

# Truth-In the Pit of Political Correctness

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The Confederate flag controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention is based on a misconstrued reading of history with the South getting the wrong end of the deal, writes Rowland Springs Baptist Church deacon Ben Thompson of Cartersville. JOEL CARILLET/Getty

By Ben Thompson

The Southern Baptist Convention's recent vote to repudiate the Battle Flag by the SBC caught me by surprise and left me in shock.

I have long considered our denomination to be socially conservative, prudent, and wise to stay out of issues that do not directly impact the mission of our church. I am a deacon but more importantly on this topic, I am a student of history and the Bible. While I do have ancestors who defended against the invasion of 1861, that does not make me uniquely qualified to make statements based on emotion to defend or excoriate these veterans and their symbols.

I understand fully what they fought for and it certainly was not what some in our leadership have shamefully claimed. Truth and hard facts are the best way to approach difficult issues. We must get this right as a church. Lincoln's War of 1861 cost our country the lives of 625,000 soldiers and the lives of 50,000 Southern civilians (black and white).

It changed the federal government forever from one that was limited, to one that controls every aspect of our lives, deeply divided this country upon racial lines, and set slaves free only to re-enslave them to another master. The topic of the Confederate Battle Flag, history of the SBC, history of the flag itself, race, and the true topics of importance are too complex to tackle with ad hominem arguments, rhetoric and straw men.

No, we need truth to tackle such issues and to admit this argument is based in political correctness. The truth and only the truth will heal wounds that keep being picked by those who profit from race and division.

*"The Truth is like a lion. You don't have to defend it. Let it loose. It will defend itself"*

*-Augustine of Hippo*

The truth of the SBC's founding is not one based in Christians wanting to protect slavery. It is one based on differing visions, uneven representation and the authority of scripture. The original American Baptist Home Mission Society had its leadership mostly in the North. Several of its leaders were abolitionists while the Society, as a whole, claimed neutrality on the issue of slavery. Southern churches noticed unbalanced distribution of resources and missionaries to the South that did not fit the proportion of membership. This frustration lasted for several years.

Secondly, both North and South wanted different denominational structures. The North wanted loosely affiliated churches with single focused missions and dues collected from individual members. The South wanted a single organization that focused the church on many different missions with funds being controlled locally. Finally, what pushed the split of 1845 was an act of non-neutrality by the leadership on the slavery issue. James E. Reeves, an elder from a Georgia church, wanted to be a missionary. He was rejected by the ABHMS because he was a slave owner. This decision by a few abolitionist leaders led to the eventual split.

So why now does our current leadership say we at the SBC have a flawed origin? Does it make sense to anyone that all of the Baptist churches of the South at that time would want to protect slavery when only 20% of the population owned them at all and less than 5% had more than 10 slaves?

The grand majority of Americans (North and South) wanted gradual emancipation to train and educate the slaves for a better transition. This was the practice used in other countries (Spain, Britain, France, Portugal) who ended slavery and the practice used in Northern states who had found slavery to be uneconomical. It was only a fringe group known as the abolitionists who wanted an immediate end to slavery no matter the cost to the families, the slaves themselves, or society as a whole.

Those who became the SBC believed that there was a Christian duty to care for slaves as the Bible taught. Responsibilities for slave and master alike with the hope of gradual emancipation. Contrast this to the Unitarians/Transcendentalists of the North who had infiltrated some Baptist leadership positions. These leaders embraced a number of Unitarian beliefs, the worst of which refused the authority of scripture. Abolitionists believed in a "higher law" more so than what was in the Bible if it conflicted with the agenda of the day.

This meant anything could be sacrificed for the good of the cause. This was evident in John Brown's murders in Kansas and failed revolt at Harper's Ferry, the Nat Turner rebellion that killed over 50 people (mostly women and children), and quotes from Northern ministers, abolitionist groups and Northern newspapers that encouraged such acts.

*"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness...Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own site."*

*-Isaiah 5:20, 21*

The truth of the Confederate flag is that it was one of many battle flags with various crosses. It was to celebrate Celtic roots and a common faith in Christ. Why is the one banner of the Armies of Northern Virginia and Tennessee the only one that opponents want to remove? After the war it was used in reverence and memorial for veterans.

Yes, it was misused by some groups like the KKK (the same group who also paraded the US and Christian flags) but that doesn't change what the symbol truly is. Just because an opponent of the flag says they feel a certain way when they see the flag does not change what the flag really is. Does an opponent get to define the meaning of a symbol?

Would we as Americans allow Iranians to define what the US flag means? Would we as Christians allow atheists to define what the Cross of Christ means to them in the name of political correctness? God forbid! Negative sentiment of the flag can be blamed on history as taught in the school system and those who have misused the flag. The current lack of solid history taught in our schools explains much of the current social ills and a counter culture that is antagonistic to things American, conservative, or Christian. It is up to us as leaders to seek truth in raw form, not

something that comes from the media or current text books.

