

Biblical Leaders Needed to Reform the Southern Baptist Convention

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Host: David Wheaton 00:00

The Biblical Leaders Needed to Reform the Southern Baptist Convention.

Tom Ascol joins us today right here on The Christian Worldview Radio Program, where the mission is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I'm David Wheaton, the host. The Christian Worldview is a non-profit, listener-supported radio ministry. Thanks to you, our listeners, for your prayer, encouragement and support. You can connect with us by calling our toll-free number 1-888-646-2233 or by visiting TheChristianWorldview.org.

Now we're going to get to the massacre at the elementary school in Uvalde, Texas later in the program today, but first, we're going to get to our topic of the day which is "What is going on within the Southern Baptist Convention?" Now, the Southern Baptist Convention or the SBC for short, is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States with over 47,000 churches and 14 million members. The SBC also operates five seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), you probably heard of that, Lifeway Christian Resources, the North American Mission Board, and much more.

So on a nearly 300-page report released recently detailing sexual abuse and cover up by SBC leadership and an allegation of sexual assault by a former SBC President, shockwaves reverberated inside and outside the denomination. This is yet another sordid situation of the SBC. You may remember the sermon plagiarism scandal that the current President Ed Litton was involved in, or the passage of Resolution 9 to use Critical Race Theory as an, "analytical tool," or the ongoing battle within the denomination with regard to women preaching to men, professing Christians who identify as, "same-sex attracted," and "Social justice is a gospel issue." Some might conclude the Southern Baptist Convention is like a soap opera. But it's really worse than that. Flagrant sin, errant doctrine, and false teachers have infiltrated the denomination, and churches and people are being harmed. And most of all, God is not glorified.

And just a couple of weeks from now, the Southern Baptist Convention will gather for its annual meeting in Anaheim, California, where the attendees or as they're called "messengers" will elect a new president to replace Ed Litton. Tom Ascol, Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church,

and President of Founders Ministries is one of three candidates for president and he joins us right now on The Christian Worldview. Tom, we're so thankful to have you back on the program. Just want to start out by reading what's called the Report of the Independent Investigation by Guidepost Solutions on May 15, 2022. The headline here is the Southern Baptist Convention executive committee's response to sexual abuse allegations and an audit of the procedures and actions of the Credentials Committee. So this is an independent investigation of what is taking place within the Southern Baptist Convention.

It starts out by saying this. "For almost two decades, survivors of abuse and other concerns, Southern Baptists had been contacting the Southern Baptist Convention executive committee to report child molesters and other abusers who were in the pulpit or employed as church staff. They made phone calls, mailed letters, sent emails, appeared at SBC in executive committee meetings, held rallies and contacted the press, only to be met time and time again with resistance, stonewalling and even outright hostility from some within the executive committee. Our investigation revealed that for many years, a few senior executive committee leaders, along with outside counsel, largely controlled the executive committee's response to these reports of abuse. They closely guarded information about abuse allegations and lawsuits, which were not shared with executive committee trustees, and were singularly focused on avoiding liability for the SBC to the exclusion of other considerations. In service of this goal, survivors and others who reported abuse were ignored, disbelieved, or met with a constant refrain that the SBC could take no action due to its polity regarding church autonomy, even if it meant that convicted molesters continued in ministry with no notice or warning to their current church or congregation." That's from the first couple paragraphs of this independent investigation into the SBC by Guidepost Solutions. We have the entire report linked on our website, TheChristianWorldview.org. So obviously very troubling allegations here in this report. What are your thoughts on this, Tom?

Guest: Tom Ascol 05:21

Yeah, David, thank you so much for having me on. And this is a culmination of nine months of research and investigation that Guideposts did last year at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting that met in Nashville. The messengers that were gathered there voted to call for this type of investigation. There have been a lot of accusations, a lot of confusion, a lot of testimonies about sex abuse and sexual abuse cover-up in various areas of the Southern Baptist Convention. Particularly with the committee that's probably the most significant committee that operates all year round, standing committee, in the convention called the executive committee. And so millions of dollars has been put on this, I don't know if the final tab is in yet, but it's probably several million dollars, hired Guideposts. They interviewed, I don't know, probably hundreds and hundreds of people, and then have issued this report that was made public Sunday.

And the report has stories in it of people who testify that they've been abused, and stories of those who've been abused that were not treated well. And some cover up for people who did abuse in different areas of southern baptist life. And so it's heartbreaking. You can't read the stories without just grieving and crying out to God, have mercy on us. And Southern Baptists will need to chart a course forward that will glorify God in how we respond to all this and what we do in the future, to make sure we don't repeat the problems that we've committed bringing us to this point. And one of the concerns that I've had all along is that this process be allowed to play out and that we follow the scripture in our response. I don't want to see it politicized. I don't want to see people use this, the discovery, as an occasion to say, "Okay, now we got to do things different than what the Bible says or even contrary to". And there have already been some noise about that from some people. That's what they want.

