



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Southern Baptist Convention Differences

A Conversation with CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal

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What is the difference between the SBC and CBF?

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First, there are some organizational differences. CBF is not a “convention of churches,” but a fellowship both of individuals and churches. There are a number of individuals who belong to CBF who are in churches that do not partner with us. Churches can partner with us in a variety of ways. Our by-laws state that a person may vote in our meetings if they give any amount of money to CBF, or if they belong to a church that gives any amount of money.

Another organizational difference is that CBF does not own or operate institutions or elect trustees that govern those institutions. Rather, we partner freely with institutions and share some common ministries with them. For example, we partner with 12 schools in theological education. However, it would be inappropriate to say that they are “CBF’s schools”. They are free and autonomous; but we value our partnership with them in training congregational leaders for Baptists. The same could be said of other partnering organizations such as Associated Baptist Press, the Baptist Center for Ethics, the Christian Center for Ethics, and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. These are partnering organizations, but not agencies of CBF.

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Are there differences between SBC and CBF other than just organizational?

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Yes. The organizational differences are great, but the theological and philosophical differences are even more profound. The SBC has stated specifically in its revised statement of faith (2000 Baptist Faith and Message) that women should not serve as pastors. We respectfully disagree, believing that God calls both men and women into ministry and uses them in many ways including in the role and function of pastor.

The SBC recently revised its statement of faith removing the crucial statement that Scriptures should be interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ. We believe that makes the Bible more important than Jesus. We believe in the Bible, but we believe that Jesus Christ is the criterion by which all scriptures should be interpreted.

The SBC has taken a number of actions in the past years which have embarrassed Baptists and which have given Baptists the reputation of being a narrow-minded people. We believe that Baptists should be known because of what they are *for* rather than what they are *against*. Instead of being known for mandating a hierarchical approach to marriage, targeting Jews for evangelism, and boycotting Disney, Baptists ought to be known for ministering to the poor, caring for the needy, and loving one another.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is committed to basic Baptist principles. As Christians, the tie that binds us is our common faith in Jesus Christ. As Baptist Christians, we also share a commitment to those principles that have shaped our unique Baptist heritage and policy. These include:

- **Soul Freedom** – We believe in the priesthood of all believers. We affirm the freedom and responsibility of every person to relate directly to God without the imposition of creed or the control of clergy or government.
- **Bible Freedom** – We believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, is central to the life of the individual and the church. We affirm the freedom and right of every Christian to interpret and apply scripture under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
- **Church Freedom** – We believe in the autonomy of every local church. We believe Baptist churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whomever they perceive as gifted for ministry, and to participate as they deem appropriate in the larger Body of Christ.
- **Religious Freedom** – We believe in freedom *of* religion, freedom *for* religion, and freedom *from* religion. We support the separation of church and state.

– For a free introductory packet about the mission and ministries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, call the CBF Resource Link at 1-888-801-4CBF (4223). Or visit our Web site at www.cbfonline.org



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