

Voices: My response to Calvary Baptist's response

August 2, 2023

It is never good to feel one has been betrayed by a loved one. I can sense that feeling in the article "[Voices: Our response to the 2023 BGCT annual meeting](#)," written by the leadership of Calvary Baptist Church in Waco.

I write this response through the lens of a male in a pastoral role. I want to offer my condolences to any woman in the audience at the annual meeting who felt the Baptist General Convention of Texas has turned its back on them.

I also want to respond to the authors of the above-mentioned article. They seem to be advocating for the BGCT to respond in the same manner the Southern Baptist Convention did in June—by completely removing church autonomy from the equation.

Local church autonomy

Church autonomy was described so wonderfully in the opening paragraph—"God led us to call ..."—that I find it ironic the authors would suggest the BGCT ignore it. Church autonomy is the key to this whole discussion on women in pastoral roles.

When the local body comes together for the purpose of selecting its next pastor, it is the church that speaks, not the BGCT. The local church must be the one to affirm the calling.

"Denominational bodies," as the authors describe the BGCT, cannot and should not affirm either way on this issue. What it can do is offer equality in

its own organization related to women in ministry.

The BGCT does this through equal opportunities for scholarships to our Texas Baptist universities. If a woman feels led or called to the pastorate, she will receive the same education as her male colleagues and will be funded equally through the BGCT.

The authors said they wanted to “articulate a vision of the church’s bright future shaped powerfully by women’s pastoral leadership.”

What is meant by “church.” Is this the church universal or local? If the article refers to the church universal, then I agree. I think women in ministry and pastoral roles show a diversified image of God within his bride, the church.

However, if the end game is calling on the BGCT to shape the local church, then the BGCT would be doing the same thing the SBC is doing—interfering with local church autonomy.

What people believe about the Bible

The authors mention messengers who gave their interpretation of Scripture, likening that interpretation to “spiritual abuse.” How is this abuse? How is someone’s belief about the word of God—and their expression thereof—abuse?

Such an accusation is inflammatory, and I do not believe it helps the cause of unity within the convention. We may not like or even agree with the interpretation, but we ought not publicly shame a pastor and call his expressed beliefs “abuse” of women.

During discussion on the motion, messengers spoke “for” and “against” the motion, so I do not see how one could say, “No one challenged the hurtful words.”

Women at the table

The authors cited statistics from previous surveys and the current makeup of BGCT boards. I serve on the committee that nominates BGCT Executive Board members, and I have two responses.

First, we strive for a diverse makeup of the Executive Board. The number of laypersons, pastors and church staff, males and females, and ethnic backgrounds serving on the board is set by policy. We spend all year painstakingly finding nominees to present to the messengers.

If only 0.6 percent of Texas Baptist churches have female pastors on staff, and we can only have a certain number of pastors and church staff on the Executive Board, how can we ever have an “equal space around the tables.” It can’t happen. There aren’t enough females serving in ministerial roles—which is the local church’s decision—for that to happen.

Second, the Executive Board is made of 30 sectors with three representatives per sector. Since we can choose no more than three people from each sector, we need more women to say “yes” when asked to serve.

I cannot speak to the decision of who preaches at the annual meetings, but as for women on the platform, we will have one on the platform next year. Why? Because she was nominated and elected.

If we want more women to be seen, more women need to step out and serve, and be willing to be nominated and to nominate other women.

I attended a question-and-answer session with the BGCT executive director search team in Waco in 2022. During the session, I said the search team needs to be open to the idea God may be calling a woman to the position of executive director.

Encouraging church autonomy

This response is not to demean or diminish the fine women of our convention, or Calvary Baptist Church and its leadership. I write this to show the BGCT is not the enemy.

The BGCT must remain “neutral” on issues that are not sin-related. Whether or not a female can pastor a local church is not an issue that needs the affirmation of a convention or association. It needs the affirmation of the local church.

By supporting each church’s fundamental Baptist right to be completely autonomous, the BGCT is preserving the unity of cooperation. How do I know this? Because even after the second business meeting on Tuesday, the convention went into a time of worship where the whole convention praised our Lord together.

We can disagree and still cooperate. If the BGCT takes a verbal stance in either direction on any issue that involves church autonomy—much like the SBC is doing—it will alienate churches on both sides of that issue.

Our best hope to see the results Calvary Baptist leadership want is to continue to have churches like Calvary Baptist that exemplify women leading and leading well in their calling.

It will take pastors, like myself, who believe God calls and equips all of humanity to his will and to his church to lead in local churches.

We need to educate our congregations on good hermeneutics. We need to “equip the saints” of our local congregations and stop relying on parachurch organizations to do it for us.

We need to recognize those who may have a calling on their life—men and women—and cultivate that calling in our churches.

I call on all the 5,276 Texas Baptist churches to pastor their congregations as the Lord leads you in your local context. May you be blessed in that calling.

All for God's kingdom!

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