

February 3, 2021

To the Elders of McLean Bible Church,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We hope that all is well with you and your families, as we continue to navigate these unprecedented times.

We thank you for your service and leadership at McLean Bible Church. Further, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our concerns with you in writing, and through virtual and in-person meetings with Elders Larry and Tom, and with Pastors David and Mike.

As you know, several months ago we provided the elder board with a paper discussing our grave concerns regarding “The Gospel, the Church, Justice and Racism” (GCJR) class. We write again to share our deeper, underlying concerns on the following key issues: elder oversight, lack of transparency, biblical preaching and teaching, staffing, and outside influences. We believe that these issues are at the root of MBC’s current predicament and regrettably believe that they call into question the fidelity of MBC to Scripture.

In approaching these issues, we are inspired by the Apostle Paul’s example in Galatians 2, where it was necessary to rebuke Peter. We are concerned that secular, worldly ideologies have improperly influenced the teaching of Scripture at MBC, confusing and dividing the church body, ultimately undermining the preaching of the Gospel at MBC. However, we believe that God can sovereignly use serious problems to very beneficial ends, as seen in Paul’s rebuke of Peter and Peter’s repentance. Please understand that this comparison to the Apostle Peter is intended to highlight that even the greatest church leaders are nevertheless fallible.

Furthermore, we wish to assure you that we raise these concerns out of deep affection and concern for MBC. We have carefully examined our motives and pursued humility before the Lord. We have engaged in prayerful consideration, and have sought wise counsel. Thus, we offer this paper in the hopes of restoring the purity of MBC, above all other concerns.

Accordingly, we request a meeting with the full elder board to make a presentation discussing the concerns outlined in this paper, to answer any questions the elders may have for us, and lastly, to provide an opportunity for the elders to address the issues that we have raised in this paper below.

Sincerely,

Jim Battle
Kent Husted
Mike Pullen
Rob Thomson
Dennis Zulu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Elder Board and the Direction of MBC.....	3
Philosophy.....	3
Board Composition.....	3
Nomination Process.....	4
Functionality.....	4
Church Polity.....	6
Budget.....	7
Transparency.....	8
Biblical Preaching and Teaching.....	9
Syncretism.....	9
Homiletics.....	10
Law-Gospel Distinction.....	11
Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture (<i>sola scriptura</i>).....	11
Legalism.....	12
Hermeneutics.....	12
Ecclesiology.....	13
Theology Proper.....	13
Shepherding.....	14
Impact of staff hiring and training, and partnerships with outside organizations.....	15
MBC management of partnerships with outside organizations.....	15
Oversight of staff hiring decisions and staff training.....	16
Closing Statement.....	17
Appendix Attached	

THE ELDER BOARD AND THE DIRECTION OF MBC

Philosophy

- *We believe that the elders have lost organizational control of the mission, direction and culture of the church.*
- *According to Article V, Section 5 of the MBC constitution, “The elders are responsible for ... guarding the reputation and doctrinal integrity of the Church.” We believe the elders have not properly exercised oversight of church doctrine, as MBC has undergone major theological shifts, including embracing a social justice interpretation of Scripture, and corresponding unbiblical prioritizing of unity at the expense of doctrinal truth, which must exist before love can unite (1 Peter 1:22).*
 - Hebrews 13:9 warns us to not be “led away by diverse and strange teachings.” We have serious concerns about unbiblical approaches to varied topics, which espouse, not refute, false doctrine to the congregation.
- *We believe pastoral staff should live up to the same biblical standard of behavior, in person and on social media, as elders (James 3:1-12).*
 - Pastoral staff should be “sober-minded” and “self-controlled,” exemplifying wisdom, temperance, and maturity (1 Tim. 3:2).
 - See Appendix for examples.
 - Members of the congregation should be able to hold pastoral staff in high esteem (1 Thess. 5:12-13) and to emulate them (Heb. 13:7).
 - There should be a transparent, formal policy regarding instances of rebuke and correction (1 Tim. 5:19-21).
 - Additionally, the purity of the people is negatively affected, as they begin to emulate the lax attitude toward sin that they observe in their leadership (Luke 6:40).
 - A church’s disobedience in this regard will invite the chastening judgment of God, rather than His blessing.

