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Frank Page sets 'biblical vision'

By Erin Roach & Mark Kelly
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Executive Committee (EC) members, Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entity heads and other guests gathered in Nashville, Tenn., Feb. 21 to inaugurate Frank Page as the SBC Executive Committee's sixth president.

Page officially assumed the position Oct. 1 after serving 30 years as a pastor and in various denominational roles, including SBC president. Guests were led in worship in the Van Ness Auditorium at LifeWay Christian Resources by Travis Cottrell, and several of Page's

colleagues spoke and prayed for him. Roger Spradlin, chairman of the Executive Committee, presented Page and his wife Dayle with a certificate of inauguration, listing his many accomplishments within the Southern Baptist Convention through the years.

"Frank has a pastor's heart," Spradlin said. "He served as a pastor for many, many years. He loves pastors. He understands pastors. He has a deep commitment to help pastors in their tasks in the local church."

Page also has the heart of an evangelist, said Spradlin, pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, Calif. "Frank regularly shares his faith. You can ask

him anytime to share a story with you, and he will share a very current story, just something that happened in the last few days or few weeks at the most, of sharing his faith. And he encourages everyone around him to do so as well," Spradlin said.

Page delivered a statement of his vision for the office, saying he wants to have priorities that would please the Lord.

"I speak to you tonight about a simple, biblical vision that I think the Lord brought to my heart," Page said, pointing to Genesis 12, the passage

(See Frank Page Page 6)



BR photo by Dianna L. Cagle

PETITIONING — Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee members pray over Frank and Dayle Page.



Photo by Greg Schneider

MEETING — NAMB church planting missionary Howard Burkhart, right, holds a church planting strategy session in Walnut Creek, Calif., with Brazilian couple Wanderley and Claudia Alvares. Burkhart is one of the Week of Prayer missionaries for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. He and his ministry in California is highlighted in a video available at www.youtube.com/biblicalrecorder.

Mississippi couple minister in Calif.'s vast mission field

By Mickey Noah
NAMB

Attending a beginning sign language course as part of the deaf ministry at 38th Avenue Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., in 1979, Howard Burkhart III liked his teacher so much he married her.

Because of Tina McMillan (Burkhart) and her attentive pupil, Howard — both students at the University of Southern Mississippi at the time — untold hundreds of the hearing and hearing-impaired from Mississippi to California have not only been taught how to communicate, but how to accept Christ as their Savior.

Today, the Burkharths' ministry — based in Benicia, Calif., just north of San Francisco — extends far beyond the deaf community, although that

remains their first love. Howard, 52, is a church planting strategist in the San Francisco Bay and San Diego areas and a jointly funded missionary for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the California Southern Baptist Convention.

In fact, Howard and Tina are only two of more than 5,000 missionaries in the United States, Canada and their territories supported by the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® (AAEO) for North American Missions. They are among the missionaries featured as part of the annual Week of Prayer, March 6-13, 2011. Visit www.anniearmstrong.com for resources.

With a theme of "Start Here," the 2011 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering's goal is \$70 million, 100 percent of which benefits missionaries like the Burkharths.

(See Mississippi Page 7)

Some Baptists seek preparation for Easter Sunday

By Robert Dilday & Ken Camp
Associated Baptist Press

Easter Sunday — the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ — is for Christians the culmination of their community life, expressing the heart of their faith. But among Baptists and other evangelicals, an intentional period of preparation for their holiest day is often understated or absent — in contrast to Christmas, the other great Christian observance, typically the focus of elaborate church festivities for weeks prior to Dec. 25.

Many Baptists are seeking to reclaim that pre-Easter focus — historically called Lent — which has been an integral part of many Christians' experience since the earliest years of the church.

"It's a biblical thing, not a made-up Catholic thing," says Kyle Henderson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Athens, Texas, acknowledging a robust Baptist suspicion of spiritual practices seen as too closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church or its distant cousins, the Anglicans.

Lost treasure

Some Baptists say they sense those suspicions — in part a legacy of the Protestant Reformation — have left them with a diminished spiritual vocabulary.

"There is an uneasy sense that something got lost," says Phyllis Tickle, whose 2008 book, *The Great Emergence*, chronicles the blurring of denominational distinctions in late 20th- and early 21st-century American Christianity.

Every 500 years or so, says Tickle, the church metaphorically holds a great rummage sale, "getting rid of the junk that we believe no longer has value and finding treasures stuck in the attic because we didn't want them or were too naïve to know their true worth."

The Reformation was one of those rummage sales and the current "great convergence" is another, she maintains. For evangelicals, the long-forgotten treasures in the attic include a wide array of spiritual disciplines — including Lent — with roots in the church's first centuries.

For Sterling Severns, discovering Lent and other

(See Some Baptists Page 6)

Border violence prompts decline in mission trips

By John Hall

Associated Baptist Press

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (ABP) — Violence between drug cartels in Mexican border towns has cut into the number of mission trips in the area. In some cases, it has led church groups, even those who have served in the area for years, to cancel trips to sites on the Texas side of the border as well.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas encourages groups who want to serve along the Texas-Mexico border to minister on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, said Daniel Rangel, director of Texas Baptists' River Ministry.

A few teams have chosen to serve in Mexico. The BGCT requires those who want to minister there to spend their evenings on the Texas side of the border if they want the convention's assistance in facilitating the groups' efforts.

Despite the encouragement to serve in Texas, some areas in South Texas have seen a significant drop in the number of mission teams serving, and the overall number of mission teams through River Ministry has decreased since the Mexico border violence broke out.

In the past, River Ministry facilitated 50 El Paso mission teams in a typical year. Last year, it helped seven. The number of trips working through the Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association has been cut in half to 25.

As a result of the border violence, a number of Mexico-based ministry agencies have partnered with Buckner International, increasing the number of mission groups Buckner expects to facilitate in 2011, said Jorge Zapata,

Helpful tips for border missions

Leaders of mission work along the Texas-Mexico border shared several helpful hints for volunteers who feel called to share the hope of Christ in the region through mission trips:

- **Work on the Texas side of the border.** Although drug cartel violence has not ravaged the entire Mexico side of the border, organizations continue urging mission teams to work along the Texas side of the border where the physical and spiritual needs remain great, and the region is safe.

- **Partner with trusted organizations.** There are a multitude of churches and ministry organizations along the Texas border. Choosing an organization that is known and trusted like those supported by Texas Baptists' Cooperative Program giving — Texas Baptists' River Ministry, Buckner International and Valley Baptist Missions Education Center — helps church groups know they will be well taken care of and put in a position where they can have a long-lasting impact for God's kingdom.

- **Listen to local leaders and organizers and do as they say.** Local residents and ministries know the area better than visitors coming into it. While the Texas border remains safe, it is always important to remain in areas organized have already scouted. It not only does it keep teams safe, but also enables them to work together better and accomplish the task at hand.

- **Consider staying at a Christian retreat center.** There are several retreat centers along the Texas border designed to host mission teams. Many of them — like Valley Baptist Missions Education Center — can help connect mission teams with projects, provide three full meals each day to each trip participant and allow space for teams to debrief at the end of the day — all at prices drastically lower than what it would cost to stay at a hotel and eat at restaurants. And the money spent at these retreat centers is invested back into ministry and mission efforts.

- **Expect God to work before a trip, during the trip and after it.** Missions leaders believe people along the border are more open to the gospel than they typically are because of the violence on the other side of the border. Organizers encourage team members to prepare themselves through prayer and studying the Bible before the trip, during the trip and long after the trip finishes. God will change the lives of people mission volunteers encounter along the border, mission leaders said. Lives of volunteers also may be changed.

director of Buckner International's colonies program.

Congregations are choosing not to minister along the border as a result of the reports of violence in Mexico border towns, Rangel said. Although

River Ministry, Buckner and Valley Baptist Missions Education Center have facilitated mission trips throughout the Texas side of the border without incident, some church members and leaders

are hesitant to undertake mission work there.

Some churches try to put together teams, but find people aren't willing to go to the border because of safety concerns, ministry leaders said. Some churches plan to do mission trips to the border, but volunteers to go on the trips never materialize.

"I think everybody has great intentions," said Jamie Campbell, facilities manager at Valley Baptist Missions Education Center. "Their heart says we have served in the Valley or served along the border before, and they want to go again. They say let's go ahead and plan like we've always done before. I think what's happening is the mission teams aren't stepping up."

Many border mission teams traditionally have been made up of youth, and parents do not want to take a chance sending their children to the border.

Texas border ministry leaders said they understand church members' concerns, but they quickly note the Texas side of the border is as safe as any large Texas city — and probably more so. Texas Baptist ministries particularly are careful about the situations in which they place volunteers, attempting to place people where they can minister safely.

"As a parent, I understand the concern about sending your child down," Campbell said.

"What they have to realize is none of us would put your children in a situation where there is any danger. We simply wouldn't do that. It wouldn't be responsible."

(EDITOR'S NOTE — Hall writes for Texas Baptist Communications.)

