

One of the first things you learn about public speaking is not to start with a disclaimer or apology, so I won't.

What I will say is I'm not as scholarly as many of you. Generally speaking, I speak to a different audience. People who come to hear a sermon. I'm not saying that I am morally superior, reaching the common man or to be correct, the common person. If I say the common person, that may imply I see women as common which causes another problem, so I'll stick with the common man. We are used to it.

When I am preparing for my sermon I am reading papers by many of you here, in addition to other scholars to get the best understanding of the text. Sometimes I even learn something from some of you. My point is most of the time my audience is different. And this paper will reflect that.

While a student at Moody I had Dr. Stephens for Hebrew. He was ancient, most likely a few years older than I am now. I still remember many things he taught me. One of which was: "When you get old you can say what you want." I will rely on that teaching today.

I am going to raise several issues and will say right now I do not have all the answers. In fact many times I don't have any answers. Actually the truth is I do have answers though you may not agree with them. In thinking about this I realized we, the Boomer generation (not using this term as a pejorative) have to mainly leave the answers for the Millennials (also not meant as a pejorative).

Before I begin to raise the issues that concern me I need to tell you my bias. In my three years at Moody there was a common theme in all classes and from all my teachers: "What does the text say?" This is still the bottom line for me today. I realize once we begin with grammar, history, culture, the answer is not always as clear as we may like. But the majority of times we can find an answer. Especially if it is Friday night and the next day you are scheduled to climb the platform and supply some answers.

To further reveal my bias, I am an old school Bible teacher. You know, the Old School Rules like: If the first sense makes sense, seek no other sense. Context is King. Clear Texts Should be Used to Interpret the Unclear Ones. I have a friend who feels the same way. We were discussing this issue and he said to me: "Robbie, we are dinosaurs." I don't mind being a dinosaur, I've always liked them. This doesn't mean I'm against education or scholarship, it only means to me the simple reading of the text usually reveals the meaning.

Let me say up front I am not the judge of anyone else's ministry. I don't believe I alone hold the truth. What I am presenting to you today are observations that are concerning to me as a leader.

I'm one of the people who had mixed feelings about the whole seeker church movement. It seems to me they have had a hand in some of the changing viewpoints in our congregations. They are churches who had good motives but sometimes with bad results. Where we live in Arizona there are five new churches - at least before Covid - opening every week. Everyday there was a postcard in the mail advertising a new church. They said things like: **"We are a church that is not like church."** **"Come as you are."** When I got the 10th postcard saying Come as you are, I said to Sharon, these should say come as you are and leave the same way. None of these churches addressed touchy issues. I know I visited some of them.

My son David recently moved and is looking for a new church. In his search for churches, he visited one church that had people in the pews tossing beach balls around before the service. It reminded me of King David in Psalm 165: I love to toss beach balls in your temple. Another had a classic car driven onto the platform for the current series. David said it seemed like he spent more time getting the car on the platform than he did working on his sermon. These things are not bad in themselves, but it makes me think.

Looking online to get an idea of a pastor, the typical bio reads something like: I married my best friend, I love rocky road ice cream and walks at sunset. It's difficult to find any info about schooling or training.

If you have moved recently you know how difficult it is to find a church that simply teaches the Word of God as a reliable document and a guide for faith and practice. Or a church that does expository preaching instead of a topical series. I believe all of this leads us as a church to some of the problems we are now dealing with. I believe it goes back to the Bible. Let me mention a few areas I believe have us working away from the Gospel. A friend of mine, a self described millennial gave me some advice about this paper. He said: "Don't make it a Boomer Rant. Cover something in a little depth."

I don't expect everyone to agree with my points, I'm ok with that. I want to raise issues we are dealing with. I may provide a Bible verse or two but I don't have time to present an exhaustive study of the issues. Maybe this will serve as a jumping off point.

- Homosexuality

This is a big issue in the believing community. Let me start by saying my brother is gay. I have a niece and nephew who are gay, and a cousin or two. So for me, as well as some of you here, this is not an academic issue.

I am against the mistreatment of homosexuals. Denying people an apartment, a loan, even spousal medical benefits, on the basis of them being gay, is wrong. Whether I agree with it or not, gay marriage is legal. There is a difference of whether a person's lifestyle is acceptable by human law or God's law.

I love my brother Chris, but if he got married what would I do? The issue of homosexuality, is generally speaking, not an issue to many younger people in our community. Younger believers not only attend gay weddings, but also take part. This is a troubling trend. A recent Newsweek poll shows Thirty percent of Millennials identify as LGBTQ, according to a soon-to-be released study that is based on scientific polling data. Among Christians the numbers were lower—but only slightly, with just under 30 percent of Millennial Christians identifying as LGBTQ.

