

# Elder statesman Fletcher lauded as educator, writer

June 8, 2007

Posted: 6/08/07

Bill Pitts (left)  
of  
Independence  
Association  
presents this  
year's Elder  
Statesman  
Award to  
Jesse  
Fletcher.

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**By Ferrell Foster**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

INDEPENDENCE—Texas Baptists honored educator and author Jesse Fletcher as recipient of this year's Elder Statesman Award in a special service at Independence Baptist Church June 3.

The award is given each year by the Independence Association to honor significant contributions to Baptist education in Texas.

Fletcher is president-emeritus of Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, where he served as president 1977 to 1991. Fletcher also is widely known as author of 10 books, including *Bill Wallace of China*, a classic book about Baptist missions, and *The Southern Baptist Convention*, which was published during the SBC's sesquicentennial.

The event's program said Fletcher has "contributed significantly to Baptist life as a teacher, missions leader, pastor and educator. Through his preaching teaching, writing, and service on numerous denominational boards and committees, he has enhanced both individuals and institutions."

Bill Pitts, a professor at Baylor University and president of Independence Association, called Fletcher's book about Wallace "maybe the best-known biography of a Baptist in the 20th century." Pitts said Fletcher depicted Wallace as a real human being—believable and human and yet inspiring.

Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board, said he read Fletcher's book about Wallace years ago, and it "caused me to want to be the best I could be" in service to Christ.

Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered the message at Independence Baptist Church. He and Fletcher met as students at Southwestern about 50 years ago and became study partners.

Speaking from Hebrews 13, Dilday urged worshippers to "remember your leaders." Godly leaders are those who have spoken the word faithfully, lived godly lives, died confidently and left noble examples to follow.

Vernon Davis, retired dean of the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons, presented the Sunday school lesson from Isaiah 40:27-31.

Waiting is a prominent theme in Scripture and it can be painful, Davis said.

Using the analogy of what an orchestra does while waiting to begin a symphony, he said during the waiting times of life “you tune your instrument, you practice your part ... and you wait for the music to begin.”

Fletcher is a graduate of Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, where he received master’s and doctorate degrees. Prior to becoming the 12th president of Hardin-Simmons, he served in an administrative role with the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC from 1960 to 1975. He was pastor of First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., 1975 to 1977.

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