

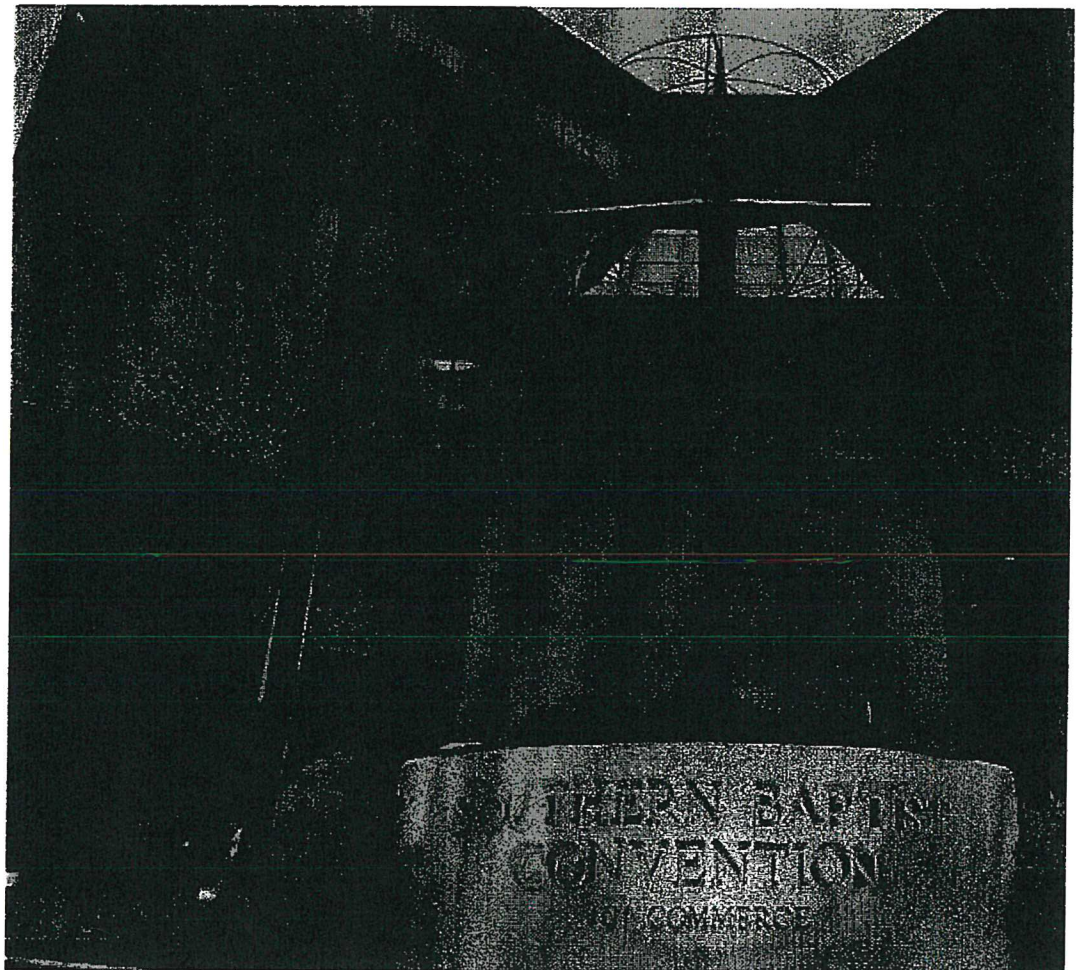
https://www.postandcourier.com/pee-dee/opinion/southern-baptist-convention-role-of-women-in-church/article_08a930c8-8741-11ef-aa63-bfbabb878615.html

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DeMarco: To all the Baptist ladies

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A cross and Bible sculpture stand outside the Southern Baptist Convention headquarters in Nashville, Tenn. Holly Meyer/AF
HOLLY MEYER

Although I am a United Methodist, I have known many, many sweet and skillful Baptist women in my time. My children went to Marion Baptist Kindergarten prior to entering 5K in the public schools and were taught by two of the sweetest, a pair of beloved elderly sisters. Baptist women can organize church events, cook the best caramel layer cakes you

have ever tasted, and I'm going to wager that most are smarter than their husbands (that's no crack on Baptist husbands; it's true in all denominations and certainly in my household).

