

# **Editorial: Hopeful people in a hope-starved time**

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Can we be hopeful people in a hope-starved time?

Yes, we can.

Will we be?

## **Who are we?**

We are Baptists in Texas. By Baptists in Texas, I mean people whose lives are ordered by Jesus Christ and who hold to historic Baptist principles, such as the authority of Scripture, believers' baptism by immersion, soul freedom and religious liberty, the priesthood of the believer and autonomy of the local church.

There are a lot of different kinds of Baptists in Texas who hold to these principles. Despite sharing this common set of principles—and one Lord—we Baptists also disagree about some things, some of them vociferously.

The world has seen our disagreements and doesn't care nearly as much about them as we do. I wonder if the world and our one Lord stand together on that point.

We are Baptists in Texas. When we are at our best, we are hopeful people shining hope (to borrow a phrase from a great Baptist institution) in a hope-starved world.

We're not always at our best, though.

# Who we are

Because we are not always at our best, Baptists in Texas go by so many different names. We cluster in so many different groups.

We are conservative Baptists, moderate Baptists and progressive Baptists; right, left and center Baptists; Republican and Democrat Baptists; East, West and South Texas Baptists; North and Central Texas Baptists; male and female Baptists; young and old Baptists; white, African American, Hispanic, Latino and every-nation-under-the-sun Baptists.

We are Southern Baptists of Texas, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist General Convention of Texas Baptists. We are Calvinist, Arminian and not-quite-one-or-the-other Baptists. We are Primitive, Independent and Missionary Baptists, and many others, too.

When we are not at our best—and let's admit, the Southern Baptist variety spent at least a decade at our worst—we fight each other; we splinter within and repel without.

We still are reeling from times when we weren't at our best, and when hopeful suggestions are made about mending fences and building bridges, the response is often somewhere between, "Psh! Yeah, right," and "Ha! Good luck."

And we think we're hopeful people.

# To be hopeful people

If we're going to be hopeful people in a hope-starved world, we have to start with us.

We have to live out among ourselves the hope we proclaim to the world.

Until the world sees us mending fences and building bridges as though we really are “confident of what we hope for,” then the world has little reason to believe we offer anything the world doesn’t already have.

To be hopeful people in a hope-starved world, we need to hold our differences not as sources of pride or weapons of war. We need to hold our differences as part of imperfect humanity in need of salvation—every one of us, and no one more than another.

To be hopeful people in a hope-starved world, we must hold to the common denominator of one God and Father, one Lord, one Spirit, one body, one faith, one baptism—aye, one hope (Ephesians 4:4-6). We must hold this One above all our differences.

## **Who the world needs us to be**

The world is too in need of the hope we profess for us to overemphasize the differences between us. The world doesn’t have time for us to bicker. Yes, when we give our differences undue attention, we are wasting time. Our differences matter ... to a point, and we’ve far surpassed the point.

The world sees a bunch of infighting, and the world needs us to drop it.

Young people concerned about the environment need us to drop it. They don’t need us to point out each other’s faults. They need us to point to the One who will restore all creation (Romans 8:19-23). They need us to live in his image. They need us to be restorers.

Our divided government needs us to drop it. They don’t need us to line up sides. They need us to point to the One who orders all things. They need us to embody his wisdom. They need us to “seek the welfare of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7).

Nations going to war need us to drop it. Hungry throngs need us to drop it.

The enslaved need us to drop it. The impoverished, the brutalized, the exploited, the addicted, they need us to drop it. They need us to drop our family feud and take up the mantle of those who live because of the hope of Jesus Christ.

They need us to hope in redemption and reconciliation by living it out with each other. They need us to be at our best.

## **Hopeful at our best**

When we're at our best, what the world needs is what the world gets.

When we're at our best, the world gets Jesus Christ lived in and through us.

When we're at our best, the world gets Texas Baptist Men and Disaster Relief, Woman's Missionary Union, Baptist Student Ministries, local and regional associations, *compañerismos*, fellowships and local churches. When we're at our best, the world gets universities, hospitals, child and family welfare institutions. When we're at our best, the world gets uplifting out of poverty, civil discourse and wise counsel.

When we're at our best, the world gets millions of messengers of Jesus Christ's good news.

Instead of competing over who is most doctrinally pure, most committed to justice, has the most baptisms or who simply is the best, let's race to be the hope of Jesus Christ in a hope-starved time.

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