



Charles Jerry Vines
Served as 45th SBC President:
1989 and 1990

Florida Pastorate:
First Baptist Church, Jacksonville
Co-pastor – 1982 –2000
Pastor – 2000 – 2006

Introductory Overview

“In my mind I would be the pastor of a country church in Carroll County (Georgia). Or, if my ministry really took off, I might even get to one of the town churches,” Jerry Vines recalled in his autobiography.¹ As a hallmark of this evolving country preacher, Vines had a uniquely personal commitment to soul winning by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone who would listen.

God blessed Jerry Vines’ commitment that included service as pastor in several Baptist churches in towns and cities in Georgia and Alabama. These were preparatory to his calling, initially as co-pastor of a big city mega-church, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, where he served for 24-years. During those Florida years Vines was elected to two one-year terms as the 45th president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Growing Up in Rural Georgia

Charles Jerry Vines (b. 1937), a native of Carrollton, Georgia, was the son of Charles C. “Totsi” and Ruby Vines. The couple, married September 19, 1936, had two children, Jerry and a daughter Brenda (1949).² Charles and Ruby were involved in the Tabernacle Baptist Church and ensured that Jerry was involved in all the church’s children’s programs ranging from Sunday school to choir to Royal Ambassadors, a boys’ missions organization.³

One Sunday afternoon in 1947 Jerry’s good friend Ray Riggs told Vines of his plan to make a profession of faith in Christ. He asked Vines to accompany him to visit with the then Tabernacle Baptist Church pastor Ebb Kilpatrick. The two went to the pastor’s study and shared their desire to join the church. The pastor explained the plan of salvation. Later during the Sunday evening service Vines said he did not recall

the songs sung or even the content of the sermon preached. But he realized, at the tender age of nine, “I was a great sinner; Jesus is a great savior; I could receive a great salvation.” When the altar call was given Vines went forward. “I repented of my sins and trusted Christ as my personal savior. I was born again! I was converted! I was justified! I was redeemed! I was saved!”⁴

Growing into his teenage years, Jerry Vines found himself caught up in school studies and activities, particularly working on the school newspaper, playing trumpet in the school band and later joining the football team. Additionally, Vines was always involved in various mischief and pranks. By now the Vines’ family were only marginally involved in the Tabernacle church. Vines recalled that although he “had received Christ as my Savior, but I was growing little in my Christian life.”⁵

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However, by the time he reached age 16 Vines felt what he called “the moment of crisis” in his spiritual journey. One

night during his pre-bedtime prayer, “I asked the Lord if I was not saved, I wanted to be. His answer was clear as a bell. I didn’t hear an audible voice. He was louder than that!” Vines went on to describe what he heard in his heart from the Lord: “You don’t need to be saved. You already are. I want you to totally yield your life to My lordship and surrender My plan for your life.” As that encounter continued, Vines came to understand that God was calling him to the preaching ministry. “Yes, I want you to preach,” God revealed to Vines.⁶

Soon thereafter Vines told his parents of his spiritual decision and during a church service went forward to

declare to the church that God had called him to be a preacher. To further his commitment to be a preacher, Vines began a self-education process to prepare for ministry service. “I read every study course book published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board’s Convention Press. They were books on Baptist doctrine, building a Sunday school, alcohol, personal soul winning . . .” among other resources. He wrote in his memoirs, that he had “totally immersed myself in the life of the church. I was learning what church was all about.”⁷

Preparing for Ministry Service

For Jerry Vines there were several significant people who were strong influences upon his spiritual growth and development as he prepared for Christian ministry. One of those was his grandfather W. O. “Poppa” Johnson, to whom Vines credited, “taught me to stand for my convictions without compromise, regardless of consequences.”⁸ Other influencers were a fiery young television evangelist named Billy Graham whose sermons began with the declaration, “The Bible says . . .” and Vines’ high school Sunday school teacher Mr. Thomas whose lifestyle modeled biblical values.

Vines, who was involved in high school football as an offensive and defensive end, had hopes of securing an athletic scholarship to underwrite his “study for the ministry at Baylor University, considered the Mecca for preacher boys in those years.”⁹ Unfortunately, no college football scouts came knocking at his door.