But I have confidence that the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, the pastors will rise up and say, No, we're grieved. We humble ourselves, we confess our sin where we need to, but we're gonna follow with Christ. Because what this has shown me is, I read the whole report, it is nearly 300 pages long and it's tedious reading, because it's so much difficulty. And you know, you just have to deal with people's lives and stories and heartaches. It's just it's hard to read. But brother, I'm convinced that we have problems across the board in our culture, as a convention. I think we've lost the fear of God. And I've been saying this now for years, but our churches have not been well ordered as they should be. If we had healthy churches, that took seriously the call of Jesus Christ, to honor His lordship in our congregations, we would not be tolerating blatant sin in our congregations the way this report indicates this happened time and again.

And we would not by any stretch of the imagination, cover up for those who have perpetrated, not only sins, but crimes against very vulnerable people who've been among us. And so my prayer, my call, is that wherever crimes have been committed, we must call the civil authorities because God ordained them to handle crimes, they are ordained of God to punish evildoers where sin has been committed. He's given the church the keys of the kingdom and local churches have responsibility to order our membership under the Lordship of Christ. And where there's unrepentant sin, it needs to be dealt with, it needs to be corrected. And if a person refuses to repent, he's to be treated like a Gentile and a tax collector, Jesus said. He's to be removed from our churches. And I think what's happened is we've lost the fear of God in our churches, we don't have returned church membership as a priority anymore. And so many of our churches don't know how to practice church discipline because they just let it go for so long, they've forgotten that this is one of the key marks of a true church.

Host: David Wheaton 09:18

That is so well said. Tom Ascol with us today on The Christian Worldview, Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, also the president of Founders Ministries.

Founders.org is their website. An excellent ministry for you to get in contact with. Sign up for their weekly emails that they send out to their members or followers. Tom is also a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention coming up at their annual meeting, which is just a couple three weeks from now.

Tom, I'm going to refer to some recent columns that either you or others have written. I believe this is one that you wrote. You said, "Over the last few years the good work that our association of churches [this would be the Southern Baptist Convention] is doing, has been somewhat disrupted and is in danger of being derailed by the subtle infiltration of secularism and godless ideologies into our ranks. I am convinced that the vast majority of Southern Baptists do not want to see their convention, which by the way is the largest Protestant denomination in America, supporting the largest missionary force in the world, and educating 1/3 of this nations seminary students, [It was a parenthetical in your statement there], we don't want to see the convention follow the path of our increasingly secular culture."

Now, this is almost jumping off the answer you just gave. But tell us more about the main issues that you see that are derailing, I think that was your word in that paragraph there, derailing the denomination. And what passage of scripture do you think aligns with what the Southern Baptist Convention is facing? You see several places in the New Testament to beware of false teachers who come in, beware of this, beware of that. Is there a passage in the New Testament that you think really represents what the Southern Baptist Convention is facing?

Guest: Tom Ascol 11:05

Yeah, well, it's a great question. And what I have been talking about for several years now is the infiltration of a Neo-Marxist, plus post-modern ideology that is manifesting itself in things like Critical Theory or Critical Race Theory or intersectionality. Those are big words and philosophical words, legal words. And it's not unusual to find sincere Christians that don't know what they are or haven't heard about them. But whether you know what they are or have heard about them or not, they are the air that we breathe in our culture today.

And especially since Founders Ministries produced a documentary three years ago called, *By What Standard? God's World God's Rules*, and we distributed that hundreds of 1000s of copies given away for free, it's on the internet, youtube, you can find it. Since that time, more and more Christians have been made aware of Critical Race Theory and these ideologies. Basically what they do is they see all the world and all relationships in terms of power dynamics. And so as classical Marxism, you know, said, you have the haves and the have nots, and the haves are always the oppressors and the have nots are always the oppressed and you have to have a revolution to turn that upside down.

What this new way of thinking says as Neo-Marxist is, yes, you have oppressors and the oppressed, and the oppressors are identified by those who have the majority culture behind them, or the hegemony, they call it, it's just a word that means the leadership or the leaders. And so here's how they identify this. If you are a white, heterosexual, cisgender, that means you agree with your heterosexuality, Christian man, then you're at the top of the scale, and everybody who's not one of those things, is being oppressed by you in some way. And the more categories of oppression that you can identify with, so example, a black, female, lesbian, transgender, Muslim, would be, you know, intersectionally way down the list and oppressed. That person has more authority to speak about issues of love, mercy and justice than you do. So you need to sit down and be quiet and listen to them. And if we're going to have reconciliation between these power differential groups, than those who are in power have to be quiet and sit down. And those without power have to be given power.