Multicultural ministry focus of online survey

BSC Communications

With North Carolina being home to 234 language groups, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) recognizes the growing diversity of the state's population, and its multicultural ministries team is working to help churches across the state better understand how to minister to such a population.

In an effort to increase ministry effectiveness in diverse communities and among different people groups, the BSC wants to help churches and associations develop a multicultural ministry strategy.

To do this, the BSC needs to hear from the churches and associations about the challenges they face in multicultural ministry, as well as how they currently seek to engage in this ministry.

A survey is now online (<http://survey.swbts.edu/cgi-bin/rws3.pl?FORM=KingdomFocusedSurvey>) that asks churches to weigh in on these questions.

Any North Carolina Baptist, whether church staff or laity, is encouraged to participate.

The survey only takes about five minutes.

"We are hopeful that as this survey gives us a better idea of specific multicultural needs in our state we will be able to come alongside churches and help them be intentional in doing multicultural ministry in their local context," said Ken Tan, multicultural ministries team leader.

"Ultimately, our goal is to reach all people groups in North Carolina with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

For more information about the survey or multicultural ministry call (800) 395-5102, ext. 5641, or e-mail ktan@ncbaptist.org.

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f t y

Elliff nominated as IMB president

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Thomas (Tom) D. Elliff, longtime Oklahoma pastor, Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leader and former missionary, is the unanimous recommendation of a 15-member trustee search committee to be the next president of International Mission Board (IMB).

The nomination of Elliff — who served as a missionary to Zimbabwe with his wife, Jeannie, in the early 1980s — will be presented to the full board of trustees for consideration and a possible vote when they meet March 15-16 in Dallas.

If elected, Elliff would succeed Jerry Rankin, who retired July 31, 2010, after 17 years as president. The IMB coordinates the work of more than 5,000 Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide. Veteran missionary and Executive

Vice President Clyde Meador currently serves as interim president.

IMB Trustee Chairman Jimmy Pritchard, who has led the presidential search committee throughout its selection process, announced the nomination Feb. 17. He said Elliff emerged as the committee's clear and unanimous choice in January.

Elliff, 66, a Texas native, was twice elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, in 1996 and 1997, and also served as president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1990. He has led several key churches in the denomination, including First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., where he was pastor for 20 years.

He most recently served as IMB senior vice president for spiritual nurture and church relations from 2005-2009.

S. Bapt. membership down; figures show still No. 2

By Richard Yeakley
Religion News Service

While mainline Protestant churches in the U.S. continue to experience decades-long decline, the memberships of Pentecostal traditions are on the rise, according to new figures compiled by the National Council of Churches (NCC).

The Roman Catholic Church (No. 1) and the Southern Baptist Convention (No. 2) are still significantly larger than all other North American denominations, but Catholics posted minimal growth of less than 1 percent, and Southern Baptist membership fell for a third straight year, according to the 2011 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches.

The yearbook is considered one of the most reliable recorders of church membership. The figures in the 2011 yearbook were compiled by churches in 2009, reported to the NCC in 2010 and released Feb. 14.

Mainline Protestant churches that have seen a fall in membership since the 1970s continued their decline; the Presbyterian Church (USA) reported the greatest membership drop (2.6 percent) of the 25 largest denominations.

The membership declines in mainline churches led to a 1 percent decrease in total U.S. church membership, to 145.8 million. Despite the national decline, some smaller denominations' memberships are increasing.

"Churches which have been increasing in membership in recent years

continue to grow and likewise, those churches which have been declining in recent years continue to decline," writes Eileen Lindner, the yearbook's editor.

Pentecostal churches make up four of the 25 largest churches, and both the Assemblies of God and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) increased in membership. Only six of the 25 largest memberships increased over the previous year. Jehovah's Witnesses experienced the greatest growth percentage overall, gaining 4.37 percent.

The 10 largest Christian bodies reported in the 2011 yearbook are:

1. The Catholic Church: 68.5 million, up 0.57 percent.

2. Southern Baptist Convention: 16.1 million, down .42 percent.

3. The United Methodist Church: 7.8 million, down 1 percent.

4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 6 million, up 1.42 percent.

5. The Church of God in Christ: 5.5 million, no membership updates reported.

6. National Baptist Convention, USA: 5 million, no membership updates reported.

7. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: 4.5 million, down 1.96 percent.

8. National Baptist Convention of America: 3.5 million, no membership updates reported.

9. Assemblies of God: 2.9 million, up .52 percent.

10. Presbyterian Church (USA): 2.7 million, down 2.61 percent.



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Around the state



Obituary

ROBERT D. CROWLEY, 80, died Feb. 14.

Crowley was a former trustee of Southeastern Seminary who was instrumental in Paige Patterson's election as president in 1992. He was on Southeastern's trustee board from 1985-95 and chairman from 1987-90.

Crowley was pastor emeritus of Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md., where he served from 1956 until his retirement in 1995.

Crowley is survived by his wife of more than 60 years, Elizabeth "Libby" Crowley; two daughters, Kathleen Coley and Christine Elizabeth Crowley; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His son-in-law, Ken Coley, is professor of education and leadership at SEBTS.



Homecoming

CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH, Hildebran, is celebrating its 50th anniversary March 27.

Morning service starts at 11 a.m. and will be followed by lunch in the fellowship hall. A remembrance service is set at 2 p.m. Contact: Priscilla Stirewalt at (828) 397-6257.

'Why is my church news not here?'

The *Biblical Recorder* is pleased to print significant news from the churches, but our staff relies on our churches and associations to send us information.



Accuracy and timeliness are enhanced if you send the information to the *Biblical Recorder* as soon as it is available (generally within two weeks after the event).

For e-mail submissions, send announcements and digital pictures as an attachment to dianna@biblicalrecorder.org.

Or, send to *Biblical Recorder*, P.O. Box 18808, Raleigh, NC 27619.



Opportunity Corner

Presentations focus on mental health

CareNet is hosting four presentations to highlight church's ministry of mental health and wellness.

CareNet wants to help churches by providing resources for sermon preparation, pastoral care, education and spiritual practices. May is mental health month.

• **March 16** — First Baptist Church, Fayetteville; fellowship hall; 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.; lunch served (register by March 9)

• **March 17** — First Baptist Church,

Wilmington; activity center; 9:30-11:30 a.m.; breakfast served (register by March 10)

• **March 18** — Oakmont Baptist Church, Greenville; fellowship hall; 9:30-11:30 a.m.; breakfast served (register by March 11)

• **March 29** — First Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem; fellowship hall; 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.; lunch served (register by March 22).

To register, contact Bryan Hatcher at bhatcher@wfubmc.edu.

Camp Mundo Vista seeks volunteers

On Sat., March 26, volunteers will gather at Camp Mundo Vista near Asheboro to help with maintenance and cleaning around the Woman's Missionary Union of North Carolina's camp.

All skill levels are needed. Work includes yard work, tree cutting, minor repairs, painting, window washing and cleaning as well as general cleaning. Bring gloves, rakes, leaf blowers, chain-saws or other personal tools.

Volunteers begin at 9 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. Lunch is provided.

Call the camp office by March 20 to provide number of volunteers: (336) 625-4828.

LifeWay trustees discuss economy

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, voiced gratitude and enthusiasm for the Southern Baptist entity's continued ministry, in addressing LifeWay trustees' semiannual meeting Feb. 14.

Relaying a "progress report" of LifeWay's ministry and business components, Rainer noted that the organizational changes at the executive level approved by trustees last September "have gone exceptionally well."

"From my perspective, the new leadership structure has allowed the team to function in ways and at different levels than the first five years of my tenure," Rainer said. "From day one, LifeWay's executive team has been healthy, has thrived as a result of the change and is taking LifeWay into Rainer highlighted several partnerships, events, initiatives and products:

- Transformational Church, which continues to have momentum and growth as a key ministry tool for churches and other organizations (www.transformationalchurch.net).

- A forthcoming small group curriculum that Rainer said will be "theologically robust, Christ-centered, mission-driven and focused on the grand narrative of scripture."

- "Secret Church" simulcasts with David Platt (www2.lifeway.com/secretchurch/?CID=RDR-SecretChurch).

- LifeWay Women.

- Sherwood Pictures and "Courageous," an upcoming film about fatherhood and faith, to be released in September.

- Partnership opportunities between LifeWay and the North American Mission Board to maximize ministry potential for both entities.

Finance and business services

Jerry Rhyne, LifeWay's CFO and vice president of finance and business services division, gave an overview of the challenges LifeWay continues to face in the economic uncertainty.

Drawing information from several research surveys, Rhyne said there "has been an uptick in optimism" regarding the economic outlook. However, he noted that based on LifeWay Research's updated findings, the economic declines experienced in the overall business community have now hit churches in a more significant way, with 79 percent of churches reporting a negative impact from the economic downturn.

Rhyne reported that LifeWay ended 2010 with no surprises and, thus far after the first quarter of 2011, LifeWay's operations have performed about as expected, with revenues being slightly behind plan but above last year.