*“Surrender means that the history of this heroic struggle will be written by the enemy; that our youth will be trained by Northern school teachers; will learn from Northern school books their version of the War; will be impressed by all the influences of history and education to regard our gallant dead as traitors, and our maimed Veterans as fit subjects for derision.” –Major General Patrick Cleburne, CSA*

The Confederate Battle Flag symbolizes hate no more than the US Flag does. To me, it's not even a symbol of heritage. The battle flag is a symbol of defiance! Before the founding of our country we have had two predominate groups who have vied for control. Ultimately, it can be summed up as Liberty versus Tyranny, but to be more specific it has been: the colonists versus the king, the Jeffersonians versus the Federalists, the Democrats versus the Whigs, the Democrats versus the Radical Republicans, and Conservatives versus Progressives. (Nineteenth century Democrats and Republicans were completely opposite of their current namesakes).

One group has wanted a small federal government with limited powers with the grand amount of rights and powers reserved to the States and their people. The other group has wanted a strong central government with unlimited powers allowing the States and people to have roles only as the federal government see fit. The battle flag captures a true seminal moment in history when the people said they wanted their own government and stood against an invading federal army and nearly defeated it against all odds. Because of this, the Confederate flag will be revered by many and reviled by the victors. It was indeed misused by certain groups and those who opposed the federal government's push of the 1960's social agenda. It was mostly in this era that the modern opponents pointed the finger of hate.

The truth on race is, had there been no war, race relations would be just as good as they are in any other country that ended slavery on their own terms. Can you imagine what race relations in the South, in this country and most importantly in God's church would look like if the South would have been left alone to secede peacefully? Slavery would have been eradicated gradually. There would have been no War, no reconstruction, no KKK, no Jim Crowe, no "Separate but Equal", no busing, no affirmative action. There would have been no "Flag" to condemn. Blacks and whites would be much stronger together, drawn by what was similar in their lives: their Southern culture and their faith in Jesus Christ.

An honest conversation on race means that we do not target a symbol that is being piled-on in current pop culture and being taken advantage of by those in the race business and PC realm. Let's talk about how young men in disadvantaged neighborhoods can be reached for the Lord. Let's talk about the leaders who claim to help these men but, are the same ones who roused violence in Ferguson and teach victimhood, zero responsibility or accountability, and blame all that ails their society on police and anyone that does not look like they do.

Let's talk about sub-culture rather than skin color. Let's discuss how this sub-culture glorifies violence, lawlessness, degrades women, and promotes self-destruction. Let's discuss how the "War on Poverty" became a war on the black family and successfully destroyed it. Let's look into how leaders at all levels want more of it and the same leaders promote and target abortion at will in the same community.

It would be wonderful and joyous if the SBC resolution would lead to saving more souls. This thought defies logic. Do people of color stay away from church because they think a Confederate Flag is there? Does someone reject the Gospel based on what they have been taught in current day American history? The answer is no! Salvation is of the Lord! Salvation is individual and never corporate. If a man rejects the Lord, then that is his decision based on the state of his own heart.

Let's be clear here. No man is going to reject the Gospel because he saw a truck roll down the road with a Confederate Flag on it. No man is going to reject the Gospel because he saw a low-rider go down the same road playing rap music. We can say we are about removing stumbling blocks, but be careful what is referred to as a stumbling block. Why stop with a flag when an entire culture can be purged? Will elements of race be demonized

from all cultures or just one?

Has anyone ever seen a Confederate Flag of any type inside or on a church? In all my 38 years and dozens of churches visited, I have not. The only place I have ever seen a Confederate Flag is in an older church's cemetery. They are usually on a veteran's grave site, placed by descendants or veteran's groups. Opponents of the flag do not want to stop at removing the flag from public places but from graveyards as well. Removing Confederate Flags from church cemeteries is what this is all about.

The truth of political correctness is that it is a tool of those who are in a minority or fringe group to exact social change and paralyze the public. After the Charleston shooting of unarmed worshipping Christians, there was a fanatical hysteria to blame the shooting on the flag. One photo of one flag and the murderer were posted to start a narrative. Conveniently, none of his other flags were posted. The man was filled with hate, he was filled with Satan, and he chose to commit a terrible crime. The full weight of the State of South Carolina should fall on him and justice served. The crime had nothing to do with any of the symbols he carried in his home.

In 2005, the city council of Memphis took to the issue of purging public places of Confederate symbols. There was enough push back and common sense to keep them from removing a Confederate general and his wife's grave in a public park. The issue was taken back up this year immediately after the Charleston murder as if it were a new issue. Soon, Memphis will dig up a couple's remains and remove them in the name of political correctness. This lunacy is taking place in every minority dominated city council across the South. It did not stop there; it has come to God's church.

