



Adrian Pierce Rogers
Served as 41st SBC President:
1980, 1987, and 1988

Florida Pastorates:

Fellsmere Baptist Church, 1951 – 1954

Parkview Baptist Church, Fort Pierce, 1958 – 1964

First Baptist Church, Merritt Island, 1964 – 1972

Introductory Overview

Adrian Pierce Rogers, a native of West Palm Beach, Florida, was born in the midst of the Great Depression and was the third child of Arden and Rose Rogers.

“Adrian’s salvation experience at the age of fourteen while attending a revival crusade” held in West Palm Beach church, marked the beginning of his spiritual journey. In the two years that followed that initial spiritual decision, Rogers said he struggled “with a lack of assurance of his salvation.”¹

However, Rogers subsequently experienced a “positive affirmation” of his relationship with Christ, as well as other manifestation of God’s direction for his life that resulted in Rogers serving a variety of Baptist churches. Those ministry benchmarks included three Florida pastorates followed by 33-years’ service to the Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee. During those Memphis years Rogers was elected to three one-year terms as the 41st president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

An “Eternal Change” that Turned His Life Around

Adrian Rogers (b. 1931; d. 2005), described his family as “good, hard-working salt of the earth kind of people,” recalling his childhood. “As a family, we were not anti-God. We were just an average family that was without Christ. As a child, I never heard my father pray. We never had Bible reading in our home, and we did not attend church.”² Without any spiritual guidance, Adrian’s young life could be characterized as a rebel without a cause. By his own admission, Rogers “frequently skipped school, used foul language, cheated in class, made trouble for his teachers, and fought often.”³

Then came the “eternal change” experience in his life. At age 14 Rogers and his family were invited down the street from their home to a revival service being held

at West Palm Beach's Northwood Baptist Church. As the evangelist issued a public invitation to accept Jesus Christ, Adrian's father, to the surprise of his family, responded. Adrian recalled that night.

My father's going forward astounded me. . . To that point everything the preacher had said seemed to pertain to other people. But at the moment my father stepped forward, the message became personal. I was immediately smitten by God's Spirit and knew I needed to do the same thing as my father. . . [to make] a profession of my faith in Christ. . . I believe an eternal change took place in those moments, and I became a new creature in Christ.⁴

Unfortunately, as Rogers later recalled, "The night I went forward to profess Christ, I was not counseled, nor did they share any Scripture with me, I was not prayed with, nor was I disciplined in any way. I left there with all the proclivities of the flesh in me."

What followed were two years of spiritual struggle as he returned to his former lifestyle of cheating in class, fighting at school, bad language, and disobedience which continued to be his daily spiritual battlefield.⁵

Despite his personal struggle, Rogers was president of his senior class and captain of a championship football team.

Finally, when he was 16 years old, Rogers determined to settle the matter "once and for all" by seeking a positive affirmation of his salvation experience. While out walking one night he came to a "spiritual and literal crossroads" at a street intersection near his house. According to Rogers:

At 39th Street and Calvin Avenue, I stopped and prayed, 'Lord I don't know if I'm lost and you have me under conviction or I'm saved and the devil's trying to make me doubt it, but I need to get it settled.' Then I looked straight up into heaven – I didn't bow my head – and I said,

‘Lord, you told me in your Word that if I would trust you, you would save me. If I have been saved this won’t take it away. But if I have not been saved, I’m going to settle it right now. So, Lord Jesus, now and forever, I trust you to save me. I don’t look for a feeling. I don’t look for a sign. It is done. Praise your holy name.’⁶

**‘God I’m as low
as I know how
to get. I want
you to use me.’**

The following year, one of the most profound events, and self-described as a “defining moment” in Rogers’ spiritual journey,

occurred when he was a high school senior. Having recently committed himself to full-time Christian ministry, as was his practice, he would go out on the football field at night and spend time talking with God. What transpired on a particular summer night became an often-repeated testimony – with slight variation – Rogers told in churches and at pastor events, and recounted here:

God filled me with the Holy Spirit as a teenage boy. God called me to preach. And I said, ‘God I want you to use me.’ And I remember, out on the field where I used to practice football, I walked up and down, praying and crying and weeping and saying, ‘God I want you to use me.’ Then I stretched myself out on the ground, put my face in the dirt, and said, ‘God please use me.’ That didn’t seem good enough, so I made a hole for my nose down in the dirt until the nostrils were filled with dust, and said, ‘God I’m as low as I know how to get. I want you to use me.’ I didn’t speak in tongues, I didn’t shout, I didn’t see any visions. But God moved into my life.⁷

Rogers shared the testimony often as a means of encouragement to his listeners, by noting, “there is a

holy dimension” to being called by God, “I thank God for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.”

Marriage and Growing a Family

Adrian and his teenage sweetheart Joyce Gentry both graduated from high school in May 1950, and Rogers was licensed to preach on July 30, by the Northwood Baptist Church. By the Fall, both had enrolled at Stetson University in Deland, Florida.