Although still early in the year, encouraging signs are seen at LifeWay's Ridgecrest Conference Center due to several large national events at the conference center located near Asheville. Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico continues to be a challenge in the weak economic climate, Rhyne said, but the new operational model "is now

totally in place and strong registration for summer youth events and camps is also encouraging."

LifeWay Christian Stores

LifeWay Christian Stores reached a significant milestone of service and ministry in 2010 — its 85th anniversary celebration. The retail ministry of LifeWay began in 1925 with the purchase of Baptist Book Concern in Louisville, Ky., and now reaches 27 states with more than 160 locations.

"Our heritage is an amazing story of providing products and services that help bring about spiritual transformation," said Mark Scott, vice president of LifeWay's retail division.

Scott indicated the stores are off to a "solid start" in the new fiscal year, despite the challenges of the economy and an unusually heavy dose of inclement winter weather.

Research/ministry development

Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and ministry development, shared with trustees his division's objective of "becoming the industry and ministry leader in knowledge-based resourcing."

In addition to serving churches within the Southern Baptist Convention, Stetzer reported on top-tier initiatives that serve churches in other evangelical circles, with LifeWay Research providing customized research and assessment tools for churches and denominations.

Technology

Tim Vineyard, vice president of

(See LifeWay Page 7)

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Conference urges people to pray toward His passion

BSC Communications

About six years ago LifeWay Research surveyed nearly 1,300 evangelical leaders in order to find out what these leaders believed to be the most challenging issues facing the church today. Ranking No. 1, above other issues that tend to be polarizing such as abortion and homosexuality, was prayer, or the need for more “ongoing, passionate prayer in both personal and church life.”

Chris Schofield, director of the office of prayer for evangelization and spiritual awakening for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC), said he believes if the survey were to be done again today the top answer would still be the same.

“We need a spiritual revival in this state, this nation and in this world. That cannot happen until God’s people are committed to seeking God’s face in prayer and to crying out for Him to change hearts,” Schofield said. “Christians often forget that we can do nothing in our own strength. We need God to fill us with His power through the working of the Holy Spirit. That only happens when we pray.”

The upcoming statewide prayer conference “Praying Toward His Passion” is an opportunity for North Carolina Baptists to re-focus their attention on Kingdom-focused prayer and to learn how to have a meaningful prayer life. The conference will be held March 11-12 at Village Baptist Church in Fayetteville.

“We pray that this conference is a time of learning practical helps for developing a Kingdom-focused prayer life that results in a stronger faith and a stronger witness. We also look forward to spending time in God’s Word and learning from excellent teachers what scripture tells us about the power of prayer,” Schofield said.

Plenary session speakers include:

- Tom Blackaby, director, Blackaby Ministries International (www.blackaby.org)
- Dick Eastman, international president, Every Home for Christ (ehc.org)
- Roy Fish, distinguished professor emeritus of evangelism, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Gary Frost, president, Concerts of Prayer Greater New York (www.copgny.org)
- Frank Page, president and chief executive officer, Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee
- Don Whitney, associate professor of biblical spirituality, senior associate dean of the School of Theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In addition to plenary sessions, a series of focus groups will be offered. Those sessions feature topics such as prayer and planting churches, the role of prayer in discipleship, prayer and the evangelistic mission, prayer and spiritual awakening, and prayer and reaching students.

The conference begins at 2 p.m. Friday, March 11 and ends at 2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 12. Cost is \$20. Visit www.ncbaptist.org/hispassion.

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LISTENING — Jairo Contreras, right, one of the Vision Fulfillment committee members, was on hand at the first VF forum Feb. 10 at Scotts Hill Baptist Church in Wilmington.

Vision Fulfillment Forums seek input

By Traci DeVette Griggs
BSC Communications

Changed lives. That’s how Milton A. Hollifield Jr. wants the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) to be measured.

“We are trying to help churches accomplish what they want to accomplish,” said Hollifield, BSC executive director-treasurer.

“We measure what we do by how it’s changing lives.”

On Feb. 10 and 24, the BSC held the first Vision Fulfillment (VF) forums listening session. The attendance was lower than expected but leaders felt the smaller crowd encouraged an atmosphere of dialogue, with attendees and committee members discussing foundational questions, such as how to ensure that the state Convention is relevant and beneficial to North Carolina Baptist churches as they seek to reach their communities and beyond for Christ.

The Feb. 10 event, which was held at Scotts Hill Baptist Church in Wilmington, was the first of 14 listening sessions planned across the state. Another was held Feb. 24 at Old Town Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

Several wondered aloud if the lack of participation might be a sign that pastors and church leaders are happy with the BSC’s direction and vision. Phil Ortego, senior pastor at Scotts Hill, said he believes the majority of people agree with the Convention’s vision as outlined in the *Seven Pillars for Ministry* vision statement.

The *Seven Pillars* was written by Hollifield and approved by the Board of Directors, which is comprised of pastors and lay leaders from across the state. (Any member of a NC Baptist church can nominate someone to be a member of the Board.)

VF committee member Al James, pastor of Carey Baptist Church in Hen-

derson and associate dean of proclamation studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said he wouldn’t necessarily read the lack of attendance as, “everything is OK” because it might mean that people feel disengaged from the Convention.

Jimmie Suggs, evangelism pastor and administrator at Scotts Hill said he thinks the Convention needs to ask the question, “What would be lost in Christendom if the Convention didn’t exist?”

He said his church is constantly evaluating what they do at their church. “How much more should the Convention be doing that?” he asked.

Mark Harris, committee member and Convention first vice president, responded “That’s what we’re doing here. We want people to say, ‘Here’s what’s working. Here’s what’s not working.’”

Of course, the best way for the committee to know what people are thinking and feeling about the Convention’s work is to hear from pastors and church leaders at the upcoming VF forums.

Participants will be asked to share with the committee and will also be given the opportunity to fill out a written survey and questionnaire.

VF Committee Chairman Allan Blume considers this an historic moment in N.C. Baptist life.

“We have seen many very positive changes in Convention life over the past five years. Now is the time to ‘fine tune’ the way we invest our resources within the context of our vision to fulfill the Great Commission.

“The input of NC Baptists is essential if we are going to cooperate as churches to see God’s glory made known to the nations.

“Please do not miss this rare privilege to share the priorities that God has built into your heart for completing the assignment Jesus left with us.

“We really want to hear your heart and we commit to you that we will seriously weigh the input of all NC Baptists.”

Other forums are planned from March through July across the state. Visit www.ncbaptist.org/vf.

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Frank Page sets 'biblical vision' for SBC

(Continued from Page 1)

where God promises to make Abraham into a great nation and bless him so that he can be a blessing to others.

"I think that God's call upon Abraham's life is precious, but is it not true of all of us, that God called us to be saved and God called us to serve Him in some capacity, shape, form or fashion?" Page said.

Page added he believes God is calling Southern Baptists to be a blessing to the nations: "I believe God's call for Southern Baptists is that we would never rest until every man, woman, boy and girl on this continent hears the Good News of Jesus, so that they can say, 'That person was a blessing to me.'"

"I don't believe God is going to be happy until every man, woman, boy and girl on the face of this earth hears the Good News of Jesus Christ," Page said. "... I want us to be able to say as Southern Baptists, 'We were a blessing.'"

In addition to blessing Abraham, God made demands of him, Page noted.

"I believe God demands a commitment from us. We are to serve Him with passion," Page said.

"We are to give Him first-rate loyalty for a first-rate cause. I believe God's calling for Southern Baptists is to be closer than we've ever been before, to be purer than we've ever been before, to be more passionate than we ever have been before about sharing the Good News with a lost and dying world."

Just as God's demands upon Abraham's life were lifelong, Page believes God is not finished with Southern Baptists.

"I know these men who are getting ready to speak are going to say some profound things to us, things we need to hear. But I just want you to remember with me tonight God's vision for us is

that He will bless us, but He wants us to be a blessing as well," Page said.

Other speakers

Thomas Hammond, personal evangelism team leader for the North American Mission Board, delivered the inauguration message. Preaching from Mark 2, Hammond encouraged Page to model the qualities of the four friends who took their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing.

Those four men were willing to adapt their actions to meet the friend at his point of need, to do whatever it took to help him, and worked together in unity, Hammond noted. Southern Baptists "are in desperate need of change," with many churches plateaued or declining and many leaders disagreeing about the best way to bring renewal, but God is ready to do a new work and Southern Baptists' best days may be ahead, Hammond said.

"Every time I've heard Frank Page preach, this is what I've heard him say: 'We can win this world to Jesus, but we must do it together,'" Hammond said. "Frank, may the hand of God be upon you. May the Spirit of God give you wisdom and strength. May the mind of Christ be with you. God bless you as you lead us."

Morris H. Chapman, president emeritus of the Executive Committee, presented the Pages with a clock for their mantle to remind them of the value of time and the lessons Jesus taught about it.

"A clock is a mechanism for measuring 24 hours of each day of our lives. Time is the moment we have in the present," Chapman said. "We do not live in the future. In fact, to live in the future is to be counterproductive in our lives."