That was the whole Black Lives Matter movement that shattered our cities in 2020. They were advocating for that exact ideology. And their leader said, we are trained Marxists. Well, that way of thinking about relationships, and problems in society has come into our church. And so we've heard a lot about racial reconciliation in evangelical environments over the last few years, and we need to be thinking about that. But here's what we're being told now, is that in order to have racial reconciliation, if your skin is white, or is not black or not dark, well, then you're the problem. and you need to sit down. And people who have darker colored skin than you, they are the solution, and they have more authority, and they have more insight than you do. And you are inevitably guilty, and you can't repent enough, they are inevitably sinned against and they don't need to repent. And of course, that goes against what the Bible teaches. We're all one race in Adam. We've all been created in the image of God, we've all sinned against God. And when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are all one in Him, regardless of whether we're Jew, Greek, Gentile, slave, free, male, female, we are one in Christ, and all those distinctions that are still there, they don't matter near as much because we're equal before God in Christ. And so it strikes at the heart of the gospel.

And the verse that I've thought about a lot over the last many years, there's a lot of them that applies to us and we need to wake up and hear again today is what Paul writes in Colossians 2:8-10, right in there he says, "See to it that nobody takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world. (And here's the key) not according to Christ." Well, there are these empty, deceitful philosophies. That's exactly what I've just described, that have come in. And Paul says, make sure that nobody takes you captive by them. And I fear what's happening is we have been and are being taken captive by these philosophies and the Word of God says, resist them. If they're not according to Christ, you must refute them and stay true to your commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Host: David Wheaton 15:28

Amen. Tom Ascol with us today on The Christian Worldview. Okay, we need to take a brief pause for some ministry announcements. Would you like to help The Christian Worldview continue broadcasting on the radio station, website, or app on which you are listening today? You can become a Christian Worldview Partner by calling 1-888-646-2233, visiting TheChristianWorldview.org, or writing to Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Featured Resource: Foreshadows by Steve Miller 15:56

And if indeed, we succeed in hacking and engineering life, this will be not just the greatest revolution in the history of humanity, this will be the greatest revolution in biology since the very beginning of life 4 billion years ago. Science is replacing evolution by natural selection with evolution by intelligent design, not the intelligent design of some God above the clouds, but our intelligent design.

That was Yuval Noah Harari, a leading adviser to Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum. Dystopian scenarios like this will likely mark the days leading up to the return of Christ. This is why we recommend you order Steve Miller's new book *Foreshadows-12 Mega Clues Jesus' Return Is Nearer Than Ever*. You can get it for a donation of any amount. Just call 1-888-646-2233 or go to TheChristianWorldview.org.

Featured Resource: Evidence Study Bible by Ray Comfort 16:56

And God loves you so much. He became a human being, suffered and died on the cross to take the punishment for the sin of the world. That means you don't have to end up in hell. God can legally forgive your sins, because he's the lover of your soul. And then Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death. Mario, if you give up the battle and just say; God, I'm a rebel, and you repent and trust in Christ, God will forgive every sin you have ever committed and grant you everlasting life as a free gift. Do you believe what I'm saying? [Yes.] It's the gospel truth. I wouldn't lie to you?

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Host: David Wheaton 18:02

Welcome back to The Christian Worldview. I'm David Wheaton. Be sure to visit our website, TheChristianWorldview.org, where you can subscribe to our free weekly email and annual print letter, order resources for adults and children and support the ministry.

Now back to the interview with Tom Ascol, Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Florida, as we discuss biblical leaders needed to reform the Southern Baptist Convention. Tom, I'm going to skip forward because you brought up Critical Race Theory early on here, you wrote in a column recently, you say in 2019, at the urging of Al Mohler, who was the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and others, I tried to stop the SBC from adopting Resolution 9 on, "Critical Race Theory and intersectionality." This is a resolution that put forward that it should be used as, "A analytical tool." But you were rebuffed. You write, by the resolutions committee and then the messengers, the messengers are the attendees so to speak of the convention, later that year, in the face of a great deal of attempted intimidation, even threats to cancel the project. You helped produce the *By What Standard*, which that cinedoc, which we really appreciated, and we liked, we encouraged listeners to get that. So looking back to 2019, Tom, has that resolution, which you tried to stop, which you tried to, I think, get overturned in 2021 (because the convention wasn't held in 2020), that didn't work, has it turned out that Critical Race Theory has just been used as an, "analytical tool within the convention?"

Guest: Tom Ascol 19:36

Well, no, it hasn't. In fact, you can't use Critical Race Theory as merely an analytical tool. If you do that, it's not Critical Race Theory, because Critical Race Theory is inherently activist. It is inherently deconstructive. It's designed to tear down hierarchies. And so if you say, well, we're just going to use this to analyze things or whatever this is, it's no longer Critical Race Theory. So that's kind of the sleight of hand that is at work here. It's very deceptive. And what we're seeing across the board now is the outworking of a lot of this way of thinking, though it's no longer called or people don't say "Critical Race Theory" anymore, because now we've got housewives showing up at school board meetings saying, you're not going to teach that to my children.