A Crisis of Faith Experienced at Mercer

As Vines considered his options for finding a college or university he could afford as well as help him realize his calling to the pastoral ministry. He visited Howard College (now Samford University) where Vines said he “met some really neat people. And there

was even an opportunity to play football” to say nothing of the young people from his home church that were attending Howard.¹⁰

When his pastor John P. Tippet learned of Vines developing plans to apply to Howard, he asked Vines to come to his office for a visit. Being a Mercer graduate, Tippet made the case for the 17-year-old Vines to re-consider his school choice, particularly inasmuch as Vines’ envisioned himself being a “pastor of a country church in Carroll County” or a Georgia Baptist city church. Tippet told Vines that being a “Mercer graduate was a distinct advantage for a Georgia Baptist pastor.”¹¹ Vines agreed and by the fall of 1956, had enrolled in the Macon, Georgia, institution.

“I thought I was headed for a four-year revival,” Vines recalled. “I was going to study the Bible, learn how to preach, and have a glorious time with the godly, scholarly professors who would teach me. And I would be there with other young men totally dedicated to the Lord Jesus and preparing for the ministry.” Unfortunately, neither the student life nor the academic setting was religiously uplifting.

His first disturbing encounter with student life was the excessive use of alcohol by some students even in his dorm residence. Despite Mercer being a Baptist school, “I had never heard such carousing and carrying on in my life.”

And as a Christianity academic major, Vines’ first class was taught by a professor who announced in a class, “Any man who

says the New Testament is not filled with contradictions is a fool.”¹² Despite having been reared

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and nurtured in a Bible-believing church, Vines said he was “totally unprepared for what I experienced” at Mercer.¹³ Such experiences, particularly those in the classroom, caused Vines to have a “crisis in my faith.” Fortunately, an afternoon in an isolated part of a Macon city park provided Vines with a spiritual encounter with God. “That day I arose from my knees with a new faith and confidence deep within.”¹⁴ Despite the on-going negative experiences, Vines completed his degree program and graduated in 1959.

Early Pastoral Service Led to the Spirit’s-Indwelling

While attending Mercer, God opened a ministry opportunity for Vines. The first church he served part-time was First Baptist Church, Eatonton, Georgia. The assignments in the small congregation involved preaching, leading the music and doing visitation. But that was a short-lived assignment.

Through the influence of the associational missionary in Heard County – located adjacent to Vines’ home county of Carroll – Vines was invited to serve as part-time pastor of the Centralhatchee Baptist Church. In accepting that assignment, Vines arranged for his home church – Tabernacle – to ordain him. But again within 12 months Vines service had run its course – out of sermons, encountering some problems with leadership, and he “didn’t know what to do.”¹⁵

In God’s Providence Bethesda Baptist Church in Carroll County – a small church of about 80 members – needed a pastor and Jerry Vines was open to God’s leadership. “I became an instant hit,” Vines wrote, “I was barely twenty.” And yet, the “boy preacher,” as Vines was called, drew large numbers of young people. This ministry lasted three-and one-half years (1957 – 1960).¹⁶

It was at Bethesda that Vines had a spiritual revelation about having a Spirit-filled life. Neighboring rural church Pastor Irvine Phillips of the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church “pointed me to the filling of the Spirit as the source of preaching and witnessing power.” Claiming the promise of Ephesians 5:18, Vines said he knelt in prayer and “asked the Holy Spirit to fill me. I didn’t speak in a tongue. There was no emotional outburst. There was a difference in my preaching from that day on,” he wrote in his memoirs.¹⁷

Marriage and Growing a Family

Soon after graduating from Mercer University, Vines planned to continue his ministerial education by attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. But he realized he did not have the financial resources to move and enroll. He decided to become a temporary public-school teacher with specialties in algebra and history. At the last minute he also was assigned to teach eighth grade science – a subject he “knew nothing about.”¹⁸

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In addition to his teaching assignment, Vines continued his pastoral responsibilities at the Bethesda Church. All the while Vines was searching for a life mate.

