

Litton, Greear say permission granted to borrow from sermon

June 29, 2021

NASHVILLE (BP)—Following the release of a video showing similarities in a sermon, SBC President Ed Litton and his predecessor J.D. Greear said Litton had sought and received permission to use material from a sermon earlier preached by Greear.

The video, which was released June 24, contains six minutes, 57 seconds of interwoven clips from a sermon delivered by Greear in January 2019 and another by Litton in January 2020. Both messages, based in the book of Romans, addressed homosexuality. Greear's sermon lasted 53 minutes, 31 seconds; Litton's was 40 minutes, 45 seconds in length.

In a statement released June 26, Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church near Mobile, Ala., said although he had received permission, he apologized for not crediting Greear. Greear confirmed Litton's account in a statement issued the same day, writing:



“I told him whatever bullets of mine worked in his gun, to use them!”

Litton was elected SBC president June 15 at the SBC annual meeting in Nashville, succeeding Greear. After the election, he described the SBC as

“a family” that sometimes seems dysfunctional but said he hoped to build bridges during his tenure, and that Southern Baptists would “leave this place focused ... with a direction—and I believe a better direction—for the future.”

In the statement, Litton described a sermon preparation process involving a preaching team of eight men from the Redemption congregation and staff who “meet weekly to discuss study insights, outlines, and approaches to the text” in addition to consulting commentaries as well as other books and individuals.

Permission obtained to use material



Ed Litton answers questions during a news conference following his election as Southern Baptist Convention president. (Photo / Adam Covington)

According to Litton, as the team met to plan a series on Romans, their

process led them to Greear's message on Romans 1, which Litton found "insightful, particularly his three points of application."

Litton said along with permission to use that material, Redemption's preaching team also secured permission from The Summit Church to use the chapter and verse breakdown.

"My own take on these kinds of things is usually shaped by the input of many godly men and women," Greear wrote. "Ed and I have been friends for many years and we have talked often about these matters, and I was honored that he found my presentation useful."

That particular sermon, Greear wrote, had "got[ten] a lot of traction, and clips and summaries of this message were shared on a number of blog and podcast sites." He added that it was "one of the most widely distributed messages I've ever preached at The Summit Church."

In his June 26 statement, Greear also responded to accusations that in the sermon, he had adapted a story from Paul David Tripp as his own. The account was about seeing the lostness on display while visiting a pagan temple—Greear in Southeast Asia and Tripp in northern India.

"I had had the same experience [as Tripp]," said Greear, who served in Southeast Asia with the International Mission Board. "In fact, almost every missionary I know has had this same moment of revelation. It's a common insight among missionaries on the field, one that is shared often in prayer and support circles."

Greear said he had related the experiences as his own because they had, indeed, happened to him and were common among missionaries. Litton, who has never lived in Asia, chose instead to relate the story in Tripp's words.

In a statement released June 28, elders of Redemption Church addressed

their reasoning in removing some sermons from the church's YouTube channel and website.

"By the action of the leadership at Redemption Church we have taken down sermon series prior to 2020 because people were going through sermons in an attempt to discredit and malign our pastor," the statement from the elders said. "It is our highest priority to care for and shepherd our church."

Sermons from 2020 through the present are posted to Redemption's YouTube channel. Sermons from 2021 are currently posted to the church's website.

The video with clips from Greear's and Litton's sermons is hosted by an anonymous YouTube account, which was created June 24, the same day the video was published. The anonymous account has no other videos.

'I should have given him credit'

In the statement issued Saturday, Litton said he should have publicly credited Greear at the time of his sermon.

"As any pastor who preaches regularly knows, we often rely on scholars and fellow pastors to help us think and communicate more clearly with the goal of faithfully preaching the truths of Scripture to our congregations," Litton wrote. "But I am sorry for not mentioning J.D.'s generosity and ownership of these points. I should have given him credit as I shared these insights."

Litton wrote that "out of a commitment to full transparency," he had gone through all 46 sermons in the Romans series, finding "in some places similar illustrations, quotes or points of application." He said one sermon shared a title with a Summit sermon, another a similar outline.

Addressing the matter, he wrote, is important "to provide the truth and to

take responsibility for places where I should have been more careful.”

“I am committed to being a man of integrity and humility,” Litton wrote. “I will not waver from that as I lead Redemption Church to be Christ followers and the SBC to unite around her mission.”