So everybody has been familiarized with the terms. And now what's happening is, oh, we don't believe that, we don't teach that. But they use the same ideas. They talk about relationships in terms of power dynamics. It's the same categories without the same vocabulary. And what God's people must do is recognize we have a book, God's given us the Bible, He tells us what's right, what's wrong, what's just, what's unjust, what's loving, what's merciful. Don't let people use those words, good Bible words, and fill them up with worldly definitions, and then tell you, you've got to do these things based on those faulty definitions. No! God is the one who defines justice. And we need to follow him, regardless of cost or consequences. And I'm fearful that a lot of our people are unwilling to do that, because they're being intimidated by those who are advocating these ideas that are embedded in these worldly ideologies.

Host: David Wheaton 21:19

Yeah, there is a lot of intimidation, there's a lot of shaming, guilting, all those kinds of things that get that pushed through. You're a bad person, you're a racist, if you're against this.

Tom Ascol with us today, here on The Christian Worldview. You write in another column, "As we have seen in so many other areas of evangelical life, the last several years, it is the elite class that is woefully out of step with the rank and file believers who are working hard to see the scourge of abortion brought to an immediate end in our nation." So you're talking about abortion and I want to get into that. But just one more paragraph from another article. "Again, for the critics, I'm not saying these men, (you're referring to men within the convention) are not believers, some of them might not be, but I do not know. I hope they are Christians. I have prayed for them, but their own actions have demonstrated that they are not the holy men we need to lead right now. And some of them should not even be leading in their own local churches." Those are strong words that you wrote there, but I think they're their true words.

Now, before we get into the issue of abortion, because we're gonna get into that, because there was so much reticence or lack of celebration that the fact that the Supreme Court might actually overturn Roe v. Wade, but hold on for a second on that one. I just want to get to the leadership of the SBC for now. You talk about one of your articles, you call it "the platform", those in charge, the heads of the various committees and leadership structures within the Southern Baptist Convention, which do so much of the power brokering I guess you'd maybe call it. So tell us about what this elite structure, this platform is like. And how do they attain these positions of authority within the convention, if they don't hold the same kind of values or conviction as the regular rank and file believers? Because this sounds very much what it's like in our political world in this country where you have elites in Washington dictating to people in the country who most likely do not share their same values.

Guest: Tom Ascol 23:21

Yeah, that's right. And I think in so many ways there are many parallels because I mean, we trust, that's kind of our nature as Christians, you know, we trust those who lead us. That's what I was doing for many, many years until about 2017. I started hearing things, reading things that didn't sound right. And I'm thinking no, no, no, we got good leaders in the SBC and evangelical world. And if these were really problems, they'd be talking about it, they'd be addressing them and they didn't address them. And so the more I studied, I started making phone calls, started having conversations with some of these people. And I remember one very distinctly, I hung up in my study, and looked across the room to an associate who was listening to my side of the conversation. I said, "We're in trouble. This man is not going to help us. We need his help, but he's not going to help us because he doesn't think it's a problem. And so that's when I started going to school. You know, I got books, I listened, I talked to people on the other side of the issues trying to understand, because I realized that our leaders had either become asleep at the wheel, or maybe some of them really did believe that these things were not that

dangerous. And that happens because of trust that has not been verified. And that's what we've got to do. So these people get elevated to positions of leadership, and some of them have done really well for a long time. But now it's like we don't want to do the hard work of continuing to work for ongoing spiritual renewal, because we've settled in very comfortably to our positions of leadership.

And none of us is immune. I mean, you look in the New Testament, Peter said to Jesus, you're the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Jesus affirmed that as being revealed to Him from His father in heaven. And then five minutes later Peter says, No way, Lord, and Jesus has to say, Get behind me, Satan. And so that happened to an apostle of the Lord Jesus. If it happened to Peter, we are naive to think that we're immune from the devil coming in and leading us astray. And that's why we've got to be eternally vigilant in taking the Word, always being corrected by the Word and being open to having people use the Word to correct us. And if we're not going to do that, then we're setting ourselves up for a massive, massive deception and failure. And I'm concerned that in some respects, that is what we have begun to see.

Host: David Wheaton 25:32

There's not only peer influence in our junior high and high school years, it really extends I think, when you get into these elite positions, these boards, these high level committees, and really in any organization, but we're talking about the Southern Baptist Convention today. There's a group think. There is a lot of pressure to conform. And it takes someone who's very, very grounded, who's willing to stand alone and stand on the Word of God, even if it means you're the only one standing.

Tom Ascol with us today here on The Christian Worldview Radio Program. You said in an article here, president, who is the current President Ed Litton, obviously very famous for the whole plagiarism scandal when he just became president, his 2021 campaign was sponsored by both the North American Mission Board which is the entity of the Southern Baptist Convention for sending missionaries and also the South West Baptist Theological Seminary. At a stop in Arkansas, the ERLC, this is another entity of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Ethics and Religious Liberty commission leaked benign audio recordings in an attempt to smear Mike Stone who was kind of a conservative candidate for president last time around. Ed Litton won. The president of Southeastern, was Southwestern, but now Southeastern as well as, Baptist Theological Seminary, in an unprecedented move publicly tweeted that Ed Litton should be elected. So there you have four SBC entities working in some way to help Ed Litton get the presidency. This is that platforming dynamic you're talking about. So as you are a candidate this year, I believe you're one of three or one of four, who is the platform's choice for SBC president this time around? Tell us about the other candidates.

