

# BAPTIST FEATURES

PRODUCED BY BAPTIST PRESS  
NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION  
460 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 244-2355  
W. C. Fields, *Director*  
Theo Sommerkamp, *Assistant Director*

March 20, 1963

Editor's Note: Herschel H. Hobbs, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, is the sixth personality to be featured in this Baptist Press series on SBC leaders:

Hobbs Calls Pastorate  
Best Way To Serve SBC

By Leland Webb  
For Baptist Press

Herschel H. Hobbs "proposed" to Frances Jackson the first time he met her.

Brought into a musical production at a Birmingham, Ala., church as a substitute, Hobbs' role called for a singing proposal.

They were married when Hobbs was not quite 20. He was five years from the bachelor of arts degree he would receive from Howard College, Alabama Baptist school at Birmingham.

He was 11 years from the doctor's degree Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville would confer and 34 years away from the honor that would come to him in St. Louis. That was when the 1961 Southern Baptist Convention elected him SBC president.

You can trace Hobbs' interest in the ministry to the little farm boy, who riding with his family to the country Baptist church, got slightly mixed up.

As they passed the Methodist church, en route, he spoke up. "I'm going to be a Methodist preacher just like Brother Allen," the lad Herschel said, naming the Baptist pastor.

He did become a preacher, after being straightened out on denominational names.

Born Oct. 24, 1907 on a farm near Talladega Springs, Ala., Hobbs moved with his family to town for a while after his father died, which was before Hobbs was three.

The only son in the family, Hobbs helped plow the 40-acre farm as a Junior boy. He had two other interesting occupations before he entered the ministry--theater usher and auto parts salesman.

Converted at 11 at Enon, an open country Baptist church near Montevallo, Ala., Hobbs was baptized in a creek. Forty-four years later, as president of the SBC, and pastor of a big city church which was 10th largest in the Convention, he returned to rural Enon to preach.

At 16 he answered the call to preach. But he drifted away from it, he admitted to a reporter. "It was after I was married that the conviction returned." At 22, he again accepted the call.

He and his wife quit their jobs, which together brought in a 1929 depression income of \$350 monthly, and entered Howard College. Monthly income dropped to \$75. Both finished school in two and a half years.

This background and concern for people identify him with ordinary folk. His familiarity with scholars' tools lets him understand the theologian's viewpoint. Theologically conservative, he is also sympathetic to new understanding of truth.

"I have endeavored to lead our Convention to maintain a theological balance as we have progressed through a time that has been characterized by problems in theology," he summarized.

Work of the special Convention Committee to Study Baptist Faith and Message, suggested and headed by Hobbs, has been a significant event during his two years as SBC president.

The 55-year-old Hobbs is no stranger to hosts of Baptists who have never shaken his hand. His clear expression of Scriptural understanding has appeared in 13 books and numerous articles.

His voice is familiar as Baptist Hour preacher.

His Baptist Hour radio ministry is satisfying to him because it lets him reach people--an estimated potential audience of over 22 million weekly.

When a change in the program's opening format was being studied, Hobbs received a letter from a Tennessee woman. "Thank you for saving my life," she began, relating how his opening words on a broadcast caught her attention as she contemplated suicide. The opening went unchanged.

His quick wit has earned him the reputation of a humorist. Once he was slated to introduce Porter Routh as guest speaker at a church dinner. The master of ceremonies pointed out this was the time for "A Word from Our Pastor."

Then he chided, "We all know this is the understatement of the year. But say a word anyway, Dr. Hobbs, and then introduce our guest speaker."

Hobbs arose, looked calmly over his snickering audience, pointed at the executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee, announced, "Routh," and sat down.

With all his extracurricular jobs he still must see to pastoral duties at First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, where he has been since 1949.

"I have always tried to be a pastor to my people," he commented. "I try to visit every member who goes to the hospital, if I am in the city."

A visitor to his office may find him calling a Sunday school teacher to talk about a prospect or in a long-distance conversation with a Convention leader.

His best avenue to serve the denomination, he feels, is in the pastorate. He has declined opportunities for denominational positions, but when he leaves the presidency in May it could be the first time in 22 years he will not be a member of a Southern Baptist Convention board or committee.

The schedule as pastor, radio minister, author and president would crush an ordinary man. How Hobbs manages it all is best answered in organization and discipline.

He expects organization to work. He depends on church staff members to do their jobs. Organization is evident even at home.

Interrupted by a salesman at the door, Hobbs patiently explained to him that his wife was not home and that she took care of such matters. "I don't like details," he said, returning to his visitors. "I let my wife take care of the family bookkeeping," he added, noting her desk in the family room.

Free evenings he spends at home in study or relaxation with his family. The Hobbs' son, Jerry, now married, is working on a master's degree at the University of Oklahoma.

Hobbs' spectator sport is football. For participation he prefers golf. Baptist Hour duties altered his former routine of 18 or 36 holes of golf each week. He is a member of Kiwanis Club and a Master Mason.

His presidential office has opened doors to wider influence. During a conference with President Kennedy before one of Hobbs' mission trips abroad, he had opportunity to commend the president for his stand on church-state separation.

**BAPTIST PRESS**<sup>®</sup>

W. C. FIELDS, *Director*

160 James Robertson Parkway  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**R T S H  
NEWS COPY**

*J.*

Dr. Davis C. Woolley  
Historical Commission  
127 Ninth Avenue North  
Nashville, Tennessee

25

Cutlines to Hobbs' photo (with feature) March 20, 1963 Baptist Press Photo

MEDITATION--One of the busiest of its leaders, Southern Baptist Convention President Herschel H. Hobbs pauses a moment from work in his study. (BP) Photo