

Voices: Don't vilify the BGCT, and don't demonize other churches

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As you've likely heard if you're involved in Texas Baptist life, [three churches recently were declared](#) out of "harmonious cooperation" with the Baptist General Convention of Texas during a meeting of the BGCT's Executive Board. This decision, of course, wasn't made unilaterally by the Executive Board. It was the result of [a motion passed in November](#) by messengers to the BGCT annual meeting.



Jake Raabe In other words, no big surprises here; no ambushes. This removal was the necessary result of the motion, and the Executive Board could not reasonably have acted in any other way without working against the wishes of those they represent.

Two camps

Watching the reactions to the removal, I've noticed the responses generally fall within one of two camps. One camp, probably the larger of the two, sees the decision a preservation of the BGCT's commitment to the authority of Scripture. The other camp, a substantial minority, sees the exclusion of

these churches as an attempt to silence or marginalize an oppressed group.

Robert Baird, a member of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, demonstrated this kind of response when he told the [Waco Tribune Herald](#): “Baptist minister and author Will Campbell ... said a time would come when we Baptists would apologize for how we treated homosexuals as we now apologize for how we once treated blacks. ...

’Til that day does come, churches such as Lake Shore in Waco ... will bear the exclusion for what seems to us a matter of love and justice.”

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Amidst these two responses—righteous indignation against those who would compromise a clear teaching of Scripture and righteous indignation at those trying to block the forward-march of social progress—I’d like to propose a third response I believe is more appropriate: Honest, genuine grief.

God’s desire

No matter what side of the same-sex marriage debate you’re on, the breaking of fellowship is a sad thing. Anyone celebrating this decision or gaining a sense of satisfaction from being “on the right side of history”—both of which are reactions I have observed recently—should reread the myriad of passages in the Bible that speak of God’s desire for a unified church.

For the [many benefits](#) of a free-church polity, this is a sad reality. Genuine disagreement by well-intended Christians reading Scripture and listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit will disagree on important issues, and splitting will result. This is as inevitable as it is sad.

The best thing we can do with this unfortunate reality is to mourn it with humility and willingness to listen.

Those churches that affirm same-sex marriage have chosen to do so not because they're flimsy, culture-conforming liberals who despise the word of God; they've done so after much consideration and deliberation. (You actually can see how that process unfolded in Lake Shore's [collection of weekly newsletters](#).) They discussed Scripture. They prayed. In the end, they made the decision they felt was most in line with the example of Christ.

Similarly, for those on the other side: I exhort you not to think those who believe Scripture teaches God reserves sexuality for the context of a heterosexual marriage as heartless or oppressive. These churches, too, have made their decisions based on Scripture and prayer, and they agonize at people's pain and isolation in the same way.

Blessing & curse

We have the same goal, but different understandings of how our shared Master has exhorted us to get there. This is the blessing and curse of Baptist polity: We can disagree, but that disagreement sometimes will lead to painful parting-of-ways.

The BGCT also shouldn't be vilified for this painful separation. The BGCT is not a board of people sitting in a conference room deciding who can and cannot be a Christian. It is a democratic conglomeration of more than 5,000 churches across Texas combining their resources to further God's kingdom. It supports hospitals in third-world countries, advocates for improvements to the Texas foster-care system, and brings the gospel to thousands of people every year who might not hear it otherwise.

The three churches that have been excluded were faithful, participating members who loved the BGCT and are grieving at being excluded for what they feel the Spirit is leading them to do. The BGCT is sad to have to part with them, and they are sad to part with the BGCT.

The situation we're facing is both sad and inevitable. Well-meaning, honest Christians exist on both sides of the debate. The witness of Baptists in Texas rises or falls with the way we treat one another during this debate. Let us pursue every opportunity for understanding and reconciliation and be quick to listen to those who believe differently than we do. Let us still show Christian love to those with whom we disagree.

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