

Letters: The BGCT's annual meeting

November 11, 2016

Editor's Note: This collection of letters—focusing on issues raised prior to and during the BGCT annual meeting in Waco—has been updated as letters have arrived. The newer letters are on top.

Never depart

Amen! Amen! Amen! to the [article by the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Amarillo](#).

May God's people never depart from the clear teachings of Scripture.

*D.L. Lowrie
Lubbock*

Proud of BGCT

Excellent [article by Craig Christina](#). I agree with him completely.

I am proud of the position that the Baptist General Convention of Texas has taken. They are not afraid to take a stand for the truth of the word.

*Paula C. Jaques
Athens*

Polity reminder

Gender issues notwithstanding, I feel compelled to remind us autonomy does not apply only to the local church in Baptist polity. I'll let the following excerpt from a Baptist distinctives initiative led by retired BGCT Executive Director Bill Pinson say it:

Some misconceptions about Baptist autonomy:

“The Baptist denomination is made up of various entities, including local congregations, associations of churches, state and national conventions, and various other groups. According to Baptist polity, each of these is autonomous.

“However, this autonomous relationship is sometimes misunderstood. For example, some think in terms of ‘levels’ in Baptist life, such as the local church level, the associational level, the state convention level and the national convention level. The concept is that the higher levels include the lower ones and have authority over them. This is not Baptist polity.

“National conventions are not comprised of state conventions. State conventions are not comprised of associations. To the contrary, each is an autonomous Baptist body. Furthermore, none of these entities has any authority over another. Actions taken by a nationwide Baptist convention, for example, have no authority over Baptist state bodies, associations or churches.

“Similarly, a church has no authority over an association or convention. Furthermore, associations and conventions, being autonomous, have the right to determine who will be accepted or seated as messengers and to decide which other Baptist organizations they will relate to and which they will not.”

Rick Willis
Lampasas

Twist the word

The truly sad thing about [these two churches](#) is to completely twist what the word of God clearly states about this issue.

As a Bible-believing Christian, we know our mandate is to love everyone but hate sin. People who are invited to receive Christ must be disciplined in what it means to serve him—that we have to be willing to set aside the things of this world and take up the cross and follow him.

If anyone has no intention of surrendering their will to God, then it will be impossible to please him. I pray these churches would pray and fast that they might be led by the true Holy Spirit.

Words can't begin to describe the depth of sadness I personally feel that this is a topic that requires discussion. Meditate on the word. Are we not bond servants to Jesus Christ?

Jim Pelham
Montgomery

Solar rotation

And the sun does revolve around the earth, ye messengers of BGCT.

Steven F. Smith
Harlingen

Unity on the primary things

As I watched the Baptist General Convention of Texas this week, I watched with fear and anticipation as we attempted to work out our own salvation by determining one another's faith. There were a few times not too long ago when another church tried to decide what it meant to be a Christian, which was really more about control than about walking in the ways of Christ. Whether it is a pope, a king or a convention, we must remember we Baptists are a people who declare there is no intercessory between the individual believer and God. It is for the church to walk with Christ together, but it is for Christ to lead each one of us on his or her path.

If the Baptist General Convention of Texas decides that some churches cannot remain a part of it due to the way that they feel God has led them, then it would be the BGCT itself that is no longer in “harmonious cooperation” with its own Baptist identity.

Regardless of your conviction about the issue of homosexuality in the church, we must remember we are a people unified on the primary things and free on the secondary things. Were we not once rejected from other churches due to our “sinful” conviction that baptism must be chosen by the believer?

We must first be committed to loving one another on those central things that unify us, like the love and community in the Trinity, and by holding on to our Baptist principles, we can do just that.

Micah Furlong

Waco

Robert’s “bully” rule

I’m almost afraid to admit this, but I get a kick out of parliamentary procedure. Henry Robert gave us some good rules that guide our discussions and ensure that each side of a question is fairly represented. If everyone understands the rules and uses them correctly, a large group of people can have a full discussion and make informed decisions.

