

**Statement Concerning the Fundamentalist  
Takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention**

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## THE ROCK WHENCE WE ARE HEWN

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs, in Chapter 1 ("The Rock Whence We Are Hewn") of his book, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (1971), wrote that "the distinctive belief held by Baptists . . . is 'the competency of the soul in religion.'" He quoted E. Y. Mullins that "this means a competency under God, not . . . in the sense of human self-sufficiency."

Soul competency, of course, is the bedrock Baptist principle, grounded in God's word, of the priesthood of the believer. It is "the presence of the indwelling Christ through the person of the Holy Spirit who guides believers into all spiritual truth."

Dr. Hobbs then predicted that "the only thing that would divide Southern Baptists with regard to their faith would be for one group—to the right or left of center or even in the center—to attempt to force upon others a credal faith. So long as they hold to the competency of the soul in religion they will remain as one body in the faith."

In today's Southern Baptist Convention, the "priesthood of the believer"—that "distinctive belief held by Baptists"—is an anachronism, having long since yielded to the creed demanded by the Fundamentalists who control it.

## ORIGIN OF SBC "CONTROVERSY"

In a May 1986 address to Sunday School Board employees, retired President James L. Sullivan told of a 1970 conference with an associate editor of a magazine in an eastern state. Sullivan had requested the conference, because the magazine was publishing things that Sullivan knew "weren't precisely true." (**Please see attached article, "James L. Sullivan addresses question of SBC turbulence," *Facts and Trends* magazine, July-August 1986.**)

This conference took place in 1970 — 9 years before the SBC controversy became public. The man complained about the system of electing trustees of Baptist agencies and institutions. He blatantly warned Sullivan, "We're going to do whatever it takes to take over the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, and we intend to do it as quickly as it can be accomplished."

Their strategy? "We're going to organize the losers of every election and cause of Southern Baptist history we can identify. . . . Winners soon forget but losers never do." As Sullivan explained, "He felt if they could identify and organize [*all of*] the losers, they would have the majority."

When Sullivan asked the man what issue he and his cohorts planned to use to take over the SBC, he replied, "We haven't picked it yet, but when we pick it, it will be one that no one can give rebuttal to without hopelessly getting himself into controversy."

How can we believe current SBC leaders that the Fundamentalist takeover was about the Bible rather than a naked grab for power? The takeover plan *preceded* the issue.

## ISSUE CHOSEN: *INERRANCY*

Several years ago, Dr. James C. Denison, now pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, carefully studied the history and usage of the word *inerrancy*. Noting that its proponents had used the word "in such divergent and contradictory ways that, in 1978, some 300 scholars gathered . . . to attempt a general definition of the term,"

Dr. Denison identified "at least eight different definitions . . . in the works of leading conservative scholars." He also identified 14 "very important qualifications" to which *inerrantists* subject their selected definitions. (**Please see attached article, "Inerrancy: Definitions and Qualifications," *Texas Baptists Committed*, July 1994.**) Again, keep in mind that these definitions and qualifications are those used by *inerrantists* themselves.

### Definitions

These definitions range from the rigid definition of "material" *inerrancy* to the flexible definition of "purposive" *inerrancy*. "Material" *inerrancy* states that "scripture does not lie or deceive or err in any assertion it makes." Proponents of this definition claim for the Bible what it does not claim for itself. On the other hand, "purposive," or "intentional," *inerrancy* asserts that "the Bible is *inerrant* in accomplishing its intended purpose" but does not claim to speak without error in areas such as science, history, or geography, because the Bible's purpose doesn't extend to these disciplines.

Perhaps even more flexible, depending on its application, is the definition of "general" *inerrancy*, which—according to Clark Pinnock—"simply means that the Bible can be trusted in what it teaches and affirms."

### Qualifications

Dr. Denison also identifies 14 qualifications that various *inerrantists* assign to the word *inerrancy*. He attributes most of them to "The Inerrancy of Scripture," written by Robert Preus, whom he identifies as "a strong defender of 'material' *inerrancy*." Dr. Denison states that even the strictest *inerrantists*—those who adhere to the "material" definition—"accept several very important qualifications to their definition."

As with the definitions, the nature of these qualifications ranges far and wide. *Inerrantists* cite them to admit and excuse the following problems, among others:

- Imprecise quotation of Old Testament scripture by New Testament writers
- Language that is scientifically imprecise
- Disagreement between "parallel accounts of the same event"
- Apparent contradictions between scriptures

Is *inerrancy* a legitimate issue, or is it a meaningless buzzword intended to both hide its proponents' doubts about the Bible and trap its critics in an endlessly whirling vortex of confusion and controversy?

