

What's the Difference?

A comparison of the two Southern Baptist state conventions in Texas

Church and associational leaders have repeatedly asked for a description of major differences between the two state conventions in Texas. The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention has resisted trying to speak for the other convention, so this document uses the characterization of their work first published in the *Baptist Standard* in 2002 and downloaded from the *Baptist Standard's* website in June of 2006. Except in the places noted, where the facts have changed, the description of the Baptist General Convention of Texas is as published in the *Baptist Standard*. The description of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is in our own words, quite different from the original piece. Thus, in this treatment, both conventions are allowed to speak for themselves. In this spirit, our comparison is also limited to the subjects addressed in the comparison published by the *Baptist Standard*.

Baptist General Convention of Texas

1. **Understanding of biblical authority**-BGCT leaders and messengers repeatedly have affirmed the Bible to be the authoritative "record of God's revelation of himself to man" and a "perfect treasure of divine instruction" that is "truth without any mixture of error." While the BGCT includes individuals and churches who use the term "inerrant" to describe the Bible, most BGCT leaders and messengers in recent years have shunned that word as a politicized codeword more than a descriptive theological statement, while still affirming the complete authority and trustworthiness of the Bible.
2. **Understanding of biblical interpretation**-Opposes the SBC's removal of the phrase from its doctrinal statement that identifies Jesus Christ as "the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted." To deny believers the right to interpret the Bible themselves through the witness of Jesus and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, BGCT leaders contend, is to deny that the word of God is "living and active" and makes religious leaders guilty of "bibliolatry." Strongly affirms the Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.
3. **Understanding of Accountability**-Rejects 2000 Baptist Faith & Message as a non-Baptist creed. Sees accountability to God alone.
4. **Understanding of humans**-Affirms all humanity as created by God and in the image of God but does not emphasize gender differences as strictly as the SBTC. BGCT leaders and messengers have rejected the assertion that wives are to be "graciously

submissive” to their husbands, instead reading Ephesians 5 to teach mutual submission. Also believes the issue of who may serve as a pastor should be left to the discretion of the local church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, some BGCT churches would not allow female pastors, while others would. Sees all humans, both male and female, as living in a fallen, sinful state where redemption is made possible only through faith in God through Jesus Christ.

5. **Understanding of salvation**-Affirms the need of all humans to receive eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Son and humanity’s Savior through the process of regeneration, justification and sanctification.
6. **Sanctity of life**-Affirms the sanctity of all human life. Has passed numerous resolutions through the years condemning abortion except in cases of rape and incest or when essential to save the life of the mother. Also opposes “partial-birth” abortion.
7. **Homosexuality**-BGCT messengers in 1982 approved a resolution stating: “The homosexual lifestyle is not normal or acceptable in God’s sight and is indeed called sin.” This position has been reaffirmed in various statements and actions since then. In 1996, the Messenger Seating Study Committee said: “The Bible teaches that the ideal for sexual behavior is the marital union between husband and wife and that all other sexual relations—whether premarital, extramarital, or homosexual—are contrary to God’s purposes and thus sinful. Homosexual practice is therefore in conflict with the Bible.” In 1998, the BGCT Executive Board voted not to accept funds from any church that “openly endorses” homosexuality or other sexual misconduct.
8. **Church and state**-Affirms the Baptist doctrine of religious liberty and the separation of church and state, with emphasis both on keeping the state out of the church and the church out of official influence on the state. Supports the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which was defunded by the SBC because of the BJC’s stricter stance on separation of church and state. In its Adopted Budget has defunded the SBC’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, charging the agency and its president engage in partisan politics. Opposes government-sponsored school prayer and taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious schools.
9. **Relationship to Southern Baptist Convention**-Although still a partner with the Southern Baptist Convention, the BGCT has not walked in lock step with changes enacted in the SBC since 1979.

BGCT leaders have publicly opposed some of the positions and actions taken by SBC leaders in recent years, including dramatic changes at the six SBC seminaries and in the SBC's doctrinal statement, called the Baptist Faith & Message. The BGCT has not adopted the SBC's 2000 version of that faith statement, instead reaffirming the 1963 Baptist Faith & Message, drafted by representatives of all state Baptist conventions within the SBC. Allows churches to relate also to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

