

Letters to My Pastor and Other Denominational Leaders

My letters to the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist General Convention of Texas, and local church began in 1988. As time passed, I became more and more dissatisfied with the Baptist position regarding female pastors. I believe that God created men and women as equals in church leadership. I believe that our Southern Baptist Convention is doing a disservice to our young women today who feel the call of God in their lives.

If we truly want the world won for Christ, and it is not just a feel-good slogan we spout, then we will allow our women to be full partners in winning people to Christ.

For over 50 years I have been a Baptist – a Southern Baptist, and it is in a Baptist church that I have become convinced that we are wrong. We will not reach the younger generation if we persist in this hard stance against women, and we are in danger of losing the older generation because of our closed minds.

April 8, 2008
To My Pastor,

I feel like I want to explain why I did not take you up on your invitation to join in the study you are now holding. At first when you said that you would be discussing women's role I thought that would be interesting.

But I came to realize that I have moved beyond those discussions. I have dug my feet into the ground and will not be persuaded that God denies women leadership roles in his church. I will hold Jesus' words to women close to my heart over Paul's words any day. My years of arguing are over.

A few weeks ago we visited a church where a woman is the pastor. As I sat there in church, I looked around. Looks old-fashioned to me, no large screen, music from the hymn books. *But a woman preaching!* And her husband singing in the choir. My soul could feel the difference. Here is a church that has allowed women the dignity given them by God. Now I am sure that there were men, and women, in that congregation who truly in their hearts hold on to the Men over Women theology, but they have put that aside and continue to worship God.

I am reading a book "*Who Stole My Church?*" by Gordon MacDonald, 2007. The future is here and we are already behind. Down through the centuries the church has had to reinvent the way they did church, and we are facing such a reinvention in a major way today. Change is happening, it can't be stopped, because the forces are already in play. What role women will have in this future I don't know. I do know that we will have to expand our attributes of God, and that will include rethinking our role of women.

Shirley Taylor

August 2008

Dear Friend,

Just what was it that the fight with the Southern Baptist Convention was all about? Women were the object of the fight (as is the case in most fights among men). The role of women in church leadership particularly caused a furor. I guess with the fight being over and the moderates winning means that it will be business as usual. No women deacons and certainly no women as "senior pastors." (Christ must cringe at that term).

Like I said, I read this newsletter from cover to cover and I did not find anything for me under the big "tent." The only thing that came close to it was on page 20 third paragraph from the bottom..."a major step in racial reconciliation and *gender* recognition of Baptists in North America." Could not even bring themselves to use the term "woman."

I have been doing my own informal survey about women as deacons this past week. If the political pollsters can use 1000 people to represent 280 million people, then the 4 people I polled can be just as reliable.

They were from 4 different Baptist churches in my city. I asked 2 men and 2 women. Three of them were 75 years old and one was 50. They are all long-time Baptists and hold leadership positions in their church. One is a retired BGCT pastor.

I asked these 4 people this question: "Are you in favor of women deacons?"

Three people said unequivocally "yes." The third was equally adamant and said "no."

Do you know who said no? It was the retired BGCT pastor.

We have a long way to go before we lose the label "Fundamentalist." In our hearts we must adopt the mission statement I sent to Dr. Wade in 2004 in which I said, "We value women and their response to God's calling in their lives, and will put up no barriers to women serving God in the same capacity as men do."

If we drop the ball and do not allow women to become deacons and ministers then the fundamentalists will have won. Who do you want to have the victory?

Shirley Taylor

July 2008

Dear BGCT Pastor,

Thank you so much for the invitation for Texas Baptists to contact you. For almost 15 years I worked for BGCT in Conroe Texas. I have been an active, tithing Baptist for over 50 years.

Everybody is tired of BGCT and SBC fighting. However, one of the motions that came out of the SBC meeting in June was extremely disturbing to me. My first impulse was to quit giving any money to the Cooperative Program because that would perpetuate their flawed beliefs about women.

If we quit fighting, do we lie down and surrender? Do we follow with a denomination that treats women under the Middle Eastern law.

Forbid it, Almighty God!

I am tired of fighting. But I am a woman. I cannot serve a biscuit or grape juice in my church because I am a Baptist. There is not a woman deacon in all of this Baptist Association. *No church here can be the first.* I can go on missions and preach (teach) in other lands to people with different languages, and go to countries where my life is in danger; I can go into the inner-city and preach (teach) to the drug addicts, whores, and downtrodden. But I cannot serve a biscuit or grape juice in my church. I cannot be a "senior pastor," even Christ must cringe at that term.

All because I am a Baptist. I know I can go to a different denomination. But why should I? It was sitting in a Baptist pew that these convictions began to take shape.

Thank you for listening.
Shirley Taylor

June 27, 2008
Dr. Johnny Hunt
President Southern Baptist Convention
11905 Highway 92
Woodstock GA 30188

Dear Dr. Hunt,

I read in my state Baptist magazine 'Radical change' needed to stop SBC decline, new president says. He says "We've been declining as a denomination, and you can't turn something around until you stop the tide and direction it is going."

And how does the Convention propose to do all this? Amend the SBC's constitution to disallow affiliation by "churches which have female senior pastors." This proposal would modify the SBC constitution, which regulates convention membership.

And where are those churches who even consider women "senior" pastors – or a deacon for that matter. I wish someone would tell me where they are. Of course Chuck Sams is talking about on the mission field because it is certainly not here in the U.S. Oh, we'll allow them to be "children and youth ministers." Our bellies are full of camels.

