

June 27, 2021

Dear Church Family,

Let me take a moment to say thank you and commend you for your commitment to “the mission.” We affirm that the Lord’s Great Commission demands of us that we actively engage in the concentric circles of our community, our nation, and the far reaches of the world, with the gospel of Jesus. To facilitate this, we intentionally partner with churches of like faith and passion through the Southern Baptist Convention, North Carolina Baptists, and other local churches.

These past weeks, I asked you to pray with me regarding our participation in the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, held in Nashville, Tennessee. It seems appropriate to share with you some of the things we were part of and to offer some perspective on the big issues at hand.

This is not a comprehensive report. Every action and every motion will not be discussed. I am intentionally focusing on some of the more high-profile actions and those that have some cultural implications for us.

You may be asking why we would set aside time for a report on a business meeting and to rehash items that were already reported on in the media. It is important that we can understand the issues of our day.

When David gathered his warriors at Hebron, among them were a group recognized as those with discernment-

1 Chronicles 12:32 (NLT)

³²From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.

We are instructed to speak appropriately and accurately when questioned-

Colossians 4:6 (NASB95)

⁶Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

And, we are called to be vigilant to give an explanation for the things we believe as Christians-

1 Peter 3:15 (NASB95)

¹⁵but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

Highlights:

As a Convention (a more precise term for our partnership than the commonly used term of a denomination) we met, prayed, discussed matters of societal importance and conducted essential business.

- This Convention had nearly sixteen thousand Messengers present and an attendance north of twenty-one thousand overall. This represents the largest Convention in more than twenty-five years.
- We commissioned 64 missionaries to the nations through our International Mission Board. I list this item first because it is the primary purpose of our strategic partnership as part of the Convention.
- As a Convention, we embraced the Vision 2025 proposal from Dr. Floyd and the Executive Committee that focused on 6 key initiatives in five years:
 - Sending 500 more missionaries overseas
 - Adding 5,000 more congregations across North America
 - Calling out the called
 - Reversing the decline in children and teenage baptisms under 18 years of age
 - Increasing giving through the Cooperative Program
 - Prayerfully endeavoring to eliminate all incidents of sexual abuse and racial discrimination among our churches.
- We saw before our eyes that what binds us together as a Convention is plenteous and strong. Much was reported before, during and after the Convention about areas of disagreement. What we saw was a generally sweet spirit of humility and commitment to the Great Commission among people who held varying positions on an array of secondary issues.
- We elected a strongly conservative pastor to lead our Convention. Dr. Ed Litton who pastors Redemption Church in Mobile, AL (<https://goredemption.com>) has served that church for the last 27 years. He is a visionary leader, an encourager, and a friend to churches and church leaders. Dr. Litton was elected on a second ballot against pastor Mike Stone (Senior Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist church, Blackshear, GA, www.ebchurch.net). The first ballot included these men along with Randy Adams (Executive-Director of the Northwest Baptist Convention) and Dr. Albert Mohler (President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), both of whom serve as entity leaders within the SBC. Many in the Press picked up on differences in these godly men and magnified them, seeking to sensationalize what is really nuanced differences on secondary issues. Many supporters of each candidate engaged in a good deal of “mudslinging” before the Convention. Some of it continues even now with the election firmly in the rearview mirror. As far as I can tell from my research along with some personal knowledge of a couple of the candidates, I believe that all four candidates

personally affirm conservative values and views of the Scripture, doctrine, and practices that are characteristic of Baptists. At the same time, these secondary differences were distinct enough to allow Messengers to indicate a mandate. In my assessment, the Messengers indicated that negativity and in-fighting were tired messages and there was a distinct preference of pastors to lead the Convention over entity heads that serve within the SBC structure.