In the 25 years I have been attending Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meetings, I have had fun watching how the rules are used, but I also have been troubled by how they can be abused. In particular, I am concerned about the way some members “call for the question.” Calling for the previous question is an appropriate motion if a messenger feels that the debate has gone too long to be of any further help to the group. Unfortunately, some use that motion to end debate too early, before the issues have been fully discussed.

As unfortunate as that is, there is even a worse use of the motion to call for the previous question. That occurs when a messenger speaks to the main motion and then ends his statement with the words, "... and I call the question." While that is technically in keeping with the rules, it is a bully tactic that says in effect, "I want to have my say, but I don't want anyone else to have the same opportunity."

I have seen messengers use that tactic many times through the years, and I think we, as the Texas Baptist family, need to agree we won't do that to each other. In the next annual meeting, we need to agree that a messenger may speak to a motion or rise to call the previous question, but no messenger should do both at the same time.

When there are important decisions to be made, let's talk to one another, listen to one another and give plenty of time for a meaningful conversation.

John Crowder

West

What does "affirming" mean?

Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director David Hardage "recognized the validity of welcoming pastors and their churches," stating: "I believe a church can be welcoming but not affirming ... (which) is not only possible, but also biblical"

Two questions come to mind whenever I hear this distinction between "welcoming" and "affirming."

First, does the BGCT believe there are persons in our churches all of whose attitudes and actions we do affirm? I certainly cannot "affirm" all of my own behaviors and seriously doubt I could affirm all of anyone else's either. That's because we are works in progress who are not yet what we should be, but with God's help better than we once were. Isn't the church to be

Christ's Body—albeit a broken one—sorely in need of ongoing forgiveness and the compassionate touch of the Great Physician?

Second, what if our common understanding of “welcoming and affirming” is wrong-headed? Suppose we're meant both to welcome and affirm others as God's little ones, God's beloved, without the need to judge or approve their attitudes or behavior as the criterion for accepting them as brothers and sisters in the Family of God?

Can we reject the typical “welcome but not affirm” prescription that leads so often to “love the sinner and hate the sin” language, committing ourselves instead to be individuals and congregations that both welcome and affirm everyone who seeks inclusion in the Body of Christ, recognizing that we are all in need of grace?

Rob Sellers

Abilene

Proud of Mason and Wilshire

It was a Friday afternoon back in 2001, only 10 days after 9/11.

I took a widow seat on the Southwest Airlines flight, heading back to Dallas after spending a day at our company offices in Houston.

As the passengers continued boarding, a very nice woman took the middle seat on my row. I said, “Hello,” and she smiled and returned my greeting and seemed just a little nervous as she buckled herself in. Still smiling, she said this was her first time to fly after the tragedy in New York.

I shared with her I had flown earlier in the week, and again earlier that morning down to Houston—and while the unforgettable images of 10 days before were on my and probably everyone else's mind, each captain and crew member of every flight had been very attentive and courteous and

certainly reassuring to every passenger.

“It was like a Godsend,” I said.

“You know, it’s ‘funny’ you say that,” she responded. “Because in my line of work, I try to reassure people that God sends his grace to each of us in so many ways, through so many people.”

“I believe that way myself. What line of work are you in?” I asked.

“I’m a chaplain and work at various hospitals in the Dallas area, but mainly at Baylor, with a group of interfaith chaplains,” she said.

“Really? Do you happen to know my good friend Roy Harrell?” I asked. “He works as a part-time chaplain, and my wife, Linda, and I work with him and others at Thanksgiving Square with the Interfaith Council, which Roy founded.”

“Of course I know Roy,” she replied. “He’s so supportive of each chaplain, no matter what each of our faith is.”

“What faith are you, if I may ask?”

“I’m Jewish. What faith are you?”

“Well, I’m a Baptist,” I said, and I quickly added, “but I don’t agree with the comments you may hear from some Baptists these days” I stopped in mid-sentence as my travel companion lifted her hand off the arm rest and touched my hand.

