

Commentary: Local autonomy: Tensions in Baptist identity, Part 7

December 16, 2025

Wade Berry considers how the somewhat straightforward concept of local autonomy has resulted in complications for Baptists.

Commentary: Apologetics was never about winning

December 16, 2025

Taylor Standridge issues a corrective to the modern approach to apologetics that returns to the full text of 1 Peter 3:15.

Letter: Baptists and justice for Gaza

December 16, 2025

A Baptist Standard reader expresses how his Baptist heritage informs his

view of moral responsibility in Gaza.

Editorial: Our hope is hallowed, not hollow

December 16, 2025

I realize Advent has moved on to peace, but I'm stuck at hope. It won't sound like that at first, but keep reading.

I'm a bit of a Grinch about the holidays—any holiday. I humor the holidays, but I don't really get into Christmas until a couple of days before Dec. 25.

Part of humoring the holidays is understanding we will start singing Christmas hymns the first Sunday after Thanksgiving and will sing them through the first Sunday after Christmas. The same songs. Every year.

And those same songs will play. Everywhere. Sometimes as early as October.

Maybe this Grinchiness started when I worked retail in college and had to listen to canned pop Christmas tunes nonstop for hours on end for days on end. Some things are hard to get over.

Or maybe it happened while I was a pastor. Most people don't realize how much work Christmas is for a church staff and volunteers. The staff would love to celebrate with you, but they're likely busy and exhausted from all the extra events and all that goes with them. So, even their celebration can be ... sleepy.

Anyway. Some people love this time of year. I humor it. Grinchy, I tell you.

So, I wasn't prepared to be moved by "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" while we sang it during the modern worship service at our church this last Sunday morning.

I had [a similar experience last year](#) when our choir sang a particular arrangement of "O Holy Night."

I really don't expect this to become a holiday habit.

A holy hope

Last year, I wrote that "O Holy Night" has "long been one of my favorite Christmas hymns." That's true. Once Dec. 22 rolls around, I really like it. But I may have given the impression I appreciate the song at any time. So, I will clarify: "Let's not get carried away. The song should inhabit it's proper setting—Dec. 22 through 24."

Or maybe just Dec. 24.

"Boy, he is Grinchy, isn't he?"

"O Holy Night" seized my attention last year because of the arrangement, which I'd heard before but really heard that particular moment in that service.

The same happened this last Sunday morning with "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," this ubiquitous song of longing for the Messiah.

Sunday morning, we sang a modern arrangement of this [old Latin hymn](#), translated bit by bit into English centuries later.

Words of woe: "O come, o come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here."

Met with the hopeful chorus: “Rejoice! Rejoice! E-ma-nu-el shall come to thee, O Israel!”

To this, [the modern arrangers](#) added: “Rejoice, again I say rejoice, For unto us is born, The savior of the world; Take heart, O weary soul take heart, For Heaven’s on its way, And holy is His name.”

And we sing it loud.

Sunday, I saw the words on the screen, and I sang them as I saw them, but the lingering echo wasn’t, “Take heart, O weary *soul* take heart,” but “Take heart, O weary *world* take heart.”

Why should it? Why should this weary world take heart?

Because Emmanuel is on his way. Better still, because Emmanuel is here.

A hollow hope

My jaw tightens at so much of the news. It’s hard to rejoice amid the news of this world. It’s wearying and disheartening. It’s hard to hold out hope, or at least to believe there’s much substance to hope. Hope really can ring hollow here.

It’s also disappointing to see so many people—especially Christians—putting their hope in worldly solutions. Even Christians place undue hope in policies, money, power and material things.

There is no policy that will make everything all right, no political party, no amount of money, no accumulation. We know this intuitively. Yet, we maintain hope in the world, or we give in to hopelessness, hiding it in hedonism or despair.

“Oh, the noise! Oh, the Noise! Noise! Noise! Noise!”

This is the substance of a world and a people who don't know, don't see or who refuse to believe: "Heaven's on its way, and holy is His name."

A 'foolish' hope

What we hope for is foolishness to this world. What we hope for actually is an inversion of this world. What Emmanuel taught, what he came to do was to turn this world inside out, and nothing will be all right until it is turned inside out.

We can cease firing and sign the treaties, we can cross the aisle and make deals, we can sell all we have and give it to the poor, but until our hearts are inverted—read: converted—by the One whose name is holy, all that activity won't satisfy the true substance of our hope. Until Jesus is Lord and we quit being pretenders, our hope will be hollow.

We can do all the worldly things right, but doing them won't mean everything will be all right. Because the problem isn't in our politics, policies, social positions or pockets. The problem is in us. To fix the problem, we must be turned inside out.

The substance of our hope is beyond the power and money and stuff of this world. The substance of our hope is not dependent on who wins the war. Yes, it would be easier—so we think—if our side wins—whatever side that may be. And we do hope our side wins, thus the fight.