Board Composition

- *We believe it is impractical for members of various campuses to accurately assess and affirm in a vote the impeccable spiritual and moral character of elder candidates from different campuses, most of whom they have never met.*
 - “Many years are usually needed for a man to reach the level of personal and spiritual maturity required of an elder. Moreover, there must be adequate time for others to observe his life and affirm his qualifications.” – Biblical Doctrine, Mayhue/MacArthur
- *We are concerned that some of our current elders, while they are good men, have not demonstrated qualifications for eldership, in particular in the matter of teaching from the Bible.*

- The primary difference in the Biblical qualifications between deacons and elders is that elders must possess and use the ability to teach. We are concerned that several of our current elders are short in teaching experience and aptitude, and therefore more suited to the traditional role of deacon, rather than elder.
- The office of elder is primarily one of spiritual oversight – leading and feeding the flock. The office of deacon is primarily one of spiritual service - assisting the elders in meeting the needs of church members.
- *Those who do not have the desire to serve in the office of elder are not qualified to hold it, yet, we have insisted that elders remain in place for reasons that are unclear, after their having expressed a need/desire to step down (1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:2).*
- *We are concerned as to why congregational approval for Chuck Hollingsworth was delayed an entire year, as opposed to having simply modified a timeframe in light of the pandemic.*
- *We believe the secular philosophy of “affirmative action” may have influenced recent decisions regarding the composition of the elder board and pastoral staff, in pursuit of the secular goal of “diversity,” in meaningless, superficial characteristics like skin shade, rather than strictly adhering to Biblical qualifications.*

Nomination Process

- *We believe it is of vital importance to train and equip the members of MBC to be an adequately informed electorate in their elder nomination and approval roles.*
- *Also, there should be a formal process to teach members of the nominating committee what they are to look for and how they are to function.*
- *We believe the entire elder nominating process needs to re-focus on ensuring the elder candidates are skilled students of God’s Word, “able to give instruction in sound doctrine” while also rebuking “those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).*
- *We believe that MBC needs a mechanism in place to raise up and develop younger men who can ultimately serve faithfully as elders in the future (2 Tim. 2:2).*

Functionality

- *We believe the elders should be much more publicly recognized and accessible, and be regularly involved in the leadership of the worship service. Members of the congregation have put themselves under the spiritual authority of the elders, yet very few congregation members know who they are, or have sat under their teaching.*
- *We believe MBC needs to better apply the safeguards and benefits of a plurality of leadership (Prov. 11:14; 15:22).*
 - We believe there is too much power (even informally) vested in the Chairman of the Elder Board and/or the Lead Pastor, which endangers the congregation to the preferences of a single individual or two.
 - Adhering to the biblical example of a plurality of leadership assists in guarding against heresy or extreme views, such as “social justice.”

- *We believe the elders need to exercise closer oversight of the staff and the direction of the church. (1 Pet. 5:1-2)*
 - We have a new staff leadership team in place. It took Lon 37 years to develop the level of trust that he had with the elder board. The new staff leadership team needs to be much more closely supervised, until it has time to demonstrate trustworthiness, and thereby earn more autonomy.
 - Therefore, while the staff leadership team previously requested and received more autonomy from the elders, they need more, not less, counsel/insight/accountability/increased engagement.
 - Revelation 2-3 is the only scriptural account of Christ directly critiquing his local churches. It is of inestimable value to every generation of churches. Elders should constantly be asking which Revelation 2-3 church do we represent at this moment in MBC's history?
 - We believe it is the elders' responsibility to discern when the church is proceeding in the wrong direction in mission and focus. In the current circumstance with MBC pursuing "social justice" and unity without sound doctrine around which to unite, the elders have failed to diagnose and remedy the problem, as demonstrated in our previous document. This is one significant example of the elders' failure to meet their constitutional responsibility of "guarding the reputation and doctrinal integrity of the Church".
 - The elders should carefully review and approve positions and written statements before they are published. For example, David Platt's book on voting necessarily represented MBC with a position of dubious biblical fidelity. When MBC senior leadership publishes a book to the world, they are representing MBC, its congregation, and the MBC elders. The same applies for statements written on social media or public speaking. Indiscretions in this area have severely damaged MBC's long-standing reputation locally, as well as nationally.
 - We believe the elders should have a prominent role in ensuring guest speakers and ministry associations (Sunday preaching, and conferences that we platform or host) are in doctrinal alignment with MBC, and thus in keeping with faithful shepherding of our people. For example, both Francis Chan and Jackie Hill Perry were questionable choices and whose behavior post-speaking at MBC validated they should not have been given access to our pulpit. Additionally, after platforming both, their subsequent actions, in conflict with MBC, were never addressed to parishioners.
 - Faithful shepherding of our flock and stewarding of our "good name" (Prov. 22:1) requires that every speaker, from main session to the smallest class, small group, or breakout session, be in keeping with the stated doctrine of MBC.
 - The promoted 2020 Evangelicals for Life conference speakers list included Ann Voskamp and Russell Moore, neither of which should be platformed at MBC, given their aberrant theological beliefs and political activism.
<https://www.evangelicals.life/home/>
 - Additionally, Jen Wilkin, scheduled speaker for the MBC Word-Filled Women's Conference in Feb 2020, has advocated for homosexual inclusion and teaches