“I made it a policy not to date members of my church. Actually, I dated little in those years. I was busy studying at Mercer, preparing my sermons, commuting back and both to Bethesda, visiting on Saturdays and preaching on Sundays.”¹⁹ He went on explain that “time was drawing near for me to head to seminary. I was single. I had been praying for a wife. There were no prospects in sight.”²⁰

In May of 1960, Vines led the homecoming services for the Bethesda congregation. As he was preaching he could not help but notice an unfamiliar face, a visiting young lady whom he said was “the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. . .[and] I totally lost my train of thought.”²¹ That young woman— Janet Denney of nearby College Park — soon became the object of Jerry’s desire. After a whirlwind romance of four-and-one-half months since their first date the couple set a December 17, 1960 wedding. During the ensuing seven years, the couple had four children that included: Elizabeth Joy (b. 1961); twins Jim and Jodi (b. 1963); and Jon (b. 1967).²² During a 1988 interview with *Baptist Press*, Janet Vines (born abt. 1938) said her life choice “is to be a wife and a mother. That’s my highest calling. I think you can achieve other goals and certainly, be fulfilled. I am fulfilled in life being his [Jerry’s] wife and especially mother.”²³

Georgia-Alabama Ministry Years – 1961 – 1982

Finally, the Vines family was able to move to New Orleans to enroll in the seminary. While enrolled in the seminary, Vines was able to undertake his first fulltime pastoral ministry position at the Second Baptist Church in Cedartown, Ga., where he served from 1961 – 1964 and again from 1965 – 1966. The one-year diversion from Second Baptist was to accept the pastorate of the Eureka Baptist Church in Carrollton, Ga. Vines quickly realized his decision was ill-advised because the Eureka Church members had “little interest in growing” and there “were many difficulties and challenges.”²⁴ Returning to serve Second Baptist lasted long enough for Vines to complete the Bachelor of Divinity degree (1966) at New Orleans Seminary. He later enrolled in the distance learning doctoral program through Luther Rice Seminary of Jacksonville, Florida, where he received a ThD degree in 1974.²⁵

His subsequent ministry assignments were country or town churches: First Baptist Church, Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga., (1966 – 1968); West Rome Baptist Church, Rome, Ga., where he had two separate tenures (1968 – 1974 and 1979 – 1982); and Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama (1974 – 1979). Upon reflection of his service at Dauphin Way Church, Vines confessed, “I learned many important lessons . . . I learned to preach when it was not easy and when I caught flack for preaching the truth.”²⁶ In contrast to his return to West Rome for his “second tenure were years of healing and peace. God gave us souls and growth.”²⁷

First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida – 1982 – 2006

The background to the invitation for Jerry Vines to serve as co-pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, had its origins nine-years earlier. In 1973 Vines invited Homer G. Lindsay, Jr., to preach a revival at the West Rome Baptist Church. At the time Vines was in the first of two separate terms (1968 – 1974 and 1979 – 1982) as pastor of the Georgia congregation. “Lindsay was impressed by the commitment, sincerity and dedication of the young preacher of 35 years of age,” reported Belton Wall in his history of the Jacksonville church. “Vines was a dedicated soulwinner who was greatly admired by Lindsay. The two became fast friends, an on occasion the two families vacationed together.”²⁸

A decade passed and by 1982, Lindsay, Jr. (b. 1927; d. 2000) expressed “the need for help in administering the affairs of a 12,000-member church,” according to Belton Wall’s history book. The addition of a co-pastor, among other things, made it possible for the church to expand to two Sunday morning worship services to accommodate the growing attendance. Within a short time, the invitation was made to Vines to come to Jacksonville and on July 4, 1982, Vines

assumed the co-pastor role.²⁹ Lindsay, Jr., had served as co-pastor alongside his father Dr. Homer Lindsay, Sr., (b. 1903; d. 1981) between 1969 and 1972 when Lindsay, Sr., retired.

Vines was called with the understanding that as co-pastor upon the retirement of Lindsay, Jr., Vines would assume the singular pastoral role.

