

# **SBC leaders welcome Bible tax reprieve**

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptist leaders welcomed indications from the U.S. Trade Ambassador on Aug. 13 that a so-called “Bible tax” on Scripture printed in China will be avoided.

Bibles and religious literature currently no longer are subject to the upcoming 10 percent tariff hike set to be imposed on goods imported from China beginning Sept. 1. Previously, Bibles were among the items that would see a price increase as part of the growing trade war between the U.S. and China.

LifeWay Christian Resources CEO Ben Mandrell expressed relief at the news of a reprieve.

“For the past several months, there has been great concern among the Christian publishing community that our important work would be threatened by proposed tariff schedules,” Mandrell said. “This announcement by the U.S Trade Representative has given us hope that the administration has heard our concern.”

On Aug. 13, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative released two lists of the items— those that will be subject to the tariff in September and those whose tariffs will be postponed until Dec. 15. Religious literature, including the Bible, no longer are on either list.

## **Southern Baptists requested change**

Prior to the announcements, many Southern Baptist leaders contacted U.S.

congressional leaders and high-ranking administration officials to support the removal of Bibles from the tariff list. They included seminary presidents Danny Akin of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Adam Greenway of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jamie Dew of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Al Mohler of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.



Russell Moore

In addition, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has been among the groups urging Washington lawmakers to reduce the impact on Bibles and religious literature from deteriorating trade conditions between the U.S. and China.

“With as many Bibles as are printed in China, the news that they will not be subject to such tariffs is welcomed news for LifeWay and other publishers of God’s holy word,” said ERLC President Russell Moore.

Both Mandrell and Moore, however, were dismayed the situation reached this point.



Ben Mandrell

Mandrell said he was “troubled that the word of God would ever be taken hostage in an international trade dispute.”

Moore echoed those sentiments. “Whatever one thinks about trade policy, the Bible should never have been a subject of this sort of taxation. As Christians, we believe the Bible is the word of God, and is thus central to our lives and mission,” he said.

The tariff on children’s books has been delayed until Dec. 15, while those on all other books published in China, including trade books and educational materials, still are set to begin Sept. 1. Moore said his hope is that these, too, will be addressed soon.

## **Three-fourths of Bibles are printed in China**

Despite historic and increasing hostility toward Christians, China plays an important role in the production of Bibles.

“Right now, only a small number of companies print Bibles affordably and with the design elements and quality features Bible readers have come to expect,” said Trevin Wax, Bible publisher at LifeWay. “Two of those companies are in China.”

Currently, China is home to the world's largest Bible printing company, and more than 75 percent of Bibles are printed in that nation.

LifeWay is working with printers in other countries, including those in the United States, Wax said, but currently there are not enough Bible-specific printers in the United States to meet the demand.

"At LifeWay, we root everything we do in Scripture, because we believe that God's word leads to life transformation," he said. "In our nearly 130-year history, countless people have been changed by their encounter with God through his word, as made available through the resources our organization provides."

Because of that life-changing impact, Mandrell says LifeWay remains committed to publishing and printing Bibles despite any political disputes.

"These past months have strengthened our resolve to get Bibles to the people who need them," he said. "Our mandate is built on obedience to Christ, regardless of any policy proposals from Washington, D.C."