

Commentary: An open letter to the SBC

May 24, 2018



Dear SBC (Southern Baptist Convention),

I spent this morning praying, asking God to please reveal Himself to the

people I love, entreating Him to sift me, confessing my sins and thanking Him over and over again for His grace and mercy. I write this while on vacation, burdened again by difficult news coming from within our ranks.

I wakened with a sort of undecorated, plain grief, a kind of gray feeling that is worn out of hoping. I reprimand myself in times like these because hope is radical, and it is real, and as I spend every day reading the book of Romans in preparation for a book I'm writing, I know hope is one of the most assured and beautiful words in the Gospel. Hope does not disappoint, yes, but perhaps it's better stated that my expectations are tired.

You already know this, but I am a woman. I am a wife to a man who empowers me and a mother to three world-challenging and world-changing adult children. I attend a large SBC church, and I am utterly grateful for the opportunities afforded me there. So my angst is not with them. Instead it's directed toward the structures built within this denomination that have seemingly been bent toward preserving reputation and circling the wagons rather than authentic, biblical repentance when it comes to the treatment of women.

I don't need to rehash what others have eloquently stated. But I can say this: I know I am one woman in a large denomination. I know there are many more noble and studied women in my midst. I don't speak for all women; I simply speak for me. I also know this: I am flawed. I grew up longing to be noticed, so Jesus continues to redirect that childhood desire toward Him. While I don't always live for an audience of One, I hope and pray that my life moves more and more toward that aspiration.

So I understand that being overlooked, unheard, dismissed, and relegated are hard for me. I have a prayer team that helps me sort through this, and they've been with me since before I published my first book.

When I emote online, when I write blog posts about the absolute

devastation of sexual abuse (one of Satan's greatest weapons against us all), when I speak up in cases of abuse of power within the church with its dismissal of victims and cover up of perpetrators and those who enable them, it is with this limping, this fear: that somehow my words would be about me and not about the issue. But the bigger fear which ultimately makes me click publish is this: that those who have been marginalized, dismissed, silenced, demeaned, made fun of, or called shrill would know that they are not alone.

Women make up more than half of all SBC churches. We love, serve, teach (in sometimes limited settings), pray, and help others. We see injustices and speak up. We make up a significant percentage of missionaries overseas. Yet we are often underrepresented in positions of leadership, influence, and service. While we all possess voices, many times those voices are dismissed or diminished.

Women, like men, are gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the body of Christ. I believe we do better together rather than segregated into overly straight-jacketed roles. In Paul's closing to Romans, he lists a significant amount of women (10) holding various positions. He lauds them, encourages them. Consider Phoebe and Priscilla in Romans 16:1-5:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.

I would love to be able to say my denomination welcomes each woman "in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people." But after the past several months and years, the very public stances the SBC has taken

reveals more disregard, far less honor. In light of all that, it's my ardent prayer that the SBC leadership would collectively hit their knees, continue to seek God earnestly, and open-heartedly listen to the women in their midst-as fellow image bearers of the One true God.

I would love to see the SBC become a denomination where:

- All people felt safe in approaching their leadership about sexual assault or domestic violence, knowing that their leadership will report it to the authorities as required by law.
- Similarly, domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment would all be seen not simply as sins to be dealt with within our ranks, but crimes, best dealt with by the criminal justice system. (Romans 13 comes to mind).
- Public statements by PR firms, carefully crafted toward reputation preservation, would be replaced by genuine repentance and a plea for forgiveness when members are harmed or wronged by leadership.
- Women have a voice and are no longer dismissed, stereotyped, or relegated to sub-committees. Instead, they felt heard, dignified, and empowered.
- Sexual predators are no longer given cheap and instant grace, and survivors are no longer harshly scrutinized, silenced, and callously told to forgive quickly.
- Truth would be welcomed, no matter how difficult. (I believe our fear of ruining Christ's reputation, or perhaps better said, mess with our bottom line, is unfounded. The world would welcome transparency and repentance far more than it tolerates our fearful coverups. For instance, if a church wrote something like "We discovered sexual misconduct, reported it, and are deeply sorry for

the harm it has caused. In light of that, we are cooperating with authorities, and we're working on solutions to provide counseling and help for the victims," I believe many would stand and cheer. But as it is, we are deserving the world's deeply entrenched mockery for our continued insistence on cover up, glossing over, and our unique ability to honor those (sometimes with standing ovations) who preyed on the innocent. I believe these words from Paul, though deeply sobering, are for the church today: "For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Romans 2:24).)

- Political power is no longer curried, but viewed with a Jesus-like skepticism. That we would embrace the beautiful truth that life change happens in small places through a paradoxical weak-is-strong kingdom.
- The Gospels would be revisited, particularly the Sermon on the Mount where we see the beautiful dynamic of the least being the greatest. That we would look again at Jesus who went out of his way to listen to and heal the masses, the hurting, the least, those living in the outskirts. May we be known as a church who loves the broken, welcomes the downtrodden, and winsomely stands against injustice—no matter how it may "harm" our reputation.
- The SBC convention in June featured more than 12 minutes of women's voices from the platform, though I know that the schedule has been fixed.

I love my church. I love serving within its ranks. I am grateful to have had the opportunity as a communicator to author dozens of books, pray for many on my daily prayer podcast, and speak up for the broken—all while being encouraged by the leadership of my SBC church. So my letter isn't meant to be mean spirited or punitive. Instead, my prayer is that we can

see the recent news events as a wake up call from the Lord to reevaluate our hearts, listen to those who have left the church in anguish, and seek to be people of justice and mercy in a world in extreme need of both.

Praying,

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This article originally appeared on Mary DeMuth's [website](#) and does not necessarily represent the views of the Baptist Standard.