Guest: Tom Ascol 27:15

Bart Barbara is a pastor in Texas, and I love Bart. I've known him a long time. And then I've just met the third and only other candidate, who's Robin Haddaway. He is a retired missionary and lives out in California. And I just enjoy these men and personally, their friends. I can say that the platform, I'm pretty sure would not want to see me elected as president. And I'll just leave it at that. And you can look at how things are being said today, how articles or encouragements are being framed today. And it's just not, anybody who's an impartial observer would come to that same conclusion. And the reason is, at least one reason, I think some people would be nervous with me is because there's this thing in the Southern Baptist Convention called the 11th commandment and the way it's been explained by leaders in the SBC as you just you can't have a convention, without "Thou shalt not criticize publicly another entity or entity leader". And so if you do that, it's going to be problematic. That's the 11th commandment. It's a real thing. And we've been told we must obey it. And I've made it crystal clear. I don't believe in the 11th commandment. I'm not obligated to keep the 11th commandment. In fact, I believe if we'd been keeping the Ten Commandments, we wouldn't need an 11th commandment. And so I'm committed to trying to keep the Ten Commandments by faith in Jesus Christ. And I think we need accountability. I think we need transparency. I think we need a forensic audit of every one of our entities so that Southern Baptist people know where their money's going. It's been like looking for teeth in a hens beak to get answers about financial questions for our entities and agencies. And that shouldn't be that way.

So I think there are a lot of people that would not want me to be president. And the people who maybe have a candidate they want to be president are the ones who send messengers to the annual meeting on the cooperate program dime, the collected funds that churches contribute. The Washington Post last year, wrote an article in which they cited an insider to the North American Mission Board and it says that the North American Mission Board flew church planters to Nashville to vote for Ed Litton. Now, that's the Washington Post report. And I made that public. I didn't write the article, I just commented on the article. And North American Mission Board people said I can't believe you're saying that, Tom, it's not true. I said, "Well, tell them to recant the article. Stand up and say the article lied." They wouldn't do that. I'm just telling you what the reporter of the Washington Post said. And that's a massive amount of inertia to overcome.

The only way we're going to change the direction of the SBC is for churches, regular Southern Baptist churches to bite the bullet, to go to the expense and the inconvenience of sending messengers out to Anaheim, California and vote. And I know it's hard. I know it's expensive, but there's no other way to change the direction. But if we will do this, that is a way that we can begin to change. And it's always harder to take the first step and get the ball rolling than it is to keep it rolling. So that's what we're faced with.

Host: David Wheaton 30:10

Well, God bless you for sticking your neck out. And I'm going to read a quote that someone wrote about you after you're off the interview today. It was a very positive quote about you, Tom, saying that you're not a, "Careful man." Careful men don't step forward and stick their neck out and say things when it's inconvenient to do so and it was quite a compliment to your character. Tom Ascol with us today here on The Christian Worldview. We need to take a short break for some ministry announcements. You're listening to The Christian Worldview. You can support this nonprofit radio ministry by calling 1-888-646-2233, visiting TheChristianWorldview.org, or writing to Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Featured Resource: Evidence Study Bible by Ray Comfort 30:53

And God loves you so much. He became a human being, suffered and died on the cross to take the punishment for the sin of the world. That means you don't have to end up in hell. God can legally forgive your sins, because he's the lover of your soul. And then Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death. Mario, if you give up the battle and just say; God, I'm a rebel, and you repent and trust in Christ, God will forgive every sin you have ever committed and grant you everlasting life as a free gift. Do you believe what I'm saying? Mario-Yes]. It's the gospel truth. I wouldn't lie to you.

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Featured Resource: God vs. Government 31:54

Pastor James Coates was arrested and sent to prison a couple of weeks ago in Canada. What did he do? He held a church service.

And it isn't the government's responsibility to protect us from a virus. What's their responsibility? To protect our God given rights.

Two days after that sermon Pastor James Coates was arrested and imprisoned. He has now co authored an important book titled God vs. Government Taking a Biblical Stand When Christ and Compliance Collide. God vs. Government is 208 pages, softcover and retails for \$17.99. You can order a copy for a donation of any amount to The Christian Worldview. Go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call 1-888-646-2233 or write to Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. That's 1-888-646-2233 or TheChristianWorldview.org.

Host: David Wheaton 32:59

Thanks for joining us on The Christian Worldview. I'm David Wheaton. Just a reminder that today's program and past programs are archived at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org. Transcripts and Short Takes are also available.

