



Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

When a historical study of a religious group is undertaken there is always interest in certain dates, leaders, doctrines and organizations. One of the most interesting ways to research a particular group is to focus on one issue, locate the most authentic sources and then permit the historical narrative to speak for itself. In that spirit of open inquiry let us look at Florida Baptists and the matter of footwashing.

Early Baptist History and Footwashing

A case could be made that as early as 1611 a Baptist Confession could be cited that included the "ministry" of foot washing (Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions of Faith, p. 138, article 76). Interesting early references to other actions like the "laying on of hands" and the "holy kiss" could also be mentioned, but for this study it needs to be noted that early on there were only two required ordinances and they were baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In the earliest Baptist confessions these other "ministries" were mentioned many times and encouraged, but never required. Baptism was by immersion, for believers only and symbolic. The Lord's Supper was for baptized believers.

Florida Baptists adopt Footwashing

The first Baptist church organized in Florida was the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, organized on January 7, 1821, north of Jacksonville, on the Georgia state line near Boulogne. Isom Peacock and Fleming Bates assisted eleven other people in forming the new church. The members came from the Sardis church and started the new fellowship near the St. Mary's River. A form of government and Rules of Procedure were adopted. On June 15, 1822, "the ordinance of Feet Washing" was observed. Later the Pigeon Creek church took on an anti-missions theology and was not considered a part of the Florida Baptist Convention when it was formed in 1854. A building and cemetery are on church property today, but there are no regular services.

Free Will Baptist and Footwashing

The National Association of Free Will Baptists was not begun until 1935, but in April, 1834, a Free Will Baptist group adopted a "Treatise of Faith and Practices" that included the three ordinances of baptism, Lord's Supper and the sacred ordinance of footwashing. Humility and cleansing were taught in foot washing and it was required for all and connected to the Lord's Supper.

Florida Southern Baptists and Footwashing

Eventually there were at least seven Primitive Baptist associations in Florida and numerous Free Will groups. The Southern Baptist Convention was begun in 1845 at Augusta, Georgia and the Florida Baptist Convention was begun near Madison, Florida in 1854. Southern Baptists did not officially adopt a statement of faith until 1925 and Baptism and the Lord's Supper were the only two ordinances presented as New Testament teachings.

However the Lafayette Baptist Association (Mayo, Branford) in Florida had other ideas. They met at Midway Baptist Church, October 25-27, 1894, and verified some interesting theology on footwashing. The articles of faith of the association had 13 statements and asserted in article eleven that "washing of the saint's feet was a 'duty'" and "should be observed immediately after the Lord's Supper."



Pigeon Creek Baptist Church



Mays Plantation in 1854
Florida Baptist Convention begun.

Even though the doctrine of footwashing was viewed as a “duty” in the Layfayette Association there must have been some churches who did not follow the practice. In 1925, the envelope was pushed forward more aggressively in the association. An amendment to article eleven was offered by T. M. Webb that stated that footwashing “was a duty enjoined by the Lord Jesus Christ upon His followers and should be observed by all churches composing this body.”

This forced the hand of the churches who had allowed the footwashing clause to be in the association articles of faith but did not choose to practice this ministry in the local church. In 1925, the footwashing question was opened for discussion and seven different men “gave lectures on said amendment.” The issue was discussed from 1925-1928 in LaFayette Association. For three years the church footwashing requirement was a controversial issue.

In 1929, the footwashing requirement was removed from the LaFayette Association Articles of Faith. The requirement was removed by deleting the footwashing reference altogether. The Baptism and Lord’s Supper statements (article nine and ten) remained intact but all references to footwashing were removed and have been removed to this day.

Southern Baptists endorsed confessions of faith in 1925, 1963, 1998 and 2000. Each of these confessions have been in a direct response to some theological issue that was pressing at that particular time. However, Southern Baptists have never addressed footwashing in their Baptist Faith and Message statement.

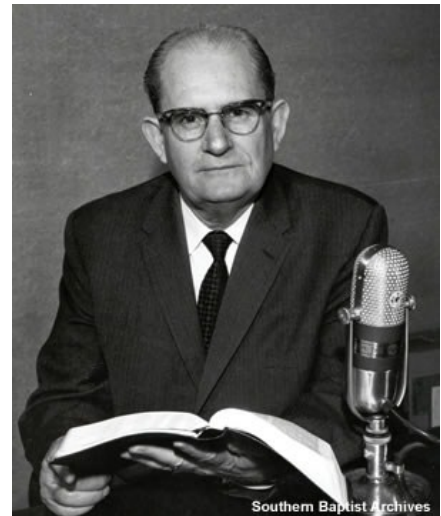
Dr. Hershel Hobbs was the chairman of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message committee and best summed up Southern Baptist sentiment on the issue. Dr. Hobbs stated that footwashing was a symbol of service and humility and was something that could be done but not required. Dr. Hobbs said this is something you “may do” but you are not required to do. This practical statement of New Testament interpretation guides Southern Baptists today.



Primitive Baptist Footwashing Service

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33



Hershel Hobbs