Soon after enrolling at Stetson University, on September 9, 1951, Rogers married Joyce Louise Gentry (b.1933) of West Palm Beach. The couple started their family in their junior year at the university, having their first child Stephen Michael (b. 1954). Later, while attending the seminary, the Rogers had a daughter Gayle Christine (b. 1956). A third child, Philip Gentry (b. 1958; d. 1958), died unexpectedly of sudden infant death syndrome soon after the family began their ministry at the Parkview Church. Several years later, while still at Parkview Church, Joyce Rogers had two other children born sixteen months apart, David (b. 1960) and Janice (b. 1961).⁸

Fellsmere Baptist Church, 1951 – 1954

At the end of his freshman year at Stetson, in 1951, Adrian was invited to become the pastor of the Fellsmere Baptist Church (org. 1947) of Fellsmere, Florida. [The town of Fellsmere is located in Indian River County, approximately 150 miles southeast of Deland, located between Sabastion and Vero Beach.] In his characteristic humorous observation, Rogers said the church was “the first, last and only Baptist church in that town of about 500 people.”⁹ Concurrent to his pastoral call to Fellsmere, Rogers was ordained to the gospel ministry May 8, 1951.

“The congregation numbered only several dozen people,” when Rogers was invited to serve as pastor.

“Adrian considered himself ‘utterly untrained’ but he also discovered that God honors the preaching of his Word. . . [despite] the worst sermons you’ve ever heard. . . God honored it and there would be tears and souls would be saved,” biographer Phil Kramer noted.¹⁰ In the first year of his pastorate the church held 51 baptisms. Those baptisms were “especially memorable” for Rogers because the church, having no running water nor a baptistry, had to use a nearby canal. Rogers, nearly 50 years later recalled, “Thank God we’ve seen multiplied thousands baptized since, but there will never be another baptism like the ones we had at Canal A in Fellsmere, Florida.”¹¹

“After three years of Adrian’s leadership, the church had added running water, a baptistry, wooden theater seats, upgraded lighting, and a finished ceiling. But more importantly, a photograph of a packed auditorium on Adrian’s final Sunday as pastor in June 1954 shows the real fruit of his ministry – namely the many who had been led to Christ, baptized and disciplined in the little church . . .” Kramer observed.¹²

Seminary and Mississippi Pastorate

Rogers graduated from Stetson in June 1954, and bidding goodbye to his Fellsmere Church family, the Rogers family moved to New Orleans where Adrian enrolled in the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. By January of the following year, Rogers preached and was soon called as pastor of the Waveland Baptist Church in Waveland, Mississippi. The Rogers decided to rent an apartment along the Gulf Coast to be close to the church and Adrian opted to make the 120-mile roundtrip between Waveland and New Orleans for classes Tuesday to Friday.

“Waveland was a difficult place in which to minister,” Joyce Rogers recalled. “It was predominantly Roman Catholic, which made it hard to establish an evangelical church. Yet there were still some who

received Christ . . .” As a result of Rogers’ commitment to his calling, he focused his efforts on reaching people with the gospel and led the church leadership to make improvements to the church facility. “The church grew from twenty-five to around seventy-five members. . . a new educational building was built and for the first time a small nursery was included.”¹³

**Parkview Baptist Church, Fort Pierce,
1958 – 1964**

As Rogers approached his January 1958 graduation from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, he was prayerfully considering three ministry options: missions, evangelism and the pastorate. About that time Rogers received letters from two small Florida Baptist churches asking Rogers to be their pastor. “After prayer he wrote both churches and respectfully declined.” A response came back from the Parkview Baptist Church, Fort Pierce, Florida, which asked Rogers to reconsider. After a time of prayerful reconsideration by Adrian and Joyce, God’s Spirit provided the “inner nudge” to accept the church’s invitation.¹⁴

By mid-April the Rogers family had moved to Fort Pierce to begin Adrian’s ministry at the Parkview Church (org. 1925). Initially the “church had slightly more than 100 people in Sunday morning attendance and the annual budget was little more than \$15,000.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, after the Mother’s Day worship service, when Rogers returned to the parsonage, he found that baby Philip was not conscious. Rushing the child to the hospital the doctor determined the child had experienced sudden infant syndrome and died. The death had a profound spiritual impact on Rogers, as he later recalled in his memoirs:

The death of my son caused me to reflect and get things in sharper spiritual focus. My life and ministerial priorities were deepened through the death of our son . . . While I would not want to go through that pain again I would not take ten million dollars for the experience we had with the Lord through that season.¹⁶

During his six years at Parkview the membership grew as noted by the statistics: 1,338 additions to the church: 652 baptisms; 686 by transfer of membership letter; and 650 average Sunday morning attendance. The hallmark of Rogers' ministry was personal evangelism and dynamic preaching which resulted in many people making professions of faith in Christ. The finances of the church improved substantially under Rogers' leadership as the annual budget grew to \$90,000, with 22 percent earmarked to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program.¹⁷