The key to such a discussion, however, is the one qualification to which all *inerrantists* adhere: namely, that the principle of *inerrancy* "applies only to the original manuscripts of the Bible, not to the copies we possess today."

In other words, no *inerrantist* claims that the Bible we use today is *inerrant*. If *inerrancy* applies only to manuscripts to which we will never have access, how credible is it as a test of our faith? If even *inerrantists* disagree among themselves concerning the definition of *inerrancy* and the qualifications to which it should be subjected, how can they credibly use this word as a test of a person's faith?

If I accept the *inerrantists'* assertion that the original manuscripts were *inerrant*, but our Bible today is not, I must conclude that the Bible that I study today is less reliable and trustworthy than the original. Does the person in the pew realize that *inerrantists* believe that the Bible that we have today is not the Bible that God intended us to have?

Not a single *inerrantist* preaches directly from one of the "autographs," or original manuscripts, of the Bible. If an *inerrantist* truly believes, as many claim—that one single error brings the whole of God's word into question—how can he then preach from that Bible that he waves from the pulpit every Sunday, which must be—according to his selected definition and qualifications—fatally flawed?

Only by refusing to inform the person in the pew that the *inerrancy* debate has nothing to do with the Bible that the parishioner carries to church with him—that's how!

### **WHO HAS MOVED—BGCT OR SBC?**

One pastor has expressed a "deep concern with recent decisions in our state convention" and asked that his church "evaluate carefully" its relationship to the BGCT. His concern is certainly no greater than my dismay over SBC decisions for the past 20 years, or my loss of trust in the Cooperative Program because of the character of those who now administer it. Yet I have never asked that my church "evaluate carefully" its relationship to the SBC. Such action would have left many people in our church with nowhere to turn. By the same token, if our church were to end or diminish its affiliation with the BGCT in favor of the Fundamentalist Southern Baptists of Texas, Joanna and I would be left with nowhere to turn.

In the past 20 years, the BGCT has not moved one iota. It stands in the same place as it did before the takeover began. Its commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the authority of God's word is the same as it was in 1979. It is the SBC that has moved. So why should we now be concerned about the BGCT rather than the SBC?

The leadership of the SBC and that of the BGCT agree on much but diverge in one area. Both proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour; both proclaim the deity of Christ; both proclaim salvation through grace; both proclaim the authority of God's Word; and, regardless of scurrilous accusations that the Fundamentalists have slung at the BGCT, both proclaim the sanctity of life and the sinfulness of homosexual behavior.

So where do they *differ*? Fundamentalists seek to control anything and anyone with which they are involved. Moderates seek to cooperate and to share authority and responsibility. SBC leaders refuse to name, to any leadership role—whether it be agency head, institutional trustee, or seminary professor—anyone who refuses to accept their monolithic interpretation of certain scriptures (and the list of such scriptures grows annually) and their specific terminology ("*inerrancy*") regarding the Bible.

BGCT leaders nevertheless continue to name *inerrantists*—those who are in sympathy with the SBC leadership and its Fundamentalist wing—to Texas agencies and institutions.

The only reason that Fundamentalists decided to break away from the BGCT was that they could not control it. They do not want to participate in any effort that they cannot control. It is as simple as that.

## Latter-Day Pharisees

Jesus leveled his strongest condemnation at the religious leaders of his day—particularly the Pharisees—who had put the law before grace. They had burdened the law with numerous requirements that were not from God. Today's Pharisees lead the SBC. They have burdened God's Holy Word with legalisms that are not from God.

Believe this. Profess that. Historically, Baptists have believed that loyalty to Christ (remember the old hymn?) is a matter of the heart and must never be coerced. However, the leaders of the SBC demand that any seminary professor or institutional trustee (will pastors be next?) proclaim loyalty to them—because they are in control—as the price of his or her position. As the chairman of the Southwestern Seminary trustees declared after they had fired Russell Dilday, they had the votes, so they didn't have to explain anything. ***Might makes right!*** Well, Jesus's words condemn the behavior of these "blind guides" just as He condemned the behavior of the Pharisees. There is no difference.