- The Messengers, considering sexual abuse allegations that had come to light in recent years among some SBC churches, charged the incoming President to commission a task force to oversee a third-party independent investigation into the Executive Committee's knowledge of allegation of abuse and response to such claims. The message seemed clear to me: Ensure that justice is secured for any victims and do so in the light of day so that the world sees our commitment to it. This is a good step before a watching world. While every SBC church is independent and autonomous in its governance, our Convention recognizes that every church in our Convention is perceived guilty by Association if we fail to disassociate ourselves with unrepentant congregations that ignore sexual abuse.
- The Messengers took action to stipulate that churches were not to be considered in friendly cooperation with our Convention if they were engaged in unrepentant instances of racial injustice or revealed sexual abuse in their churches. In other words, this action wrote into the requirements of affiliation that a church would not tolerate these things in addition to other areas of doctrinal alignment.
- The Messengers heard 40 proposed resolutions brought before the Convention for consideration. The resolution process is interesting, since no resolutions can be voted on from the floor *per se*; rather, a committee reviews all resolutions and may even modify them for the purpose of clarity. Often times, many resolutions will be combined together. A resolution represents an opinion of the Convention as voiced through its Messengers in a particular gathering. As such, several motions were made to rescind resolutions of previous years, including Resolution 9 of the 2019 Convention that asserted that Critical Race Theory could be a helpful analytical tool subordinate to Scripture. Attempts to rescind previous resolutions (going back to some in the 1800s) were ruled out of order since the resolutions were not binding on present or future Conventions. Again, resolutions state an opinion for the Convention at a point in time as voiced by a group of Messengers.
- The Messengers weighed in on the subject of Critical Race Theory when they passed Resolution 2 which states: ¹

RESOLUTION 2: ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE FOR RACE AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION

WHEREAS, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17); and

WHEREAS, The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 states, “All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy” (Article I); and

WHEREAS, “God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27); and

WHEREAS, “From one man [God] has made every nationality to live over the whole earth” (Acts 17:26); and

WHEREAS, In his prophetic vision John saw “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9-10); and

WHEREAS, “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12); and

WHEREAS, “Through faith [we] are all sons of God in Christ Jesus ... There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28); and

WHEREAS, “God ... has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18); and WHEREAS, The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 states, “Christians should oppose racism” (Article XV); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, June 15–16, 2021, affirm the sufficiency of Scripture on race and racial reconciliation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we reaffirm our agreement with historic, biblically-faithful Southern Baptist condemnations of racism in all forms; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we reject any theory or worldview that finds the ultimate identity of human beings in ethnicity or in any other group dynamic; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we reject any theory or worldview that sees the primary problem of humanity as anything other than sin against God and the ultimate solution as anything other than redemption found only in Christ; and be it further

RESOLVED, We, therefore, reject any theory or worldview that denies that racism, oppression, or discrimination is rooted, ultimately, in anything other than sin; and be it further

RESOLVED, That, understanding we live in a fallen world, we reaffirm the 1995 Resolution On Racial Reconciliation On The 150th Anniversary Of The Southern Baptist Convention, which includes, “That we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27),” applying this disposition to every instance of racism; and be it finally

RESOLVED, We affirm that our reconciliation in Christ gives us the opportunity and responsibility to pursue reconciliation with others so that we can display and share the hope of the gospel with the world.

This resolution may have been one of the most contentious going into the meeting because many messengers simply wanted a resolution that repudiated Critical Race Theory. The Committee explained their rationale that they did not want to limit the action to only CRT/I; rather, they desired for any theory (such as evolutionary theory for instance) to be treated in like manner. The Resolution passed with overwhelming approval of the Messengers.

I believe this was a good and proper decision of the Convention. While I do not believe that I would have affirmed Resolution 9 from 2019, I did not find the mention of CRT/I offensive, or helpful- other than to demonstrate that the SBC was aware and informed about CRT/I and saw it only as helpful insofar as it was subordinate to Scripture and our gospel mandate.

While I am not an expert on CRT/I, I have given myself to read a good deal on it and, having done so, I do not believe that CRT/I is a helpful tool in addressing racism or racial oppression. This view is based, in part, on these five primary tenets of Critical Race Theory:ⁱⁱ

1. Racism is ordinary and not aberrational
2. The idea of an interest convergence
3. The social construction of race
4. The idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling
5. Whites have actually been the recipients of civil rights legislation

Janel George, writing for a publication of the American BAR Association states: ⁱⁱⁱ

CRT is not a diversity and inclusion “training” but a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society that emerged in the legal academy and spread to other fields of scholarship. Crenshaw—who coined the term “CRT”—notes that CRT is not a noun, but a verb. It cannot be confined to a static and narrow definition but is considered to be an evolving and malleable practice. It critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers. CRT also recognizes that race intersects with other identities, including sexuality, gender identity, and others. CRT recognizes that racism is not a bygone relic of

the past. Instead, it acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation.

In my prayerful reading of the subject, while again affirming that I am not an expert in the subject of CRT, I recognize that CRT/I is an academic theory, and, as such, cannot sufficiently bring resolution to the issue of racial disparity and injustice that has occurred and continues to occur today. While I would state that the racial climate of our nation is far better than during or prior to the civil rights era, there is still work to do.

