

Chapman urges SBC: Don't make every doctrinal issue a 'political football'

June 13, 2007

Posted: 6/13/07

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Kentucky Western Recorder

SAN ANTONIO—Warning that Southern Baptists “must not make every doctrinal issue a crusade or political football,” SBC Executive Committee President Morris Chapman declared it is a waste of time to “harshly debate disputable doctrines that lead to destructive distractions.”

Chapman offered his assessment in the wake of widespread debate about recent actions by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board regarding believer's baptism and private prayer language.

“We have no right to judge others with whom we disagree about secondary and tertiary doctrines,” Chapman insisted. “Only God is our judge.

“But we do have the right to engage in spirited debate where we differ,” he noted, adding that such debate should reflect the Spirit and mind of Christ and “honor Christ in every thought and deed and word.”

Without directly referencing the mission board or specific doctrinal issues, Chapman proposed “two suggestions for future consideration.”

“Any practice instituted by an entity in the Southern Baptist Convention that has the force of doctrine should be in accord with the Baptist Faith & Message and not exceed its boundaries unless and until it has been approved” by convention messengers, he said to the applause of the crowd.

“Secondly, if an entity ... adopts a confession of faith separate and distinct from the Baptist Faith & Message and it includes a doctrine unsupported by our confessional statement, the entity should request approval from the convention prior to including the doctrine in its confession.”

The SBC Executive Committee “acknowledged that the Baptist Faith & Message is the only consensus statement of doctrinal beliefs approved by the Southern Baptist Convention and as such is sufficient in its current form to guide trustees in their establishment of policies and practice,” Chapman said.

The Baptist Faith & Message, first adopted in 1925 and revised in 1963 and 2000, “has long been the doctrinal umbrella under which we send missionaries to foreign fields and preachers into local pulpits,” he noted. The faith statement “is not a creed,” he added, “but it is a confession of our core beliefs of Southern Baptists.”

Revising the Baptist Faith & Message “should not be lightly regarded, nor should our confessional statement be revised year after year,” Chapman said. “However, if we believe a doctrine is a part of the core belief system of Southern Baptists, it should be in the Baptist Faith & Message.

“Only a few years ago, it seemed sufficient for our missionaries and convention leaders to sign the Baptist Faith & Message as a statement of loyalty to Christ and to the convention,” he remarked. “Now other doctrines are beginning to be required aside from our adopted confession. It causes

one to ask, 'Where does it end?'"

Insisting that his proposals "do not infringe upon the responsibilities of trustees to govern an entity of our convention," Chapman told SBC messengers, "We must come together in one spirit over the core beliefs that we hold in common and learn to engage in healthy debate about varied interpretations about other doctrinally-related Scripture.

"Otherwise," he cautioned, "we shall spend our time arguing among ourselves while thousands, even millions, die without a Savior."

Emphasizing that the SBC's "conservative resurgence" launched in 1979 "clarified and solidified what we think about the authority of God's word," the former convention president said Southern Baptists are now "struggling with the temptation to lay down certain interpretations for defining a true Southern Baptist compared to a maverick Southern Baptist."

"Holiness, humility and righteousness are the traits that will rescue Southern Baptists for another day," Chapman declared. "We desperately need to pray for God to send his Pentecostal power upon us as he did for the early Christians."

Describing the baptism of the Holy Spirit as "a one-time experience," he added, "We are baptized by the Holy Spirit when we are saved; we are filled daily by abandoning our will to the will of the Father."

Warning that God "will not pour out his power if we are disobedient to his word," Chapman concluded, "Both in our doctrinal convictions and our attitudes toward one another, let us go before the Lord to pray, 'God forgive me.'"

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