that God's Word "whispers" about homosexuality while it "shouts" about other sins.

- The elders should insist on doctrinal clarity and the education of the congregation regarding biblical fidelity, especially where the American church overwhelmingly is abandoning orthodox positions on gender roles, sexuality, etc. This will test our resolve, as it will result in criticism and pressure from once orthodox individuals and institutions, which have conformed to secular culture.
- We believe the elders should be much more involved in evaluating the biblical fidelity of corporate worship, which includes worship songs and artists, which should reinforce, not contradict, our doctrinal convictions.
 - "Words matter. The depth of our singing is directly connected to the depth of doctrine in our songs. In years past, the songs of the church were penned by theologians, scholars, and pastors who were fixated on the health and strength of the church." - Josh Buice
<https://g3min.org/did-you-enjoy-your-singing-on-sunday-did-god-enjoy-it-too/>

Church Polity

- *As the God-ordained leaders of the church, the elders ought to determine matters of policy and practice, as they prayerfully seek guidance from the Scriptures (Acts 15:22).*
- *Hiring and staff changes seem to be unilateral, and not even in keeping with the constitution, as in the case of the senior pastor position being split into three, with two individuals installed as part of a new three-headed senior pastorship without any candidating or congregational vote.*
 - The elevating of Mike Kelsey to his current position, **Lead Pastor**, Preaching & Culture, apart from congregational approval, is a glaring example of the devastating results of foregoing the stated bylaws in the MBC Constitution and an inadequate vetting process. The result is an individual who has been promoted to a position that he is ill-equipped to assume. At best, Mike is in need of mentoring to continue his maturation process, and, at worst, requiring of regular rebuke and correction for lack of temperance and aberrant theology, which was on full display in the GCJR class and subsequent sermons. Mike has been described, and is perceived by many, as an activist first...and a pastor second. This is a serious problem that must be dealt with by the board. It is not a positive reflection on David Platt's judgment in elevating Mike Kelsey to such a position.
 - The hiring of Wade Burnett, **Lead Pastor**, Executive Leadership, to oversee the development of satellite campuses was also disconcerting. Membership had no indication of a change of strategy from the goal of moving the campuses to individual church plants, in keeping with our stated mission of "glorifying God by making disciples and multiplying churches..." This serves as another example of the all too frequent scenario of "informing" membership after a decision has been made, as opposed to including them in the decision-making process.
- *Congregational meetings have now become programs, highlighting a few individuals, rather than business meetings designed to inform, equip and engage with those who are formal members of the church body. We must respect the congregation by having substantial time for open-forum Q&A at each meeting. Thanks for finally having a Q&A*

session at the recent congregational meeting of 12/9/20. Please continue this practice at subsequent meetings.

