

Beth Moore Ends Relationship With Southern Baptists, Drops Lifeway as Publisher

Renowned Bible teacher and longtime Southern Baptist author and speaker Beth Moore has made a staggering decision public: On March 5, she told Religion News Service in an interview that she is “no longer a Southern Baptist.”

. @BethMooreLPM said the #SBC has been her family, her tribe and her world. But she is walking away, saying the denomination's public witness has been poisoned.

— Religion News Service (@RNS) March 9, 2021

“I am still a Baptist, but I can no longer identify with Southern Baptists,” Moore said. “I love so many Southern Baptist people, so many Southern Baptist churches, but I don’t identify with some of the things in our heritage that haven’t remained in the past.” She also told RNS that she has ended her long-term relationship with Lifeway Christian, which will continue distributing her books but will no longer publish them or administer her live events.

Moore was the first woman to have a Bible study published by LifeWay and has since reached more than 22 million women, per *The Atlantic*. Her Living Proof Ministries grew in assets from \$1 million in 2001 to just under \$15 million by April 2016, RNS says. Her Bible teaching ministry grew from her home church, First Baptist Houston, to a broad teaching ministry that included sold-out stadium events.

But some of that changed when Moore, horrified by the release of the *Access Hollywood* tapes prior to the 2016 election, began speaking out against Trump. His boasting of his sexual

exploits with women dismayed Moore, herself a survivor of sexual abuse. Her Twitter posts revealed her growing concern for what she viewed as her fellow Southern Baptists' and evangelicals' blind eye to his issues.

Kate Bowler, a historian at Duke Divinity School, told RNS that Moore's departure represents a significant loss for the Southern Baptist Convention, which remains the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. Rather than basing her platform on marriage to a famed pastor, Bowler said Moore developed her broad following from her own "charisma, leadership and incredible work ethic."

"Ms. Moore is a deeply trusted voice across the liberal-conservative divide, and has always been able to communicate a deep faithfulness to her tradition without having to follow the Southern Baptist's scramble to make Trump spiritually respectable," Bowler said. "The Southern Baptists have lost a powerful champion in a time in which their public witness has already been significantly weakened."

Moore told RNS she believes politics and Christian nationalism have crowded out the gospel in her former denomination, saying she has realized the SBC is "not in step with the gospel. It felt like we had landed on Mars."

Moore also sparked a 2019 debate among Southern Baptists and other evangelicals about whether women should be allowed to preach in church and, at the same time, condemned what she saw as widespread hypocrisy, misogyny and power abuse within the SBC, posting an open letter "to my brothers" and writing on Twitter that "there are countless godly conservative complementarians. So many."

Beth Allison Barr, a history professor and dean at Baylor University, told RNS that Moore's departure will come as a shock and a potential call to action for Southern Baptist women. "If she walks away, she's going to carry a lot of these

women with her,” Barr said. “I applaud this move and support her because I know how soul-crushing the SBC is for women. She will be far better off without them, doing the ministry God calls her to do.”

Ed Stetzer, longtime Southern Baptist and current Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission and Evangelism at Wheaton College and executive director of the college’s Billy Graham Center, posted his thinly veiled support for Moore’s decision on Twitter, announcing that she will co-teach at Wheaton this summer and ending with, “Yep, Beth is at home at @WheatonCollege.”

Whelp, @BethMooreLPM is trending on twitter.

Fun fact, if you’re in one of our 5 @PropelWomen master’s degree cohorts, you can take a class w/ Beth (& others) this summer on campus at Wheaton.

Yep, Beth is at home at @WheatonCollege.

– Ed Stetzer (@edstetzer) March 9, 2021

And Trillia Newbell, acquisitions editor for Moody Press, wrote words of unity in her Twitter post: “As I think about our tendency to analyze and tear each other apart, I hope we’d resist it here and instead pray.”

I have deep love and respect for @BethMooreLPM. She let me know this was coming because she is human, and she loves others fiercely. As I think about our tendency to analyze and tear each other apart, I hope we’d resist it here and instead pray.

– Trillia Newbell (@trillianewbell) March 9, 2021

Where is Moore headed? After saying that she and her husband have begun visiting a new church, “one not tied as closely to

the SBC but still 'gospel-driven,'" Moore told RNS, "I am going to serve whoever God puts in front of me." {eoa}

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