I have a good friend, a Jewish believer, who is divorced. His ex-wife called him to say their teen aged daughter recently told her she was gay. When her mom went to pick her up from her New York high school, she was shocked to see several couples, all girls, making out in front of the school. Her mom and the daughter moved to Florida and when her mom went to pick her up from school, she encountered the same scene. The daughter identifies as a Jewish believer.

I believe part of the reason for this is a changing hermeneutic that reflects the current thinking in society rather than a biblical perspective. One of the main texts used for this is Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Traditionally the understanding of this text was the sin of homosexuality was the cause of the destruction of these two towns. That, along with the sin of Lot's daughters, both sexual sins, was a violation of God's law. Recently, the emphasis has shifted from sexual sin to the sin being a lack of hospitality. Many of the newer commentaries reflect this view.

In his paper: **THE SIN OF SODOM REVISITED: READING GENESIS 19 IN LIGHT OF TORAH**, Brian Peterson, assistant professor of OT and Hebrew at Lee University, maintains this is a relatively modern understanding. He cites many historical examples of Sodom's sin being of a sexual nature. He states: "Aside from the numerous comments

made by the early Church Fathers concerning Sodom's sin as homosexuality (cf. Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, 33 Jewish authors also interpreted Sodom's sin as sexual. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha both deal with it, and Josephus. Rabbinic literature also interpreted Sodom's sin as deviant sexual actions. These include Gen. Rab. and the commentaries on Genesis. It has only been within the last few decades that scholars have sought to reinterpret this text as only homosexual rape or inhospitality!"

In his paper he not only deals with the hospitality issue raised in Ezekiel 16:49-50, but with several grammar issues as well. A brief statement from his conclusion reads: "the central problem for the men of Sodom and Lot's family was their failure to abide by God's divine decrees, especially those related to God's moral standards. Nowhere are these decrees clearer than the presentation of Leviticus 18. As Torah, the author presents Genesis 19 as a narrative picture of what happens to a society that breaks these laws—death, destruction, and familial chaos." He goes on to say: "We may conclude that when Sodom's sin is viewed within both the immediate and larger contexts, sexual depravity best defines the reason for their destruction."

Both the OC and NC are clear about the sin of homosexuality. Lv. 18, Romans 1:26, 1 Corinthians 6:9 to name a few. While being careful to show love to those who are in sin, we must also take care to teach correctly. We need to deal with the gay community in love while ministering biblical truth to people. The church I visited in SF - Many gay people walked past on a Sunday am. They were a storefront with a big sign in the window with a verse from Isaiah? about judgement. I thought it would b better to give out coffee and doughnuts.

- Gender

This is also an issue the church is dealing with. Again, this is a personal issue for me. I have a gay niece who is living with a trans man. Who ever would have thought of something like this twenty years ago?

Who would have thought the Transportation Secretary of the US, a man, would get paternity leave for two months because his husband, another man, and he adopted a baby?

When we had our LCJE international meeting in Toronto I was talking to a man who had a son who identified as a woman. The son insisted the man use feminine pronouns and call him by his new name. This man was struggling with this so his son refused to communicate with him.

We had a trans man come to our church and use the women's bathroom. A woman came up to me and insisted I throw him out. I asked if he used the stall, I wasn't sure exactly what to ask. We have men competing in women's sports. Recently a women's swimming record was broken by a man who claims to be a woman.

Not only are these things happening, they are being applauded. Several years ago Bruce Jenner, who wants to be known as Caitlyn, was awarded the ESPY Arthur Ashe Courage Award. Jenner said: "Trans people deserve something vital. They deserve your respect."

At a recent college orientation, people were encouraged to let others know their pronouns. It goes on and on.

The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide For Queer Jews everywhere: this guide is for you. Here's to a future of reconciliation, celebration, and peace. On 18Doors.org, Unlocking Jewish, we find a new insight to Purim: Purim has a special connection to the LGBTQ community. Esther's revelation that she's a Jew can be compared to coming out experiences and sharing one's sexuality and/or gender identity with the world. Hamtashen is so old school.

We live in a world that is LBGTQ+. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, 2/Two-Spirit, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Pansexual, + Agender, + Gender Queer, + Bigender, + Gender Variant, + Pangender.

This is the world our children and grandchildren inhabit. Once again, I don't support discrimination, violence, or any other behavior that would dishonor our Savior. At the same time, I must honor the Scripture which says: Genesis 1:27: God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. This is the truth we must pass on to the next generation.