- *We believe the elders need a process for evaluating/communicating large-scale church-wide policy shifts:*
 - Social Justice – This newfound direction, exemplified by GCJR resources, and prioritization and incorporation into the vision of the church, is something that David neither initially communicated prior to joining MBC, nor were members given the opportunity to vote on, in light of this proposed vision for the church. Likewise, the spring leader meeting (improperly bypassing membership), unveiling a new vision and campus strategy and reorganizing vital leadership structures, was wholly unforeseen and extremely alarming. As is far too often the case, items are presented as for the congregation’s “consideration,” when, in reality, we learn subsequently decisions have already been made and the outcome is a foregone conclusion.
 - Spontaneous baptisms – In 2019 MBC suddenly shifted away from its historic practice of carefully vetting and proper teaching of candidates for baptism. We believe insufficient rationale for such a drastic deviation from standard practice was provided, nor was adequate follow-up provided. That leads us to believe that an overemphasis on emotional appeal combined with an insufficient call to count the cost produced a large number we could advertise, but comparatively few professions/baptized we can account for.
 - We seem to be satisfied measuring outputs (numbers) as opposed to outcomes (ensuring each disciple is instructed in everything that Christ taught his disciples. Matt 28:20)
 - Charles Spurgeon warned, “Nothing is more injurious to a church than a large dilution with halfhearted members, and nothing more dangerous to the persons themselves than to allow them to put on an untrue profession.”
 - The elders have failed to ensure that there is any training (such as Christianity 101/201) for new believers. We go for conversions and baptisms, which is good; however, without follow-up believers will wander around in the wilderness.
 - Simultaneous prayer – First, we want to commend the emphasis on corporate prayer within the service. The practice of the church being led in extended times of personal or group prayer is a welcome addition. However, the practice of having all the members pray simultaneously out loud has left many bewildered and disturbed, as, while we have no doubt the Lord can comprehend each prayer simultaneously, the practice ceases to be mutually edifying as does group prayer, when it becomes a charismatic-like cacophony of indiscernible noise. Were the elders involved in such a decision and is this the best means to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) through corporate prayer?

Budget

- *How can the elders present a budget without showing actual expenses for the past year? Just comparing one budget to another does not help the congregation make an informed decision. Thanks for belatedly presenting the actual expenses at the recent*

congregational meeting. However, in the future, they should be presented in the preliminary budget meeting, so that people have enough time to actually review and consider them.

- *The budget presentation needs to clearly show the effects of the previous “box budget” (now called “surplus revenue budget”). That is also part of helping the congregation make an informed decision. Otherwise, it is very hard to evaluate.*
- *How much money has gone out of MBC to outside organizations such as SBC, NAMB, IMB, Radical, outside trainers, etc. and for what purpose? Why is this so secret? Assuming it is all above-board, it should be clearly documented, and the purposes explained to the congregation who are paying for it. Both congregates and Elders have asked church staff about money going to certain missions and parachurch organizations. How is the organization vetted, for what purpose, why did we select them and did we get a final report indicating how the was money spent and its outcome. It was obvious church staff could not answer most of these questions.*
- *Did the elders discuss and understand the ramifications of accepting government loans/grants? Is MBC meeting the federal accounting requirements related to these loans/grants?*
- *How much MBC money (as opposed to government money) has gone into the food distribution effort? Where did it come from in the 2020 budget? Will it continue in the same manner in the 2021 budget? Where does it show in the actual expenses listed at the congregational meeting? This would seem to be millions of dollars that were just moved around in the budget without any notice to the congregation.*
- *A statement was made at the most recent meeting, in response to a question about the ability to reallocate large sums within the budget without congregational approval, which indicated the congregation only approves the total yearly budget. The response was at best dismissive, and defensive, but also disconcerting to many of us. What is the formal policy regarding this?*

Transparency

- *Of all the problems listed, lack of transparency is one of the most troubling. The congregation has always been in the habit of trusting the elders and pastors. Unfortunately, at this point, there are a lot of reasons that trust has been violated. Here are a number of examples.*
 - *At the congregational meeting on 12/9/20, David explained elder appointments by saying that John Baber moved away, and so Chuck Hollingsworth was appointed to fill his unexpired term. The truth is that neither John Baber nor Jimmy Mitchell have done any substantive work as elders since June of 2018 and possibly before. However, the resignations were not accepted for nearly two years. None of this was reported to the congregation. Both John Baber and Jimmy Mitchel resignations were held on to for over a year before announcing them to the congregation. This action was used to allow the senior pastor and board members to appoint their own desired candidate using a loophole allowed by the church constitution for extenuating and rare situations. This practice is now used extensively circumventing congregational approval.*