Sincerely,
Shirley Taylor

May 14, 2008

Dr. Randel Everett
Baptist General Convention of Texas

Dear Dr. Everett,

I, too, have had some conversations across Texas recently and I imagine that what I heard was substantially different from what you heard from the 1,000 pastors, leaders of institutions, DOMs, WMU, and other institutional leaders. The conversations I had were with the people who sit in the pews each Sunday.

The church is in a revolution. Across denominational lines, the church congregation is having a revolution of thoughts. Until we tune in to the thought changes that are happening with Christians of all kinds, we are not going to move into this new future. If you want to reach the young 35 year olds, then you need to know that they are already full swing into a new church paradigm.

The conversations I had were with long time active members of Baptist churches in this association. Three of those people attend churches affiliated with the more fundamental Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. They each believe that women should be deacons. But they have never told their pastor, nor have they written him a letter telling him this. Only one man did not believe women should be deacons.

One conversation was with a member of a large Baptist church in our area. This lady loves her church. She is divorced and has found the women's group to be so accepting of her. In our conversation, she did not know that I have been a Baptist for over 50 years. I mentioned women should be deacons and she said, "We don't have women deacons in our church. I'm Baptist." But it is thought changes that occurred in the past which is allowing her to be an accepted part of her church today, as a divorced woman. Those same thought changes will one day allow women to be deacons and ministers in Baptist churches.

Shirley Taylor

July 20, 2008

Dr. Randel Everett

Baptist General Convention of Texas

Dear Dr. Everett,

A Baptist denominational leader (name removed) spoke at the Hispanic Baptist Convention and said these words: "Where do you get the preachers? Not in the seminaries. You get them from the harvest."

In Texas Hope 2010, women will be in the harvest.

We will make every effort to reach women, but we will fall short when it comes to allowing them the full expression of their faith. The only place we will send them to preach is on foreign soil speaking a strange language for a few years. But the church is growing on every continent except our own soil. When one-half of the population cannot be free to answer the call from their Lord, and find a place of service leading the church, there can be no "Hope."

We will catch them – but we will not keep them.

We value women and their response to God's calling in their lives and will put up no barriers to women serving God in the same capacity as men do.

Shirley Taylor

November 30, 2008

Dear Friend,

It is not my intention to start or be a part of an argument over women in ministry. In fact, those arguments hurt me to the core of my being. The very idea that women are not equal in the sight of God causes my soul to cry out. In the 1960s, my Sunday School Teachers Guide said that the Pharisees loved nothing more than to stand on the street corners and argue whether or not women had souls. We are doing the same thing today.

We stab those passages from Paul with our bony fingers and shout to all that will listen that women cannot be senior pastors or deacons.

Instead we should be answering the larger questions:

- What is it that we are afraid of?
- Why do we think that if women are released from this Middle Eastern philosophy that our churches will be full of homosexuals, liberal social views, etc?
- What damage is it doing to our young girls and women in the church today who feel the call of God?
- Are we afraid that men will drop out of church if a woman is the pastor?
- Why do we give women authority over children, and youth if they are inferior in the sight of God (straining a gnat and swallowing a camel?)
- Just what do we hope to accomplish by hanging on to this rejection of women as deacons?
- Are we afraid of losing our denominational beliefs – what will it do to Baptists if we do change?
- How do we view those Baptist churches who have taken this step?
- Why did we parade our one woman pastor (who left) and not allow others?
- What will we say to God when He asks us why we didn't use the people He has called?

Instead of churches deciding whether or not they want to have women as deacons, I would like to see us adopt this mission statement: *"We value women and their response to God's calling in their lives and will put up no barriers to women serving God in the same capacity as men do."*

Shirley Taylor

November 5, 2007

Dear Friend,

What will you bring back from Atlanta for me? (The New Baptist Covenant meeting). I see nothing about women in ministry. The theme passage from Luke includes "set free the oppressed." In our zeal to set the world free, we fail to see the oppressed sitting in the pew beside us. Ken Williams (2nd Opinion, Baptist Standard) said "I was embarrassed that my denomination chose to use its resources to defend archaic scientific theories and remove women from leadership positions rather than to let justice roll on like a river, and I was enraged by the pettiness of it all." Well, I am still enraged. Nothing has changed for women. Oh, we talk a good talk, but our actions have not kept up. Women cannot be deacons in most churches. Joy Fenner, president of BGCT, and with her missionary and WMU background cannot go back to her church and serve the Lord's Supper. All because she is a woman.

We wrap our denomination in a tight little bundle and hug it closely to our heart. Gently we pat its sleeping head and soothe with reassuring words. "We won't let anybody unwrap you, or get between me and you," we whisper.

The scribes and Pharisees did that too. Their denomination, so to speak, was their security, their way to God, and even when God came in the form of Jesus, they could not unwrap the bundle they had so tightly wrapped. Jesus told them that. He said that they had laws that they couldn't keep, that they strained a gnat and swallowed a camel, and that their religion was like dead men's tombs. He told them that they had forgotten the God they worshiped in their desire to get it right. That they loved their law more than they loved the God who created them.

Our denomination's womb births women missionaries. We wrap our women up and tie a bow around them and send them off to some foreign land. Yet these same women cannot come back to our churches and serve God as fully as a man can do. We pat ourselves on the back because we have birthed missionaries. But don't let it be said that we have birthed ministers.

Baptists are raising daughters, but we are still self-consumed with raising sons. I am a woman. What will you bring back from Atlanta for me?

Shirley Taylor