“You don’t need to explain,” she said. “I know what kind of Baptist you are. You’re a George Mason kind of Baptist.”

I was proud to be called that then, and I could not be more proud today of my pastor, George Mason, and so proud to be part of the Wilshire Baptist

Church family.

Carl Bell

Dallas

Moved from church autonomy

With its [letter to Wilshire Baptist Church and First Baptist Church in Austin](#), the Baptist General Convention of Texas has clearly moved away from the long-held and historic Baptist tenet of church autonomy.

In making this decision, it has abandoned many of us and our churches in spite of faithfulness and support through the years. I cannot imagine what will become of the BGCT, the Hunger Offering, the Christian Life Commission, the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation and other ministries and partner institutions.

That the current leadership of the BGCT has chosen to turn away from the extensive support of the very Texas Baptists who have identified and ministered with them and their partner institutions through many years is at best heartbreaking.

However, my family, my church and others will find refuge in a strengthened Texas Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and through fellowship with other Baptist churches that believe in the priesthood of all believers, church autonomy, and separation of church and state, and with those institutions and ministries that proclaim the love and inclusive message of Jesus.

Jackie Baugh Moore

San Antonio

BGCT letter premature, presumptuous

First, [the letter from the BGCT](#) is not only premature

at Wilshire Baptist Church, since the vote is not yet completed, but it is presumptuous and violative of BGCT theology.

The BGCT assumes Wilshire is violating BGCT theology, even though its theologian-in-residence, Jim Denison, has said a homosexual person who is celibate and accepts Jesus is a Christian, just like any other who claims Jesus as Lord and can thus be a full member of any Baptist church in Texas. If a celibate gay person is a full member of a Baptist church, what biblical principle would deny that gay person the right to be a deacon, an ordained minister, or senior pastor?

The BGCT leaders who sent the letter without a vote of any authorized BGCT entity condemn all gays without any evidence that any at Wilshire are in violation of accepted BGCT theology.

Second, the leaders also have not evaluated what or how Wilshire will implement its policies if allowed once the vote is completed. For example, assuming that the one-membership policies were to become active because a gay person were nominated to be a deacon at Wilshire, that Christian person would be judged by the same standards as are applied to all other members who are or have been nominated to serve as deacons—their commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, including the evidences of their love of God, their commitment to teachings of Jesus and their love of their neighbors in all of the world.

The BGCT leaders assume, however, that all gays must be practicing a gay lifestyle, without any explanation of the assumptions that they are applying to that term. Instead, their letter assumes that all gays are living a gay lifestyle, whatever that is. That is not consistent with BGCT theology as it has been explained to Texas Baptists.

Third, the leaders forget the BGCT is a voluntary association of cooperating churches, not a membership organization like the local Baptist association.

They do not have the authority to dictate policy or theology to a local church. Of course, their main threat is not to Wilshire, but to their individual employees who are members of Wilshire who they may fire if those employees remain a member of a church they unilaterally deem to be non-cooperating without any evidence other than their particular view of what is acceptable theology.

Robert Coleman

Dallas

Will BGCT exclude divorced-and-remarried?

I am trying to understand [the position of the BGCT](#) regarding openly gay or lesbian members, but I have a nagging concern that this same exclusion then should apply to divorced and remarried couples, since Jesus clearly says anyone marrying a divorced woman causes her to commit adultery. Yet we have hundreds—if not thousands—of couples in our Baptist churches who have been divorced and then remarried. Some of the men are even deacons. I think this teaching against this form of adultery is pretty clear, as Paul reinforced this teaching.

This is not so much to question the Executive Board's decision, but to seek explanation why this sin is worse than others living under situations which Jesus described as adultery.

Thank you for allowing my request for understanding,

Maurine Frost

Hewitt

Slow decline

In our opinion, [the BGCT is slowly going down](#). Churches have voted to withdraw their funds.

Where does the BGCT go from here?