- The last three elders to be added to the board – Wayne Fujito, Patrick Lee, and Chuck Hollingsworth – were all initially added by appointment of the elders, rather than initial vote of the congregation. A provision that was put in place for the anomaly appears to now be the norm, whereby candidates bypass initial congregational approval, serve and then are presented positively as having already been serving.
- Additionally, at the congregational meeting on 12/9/20, in response to a question, David strongly disavowed Black Lives Matter. Further he made the absolute statement that nobody on MBC staff supports Black Lives Matter. The truth is that in June Mike Kelsey, his newly appointed Lead Pastor for Preaching and Culture, posted a picture on Facebook of himself at a BLM rally in DC, holding a BLM sign. [Picture was posted on Facebook, but was removed after a couple months]. He also wrote an article equating support for President Trump and support for BLM as equally acceptable for a Christian.
<https://uwepray.com/articles/united-we-pray-blm-trump>.
- Also, at the congregational meeting on 12/9/20, David strongly disavowed Critical Race Theory. However, the church continues to promote and use secular sociology books that promote CRT. Further, much CRT terminology continues to be used at MBC.
- MBC leaders have disavowed MBC membership in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). They say fuzzy things like “We work/associate with a lot of Christian ministries, of which SBC is one.” SBC membership is in violation of the MBC Constitution. Taking leader statements at face value, MBC is apparently not a member. However, if you visit the SBC web site and look for local churches, MBC is listed, apparently as a member. MBC leaders’ words seem to be a distinction without a difference.
- When Lon left, he said, and others in church leadership communicated as well, that he would be back to preach from time to time. He has not been back even once, and there has been no explanation to the congregation about why he has not been back. When will we see Lon preaching at MBC? His absence over the last three years has created the impression that Lon is not in agreement with the direction of MBC, and leading some to believe he is not at liberty to voice his concerns. Additionally, no explanation was given regarding the unannounced removal of years of Lon’s sermons from the MBC website.

BIBLICAL PREACHING AND TEACHING

Syncretism

- *The worldview of the culture has been caught by the Church, and baptized so that the Church sounds culturally relevant, but remains biblically illiterate. As we communicated in our previous submission, the GCJR class was replete with worldly ideologies, rhetoric and disingenuous information, which because of its unbiblical roots will only serve to further divide not unify.*
- *Sadly, within evangelicalism, and the MBC pulpit, we see the following principle at work: the presence of preaching/teaching based on the wrong assumptions, resulting in wrong*

conclusions, thereby leading to the wrong solutions. The best examples are the “woke church” movement, and the takeover of many seminaries by critical race theory. When qualified elders do not oversee the hiring of pastoral staff, we endanger the flock to the possibility of those who bring wrong assumptions/beliefs on critical issues to our congregation and pulpit.

- Despite repeated inquiries, MBC leadership has refused to sign the Statement on Social Justice, nor provide to the congregants a justification for their unwillingness to endorse a document signed by approximately 16,000 individuals, including our former pastor Lon Solomon.

Homiletics

- *It is our contention that bias has begun to influence the interpretive process of some who have mounted our pulpit, as a preconceived understanding is read into a text. As a result, the authority of the biblical text is muted even while it is being proclaimed. MBC preachers must submit to the full intent of the writer, not permit their passions or proclivities to influence interpretation nor application. Bias governing interpretation has been evident throughout recent months, most notably within the class, the Psalm 133 sermon on diversity, and the Nehemiah 4 sermon.*
- *We should focus preaching and teaching on exposition, followed by broad application, as specific application in an individual believer’s life is the work of the Holy Spirit. The agenda of the preacher enters into this issue as well.*
 - For example, the pastor should not tell the congregation that everybody is a racist sinner – rather, if you want to address the issue then describe what a racist is/does and let people take it up with the Lord.
 - Nor should we begin a sermon stating what we want our listeners to consider or do, which is more in line with the practice of a motivational speaker than expository preacher, as was done, for example in *Giving in a Time of Scarcity* (9.23.20), “I want you to consider...Are you giving away enough of your money?”
 - There may be a temptation to use the Scriptures as a springboard for preconceived applications, but they must always surrender to the biblical intention of the passage.
- *Preaching must boldly speak to the needs of the congregation, while establishing their confidence in properly interpreted passages that give the preacher an authority to speak to life concerns, issues, and joys. It is our belief that this confidence has been severely eroded over the past year.*
- *We believe a perpetual call for unity has been weaponized to tamp down justified concerns within MBC. Unity itself is neutral until it is given goodness or badness by something else. So, if Herod and Pilate are unified by their common scorn for Jesus (Luke 23:12), this is not a good unity. But if Paul and Silas sing together in prison for Christ’s sake (Acts 16:25), this is a good unity. Scripture calls us to unify together through Christ Jesus, and to stand against evil.*