Now back to the interview with Tom Ascol, Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Florida and one of three candidates for president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Tom, let's talk about this issue of abortion that has been so much in the news. You say, "And by God's grace in the national meeting in 2021 (the convention meeting that year), the convention overruled the resolutions committee and insisted on hearing and ultimately adopted the strongest pro-life anti-abortion resolution in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention. But its adoption came only after various Southern Baptist ethicists spoke against it. Later, a group of Southern Baptist theologians and ethicists wrote a lengthy statement arguing against the resolution's call for the abolition of abortion.

Now this might be hard for, it's hard for me to understand, I'm sure it's hard for listeners to understand today that there's people within the Southern Baptist Convention who weren't for a resolution of the strongest language, pro-life language, in the history of the convention, and who weren't necessarily celebrating the potential overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. And I could read more quotes, but I won't right now. Help us understand, Tom, how professing Christians are not for the complete abolition of the killing of unborn human beings.

Guest: Tom Ascol 34:37

Well, it's been an eye opener to me over the last few years, because I've just assumed pro-life organizations like National Right to Life and others that I've supported and championed through my adult life, I just assumed we had the same goal which was the complete abolition of abortion and go about it different ways politically. I understand different strategies, but I thought we all were for the abolition of abortion. But that resolution, this is a platform, the platform didn't want it to come out, tried to keep it from coming out. And by God's grace through my brother, Bill Ascol, a pastor in Oklahoma, was able to get it out in front of the messengers, argue for it, the messengers overwhelmingly passed it. And then we've been told since that time, well, they didn't know what they were voting on. This goes too far. If we were to do this, we would be holding women who have abortions accountable for killing their babies, we're not going to do that.

If there was any doubt about that rationale, it was erased two weeks ago, when the Louisiana legislature for the first time in the history of the United States had a bill come out of committee to be debated on the floor of that state Congress that recognized personhood to unborn children, unborn babies. So from conception and fertilization, and then required equal protection under the law as the US Constitution, the 14th Amendment guarantees. And it's great, it's going to be debated. This looks like we might finally get something done on a state level that's not been done before since *Roe v. Wade* was recognized by the court. And the 75

plus, right to life organizations signed an open letter condemning that way of thinking, and they sent it to state legislators and said, you know, this is wrong. We've never held women culpable for abortion, they're victims. It's only the Abortionists that are culpable. The women who seek out abortions, they are victims, they're not to be held accountable. And the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's acting president Brent Leatherwood, put his name on that document. And I was blown away. This bill, HB 813 in Louisiana, had an opportunity to be passed. But whenever these nationally recognized organizations, right to life, so-called, organizations signed this open letter saying this is the wrong way, the bill got gutted, and they pulled it off, and I'm blown away and Southern Baptists were blown away. My phone hadn't stopped ringing for people saying what just happened here? How can our Ethics and Religious Liberty commission, if nothing else, why don't they just be quiet? I mean, they should have advocated for the bill based upon the resolution that was passed in 2021 that you just read portions of or read about. They should have advocated for the Louisiana bill. They certainly shouldn't have worked against it. And again, it's just a commentary on the disconnect between those who are in leadership with the rank and file Southern Baptist pastors and churches and members who were not on the same page on this issue. And it's sad. It's really sad.

Host: David Wheaton 37:35

Tom, let me just read you the reasoning. You mentioned Brent Leatherwood. He signed on to this, I think it was a statement that they put out. He's now the acting president of the ERLC, took over for Russell Moore who's now with Christianity Today. The tragedy of abortion in this column isn't limited to the unborn child who loses her life. The mother who aborts her child is also Roe's victim. They might think oh, that's absolutely the case. Well, let's read on. She is the victim of a callus industry created to take lives. An industry that claimed to provide for, "Women's health," but denies the reality that far too many American women suffered devastating physical and psychological damage following abortion. This is true to a certain degree here.

One more paragraph. As national and state pro-life organizations representing 10's of millions of pro-life men, women and children across the country, let us be clear, we state unequivocally that we do not support any measures seeking to criminalize or punish women. And we stand firmly opposed to such penalties in legislation. Now, hearing this if you don't think beneath the surface here, you might think, Well, that sounds okay. But then you think well wait, now, it's the mother who really, in most cases, I mean, obviously, there's lots of different examples of how an abortion takes place. Some people get coerced or deceived into it possibly, but in a lot of cases, it's a very elective procedure by a mother. And to try to take this stance too we don't want any punishing or criminalizing of a woman who chooses to, I guess you'd have to say, kill or murder her unborn child, it seems like an effective tact to take if you're really not pro-life, because it seems like you're being anti-woman if you would say a woman should be culpable and held accountable for the killing of another human being. Go into this line of reasoning

that's coming out by professing Christians within the Southern Baptist Convention. They look like they're taking the side of women in a way by not wanting to hold them accountable for abortions. That really shouldn't be.

