

# Editorial: Redressing sexual abuse must be thorough

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*CONTENT WARNING: This editorial contains references to feelings associated with sexual abuse.*

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I agree with two statements made during this week's meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee as reported by Baptist Press. Both statements point to how thorough the convention's and committee's work needs to be to redress the sin of sexual abuse.

SBC President Ed Litton called sexual abuse and racism "[stains](#)." Yes, they are. I also would describe them as [destructive fires](#). Both must be redressed.

Mike Keahbone, SBC Executive Committee member and pastor of First Baptist Church in Lawton, Okla., said the investigation into the Executive Committee's mishandling of sexual abuse claims and the findings of that investigation "are [not the ending](#) of where we stand regarding sexual abuse. It's the very beginning."

Not only does the Executive Committee find itself at the beginning, not the end; the committee also needs to settle in for how long it will take to thoroughly rectify its failure to care for the sexually abused.

# Redressing language about sexual abuse

To call sexual abuse a “stain” should not be a value statement about the abused, which I don’t think Litton intended. Nor should “stain” be a lament of the SBC’s damaged reputation. Many will hear Litton’s descriptor that way if they still have ringing in their ears Ronnie [Floyd’s worry](#) about “preserving the base.”

Litton and the Executive Committee must be careful to differentiate what they mean by “stain.”

To call sexual abuse a “stain” could be taken to mean at least two different things. Those who have been sexually abused often use the word as a self-description. They often believe their entire being is stained and that they’re to blame.

To right the wrong of sexual abuse, groups like the SBC Executive Committee must do all it takes to make clear the sexually abused are not the stain or its cause.

“Stain” could refer to a blemish on a reputation. In this sense, groups like the SBC and its Executive Committee might see themselves also as victims of sexual abusers. Like Lady MacBeth, they might wish for [clean hands](#). Unlike Lady MacBeth, they might not see themselves as responsible.

Undoubtedly, the SBC is stained by sexual abusers’ sin and the failure of its leaders to address that sin correctly. But in no way should the SBC or the Executive Committee see itself as direct equivalents to the sexually abused. I don’t think they do, but they need to make that distinction crystal clear.

# Redressing sexual abuse impacts faith

A recent Lifeway Research study gives at least one good reason why the SBC and Executive Committee need to do careful and thorough work rectifying their failings around sexual abuse.

“The biggest thing that influences people’s willingness to talk about faith is the presence of a relationship with that person or faith being tied to their life story,” Scott McConnell stated.

“If your [relationship with God](#) isn’t impacting your life, why would someone else want to hear about it?” he asked.

For too long, many people have seen Southern Baptists’ relationship with God as worse than having no impact. They’ve seen it used as cover for sexual abuse and other sins, such as racism. As a result, many have rejected Southern Baptists, along with their gospel.

Southern Baptists and the SBC Executive Committee aren’t the only ones needing to right this wrong. Other faith groups have their own work to do to redress sexual abuse. Even so, the SBC Adam must not deflect responsibility for its sin onto any other Eve.

The SBC and Executive Committee can regain “[moral credibility](#)”—as Litton called for—by owning up to their failings and doing the long and uncomfortable work of caring for and restoring the sexually abused ... for as long as it takes. And with [as many as have been abused](#), it’s going to take a long time.

## Redressing sexual abuse matters

Two more reasons the SBC and Executive Committee must thoroughly redress the sin of sexual abuse and the wrong of their failed care of the

abused: (1) it's the right thing to do, and (2) sexual abuse is an assault on God's image.

Yes, the SBC needs "to regain 'moral credibility' ... to accomplish its mission," as Litton said. Southern Baptists will find it hard to accomplish the SBC's mission of [propagating the gospel](#) if the intended audience doesn't find Southern Baptists morally credible.

Preceding the gospel, however, and at its root is the image of God in which every human being is created. Southern Baptists need to be about the work of redressing sexual abuse because it is part of Jesus' work to redeem and restore God's creation.

Is this not at least part of what Jesus meant when he told his disciples: "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these" ([John 14:12](#))?

The SBC and Executive Committee have much work to do. It will be long and uncomfortable work. It also is necessary, right and good work. Along the way, they will accomplish more than regaining moral credibility, more than removing a stain. They will be restoring people who never should have needed it.

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Churches and ministries can find resources for preventing and redressing sexual abuse [here](#). Las iglesias y los ministerios pueden encontrar recursos en español para prevenir y reparar el abuso sexual [aquí](#).

*Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at [eric.black@baptiststandard.com](mailto:eric.black@baptiststandard.com) or on Twitter at [@EricBlackBSP](#). The views expressed are those solely of the author.*