

# Georgia Baptist Pastors Tempted With Reach for Power

A huge billboard in south Georgia in state Sen. Josh McKoon's district bears witness of Georgia Baptist Convention money being spent for his support of "religious liberty" legislation. Gov. Nathan Deal, a Baptist, wisely vetoed the legislation.

Much more will be spent by the state convention covering the costs for pastors to attend an October lobbying training session at Georgia Baptist headquarters in Duluth.

These pastors want legislation that is beneficial to Christians. That is at the heart and soul of their lobbying efforts. Shouldn't we all want this? Don't we need Christian lawmakers on our side pushing our agenda through?

We need to remember the phrase "liberty and justice for all." We need to remember the Golden Rule. Efforts by Baptists to do the same don't pass the Golden Rule test.

It is tempting though, because many Christians have been feeling the swing of American pluralism pecking away at our majority status and it feels threatening.

For some, the answer is to create laws protecting our status and power; thus, the need to lobby legislators.

Yet, the job of legislators is to propose legislation that seeks the greater good, not only the concerns of a large group; otherwise, minorities are discriminated against.

However, Baptists should remember our minority roots. If we do, we will always be an advocate for those who are in a minority status and those who seek justice.

Where we see injustice around us, we should become involved and work for change.

This falls in line with Jesus' purpose of "proclaiming freedom for the prisoners, recovering sight for the blind and setting the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).

Baptists would cry foul if we lived in a predominately Catholic, Mormon or Muslim state, and our legislators were being lobbied by Catholic and Mormon priests, or Muslim imams or with a Catholic, Mormon or Muslim agenda.

Unfortunately, Southern Baptists still suffer from a brand of top-down thinking that was successful in taking over the Southern Baptist Convention, but has not been successful in sustaining it.

It is a brand of politics that is hungry for power and believes that God's blessings are evident in the results.

It is a brand of politics that is cloaked in spiritual language but has a specific agenda not often spoken in media soundbites.

So, as this lobbying effort continues in Georgia, and Baptist pastors are called on by their leaders to take up the charge, what will be the outcome?

People in the pews are likely to continue funding the expenses of the effort because most don't realize what they are paying for. Most think they are giving to missions, even though some money is being diverted to spiritual lobbying.

Baptist pastors who take up the charge do so believing they are doing the work of the kingdom, despite its having nothing to do with their church's mission or vision. They do so because they are loyal to convention leadership.

Even if this group were successful in influencing some kind of legislation, they might gloat for a while and pat themselves on the back for the power they gained.

Yet, the glory of such an accomplishment would soon dissipate after they realized that salvation would never come through a piece of legislation.

Actually, most pastors know this. However, there is a seductive quality about power that draws us to these efforts, just as it did for the mother of James and John who was seeking a position of power for her sons, one seated at Jesus' right hand and the other at his left in his kingdom, clearly not understanding that he was not a political leader.

Jesus responded, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever

wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Instead of lobbying legislators and trying to “bear influence” on them, I wonder what Jesus’ model might look like if it were adopted by Georgia Baptist pastors instead of spiritually lobbying legislators?

What if Jesus’ model became the reputation of Georgia Baptists as we meet people across denominational lines or with those who have no religion at all?

✘ [Michael Helms](#) is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Jefferson, Georgia. His writings can also be found on his [blog](#), *Finding Our Way*.