

Editorial: Ensure women in ministry is not a test of fellowship here

June 15, 2023

Messengers to the 2023 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting approved at least three items of business with a singular message. They couldn't have been more clear in communicating they believe only men can be pastors—of any kind.

Texas Baptists with differing views of women in ministry have responded on social media with great grief about these actions by SBC messengers. Some who also believe only men can be pastors see these actions by SBC messengers as diminishing the SBC.

These Texas Baptists and many others want the Baptist General Convention of Texas to allow for difference over women in ministry while maintaining cooperation among churches who differ on this issue.

The actions taken by SBC messengers this week make clear we are past the time when such cooperation can be assumed. It must be stated clearly.

Many Texas Baptists celebrate that a church's position on women in ministry is not a test of fellowship with the BGCT—a worthy thing to celebrate. The BGCT's upcoming annual meeting in McAllen July 17-18 is a good place and time to make that position official.

Some Texas Baptists already are thinking along those lines. I applaud that and encourage appropriate actions before, during and after the 2023 BGCT annual meeting that maintain our current differences over women in ministry and that edify the whole convention.

Steps to excluding churches with women as pastors

For that purpose, the kinds of actions taken by SBC messengers to cement opposition to women as pastors is instructive. Three particular actions clearly communicate that opposition.

These actions were to [exclude two churches](#) with women pastors, to adopt a resolution about the office of “bishop/elder/pastor,” and to [pass a constitutional amendment](#) barring churches who affirm, appoint or employ women as pastors of any kind.

The exclusion of Saddleback Church and Fern Creek Baptist Church is straightforward.

The constitutional amendment also is fairly straightforward, though the wording was amended to state it in the positive rather than the negative. “Does not affirm, appoint, or employ a woman as a pastor of any kind” was amended to “affirms, appoints, or employs only men as any kind of pastor or elder as qualified by Scripture.”

The adopted resolution needs a little more explanation since it does not explicitly mention men or women. [The last “resolved” of Resolution 6](#)—an effort to make clear the SBC acknowledges only two offices in a local church: bishop/elder/pastor and deacon—[was amended](#) to remove “while autonomous churches may differ in their uses and categories regarding titles for staff members.”

In the larger context of all the discussion surrounding women in pastoral roles and what constitutes an appropriate title for a woman on a local church’s ministerial staff, this resolution as amended intends to communicate SBC churches cannot differ on the issue of women as pastors. In the SBC, the pastoral office is for men only.

In fairness, Resolution 5 also was adopted. It seeks to clearly praise, affirm, honor, equip and cultivate the call of women to fulfill the Great Commission.

Logical extension of stated position

Excluding churches with women as pastors is a logical extension of the [2000 Baptist Faith and Message](#)—also amended during the 2023 SBC annual meeting. “Article 6: The Church” states: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” “Elder/overseer” was added this week.

The BGCT includes churches who affirm the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message—which does not limit the role of pastors to men—and churches who affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message—which does, demonstrating it is possible to differ on this issue and still cooperate.

The actions taken to solidify the SBC’s opposition to women as pastors highlights the need for other cooperative bodies—such as the BGCT—to make clear their official position on women in ministry. If the BGCT wishes to maintain “harmonious cooperation” amid differences over women in ministry, that position needs to be clearly stated by BGCT messengers.

Clearly stating women as pastors will not be a test of fellowship with the BGCT will alleviate concern that exists currently among Texas Baptists. That concern exists as a logical extension of no official position being clearly stated.

State the position clearly

During his address to the BGCT Executive Board in May, Craig

Christina—BGCT associate executive director and acting executive director—described [the BGCT's historic stance on women in ministry](#). We published his comments in our Voices column.

Christina began by noting he does not “see it as [his] role to speak on behalf of the [BGCT],” because BGCT messengers to annual meetings and an Executive Board between those annual meetings speak for the convention.

He laid out the biblical basis for the BGCT's stance and pointed out the BGCT's faithfulness to the Bible despite disagreement about women in ministry.

“Among Texas Baptists, conformity over the role of women in the church is neither a test of fellowship nor a condition of cooperation,” Christina stated.

“We neither insist on uniform practices or ministry titles, nor do we compel the conscience of any Baptist to adhere to the conclusions of another on this issue. Of the theological issues we consider worthy of defining harmonious cooperation in the BGCT, the issue of women in ministry is not among them,” he continued.

Messengers to the 2023 BGCT annual meeting July 17-18 in McAllen can and should make this position official and unequivocal.

State the position humbly

As BGCT messengers make their historic stance their official position, they should be committed to doing so humbly.

Throughout almost all the floor discussion about the three actions taken by SBC messengers, speakers in favor of the actions declared their position to be “God's way,” “faithful to Scripture” and faithful to the truth. When the

opposing view was labeled explicitly, it was disparaged as an “interpretation.”

The truth is both sides of the discussion are an interpretation of Scripture. To think otherwise and to say or imply only “their” view is an interpretation is itself a violation of Scripture, which instructs us to be humble.

So, let us make clear and official that Texas Baptists come to Scripture together, honestly and humbly, and agree to differ over the role of women in ministry. And let us welcome others who do likewise.

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