First Baptist Church, Merritt Island, 1964 – 1972

In late April 1964, Rogers received a letter from a pastor's search committee seeking his interest in accepting the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Merritt Island, Florida. "Merritt Island is located in the fastest growing county in the country. . . The challenge of the area is second to none, and a man of vision and dedication is needed," the invitation letter stated.¹⁸ At first, Adrian and Joyce were not interested in leaving Parkview. But after a "secret visit" to the church during the week, and extended prayers, Rogers later said he and Joyce "felt that a nail-pierced hand" pointed them to Merritt Island.¹⁹

Rogers' preaching ministry at the Merritt Island Church (org. 1949) "highlighted the Spirit-filled life and the fulness of the Holy Spirit as often as he celebrated the inspiration of the Bible," biographer Phil Kramer observed.²⁰ Although Rogers' personal

experiences with the Holy Spirit affected his teaching emphasis, he made it clear to his congregation that being Spirit-filled, “simply means to be in a continual state of possession and control by the Spirit.”²¹ His preaching also stressed that, “The Spirit-filled life is not a matter of visions, tongues, and ecstasies; but the very practical living of the Christian life.”²²

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During his eight years at the Merritt Island Church the membership grew to over 4,000 from 1,150 members. Some of that growth was the result of over 3,400 persons making professions of faith, which produced a cumulative baptism total

of 2,470, for an annual average of over 308 baptisms.²³

A new pastoral call came from a Memphis, Tennessee, congregation which Rogers understood as being from God. Rogers read his resignation letter to an unusually large crowd attending the Wednesday night service and explained to the members present how God had called him to Memphis. His last Sunday was August 27, 1972.

Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, 1972 – 2005

Rogers responded in 1972 to the call to serve as pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church (org. 1908), Memphis. He was following in the footsteps of legendary former pastors R. G. Lee (served 1927 to 1960) and Ramsey Pollard (served 1960 to 1972). During the ensuing 33 years, Rogers helped build the church to a membership from a on paper count of 9,000 to more than 29,000.

“The ministry at Bellevue presented a challenge,” recalled Joyce Rogers. Describing the downtown location she wrote, “There had been a numerical decline for twenty years. Some of the buildings were stately but worn down. The parking was inadequate. . . The auditorium that would seat almost 3,000 had only about 1,500 in attendance on a strong Sunday.”²⁴

In all the churches he served, Rogers brought a biblically-inspired preaching which continually focused on reaching people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Rogers often told young pastors that biblical preaching is “communicated through a two-fold medium – you and the Holy Spirit.”

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He would go on to explain that the four purposes of biblical preaching include: to confront; to clarify; to convict; and to convert.²⁵ He also

brought the same commitment to the leading the church members to embrace the Spirit-filled life he had stressed at Merritt Island. Those efforts resulted not only in growing the church with new believers, but also in establishing a host of local ministry and missionary projects that resulted in individuals responding to missionary service.

Subsequently, Rogers’ face and deep voice became known to millions of believers worldwide thanks to his *Love Worth Finding* radio and television ministries. Although established in 1987, the Bellevue ministry, to this day, re-packages and distributes Rogers’ sermons. Rogers’ use of broadcast ministries to share the gospel began while serving as pastor at the Ft. Pierce and Merritt Island churches. Bellevue’s *Love Worth Finding* “not only broadcasts Rogers’

sermons over radio and television stations around the world, it preserves his legacy” explained scholar Graham M. Weaver. “Those who had heard of Rogers said that he was an excellent preacher and that his sermons still speak to the current dilemmas that our culture faces and many did not realize Rogers has been dead since 2005. The messenger may be dead, but the message continues to be broadcast,” nearly two decades later, Graham wrote.²⁶

In the midst of growing the Bellevue congregation – both in reaching people and building a new campus discussed later – Rogers was enlisted to respond to the simmering controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Lead-up to the 1979 SBC Annual Meeting

The period between 1979 and 1993 reflected a theological and leadership controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention. “Conservative leaders focused the battle cry on a single word in the late seventies . . . The word was *inerrant*. Whereas the Bible had been called inspired and infallible by most Southern Baptist leaders and theologians, the word *inerrant* soon became a codeword for the conservative movement,” Southern Baptist Historian Jesse Fletcher explained.²⁷ By 1985, survey research among Southern Baptists by Emory University religion sociologist and researcher Nancy Ammerman confirmed the conclusion. “The word ‘inerrancy’ became, then, a synonym for Southern Baptist orthodoxy, and only the most determined non-traditionalist refused to use the word.”²⁸

Despite the growing acceptance of the concept of “inerrancy,” Grady C. Cothen (b. 1920; d.2017), former President of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board between 1975 – 1984, expressed concerns with the inerrancy movement by noting:

The nonscholar inerrantists generally claim absolute accuracy for the Bible in every statement that it makes. If it seems to contradict some known position of science or fact of history, or if the accounts of the same events do not coincide, explanation is sought in some ‘scribal inadvertency’ or miscopied text or the problem is attributed to the understanding of the era of the writer.²⁹

