

Editorial: Let's work together to leave a better legacy

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My first direct experience with Southern Baptist Convention business was the 1988 SBC annual meeting in San Antonio. I was 13 and old enough to be appalled at the way adults who called themselves Christians talked to and about each other at the microphones.

I watched all I wanted to see of it—on the big screen, no less—from a theater seat in an overflow room of the San Antonio Convention Center. Within minutes, I left. As far as I was concerned, the adults should have been ashamed of themselves.

But I'm the adult now, with teenagers of my own. Am I any better? Lord, you know the truth I don't want to confess out loud.

We don't like to talk about it in public, but the fact is bitter division is a large part of our Baptist heritage and legacy. It's who we have been, and it's what we have passed down.

It didn't have to be that way then, it doesn't have to be that way now, and it sure doesn't have to be that way going forward. But to leave a better legacy, we're going to have to work together.

But we're not together

I need to stop here for a moment to respond to objections I already hear.

Work together? We already tried that. There's a reason we split. There's a reason we don't cooperate with them. *They*—whoever "they" happen to be for you—weren't going to have it. *They* didn't want to work with us. *They*

excluded *us*. *They left us*.

Yes, more than once we have had strong disagreements over substantive issues. Our respective positions on these issues have been enough to make cooperation between us unworkable at times. We have separated over some of these issues, sometimes by necessity.

But the fact of those separations and the reasons for them do not excuse the grievous ways we have regarded each other because of our differences. We may not be able to change the substance of our disagreements, but we can change the tone of them.

By calling us to work together, I'm not saying we need to ignore what separates us and simply come back together in a kumbaya moment. I'm saying we need to change how we conceive of and speak about one another. Even if we can't work together any other way—though I think we can—that's where we need to work together to leave a better legacy.

I see glimpses of this happening within the Baptist General Convention of Texas after the [motion to affirm](#) the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message was defeated.

Still welcome

Following the close of the BGCT's 2024 annual meeting in Waco, I was in the crowd waiting for the doors to open letting us into the room where the [panel discussion on women in ministry](#) would be held.

With the defeat of the motion fresh in the air, I overheard conversations about what the motion's defeat might mean for churches that affirm and follow the 2000 BFM. Concern already had been voiced during floor discussion that those churches would feel or be distanced from Texas Baptists.

This concern was echoed in conversations I overheard in the hall. At least one person said some who opposed the motion communicated—not at the mic—that 2000 BFM-affirming churches should go to the other convention—the Southern Baptists of Texas.

The SBTC formed within the BGCT in 1995 before becoming a separate entity in 1998. The SBTC adopted the 2000 BFM soon after its adoption by the SBC. The [BGCT has adopted the 1963 BFM](#), but neither the 1963 nor the 2000 “confession of faith is a requirement for inclusion in the BGCT.”

While churches that affirm the 2000 BFM always have been included and welcome in the BGCT, and their pastors and church members have served on BGCT committees and on boards of BGCT-affiliated institutions, several who voted against the motion want to make clear this is not a matter of mere toleration.

It’s a matter of continuing ministry that’s been shared for at least the last 24 years. It’s a matter of friendship and fellowship. It’s a matter of working together for the sake of God’s kingdom.

The “no” vote on the motion was not intended to end that welcome. Several are working to make sure the continuing welcome is clearly communicated.

Getting there

This communication will take time and will require clear and kind words. More importantly, it will require the right spirit and attitude—a spirit and attitude that has been absent far too often in all our disagreements.

Far too often, we have allowed anger, hurt, disappointment and pride to govern what we say about those with whom we disagree, and how we say it. Brothers and sisters, this must not be so.

If churches do decide to separate from the BGCT, they ought to go with

blessing and not cursing. They ought to go with prayers for God's kingdom to flourish in and through them. And the same should be given to those who remain in the BGCT.

The preference, however, is that there be no more separation, that those who disagree will work through their disagreement to a new place of deeper and more God-honoring relationship. This hard and sometimes long work doesn't require compromising convictions. It requires time, grace, patience, kindness, love, prayer and God's Spirit.

Baptists—like other Protestants—have a long history of separating. It's part of our heritage and legacy we prefer not to spotlight, probably because it comes with a lot of heartache. When we do talk about it, we glory in *our* side—the one truly Christian and faithful to Scripture. But this isn't winning converts—or our children.

As followers of one Lord, let's work together to leave a better legacy, one our children will be eager to pass down.

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