

Dr. Nelson Price
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Dr. Nelson L. Price is Pastor Emeritus of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta , Georgia and former pastor of Oak Park Baptist Church in New Orleans , Louisiana . Dr. Price, a native of Osyka , Mississippi , has faithfully served SBC churches and entities in a ministry spanning five decades. His service to Southern Baptists has included appointments such as First Vice President of the SBC (1991), President of the SBC Pastor's Conference (1990), President of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1982-1983), and memberships and accolades with a number of other Southern Baptist and Evangelical entities and institutions. In addition to this service, Dr. Price formerly served as the Chairman of the National Board of Trustees for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1999-2005). Dr. Price holds degrees from the University of Southeastern Louisiana (B.S., 1953), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Mercer University (D.D., 1984), and Hannibal-LaGrange College (D.D., 1990). He is also the author of sixteen books, including, *How to Find Where You Are, I've Got to Play on Their Court, Shadows We Run From*, and many others.

1. What would you say to a young (old) pastor who is considering leaving the SBC? Why should he stay a Southern Baptist?

Don't even consider leaving as an option. Faced with this decision as a young pastor I reasoned that if I were not willing to stay and help address issues of which I disapproved I would forfeit my right to criticize those inequities. Furthermore I would weaken support for my beliefs in the convention by however little that might be. If I stayed I had the right and responsibility to address these variances. Staying eventuated in having the privilege of helping draft "The Baptist Faith and Message" statement of 2000.

2. The resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC has been a controversial issue in some ways. What is your perspective on the resurgence in the SBC?

The school of doctrine is one thing. The method of introducing it into a local church and the contentious spirit of many current advocates are other matters of concern. Calvinism has been a nonissue among Southern Baptists for so many years most laypersons were not indoctrinated or even aware of its consideration in our ranks. Therefore most pastor search teams have not known to ask a potential pastor about it. Many pastors predisposed toward Calvinism have practiced a policy of don't ask, don't tell, and have come in fully aware the church was not committed to the doctrines of Calvinism. They conduct home cell study groups of confidants until they feel they have enough support to introduce it into the mainstream of the church. This has been highly disruptive to many local churches. It is a destructive deception. A potential pastor should be open and clear regarding the issue. The warrior spirit of many young Calvinists in attacking the integrity and intellect of those with whom they disagree is appalling and un-Christ like. Address principles and don't attack personalities. Don't try to defend a principle by attempting to destroy the reputation of a person.

3. The issue of elder rule has been a controversial in many churches. What is your perspective on ruling elders as an expression of Baptist church polity and ecclesiology?

In the early church the terms “elders” (presbyteroi) and “bishops” or “overseers” (episkopoi) are used interchangeably as to functions not as titles or offices. The Bible gives clear insight regarding the roles of bishops and deacons but does not for elders leading many scholars to conclude it was not a separate office in the early church. There is no Scripture that teaches a church has to have a board of elders. The term “elder” has gone through an evolution since the Bible times. The present meaning and role is based on the role that evolved in subsequent years of the first century. Biblically the service of elders was to be performed by older individuals who related to the spiritual life within the church not the business affairs. Changing the of church governance can be traumatic for a congregation. If a church has a form of governance that works in place following a current trend is not advantageous.

4. What would you say is the most significant theological issue confronting Southern Baptists in this generation?

Calvinism is foremost, but glossology is emerging once more also. There are so many different schools of Calvinistic thought that no matter what is said to be a belief there are those of other schools who deny it. There are many admirable aspects of Calvinism with which most Souther Baptists agree. A high regard for the authority and integrity of Scripture, the belief that salvation is by grace alone, the atonement of Christ, and the belief that everything should be to the glory of God are broadly held concepts among Baptists. However, irresistible grace which teaches those predestined to be saved cannot resist salvation and limited atonement which says Christ died only for those predestined by God to be saved is where the road forks. This is where the introduction of the doctrines of Calvinism into a traditional Southern Baptist church becomes divisive.

5. What do you think of the plans of former Presidents Carter and Clinton regarding a potential new religious movement of denomination?

Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton are undertaking the establishment of a new religious denomination. I am a member of the imperfect denomination they are leaving in order to establish a more perfect world order. They say their “all inclusive” denomination will fight poverty, work on health care, environmental issues, and eliminate religious and racial conflict. Both of these men have been critical of Southern Baptists, and we deserve some criticism like most religious bodies. I say most because I met the pastor of one and have his calling card with the name of his church in Atlanta: “The Perfect Church.” I always wanted to meet his wife to see what she had to say about that! In addition to criticizing Southern Baptists they should take time to observe some of the good the denomination is already doing in the areas they propose to address. They have been so preoccupied with criticism they have failed to take note of attributes and assets with which they could ally and achieve far more than by starting another denomination.

In noting areas in which Southern Baptists are making progress I want to readily admit much progress is yet to be made. In 1995 Southern Baptists issued a resolution of repentance. The lengthy document stated in part, “...we apologize to all African Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systematic racism....” Implementation of the commitments to work for racial reconciliation are ongoing. Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary, not a Southern Baptist, wrote, “At the top of the

list in ethnic ministries in the United States are Southern Baptists.... Southern Baptists are the most ethnically diverse denomination, worshiping in 87 languages in more than 4,600 language-culture congregations every Sunday.” It should be noted the denomination works with many diverse racial groups, especially Native Americans. The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, of which Southern Baptists are a part, has done work in the area of the environment which “would improve the lot of the poor more surely and effectively” than that proposed by many environmentalist groups. Their proposals are believed to be potentially more effective in reducing high rates of disease and premature deaths and have a more positive impact on the poor.

Another area the presidents propose to address is world hunger. Southern Baptists are at the forefront of denominations seeking to provide relief. Much help is needed in that 16,000 children worldwide die daily from hunger-related causes. That is one child every five seconds. The former Presidents need to understand that more can be done more immediately by working in programs already in place than by reinventing the wheel. By doing so time, money, and lives can be saved. Unfortunately, the former Presidents have said nothing about such spiritual ministries as Christ commissioned His church to fulfill: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you...”