"The past is gone and the future has

not arrived. Jesus captured this when He said, 'Live one day at a time. Tomorrow has too many worries.'"

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, delivered a charge on behalf of Page's colleagues at the 42 Baptist state conventions. He challenged Page to remember that being a follower of Christ is a prerequisite to being a Christian leader.

"You will never catch up to Christ, but you must keep following Him," Lance said. "Continue to be faithful to your calling."

Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and chairman of the Great Commission Council, delivered a charge on behalf of SBC entity presidents. He told Page he will find joy working for the "great people of God called Southern Baptists" because they are "people of the Book and people of the Cross."

Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and ministry development for LifeWay Christian Resources, delivered a charge on behalf of Page's colleagues at SBC entities. Stetzer reflected on the "courage and conviction" Page demonstrated when he was elected Southern Baptist Convention president at Greensboro in 2006 and called on Page to help Southern Baptists move past their differences toward common goals.

Stetzer delivered seven "exhortations" to the new Executive Committee president: stand for God's Word; stand for the gospel; stand for the Kingdom; stand for a confessional consensus; stand for accountability in our denomination; stand for a denomination that joins God on mission; and stand to make it true that we are all about missions.

Executive Committee members voted unanimously to recommend increas-

ing the International Mission Board's (IMB) percentage of budget receipts from 50 percent to 50.2 percent and decreasing the Executive Committee's percentage by the same amount. The committee also voted to recommend directing 51 percent of any missions receipts exceeding the proposed 2011-12 budget to the overseas mission entity.

The budget being recommended to messengers in June anticipates the national convention receiving \$186 million from local churches through their state conventions.

The report of the SBC's Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, which was adopted during the convention's 2010 annual meeting in Orlando, had asked the Executive Committee to consider a 1 percent increase to the IMB.

Al Gilbert, chairman of the EC's Cooperative Program subcommittee who was a member of the Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force, told Executive Committee members the group intends to move toward the 1 percent goal as quickly as possible, but that dramatic budget and staff reductions already made to accommodate reduced income in the current fiscal year made it impossible to accomplish that goal this year. In a related matter, Executive Committee members voted to add a category of "Great Commission Giving" to the convention's Annual Church Profile survey. The GCR Task Force had suggested adding that category as a way of celebrating what Southern Baptist churches are doing in missions beyond the core strategy of giving through the convention's Cooperative Program.

However, rather than replacing the existing "Total Missions Giving" category, the recommendation proposes adding the "Great Commission Giving" category, providing a clearer picture of the church's missions endeavors.

Some Baptists seek preparation for Easter

(Continued from Page 1)

seasons of the Christian year was "an eye-opening experience," which he encountered at the first church he served after graduating from seminary.

"It tapped into something in me that surprised me," says Severns, now pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. "I remember I almost felt as if I'd been let in on a great secret."

Lenten practice

Lent — a 40-day period of fasting and self-sacrifice preceding Resurrection Sunday — began as early as the second century, probably as a period of preparation for new Christians who were to be baptized on Easter. Eventually the entire Christian community, not just baptismal candidates, observed the fast. Among Christians in Western Europe it universally began on Ash Wednesday and culminated in Holy Week — the days just before Easter that include Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

After more than a millennium as an essential element of spiritual formation, Lent and other spiritual practices were reduced in importance as unbiblical innovations by the Protestant Reformers and eliminated entirely by the Baptists who emerged from their influence. Today some Baptists who are recovering disciplines like Lent say they're struck by their spiritual richness. First Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., inaugurates Lent with an Ash Wednesday service — in which the ash of burnt palm branches are imposed on worshipers' foreheads — and in the last week includes a contemplative service.

Touching the emotions

Baptists involved in intentional preparation for Easter — whether referred to as Lent or some other name — view it as an effective tool for teaching and spiritual formation.

Lenten practices can help Baptists get in touch with an

often-neglected side of worship — the emotional dimension, said Bill Tillman, who holds the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics and teaches spiritual formation at Hardin Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary in Abilene, Texas.

"It's appropriate to grieve over one's sins and to grieve the death of Jesus. At the same time, Easter should be the ultimate celebration for Christians," he said. "Spiritual disciplines are things that can help people get into the emotional side of their faith practice, experiencing grief and delight."

Teaching time

Severns called Ash Wednesday "a teaching day."

"Our service is a way of teaching people what it means" — a key consideration in a church which had never observed Lent before Severns was called as pastor.

Community is essential to spiritual formation at Mosaic, a congregation in Austin, Texas, with Baptist ties and roots in the city's lively artistic scene. In recent conversations held between Mosaic's leadership and its worshippers to determine how the church had contributed to spiritual development, one theme emerged repeatedly, said pastor Don Vanderslice.

"It was how important observing the Christian year — including Lent — had been in their spiritual formation," he said. "Focusing on the seasons of the church year reminds us that the spiritual life is a journey. ... The idea behind journey or pilgrimage is that we're going somewhere, and not just landing on a holiday here and there."

For Henderson, Ash Wednesday is a two-fold teaching experience. First, he emphasizes the Old Testament meaning of bearing a mark and using ashes as a sign of repentance. At the same time, he explains the meaning of terms such as Lent so members who did not grow up in churches that follow liturgical practices will understand what fellow Christians do during the weeks leading to Easter.

"It's a way to connect to the broader Christian world," he said.

Vestal predicts deeper budget cuts at CBF

DECATUR, Ga. (ABP) — The head of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) predicted future budget cuts that for the first time would affect global-missions personnel for the 20-year-old movement spun off from the Southern Baptist Convention.

The CBF Coordinating Council normally recommends a budget at its February meeting.

Based on declining financial support from approximately 1,900 contributing churches and individuals the elected body instead instructed staff to anticipate revenues of \$12.3 million in 2011-2012 — scaled back from an already lean projection of \$12.9 million proposed by staff — at the Feb. 23-25 meeting at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

"I just have to be real candid with you," said CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal.

"I don't see how we can cut another \$600,000 out of the budget without addressing it to global missions, unless you don't want us to do anything else but global missions, because we have cut for the last two years."

CBF leadership will ask churches over the next six months to have a special offering to keep global missions at its current work force, but Vestal said that would be only "a one-year deal."

Mississippi couple minister in Calif.'s vast mission field

(Continued from Page 1)

"The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering makes everything possible," says Burkhart. "It puts missionaries on the field, provides ministry funds, provides Bibles, church planter training, support for new churches and allows for special projects that are critical. AAEO is our lifeblood, our lifeline and our future."

After both graduating from Southern Miss and enrolling at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the Burkharths became aware of the huge need for pastors and missionaries to work with deaf people.

Howard would later become missionary to the deaf in California, where the Burkharths have lived and ministered for the last 27 years. From 1988-2000, Howard taught classes through Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary for the hearing-impaired so they could learn to be pastors, teachers and other ministry leaders. It was the first opportunity for deaf people to get seminary education at the diploma level.

"Deafness is its own culture," he says. "It has its own language, its own grammar, its own social structure. Deaf people tend to marry other deaf people." At the same time, Burkhart says today's technology has empowered many deaf people, enabling them to become more part of mainstream society.

Why do the hearing-impaired need special ministries aimed at them and their needs?

"You'd think they could choose from a hundred different churches but they can't. They have to go to a church where there's either a pastor to the deaf or where there's a competent interpreter. And when deaf people need pastoral care, they call the interpreter, so the interpreter often becomes their pastor and advocate," according to Burkhart.

"For hearing-impaired Americans, English is their second language. Sign language is their first language," he said. "For deaf people from other countries, English is their third or fourth language."

And not only does Burkhart work with hearing-impaired Anglos, he also ministers to the deaf in other people groups, such as Hispanics, Asians and Koreans. It's not commonly known that each nationality has its own unique deaf signing language — for instance, Koreans have their own. So signing is different across different cultures and languages. Burkhart says one of his "joys" is to return to churches he helped start years ago, and one of his favorites is New Hope Community Church in El Monte, Calif.



Photo by Greg Schneider

WEEK OF PRAYER — Howard and Tina Burkhart are based in California, where Burkhart serves as a North American Mission Board church planting missionary among a variety of people groups in the San Francisco Bay and San Diego areas.

"Going back there and knowing that probably more than 50 deaf people there now have a relationship with Jesus — and many of them are serving and leading in the church — makes for an exciting day," he said.

Burkhart said the deaf ministry at New Hope is very multi-ethnic, with nine or 10 countries represented. Out of 30 or so deaf people in attendance, only three or four are Anglo or Caucasian.

"Deafness trumps ethnicity, so if you ask a hearing-impaired Indonesian, they're going to say they are deaf first and Indonesian second."

Steve Lucero, pastor to the deaf at New Hope, is the father of a deaf son, Leo, who pulled him into deaf ministry. "When Leo was born, I asked, 'Well,

Lord, why did you give me a deaf son?' It was a big question in my heart and mind."

At the time of Leo's birth, Lucero and his wife, Linda, already had a hearing son. And although Lucero was successfully climbing up the career ladder with Safeway, he would later leave the business world and go into deaf ministry — partly because of Leo and partly because of Howard Burkhart.