Unfortunately, Lindsay, Jr., experienced a near fatal heart attack in late 1983. During the next several years Lindsay never fully recovered and in 1987 had open heart surgery. All the while Vines continued to lead the church. Lindsay, Jr, retired in 1999 and died the following year. The Jacksonville *Florida Times Union* noted that by the time of Lindsay's retirement in 1999, the church had a Sunday morning attendance of about 7,000, eighteen ordained ministers, an annual budget of over \$9 million, full-time staff of 142, and land and other assets valued at about \$6 million.³⁰

Vines assumed full leadership of the congregation in 2000 and continued until his retirement in 2006. During the two-plus decades of Vines leadership, “First Baptist Church became one of the largest churches in America and was among the annual leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention for baptisms,” chronicled James A. Smith, Sr., in an article in the *Florida Baptist Witness*. “The church with more than 25,000 members and an annual budget of almost \$13 million, operates facilities occupying 11 city blocks in the heart of downtown Jacksonville including a 10,000-seat sanctuary.”³¹ In the early 2000s, Vines wrote a book titled, *Miracle of Downtown Jacksonville: First Baptist Church*, which provided a detailed “how to” blueprint of the church’s diverse and aggressive evangelistic outreach, missions and ministry programs.

Entering the National Stage of Recognition

Before the Jacksonville ministry – during the mid-1970's – Vines' ministry at the Dauphin Way Baptist Church began to gain statewide recognition. "The church grew and grew. The Sunday School was doing well. We led the state of Alabama in baptisms year after year. The services were packed," Vines explained in his memoirs.³² Additionally, the high visibility of the church caused book publishers to encourage Vines to write about his ministry and sermons. Thus began a fifty-year career as an author of over three dozen books ranging from commentaries to spiritual guidance to preaching expositions.

In January 1976, Dauphin Way Church hosted the annual Alabama Baptist Evangelism Conference. In addition to Vines, two other notable pastor-preachers – John Bisagno of Houston and Adrian Rogers of Memphis – were assigned preaching slots. However, it was Vines' message titled "Our Ascended Lord" in which "God came down upon me in a mighty Holy Spirit anointing," that sent the conference attendees "into the heavenlies," Vines later recalled.³³ The positive word-of-mouth comments on the "Spirit-filled" message brought by this dynamic pastor in Mobile, Ala., began to spread across Alabama. Later in the year, during the 1976 Alabama Baptist Pastors' Conference, attendees elected Vines as the conference president.

Adrian Rogers, as president of the 1976 SBC Pastors' Conference held in Norfolk, Va., invited Vines to preach the "Our Ascended Lord" message. Vines recalled the SBC Pastors' Conference "response was similar" to what followed the Alabama Baptist Evangelism Conference. Before the Pastors' Conference concluded, and without Vines' permission, he was nominated and elected as president of the 1977 SBC Pastors' Conference.³⁴

Vines's visibility as the president of the SBC Pastors' Conference set the stage for his potential ascension to the SBC presidency during the 1977 SBC annual meeting held in Kansas City, Missouri. Then current SBC President James L. Sullivan of Tennessee announced that he would not seek re-election to the typical second one-year term. As a result, by the time of the Tuesday (June 14)

afternoon session when the nominations for convention president were scheduled, six candidates had been identified. Among those were Jerry Vines of Mobile, Alabama, nominated by Adrian

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Rogers of Tennessee, and Jimmy R. Allen of San Antonio, Texas, nominated by H. E. Young of South Carolina.³⁵ Subsequently Registration Secretary W. Fred Kendall announced the need for a run-off between Jerry Vines and Jimmy Allen. Ballots were cast.³⁶ The final vote count, as reported by the presiding officer, affirmed that Jimmy R. Allen had received 5,136 votes while Jerry Vines received 3,329 votes. Allen was declared president for the year 1977-78.³⁷

According to Southern Baptist journalist James A. Smith, Sr., Vines was one of the "most respected preachers in the Southern Baptist Convention. Vines is widely known for his commitment to expository preaching and his defense of biblical inerrancy," Smith reported. "Considered one of his most famous sermons, Vines preached 'A Baptist and His Bible,' at the 1987 annual meeting" of the SBC.³⁸ Later in the year the sermon was printed and distributed as a booklet by the same title by the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville.