10. **Relationship to churches**-The BGCT is built around cooperation. Membership is open to any missionary Baptist church that desires to cooperate in fulfilling the convention's objectives of evangelism, missions, Christian education and benevolence work. The BGCT's constitution states the object of the convention is "to awaken and stimulate among those churches the greatest possible activity" in cooperative ministry. No affirmation of a specific doctrinal statement is required, although participating churches are to be of "like faith and work."
11. **Relationship to agencies/institutions**-In addition to processing Cooperative Program contributions to national and worldwide Baptist ministries, the BGCT conducts much of its statewide ministry through affiliated agencies and institutions. No formal statement of faith must be signed, but in most cases, the BGCT elects all or a majority of the institution's governing board. In a few cases, special arrangements have been negotiated between the BGCT and an institution concerning governance and related matters.
12. **Support for Texas ministries**-In addition to extensive Executive Board ministries such as Baptist Student Ministry, River Ministry and the Church Starting Center, the BGCT affiliates with and supports Baylor University, Dallas Baptist University, East Texas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University, Houston Baptist University, Howard Payne University, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Wayland Baptist University, San Marcos Baptist Academy, Hispanic Baptist Theological School, Valley Baptist Missions/Education Center, Baptist Child & Family Services, Buckner Baptist Benevolences, South Texas Children's Home, Texas Baptist Children's Home & Family Services, Baptist Memorials Ministries, Baptist Community Services, Golden Palms Retirement and Health Center, Hendrick Health Center, Baptist Health System, Baptist St. Anthony's Health System, Baylor Health Care System, Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center, Memorial Hermann Baptist Hospitals and Valley Baptist Health System.

13. **Giving options**-The BGCT offers two basic giving plans, which create a variety of options. The BGCT Adopted Budget allocates 72.3 percent of income to fund all BGCT ministries and 27.7 percent to fund the two mission boards and most of the other ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Adopted Budget provides up to \$1 million annually in funding for SBC seminaries, plus additional funding for three Texas Baptist seminaries. It does not fund the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Churches not using the Adopted Budget are allowed to divide their gifts any way they choose, including allocations to BGCT ministries and institutions, SBC ministries, including seminaries, and other Baptist work. Churches may send worldwide missions contributions through the BGCT to the SBC, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or the Baptist World Alliance

Editor's note: Since 2002, the BGCT adopted budget has moved to 79% of undesignated funds remaining in Texas and 21% being made available for ministries beyond Texas (includes CBF, SBC, and World Connex, the BGCT's own missionary enterprise—divided as a church instructs). The convention budget also no longer designates against the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and the six SBC seminaries since this piece was written in 2002.

14. **Theological education**-A Seminary Study Committee in 2000 determined the six SBC seminaries no longer teach in accordance with Texas Baptist beliefs and therefore recommended a redirection of some funding from those seminaries to three BGCT schools—Hispanic Baptist Theological School, Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University and Truett Seminary at Baylor University. The BGCT Adopted Budget provides up to \$1 million annually to the SBC seminaries, mainly Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth. The BGCT also provides millions of dollars in additional funding to the SBC seminaries annually through the designated gifts of BGCT churches. The BGCT has pledged to distribute church-directed funds in the manner any church desires.

(See editor's note above. The funding changes which resulted from the Seminary Study Committee report have since been rescinded)

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention

1. **Biblical Authority**-The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention was founded on the conviction that the Bible is without error in all that it teaches. It is the objective revelation of God to man. Affiliated churches affirm biblical authority, as stipulated in SBTC's constitution, and biblical inerrancy is foundational to the conduct of all SBTC ministries. "Authoritative," "infallible," and "divine" are words that have proved insufficient because some will use those words to indicate a view of biblical authority that denies the historical nature of biblical miracles, the attributed authorship of some biblical books, or the historical accuracy of some narratives.
2. **Biblical interpretation**-The SBTC, indicated by adopting the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) as our statement of faith, agrees with the clearer language of that confession's statement on the nature and interpretation of Scripture. Although the intent of the writers of the 1963 BFM was to affirm inerrancy, a statement that "the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ," has been used by many as a more subjective standard for biblical interpretation. The SBTC affirms the priesthood of believers as a biblical teaching that we are accountable for and to one another in the body of Christ. This doctrine does not indicate that all opinions about biblical teachings are equally valid.
3. **Accountability**-As a confessional fellowship, our churches hold one another accountable within the broad parameters of our statement of faith. It is not creedal to do this. The BFM (2000) was adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention as an instrument of doctrinal accountability for the work cooperatively supported by Southern Baptist churches. It was adopted by the SBTC to be a standard for the corporate ministry of our convention and as a standard for accountability among the churches.
4. **Salvation**-Outside of Christ, all are lost. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
5. **Humanity**-All people are created by God and bear his image. All people are equal in worth before God and in Christ. Men and women are nonetheless different in important and God-blessed ways. In all human institutions people are assigned different roles. The language of our statement of faith says that the home is one of those institutions where men are called to love their wives; and provide for, protect, and lead their families. Women are called to graciously submit to the servant leadership of her husband, and manage the household and nurture the next generation. All Christians receive spiritual gifts and significant roles within the local church; the role of pastor should be held by a man, as indicated in Scripture.