There was a pre-cursor action in 1964 before the “battle cry” over biblical inerrancy was amplified. Houston Appeals Court Judge Paul Pressler (b. 1930; d. 2024), at the time a deacon at Second Baptist Church, participated in a self-appointed fact-finding investigation into the perceived growing liberalism within the Southern Baptist Convention – based upon his assessments of the commentaries produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board and what was being taught in the seminaries. As a result of his findings, Pressler published a booklet entitled, “A Message to Southern Baptists,” that highlighted the liberal trends in the SBC,³⁰ that established the need for a response by traditionally conservative Southern Baptists.³¹ According to self-described conservative religion journalist James Hefley the then existent SBC conservative leadership agreed the need existed “that the movement must be broadened . . . Publicizing ‘liberalism’ in the SBC wasn’t enough. They had to start changing the organizational machinery.”³²

Subsequently, in the year leading up to the 1979 SBC annual meeting to be held in Houston, Texas, two men spearheaded the effort to bring about a renaissance of conservative values within the denomination. They were Paige Patterson (b. 1942), then president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, and Houston Appeals Court Judge

Paul Pressler. The two men “literally crisscrossed America meeting with pastors one-on-one, small groups, large groups, and even rallies in their attempt to network and organize and motivate pastors” to go to Houston to attend the Pastors’ Conference and the SBC annual meeting. Self-described conservative theologian-pastor Jerry Sutton further explained that the Pastors’ Conference became “a platform to inform and motivate conservatives as to how to vote and how to access issues that would come before the Southern Baptist Convention.”³³ Additionally, Patterson and Pressler sent numerous letters to thousands of persons calling upon them “to help turn the Southern Baptist Convention to a conservative direction.”³⁴ The two stressed in news accounts “that they were pushing no particular person” to be elected as SBC president “committed to biblical inerrancy.”

However, Patterson had identified ten pastors who would be “acceptable” nominees. Three of those potential candidates, including Adrian Rogers, publicly ruled out their respective nomination, although Patterson insisted Rogers was “draftable.”³⁵ Meanwhile, Adrian Rogers, said publicly that he had no interest in being nominated and denied having participated in the Patterson-Pressler “get out the vote” effort. Although Rogers said, “he supported the goal of electing a conservative president who would set a new direction for the Convention.”³⁶

The 1979 Election for President to serve 1980

On the Sunday night prior to the convening of the 1979 SBC annual meeting, the pre-convention Pastors’ Conference featured Adrian Rogers bringing the opening message. The Memphis pastor “expressed fear that liberalism was taking over Baptist colleges, universities and seminaries.” Later as he continued his attack on the “liberalism in the SBC,” Rogers claimed that “if those liberals will ever come to the cross of Christ, all heaven will break loose.” In a

surprise move, at least to Rogers, Dallas pastor W.A. Criswell told the crowd, “We will have a great time here if for no other reason, than to elect Adrian Rogers as president of the Southern Baptist Convention.” The crowd of 8,000 stood and applauded.³⁷

Later that night, Adrian was approached by Paige Patterson and Jacksonville, Florida, pastor Jerry Vines who asked, “Are you going to allow your nomination?” Rogers responded, “It is not settled in my heart.” The three went to Rogers’ hotel room where they knelt in fervent prayer. Now well after midnight, and with the encouragement of his wife, Rogers agreed, “I will do it.”³⁸

The following Tuesday afternoon, when the appointed time for the nominations for president arrived, six persons were nominated. Included was Adrian Rogers who was nominated by Jacksonville, Florida, pastor Homer Lindsay, Jr.³⁹ Later in the session, Convention Registration Secretary Lee Porter reported the results of the ballot count for each president nominee. He said Rogers received 6,129 votes or 51.36 percent of the 11,933 ballots cast and was elected president of the Convention.⁴⁰

Years later reflecting upon Rogers’ election, Jerry Vines in his 2014 published memoirs observed, “And thus the Conservative Resurgence was officially underway. Dr. Rogers’ election was the first in a string of seven presidents known as Conservative Resurgence Presidents.”⁴¹

Following his election and during a press conference, Rogers denied he was a part of the so-called “conservative political machine” that supported his election. “I was not a part of this campaign. I never went to a single meeting. I don’t belong to Paige

Patterson and Judge Paul Pressler . . . I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.” In prepared remarks to the press corps Rogers highlighted his goals as convention president to emphasize missions, evangelism, faith in God’s word, and loving each other. Declaring he wanted to be positive in his approach, Rogers said, “I am not against anyone or anything except the devil and sin.” He continued his remarks by stressing, “I want to try to be a good conservative, soul-winning, Bible-believing, church-building pastor and convention president.”⁴²

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Although Rogers contended that he was not a part of a “conservative political machine,” others like self-described conservative Southern Baptist journalist and historian James Hefley confirmed Rogers was a part of the conservative resurgence leadership. “In the forefront was Adrian Rogers. By his side were Paige Patterson, the theologian of the movement and Paul Pressler, the strategist.”⁴³ Another observer of Southern Baptist history – Walter B. Shurden – noted that “the Patterson-Pressler coalition would not have won without Rogers’ ability to communicate with the Southern Baptist masses and call them to action,” particularly by simply defining the theological perspective of the conservative movement.⁴⁴

