

Editorial: What do we mean by ‘responsible journalism?’

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[Lack of trust in the media is growing](#). Whatever the cause—whether it be President Trump calling the media “fake news,” bias within the media or some other reason—[studies](#) show declining trust in the media.

Declining trust in the media suggests trouble for truth. Since we cannot be everywhere and know everything, we rely on others to inform us about what is happening in our world. But if we can’t trust those others, how can we know the truth?

My concern about declining trust in the media is why we include responsible journalism as one of the *Baptist Standard’s* three core commitments. Our other two commitments are historic Baptist principles and the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

When I list our core commitments, most people seem to understand and appreciate historic Baptist principles and the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ. If they question anything, they question “responsible journalism.”

Skepticism about the media is high enough that even the phrase “responsible journalism” receives chuckles, raised eyebrows and disbelief. The media is considered by many to be biased, distorted and exploitative. Seen that way, of course trust is low.

People want to know what “responsible journalism” means, because a common sentiment these days is that journalism is anything but responsible.

Responsible journalism in our news

I generally define “responsible journalism” as truth and fairness in reporting.

We strive to be faithful to the facts and to tell the truth. We work to make sure our facts are correct and to corroborate details. We don’t publish everything we hear, because there are times we cannot corroborate the account or name a source.

When we publish a factual error or learn new and clarifying information, we publish corrections and updates.

In our news, fairness means we seek to report differing sides of an account, letting each side speak for itself. We include varying views of the facts—even if those views seem to be at odds with each other—so we can arrive at the truth. While not all views are equal, certainly a single view of the facts is not the sum total of the truth.

But news and facts are one thing; opinions are another.

Responsible journalism in our opinions

In our published opinions, fairness means we seek to give voice to varying viewpoints, again letting each voice speak for itself without disparaging others. We know not all opinions are equal, and not all opinions are appreciated, but that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be considered.

As with our news, we do not publish every opinion we receive. We do not publish blatantly mean-spirited opinions. We also do not publish anonymous opinions and do not knowingly publish opinions written under a pseudonym.

We don't follow [Robert's Rules of Order](#) in choosing and publishing opinions, meaning we don't make sure there is an equal number of voices and a turn-taking for and against every issue. This likely creates the impression that the *Baptist Standard* prefers, or even favors, one set of views over another.

In choosing what opinions to publish, we give preference to writers on the following basis: first, those who have some connection to a BGCT-affiliated church or institution; second, Baptists in Texas and then elsewhere; third, Christians. We do not give preference based on politics.

What responsible journalism means for *us*

At bottom, responsible journalism isn't as much about the organization and what it does as it is about me and what I do. Am *I* responsible? The truth is I haven't always been.

Whether recently, years ago or even decades in the past, some things I have said to and about people—including well-intentioned yet still hurtful words—were irresponsible and continue to haunt me. Some are in print; some aren't. I want to erase them, but I can't.

I can strive to make amends when possible and appropriate, and I have sought to do so in my personal life.

Organizationally, we can demonstrate responsible journalism by recognizing gaps in our coverage, acknowledging how those gaps may cut across the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ, and working to fill in gaps where we can.

We also can—and do—receive feedback about topics like politics, race and other social issues being treated problematically in the *Standard*. Such

feedback helps us see what perspectives have been under or unfairly represented and to scrutinize opinion content more effectively in the future.

We like to think we embody responsible journalism exceptionally well and simply need to stay the course. But trust and relationships are fluid things, necessitating constant attention. To be trusted—as we want to be—our commitment to responsible journalism means we cannot rest but must continue to grow.

More important than earning trust, we want to embody responsible journalism more and more every day because our primary commitment is to the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ, who commanded us to love one another as he loves us, and not just in our words.

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