"We were going to Howard's night class to learn religious signing," recalls Lucero. "He was very patient as he taught us. He also was an encourager and gave us the confidence we needed to do deaf ministry."

"If it weren't for Howard, we would have been stuck," admits Lucero.



"That was 25 years ago and I still love him dearly and so do the deaf (at New Hope)."

Beyond the hearing-impaired, California — Burkhart's mission field — is home to some 37 million people and if a country, it would be the 34th largest nation in the world. More than 200 languages are spoken in the Golden State. About 40 percent of the population speaks another language or are bilingual at home.

"In several cases, California is home to a nation's largest ethnic population outside its home country," he said. "In other cases, we may have more people living here from a country than who actually live back in that country."

Burkhart strategizes and works with other church planters to start churches in the San Francisco and San Diego metro areas trying to reach a number of people groups — Indonesians, Romanians, Mongolians, Burmese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Russians and Brazilians. He also coordinates and leads 10 basic training events a year for 60 California church planting teams.

"Everybody needs Jesus. It doesn't matter where you're from, what language you speak, where you came from or where you live. Everybody needs Jesus and it's our job to communicate that in a language they can understand."

"We would ask Southern Baptists to pray for us because we need to identify a Japanese church planter for San Diego and several Vietnamese church planters for 10 churches that need to be planted in California. We also need partners for several new churches being planted in the San Francisco Bay area."

Miami-born Howard and Tina — a Jackson, Miss., native who grew up in Alabama — are the parents of two children, Nathan and Victoria. Howard also asks Baptists to especially pray for Victoria, only 18, who has been seriously ill with a rare, debilitating neurological disease, leaving her mostly homebound for the last six years.

"I grew up in Miami and if you'd told me growing up that I would be a missionary in California working among the Burmese and Karen, deaf people or the other language groups I work with, I would have said, 'never in a million years.' But God had a work for me to do and He is completing it in me," said Burkhart.

"It's hard work, it takes people, money, mission teams and partners. It takes a lot of people to reach a community for Christ."

(EDITOR'S NOTE — Noah is a writer for NAMB. Visit www.anniearmstrong.com for resources.)

LifeWay trustees discuss economy, initiatives

(Continued from Page 4)

technology, detailed the strategic focus for LifeWay's digital shift and resourcing. As a support element, technology touches every aspect of LifeWay's ministry and business, Vineyard told trustees.

"Since we support most of the operational functions of LifeWay, it is important to have a clear and compelling strategy that draws together what we do," he said.

Vineyard emphasized several important strategic processes, including a time of "discovery," provoking the company to find how to improve productivity through advances and

upgrades in business technologies. Key information insights provided by discovery of current tools and processes add a wealth of value for LifeWay's operation, he noted.

LifeWay's technology division manages more than 160 critical applications to deliver ministry and business capabilities across the organization. "Making sure that these systems are stable, enhanced and accessible to those who need them is essential for normal operations," he said.

Beyond discovery and deployment is the technology division's strategic focus to "deliver" operational functionality as a "best practice company," Vineyard said. LifeWay must "remain

current and creative," he said. Vineyard noted LifeWay's progress in the areas of e-publishing and mobile application options, citing developments for Apple and Android platforms and more.

Bestsellers among LifeWay's apps include Beth Moore's *Praying God's Word*, *Breaking Free* and the HCSB Study Bible.

Vineyard updated trustees concerning the progress of *MyStudyBible.com*, which he said continues to receive user affirmation in its beta version and is moving forward with new features, additional content and functionality.

B&H

Selma Wilson, B&H vice president,

reported to trustees a strong fiscal finish to 2010 as a result of such factors as continued sales strength of *The Love Dare*, sustained Bible sales and controlled expenses.

"We ended the year right on plan, on solid ground," Wilson said. "But we are planning for growth in 2011 in every channel of this publishing ministry."

B&H continues to advance a vibrant e-publishing strategy across platforms with upcoming releases for Kindle, Nook and iPad devices, Wilson said, telling trustees that B&H has proven itself as a leader in digital resources.

(EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was edited together from two stories that moved on Baptist Press.)

Explaining theological grant funds

BSC Communications

During its September 2010 meeting, the Christian Higher Education Committee (Committee) of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) Board of Directors appointed a subcommittee to study and propose recommendations related to the continued funding of theological grants for students attending the divinity schools of Campbell and Gardner-Webb universities.

North Carolina Baptists may recall that under the previous multiple giving plans, two of the giving plans, known as Plans B and C, included a designation for theological grants.

Specifically, the plans included two designations: the first designation provided support exclusively for students from North Carolina Baptist churches attending the divinity schools at Campbell and Gardner-Webb, and a second designation was for students attending other divinity schools or seminaries.

These additional schools were identified and approved by the former Council on Christian Higher Education as institutions that could also receive these funds. However, these funds were not to be used for students attending any of the Southern Baptist seminaries as these students already share in the distribution of Cooperative Program funds.

During the 2008 BSC annual meeting, messengers approved a move from the multiple giving plans back to a single giving plan.

In this change a provision was retained for churches to continue to designate a portion of their gifts to theological education.

The Committee anticipated that the congregations that utilized the former multiple giving plans, in an effort to support theological education through their designations, would utilize the new theological education designation option in the single giving plan to continue to support theological education grants.

However, the designations for theological education decreased substantially in 2009 and 2010.

By the summer of 2010 it became apparent that the designations from the churches were not keeping up with the disbursements being made to the divinity schools.

While a surplus had been established for theological grants, that surplus would soon be depleted if changes were not enacted.

As a result, grants for schools other than the divinity schools at Campbell and Gardner-Webb were halted, and the Committee determined to find a way to establish an endowment to preserve these grants.

At the Committee's January 2011 meeting, the subcommittee recommended the following:

1) The remaining theological grant funds be transferred to the North Carolina Baptist Foundation for

the establishment of an endowment for the purpose of funding theological grants for students from churches cooperating with the BSC who attend the Campbell University and Gardner-Webb University divinity schools.

2) The annual investment gains of the account, plus 10 percent of the principal, be equally distributed to these two divinity schools for disbursement to students.

The divinity schools will determine the criteria for students to receive these funds.

3) This endowment be promoted by the BSC and both divinity schools in an effort to elicit continued contributions to the endowment.

The BSC Board of Directors approved this transfer of funds and the establishment of the new endowment. This action is important for three reasons.

First, the funds previously held by the BSC were designated funds and could not be used for any other ministry purposes, therefore every effort needed to be made to ensure that the funds were used for their expressed purpose.

The endowment will accomplish this task. Second, the endowment will allow not only churches but also individuals to make contributions to the endowment, as the BSC giving plan is for churches rather than individuals.

Third, the endowment will allow students to continue to receive much needed financial support as it appears that the giving plan designation will be unable to provide this support into the future.

Applications for the theological education grants through the BSC will end with the current semester.

Students wanting to apply for theological education grants for the divinity schools at Campbell and Gardner-Webb universities for the 2011-2012 academic year will apply directly through the divinity schools.

Each school will determine and establish the application process. Please contact the individuals, listed below, for more information:

Kelly Jones Jorgenson, Director of Admissions and Financial Aid, Campbell University Divinity School, P.O. Box 4050, Buies Creek, NC 27506; (800) 760-9827, ext. 1830; jorgensonk@campbell.edu.

Kheresa Harmon, Director of Admissions, School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb University, P.O. Box 7256, Boiling Springs, NC 28017; (704) 406-3205; kharmon@gardner-webb.edu.

The leadership of the BSC and the leadership of the divinity schools encourage both the churches and individuals to consider making gifts through the North Carolina Baptist Foundation to the newly established endowment.

Most of all, the leadership of the BSC and the leadership of these schools encourage North Carolina Baptists to pray for the continued education and preparation of ministers and missionaries that take place on each campus. Your support, both prayerfully and financially, in this effort makes an eternal impact of the good of Christ's Kingdom.

How do you measure up?

By Milton A. Hollifield Jr.

BSC Executive Director-Treasurer

In our world today we do not need someone to explain to us what it means to compete. Just one month ago millions tuned in to watch two teams compete in the most important professional football game of the year.

Every year college students try to have the best grades and the best application essays so they can compete to get into the school of their choice. More adults find themselves competing with others for employment.

In order to compete there must be a winner, and to have a winner there must be some way to keep score, whether that means goals scored, touchdowns made or number of As earned.

Sadly, many churches today see ministry as a competition and thus create a scorecard to keep track of who is winning.

In *Transformational Church*, the latest study from LifeWay research, Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer suggest that the scorecard for many churches is "bodies, budget and building." In other words, who can get the most people to come to their church, who has the largest offering and who has the most buildings.

North Carolina Baptists, let's keep in mind that when it comes to building God's Kingdom and impacting eternity, we are not competing with each other. We do what we do because God has called us to serve Him and our goal is to honor and glorify Him. We must seek His praise, not the praise of men.