Nearly a year later – May 6, 1980 – Rogers announced that he would not seek a second term as SBC president. “After much prayer and heart searching, I have decided not to allow my name to be placed in nomination for a second term” at the 1980 SBC annual meeting. In an interview with *Baptist*

Press, Rogers said, “As much as I love my denomination, my church is still my first responsibility.” He continued by stressing, “there are pressing duties and vast opportunities I face as pastor of Bellevue. Our church is in a period of growth unprecedented in his history. These are days therefore, that I want to maximize for my church.”⁴⁵

Rogers’ Confrontations With “Neo-Orthodoxy” Theology

Five-years later Rogers confirmed he attended an early December 1985 meeting in Atlanta with 18 conservative leaders who asked him to be a candidate for the presidency of the SBC in 1986, *Baptist Press* reported. “When these friends met, they seemed to have a spirit of unanimity and asked me if I would be willing to be nominated again,” Rogers said. “I certainly have not decided to run . . .” he explained to the media.⁴⁶

In a May 1986 interview with *Florida Baptist Witness* Associate Editor Greg Warner, Rogers confirmed that he was willing to be nominated again for the SBC presidency, “in order to continue the corrective action begun” by the SBC conservative resurgence. The corrective action would eliminate, what he called the “neo-orthodoxy,” being taught in the SBC seminaries. Rogers defined “neo-orthodoxy” as a theological position which “uses traditional words to describe biblical faith, but which means something quite different.” He cited the example of the person who teaches a biblical passage which is “not to be taken factually, historically or literally.”⁴⁷ Years later, Rogers wrote in one of his books on biblical authority, that the problem with neo-orthodoxy is that it “was a sort of a ‘halfway’ house between abject liberalism and Bible belief. It teaches that the *Bible is not the objective Word of God* [Rogers’ italic emphasis] because God cannot be known by mere human words.

Rather, the Bible is a channel through which men may encounter God.”⁴⁸

Rogers’ perspective on his “fear that liberalism was taking over Baptist colleges, universities and seminaries,” which he cited during a sermon preached at the 1979 SBC Pastors’ Conference,⁴⁹ likely was partially informed by his own negative educational experiences. While a student at Stetson University, Rogers encountered faculty who “did not share his basic convictions about the Bible and the Christian faith.” In his retelling, “I began to hear that there wasn’t someone named Matthew who wrote the *Gospel of Matthew* or Luke who wrote *Luke* or John who wrote *John*. I heard that Moses didn’t write *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers* or *Deuteronomy*. . .”⁵⁰ And again, several years later, while attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Rogers recalled in his memoirs, “I was taught to see the Bible as some sort of composite human instrument, it seemed to me, rather than the divine, holy, inspired, inerrant, infallible, Word of God.”⁵¹

To stem the growing liberalism in at least one Baptist school – his alma mater of Florida Baptist State Convention’s Stetson University – Joyce Rogers’ wrote about one defining moment in Adrian’s ministry. “When he returned to Florida after graduating from seminary, he discovered that the liberal, neo-orthodox teaching had gotten worse at Stetson and moral standards had dropped. As a result of his grieved spirit over these things” he took his concern to the Florida Baptist State Convention.⁵² During the 1966 annual meeting held in Pensacola, Rogers made a motion to delete the 1966-67 funding allocation of \$149,820 for Stetson University. After extended discussion that included “heated debate” and a pause for corporate prayer by messengers, a vote was taken and Rogers’ motion was defeated.⁵³

The Election to Serve as President for 1986-87

The 129th annual session of the 1986 Southern Baptist Convention was to convene in Atlanta, where Charles Stanley presided as president. The election of convention president was held on Tuesday morning with only two nominees presented. Nelson Price of Marietta, Georgia, nominated Adrian Rogers and Richard Jackson of Phoenix, Arizona, nominated Winfred Moore of Amarillo, Texas.⁵⁴ Soon thereafter Convention Registration Secretary Lee Porter reported the voting results for president with 39,099 ballots cast. He reported that Adrian Rogers received 21,201 votes or 54.22 percent and declared Rogers as the next SBC president.⁵⁵

As the annual meeting came to a close the next day, Rogers brought the convention sermon, an honor for which he had been selected the prior year. In his message, Rogers exhorted Southern Baptists to lay down their weapons of

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civil warfare and take up the battle against their common enemy – the devil. Rogers stressed that “our battle is not with flesh and blood” but against the “organized, mobilized, demonized forces of hell.” He added, “It has always been the devil’s purpose to bring disunity to the people of God and get them to battling one another rather than bombarding the gates of hell.”⁵⁶

