

Voices: SBC, sex abuse, pragmatism and sufficiency of Scripture

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Josh Buice, pastor of Pray's Mill Baptist Church in Douglasville, Ga., and president of G3 Ministries, recently published an [article](#) on his blog titled "Dear SBC, the Answer to the Sex Abuse Crisis is Not Pragmatism."

Buice led his church to leave the Southern Baptist Convention over alleged "liberalism" and "critical race theory" in the denomination. In his article, he fundamentally misdiagnoses the problem in the SBC. In the process, he warps the doctrine of Scripture's sufficiency.

Buice vocally opposes the Guidepost Solutions investigation and argues against the SBC developing a public database of sexual abusers connected to the convention. He is wrong, and his proposals are dangerous to the SBC.

Pragmatism?

Buice argues the SBC is awash with pragmatism, which he defines as "the philosophy that encourages people to make decisions based on whatever will give them positive results. In other words, *if it works—do it*" (emphasis his).

I agree with Buice on this point: Pragmatism is a big problem in the SBC and should be opposed. We should submit to the authority of Scripture, even if what it teaches does not "work" by secular standards. But the way Buice connects the SBC's problem of pragmatism with its sexual abuse

crisis is baffling.

Buice argues developing a sexual abuse database for the SBC is a form of pragmatism. He says such a database is “a bad idea from a church government standpoint ... It’s another example of pragmatism driving theology and it will do more harm than good in the SBC.” However, he doesn’t explain or prove this point from Scripture. He just asserts it.

By contrast, SBC pastor and presidential candidate Bart Barber [clearly lays out](#) how a sexual abuse database for the SBC would not violate biblical, Baptist polity.

When it comes to the problem of pragmatism in relation to the SBC’s sexual abuse crisis, the real issue is several SBC leaders letting the risk of legal liability [dictate](#) how they responded to sexual abuse within the convention. Buice echoes their concerns about legal liability in his article. If that’s not pragmatism, I don’t know what is.

The sufficiency of Scripture

Buice repeatedly grounds his argument in “the sufficiency of Scripture,” a vitally important doctrine he doesn’t define in his article. He appeals to “the sufficiency of Scripture” repeatedly but doesn’t give a detailed definition of what the doctrine does and does not mean.

In an [article](#) for *The Gospel Coalition*, Baptist theologian and philosopher Jordan Steffaniak gives a thorough explanation of Scripture’s sufficiency. Steffaniak states: “There are some things that are ordered by the *light of nature* and *Christian prudence*. The sufficiency of Scripture is about matters of **saving** knowledge, faith, and obedience. That modifier is critical” (emphasis his).

Steffaniak, drawing on the evidence from Scripture and church history,

points out Scripture is the final, ultimate authority over all Christian faith and practice. He points out everything we need to know to be saved and to obey God is contained explicitly in Scripture or can be deduced logically from Scripture.

He also points out the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean, and never has meant, Scripture teaches us everything we ever could need to know about everything. Nor does the sufficiency of Scripture mean Christians cannot or should not use other sources of information—subordinated to Scripture—to help guide our lives.

Buice doesn't explain in his article how an SBC database of sexual abusers or the Guidepost Solutions report are violations of Scripture's sufficiency. The closest he comes to doing so is claiming a sex abuse database would constitute a "top-down approach of ecclesiastical policing." Buice doesn't justify this claim using evidence; he simply asserts it.

A sexual abuse database for the SBC would not constitute a "top-down approach of ecclesiastical policing," because such a database would provide only information for local churches to use. The database would not and could not force local churches to do anything. See Bart Barber's article, linked above, for elaboration.

The Guidepost report

The most baffling claim Buice makes is the Guidepost report is "harmful." My jaw literally fell open when I read that remark.

Buice states: "I find the Guidepost report to be harmful as well. Not only is it a tragedy that \$4 million dollars [sic] of money given by SBC churches had to be used to form such a report, it's not a step in the right direction."

He argues that hiring a third party to investigate the SBC usurps the roles

of the local church and the civil authorities “as the God ordained means of accountability, discipline, and justice.” This is a specious argument.

SBC local churches voted overwhelmingly in favor of hiring Guidepost to conduct the investigation. The convention’s churches realized they did not have the resources to conduct a thorough and proper investigation, so they chose to use their money to hire an organization equipped to do so.

Hiring Guidepost is a great example of SBC churches collectively honoring their biblical responsibility to hold one another and their leaders accountable (1 Corinthians 5). Just because the SBC used a means not explicitly described in Scripture does not mean what the SBC did violates Scripture.

Guidepost and similar organizations are recognized as legitimate by the civil authorities and operate in concert with them, not against them. Groups like Guidepost play an invaluable role in supplementing the investigative resources of official government agencies.

In contrast to Josh Buice, I completely support the decision to hire Guidepost, and I completely support the development of a sexual abuser database for the SBC. These are not examples of pragmatism, and they are not violations of Scripture’s sufficiency. They are vitally important for providing justice to victims of sexual abuse in the SBC.

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