

BGAV CHURCHES BELIEVE IN THESE TRUTHS AND PRINCIPLES:

- The centrality of Jesus Christ. "Jesus is Lord" is the confession of the BGAV and its churches from its beginning. Jesus is the beginning, center and end of our worship. It is heresy to make the church, denomination or even the Bible as the supreme object of faith.

(Rom 10:9 NIV) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

(1 Cor 8:6 NIV) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

(Col 2:6 NIV) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,

- The authority of the Bible. In 1988 and again in 1995 the BGAV affirmed its complete confidence in and commitment to the inspired, written Word of God. It is the primary source that sets our faith and practice. From its message Virginia Baptists draw truth and power.

(2 Tim 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.

- Soul competency. Every human being is free and responsible for his or her relationship with God. New-style Baptists argue that making faith a personal matter leads to a subjective faith. Virginia Baptists reject this criticism, believing that soul competency comes straight from the Bible's view of God and humanity. God is revealed to us, and we are free to respond to God and are accountable for our response.

(Rom 10:9-10 NIV) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

- The priesthood of all believers. Virginia Baptists believe that every person is privileged to approach God without a human intermediary and that every person, led by the Holy Spirit, may interpret the Bible. No human authority should compel another person to submit to his or her interpretation or belief. The BGAV believes in empowering laity for service, and not in making distinctions between the callings of clergy and laity, except in function.

(Gal 3:28 NIV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

(1 Pet 2:5 NIV) you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- Believer's baptism. Most BGAV churches practice immersion as the mode of baptism, for compelling reasons. But the timing is more important than the mode. When Virginia Baptists practice baptism of believers, the baptism is a sign that one is a deliberate, willing follower of Jesus Christ. This squares with our belief in soul competency.

(Mat 28:19-20 NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Rom 6:4 NIV) We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

- The autonomy of the local church. The BGAV believes every congregation is self-governing. It is to be under the control of Jesus Christ, not an autocratic pastor, faction of laity or denominational body to which it relates.

(Eph 1:22-23 NIV) And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- Voluntary connectionalism. Every Virginia Baptist congregation chooses its friends and partners. It may choose to relate to a local Baptist association, the BGAV, the SBC or the CBF, or it may choose not to relate to these. BGAV churches believe no denominational hierarchy may force itself on local churches or compel cooperation. Cooperation is always voluntary.

(2 Cor 8:7-8 NIV) But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us --see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

- Separation of church and state. The BGAV believes this is embedded in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Virginia Baptists want to live in a nation where the institutions of government and religion exist in an atmosphere where individuals follow their conscience, not the government's direction, in matters of faith. Personal faith thrives best where government and church are free and separate.

(Mark 12:17 NIV) Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

This is a summary of beliefs held by a majority of people and churches in the BGAV, having been affirmed more than once by messengers to a BGAV annual meeting.

But they are not binding on any BGAV congregation or its members. It is a consensus of what Virginia Baptists believe, not an infallible document of what they must believe. This is a final principle of our fellowship. The BGAV is confessional, but not creedal.

Virginia Baptists have embraced confessions of faith for 180 years. The BGAV has affirmed such confessions as the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963, which summarizes what Southern Baptists generally believed at that time.

But the BGAV always has rejected creeds, or written documents designed to instruct people what they must believe. Virginia Baptists reject creeds because they usurp the place of the Bible and the role of the Holy Spirit as our Helper in interpreting it. We also reject creeds because as human creations they are incomplete.

The BGAV has not endorsed the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 precisely because it is being used by the SBC as a creed instead of a confession. It is being wielded as a tool to enforce conformity rather than as a document to state consensus.

The BGAV continues to be "the right choice" for more than 1,400 churches, not in spite of its beliefs, but because it is unwavering in its commitment to historic Baptist truths.