

Resolution on Ecclesiastical Separation and the Southern Baptist Convention

Founded in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention today unites over 47,000 local churches, just over 5,000 domestic missionaries, nearly 4,000 overseas missionaries, 41 state conventions, and over 1,000 other local associations. Church membership totals 14.8 million with weekly attendance at these churches numbering 5.3 million. The national organization administers six seminaries training nearly 23,000 students. In the fiscal year 2017-2018, Southern Baptist churches raised \$9.6 billion, including \$463 million donated to its Cooperative Program.<sup>1</sup>

The Convention's numerical success and widespread influence mirrors that of its most renowned preacher, Evangelist Billy Graham (d. 2018). A favorite son of Southern Baptists, Graham was remembered fondly by the 2018 Convention as "a beloved Southern Baptist who traveled the world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> R. Albert Mohler, President of Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY, also venerated Graham as "a man of deep conviction whose passionate heartbeat was for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Graham delivered the address at Dr. Mohler's inauguration as Seminary President in 1993, and in 2001 Dr. Mohler served as the Chairman of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusade in Louisville, KY. Today, students at Southern are educated at The Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry.

In addition to the Convention's numerical success, Dr. Graham embodied its theology. That theology has included the repudiation of biblical separatism from false teachers. For the Evangelist, a stated concern for winning souls justified the disobedience of ecumenical evangelism. For the Convention, a stated concern for Christian unity has justified the disobedience of denominational loyalty in spite of unpurged errors. Many conservative Southern Baptist leaders even affirm that they are not separatist fundamentalists: "Fundamentalism in religious circles has normally been characterized by separation, that is, departing from or removing oneself from a denomination. Quite obviously, [SBC] conservatives stayed."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net/sbc18/resolutions>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sbts.edu/graham/>

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holdman, 2000), 1. Sutton writes as an apologist for the resurgence. For a thorough response, see George Houghton, "Are Conservative Southern Baptists Fundamentalists?" *Faith Pulpit* (January/February, 2004). See also Larry Oats, "Southern Baptists: What has Changed, What Needs to Change" (unpublished paper presented at the Foundations Baptist Fellowship

This commitment to denominational loyalty continues to require problematic associational toleration and support of serious error by Southern Baptist churches and leaders. The ecumenism of Rick Warren, Russell Moore, and Timothy George, the charismaticism<sup>5</sup> of Matt Chandler, Steven Furtick, and Ronnie Floyd, the female preaching of Beth Moore and Lysa TerKeurst, and the 2019 Convention's embrace of the critical race theory and intersectionality as legitimate "analytical tools" are all representative problems intrinsic to a number of the Convention's churches and leadership. The financial ties of the Cooperative Program, upon which conservative seminaries depend, are funded by the same state conventions that also finance state-controlled Southern Baptist universities with their liberal seminaries. These arrangements violate the command of the New Testament: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 9-10). As one of the forbearers of new evangelicalism's spirit of disobedience to the Bible doctrine of separation, the Convention is comprised of many congregations that exhibit the worldly weakness of this present evil age (Gal. 1:4).<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 78th annual convention, October 22-24, 2019, at Faith Chapel, Carlisle, PA, resolves to warn churches and Christian institutions against the dangers of compromise with and within the Southern Baptist Convention. Although thankful for every instance in which God's blessing overrules man's disobedience in the furtherance of the gospel, our consciences are bound by Scripture. Prior to co-laboring with SBC brethren, our challenge to them should be obedience to the clear command of the Lord: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).



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International's Annual Fellowship on June 13, 2018; audio available at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/preacher/larry-oats/>.

<sup>5</sup> In 2015 the SBC's International Missionary Board began to allow missionaries who speak in tongues, and a 2017 Lifeway Research survey found that 55% of SBC pastors believe that the phenomenon is a gift of the Holy Spirit today.

<sup>6</sup> "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world [age], according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4).