Having said that, let me also say that I do agree with Stetzer and Rainer about the need for churches to keep a scorecard — but it needs to be a different scorecard than one most commonly being used right now.

This research suggests that the new scorecard for churches should be one focused on "people coming to Christ and living in the Christian community." In other words, making disciples. We must continue to evangelize and pray for people to come to faith in Jesus, but our work does not stop there. The Great Commission mandates that we are to make disciples by teaching converts how to follow Jesus, how to abide in Him and how to serve Him.

This, North Carolina Baptists, is why we as a Convention and why your local churches exist: to help others come to know the hope of the gospel. Are you doing this individually? Is your church focused on making disciples? How do you measure up to this new scorecard?

Our 2011 Find it Here: Embracing Christ emphasis can you help you learn how to do this. Just visit www.findithere-nc.org.

We are also offering a series of regional conferences across the state focused on transformational Sunday School and you can learn more about that at www.ncbaptist.org.

Please make 2011 the start of a new scorecard that measures what truly matters: changed lives.

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." John 15:8



Tar Heel Voices

Leaders need to focus on getting more students to 20/20

Although long past my college days, I recently had the opportunity to attend the 20/20 Collegiate Conference at Southeastern Seminary. The theme of the conference was "Conversing with the Culture." Without a doubt, it was the most worthwhile Christian college event I have ever attended. I would now give anything if I could have attended a Christian college and had the opportunity to participate in such a program as this. Unfortunately, nothing close to this existed then. It also gave me great hope for our church and country to see so many young people eager to embrace the gospel, defend the gospel, and share it with the world. A word to pastors, youth ministers, parents, teachers, and BSU directors: Take it upon yourselves to recruit as many college and highly motivated high school students as you can to the 20/20 Conference next year at Southeastern. These youth are our future. The seminary administration and faculty pour their hearts and souls into making this annual conference a blessing for the students.

Sam Currin
Raleigh

Friends

by Franko



We always seem to do better when we don't know what we're doing ...

'Why Baptize by Immersion?'

I wonder how many people read the title of this editorial and their blood pressure went up 30 points? The purpose of my title was to do just that.

I am not known by enough people to be an attention getter, but when our passions are stirred we will listen. I thought of so many titles that I could use just to stir more people to extend their passion for just a minute. Now, what? What is it that I wanted you to listen to?

What did you think about when you read the title of this editorial? Did your heart sink with, "Oh no, here we go again with another argument on doctrine?"

Were you itching to write an online comment "for" or "against?"

Did you feel threatened or frustrated that someone would write such a statement?

The question asked in the title is very simple. How would you answer? I believe the only answer should be, "Because King Jesus told us to."

Before we get off track by using the rest of this article defining the word "bap-tid'-zo," let's go back to the answer. What stirs my emotions about baptism is the fact that my King said it is something for me to do.

I am stirred! Just like many of the articles I read, I am often stirred, not because of "issues" I have with a person writing an opinion, but because it traces my heart back to ask the question, "Did My King say that?" If so, I have a reason to take note ... my passions are stirred!

I'm writing this article to be read just after the State Evangelism conference (Feb. 28-March 1). If you attended, and I lived long enough to attend and preach as planned, then you heard me speak from this very angle of making disciples — because Jesus said so. What does that statement have to do with the title of this article?

Let's do some evaluations. Why is it that we make baptism by immersion a "requirement" for church membership (as our church family does), but not discipleship?

I believe the reason we are missing the mark in discipleship is because we have failed to recognize the only reason the subject has validity ... Our King commanded it!

Many of you reading this article would cringe if you heard someone say, "It is a requirement in our church that a believer is disciplined." "You can't force someone to be disciplined," you might say. No, you can't.

Nor can you force someone to be a disciple. But if you are going to be a disciple of King Jesus, He said you must "make disciples of all nations," not only "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," but also "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." This is also a part of the command.

Now, the question is, should we be required to baptize?

The answer is YES, but the primary reason is not because we are Baptist, but because we are Christians.

I was not raised in the home of Southern Baptist parents, but I was most definitely raised in the home of Christian parents. So when the Holy Spirit of God brought me to see my need of King Jesus to save me from my sin, my life was surrendered to Him, and I was immediately baptized in our little pond.

This I did not because it was the "Baptist thing to do," but it was the "Christian ... Christ follower ... thing to do." I was disciplined in the Word of God because discipleship was just the expected continuation of following Christ.

Let's pause!

What does my heart look like as I write this article? What does my face look like as I pen these words?

Tears well up in my eyes as I make declarative statements of "My King" and "Our King" because I know what a wonderful blessing it is that The King of kings would love someone like me. You see, I work every day of my life with great passion in making disciples and teaching them because I've never gotten

over how wonderful My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ really is. You may ask, "What difference does it make to know your heart attitude in this subject?" My answer would simply be, because my heart attitude reveals my passion.

The Bible teaches us that it is "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matt. 12:34).

We must come to the place in our personal lives that we allow the Spirit of God to search us to see "why" we do what we do. Heart checks are good for all of us.

Again, the Bible teaches us in Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Did you catch those words? "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

We can't do that for each other, but God's Word will sure do that for us. So, how do we help each other?

In my own life, I have struggled many times over with how I am to control feelings of frustration, hurt, anger, etc., in my relationship with other Christians who disagree with me.

What I am learning in my personal walk is that we as God's people should never be afraid of examinations because they are simply making us more like our King.

What we do need to guard against is attacks from our enemy Satan that bring divisions. So many times I have "debated" with people over "issues" that never accomplished anything because our discussion digressed from a "spiritual question" to an argument. We often do this under the guise of "standing up for truth," but the reality is that Christians should be led by the Word of God and not by our opinions or the pressures put on us by others.

If we all simply desire to follow our King Jesus, we will gladly help each other walk through

His Word and learn the application of what He has said.

That is discipleship!

So, why is it so complicated? I believe the answer is very simple ... we are sinful by nature!

I believe the "fix" for evangelism, discipleship, doctrinal purity, fellowship, worship, indeed, most issues we face in life, is to get back to the basics.

Now what would that be? Do what we do because King Jesus told us to and stop arguing with each other about what He said to do; or to borrow from Nike; "Just do it!"

No, I'm not shouting this in anger, frustration, or hurt, but I'm shouting this just like a fireman would shout out directions to someone trapped in a fire and needed to know directions to the nearest exit! There's urgency in this my friends!

King Jesus didn't give us long to work so we have no time to waste! Our task to make disciples of all nations demands that we help each other, and we'll never do that unless we get back to Who we allow to give us directions.

I will never be all I was created to be until I stop following my orders or your orders and begin following the orders of King Jesus. Until He alone becomes my passion, I will not be a disciple. What about you? Did you extend your heart for this article? Has the Holy Spirit stirred some things in you that you need to just repent of? Will you allow King Jesus to be the last Word? I pray you will!

I want to thank you for taking the time to read this article. My desire is that we would help each other just get back to doing the work by asking, "Who said so?" Wouldn't it be wonderful if we as God's people would spend our times talking to everyone around us about our wonderful, perfect King Jesus?

Then, I believe we will see the revival needed in this generation because we will be making disciples of all nations and teaching them to observe everything He has commanded, just like King Jesus told us to. I love you my brothers and sisters! May we follow faithfully until He comes!

(EDITOR'S NOTE — Redding is pastor of Hull's Grove Baptist Church in Vale.)

GUEST EDITORIAL



Marcus Redding

REACT: Tar Heel Voices is your forum



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Lesson for March 13

Formations

Lesson for March 20

Gaining and Losing

Focal Passage: Matthew 16:21-26

George Bernanos, French writer and soldier during World War I, once penned these words of challenge to his nation: "Do we wish to 'influence' the world or have we seen something that has hit us and overpowered us and to which we must bear witness no matter what it costs?"

This noted writer posits a paradox much like Jesus' paradox in today's reading — influence or sacrifice, an earthly, comfortable crown or a brutal cross?

Jesus had questioned his disciples concerning the talk among people as to the Son of Man's identity and more directly their thoughts to which Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (16:13ff.) Then followed a brief description of what being Christ meant — sacrifice, betrayal, death and resurrection! A paradox — Jesus presents a Messiah (Christ) as one who gives up his life loses it in order to gain his life. Peter, who moments before speaks the divine reality, now has to correct and refocus Jesus' ideas "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." For Jesus those words of disagreement and dismay are not beneficial, but a hindrance, a scandal (stumbling block)!

As if Jesus' words were not paradoxical enough he gives them another one — If you will follow me, you must deny yourself,



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die to yourself (take up your cross) and then follow me (16:24).

When did we lose our way? When did Peter's words of rebuke become our theology and not Jesus' words (and example)? In the guise of taking up crosses we merely redefine our unfulfilled wishes as sacrificial living for Jesus. Rather than open ourselves to being His loving generous presence, we dictate a plethora of rules and regulations. This becomes a paradox of service given in the name of God's Servant rather than service required.

A number of years ago I came across this short note by Heinz Zahrat (I cannot remember the source):

"I am constantly reminded of the spectacle of two men on a scaffold at the top of a cathedral spire, violently arguing over whether the last bit of ornament should be turned to the right or left, both of them looking as if they were about to plunge to the street.

