

Largest Protestant Denomination in US Affirms Women, Asks for 'Purity' of Leaders

Southern Baptists, grappling with some #MeToo-aided falls from grace among their leaders, have called for affirming women, showing compassion for the abused and expecting "moral and sexual purity" of their leaders.

A resolutions committee recommended a total of 16 nonbinding statements to express the sentiments of Southern Baptist delegates, known as messengers, and all were adopted Tuesday (June 12) by more than 7,000 Baptists gathered at their annual meeting.

The raft of resolutions came after the May termination of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary President Paige Patterson, who had counseled against divorce even in cases of domestic abuse and was accused of mishandling seminary students' allegations of rape. Two months earlier, Frank Page, the president of the denomination's Executive Committee, resigned suddenly after what was described as a "morally inappropriate relationship in the recent past."

On Wednesday, after a lengthy debate, messengers voted against a request to remove the members of the seminary executive committee that decided to fire Patterson.

"It was clear to us that the convention wanted to speak to those themes," resolutions committee Chairman Jason Duesing told reporters after the adoption of the statements. "We felt that three separate resolutions allowed us to do that best."

"Biblical headship blesses, honors, and protects wives and

children and does not require them to submit to sin or to abuse," the resolution on abuse reads. "(W)e acknowledge that spousal abuse dishonors the marriage covenant and fundamentally blasphemes the relationship between Christ and the church."

The affirmation of "the dignity and worth of women" came as the nation's largest Protestant denomination marked the 100th anniversary of women serving as messengers, even as it held fast to the view that women are equal before God but hold different roles in the church and the home. "(W)e affirm the gifts of women in their distinctive God-assigned roles, even as we continue to witness to Scripture's teaching ... in a culture increasingly confused in matters of gender and sexuality," they said.

Baptists also passed a resolution renouncing the "Curse of Ham," an interpretation of a story in the Book of Genesis that has been used in some Baptist churches to lend biblical support to the idea that some races are subordinate to others.

"We don't understand that to be a biblical reading of the Scripture at all," said Duesing, provost of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. "That 'Curse of Ham' in history is a doctrine that's actually counter to clear biblical teaching."

The passage of that statement followed a report from the Executive Committee that it had disfellowshipped Raleigh White Baptist Church of Albany, Georgia, because it had "performed acts of racial discrimination."

Other statements adopted by the Baptists affirmed "the full dignity of every human being" and "the value and dignity of immigrants." The latter resolution called for immigration reform "maintaining the priority of family unity" while securing the country's borders and "providing a pathway to legal status with appropriate restitutionary measures."

They also called for “Christ-like” behavior when using social media—refraining from tearing others down and from gossip.

Seven months after the fatal shootings at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, Baptists called for authorities to work to reduce gun violence and said “gun ownership carries with it a great responsibility of being aware of the sinfulness of one’s own heart.” And four months after the death of evangelist Billy Graham, they commemorated his life and ministry.

In a year when they submitted more resolutions than they had since 1997, Southern Baptists also voiced support for Arab Christians and urged pastors and all Christians to become more aware of the dangers of opioids and “to resist the temptation to assume they are immune from this temptation.” {eoa}

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