All humans, male and female, live in a fallen, sinful state. Redemption is made possible only through faith in God through Jesus Christ.

6. **Sanctity of Life**-SBTC has consistently affirmed the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. The convention's resolutions on the subject have never listed exceptions to this affirmation. Convention ministries and all convention employees conduct their ministry according to this conviction, which is also specified in the convention's statement of faith.

7. **Homosexual behavior**-SBTC's constitution and bylaws uphold the biblical witness on homosexual behavior. "We will not consider for affiliation or continued affiliation any church that has taken action affirming, approving or endorsing the practice of homosexuality. Such actions include but are not limited to the licensure or ordination of homosexuals, marriage or blessing of homosexual relationships, and endorsing homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle." Because SBTC is a confessional fellowship, the convention's options go beyond refusing contributions from churches that violate this standard. SBTC has the further option of disaffiliation if the church will not honor its commitment to the parameters of the convention's fellowship. The convention has removed one church from affiliation over this issue.

8. **Church and State**-SBTC affirms the Baptist teaching of religious liberty. Religious liberty requires that government in no way dictate or hinder the practice of religion. The convention works in partnership with the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. SBTC has no relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a group no longer in harmony with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention. SBTC has expressed no opinion on government-sponsored school prayer or for taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious schools.

9. **Relation to the Southern Baptist Convention**-The SBTC is an autonomous fellowship of Southern Baptist Churches. A primary reason for the convention's founding was the desire on the part of Texas Southern Baptists to work in friendly cooperation with the SBC. SBTC remains the only state convention to pass on more than half of all undesignated Cooperative Program budget receipts to the SBC operating budget. The convention's mission statement states the intent to "facilitate and enlarge the Great Commission ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist churches and associations in Texas." The partnership with other denominational bodies is not unthinking but based on the ministry SBTC holds in common with others.

SBTC has adopted the same confession of faith as the SBC, the BFM, (2000). SBTC has no relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

10. **Relation to churches**-SBTC was formed by churches that wanted a confessional fellowship with theological, missiological, and methodological harmony. The convention's statement of faith, constitution and bylaws describes the specifics of this harmony. Affiliating churches affirm their desire to work with sister churches in this way. The convention does not seek to dictate the conduct of any church. It does define the parameters of its fellowship as instructed by its affiliated churches.
11. **Agencies/institutions**-As a part of SBTC's harmonious relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention, the convention gladly works in partnership with the 12 entities supported by the denomination. This partnership enhances the ability of the SBTC to assist affiliated churches and strengthens the work of national entities. Institutions in Texas wishing to partner with SBTC must also be in harmony with the convention's doctrinal priorities.
12. **Support for institutions in Texas**-The SBTC's priorities require the convention to limit its organizational structure. SBTC has not built and does not own institutions. The convention has developed partnerships with three educational institutions (Criswell College, Jacksonville College, Houston Baptist University), two family ministry institutions (East Texas Baptists Family Ministries, Texas Baptist Home for Children) and a men's ministry organization (Texas Baptist Men). The SBTC does not provide primary funding or nominate a majority of trustees for any of these ministry partners. This allows missions and evangelism to use the largest portion of the convention's instate budget.
13. **Giving options**-SBTC emphasizes the traditional definition of Cooperative Program as defined by the SBC at the program's founding. By definition, Cooperative Program is an undesignated gift given through the state convention, which is divided, according to the convention's budget, with the Southern Baptist Convention. As of 2008, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention passes 55% of all undesignated receipts to the SBC allocation budget, as of 2009. From its beginning, it was the stated intent of SBTC's executive board to work toward a 55/45 division of undesignated funds by this year, with the larger percentage going to the SBC allocation budget. SBTC churches also fund a variety of other ministry needs through designated giving.

14. **Theological education**-The SBTC is in full and harmonious relationship with all SBC entities. The six SBC seminaries are welcome to promote their work at SBTC meetings, those who wish to do so also hold alumni meetings in the convention's meeting site. Because of geography, SBTC works most closely with Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. The convention has joined with Southwestern, for example, in an initiative to provide theological training for Hispanic pastors in Texas. In addition to the SBC seminaries, SBTC has two affiliated Christian colleges, Jacksonville College and Criswell College, that also provide theological training.