What I do know is this: The gospel, for the people of God, is a unique solution to the issue of racial injustice because it recognizes that sin has been the cause for suffering of all humanity and the Gospel alone has the power to redeem and restore those suffering under the curse of sin. Furthermore, the Gospel compels Christians to seek the welfare of others (Jeremiah 29:4-7) and to subordinate our own personal interests to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3). It calls us to care for the vulnerable and oppressed (James 1:27). It directs us to live out the heart of the Father toward all people, which is indisputably a heart of love and compassion (John 3:16; Matthew 9:36), and a heart of justice for all peoples (Micah 6:8).

Furthermore, I find that it is an error to assert that we should be solely committed to evangelism or solely committed to righting social wrongs. Somehow, God expects and empowers us to address both missions as we “preach and heal” (Matthew 4:23, 10:7-8).

- Another Resolution was passed to abolish Abortion. This resolution was debated extensively and passed in an amended form. Originally, the resolution was submitted in a form that *disavowed any mediate steps of reducing abortions*. In other words, it sought to declare participants in abortion and those who permitted such as committing murder. The Messengers struggled with the language because the resolution would not allow, for instance, a lawmaker to support a partial birth abortion bill or a heartbeat bill since doing so would allow for some abortions to take place, making the lawmaker who stood to restrict abortion, complicit in its existence. The resolution did not allow for any health or welfare exceptions. In the end, the Messengers softened the language and passed the resolution that spoke strongly against abortion by inserting the word “alone” in the second resolve.

Text of Resolution on Abolishing Abortion

As adopted by the SBC annual meeting in Nashville, Tenn., June 16, 2021

WHEREAS, from the moment of fertilization, all humans are created in God’s image by, through, and for Jesus to the glory of God, and all souls belong to Him (Genesis 1:27; 4:1; 21:2; Isaiah 7:14; Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36; Ezekiel 18:4), and

WHEREAS, as God’s image-bearers, all humans both display His divine worth, power, and attributes, and possess equal, objective worth before God, not

varying based on incidental characteristics; such as ethnicity, age, size, means of conception, mental development, physical development, gender, potential, or contribution to society (Rom 1:19-20; Gen 1:27; 9:6; Matthew 18:6), and

WHEREAS, to murder any preborn image-bearer is a sin, violating both the natural law of retributive justice as set forth in the Noahic covenant, as well as the sixth commandment forbidding murder, and as such, is ultimately an assault on God's image, seeking to usurp God's sovereignty as Creator (Gen 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13; Proverbs 6:17), and

WHEREAS, God's Word declares that all human life is a sacred gift and that His Law is supreme over man's life and man's law (Psalm 127:3-5; 139:13-16; Rom 2:15-16; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 1 Corinthians 4:5), and

WHEREAS, God commands His people to "rescue those who are being taken away to death" and holds them responsible and without excuse when they fail to do so (Prov 24:11-12), and

WHEREAS, God establishes all governing authorities as His avenging servants to carry out His wrath on the evildoer, and commands these authorities to judge justly, neither showing partiality to the wicked, nor using unequal standards, which are abominations (Psa 82; Prov 20:10; Rom 13:4), and

WHEREAS, in 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States rendered an iniquitous decision on *Roe v. Wade*, and in doing so deprived the innocent of their rights, and usurped God, who sovereignly ordained their authority (Isa 5:23; 10:1-2; Psa 2; Matt 22:21; John 19:11; Acts 4:19; 5:29, Rom 13:1), and

WHEREAS, in the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Supreme Court of the United States subverted the U.S. Constitution namely, the Preamble, as well as the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments without any legal authority (Article 6, Clause 2 "Supremacy Clause"), and

WHEREAS, governing authorities at every level have a duty before God to uphold justice asserting their God-ordained and constitutional authority to establish equal protection under the law for all, born and preborn, by intervening, ignoring, or nullifying iniquitous decisions when other authorities, such as the Supreme Court, condone such injustices as the legal taking of innocent life (Daniel 3; 1 Kings 12; 2 Kings 11; Jeremiah 26:10-16; 36:9-31; 37:11- 21; 39:7-10), and

WHEREAS, over the past 48 years with 60+ million abortions, traditional Pro-life laws, though well intended, have not established equal protection and justice for the preborn, but on the contrary, appallingly have established incremental,

regulatory guidelines for when, where, why, and how to obtain legal abortion of innocent preborn children, thereby legally sanctioning abortion, and