During the three-day meeting, one of the most hotly debated items of business, messengers – by a vote of 12,001 to 9,556 – refused to withdraw the SBC from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The agency operates from a Washington office that advocates religious liberty and separation of church

and state on behalf of eight U.S. Baptist denominations.⁵⁷

Re-elected SBC President for 1987-88

The 1987 SBC annual meeting was held in St. Louis, Missouri, and Rogers presided over the gathering. Rogers, during the opening session, delivered his presidential address in which he called for doctrinal unity and functional diversity. “We are a missionary convention,” Rogers said. “That is the reason that we come together to do business,” which he specified as being missions and evangelism. He went on to declare, “I want to say the basis of our unity is not missions and evangelism. The basis of our unity is spiritual and doctrinal.”⁵⁸

At the appointed time for the election of president for 1987-88, Rogers turned the presiding over to second Vice President Ray Roberts of North Carolina. Only two nominations were presented. Edwin Young of Houston, Texas, nominated Adrian Rogers to be re-elected to a third one-year term. Charles Redmond of Pasadena, Texas, nominated Richard Jackson of Phoenix, Arizona.⁵⁹ Later that afternoon Registration Secretary Lee Porter reported that 23,327 ballots had been cast for president with Adrian Rogers receiving 13,980 or 59.97 percent of the vote. Rogers was declared president and he resumed presiding.⁶⁰

Among the most significant actions that occurred during that annual meeting was the presentation of the Peace Committee’s report. The study and report – which had been authorized in 1985 – was undertaken by a 22-member group. The committee included Rogers and five other former and future SBC presidents: Herschel Hobbs (1962 and 1963); Charles Stanley (1985 and 1986); Jerry Vines (1989 and 1990); Edwin Young (1993 and 1994); and James B. “Jim” Henry (1995 and 1996). The five-part report document contained background and sources of the

controversy, the findings and conclusions, and ten recommendations. Upon its presentation by Committee Chairman Charles Fuller of Roanoke, Virginia, three messengers made motions to amend the document, but all were voted down. The report was approved as printed.⁶¹

Rogers, in his 2005 autobiography, said that the Peace Committee report, “concluded that the division in the convention was primarily over doctrinal issues, especially the nature of the Bible. The report came down firmly on the side of biblical inerrancy.”⁶² Earlier in 1993, retired Sunday School Board President Grady C. Cothen in a book on the denomination wrote a critique of the Peace Committee’s report and observed:

Several elements of the report were on target. The description of the theological controversy did not get to the heart of the matter . . . Subsequent events show that the movement was really aimed at a dramatic change in historic Baptist positions related not only to the nature of Scripture, but to the insistence on interpretations of Scripture and the promotion of various social and political programs. The statements of the leaders of the rightest movement support this analysis.⁶³

In his post-re-election presidential news conference, Rogers said, “We believe in the absolute, total freedom of conscience.” He went on to stress, “We believe in the priesthood of the believer. We believe in soul liberty. We would not force our views on anyone if we could.” Rogers was questioned about his appointment of people to committees and boards of trustees, which had been one aspect of the Peace Committee’s investigation. “The people that I have appointed are people that I believe represent who Southern Baptists are,” Rogers said. “I believe that Southern Baptists have a right to set parameters for

those who serve them on committees, those who serve them in places of responsibility for which salaries are paid. I'm talking about places of executive leadership and teaching."⁶⁴

Prior to Rogers' death, the *Florida Baptist Witness* did a profile of Rogers' life based upon an interview by Editor James A. Smith, Sr.

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Rogers humbly acknowledged the significance of his role in the Conservative Resurgence. "I look back on my life and there are a lot of things that have happened. I have written books, pastored churches, and preached on radio and television around the world. But I think the part that God allowed me to have in the turning of the SBC may have the longest-lasting effect and be the most significant," . . . [The conservative resurgence] is part of church history. We think of the ancient councils of the church in decisions and so forth, but this thing is not small; it is big."⁶⁵

Attention Returned to Bellevue

By and large, with the completion of his service as SBC president, Rogers returned to his first love of commitment, Bellevue Baptist Church. Now in the midst of 1987, the church was in the process of constructing a new church facility in the Cordova suburb of Memphis. The new facility, located on a 360-acre site, ultimately contained a worship center with seating for 7,000, an educational building, a 100,000 square feet children's center, a family life center, and a fellowship building.⁶⁶ The church held its first Sunday morning worship services in Cordova on November 19, 1989, at which 14,000 attended. By February the following year a second worship service was added to accommodate the growing attendance.⁶⁷

Southern Baptists again called upon Adrian Rogers to bring his leadership and doctrinal perspective to the 1999 appointed *Baptist Faith and Message* Committee assigned to review and revise the Convention's official doctrinal statement.⁶⁸ Then convention president Paige Patterson appointed a 15-member committee that represented the most diverse group of

representatives from Southern Baptist life than had ever been assembled up to that date. The multi-ethnic group included pastors, educators, laymen and women, who collectively represented four

“The only Jesus we know is the Jesus in the Bible and the Jesus in the Bible believed in the inerrancy of the Scripture.”

ethnicities – African Americans, Anglos, Asians and Hispanics.⁶⁹ Among the committee members were former SBC presidents Jerry Vines (1989 and 1990), and Adrian Rogers (1980; 1987; 1988) who was named chairman. The committee's report was presented and adopted as printed without amendments during the 2000 SBC meeting held in Orlando.⁷⁰

