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Commentary: An Open Letter to Southern Baptists

May 24, 2013
By R. CHIP TURNER



R. Chip Turner, chairman of the BSA Religious Relationships Task Force and past president of the

Association of Baptists for Scouting, released this open letter after the Boy Scouts of America voted to end denying membership to boys on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Results of the much-publicized vote at the 2013 national meeting of the Boy Scouts of America were announced May 23. Understandably, this was not what many Baptist denominations and others wanted to see transpire.



R. Chip Turner

Now what? Before deciding, I urge you to prayerfully consider the following:

* Are the evangelism and family ministry opportunities now lessened in the church's Scout unit(s)? Are the lost and un-enlisted any less our responsibility now? I respectfully remind us that the Great Commission remains unchanged and no vote can alter this reality.

Still 'fishers of men'

The local church still owns its Scout units and is responsible for selecting the leadership. As "fishers of men," are we not to go where the fish are located? In the case of church-based Scout units, there are unreached people already in your buildings! [In the average Scout unit, as much as 60% of the youth and their families are not currently involved in anyone's church. What an opportunity!]

* Are our churches being compelled to accept homosexual leaders or the homosexual lifestyle? No, fact, it remains the responsibility of our churches to hold high a standard. The resolution clearly states that "youth are still developing, learning about themselves and who they are, developing their sense of right and wrong, and understanding their duty to God to live a moral life." Shouldn't Baptists be at the forefront in helping youth find answers which are biblically-based?

Behavior standard still in place

Keep in mind. Too, that there are a number of membership requirements which must still be met, including affirming the declaration of religious principle, doing one's "duty to God, and adhering to the principles of the Scout Oath and Law. In addition, a behavior standard is being set forth which disallows sexual behavior of any kind in Scouting.

Do our churches routinely exclude persons from our other evangelism and outreach efforts or do

we seek to reach them where they are with the Good News and help them discover The Way?

* Do we surrender the opportunity of involving children, youth, and families in the Religious Emblems Program which is an effective tool for reaching Scouts (and entire families) for Christ, discipling them, and helping many clarify their call to vocational Christian service? I pray not!

* Does it really matter whether or not Baptists are involved in Scouting? First, the obvious answer is "yes" for every Scout, family, and leader in Baptist units. Second, there are tens of thousands of Baptist Scouts and thousands of Baptist Scout leaders involved in Scouting who are not in Baptist units and we should be serving them, too. [The third largest group of Scouts and leaders at the 2013 National Jamboree will be Baptist.]

* Why not invest our outreach ministry and energies elsewhere? Obviously, you can. But why does it have to be an "either/or" situation?

Reaching the unreached

There are many fine children and youth programs in our churches which primarily address those already in the church family. However, what about the unchurched and unreached? Plus, consider the people in your church family who are better members, parents, leaders, and citizens because they had the Scouting experience delivered by godly men and women.

Dare we deprive our children and grandchildren of this same life-changing experience? Do we surrender this precious opportunity to others who may not share our values. Shall we abandon an organization which needs our influence now more than ever? Future generations hang in the balance.

The Lord of the Harvest stands ready to help us, guide us, encourage us, empower us, and equip us to reap an abundant ingathering.



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