

Voices: Doctrinal alignment, affinity and agreement

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Since joining Texas Baptists by way of assuming the pastorate of a historic Texas Baptist church, I have grown to love and deeply respect Dr. Julio Guarneri. He and the whole of our network of churches have been nothing but kind and welcoming.

What follows in no way is a contradiction of what Dr. Guarneri wrote and expressed in his recent weekly update, but rather a continuation of the thoughts he raised, at least from my perspective.

Guarneri's weekly update

[In his weekly update, dated Oct. 15, 2025](#), Guarneri laid out a convincing plea for churches to work together in what he refers to as doctrinal affinity. As he states it:

“Doctrinal affinity is not the same as doctrinal uniformity. While there are Christian doctrines and Baptist principles that are non-negotiable, there are beliefs and practices where local churches have freedom. It is enough for a church to hold to Christian orthodoxy and historical Baptist principles to collaborate with Texas Baptists for the cause of missions.”

I wholeheartedly agree.

As he also reminded us, “We should resist the temptation to demand uniformity in every secondary issue, because that diminishes our ability to work together for the sake of the gospel.”

That truth is both freeing and motivating, allowing us to be generous with

one another in areas of freedom.

Where I would offer caution, however, is in urging readers to think through these things with greater nuance—especially as it relates to different groups and organizations within our convention.

The local church: Doctrinal alignment

The Bible repeatedly calls for unity and for believers to be of the same “heart and mind.” The early church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and that shared doctrine fostered unity, generosity and love. For that reason, a local church must expect doctrinal alignment among its leaders and teachers.

Alignment means walking in the same direction together, united in core convictions and practices. No other group or organization should force a local church to abide by their particular standards, but within the congregation itself, there must be a shared commitment to doctrine and mission.

This means one church may organize its staff differently than another or may arrive at a different conviction about, say, women preaching on a Sunday morning. Each local body should have the freedom to determine what it believes best aligns with Scripture. But within that body, clarity and alignment are essential.

The network of churches: Doctrinal affinity

When we gather as a network of churches, doctrinal affinity is both necessary and sufficient. As Guarneri emphasized, “It is enough for us to be orthodox Christians and historic Baptists in order to lock arms for

missions.”

This “big tent” approach allows us to pursue missions together without demanding identical positions on every issue as it relates to the local church. What binds us together is a family resemblance of belief and practice rooted in Christian orthodoxy and historic Baptist principles.

Affinity makes cooperation possible, even across lines of difference.

The entities we support: Doctrinal agreement

Entities—our seminaries, universities and mission boards—are in a different category altogether.

These organizations exist to serve and resource the churches. Because they are entrusted with teaching, training and sending, they should be expected not only to share doctrinal affinity, but to fully affirm and champion the doctrinal stances of the network as a whole. In other words, our entities must operate in doctrinal agreement.

Agreement conveys a binding commitment to the statements of faith adopted by our network. These standards are not restrictive for the sake of control, but for the sake of confidence. They ensure those who are trained and sent out by our entities faithfully reflect Baptist convictions.

This is how we, as churches, can support them in good conscience—knowing they are aligned with us in belief, conviction and mission.

A framework of use

Doctrinal statements are valuable so long as we recognize their different uses in different contexts:

- The local church: Doctrinal alignment—leaders and members walking in the same direction.
- The network of churches: Doctrinal affinity—a generous, cooperative spirit across differences.
- Our entities: Doctrinal agreement—formal affirmation of Baptist convictions.

None of this is about control or restriction. Rather, it is about fostering genuine partnership, mutual assurance and a free, open spirit of cooperation.

We are a large body of churches, and while we will not all agree on every particular, we should be confident those who represent us—especially in education and missions—do so with convictional faithfulness.

Conclusion: Cooperation with conviction

I am deeply encouraged by the vision Dr. Guarneri has cast. His call for doctrinal affinity is a much-needed reminder we are better together when we unite around the essentials and extend grace in areas of freedom.

By carefully distinguishing between doctrinal alignment in the local church, doctrinal affinity in our cooperative network and doctrinal agreement in our entities, we can remain both convictional and cooperative.

We do not have to choose between clarity and cooperation, between

conviction and unity. We can hold fast to the truth with courage, while also locking arms with one another for the mission of Christ.

That balance—anchored in Scripture, guided by Baptist principles and motivated by the gospel—will allow Texas Baptists to flourish as a centrist, cooperative, mission-minded family of churches clear on what we believe and eager to work together for the kingdom.

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