Elected as SBC President for 1989

Eleven years later, after the 1977 failed election as SBC president, Homer Lindsay, Jr., announced during the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville's annual Pastors' School and Bible Conference, that Jerry Vines would be a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention for 1988-89. The announcement reportedly was greeted with applause and cheering by the mostly pastors in attendance.³⁹

As a follow-up to the announcement, Lindsay, Jr., told Vines they should plan and conduct "a series of conservative meetings in Florida to rally conservative pastors and laypeople. They needed to be aware of the issues and encouraged to attend the annual SBC meeting," Vines wrote.⁴⁰ The Jacksonville Pastors' School and Bible Conference from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s became a platform to showcase potential SBC presidential candidates similarly to the SBC Pastors' Conference. According to conservative theologian-pastor Jerry Sutton who explained that the SBC Pastors' Conference, at least between 1979 and 1993, 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."⁴¹

Meanwhile across the country competing information and "rally the troops" meetings were being held separately by the leadership of the conservatives' and moderates' groups to encourage attendance at the SBC meeting set for San Antonio, Texas. Vines said he did not enjoy campaigning, contending "The politics of the entire matter was unpleasant to me."⁴²

As the "Conservative Resurgence" was coming to the end of its nine-year control of the Southern Baptist Convention with the conclusion (1988) of the third one-year term of service by SBC president Adrian

Rogers, the convention messengers looked to elect a new leader. “It was now virtually certain that Jerry Vines and Richard Jackson would be the presidential candidates . . . both were inerrantists with outstanding records in evangelism,” observed self-described conservative religion writer James Hefley.⁴³

“The politics of the entire matter was unpleasant to me.”

During the 1988 San Antonio convention, the presidential nomination featured four candidates being presented including Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, Fla., nominated by Ralph Smith of Texas, and Richard Jackson of Phoenix, Arizona, who was nominated by George Harris of Texas.⁴⁴ Registration Secretary Lee Porter later reported the results, noting among the 31,291 ballots cast, Jerry Vines had received 15,804 or 50.53 percent of the votes, while Richard Jackson received 15,112 or 48.32 percent of the votes. The presiding officer declared Jerry Vines as president for 1988-89.⁴⁵

Conservative historian-observer Jerry Sutton wrote that Vines would lead the conservative movement into a new phase. He said Vines would be “faithful to Scripture” and would encourage support of the Cooperative Program. “His heartbeat, however, was in winning souls – a theme that heretofore had been dormant among Southern Baptists.”⁴⁶

During his post-election press conference, Vines declared that “neo-orthodoxy, not classical liberalism, is the problem in the Southern Baptist Convention.” Vines went on to define the neo-orthodox as those who “use our vocabulary but not our dictionary.” In response to another question, Vines said he did not expect all Baptists to label themselves as “inerrantists” which he defined as “those who believe the Bible is without error.” To that end, Vines vowed not to

appoint anyone to a convention committee or board “who believe there are errors in the Bible.”⁴⁷

As president, Vines initiated the issuance of a series of presidential “statements of commitment” that sought to address several topics and include “proposals of reconciliation.” He expressed the belief “that the time has come to begin to heal some of the hurts of the SBC, which had been torn by strife for nearly a decade.”⁴⁸ Subsequent statements addressed the Cooperative Program, personal witnessing and the priesthood of believers.

Although the 1989 annual meeting was to be held in Las Vegas, Vines focused his public statements and preaching “on personal soul winning in appearances around the Convention.” He also continued to promote the Home Mission Board-planned door-to-door pre-convention gospel witnessing effort to be held in Las Vegas.⁴⁹

However, a growing controversy within the denomination centered on an SBC Executive Committee proposal to withdraw SBC participation with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. In its stead it also was to be proposed the establishment of a new agency, the Religious Liberty Commission. The argument had been made that “there is the perception that the Baptist Joint Committee speaks for the liberal element” and did not fairly represent Southern Baptists’ concerns in Washington, D. C.⁵⁰ Vines wrote Charles Sullivan, chairman of the Executive Committee, to delay the recommendation for one year. “I felt it would take away from the emphasis on missions and evangelism so needed in Las Vegas.” The Executive Committee approved the Vines’ request.⁵¹