John Jarrett

San Antonio

Wilshire should report early

As a member of Wilshire Baptist Church I am against the resolution before the church to allow the marriage, ordination, calling as minister or senior pastor of a person practicing the LGBTQ lifestyle. I am against this because of the Bible's clear teaching on these issues.

I am also a BGCT employee, but I do not speak to save my job. What in fact the church is doing is equating authority of personal experience and reason with that of Scripture.

I offered an amendment to the resolution at our church's called conference on Oct. 30 to the effect that "upon an affirmative vote by the church on the resolution allowing for full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the church, that Wilshire end its historic 60-plus-year affiliation and relationship with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and to have a reflected termination date of Nov. 13, 2016, the final day of voting on this resolution." This amendment was overwhelmingly defeated by the church body with a vote of more than 90 percent against.

There is a simple solution to the question of seating Wilshire's messengers, as voting will end around 12:15 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 13, but the church said it wouldn't release the final results until Monday. There is no reason that the church cannot release those results by 8 p.m. Sunday evening to the church membership or at the very latest at 8 a.m. Monday morning, Nov. 14.

This would clarify whether Wilshire's messengers could be seated or not.

Stan Granberry

Dallas

Sometimes you lose friends

After reading the letters from the two churches that are the focus of the editorial, [“A welcoming way ahead for the BGCT,”](#) and your editorial itself, I was at first confused about what all the fuss was about. I thought even then that this had to be about more than just accepting people into the fellowship of the church who were homosexuals. That seems to me to be straight (no pun intended) forward enough. It would be difficult, but that probably could be reconciled under the old “love the sinner hate the sin” mantra.

However, since I sensed there had to be more going on here than what is in the letters and editorial, I decided to read the letters to the editor about the issue. Only one of those letters was really informative. It was the one from Stan Granberry, a member of Wilshire Baptist Church. He wrote: “As a member of Wilshire Baptist Church I am against the resolution before the church to allow the marriage, ordination, calling as minister or senior pastor of a person practicing the LGBTQ lifestyle. I am against this because of the Bible’s clear teaching on these issues.”

Now it doesn’t matter much to me that he is against an action being taken by his church. It is the action that they are taking that is informative. It goes well beyond what we are told in the editorials and leaders from the leaders of the church and apparently strikes at the heart of the decision the church is actually making. For me this changes the discussion significantly.

Apparently, the issue has undercurrents within these churches and the BGCT that are being wallpapered over in the public discussion. It appears to me the BGCT leadership actually has the high ground on this one.

Now as to the comment, “Texas Baptists championed the priesthood of all believers and local-church autonomy throughout the battle for the Southern Baptist Convention a generation ago. Texas Baptists’ strong belief in those principles explains why they did not walk in lockstep with the people who took over the SBC and who violated individual priesthood and church autonomy. Forsaking those principles now would be a travesty”:

First, I would note that the statement is inflammatory and designed to shame into acquiescence. This issue has nothing to do with the denominational wars of the 1980s, but it is very relative to the denominational spanning cultural wars going on in our nation today. Somewhere along the line, we have to answer in a legitimate way how to apply the gospel to a society and a church that is growing more secular by the day. This is not the time to re-litigate the 1980s.

Second, these two doctrines do not exist in a vacuum and must result in actions at the very least consistent with the other great doctrines coming out of Scripture.

Third, neither the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer nor the local church’s autonomy open the door for accepting the practice of behavior that the Scripture clearly defines as totally unacceptable. These doctrines of the priesthood of the believer simply means I am competent to come before the Lord and to interpret Scripture without an intermediary other than the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t mean that I will do either correctly or that others should accept it. The same is true for the autonomy of the local church. Do what you must, but don’t expect everyone to love you for it. I remind them that God does not regulate what he prohibits, and he always regulates what he permits. I simply remind us of Jesus’ command to the sinner that he “go and sin no more.”

Sometimes staying consistent with Scripture means you lose friends and fellowship on both sides of an issue.

David Appleby
Port Neches