WHEREAS, since 1980, the SBC has passed many resolutions reaffirming the importance of human life at all stages of development, but we have yet to call for the immediate abolition of abortion without exception or compromise, and

WHEREAS, our confessional statement, The Baptist Faith and Message, according to Article XV, affirms that children “from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord”; and further affirms that Southern Baptists are mandated by Scripture to “speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death,” now, be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the messengers of the SBC meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, June 15-16, 2021, do state unequivocally that abortion is murder, and we reject any position that allows for any exceptions to the legal protection of our preborn neighbors, compromises God’s holy standard of justice, or promotes any God-hating partiality (Psa 94:6; Isa 10:1-2; Prov 24:11; Psa 82:1-4), and be it further

RESOLVED, that we will not embrace an incremental approach alone to ending abortion because it challenges God’s Lordship over the heart and the conscience, and rejects His call to repent of sin completely and immediately (Gen 3:1; John 8:44; Rom 2:14-15; 2 Corinthians 11:3), and be it further

RESOLVED, that we affirm that the murder of preborn children is a crime against humanity that must be punished equally under the law, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we humbly confess and lament any complicity in recognizing exceptions that legitimize or regulate abortion, and of any apathy, in not laboring with the power and influence we have to abolish abortion, and be it further

RESOLVED, that as Southern Baptists we will engage, with God’s help, in establishing equal justice and protection for the preborn according to the authority of God’s Word as well as local and federal law, and call upon pastors and leaders to use their God-given gifts of preaching, teaching, and leading with one unified, principled, prophetic voice to abolish abortion, and be it finally

RESOLVED, that, because abolishing abortion is a Great Commission issue, we must call upon governing authorities at all levels to repent and “obey everything that [Christ] has commanded,” exhorting them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance by faithfully executing their responsibilities as God’s servants of justice, and working with all urgency to enact legislation using the full weight of their office to interpose on behalf of the preborn, abolishing abortion

immediately, without exception or compromise (Mark 6:18; Matt 28:18-20; Rom 13:4, 6).

The general tone of the resolution in my assessment was more “anti-abortion” than “pro-life” and could do more harm to the fight against abortion than good. Southern Baptists are confessionally and practically a vocal pro-life people^{iv}. Tireless efforts to counsel, correct, and change abortion laws are part and parcel of our greater work. I believe that in a system of laws that has determined it legal to terminate the life of the preborn, it is GOOD when restrictions are codified in the law that restrict and reduce the number of abortions.

Friends, let me say unequivocally, I am pro-life. I believe that this is a Gospel issue. I believe that all Christians ought to be concerned with life “from the womb to the tomb” and, therefore, I further believe that the same passion we exhibit, and rightly so, for the unborn should also exist for children who are in abusive relationships, victims of sex trafficking, slavery, genocide, injustice, and other such life stealing schemes of the devil (John 10:10).

I do not believe that laws against abortion will ultimately change the heart of the person considering or engaging in abortion. Abortion advocates agree, regularly citing that to make abortions illegal would only force mothers to have an illegal abortion that is potentially less safe. This does not mean that I would affirm or even appreciate legalized abortion. It simply means that I recognize that the issue is a deeper one of the heart. As such:

- I pray that one day, we will have more pro-life language than anti-abortion language.
- I pray that we, as Christians, will live and work sacrificially and tirelessly to make choices of life easier by making adoption affordable and care for at-risk mothers possible.
- I pray that the church will always be a place where a person shackled in sin can find help and hope in redemption and will experience the grace of God through God’s redeemed people.
- I pray that the lost and those in sin will always be welcome among the people of God and will be lovingly and winsomely (to quote one of my mentors, Dr. Gray Allison) called to repentance so that they can experience the transforming power of the gospel.
- I pray that Christians will be quick to point out the log in our eyes as we help our neighbor with the speck of sawdust in their eyes (Matthew 7:5).
- And, I pray that we will be known for our humility and gentleness of speech with believers and unbelievers alike, as we faithfully call all to live out and experience the power of the gospel.

Other resolutions were considered and passed on a variety of matters including the Hyde Amendment, gratitude to the City of Nashville for their hospitality, and many others.

Summary

I think that pulling together 16,000 people from across as many as 50,000 churches to vote on matters of such public significance is messy, at times inefficient, and the best form of governing that I know. I am a convictional Baptist. I get frustrated with some of what I see and hear at times. I imagine that some feel the same way about me as well.

