

An Open Letter to My Southern Baptist Brothers and Sisters

Dear Southern Baptist Brothers and Sisters,

Having served as a chairman of our largest board I understand how such matters as our current controversy at Southwestern should have been handled. One of the larger concerns during conflict is the need to proceed biblically, with love and grace. My greater concern at this moment is the damage we could be doing to our organizational integrity over time. If this becomes the new norm, then we are going to destroy one another and the Lord's work through us.

I am asking all of you to join me in praying for healing and for a proper way forward. Let us learn during this moment and determine to never take this path again.

Here are three suggestions as to how we might turn this matter to a pattern of mutual respect and healing. Some of these suggestions are strong, but in my opinion, they are needed.

- I recommend that the SWBTS board chairman and executive committee resign as board members for the following reasons:
 - A lack of understanding of the need for decorum, process and honest reporting has not been evident in their leadership.
 - There has been a failure to enforce the guidelines of Jesus in Matthew 18. Personal conflict should be first handled by one on one resolution where possible. If needed, the parties should proceed to resolution with the assistance of several wise leaders. If not resolved at that level, Dr. Patterson's local church leaders and church should be involved. If still unresolved, then the board could take a look at the extreme need and vote on a solution.
 - There has been a failure to abide by scripture by confirming all matters with two or three witnesses who have direct knowledge of the problem at hand. ("One witness cannot establish any iniquity or sin against a person, whatever that person has done. A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" Deut.19:15 CSB, this verse is also referenced in the New Testament.)
 - It appears the chairman may not have abided by the bylaws in giving proper notice of the last board meeting.

- This chairman would be the one to appoint a search team to seek a new president. His management of the current controversy demonstrates he would not be the right person to lead that search.
- The second termination of Dr. Patterson was enacted with spurious evidence and with no input from Dr. Patterson or his staff or his lawyer. It is not biblical to condemn someone without hearing from them first. Why could the matter have not waited a few days or weeks to be sure all was done properly?
- Apparently, hard evidence in this matter was suppressed.
- There is no way now that this executive committee can be seen as objective going forward. They have tainted their own reputations by revealing their lack of respect for our history, our protocols and our desire to handle all things with love.
- The chairman has stated that his own “evidence” is “beyond dispute” when it is easily disputed and refuted. Repetition of a false conclusion does not make it less false.
- The chairman continues to mention the decision was “unanimous”, but that is only by the small number on the executive committee, not the full board. With the emergence of evidence that stands in opposition to the executive committee’s storyline, it is doubtful that a majority of the board would have supported this last decision.
- An honest 3rd party review of accusations and evidence with Dr. Patterson’s and the seminary’s lawyers deep involvement. That 3rd party would then act as the head of a mediation team to bring a fitting conclusion to this matter. The board, of course would have to vote to accept the findings and conclusions of that mediation team. (One approach would be for our current SBC president to recommend or sign off on the choice of mediator.)
- Reinstatement of Dr. Patterson as President but with no direct duties or involvement with any issues involving moral failure at the school. Such should be handled by others until his retirement. This would allay anyone’s fears that he might mishandle such situations. A condition of his reemployment would be that when the final decision was made by the mediation team and the board that he would abide by their decisions even if one of those was that he no longer serve as president.

I know there are many programs and initiatives in place at Southwestern that will be damaged by a sudden change in direction. Dr. Patterson is near retirement and has been readying the ministries of the school for a smooth and powerful transition to

whoever is the new president. The Kingdom of our Lord would be best served if he is leading the school while proper investigation is ongoing.

There should be no hostility toward anyone. We should appreciate the difficult situation with which everyone involved has had to deal.

It is time to forgive, restore, heal and move forward in unity. The whole world is watching. We have demonstrated to them that we are not perfect. Now let us demonstrate to them that we still love one another. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35 NKJV

With all my love and prayers,

Tom Hatley
Jeremiah 33:3

Dr. Thomas Hatley has been a Southern Baptist Pastor for over 40 years. Here is some basic information about him.

- Experience as a board chairman (IMB Chairman from summer of 2005 through summer of 2007).
- His Doctoral Thesis at Liberty University was on conflict management in ministry.
- Currently serves as pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church Global Outreach Center, Rogers AR. (25 years of tenure) (The church has a powerful training ministry in South Asia that includes over 20,000 pastors.)