



# FBC MERIDIAN

## What's In a Name?

by Josh King

A lot. Names are meaningful. Always. The parent who chooses their child's name purely for the cool factor also communicates meaning with that name. A church that chooses a hip name has a name that means *something*. "Mosaic-Journey-Justice-Resonate-Elevate" church discloses much by their *cool* handle. Handles like that are *generally* attached to things I don't want to pick up. Yes, one shouldn't judge a book by the title. Still, the title does communicate something about the author. Unlike a person's name, a church's name is, at some point, chosen rather than given. A church names herself. Catchy church names often remind me of a teenager trying to find their identity.

When a church undergoes significant change, as we have, it *may* be prudent for her to ask if the name she once gave herself is faithful to who she is today? Does our name communicate what we want? We ask this not because we want to communicate something faddish and cool so as to sail the winds of this age, but because we want a new wine skin so that people know we're drinking a 2000 year old vintage.

At our December 2017 MeridianLife Fellowship the elders will recommend that we change our name from *First Baptist Church Meridian* to *Meridian Church*. Here's why:

First, the elders propose we change our name to "Meridian Church" because we want to highlight our faith. When a church changes its name it *may* be because she is trying to mirror the world and mask the Word. The opposite is our intent. Many people assume they understand what "baptist" means, and their definition has more to do with a fifty year old baptist culture rather than historic baptist belief. We want to overcome any assumptions and present an opportunity for clarity. How this will be done will become apparent later in the article.

Second, the elders propose we change our name to "Meridian Church" because we want to highlight the priorities and shared essentials of our faith. We believe that the baptist doctrine of baptism is so important that we must stand distinct from those with whom we otherwise share so much in common, and yet we believe that many of those things which we hold in common are far more important than baptism by immersion and other baptist distinctives. When our baptist forefathers crafted the 1689 Confession, they intentionally used the Westminster Confession as their basis and adapted it. They wanted to both demonstrate their solidarity and their differences with their Presbyterian and Congregationalist brothers (the Congregationalist had already used the Westminster Confession to produce their Savoy Confession).



## FBC MERIDIAN

We have far more in common with contemporary Presbyterians like R.C. Sproul, Anglicans like J.I. Packer, Congregationalist like David Wells, Non-denominational persons like Ray Ortlund, Bible Church men like Crawford Loritts, and Evangelical Free persons like Bill Kynes than we do with popular Southern Baptists like Stephen Furtick and Andy Stanley. Furtick is an outright heretic with charismatic beliefs. Stanley has repeatedly denied orthodoxy in order to appeal to the tastes of this world. That Furtick and Stanley remain in our denomination demonstrates just how far baptist identity has shifted from being centered on truth to being centered on programs, politics, and money. Removing “baptist” from our name will allow us to both show our solidarity with the faithful of other denominations while maintaining our distinctives, and to distance ourselves from those we would not fellowship with.

Third, the elders propose we change our name to “Meridian Church” because we want to create opportunities for conversation about our faith. The first two reasons lead to this one. Too often a conversation about one’s church or belief goes only as far as this:

“Are you a Christian?”

“Yes.”

“Where do you go to church?”

“First Baptist.”

“Ok. [Oh, so you’re a baptist.]”

We’d like to see something more like this:

“Where do you go to church?”

“Meridian Church.”

“What kind of church is that?”

“The best way I could answer that is to give you our affirmation of faith. It’s what we believe that fundamentally determines what kind of church we are. For instance, “We believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, Word of God.”

“We do too.”

“Ok, but how does your church believe that?”

“I don’t understand?”



## FBC MERIDIAN

“Because God’s Word has absolute authority, we believe it is to rule His church. For example, this means when we gather, God’s speaking to us in His Word is the focus. We gather to read the word, pray the word, sing the word, preach the word, hear the word, and see the word in the sacraments.”

Fourth, the elders propose we change our name to “Meridian Church” because of precedence. The church has been unofficially known as “Meridian Church” for a number of years. There once were car stickers, ads, and printed material carrying that name. Once, this was not only our domain name, but the name our website put forward. Currently, we have a long name and a short name and one in-between. The long name, First Baptist Church Meridian, is a mouth full, but at least when you say it you say church. The second one, Meridian Church, isn’t official. So we’re left in between with the awkward FBC Meridian. We want to clear the air, ease the awkwardness, and say, “Just call us Meridian Church.”

But the precedence goes well beyond our little history all the way back to the New Testament. There we read of “the church at Antioch” (Acts 13:1) “the church at Cenchreae” (Romans 16:1), “the church of God that is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1), “the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1); and “the church in Smyrna” (Revelation 2:8). Our ultimate aim is not trying to be a baptist church, we’re simply trying to be the church. Church is *what* we are. Meridian is *where* we are. In short, we want to change our name as a way of expressing humility about ourselves, pride in our Christ, and zeal for the faith.

### Conclusion

The elders ask that you prayerfully consider this matter, discuss it with one another, and let the elders know your thoughts. I leave you with an admonishment from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Lloyd-Jones contended zealously for the faith. One aspect of this was the annual Puritan Conference that ran from 1959–1969. Lloyd-Jones spoke every year. In 1969 his talk dealt with Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, the tradition Lloyd-Jones proudly came from. Nonetheless, in this very talk he admonished his brothers by saying:

“We are familiar with all these terms—Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, Baptists, and so on—and the multiplicity of divisions and names that our friends in America know so much better than we do. But I am raising this question now: Is it not time that we put an end to all this, and that we cease to use and to bandy about these names of men? I know the difficulty. The argument is: ‘Well, you have got to call the church something, you have got to show how one differs from another.’ But I am



## FBC MERIDIAN

raising the question as to whether you should do that; whether we should not merely as the result of all we have been considering in this Conference, and all we know about the history of these matters, decide that in [the] future all we put on the notice-boards of our buildings is —‘Christian church’.

If a man should come and say to me, 'But what do they teach in there?' I would reply, 'Go in and listen.' Why should we put up a notice that is going to exclude people? Let it be known that the gospel is going to be preached here. That is what a church is for. Let them go in, let them listen; they will soon find out what is being preached, and they can then decide for themselves whether they are going there again or whether they are not.<sup>1</sup>”

<sup>1</sup> D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 206–207.