

# **sbc\_pastorsconf\_62303**

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## **Family first priority at SBC Pastors' Conference**

**By Stella Prather, Jennifer Rash & Stacy Hamby**

PHOENIX—"Kingdom families" captured the spotlight of the 2003 Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, even as participants heard a new version of the Monday Night Football song from evangelist Hank Williams.

Headlining the two-day meeting was the first-ever Southern Baptist Convention Kingdom Family Rally held during the closing session June 16. The Pastors' Conference met June 15-16 in Phoenix, immediately prior to the SBC annual meeting.

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Ergun  
Caner, an  
assistant  
professor at  
Criswell  
College,  
Dallas,  
speaks  
during the  
second  
session of  
the  
Southern  
Baptist  
Pastors'  
Conference  
June 15-16  
in the  
Phoenix  
Civic  
Center  
prior to the  
SBC annual  
meeting,  
June 17-18.  
Caner will  
begin  
teaching at  
Lynchburg's  
Liberty  
University  
in the fall.

Leading up to the Monday evening rally, Pastors' Conference speakers focused their sermons around the family theme. Music was provided by the Annie Moses Band, Wintley Phipps and the Rick Webb Trio. Choirs from First Baptist Church of Dallas also performed.

Away from the convention hall, ministers took advantage of a free family counseling service organized by Pastors' Conference President Mac Brunson of Dallas.

"We know pastors are experiencing difficult days," Brunson said as he urged participants to take advantage of the counseling. "If Satan can cause our families to fall, he will affect a church for a generation."

The conference opened on Father's Day, with evangelist Williams performing a special ode to fathers.

Williams joked that anyone expecting to hear from Hank Williams the popular country singer was going to be disappointed. However, he shared his own rendition of the country singer's Monday Night Football theme song, "Are you ready for some football?"

"Are you ready for some preaching, some real Sunday night preaching?" the evangelist wittingly said, adding, "I've got my Bible in my hand and the devil on the run, and all my rowdy friends are going to have some fun tonight."

On a more serious note, Williams turned to what he called the biblical priorities of a minister—God, family and church.

Unfortunately, many ministers since the beginning of time, have struggled to maintain these priorities, he acknowledged.

The Hebrew patriarch Moses, for example, "failed to understand his family was his first priority," Williams said.

He warned pastors: "If you don't have a family, you don't have a ministry."

And if pastors can't manage their own family, "you have no business managing the church and the people of God," he added.

Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary drew from Nehemiah 3 to offer advice for developing a winning team in marriages and families.

A winning team, he said, consists of two or more individuals moving along a path of interaction marked by three characteristics. Team members must be totally cooperative, completely organized and successfully competing for a single objective, he explained.

Christian apologist Josh McDowell, a popular author and youth speaker from Dallas, cautioned parents of temptations facing their children-particularly temptations to believe non-Christian doctrine.

He cited a poll that found 65 percent of "Bible-believing, church going, born-again children" don't believe Satan is real and 68 percent aren't sure Christianity is true.

The poll, he added, also said 65 percent of church youth believe there is no way to tell what is absolute truth.

Only 9 percent believe in absolute truth, he explained, while only 33 percent say God and the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home.

These statistics illustrate the No. 1 problem in America, McDowell said, which is fathers not living up to their responsibility as Christian leaders of their homes and children.

"We are losing our kids not because they are not hearing the truth, but because we are not building relationships with them," he exclaimed. "Truth without relationships will lead to rejection in most cases."

It is up to parents to “help kids become so convinced that Christianity is the truth they will take a stand regardless of the consequences,” McDowell said. “If we don't, we have failed this generation.”

Humorist Dennis Swanberg sparked laughter during the Monday morning session as he told stories about his grandparents, parents, wife and children. He challenged pastors to live with laughter, love and without limits.

Chip Roberson, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Va., warned pastors about the dangers of letting the flesh rule. Preaching from Ecclesiastes 10:1 and 1 Samuel 25, Roberson said, “When you let the power of the flesh overlord the power of God's Spirit, you are in danger.”

A minister may have spent years maintaining the proper image and doing the right things, but it can all be thrown away by one bad decision such as looking at Internet pornography, he warned.

“When we allow our lives to go unguarded, when we are in danger of losing it all, God always sends a restrainer,” he said, noting “the sovereignty of God does not overrule the free will of man. You don't have to miss God's calling or timing very much to lose it all.”

Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga., offered a plea for Baptist families to increase their financial support of the SBC's International Mission Board.

“You are never more like Jesus than when you are giving,” he said. “It is time for the Southern Baptist Convention to rise up and say we believe in missions. Now's the day to say: 'Lord, listen. I want to be part of a family who refuses to leave this world the way we found it.'”

Ergun Caner, assistant professor at Criswell College in Dallas, garnered sustained applause, bursts of laughter and a few moments of shock from

those attending the Monday morning session.

Preaching from Romans 8, Caner, a former Muslim, answered the question, "Is God a man or a woman?"

While the recent controversy over a gender-neutral or "gender-accurate" Bible served as the foundation of his sermon, Caner also dealt with the concepts of a gender-neutral God and political correctness.

"Political correctness has an agenda," he warned. "Nobody is responsible, ... thus I am a victim. Political correctness turns everyone into a victim.

"Political correctness also has given us hyphenated Americans," Caner continued, noting the labels African-American, Spanish-American and others.

Caner, a Turkish-American, said, "Stop hyphenating me and each other. Just be American; stop hyphenating."

With a taunt to the media about his opposition to political correctness, Caner looked directly into the camera and said: "I spank my child, ... not to leave a mark but to leave an impression, out of love, and I love him a lot.

"If social services shows up at my door, I will spank you too," he said.

Political correctness also has shaped the church's teaching on God and gender, Caner said, causing many to miss the point.

"God is not male in relation to his gender," the professor asserted. "God is Father in relation to his children. This is a theological issue, not a biological issue. To remove God as Father robs us of our divine rights as his children."

He later added: "For all embedded media, get the message right. Southern Baptists don't believe God is our God, but the God, the one and only God. Is

God a man? No. Is God a Woman? No. More than a man, more than a woman, he is Father.”

Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla., focused on the pastor's family with a sermon from James 3.

“It is not easy living in a pastor's home,” Whitten said. “It is not easy being a parent of a preacher's kids.

He outlined five dangers for pastors' kids—pride produced by praise, woundedness, rebellion from restrictions, familiarity with the faith and bitterness borne of battles.

“If you don't guard your heart, offenses are passed down to your children,” he said. “The greatest thing we can tell our kids is be obedient because you are God's sons and daughters, not because you are the pastor's kids.”

New officers for the 2004 Pastors' Conference were elected without opposition: President Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.; Vice President Bryan Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Van Buren, Ark.; Secretary Hal Kitchings, pastor of First Baptist Church of Eustis, Fla.