"Down below people stand, looking up and have no idea what it is all about. And because they do not understand it, they turn away shaking their heads."

The final paralyzing paradox is that in the name of God's kingdom we create mini-kingdoms based on Peterine rebukes and influence and lose the very ones that that Kingdom receives — no matter the costs.



John Pond
associational
missionary, West
Chowan Baptist
Association

The Greatest in the Kingdom

Focal Passage: Matthew 18:1-7

They were going the wrong way. The disciples had followed Him from the early days to this present moment.

And now, most likely in Peter's home with his family around them, they are concerned with positions of greatness. Previously, Jesus had affirmed Peter's confession and even included him personally in paying the temple tax. Maybe the others were not as agreeable to this apparent turn of events, thus they needed to know "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" (18:1).

Ignoring the call to self-denial and cross-bearing, they needed affirmation about their self-defined way.

They truly were going the wrong way.

So Jesus called a young toddler (probably Peter's young child or a relative of his) and lovingly placed the child in their midst — "Except you turn (You're heading in the wrong direction with your selfish ambition) and become

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'" — Matthew 18:1

little child by His side Jesus stuns the disciples with the reality that true greatness comes from humbling oneself; i.e., to literally make oneself low. This statement is a powerful blow to any who would exalt themselves to the point of imagining that God would be pleased with them for their individual goodness. Bruce writes that to humble oneself is "the most difficult thing in the world for saint or for sinner."

Further, not only must one humble his or herself, but they must be humble enough to receive others as children. Later the Apostle Paul will make much of how we must regard that individual who may be the weaker brother or sister.

He will stress in his letters and actions how we should treat not only those within the community of faith, but also those outside that are truly the weaker one (cf. Acts 17:16ff; 1 Cor. 11; Rom. 13, etc.). We must not be a stumbling stone to anyone.

The story is told of a man who was an alcoholic. One cold winter evening he snuck out of the house to go to the local pub for drinks with his buddies. He had not walked too far when he suddenly heard the soft crunching sound

in the deep snow behind him. When he turned around he saw his five-year old son a few yards behind him. When he asked his son what he was doing,

the small child replied, "I'm trying to walk in your footsteps, Daddy." With those words this dad turned around and never drank again.

Lesson for March 13

Bible Studies for Life

Lesson for March 20

Ready for Action

Focal Passage: 1 Peter 1:13-2:1

It's one of those memories I wish I could forget, because it reminds me of a season in my life that I wish had never happened.

During my college years, I was the prodigal. And I was a hypocrite to boot. I was a Christian; and on Sunday morning I still behaved like one. But the other six and a half days of the week were another story.

It happened one New Year's Eve as I was leaving an establishment, having fully participated in the usual revelries that accompany that "holiday." I was searching for my truck, unable to remember clearly where I had parked it, when I heard a young woman's voice that was all too familiar.

"Joel? Is that you?" she asked in an excited voice, expecting a renewed friendship.

I was so startled that I glanced up. I guess that in my self-inflicted condition, I just couldn't think fast enough to avoid eye contact. Even in the dim orange glow of the parking lot lights, my face was obviously recognized.

I recognized her too. We had grown up in church together. We had been on youth retreats together. We had spent most of our lives attending the same Sunday School class!

That was the "Joel" she was expected to meet. Her smile evaporated as she examined a different "Joel" standing before. Her eyes darted back to the door I had left just seconds before. With a flash of confused disgust, her mouth uttered the question that was already on her face. "What are you doing here?"

I will never forget that question. It was her voice, but the question came directly from God's throne, and it pierced to the depths of my heart. I knew I didn't belong there. I was a born-again, Spirit-indwelted adopted son of God. I was to "be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). And yet, I was standing in a parking lot in the middle of the night, stripped of all pride, wishing I could crawl into a hole and pull the dirt in on top of me.

God recalled her question to my mind several thousand times over the months that followed. He used her words and her sense of disgust to cause this prodigal to come to his senses. The hog pit is no place for the redeemed.



Joel Stephens
pastor, Westfield
Baptist Church

Relationships Under Stress

Focal Passages: 1 Peter 2:11-12; 3:1-12

When two boats pull alongside each other, the boatmen lash the two crafts together. Without the lashings, these two boats would passively drift apart even in the calmest of water.

And when a storm arises and the waves mount up, without the lashings holding the vessels together as one, they would smash each other to bits.

The more tumultuous the storm, the more vehemently the boats are pulled apart and pushed together by the raging sea.

Together they can aid one another and steady one another. Separated they can sink one another.

Boats, like individuals, have their own mission and their own captain overseeing the mission.

For the most part, boats are self-sufficient; they have to be so to survive long voyages.

But every now and then, it becomes necessary for two boats to mutually agree to be tied together for a time in order to be mutually benefited.

That's what a relationship is: two individuals who choose to tie themselves together in a friendship, a marriage, or a workplace.

And just like on the ocean, storms will come on the sea of life; there's no getting around that.

Marriages will be rocked by financial difficulties.

Friendships will be strained by overpacked schedules or competition from other social connections. Workplaces can be poisoned by distrust and devaluing one another.

Stress is a reality in this fallen world. Are your relationships sufficiently lashed together in order to withstand the storm?

Love, mutual accountability, unselfishness, integrity, and fellowship all serve to tie relationships together in the midst of life's storms. And the lashing — the tying together of these two lives must be sufficiently completed prior to the arrival of the storm if the relationship is to last.

On the ocean, if you can't keep your ships together, you cut the ties that bind you and sail away from one another. We have all witnessed this sad conclusion to many relationships.

We must guard against such devastating results. Anger and bitterness, secrecy, and selfishness can rip and tear at the chords of fellowship when stress comes.

Dishonesty and betrayal are the axes that sever those chords with nauseating finality. The lashings must be strong and numerous, and they must be nurtured constantly.

Who is your boat tied to? Have you prepared that relationship for the inevitable storms that will surely come?

It's true; relationships need an effort from both/all parties. But after all, somebody's got to throw the first rope.



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Convention, seminary leaders talk missional discipleship

By Melissa Lilley
BSC Communications

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) recently partnered to sponsor a panel discussion about what it means to engage in missional discipleship.

Panelists included: Andy Hughes, pastor, Journey Church of the Highlands; Sean Cordell, pastor, Treasuring Christ Church; Winfield Bevins, pastor, Church of the Outerbanks; Nathan Akin, student development liaison to churches, SEBTS; Alvin Reid, professor of evangelism and student ministry, SEBTS; Brian Upshaw, church ministry team leader, BSC; Mark Liederbach, vice president for student services, dean of students, SEBTS.

The discussion began with each panelist speaking briefly on a topic related to discipleship, and then the panel fielded specific questions from the audience about discipleship.

Here's a look inside at some of the Q & A:

Q: How can churches turn existing ministries into discipleship opportunities?

Liederbach: "Southern Baptists have primarily thought of discipleship in terms of 'pulpitizing.'" When this happens, leaders are "stealing from our people the life-on-life relationships."

While Southern Baptists have been known for their programs, programs are not to blame for the lack of discipleship in churches. Pastors must be taught how to shepherd their people and must learn that discipleship does not happen just because the pastor preaches discipleship from the pulpit.

Upshaw: "I've seen small groups in homes become programs."

Even ministries that start out as gospel-centered can very easily become programs that do not have transformed lives as the measure of success. Pastors and leaders can use existing ministries as platforms in which to build relationships, which in turn will encourage discipleship.

Cordell: Don't let Sunday School become another "preaching post."

Although teaching and preaching is certainly valuable and necessary, it cannot, on its own, produce disciples. Use Sunday School or small groups as an opportunity to let people "get into your life."

Q: How can pastors and leaders involve their congregation in missions?

Reid: This generation is one that wants to be in-



ENGAGING — Mark Liederbach, left, dean of students for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Nathan Akin, Southeastern's student development liaison to churches, took part in a panel recently. Liederbach and Akin, along with several other seminary and state leaders, shared about specific discipleship topics and then took questions from the audience.

involved in missions and mercy missions. Help them get their hands dirty.

Akin: Give them areas of responsibility and let them have opportunities to lead.

Cordell: People are drawn to something bigger than themselves. Show them Jesus Christ, who is superior to all things.

Bevins: Give them ways to engage in missions other than just on Sunday mornings. "Go where they are — that's what Jesus did. Maybe you need to schedule office hours outside the office." Instead of blogging about being missional — go out and be missional.

Q: What do we do if we do not use specific curriculum?

Bevins: Consider using small group or Sunday School time to go back and discuss material from that week's sermon. Teach and train your leaders in how to facilitate discussion of a text.

Upshaw: Make sure you equip your leaders theologically and not just pragmatically.

Q: How do we measure the purity of our members?

Reid: You should be able to tell whether or not

anyone would notice if your church no longer existed. Ask restaurant waiters and waitresses how your congregation is doing.

Talk about holiness. We are not having a lot of discussions about holiness, especially among young people.

