

SBC resolutions address sinner's prayer, gay marriage

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NEW ORLEANS (BP) — Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention approved resolutions reaffirming their convictions regarding the means of salvation and a literal Adam and Eve, while stating their opposition to rhetoric that equates gay rights with the civil rights of racial and ethnic minorities.

Among the nine resolutions passed in two sessions were ones:

- Identifying what is frequently described as a "sinner's prayer" as a biblical way of expressing repentance and faith while providing some careful descriptions of what that means;
- Reaffirming the belief the Bible is without error and attesting to the direct creation of and historicity of Adam and Eve;
- Agreeing to continue to work together to spread the Gospel with an understanding that the Baptist Faith & Message, the convention's confession of faith, sets "sufficient parameters for understanding the doctrine of salvation" among Southern Baptists.

The resolution on cooperation addressed some pre-convention "verbal sparring" between non-Calvinists and Calvinists, Resolutions Committee Chairman Jimmy Scroggins acknowledged afterward.

Messengers also approved resolutions:

- Opposing efforts to use the rhetoric of the African-American civil rights movement in the attempt to legalize same-sex marriage;

- Protesting what a majority of messengers viewed as the Obama administration's attempts to subvert religious freedom in such arenas as health care, marriage and the military;
- Acknowledging and expressing gratitude for the role of African-Americans in Baptist work in the United States;
- Affirming community and human needs ministries by churches;
- Celebrating the 200th anniversary this year of Baptist ministry in Louisiana;
- Expressing appreciation to God and all those who helped with this year's annual meeting.

Messengers approved the resolution on a "sinner's prayer" with what appeared to be at least an 80 percent majority. The other measures gained passage in unanimous or nearly unanimous votes.

The committee sought to emphasize cooperation, said Scroggins, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in West Palm Beach, Fla. That seemed obvious in the resolutions on a "sinner's prayer" and cooperation between Calvinists and non-Calvinists. The explicit intention "from the time our committee started meeting was to try to present resolutions in a way that we could be winsome, that we could say strong things in a winsome way and do it in a way that promoted unity among Southern Baptists," Scroggins said at a news conference after the completion of the resolutions reports.

The way the committee put it was it "wanted to 'demilitarize' the resolutions process," he told reporters. "We just felt like we wanted to affirm our commitment to the Baptist Faith & Message as our unifying confession of faith," he told reporters.

"Southern Baptists are going to have to agree on the essentials. We're going to have to disagree on certain things, but what we really want to do is lock arms and fight the darkness. We want to lock arms and cooperate to win the nations to Christ, to win our communities, to make a difference for Jesus, to push back the darkness with the light of Jesus. And that's really what we think most Southern Baptists would like to focus on."

The resolution on cooperation and the doctrine of salvation gained approval without any verbal opposition expressed from the floor, but debate on the measure on a "sinner's prayer" consumed much of the 30 minutes allotted for the morning report, necessitating an afternoon report. The resolution, which survived two amendment efforts, affirmed the concept of a "sinner's prayer" while reiterating the belief that "repentance from sin and personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are necessary for salvation."

It said such a "crying out for mercy and a calling on the Lord," which constitute what is often described as a "sinner's prayer," are a "biblical expression of repentance and faith."

The resolution also said "a 'sinner's prayer' is not an incantation that results in salvation merely by its recitation and should never be manipulatively employed or utilized apart from a clear articulation of the Gospel." It also urged Southern Baptists to continue to take the Gospel to sinners of "every tribe, tongue, and language."

Two African-American pastors — Dwight McKissic of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington and Eric Redmond of Reformation Alive Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Md. — submitted the resolution objecting to applying civil rights language to the cause of legalizing same-sex marriage.

The resolution provides encouragement to black pastors, said Kevin Smith, an African-American who was a member of the committee. Smith is pastor of Watson Memorial Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., and assistant

professor of Christian preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"During this season, black pastors will have to speak about this issue in a way that white pastors won't," Smith said at the news conference. Referring to President Obama's recently announced support for gay marriage, Smith said, "They'll speak against the first black president and his personal views on marriage while affirming biblical authority."

Black pastors already are taking a clear stand on the issue, but "it's just good to have the affirmation of your brothers and sisters" in the denomination, Smith said.

The resolution on the use of civil rights rhetoric on the same-sex marriage issue was "beautifully crafted," Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land told reporters. "I think it's important that the largest Protestant denomination in the country made it clear where they stand on this issue."

Part of the resolution on religious freedom urged Obama to tell his administration to back down from its requirement that health plans cover contraceptives, including ones that can cause abortions, and sterilizations. It also called for a sufficient exemption for all people and organizations with a religious objection.

It "is so important that our people understand and that the country understand that this debate is not about reproductive freedom. This is about religious freedom," said Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "It's about all people of faith and whether or not the government can coerce them to pay for that which they find unconscionable."