Moderates, such as Russell H. Dilday (b. 1930; d. 2023), former professor of homiletics at Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary from 1994 to 2002, expressed concerns about the revised 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statement, after its release. “Baptists say their only creed is the Bible, and until recently, they have defended tenaciously the privilege of every believer, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to interpret Scripture according to his or her own conscience. This deeply engrained anti-creedal sentiment so characteristic of Baptists lies

behind the negative reactions to the newly revised document. Some have built-in suspicions of *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 because it was crafted by the ‘party’ who succeeded in a two-decade effort to take control of the SBC.” He continued in his assessment to identify seven positive and 12 “troubling factors” in the revised doctrinal statement.⁷¹

Two decades later, Adrian Rogers, in an interview with the *Florida Baptist Witness*, stressed the importance of the revised 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statement. “I think that a lot of the things in the *Baptist Faith and Message* that have been nuanced and changed are not as nearly significant as that one statement concerning how the Bible is to be interpreted. The only Jesus we know is the Jesus in the Bible and the Jesus in the Bible believed in the inerrancy of the Scripture.”⁷²

Rogers continued his service to Bellevue until early 2005, when he retired. By then he was struggling against cancer, which became complicated by double pneumonia. Roger died November 15, 2005. He was 74. At the time this 2026 *Journal* article was prepared, Joyce Rogers was still active in Bellevue Baptist Church and particularly the *Love Worth Finding* ministry.

Adrianisms

by Dr. Adrian Rogers

Adrian Rogers was a biblical preacher who used witty quips, anecdotes, alliterations and even a whimsical poem to complement his message of the gospel. These illustrations were a tool to effectively tell others of Jesus. These snippets of wit and wisdom are drawn from a collection called “Adrianisms:”

God is love, **Jesus** is wonderful.

Try to define the **Trinity** and you'll lose your mind.
Deny it and you'll lose your soul.

God only wants for us what we would want for ourselves
if we were smart *enough* to want it.

The **Bible** is: saving to the sinner; sweet to the saint;
sufficient to the sufferer; satisfying to the scholar.

The **Bible** is not the book of the week; it is not the book of
the month; nor is it the book of the year. *It is the book of
the ages!*

Satan can't keep God from answering our prayers,
but he will keep us from asking.

Sometimes we don't feel like **Praying**. But if there were
ever a time that we need to pray, it's when we don't feel like
it. We need to pray until we do feel like.

You deny yourself when you don't pray.
Prayer is the key that unlocks *heaven's treasury*.

Humility is knowing what I am, acknowledging that God
made me that way, and giving Him glory for it.

Joy is important in winning people to Christ.
Don't go around looking like an advance agent for the
undertaker.

What **Jesus** says is more *certain* than anything we can
feel.

We don't live by explanations. We live by **Promises**.

Too often, our **churches** are sacred societies for the
snubbing of sinners.

The **Mission of the Church**: make them; mark them;
and mature them.

[SOURCE: Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms: The Collected Wit and
Wisdom of Adrian Rogers*, 2015.]

ENDNOTES:

Editor's Note: This profile of Adrian P. Rogers was written by Donald S. Hepburn, managing director, Florida Baptist Historical Society, using the following resources:

¹ Joyce Rogers, *Love Worth Finding: The Life of Adrian Rogers*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 12 – 14.

² Phil Kramer, *Moon Port Pastor*, (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding Ministries, Inc., 2024), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ Joyce Rogers, 13 – 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶ Phil Kramer, 16 – 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 – 23.

⁸ Joyce Rogers cited her respective child's birthdate on the following pages of her book: Steve, 31; Gayle, 35; Philip Gentry, 37; David, 45; and Janice, 45.

⁹ Phil Kramer, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³ Joyce Rogers, 37 – 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39 – 40.

¹⁵ Phil Kramer, 37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷ Indian River Baptist Association "Statistical Reports," Florida Baptist *Annual*, 1958 to 1964; also see Phil Kramer, 46.

¹⁸ Phil Kramer, 46 – 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

²² *Ibid.*, 247, citing Rogers own memoirs, "*The Merritt Island Years*."

²³ Brevard Baptist Association "Statistical Reports," Florida Baptist *Annual*, 1965 to 1973.

²⁴ Joyce Rogers, 68.

²⁵ James A. Smith, Sr., "Adrian Rogers: There is no substitute for preaching the Word of God," *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 17, 2005, 1, 12; [news stories on Adrian Rogers are held in the files of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Graceville, Florida, and are hereinafter referred to as story held in Rogers' bio file].

²⁶ Graham M. Weaver, "Give me that big time religion: Adrian Rogers as a builder in the Southern Baptist Convention, at Bellevue Baptist Church, and with his radio ministry Love Worth Finding, 1972-2005," (M.A. degree thesis, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, 2017), 73; accessed May 30, 2026, through <https://krex.k-state.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/854be34e-5d91-43f8-83be-215fd6f5e8cf/content>.

