from the dictionary. Point out that the word *doctrine* comes from a root Greek verb meaning *to teach*. Doctrine is what is taught or teaching. Ask: *Why is doctrine important?* After responses share: *Doctrine provides a foundation for our Christian lives, provides principles for us to live by, equips us to reject false teaching, helps us grow toward Christian maturity, and prepares us to serve God with our whole minds.*

3. Using the course poster, point out the various doctrines to be studied. Lead in prayer, asking God to reveal the truth of His Word as you study together.
4. State that this session focuses on the Scriptures. Show the agree/disagree statements. Read a statement and, by a show of hands, determine who agrees, who disagrees, and who is undecided. If the group is divided, allow time for brief discussion. Answers: 1. D; 2. D (Paul asserted in Rom. 1 that no one is obedient.); 3. D (We have the exact words God wanted recorded in Scripture, but He did not dictate them to passive writers.) 4. D; 5. A.
5. Display the two placards *General Revelation* and *Special Revelation*. Define each type of revelation. Read the following and ask members to name the type of revelation it represents: *a flower, Genesis 1:1, a field of grain, a sunset, Leviticus, the conscience, a storm, Christ's birth, a river, John 3:16.*
6. Distribute copies of *The Baptist Hymnal*. Ask two volunteers to read stanzas 1 and 2 of *How Great Thou Art* (no. 10). Ask: *What kind of revelation do these stanzas refer to?* Then ask a volunteer to read stanza 3. Ask, *What kind of revelation does this stanza refer to?*
7. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 19:1-4. Ask members to describe times when they were drawn close to God through His creation. Point out that general revelation is not enough. We could look at a beautiful sunset every day for a hundred years and still never know God's name, nor would we learn of Christ's coming or His death on the cross. That is why God has given us special revelation, the Bible.
8. Display the sentence strip *God is its Author*. Then display the placards with the theories of inspiration. Briefly explain the three theories.
9. Call for responses to the matching activity on page 11 and to the true/false activity on page 12.
10. Display the sentence strip *Salvation is its purpose*. Summarize the section "Salvation for Its End," beginning on page 13. Point out that the main purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus Christ and tell us how to be saved.
11. Display the sentence strip *It is truth without any mixture of error*. Share the story of Billy Graham (pp. 15-16).
12. Write *authoritative, infallible, inerrant, sufficient, and eternal* on the board. Ask members to define them. Share the account from Jeremiah 36 (p. 19).
13. Divide into five small groups and give each group one of the cards with Scripture references. Ask each group to study its Scripture, discuss what it means, and report to the large group. Allow time for work and call for reports.
14. Give each of the five groups one of the cards with questions. Ask the groups to discuss the questions and report to

- the large group how they would answer. Allow time for work and call for reports.
15. Review the three main points of the session, using the sentence strips. Ask members to work in pairs, taking turns briefly sharing what Baptists believe about the Bible.
 16. State that one of the greatest ways we can show our love for God's Word is to read it every day. Call attention to the prayer of commitment to read the Bible every day (margin, p. 20). Sign the commitment and encourage members to sign also.
 17. Call attention to the teaching posters on the walls. Ask volunteers to read them and comment on their meanings.
 18. Explain that God has promised to bless us when we meditate on His Word. Introduce members to the ancient biblical practice of meditation by reviewing the guidelines in the activity on page 20. Call attention to the memory verses for this session, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Challenge members to meditate on this passage each day this week.
 19. Ask members to read chapters 2–5 and to complete the activities before the next session.
 20. Read or sing “Break Thou the Bread of Life” (*The Baptist Hymnal*, no. 263) as a closing prayer.

Session 2

God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

Before the Session

1. Study chapters 2–5. Complete the activities.
2. Prepare teaching posters and display them around the room: *God is in charge of the universe. God knows the name on your mailbox. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. Christ died in our place. The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. The Holy Spirit helps us understand truth.*
3. Prepare signs with these outlines:

God

<i>Creator</i>	<i>Providence</i>
<i>Redeemer</i>	<i>Omnipotence</i>
<i>Preserver</i>	<i>Omniscience</i>
<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Love</i>
<i>The Trinity</i>	

Jesus Christ

<i>Preexistence</i>	<i>Death</i>
<i>Birth</i>	<i>Resurrection</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>Return</i>

The Holy Spirit

<i>Inspired Scripture</i>	<i>Regenerates</i>
<i>Teaches, guides</i>	<i>Dwells in believers</i>
<i>Convicts of sin</i>	<i>Bestows gifts</i>
<i>Invites to Christ</i>	<i>Seals believers</i>
<i>Illuminates truth</i>	<i>Intercedes for believers</i>
<i>Builds the church</i>	