*"If we were wrong in our contest, then the Declaration of Independence of 1776 was a grave mistake and the revolution to which it led was a crime. If Washington was a patriot; Lee cannot have been a rebel."-General Wade Hampton, CSA*

The Confederate Flag is but a leaf on a tree. It is not the roots of the tree. The roots are this: The first seven Southern States had a right to secede from the Union in 1860 and 1861. The next seven (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland) had a right to secede after Lincoln said he was going to invade the first seven. Those last States initially voted to stay in the Union, but after Lincoln let his intentions be known to invade, and do so unconstitutionally, they decided it was time to leave. They would not provide troops to his army nor let an army march through their States. Kentucky and Missouri were invaded and their capitals seized before they voted to secede while State leaders in Maryland were simply arrested in the middle of night and held on no charges by federal troops the day before the vote.

*"I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union...Still, a Union that can only be maintained by swords and bayonets, and in which strife and civil war are to take the place of brotherly love and kindness, has no charm for me." -General Robert E. Lee*

The North did not fight to make men free and the South did not fight to enslave them. The War was fought for money (tax revenue), control of the money and political power. The same reason all wars are fought. Lincoln was a white supremacist who did not want to extend voting rights to blacks, did not want them to settle up North or out West, wanted to re-colonize blacks in Central America and Africa, and would support an amendment to make slavery permanent in 1861 just so he could keep the Union intact and its revenue flow. The tariff accounted for 95% of all tax revenue and as of 1860, the South paid 87% of the tariff while close to 80% of the taxes went to Northern interests. This is one of many reasons why the South wanted to secede and equally why Lincoln could not let them go!

If slavery had really been the sole issue, the North would have let the South leave. Slavery was used as a tool in 1862 when Lincoln was losing the war. He unconstitutionally set free the slaves in areas not controlled by the North in hopes of starting a slave revolt of Haitian proportion to end the conflict. No revolt ever happened and by and large, slaves stayed loyal to their families. True division did not take place until after the war with Reconstruction and federal laws aimed at causing such hatred in the South.

*“Nothing fills me with deeper sadness than to see a Southern man apologize for the defense we made our own inheritance. Our Cause was so just, so sacred, that had I known all that has come to pass, had I known what was to be inflicted upon me, all that my country was to suffer, all that our posterity was to endure, I would do it all over again.” –Jefferson Davis*

It is time for us to gain a basic understanding of history and not think we are suddenly enlightened because we have a Twitter or Facebook account. We are not suddenly enlightened on the flag issue. To the contrary, earlier generations with classical educations understood history and how it mattered to current events much more than we do today. There were more men in that era who were capable of leading and standing up to the winds and feelings of the day than what is seen currently. Those generations closest to the history provide the truest and strongest accounts.

I, as a Christian, will not condemn my Christian ancestors. I will stand up and defend their honor rather than go along with the latest tweet of the day. This act by the Convention will bring in no more converts but will alienate those among the church who are educated in history.

*“Those who have no concern for their ancestors will by simple application of the same rule have none for their descendants.” -Richard Weaver*

Will the same people who brought this subject forth also ask to condemn all symbols associated with Islam? How about the American flag, as it also supported slavery for over 80 years? Will they ask that we repudiate the Battle Hymn of the Republic? (It was actually written to sanctify John Brown and his terrorists acts in Kansas and Harper’s Ferry.)

Finally, if we are to take up a flag topic as Baptists. Let’s talk about one inside our sanctuaries. Why is it permissible to pledge allegiance to a thing and its government? How are we excused to make such a pledge in God’s house? Is this idolatry? No matter how deep our patriotic sentiments run, should we hold a flag in the same esteem as the Cross?

The period in our history that was the War for Southern Independence has been *referred to as the American Iliad, our great epic. It was a tragedy that we cannot possibly comprehend today.* Symbols from either side of the history should be preserved and discussed, not selectively scrubbed for political reasons. That type of action is reserved to tyrants and despots. It has no place in a free, civilized, Christian society. Had we lived in that time, what would we do if we were invaded by a federal army?

*“We could have pursued no other course without dishonor. And sad as the results have been, if it had all to be done again, we should be compelled to act in precisely the same manner.”-General Robert E. Lee*

This issue of the Confederate Flag should never have been given consideration. I hope that it is more based in ignorance rather than politics. Even then, we must pray that no one in the church will be found “suppressing the truth”, “becoming open to futile thinking” and “letting a foolish heart become darkened”. I do pray true racial unity will come to all. But, that will only come through the destruction of political correctness, and displaying nothing but the truth. Salvation will not come to any group of people because of some political charade. Salvation will come when those close to them share the Gospel, the Gospel alone, with no victimhood or politics attached. Christians planting seeds then praying that hearts turn, and turn to the Lord.

Suggested Reading:

When in the Course of Human Events-Charles Adams

The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Civil War-H.W. Crockett

The Real Lincoln-Thomas Di Lorenzo

The Un-Civil War-Leonard M. Scruggs

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