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October 31, 2003

Posted: 10/31/03

Stanley backs off statements on SBC and women

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FORT WORTH-For the second time, Charles Stanley has been quoted in the secular press disagreeing with the Southern Baptist Convention's position on women. And for the second time, he contends he was misquoted.

In a taped interview with veteran religion reporter Jim Jones of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Stanley said the SBC mandate that wives should be graciously submissive to their husbands was "ridiculous."

And the Star-Telegram indicated the former SBC president doesn't support the convention's prohibition on women serving as pastors.

The article was published in the newspaper's Oct. 18 issue. It was based on an interview given during Stanley's visit to Texas to promote his latest book, "Finding Peace: God's Promise of a Life Free from Regret, Anxiety and Fear."

Six days later, the SBC's Baptist Press issued lengthy coverage of Stanley's remarks, including his assertion that his words had been twisted.

However, Jones released a transcript of the tape-recorded interview that verified the words he had quoted Stanley as saying.

According to that transcript, Jones asked Stanley about some other Christian denominations that allow women to serve as pastors.

Stanley responded: "Yeah, and for example in other countries of the world where men are not taking responsibility, women are beginning to be pastors of churches. The women are rising up in different places. So you can't go to somebody (in) like India or Japan or wherever it is and tell some woman who is preaching the gospel, people are being saved, lives are being changed, big churches (are being established) and say, 'You can't do that.' My feeling is this: You have to leave God's calling to whomever God calls. Period. And I just say no. I think getting into that was a mistake. What happened was it just stirred up anger and resentment toward Baptists that probably people hadn't even thought about Baptists before. And you know, if a woman is going to be submissive, she's not going to be submissive because of the Southern Baptist Convention. So it's just ridiculous."

According to the transcript, Jones then asked: "Speaking of submissive, what do think about that issue? You know, they talk about every verse of the Bible where (you) have statements on submission."

Stanley answered: "Well, Jesus said to honor one another. Submissive doesn't mean doormat. Submissive means you should submit yourselves one to another. That husband and wives understand each others' needs, try to meet each others' needs. The Bible talks about unity and oneness. If I love my wife and she loves me, we are going to come to some kind of agreement. But the emphasis is usually, 'OK, the man is up here and the woman is down here.' And so, that's the message that gets sent, no matter what you believe. So my feeling is that we don't need to discuss the issue."

Jones asked further: "So you disagree on that issue with Southern

Baptists?"

Stanley responded: "My opinion was it wasn't necessary for it to come up."

In the Baptist Press coverage, Stanley contends Jones "did not quote me accurately, and I noticed he sort of rearranged a few things."

The quotes attributed to Stanley in the Star-Telegram story, however, appear essentially as verified by Jones' transcript.

Stanley insisted to Baptist Press he does not disagree with other conservative SBC presidents and leaders on theological issues, as the story seems to indicate.

Further, he said of Jones: "He asked me specifically, which he did not include in his article, 'Would you vote for a lady to be the pastor of a church, a woman?' I said, 'No, I would not.' I said, 'That's my personal opinion, and I certainly respect other people's opinions, but I would not vote for a woman to be the pastor of a church.' But he never put that in the article."

Jones responded that he has no recollection of asking such a question and that no such question or answer appears on his tape recording of the interview.

Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, was elected president at the peak of the battle between SBC moderates and conservatives. His re-election victory in Dallas in June 1985, when more than 45,000 messengers registered, is considered a pivotal moment in the so-called "conservative resurgence."

However, Stanley later fell out of favor with some SBC leaders after he and his wife divorced and he stayed on as pastor.

Both edicts Stanley reportedly criticized were additions to the SBC's

Baptist Faith & Message doctrinal statement approved by convention messengers in 2000. Those controversial additions were penned and promoted by some of Stanley's allies in the fight to change the direction of the SBC beginning in 1979.

The fact that Stanley was converted under the preaching of a female Pentecostal preacher in Danville, Va., has been previously reported.

In the summer of 2000, soon after the revised Baptist Faith & Message was adopted, Stanley told a group of pastors in North Carolina: "There are some godly women out there. I would never say that a woman could not preach. ... You just can't put God in a box."

Stanley quickly backed away from that report, however, saying his words had been "twisted and distorted" by the Charlotte Observer. At the time, he drew a distinction between a woman being a preacher and being a pastor.

He reiterated that distinction in his latest comments to Baptist Press.

"There are a number of women who are preachers who are preaching the gospel today, teaching the gospel today, and they are being very successful at it, and they are meeting people's needs," he told BP. "You can't tell a woman who is called by God to teach that she cannot teach the word of God."

There is a difference, he insisted, "between the authority of a pastor and a Bible teacher. And I think that's the distinction."

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