Guest: Tom Ascol 39:49

That's right. And that is newspeak and that is straight out of George Orwell. Nobody's calling for criminalizing women. I mean my goodness, I'm married to a woman and my wife gave birth to five women. I don't criminalize women. It's not criminalizing women, it's criminalizing murder. It's criminalizing the taking of life, homicide. We have homicide laws that guarantee life and liberty to citizens of this, these United States. All we're arguing for is what all pro-lifers say they believe. That from conception and fertilization, the baby formed in a mother's womb is a living human being, is a person. Well, shouldn't we want for our most vulnerable neighbors in the mother's wombs the same kind of protection that we want for ourselves? Isn't that what true love does? You love your neighbor as much as you love yourself? Of course it is.

All we are saying is that we use the homicide laws that are already on the books to protect unborn children. That doesn't mean that every mother who goes and gets an abortion is going to be executed as a felony murder case. I mean, they're just like anything else. They're in a bank robbery. You know, somebody goes and robs a bank, somebody's a lookout, somebody drives the car, somebody planned it, and then somebody goes in with the gun. Well, they're all culpable, but in different degrees. And there are women who've been trafficked, there are women who've been beaten, women who had been coerced into having abortions, no doubt. But that's different than the people, the women you'll see when you go to shoutyourabortion.com and read those testimonies and watch those women wearing T-shirts saying, "Yeah, I'm gonna kill that baby. This is number three for me." You're going to tell me that those women are not culpable. So it's smoke and mirrors. It sounds compassionate, but it's not compassionate. And in fact, I would argue that it's an instrument of the devil to reason that way.

Because if a woman is culpable, and you tell her she's not, then you have just cut her off from the only hope she has of forgiveness and grace for healing, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus said, I didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Well if you tell this woman she's not sinned, she's not done anything wrong because she's a victim, what you have done is you have perpetually kept her from the only avenue of grace, forgiveness, healing, which is Jesus Christ. Because when sinners own their sin, own their culpability in breaking God's commandments, and they look to Christ for forgiveness, that's when we get healed. That's when we get reconciled to God. But if I'm convinced I don't need God's grace for my abortion, then there will be no experience of grace, because I won't seek it in the only way, in the only place it can be found.

Host: David Wheaton 42:33

Well said. Tom Ascol with us today. Final question for you, Tom. You know as we look at the Southern Baptist Convention, and we've titled today's interview, Biblical Leaders Needed to Change the Southern Baptists Soap, crossed out soap, Sinful Opera. I said soap opera, because that's kind of like from a distance, that appears to what it kind of can be. There could be a TV drama, and all that goes on within the Southern Baptist Convention on a regular basis. So it's a big convention, and you know, at a big convention is gonna be lots of different beliefs and ideas and so forth. What do you think Tom, leads you to the conclusions in your convictions that you have? You're really biblically grounded and you're outspoken about them, strong on them, you see things in very much a black and white way. What do you think leads to your conclusions as a pastor while others in the SBC are in favor of some of these things you've spoken out against, like social justice, Critical Race Theory, or now holding a woman accountable when she chooses to have an abortion? What do you think leads you to different conclusions than someone else within the convention?

Guest: Tom Ascol 43:48

Well, I would have to say it's the grace of God. I mean if I see anything, right, it's because of God's grace. If I've been able to take right stances, it's because of God's grace, not because I'm smarter than these guys, I'm not. There are guys so much smarter than me and so much better than me in many ways that ought to be leading this charge. But for whatever reason, God loves to choose the foolish things to confound the wise. And I think perhaps that's what He's doing with me.

I want to be faithful, I believe the Bible, I fear God. You know, there's something that is very sanctifying about coming close to death and in God's providential arrangement in my life, I've had that experience more than once. And that focuses your mind, and it sets you more and more free from the fear of men. And I don't mean to suggest that I'm done with any kind of fear of people and I don't try to please people. I don't want to. But God has convinced me of the seriousness of fearing not just the one who can kill the body, but the one who can kill the body and afterwards throw the soul into hell. And I love Him. I love Christ. I love God's people. I love the gospel. I want to see people come to know God. And I don't think I'm smarter than God. I think He's given us a book and I have to follow this book, I don't have any other choice. I'm not suggesting I do it better than others. I don't want to come across that way at all. It's grace. If I've seen anything, it's grace. It's all God's work.

But I am a steward. And one day, I'm going to stand before God and I'm going to give an account for the stewardship entrusted to me as a pastor. I'm going to give an account for the souls under my care at Grace Baptist Church, and that weighs on me. And that drives me to be as careful as I can be in understanding and proclaiming this Word that He's given us in the

Scriptures without fear of cost, or regard for consequences. I want to leave all that to Him. I just want to be faithful.

Host: David Wheaton 45:44

Tom, I think you just explained why we so strongly believe that you would make an excellent president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Thank you so much for coming on The Christian Worldview today. We just wish all of God's best and grace and strength to you as you approach the convention coming up in a couple of weeks here. And may the Lord be with you and be your strength.

Guest: Tom Ascol 46:05

Thank you so much, David. Appreciate you having me on today.

Host: David Wheaton 46:08

If you missed any of the interview with Tom Ascol today, you can always go to our website, TheChristianWorldview.org to hear a replay of today's program.