To this world, saying Jesus guarantees what we hope for is abdicating the fight. Or it's militarizing Jesus. Talk about polarization.

But what we really long for, what we really need, is not guaranteed by our side winning. It is guaranteed by Jesus and is kept in his kingdom. To this world, that's hopeless, irresponsible, stupid, weak, naïve, foolish.

A hope fulfilled

Back to peace: Scripture warns against proclaiming peace when there is no peace. This world warns against proclaiming hope when this world thinks there is no hope.

But Jesus really was born. Jesus really did live and teach and heal. Jesus really did die. Jesus really did rise again to live and reign over all things for all eternity. And Jesus said he will come back and restore all things.

No, there may not be peace on Earth right now, but there always is hope—a hallowed hope.

And *that* will make any Grinch's heart grow.

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Voices: The light through Christmas depression

December 16, 2025

Christmas is not joyous for everyone. Ruth Cook shares her experience with depression during Christmas and how she found healing.

Voces: ¿Dónde están los graduados hispanos de los bautistas de Texas?

December 16, 2025

El Dr. Gabriel Cortés comparte una visión general de dónde se encuentran actualmente muchos graduados hispanos de las escuelas afiliadas a la Convención Bautista de Texas y dónde podrían estar en el futuro.

Voices: Where are Texas Baptists' Hispanic graduates?

December 16, 2025

Dr. Gabriel Cortés shares a glimpse of where many Hispanic graduates of Texas Baptists-affiliated schools are now and may be in the future.

Commentary: How to support women in ministry

December 16, 2025

Mandy McMichael offers “one simple suggestion” to those who support women in any and all forms of ministry.

Editorial: Don't rush past yesterday

December 16, 2025

Yesterday may be gone, but its importance is still alive and well, informing our today and tomorrow. We must reflect on it with a purpose.

Commentary: Religious liberty: Tensions in Baptist identity, Part 6

December 16, 2025

Wade Berry examines the interrelationship of two sometimes-controversial

Baptist principles—soul competency and religious freedom.

Voices: Forgiveness: 70 times seven

December 16, 2025

Johnny Teague shares a story from his church about forgiveness and discipleship.

Editorial: Being thankful it isn't 'otherwise'

December 16, 2025

Jane Kenyon was a poet and translator. She died young. Already, I am three years older than she was when leukemia took her. How many times in my life I also could have died young.

Her poem “Otherwise” is short. It is a powerful poem, because in simple, spare prose, it makes much of the overlooked and mundane. Through it, Kenyon expresses gratitude for everyday things many of us long since have taken for granted.

Things like getting out of bed in the morning, eating a bowl of cereal,

seeing art on the walls of our home. Having a home.

You can [listen to “Otherwise” here](#).

Kenyon knew it could be otherwise, all of it. She knew someday it would be. She wasn't well.

I'm old enough now, I've experienced enough life, I've seen enough things go well enough to know and appreciate, to be thankful it wasn't, it isn't otherwise.

And I'm learning to be thankful still.

Thankful in all circumstances

One of our brothers returned to his home after the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Abilene last week. His home is at war. It is otherwise for him. Yet, even in the midst of war, he and his fellow Ukrainians know it could be worse.

In so knowing, they teach us to be thankful in all circumstances.

Another of our brothers posted a video to Facebook last Thursday from an emergency room. On Tuesday, his wife had emergency gall bladder removal. On Thursday, he was back in the emergency room with his daughter after she was in a car accident. He was thankful for a seat belt.

“Yes ... in spite [of] anything, we will be thankful. We need to be thankful. There is so much to be thankful for,” he said.

“Even if it's hard, even if it's unsettling, if life throws things at you, we come before the Lord, we pray together, we ask for help, and we thank [him] for things we already have,” he concluded, encouraging those watching to come celebrate with his church.

Our brother teaches me to be thankful amid all circumstances.

Are we thankful?

What about us? What do we take for granted? What, who have we grown so accustomed to in our lives that we have forgotten to be grateful for them, that we fail to imagine it could be otherwise?

We simply don't see so much of what we ought to be, can be thankful for. Many times because we don't look through the irritations, the inconveniences, the frustrations common to all of us. More than anything, that's my problem when it comes to thankfulness.

Lord, thank you that the bad isn't as bad as it could be, and thank you for the good that doesn't have to be at all.

Some of what I'm thankful for

I am thankful for the Baptist Standard staff. Each person loves the Lord and cares deeply for people.

I am thankful for the Baptist Standard board. They are great encouragers, on top of being great leaders in their respective places of service.

I am thankful for our donors, who do far more than help pay our bills. They fuel us to pursue our mission.

I take none of them for granted.

Because I know it could be otherwise.

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