The gospel witnessing effort in Las Vegas yielded a number of positive outcomes: revivals were held in 90 of Nevada's 120 SBC churches; 2,025 Southern Baptists – including Vines – contacted 120,000 households; at which 5000 church prospects were identified with over 470 persons making professions of faith.⁵²

The 132nd session of the Southern Baptist Convention was called to order by President Jerry Vines on Tuesday morning, June 13. After a session filled with recommendations, motions made and resolutions proposed, Jerry Vines brought the president's address to conclude the morning session. Vines declared, "Southern Baptists have settled the issue of the Bible. Southern Baptists believe the Bible is the incorruptible word of God." He went on to observe, "Some may doubt the word of God; Southern Baptists will sow the precious seed." In keeping with his life-long gospel sharing commitment, Vines said emphasis upon personal evangelism will "put the joy back in the Southern Baptist Convention."⁵³

Re-elected SBC President for 1990

On the following day nominations for convention president were scheduled. Only one person challenged Vines' re-election. Daniel Vestal of Dunwoody, Georgia, was nominated by David Sapp of Georgia and Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, Florida, was nominated by Thomas Elliff of Oklahoma.⁵⁴ Later, Registration Secretary Lee Porter reported on the 19,007 ballots cast which had yielded 10,764 or 56.58 percent of ballots cast for Jerry Vines. Daniel Vestal received 8,248 or 43.39 percent of the votes. Jerry Vines was declared president for 1989–90.⁵⁵

At a post-election press conference, Vines repeated the central theme of his presidential address. However, in the questions from the reporters'

segment, Vines was asked about his “fundamentalist faction.” Vines responded, “I have always asked that I not be referred to as a fundamentalist. If you mean by fundamentalist that I’m one of those who believe in the fundamentals of the faith, yes. But if you mean that I would fall in the category of a legalist, an unloving person, an Ayatollah Khomeini or a Jim Jones, then the answer is no. I would like to be known as a Bible-believing Christian.” Vines stressed that he intended to be the same person in his second term as he was in his first. However, he said he would extend his emphasis on personal evangelism to promote “building great soul-winning churches.”⁵⁶

In his official president’s address to the over 38,400 messengers in attendance at the 1990 annual meeting held in New Orleans, Vines offered a stark warning. He said that the Southern Baptist Convention must be alert to the tendency toward “organizational overload and doctrinal error” or be destined for the “garbage dump of denominations.” His sermon theme was “the glory of the church.”⁵⁷

“Those denominations that affirm the inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of scripture have a bright future. But those that do not are destined for the garbage dump of denominations,” Vines said. “It is better for Southern Baptists to debate and settle the issue of scriptural inerrancy today than to someday debate whether homosexuals are suitable in our pulpits.” He went on to stress, “Unless churches remain vigilant in protecting doctrinal integrity and local identity,” he said the denomination could become a “mustard tree monstrosity with bureaucratic branches infested with blasphemous birds.”⁵⁸

Among actions taken by messengers was the approval of a recommendation of the convention's Executive

Committee, to transfer the primary religious liberty function from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs to the Christian Life Commission (CLC), allowing the social action agency to address religious liberty issues as well as Christian social

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ethics. At the same time, messengers approved a Cooperative Program budget which reduced the allocation to the Baptist Joint Committee by 87 percent and increased the allocation to the CLC by 40 percent.⁵⁹

**Vines’ 2002 Sermon on Islam
Garnered Worldwide Media**

Twelve years later, during the 2002 SBC Pastors’ Conference, a watershed event occurred in Vines’ life and ministry. The summer gathering was held just ten months after the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The following summer Jerry Vines was scheduled to speak at the Pastors’ Conference. He sought to make his message to his fellow pastors as Biblically contemporary and applicable as possible. Recalling the context of his sermon, Vines wrote years later, “in my message I was trying to contrast the differences between Christianity and Islam, by observing, ‘Allah is not Jehovah. . .’ Then I contrasted the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, and the founder of Islam, Muhammad. I said, ‘Christianity was founded by the virgin-born Jesus Christ, while ‘Islam was founded by Muhammad, a demon-possessed pedophile who had twelve wives, and his last one was a nine-year-old girl.’” The pastors’ response was a resounding standing ovation. Later that evening Vines learned “my statement was all over the news. That was when I became aware of the furor my statement had caused.”⁶⁰

