

Despite Rumors of Splits, SBC's Russell Moore Will Keep His Job

Russell Moore can keep his job.

But only after he apologized for criticizing Southern Baptists who supported Donald Trump for president.

The beleaguered head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission was told by his agency's executive committee that it stands by him, according to a statement it released on Monday (March 20).

The decision followed a months-long saga over Moore's fate that split the denomination between his supporters, who tended to include younger Southern Baptists and minorities, and members of an older generation who often are more interested in ties with the Republican Party.

"For us not to stand in affirmation of the principles that Dr. Moore has espoused would be unfaithful to the mission entrusted to us by the Convention," the statement said.

Last week, Moore and SBC leader Frank Page issued a shorter joint statement about how they "fully support one another" after the two held a two-hour meeting.

The SBC is the nation's largest Protestant denomination, and the ERLC is its public-policy arm. The commission's board of trustees, including its executive committee, oversees Moore.

During the election season, Moore wrote, spoke and tweeted critiques of then-GOP candidate Trump and questioned the motives of Christian leaders who supported him.

A number of Southern Baptists, including Dallas pastor Robert

Jeffress and former SBC President Jack Graham, were members of Trump's evangelical advisory board.

In May, on CBS' *Face the Nation*, Moore said Trump represented "an embrace of the very kind of moral and cultural decadence that conservatives have been saying for a long time is the problem."

Trump himself waded into the debate by tweeting: "Russell Moore is truly a terrible representative of Evangelicals and all of the good they stand for. A nasty guy with no heart!"

In response to Moore's actions, some Southern Baptist leaders threatened to halt funding of his agency or the whole denomination.

Jeffress, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Dallas and a Trump supporter, told *The Wall Street Journal* that members of his church didn't believe the ERLC "represents our church's beliefs." Graham's Texas church decided to hold back \$1 million in funds for the denomination.

But after apologies from Moore and "numerous private conversations with many of those who had criticisms of him," the ERLC committee decided to support Moore.

"We realize that divisions do not heal overnight," the committee said. "But in terms of leadership and support, Dr. Moore is the man to whom it has been entrusted to lead this entity—speaking prophetically both to our culture and to our Convention. He will continue doing so with the confidence of our support."

In his latest statement, Moore said he had not meant to "suggest it was sinful for Southern Baptists or others to advise candidates or to serve on advisory boards in order to bear some influence there."

"What I was attempting to talk about were those—most often

prosperity gospel teachers—who were willing to define the gospel in ways that I believe untrue to the plan of salvation, or to dismiss the moral concerns other Christians had,” Moore said.

He added that he stands by his convictions to address “what the gospel is and is not, what sexual morality and sexual assault are and are not and the crucial need for white Christians to listen to the concerns of our black and brown brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Moore said he regretted his social media postings that “were at times overly broad or unnecessarily harsh. That is a failure on my part.”

Graham, the Texas preacher, welcomed Moore’s apology, tweeting:

“This is a gracious and unifying statement from @drmoore,” he said. {eoa}

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