- Marriage /Divorce/Remarriage

It is common for people in our world today to wonder if they should marry at all. The idea of getting married is considered optional. Living together, which used to carry a stigma, is not only accepted but normal. At one time couples who wished to live together would move away from family. Now they can live in the same house as their parents. It has

become a regular practice for many getting married to have their children participate in the wedding. Baby showers are not uncommon for unwed couples.

Let me tell you as Paul wrote, I am the chief of sinners. I don't say these things from my high moral ground, but rather with a sadness that God's instructions for people have been so easily tossed aside. You can look around and see the result this has had on society.

Once again I believe the solution is a simple teaching of God's Word. To many this may seem naive, I know it's not a magic formula, but most people today are unaware of what God has to say about life. The teaching, and the practice of this may go a long way to helping young people as they seek their way in life. Us taking God's Word seriously will have an impact on our children. I saw an example of this once while speaking in Dnepro. The pastor told me he and the elders had heard one of their members was living with his girlfriend. They went to his house and asked him not to return to church until he had fixed the situation. They were concerned he may give the church a bad reputation.

It is not only marriage that the church is struggling with but also the issue of divorce. My younger son was divorced three years ago. What was once a counseling issue became a personal issue. Divorce is a complicated, sad and hurtful experience. Divorce has become as common in the church as in the world.

Sharon likes to watch old movies and sometimes while watching them one of the people, either the husband or wife, will say: "You want a divorce? Well, I won't give you one!" Divorce today is not like in the old movies. If one person says I'm leaving, that's it. The spouse has no say.

Most of the time discussion of divorce winds up being: "Are there biblical grounds?" I'm not sure how helpful these discussions are. Most people going through a divorce are in pain. Afterwards they have PTSD. Maybe we can encourage younger leaders to emphasize a better approach towards marriage preparation. People need to know the family is God's basic building block for society and as such, is a prime target for the enemy. Ephesians 5 for example, gives some guidance for a solid marriage

- Social Justice

If you have followed any movements among younger people in the last several years, you know Social Justice is an intricate piece of the lives. I believe this is a good trend, many believers need to be made aware of the injustice of our world. The difficulty comes in defining what is justice?

We have already gone through the phase of microaggression. Wikipedia defines the term this way: Microaggression is a term used for commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups. The term was coined by Harvard University psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe insults and dismissals which he regularly witnessed non-black Americans inflicting on African Americans. By the early 21st century, use of the term was applied to the casual degradation of any socially marginalized group, including LGBT people, people living in poverty, and people who are disabled.

We now live in a time where even if someone feels you have offended them, you have offended them. How do we respond to: I feel offended by your remark? I admit there are many remarks made that are better left unsaid. I've often made them myself. I also agree we need to look at the concept of social justice. It may have been cast aside as people were afraid of a social gospel. One trait of believers is many times we throw out the baby with the bathwater.

But in order to deal with social justice, we need to look to the Scriptures as a foundation for what justice really is. World vision offers a good starting point. "Biblical references to the word "justice" mean "to make right." Justice is, first and foremost, a relational term – people living in right relationship with God, one another, and the natural creation. From a scriptural point of view, **justice means loving our neighbor as we love ourselves** and is rooted in the character and nature of God. As God is just and loving, so we are called to do justice and live in love."

In our current culture, Justice has come to be defined by: If I get my way, that is justice. Justice has come to mean if the decision doesn't go my way, it is not justice. How many times have we heard the phrase: No Justice no Peace. This is a Biblical concept. Before we jump on the Social Justice bandwagon, we need to have a Scriptural foundation.

- Racism

Perhaps the biggest topic today is racism. It comes up in politics, sports, and congregations. Some of the better known spokespeople are Ibram X. Kendi - How To Raise An Antiracist and Robin DiAngelo - White Fragility. These are not the latest books but each is a best seller.

You might not be reading these books but many college age people are. Maybe more importantly, their professors are. People are flocking to their seminars to hear and learn from them and many others. There is the controversy about CRT: Critical Race Theory.

I will be honest with you, I cannot keep up with all the CRT information and the latest developments. It's too time consuming. When it comes to the CRT information, I look to Neil Shevni, and Eric Chabot. Eric does his main ministry at OSU and if I have a question I ask him. I learned years ago it doesn't matter how smart you are, it matters how smart your friends are.