"The reason we're not holy is because we're not around people who are hungry for it." Believers must be intentional in engaging the culture, building relationships with lost people and then sharing the gospel with them. Belief in Jesus Christ comes first, and behavior change follows.

Upshaw: "We don't ask about holiness — that's part of the problem." We don't have accountability. We need to confront sin and love the person.

Cordell: We need to warn people about sin and its consequences, yet at the same time we need to speak about the beauty of redemption.

Q: Why are so many young adults leaving the church?

Upshaw: "What they see isn't real."

We are teaching moralism, but Christianity is not about being good enough. We need to model Christ to our children.

Reid: "We are not raising them to think like missionaries."

We have to stop treating them like kids.

The panel gave great attention to this topic, noting that the problem is with the family and the church — it's not one or the other. Although parents are primarily responsible for the faith development of their children, that responsibility comes within the context of their church family.

Parents cannot outsource their responsibility to the church, and the church cannot expect parents to fulfill their role without coming alongside and being willing to help. The church can help teach parents practical applications, such as how to have a family devotional time.

Too often the church focuses on just giving youth events and entertainment without ever teaching them what it means to follow Christ or giving them opportunity to be involved in the church and in the community.

The panel encouraged those in attendance to make sure they are involved in their children's lives. Schedules should never become so busy that they lack time for family. Children and teenagers know what their parents care about; they should know their parents care about both family and ministry.

To learn more about what it means to engage in missional discipleship visit www.finditherenc.org.



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Akin urges believers to defend faith, hope

By Melissa Lilley
BSC Communications

According to a Barna research study, the impression Christians are making on the 16 to 29-year-old demographic isn't a very good one. Of those non-believers surveyed, only 16 percent reported a favorable attitude toward Christianity. The research also found that 87 percent believe Christians to be judgmental, 85 percent view Christians as hypocritical and 70 percent describe Christians as insensitive to others.

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, began his message during the recent 20/20 "Conversing with the culture" collegiate conference by referring to these statistics and noting that sometimes Christians present a distortion of the faith instead of giving a defense for the faith. "Christians are often their own worst enemy," he said.

In order to overcome these negative perceptions, and speak the truth in love, Christians must be ready to make a case for their faith.

"We must know what we believe and why we believe it if we're going to profess well the faith we believe," Akin said.

Speaking from 1 Peter 3:8-18, Akin outlined a three-fold strategy to help believers understand what it looks like to be a person ready to make a case for the faith. First, believers must be ready for action, which begins with being united in love as believers in Jesus Christ. Christians must guard their tongue, for "the Lord knows what's going on in our lives. Who you are must precede what you say," Akin said.

Being ready for action requires a person to be zealous for doing what is right. "Hold the truth with conviction and humility," Akin said, "with firmness and grace."

The Christian life is not defined as a life free from suffering and sorrow. In fact, scripture teaches that

Christians can expect to suffer for the cause of Christ. "You may suffer for righteousness' sake," Akin said. Yet, "suffering provides a glorious opportunity to learn what it truly means to be a disciple of Christ."

Suffering will not be considered from this perspective until Christians understand their life is about pleasing God — not man. "Make sure you fear the right one," Akin said.

The second part of the strategy, being prepared with a defense, requires believers to "slay the idols" of the heart and to consider Christ as preeminent over everything in life. "Nothing displeases Jesus more than disbelief. You trust Him no matter what comes your way," Akin said.

One of the most poignant moments during Akin's address came as he talked about the need for believers to not just give a well-defended case for the faith, but to give a well-defended hope. A defense for the faith can't come if believers are not personally experiencing the hope they are trying to defend.

The gospel is about hope in Christ. If the defense is weak, perhaps the way to make it strong is to go back and remember the hope that comes when trusting in Christ. "What is it that makes you hope in Christ above all else?" Akin said. "Why do you treasure Him above all else? Do you know Him as the lover of your soul?"

Akin then challenged the audience to be active in doing good. To do good requires the action to be done in the right time in the right way. "Doing the right thing in the wrong way at the wrong time leads to resistance," Akin warned.

Believers must seek to do good by seeking to always be gracious in attitude. While a gracious spirit does not mean compromising on the truths of the gospel, it does not mean speaking truth in way that is rude or evokes an "inferiority complex," Akin said.

Believers must seek to cultivate a clear conscience



MISLEADING — Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, says that sometimes Christians present a distortion of the faith instead of giving a defense for the faith.

and to become known for good, godly behavior. Being ready to give a defense is not passive; it is an active, constant process.

When Christians are committed to always being ready to tell about the hope they have in Christ they will in turn learn to trust in the will of God no matter what.

God's will may not be safe — many Christians have given the ultimate cost, their very lives, to advance the gospel. Yet, God's will is acceptable and perfect. The Christian trusting in Christ is one who is unashamed to tell of God's great love for sinners.

Panel answers tough questions about conversing with culture

By Thomas Crane
BSC Communications

Believers are often confronted with hard questions: Why do you believe what you believe? Why does God allow suffering in the world? Is Christianity the only way to salvation? Why should I believe that God exists? What about homosexuality and abortion?

These are just some of the questions addressed during the recent 20/20 Conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). More than 800 college and high school students filled Binkley Chapel to hear from Daniel Akin, president of SEBTS; Albert Mohler Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Michael Green, chaplain for the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics; Bruce Little, professor of philosophy and director of the SEBTS L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture; as well as numerous other professors and pastors who led nearly 20 different break out sessions.

Feb. 5 featured a panel discussion with the plenary speakers. Bruce Ashford, dean of the College at Southeastern, moderated the discussion. Ashford first asked the panel to speak on one or two key issues Christians are faced with in a 21st century context.

Akin spoke about how Christians are making hard decisions concerning evolution and the practice of homosexuality. Unfortunately, many Christians in the academy and the church are giving ground on these issues instead of holding firm to the biblical position. Akin believes the "exclusivity of Christ will continue to be extremely offensive to a pluralistic culture."

Akin described the continual growth of Islam in the United States, as well as internationally, as an issue facing not



DISCUSSING — Panelists at 20/20 Conference answer questions from the audience about contemporary issues that Christians face.

only the church but the wider American culture in general. Green also highlighted the issue of Islam. He encouraged Christians to study the religion more in-depth and to study missionary evangelism strategies seeing success in different parts of the Islamic world in order to better engage Muslim neighbors in this country.

Mohler brought up the issue of gender as a noteworthy influencing factor in the 21st century. He said culture today is beginning to ask if gender even matters. Already in New York people are allowed to change the sex on their birth certificate. "We are living in a time where the whole issue of gender (male and female) is a liquid concept. It is becoming more and more acceptable to wear a beard to work one day and a dress the next," Mohler said. "The issue of homosexuality is the prow of the ship, so to speak, but there are a host of other issues such as this right behind it." As Judeo-Christian morality continues to be thrown out of American culture, the church needs to learn how to speak with clarity and grace into these issues, regardless of how uncomfortable it may seem.

Akin then asked Green, an 80-year-old Englishman who has served in ministry on both sides of the Atlantic, if he thought the American church would follow the pattern of what has tragically happened to the church in Europe. Green said he does see the American church following in the footsteps of the now nearly extinct European church. He pointed to the liberalism of American universities as one of the main factors in the slide toward becoming "post-Christian." He also suggested that if the church does not address "the issues within as well as the issues on the outside," such as gender and homosexuality, he fears for its demise.

In regards to engaging the culture on many of these issues, Mohler encouraged the audience with three imperatives: "1. Think. Cultural engagement begins with thinking. How do the claims of Christ and the claims of the Bible lay claim on us as we consider these issues? 2. Read. We need to be very careful and avid consumers of the conversation of the culture around us. We need to know what is going on, especially in the larger intellectual culture. 3. Articulate. Speak, write,

blog, tweet on the basis of Christian conviction. Cultural engagement is best seen by engaging with Christian truth. It helps us think through the issues ourselves as well as explain it to the culture around us."

Ashford asked the panel to highlight a few models, either Christian theologians or public figures, who are exemplary at engaging the culture. Akin began by saying that, "no matter how well we do this (engage the culture around us) there is always going to be a degree of rejection. By its very nature the gospel is going to be offensive ... but we do not need to be the ones who are doing the offending and thus keeping people from the gospel."

Akin then went on to list men like Mohler, C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer as good models.

Mohler answered the question by saying that the ambition of Christians is not just to speak to the culture. "Our goal is to be faithful to the gospel," he said.

However, Mohler went on to explain that today's society is one of culturally imbedded people who have a responsibility to speak the gospel to the culture. Throughout the history of the church each model has been mixed; there is no exact right way to do it.

He pointed to Augustine and his book *City of God*. Augustine "set forth a Christian mode of cultural engagement that made clear that the gospel is supreme over all cultures. But God loves people and people are set in cultures, and therefore we are to pay attention to the city of man, even though our primary allegiance is to the city of God," Mohler said.

Mohler also highlighted William Wilberforce and Jonathan Edwards as great models of cultural engagement.