In the things that matter most, I believe that our Convention is the best there is. Through our Cooperative Program of financial support and our shoulder-to-shoulder partnerships, we fulfill with distinction the shared responsibilities of:

- Theological training and education
- Sending and caring for missionaries
- Providing one of the world's largest disaster and needs-meeting networks
- Care for the most vulnerable through orphan ministry
- Influencing the wider culture by providing ethical and biblical counsel to all three branches of government as well as engaging in the public discourse
- And, providing fellowship, accountability, and doctrinal alignment through our voluntary associational structure

I further think that we have an awesome responsibility to not only continue but *to increase* our efforts in planting churches and sending missionaries throughout the world.

- I look for and pray for the day when we will see dozens of people sent out every year from our church to plant churches and to take the gospel to places in the world where it has yet to be heard.
- I look forward to and pray for the day when we see dozens of young men and women serving through our church as interns as they explore their sense of calling to full-time ministry.
- I look forward to and pray for the day when we embrace the cause of adoption, fostering, and child advocacy in such a way that not one child in our area sleeps in an orphanage, but enjoys the stability of a loving home of Christ-followers from Englewood who will care for them and love them to Jesus.
- I look for and pray for the day when hundreds more families find their place among the family of Englewood and return the locus of biblical discipleship to the kitchen table, the living room, the back yard, and the family vacation.
- I look for and pray for the day when our church is known across our city and across surrounding cities as the most generous, most caring, most loving, most humble, most actively engaged, and most giving people they know.
- I look for and pray for the day when we will all stand before Christ and can say that we left nothing, not one thing undone, and we hear those words- Well done, good and faithful servant.

While I cannot and do not represent that I speak for the whole of Southern Baptists, nor do I claim responsibility to influence the larger Convention or even the onlooking world, I do hope that this report from pastor to people will be received as a faithful reflection of what I saw and heard personally at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2021. I hope that the readers will review this with great charity toward me as one is limited in the ability to communicate “heart intent” in the medium of print. I further hope that this reflection will encourage those I serve in their affiliation with the SBC and that my vision will inspire us to undertake the weighty task before us as we continue to love and lead like Jesus in a world that is confessionally at odds with most things we believe, desire, and work for. I also hope that questions to this report will be addressed biblically to me first along with biblical rationale for any areas of disagreement. Holy Scripture is inspired. This report is not. I can be corrected if it is demonstrated that I have understood these matters wrongly.

Until such time as we are gathered home to meet King Jesus face to face, let’s commit ourselves to the task before us and continue pressing on toward the upward call in Christ Jesus.

With abiding affection,
Pastor Chris

ⁱ Underlining is added for emphasis and clarity.

ⁱⁱ These tenets are articulated well in a paper written by Nicholas Daniel Hartlep, a PhD candidate at the time of authorship, in his literature review of the subject as part of his work toward his degree from the University of Wisconsin in Urban Education and Social Foundations of Education.

ⁱⁱⁱ George, Janel. “A Lesson on Critical Race Theory” published January 12, 2021, in Human Rights Magazine, Vol. 46, No.2: Civil Rights Policing, by the American Bar Association on their public website.

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/, accessed June 26, 2021. George notes that some of the key features/tenets of CRT include (but are not limited to): (1) Recognition that race is not biologically real but is socially constructed and socially significant. It recognizes that science (as demonstrated in the Human Genome Project) refutes the idea of biological racial differences. According to scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, race is the product of social thought and is not connected to biological reality. (2) Acknowledgement that racism is a normal feature of society and is embedded within systems and institutions, like the legal system, that replicate racial inequality. This dismisses the idea that racist incidents are aberrations but instead are manifestations of structural and systemic racism. (3) Rejection of popular understandings about racism, such as arguments that confine racism to a few “bad apples.” CRT recognizes that racism is codified in law, embedded in structures, and woven into public policy. CRT rejects claims of meritocracy or “colorblindness.” CRT recognizes that it is the systemic nature of racism that bears primary responsibility for reproducing racial inequality. (4) Recognition of the relevance of people’s everyday lives to scholarship. This includes embracing the lived experiences of people of color, including those preserved through storytelling, and rejecting deficit-informed research that excludes the epistemologies of people of color.

^{iv} See <https://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html>, for a list of resolutions considered and passed by previous Conventions.