THIS IS HIS ISSUE = The Baptist View of Women Preachers

I expect that most Baptist ladies of a certain age will stay put and keep doing important work for their congregations and communities. But after the Southern Baptist Convention's recent annual meeting, I'm not sure how the the denomination thinks it's going to hold onto young women. → IS THIS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BIBLICAL TRUTH?

Since 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention has had a nonbinding statement of faith banning women from the pulpit. At the annual meeting this past June in Indianapolis, the denomination came close to formalizing that ban into its constitution. The ban received support from 61% of the delegates, but it failed to achieve the required two-thirds supermajority. Still, the vote demonstrated that over half of the delegates hold this outmoded view.

I remember watching my mother struggle with the restrictions placed on women by the Catholic church in which she was raised and educated. I think she might have been the first doctor in our family if Fordham, the Jesuit university she attended, had allowed her to major in chemistry. However, in the early 1960s, Fordham's chemistry degree was offered only to men. As opportunities expanded for women in the secular world, the idea that women could not be priests or use birth control became insupportable to her. Eventually, she and my father found a happy home in the Episcopal church, where men and women are treated equally.

I remember as a teenager meeting a brilliant Mormon high school senior. She had been selected as a presidential scholar, one of only 100 young people in the country to receive that annual award. To my surprise she was already engaged to be married. She had been admitted to college and had a bright future ahead. But when I asked how she would respond if her husband wanted her to stay home with the children they were sure to bring into the world, she said without hesitation that she would drop out.

My point is not that staying home with children is a bad choice. It's a wonderful choice. I am grateful to my wife for choosing to stay home with our two when they were young. As a brilliant master's prepared nurse, she could have decided she wanted to pursue a high-profile academic or administrative position. How could I have denied her that? **Using a few verses from the Bible, a book written two millennia ago exclusively by men at a time when women were considered property?**

The Bible contains great truths, but it must be interpreted. (Whether we want to admit it or not, **every reader of the Bible interprets Scripture. There is no objective reading of a text so voluminous, complex or contradictory**). As a physician, one of my favorite examples of bringing a modern interpretation to the Bible concerns the Gospel writers' descriptions of Jesus casting out demons. Today we would diagnose the afflicted as having epilepsy or perhaps psychosis. Building a church infrastructure around exorcism of demons would be foolish based on today's understanding of the brain. Likewise, building a church infrastructure to uphold another antiquated idea, that women are not men's equals in the work of the church — including, teaching, preaching and leading — is similarly foolish.

Wow! Not true!

(The Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1845 by men who wanted a denomination that would allow its members to own slaves, twisting the message of the Bible to accommodate that view) It took 150 years for the denomination to formally apologize for that. Ladies, I am confident that at some point in the future, the Southern Baptist Convention will recognize that it has made a similar mistake with its treatment of women. But why wait a century and a half for the apology?

If you're a young or young at heart Baptist woman, consider moving to a denomination that fully recognizes your God-given worth. There are many, but I am partial to my own, the United Methodist Church, where women are viewed as equals in every way and hold every leadership position, including pastor and bishop.

Women lead men successfully in every secular aspect of life — in our homes, in the workplace and in government. Does God really want them to remain subservient in the church? Mike Law, pastor of Arlington Baptist Church in Virginia and author of the

constitutional amendment banning women pastors argues, "Our culture may see this prohibition as harsh, but our God is all wise, and wrote this word for the flourishing of both men and women." Rev. Law, let me respond for all the women rolling their eyes right now: "Well, pastor, bless your heart."

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