

Forward, or backward?

By William H. Perkins Jr.

Editor



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Citing the teachings of Jesus Himself, the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Executive Committee has unanimously agreed that the current Mississippi state flag, with its Confederate symbolism harking back 160 years to the U.S. Civil War, has to go (see page one of this issue).

Some of the convention's most prominent leaders gathered June 23 to affirm the decision:

- Ken Hester, convention president and senior pastor of First Church, Pontotoc.
- Clarence Cooper, Executive Committee chairman, senior pastor of Brandon Church, Brandon, and former two-term president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.
- Shawn Parker, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. He has served on the board and the Executive Committee in the past.
- Jim Futral, who retired as executive director-treasurer of the board in March. Among his many roles have been two-term president of the convention and chairman of the Executive Committee.

As the Mississippi Legislature presently wrestles with how – and if – to remove the flag, the tension is palpable.

A reasonable person can understand how some black citizens of the state are deeply offended by an official reminder of a dark, dark, past that included slavery, oppression and deprivation as freedmen, and murder in all its forms when a black person stepped out of line.

A reasonable person could also acknowledge that white southerners have embedded in their psyches the acts of depredation, families rended, and Reconstruction injustices that preyed upon their ancestors during the Civil War and its aftermath.

The oft-quoted aphorism tells us there's a reason why an automobile's windshield is much larger than the rear view mirror. That's because we should be paying more attention to where we're going than where we've been.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we must overcome bitter rivalries over earthly issues such as the flag and agree we have much work to do before Jesus returns (Matthew 28:18-20) – and He is returning one day.

United we stand; divided we fall. Our mission requires every single one of us. Let's retire the flag, put aside the divisiveness, and get on with the vital, eternal mission that is in our windshield.