I want to get to that quote that I referenced earlier, from Alan Nelson, who writes on a website called, Servants and Harold's. And he wrote this about Tom Ascol. He said, "These are desperate times in the SBC. And Tom Ascol is not a careful man. A careful man would not have stood at microphone 4A in Birmingham and pushed back so strongly against Resolution 9 in 2019. That's for Critical Race Theory. A careful man would not have attempted to get Resolution 9 rescinded in Nashville in 2021 in the face of a scoffing moderator. A careful man would not have created a Cinedoc, or film, reminding Southern Baptists that our standard is the Word of God, and that we must submit to its authority and trust its sufficiency. A careful man would not stand for God's truth, time and again, both publicly and privately at the constant risk of losing friends and influence in certain circles. Tom has been run down, slandered, falsely accused and attacked repeatedly over his stand on God's Word. A careful man would have backed down a long time ago. But as I said, Tom Ascol is not a careful man." That from Alan Nelson on his website, Servants and Harold's.

I've never met Tom personally but from following him and interviewing him a couple of times, I would agree with that assessment of Tom Ascol. I also thought what Tom said earlier in the interview about what leads to this sort of situation going on within the Southern Baptist Convention was very good. Errant doctrines and upheaval and leaders who are doing the wrong things, covering up sin and so forth. And he mentioned two things I thought were really important that the qualifications for elders or leaders that the Bible prescribes is not being followed in so many cases in churches, and then more broadly across the denominational leadership as well. When those qualifications are lowered and not held to the high standard

that the Bible prescribes, well, you're gonna get people in positions of influence and power who make sinful choices. So that's number one.

Number two, we mentioned, is a lack of church discipline, or you could call it church restoration. This is found in Matthew chapter 18, and a few other places where Christ talks about what should be done for a member of a church who is involved in unrepentant sin and there's a process that is gone through where one or two go to him and then if he doesn't repent then more go to him, and it's brought before the church and if he still doesn't repent, he's cast out of the body, not to excommunicate him forever, but so that the isolation would lead to repentance and then restoration so he can be brought back into the body. And this has been a completely neglected doctrine within churches today. How often have you seen a case of church discipline being exercised on a member of a church? It just rarely happens anymore, because it makes people uncomfortable. But it's so important not to neglect this command of Scripture to exercise church discipline over those professing Christians who are members of churches, because you can't allow sin to come in the body because it affects everyone and everything. And it brings disrepute upon the name of Christ and that is the point of of church to glorify the name of Christ. And so this must be done.

And when it is done, it causes others to fear having to go through this process themselves. And fear is a good thing. By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from sin or evil. We need this fear of the Lord a fear of our sin being exposed. And I'm going to add one more thing as well. I think what leads to this really dysfunctional or sinful situation within the Southern Baptist Convention is that there's this denominational power structure that really isn't prescribed in Scripture for all these churches, over 45,000 churches to come together and have this huge denominational hierarchy. The local church is what is prescribed in Scripture. And the Southern Baptist Convention is just too big, too powerful, and too lucrative. While the SBC is made up of member churches, local churches, the SBC is not a church, but it's really a parachurch organization. And Christ never promised to bless the parachurch, but the local church. And so it would be better if churches just remained far more independent, and just abided by the structure of leadership with biblically qualified pastors and elders, leading their own flocks, and not having this gigantic parachurch organization.

So pray for Tom Ascol. I don't know much about the other men who are candidates. But I do know that Tom would be an excellent president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and with God's help, would be able to get the train back on the tracks so to speak. You need to have soundly converted men who are sanctified in their personal walk with Christ to lead the body of Christ. And if you're listening today, and if you have never received the gift of forgiveness and eternal life that God is offering you, I would encourage you to go to our website and click on the page, What must I do to be saved? That is the starting point for you to be right with God, the starting point to have eternal life. Thanks for joining us today on The Christian Worldview.

We apologize for not getting to the commentary on the Uvalde Elementary School mass murder. We also wanted to get to the World Health Organization and a treaty that the US is trying to sign to give over our sovereignty to that global organization. We'll have to get to these stories in a coming week. Thank you to you, our listeners, for funding today's program. In just a moment there'll be lots of information on The Christian Worldview. Let's know where our hope is. Churches and parachurches sometimes go astray. But Jesus Christ and His Word are the same yesterday and today and forever. Until next time, "Think biblically, live accordingly, and stand firm!"

Host: David Wheaton 53:00

The mission of The Christian Worldview is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope today's broadcast encouraged you toward that end. To hear a replay of today's program, order a transcript or find out, What must I do to be saved? Go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call toll free 1-888-646-2233. The Christian Worldview is a listener supported nonprofit radio ministry furnished by the Overcomer Foundation. To make a donation, become a Christian Worldview Partner, order resources, subscribe to our free newsletter or contact us, visit TheChristianWorldview.org, call 1-888-646-2233 or write to Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. That's Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. Thanks for listening to The Christian Worldview.