

Southern Baptist Convention 2008: A Time To Be Encouraged
And A Time To Get To Work For Our Lord

The 2008 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention took a number of interesting and unexpected turns. However, I leave “Indy” hopeful and encouraged, still recognizing we do have some significant challenges before us. What follows are some general reflections on our annual meeting.

- 1) Johnny Hunt was elected president of our Convention on the first ballot from a field where there were a number of gifted and godly men. Being elected on the first ballot surprised many if not most. His election is an occasion for hope for our future. I believe Dr. Hunt will build on the two years of statesman-like leadership of Frank Page. I am praying that his passion for the gospel, the church, and the lost both in America and among the nations will infect our denomination. I know he has a burning desire to reach out to a younger generation and get them engaged and involved in Southern Baptist life. I know his heart is to extend a welcoming hand to any and all Southern Baptist who long to see a Great Commission Resurgence in our Convention. I believe Johnny Hunt is the right man at the right time for Southern Baptist. I encourage all to join me in praying for him and supporting him as he leads us.
- 2) We finally passed a resolution on Regenerate Church Membership that, with several amendments, has biblical conviction and theological integrity. A regenerate church has always been a Baptist distinctive, but somehow that was lost along the way. I am grateful for the fine work of men like Tom Ascol, Bart Barber and Malcolm Yarnell in getting this issue before our people. Now we need to begin the recovery process. Let’s pray that we will do this with pastoral

- wisdom and sensitivity. It will not happen over night. It will take time. Let's preach and teach on the biblical basis and theological necessity of a believer's church, the nature and fruit of genuine regeneration, and the importance of gracious and loving church discipline.
- 3) Al Gilbert's charge in the Convention sermon to our denominational entities and our churches was a clarion call we all need to heed. A bloated denominational bureaucracy on the national, state and associational levels is choking us, and it must receive attention. The stewardship of our financial resources and how we account for and count those resources needs to be rethought. Praying that God would send us to the great missions fields of America and the nations and, if not us, then our children (and grandchildren), should become the heartbeat of every Southern Baptist. It certainly will be mine and one I hope captures all who are a part of the Southeastern Seminary family.
 - 4) The recognition that we are "graying" at our annual meeting and must reach out to our younger brothers and sisters, I believe, became more evident at this Convention. Both Johnny Hunt and Ed Litton (President of the 2009 Pastors Conference) recognize this. My close friends Al Mohler, James Merritt, Mark Dever and I had conversations about this. All of us who have leadership assignments in our Convention have a responsibility to get busy in addressing and solving this growing crisis. Some excellent ideas are already being bantered about. As someone who, by God's providence and grace, has been placed in a position of responsibility, I am happy to hear from anyone on what we can do to

move ahead in bringing grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren together for the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

- 5) I sense that the vision for a “Great Commission Resurgence,” is beginning to capture some real excitement. David Dockery’s new book *Southern Baptist: Consensus and Renewal* and his address at the Convention points in that direction. The reports of NAMB and the IMB certainly had that focus. Standing on the shoulders of men like W.A. Criswell, Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, Adrian Rogers and Jerry Vines and the ground they reclaimed for Southern Baptist in the “Conservative Resurgence,” we have the opportunity to move forward together trumpeting in work and deed, “Southern Baptist are a Great Commission people.” As I shared in my report, there will be no retreat from or compromise of the great theological truths and Baptist distinctives that unite us. We have a wonderful body of biblical truth affirmed in our confessions of faith to unite us as we work together in fulfilling the final marching orders of King Jesus (Matt. 28:16-20).

I have left the 2008 Southern Baptist Convention hopeful and even optimistic. Of course how could I not be? I’ve read the final chapter of God’s grand redemptive story. King Jesus reigns, His church will prevail, His gospel will be preached to all the nations and a number too great to count will gather around His throne for all of eternity worshipping Him and praising Him. So let’s get to work for our Lord. The glory is His and the joy is ours!