Fundamentalists continue to add to the number of scriptures where Southern Baptists are no longer permitted to listen to the indwelling Holy Spirit. The amendment to the ***Baptist Faith and Message***, concerning the submission of wives to their husbands, is only the latest example. These passages in ***Ephesians*** must now be interpreted as declaring that the husband is in a place of authority over his wife. In a stark example of the intellectual dishonesty of the Fundamentalist leadership of the SBC, the scripture passage cited in the amendment begins with ***Ephesians*** 5:22 and omits verse 21—"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." It did not fit their agenda.

So who really believes the Bible? Prooftexters who wield a cut-and-paste Bible to advance their own agenda? Or those who believe in the whole Bible, where one scripture informs another?

Ordination of women is another issue on which the SBC leadership now demands a single interpretation: namely, prohibiting such ordination. So a congregation claims it is following a strict literal interpretation of ***1 Timothy*** 3:12 ("Let deacons be the husband of one wife") by refusing to ordain women—yet turns around and ordains men who are not married? Bible-believing Baptists are not permitted to inform their understanding of ***1 Timothy*** 3:12 with ***Galatians*** 3:28—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In our Sunday School classes, we deride the Pharisees because they elevated the law over grace. Similarly, we ridicule the Jews of Jesus's day for their demand that God's promised Messiah bring political deliverance and power over their oppressors. We smirk at their confusion over God bringing Jesus to them humbly in a manger in a stable.

Then we hail a group that has seized power and promises us a Christian nation in which Christians will wield power over their perceived "oppressors." How sad. How hypocritical. How unlike the Christ whom we proclaim to worship. How can we so clearly see the speck in their eyes yet ignore the log in our own?

The church of Jesus Christ must proclaim God's word prophetically to a lost world. To do that, we must be spiritually subject to no man but only to "the presence of the indwelling Christ through the person of the Holy Spirit who guides believers into all spiritual truth." The church must speak from a position of spiritual authority. Spiritual authority is incompatible with the exercise of political power.

Shall we align ourselves with those who seek to exercise power over our interpretation of God's word, thus usurping the divine role of the Holy Spirit?

## A MORAL ISSUE

This is a moral issue. The Fundamentalist leaders of the SBC, and their henchmen, have sought to destroy the lives, careers, and ministries of numerous Bible-believing and Bible-preaching ministers of the Gospel, and seminary professors and administrators, merely because those dear souls refused to profess loyalty to their leadership. Faithful souls, called by God, had the audacity to hold fast to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit within them rather than bow to the shrill, bombastic tones blaring from the self-proclaimed high priests of the SBC.

The SBC cemetery is strewn with their bones. Russell Dilday, Roy Honeycutt, Molly Marshall, to name but a few. Was God's kingdom served by the actions taken against these people? Or were the SBC leaders simply serving themselves?

Would a pastor countenance a movement against him because he interpreted a scripture contrary to the interpretation of a few shrill voices within the congregation? How can he then countenance the character assassination carried out against Russell Dilday, Roy Honeycutt, Molly Marshall, Jimmy Allen, James Dunn, Foy Valentine—all faithful servants of our Lord—simply because they refused to bow down to a false god? Simply because they insisted on listening to the indwelling Holy Spirit? If, however, such a pastor leads his church away from the Baptist General Convention of Texas and toward the Fundamentalist Southern Baptists of Texas, these questions would become moot. His answers would be self-evident.

## SUMMARY

It has been said that great evils are often perpetrated because good people remain silent. Many Southern Baptist churches now find themselves at a crossroads. As I wrote earlier, this is a moral issue. The Fundamentalists have blasphemously perpetrated great evils in the holy name of Jesus Christ. We can remain silent and accommodate them—and thereby share in responsibility for those deeds—or we can stand for Christ against them. We can participate in their defense of the meaningless—yet divisive—word *inerrancy*, or we can live the truths of the Bible. Our witness is worthless—even blasphemous—if we go to tell others of Christ but fail to take His spirit and His character with us as we go. We must go in love and in truth—or not at all. My father, a minister of the Gospel who has spent a lifetime committed to Christ in the areas of evangelism and missions, once wrote that what we call the 'Great Commission' was actually one of many great commissions that Jesus gave.

I take this stand not to oppose any man but to follow God. I take this stand because I love God, I love His precious Son, I love His word, and I love His church.

## **Attachments**

- 1. "James L. Sullivan addresses question of SBC turbulence," *Facts and Trends* magazine, July-August 1986**
- 2. "Inerrancy: Definitions and Qualifications," *Texas Baptists Committed*, July 1994**