

Evans challenges Texas Baptists to love one another

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Jesus called his followers to love one another, even in the midst of a bitterly divided society, said Pastor Michael Evans of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“I believe we are called to unity in the spirit of love,” Evans said in his presidential message to Texas Baptists’ virtual annual meeting.

He reminded Texas Baptists’ of their mission, vision and identity as “a fellowship of transformational churches sacrificially giving themselves to God’s redemptive purposes.”

Texas Baptist churches reflect the state’s ethnic, racial, cultural and language diversity, Evans noted.

“We are the face of the state, but also the nation and even the world,” he said.

Truth in time of chaos and confusion

At their best, Texas Baptists seek to live out Christ’s Great Commission and Great Commandment, Evans emphasized. They value the authority of Scripture, the local church, spiritual formation, servant leadership, and Baptists’ distinctive heritage and principles, he said.

“We value the worth of all people. ... Even in times like these, we value integrity and inclusion,” Evans said.

“I would say to you, my family, if there was ever a time when we needed to

hold these truths to the light of day, that time is now. That time is now, when we find ourselves in the midst of some chaos and some confusion.

“That time is now, when it appears we are a divided nation. We are so divided, Lord help us, that we have even politicized the pandemic. We are so divided, we have an entire people group begging the attention of fellow citizens to say that their lives matter. We are so divided that civil discourse seldom exists and compromise seems to be a thing of the past.”

The church “does not get a pass” when it comes to the matter of division, he added.

‘These are some tense times’

Focusing on John 15, Evans pointed out when Jesus was giving instructions to his disciples just prior to his crucifixion, he commanded them to love one another without selfish intention. At that point, some disciples were jockeying for positions of power and prestige in Christ’s kingdom, even within the hearing of fellow followers of Jesus.

“There was tension in that room,” Evans said.

Likewise, American society today is characterized by tension and uneasiness, he noted.

“People are quite uncomfortable. Folks are afraid to say anything. ... These are some tense times,” he said.

In the midst of a tense situation, Jesus commanded his disciples to abide in his love, Evans said.

Christians cannot afford to allow “differing political views” to create the kind of tension that creates division and prevents Christ’s followers from demonstrating love to each other, he insisted.

Called to self-sacrificial love

“We increase our power through love. ... I believe, in these times, the Lord is calling us to be self-sacrificing,” Evans said. “We have got to move beyond our own self-interests.”

He called on Christians to “lay down” anything that hinders love and harmony—bitterness, bigotry, selfishness, gossip or any sin that keeps a believer from being an effective ambassador for righteousness.

Traveling the state as BGCT president, Evans said, God gave him “renewed hope” as he saw diverse Texas Baptists working together for kingdom causes.

“We are in this together. ... It’s real love that makes our mission meaningful,” he said.