That comment to a group of pastors soon became the lead story on network and cable news programs as well as “front-page news” on major newspapers across the country. Vines initially did not consent to speak to the news media until he had an opportunity to address his Jacksonville congregation. That was preceded by consultation with his mentors. He arranged “a conference call with Paige Patterson, Al Mohler, and Jerry Falwell,” Vines later recalled. “They gave me good, wise counsel. I prepared a statement for my church.”⁶¹

“I made my statement at the beginning of the service. I did not back down. I stood by my comments. I told the people where I got my information,” which he said was drawn from the book *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (2002) by Emir and Ergun Caner. [The brothers claimed they were raised as devout Muslim terrorists until their teenage years when they converted to Christianity.] Vines went on to tell the congregation, “If I have misread this information, I would be glad for Muslim scholars to explain their own documents to us all.” Vines reported the congregation gave him “several standing ovations.”⁶²

In the ensuing seven months, the media news cycle seemed to have forgotten the story until a February 25, 2003, “NBC Nightly News” report. The broadcast “portrayed Vines ‘preaching hate’ against Muslims but failed to include a portion of the NBC interview in which Vines endorsed religious freedom for all persons,” the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. The NBC report noted national political and religious leaders’ efforts to not blame the 9/11 “attacks on Islam itself, or Muslims generally” as contrasted against the “bold” comments by Vines.⁶³ The NBC broadcast report did not include any interviews with anyone who supported Vines’ perspective. The Southern

Baptist Convention's *Baptist Press* subsequently reported several stories quoting SBC leaders' negative reaction to the NBC story and their positive support of Vines. "I have been preaching the loving gospel of Jesus Christ for 49 years. I challenge NBC Nightly News, or anyone, to find one single sentence, word or syllable of hate in any message I have delivered during those years," Vines told the *Witness*.⁶⁴

Southern Baptists Sought Vines' Doctrinal Perspective

Although Vines had returned to his first love of serving as a pastor, Southern Baptists again called upon Jerry Vines to share his doctrinal perspective. The assignment was to assist the 1999 appointed *Baptist Faith and Message* (BF&M) Committee tasked to review and revise the Convention's official doctrinal statement.⁶⁵ 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

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women, who collectively represented four ethnicities – African Americans, Anglos, Asians and Hispanics.⁶⁶ Among the committee members were former SBC presidents Jerry Vines (1989 and 1990), and Adrian Rogers (1980; 1987; 1988). The

committee's report was presented and adopted as printed without amendments during the 2000 SBC meeting held in Orlando.⁶⁷

In his memoirs, Vines admitted, “I was not an effective member of the committee.” Although he did take credit for at least one significant contribution to the BF&M doctrinal statement. “I was able to have a revision made in the BF&M that clarified what Southern Baptists believed about the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸

Upon retirement from the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, in 2006, Vines established the Jerry Vines Ministries in Canton, Georgia, which is also Jerry’s and Janet’s retirement home city. The ministry organization – which continued to function in 2026 – specializes in providing books and digital resources, as well as training conferences, for pastor enrichment.

ENDNOTES:

Editor’s Note: This profile of C. Jerry Vines was written by Donald S. Hepburn, managing director, Florida Baptist Historical Society, using the following resources:

¹ Jerry Vines, “VINES: My Life and Ministry,” (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 35.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48 – 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²² Jerry Vines in his autobiography cited his marriage date on p. 55; and his children's birthdates on the following pages: Elizabeth Joy, 70; twins Jim and Jodi, 73; and Jon, 83.

²² Jerry Vines, 197.

²³ Stan Hastey, "Janet Vines Interview," *Baptist Press*, June 15, 1988, 1; [news stories on Jerry and Janet Vines are held in the files of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Graceville, Florida, and are hereinafter referred to as story held in Vines' bio file].

