

Southern Baptist Position Statements

Priesthood of All Believers

We affirm the priesthood of all believers. Laypersons have the same right as ordained ministers to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ's name. That is why the Convention requires strong lay involvement on its boards. This doctrine is first and foremost a matter of responsibility and servant-hood, not privilege and license. It is of course, a perversion of this doctrine to say that all views are equally valid, that you can believe anything and still be a Baptist or that the pastor has no unique leadership role.

Soul Competency

We affirm soul competency, the accountability of each person before God. Your family cannot save you. Neither can your church. It comes down to you and God. Authorities can't force belief or unbelief. They shouldn't try.

Against this backdrop of religious freedom, it's important for us Baptists to set forth our convictions. By stating them in a forthright manner, we provide nonbelievers with a clear choice.

Creeds and Confessions

In some groups, statements of belief have the same authority as Scripture. We call this creedalism. Baptists also make statements of belief, but all of them are revisable in light of Scripture. The Bible is the final word.

Because of this distinction, we are generally more comfortable with the word "confession." Still, we are "creedal" in the sense that we believe certain things, express those beliefs and order our institutions accordingly. There have always been Baptist limits. And within these limits, there have always been Baptist preferences.

Women in Ministry

Women participate equally with men in the priesthood of all believers. Their role is crucial, their wisdom, grace and commitment exemplary. Women are an integral part of our Southern Baptist boards, faculties, mission teams, writer pools, and professional staffs. We affirm and celebrate their Great Commission impact.

While Scripture teaches that a woman's role is not identical to that of men in every respect, and that pastoral leadership is assigned to men, it also teaches that women are equal in value to men.

Church and State

We stand for a free church in a free state. Neither one should control the affairs of the other. We support the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, with its "establishment" and "free exercise" clauses.

We do, of course, acknowledge the legitimate interplay of these two spheres. For example, it is appropriate for the state to enact and enforce fire codes for the church nurseries. It is also appropriate for ministers to offer prayer at civic functions. Neither the Constitution nor Baptist tradition would build a wall of separation against such practices as these.

Missions

We ask the people of the world to conform to Christ and His Word, and not to our merely human traditions. We seek to lift up national leadership in the countries where we serve, and to respect the cultural expressions of their faith – we honor the indigenous principle in missions. We cannot, however, compromise doctrine or give up who we are to win the favor of those we try to reach or those with whom we desire to work. This would rob our efforts of their integrity and life.

The priority is evangelism which results in churches. This priority is consistent with strong social ministries, including medical care, emergency famine relief, water projects and agricultural assistance.

Autonomy

We affirm the autonomy of the local church. Each church is free to determine its own membership and to set its own course under the headship of Jesus. It may enter into alliance with other churches as it chooses, so long as those other churches are willing.

The same is true for other Baptist bodies – local associations; state conventions; national conventions. They, too, may determine their membership and set their own course.

If, in its autonomy, a Baptist body expels a church from its fellowship, it does not negate that church's autonomy. The church is perfectly free to go on with its business – but not as a member of that larger Baptist body.

Cooperation

The Cooperative Program of missions is integral to the Southern Baptist genius. In the early days of our Convention, churches were bombarded with special appeals from various mission causes. The material resources of each ministry were dependent upon the persistence and eloquence of the spokesmen. This societal approach to missions was uneven and exhausting.

In 1925, Southern Baptists chose to join the causes of state and national missions in a denominational plan of unified giving. This Cooperative Program laid the foundation for extraordinary growth and fruitfulness. The Partners in the Harvest campaign celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Cooperative Program in the year 2000 with goals of 1 million baptisms, unprecedented volunteer mission involvement, and \$750 million in Cooperative Program and other missions gifts.

Sexuality

We affirm God's plan for marriage and sexual intimacy – one man, and one woman, for life. Homosexuality is not a "valid alternative lifestyle." The Bible condemns it as sin. It is not, however, unforgivable sin. The same redemption available to all sinners is available to homosexuals. They, too, may become new creations in Christ.

Sanctity of Life

Procreation is a gift from God, a precious trust reserved for marriage. At the moment of conception, a new being enters the universe, a human being, a being created in God's image. This human being deserves our protection, whatever the circumstances of conception.