Let me make a suggestion that once again, you may think is naive. It's better to study the Scripture than to study all the current theories. I'll give you two examples that came to mind. Years ago I was on a church speaking tour in Pennsylvania. I know, you are probably impressed I did a big time tour like that. I was traveling between meetings one afternoon and spied a used book store. I always have to stop in any used book store. The woman who ran the store was an avid new ager. If you remember that craze, there was a multitude of materials produced about it. There was a special branch of that literature for believers to share their faith. I had several of those books and always intended to read them. We started to talk and she asked what I was doing and my response was: "Speaking in a few local churches." She immediately shared her past about attending a Baptist church and all the problems it caused her and how new age thinking had set her free.

I really didn't know much about new age thinking. But as she spoke the Spirit brought to mind Scripture verses which I shared with her. It was not a Philippian jailor experience but knowing the Scripture equipped me to speak with her.

Several years ago Sharon and I were attending one of the many churches we tried in our attempt to find a church after our move to Arizona. FYI, we had moved to Gilbert, AZ which has a large number of Mormons. We joined a small group and attended for two weeks. The reason we only attended for two weeks was the group was studying Mormonism. I think the time would have been more profitable if we had studied the Bible. In the seventeen years we have lived in Gilbert, I have had many discussions with the young elders the Mormon church has sent to my house. I never wished I knew more about Mormonism, the Bible was always enough.

I feel the same way about CRT. I know some of the general principles, but the Bible will serve me well. Moses writes in Genesis: Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and

over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Every human being is created in the image of God. What a person does with that image is up to them. That is our starting point in dealing with racism. We need to ask ourselves how can I see the image of god in this person?

- Our Youth

A recent survey conducted by the Barna Group, a leading research organization whose focus is on the relationship of faith and culture, found that less than 1 percent of the young adult population in the United States has a biblical worldview. Even more startling, the data shows that less than one half of one percent of Christians between the ages of 18 and 23 has a biblical worldview.

In an article entitled: Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back By Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux write: Millennials have earned a reputation for reshaping industries and institutions – shaking up the workplace, transforming dating culture, and rethinking parenthood. They’ve also had a dramatic impact on American religious life. Four in ten millennials now say they are religiously unaffiliated, according to the Pew Research Center. In fact, millennials (those between the ages of 23 and 38) are now almost as likely to say they have no religion as they are to identify as Christian.

Why is this happening? I believe one main reason is the lack of Bible education we are giving our young people. While I believe it is important for young people to have fun and play games and go on trips, I also believe while we have them in Shabbat and Sunday school we need to provide them with good general Bible knowledge.

Many young people fall away from the faith at university. They are not prepared for the difficult questions they hear. They are not equipped to stand up to peer pressure. Part of the solution is not to look for young people to lead youth groups, but to take advantage of older believers, many of whom are in this room. Older leaders have more wisdom to pass on. We who are grandparents have learned over time to separate the wheat from the chaff. We have experimented on our children and now use all the wisdom we learned ruining their lives to make the lives of our grandchildren better. We can do the same with our congregational youth.

At CJFM we had several years of tours called Live the Land. Specifically designed for people attending college. I often heard the remark: “you’re older than my father.” I wondered whether I could have a valuable ministry to the young people. I asked some of the young people what they thought about someone my age teaching them. Their response was: “it’s not age, it’s about transparency and honesty.” This is something we can offer our youth. It’s not about the leaders adopting the trends of youth, trying to be hip. It’s about living lives that are transparent and honest.

Of course this starts in the home Moses again: Deuteronomy 6:6-7 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. Let’s begin by equipping the parents.

I know I have only scratched the surface with this paper. It may seem simplistic for a complicated world. I do believe the solution to being woke is being born again. What is a bigger miracle: to wake up or to come back from the dead?

We live in a time when Society is interpreting the Scripture. God’s way is for Scripture to interpret Society. True faith is supposed to be counter culture. The more we try to attach true faith to the culture the weirder it becomes. Sin used to be defined as an offense against God. Now God is taken out of the equation. Sin has an ever changing definition, depending on who is offended.

Megan Basham on the Andrew Klavin podcast: “The church is trying to be culturally relevant so we don’t seem backwoods and backwards, but if you follow Jesus the world may think you are backwoods and backwards any way.” She went on to say: “When the church tries to be culturally relevant we will do what society does but we will do it five years later and worse.”

I recently read a quote by James Montgomery Boice:
There are four things that lead a church to liberalism:

- Pursuing the world’s wisdom
- Embracing the world’s theology
- Following the world’s agenda
- Employing the world’s methods

Foe me, it ends where it begins: with the Bible. The church has always dealt with hard issues. In the past I believe many times the choices have been either condemning or

condoning. I believe to really be followers of Messiah we need to follow a different path. We need to be compassionate.