²⁴ Jerry Vines, 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁸ Belton S. Wall, *A Tale to be Told: The History of the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida*, (Jacksonville: First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, 1999), 70-71.

²⁹ Belton Wall, 71.

³⁰ Bruce Bryant-Friedland, "First Baptist's Quiet Crusader," *Florida Times-Union*, July 11, 1999; [story held in Vines' bio file].

³¹ James A. Smith, Sr., "Vines ends 23-year pastorate in Jacksonville," *Florida Baptist Witness*, February 16, 2006, 1, 6 – 7; [story held in Vines' bio file]. *Editor's note:* The 10,000-seats sanctuary was constructed in 1992 and by 2021, amid a declining church membership, the worship center was sold to generate cash for the church. The building was used by a third party until it was closed and demolished in 2026 for use in a downtown revitalization project.

³² Jerry Vines, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ Proceedings, item 43, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual*, 1977, 32 (hereinafter referred to as *SBC Annual*).

³⁶ Proceedings, item 58, *SBC Annual*, 1977, 37. The six persons nominated for president were: Jimmy R. Allen (TX); Jerry Vines (FL); Clifton W. Brannon (TX); Dotson M. Nelson (AL); Warren C. Hultgren (OK); and Richard Jackson (AZ).

³⁷ Proceedings, item 76, *SBC Annual*, 1977, 39.

³⁸ James A. Smith, Sr., "Jerry Vines to retire in '06; FBC Orlando announces transition," *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 2, 2005, 1; re-issued by *Baptist Press*, May 3, 2005; [story held in Vines' bio file].

³⁹ Greg Warner, "Vines Will Be SBC Candidate, Lindsay Says," *Baptist Press*, February 17, 1988, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁴⁰ Jerry Vines, 136.

⁴¹ Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 85.

⁴² Jerry Vines, 161.

⁴³ James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Hannibal, MO.: Hannibal Books, 1999), 66.

⁴⁴ Proceedings, item 99, *SBC Annual*, 1988, 42. The two other persons nominated for president were James Craig (OK) and Anis Shorosh (AL).

⁴⁵ Proceedings, item 118, *SBC Annual*, 1988, 61.

⁴⁶ Jerry Sutton, 190.

⁴⁷ Mark Wingfield, "Jerry Vines News Conference," *Baptist Press*, June 15, 1988, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁴⁸ Jerry Sutton, 192 –193; also see Dan Martin, "President Vines Issues Statement of Commitment," *Baptist Press*, June 24, 1988, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁴⁹ James Hefley, 78.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵¹ Jerry Vines, 169 – 170.

⁵² James Hefley, 79 – 80; also see Roy Jennings, "SBC Wrap-up," *Baptist Press*, June 15, 1989, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁵³ Mark Wingfield, "President's Address," *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1989, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁵⁴ Proceedings, item 92, *SBC Annual*, 1989, 43.

⁵⁵ Proceedings, item 107, *SBC Annual*, 1989, 44 – 45.

⁵⁶ Mark Wingfield and Kathy Palen, "Presidential News Conference," *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1989, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁵⁷ Ken Camp, "President's Address," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1990, 1; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Dan Martin, "SBC Wrap-up," *Baptist Press*, June 13, 1990, 2; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁶⁰ Jerry Vines, 196.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶³ Joni B. Hannigan, "Vines Speaks Out Against NBC News Report," *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 6, 2003, 1, 5; [story held in Vines' bio file].

⁶⁴ Art Toalston, "NBC Targets Southern Baptist Pastor about 2002 Remarks on Islam's Muhammad," *Baptist Press*, February 26, 2003, 1; and Art Toalston, "Reaction Mounts to NBC News Over Segment on Pastor's View of Muhammad," *Baptist Press*, February 27, 2003, 1; [stories held in Vines' bio file].

⁶⁵ Proceedings, items 18, 52, 108 – 113, and 127, *SBC Annual*, 1999, 37, 79, 87, and 88.

⁶⁶ Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), ix.

⁶⁷ 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*.

⁶⁸ Jerry Vines, 193.

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