²⁷ Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 251-252.

²⁸ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 75.

²⁹ Grady C. Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993), 127.

³⁰ Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 68 – 70.

³¹ Four books provide excellent overviews and the detailed history of the conflicts that occurred within the Southern Baptist Convention in the late twentieth century and which are cited within this article: Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation (2000)*; Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles (1995)*; James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence (1991)*; and Grady C. Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy 1993*).

³² James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Hannibal, Missouri: Hannibal Books, 1991), 36.

³³ Jerry Sutton, 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁵ Toby Druin, "Groups Meet in Fifteen States to Push SBC President," *Baptist Press*, May 9, 1979, 4; Druin reported in this May 9 issue of *Baptist Press* the six possible presidential candidates identified included Jerry Vines, Ala.; Bailey Smith, Okla.; Richard Jackson, Ariz.; Adrian Rogers, Tenn.; Homer Lindsey, Jr., Fla.; and John Bisagno, Tex.; Druin in a separate May 9, 1979 issue of the *Texas Baptist Standard* newspaper, four other possible candidates were identified: Abner McCall, Tex.; Douglas Watterson, Tenn.; William L. Self, Ga.; and Porter Routh, Tenn.; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

³⁶ Jerry Sutton, 100.

³⁷ Jim Newton and Charlie Warren, "Pastors Urged to Purge 'Liberals'," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1979, 2; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

³⁸ Joyce Rogers, 101.

³⁹ Proceedings, item 78, *SBC Annual 1979*, 35. The other five persons nominated for president were: C. E. Price (PA); A. Douglas Watterson (TN); Robert E. Naylor (TX); William Self (GA); and Abner McCall (TX).

⁴⁰ Proceedings, item 99, *SBC Annual 1979*, 43.

⁴¹ Jerry Vines, "Vines: My Life and Ministry," (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 114.

⁴² Jim Newton and Orville Scott, "Adrian Rogers Press Conference," *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1979, 1; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁴³ James C. Hefley, 40.

⁴⁴ Graham M. Weaver in his thesis "Introduction" quotes Walter B. Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), xxix.

⁴⁵ Robert O'Brien, "Adrian Rogers Declines 2nd Term as SBC President," *Baptist Press*, May 7, 1980, 1; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁴⁶ Al Shackelford, "Rogers Confirms Candidacy Request," *Baptist Press*, December 10, 1985, 1; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁴⁷ Greg Warner, "Rogers says SBC needs correction, not status quo," *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 28, 1986, 7; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁴⁸ Adrian Rogers, *The Incredible Power of Kingdom Authority: Getting an Upper Hand on the Underworld*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 117-8.

⁴⁹ Jim Newton and Charlie Warren, "Pastors Urged to Purge 'Liberals'."

⁵⁰ Phil Kramer, 25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵² Joyce Rogers, 45.

⁵³ Proceedings, item 16(1), *Florida Baptist Annual 1966*, 29.

⁵⁴ Proceedings, item 78, *SBC Annual 1986*, 42.

⁵⁵ Proceedings, item 97, *SBC Annual 1986*, 61.

⁵⁶ David Wilkinson, "Rogers' Sermon," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1986, 1; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁵⁷ Stan Hastey, "Group Consolidates Power Within SBC," *Baptist Press*, June 16, 1986, 2; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁵⁸ Stan Hastey, "Roger Presidential Address," *Baptist Press*, June 16, 1987, 1; [story held in Rogers' bio file].

⁵⁹ Proceedings, item 103, *SBC Annual 1987*, 47.

⁶⁰ Proceedings, item 111, *SBC Annual 1987*, 53.

⁶¹ Proceedings, item 153, *SBC Annual 1987*, 56 – 57; and “Special Report of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee,” 232 – 242.

⁶² Joyce Rogers, 110.

⁶³ Grady C. Cothen, 224.

⁶⁴ Stan Hastey, “Presidential News Conference.”

⁶⁵ James A. Smith, Sr., “Rogers on ministry, the SBC, and post-retirement,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 17, 2005, 12-13; [story held in Rogers’ bio file].

⁶⁶ Joyce Rogers, 81 – 83.

⁶⁷ Cyndi Richardson, *By His Grace and For His Glory: Celebrating a Century with Bellevue Baptist Church*, (Memphis, TN: Bellevue Baptist Church, 2004), 251.

⁶⁸ Proceedings, items 18, 52, 108 – 113, and 127, *SBC Annual*, 1999, 37, 79, 87, and 88.

⁶⁹ Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), ix.

⁷⁰ Proceedings, items 112 through 119, *SBC Annual*, 2000, 76. Also see two notable books that provide overviews and the detailed history on the development of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* and served as resource for this article: Blount and Wooddell, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*; and William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*.

⁷¹ Russell H. Dilday, “An Analysis of the Baptist Faith and Message, 2000,” posted on-line by The Center for Baptist Studies, April 2001, accessed May 30, 2026, through <https://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/hotissues/dildayfm2000.htm>.

⁷² James A. Smith, Sr., “Rogers on ministry, the SBC, and post-retirement.”

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