Law-Gospel Distinction

- *Any preacher or Christian, who uses God's commandments as a means to control, manipulate, or even justify themselves as more righteous than another, proves to misunderstand the very character of our good Father in heaven, who forgives us freely in Christ and treats us as forgiven.*
 - This is a danger faced at MBC, when teachers fail in distinguishing between Law and Gospel.
- *When, week after week, we hear the equivalent of the Old Testament Law "Do this and Live" (go on a mission trip, read your Bible more, foster a child, give more sacrificially...etc.) without the Gospel "DONE" of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, we are not faithfully shepherding our flock.*
 - In both law and gospel, God proclaims his saving work and demands that his people respond by obeying his commands. Law and gospel differ in emphasis, but they overlap and intersect. They present the Word of God from different perspectives. Indeed, we can say that our Bible as a whole is both law (because as a whole it speaks with divine authority and requires belief) and gospel (because as a whole it is good news to fallen creatures). Each concept is meaningless apart from the other. Each implies the other.

Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture (*sola scriptura*)

- *The solution to the 'race' problem in America is more Bible, not more sociology books. It is not the Bible plus a secular reading list, but sola scriptura.*
- *MBC leadership has required staff members to read, and recommended from the pulpit, a list of secular non-biblical books regarding social justice. The list, which includes Reading While Black, White Awake, White Fragility, The Color of Compromise...etc. is quite one-sided and often spiritually toxic, in spite of the fact that there are other more biblical publications available.*
- *You cannot attach identity politics nor standpoint epistemology to the all-sufficient Scriptures and still claim to be champions of Scriptural sufficiency. Standpoint epistemology was on full display throughout the GCJR class and subsequent sermons. Standpoint epistemology is problematic in opening the door wide to reader-response theory, where the meaning depends on the standpoint of the interpreter, rather than on the text, itself.*
- *God's Word must stand-alone. Scripture needs no assistance to diagnose and address the social ills of a depraved society.*
 - "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men." - Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6
 - "Everything I need to learn in order to live to the glory of God and enjoy him forever I will find in the application of Scripture...So, Scripture is sufficient to give me a rational ground for thinking about anything and everything on the

assumption that this world and everything in it make sense. Further, no matter what my calling or abilities, the Scriptures are sufficient to teach me principles that will enable me to think and act in a God-honoring way when I am engaged in any activity or vocation.” - Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

Legalism

- *In the GCJR class and resulting Discipleship Resource, Old Testament verses about justice are taken out of their proper OT context, and applied as a compulsion on the New Testament church.*
 - This results in an improper relationship between Law and Gospel.
- *Any time we say something like, “We can’t just preach the gospel,” we have gone off the rails as a church.*
 - “I hope folks will permanently retire the ‘let’s just preach the gospel’ response to injustice. It’s unbiblical, illogical, and deeply inconsistent ”.
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10109410301577058&id=5733848
- *The Gospel + anything = “a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6).*
- *“Sinners cannot obey the gospel, any more than the law, without renewal of heart.” - J.I. Packer*
- *“Antinomianism and legalism are not so much antithetical to each other as they are both antithetical to grace. This is why Scripture never prescribes one as the antidote for the other. Rather grace, God’s grace in Christ in our union with Christ, is the antidote to both.” - Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson*

Hermeneutics

- *Applying secular categories like “race” and Cultural Marxist principles of “oppressed” and “oppressor” groupings, leads to a distortion of the biblical principle of justice, as we pointed out in our previous paper concerning the GCJR class and resulting Discipleship Resource.*
- *There seems to be a drifting away from biblical expository preaching, allowing the text to speak, as opposed to imposing a predetermined agenda, under the guise of expository preaching.*
 - “The history of Jesus is thus the hermeneutical key to the biblical canon as a whole. Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical key not only to the history of Israel but to the history of the world, and hence to the meaning of life, for he is the Logos through whom all things were made.” - Kevin J. Vanhoozer
 - “By referring to the gospel as the hermeneutical key I mean that proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus.” - Graeme Goldsworthy
- *In the Roman Empire, it was understood that “All roads lead to Rome.” At McLean Bible Church there is a perception that all passages lead to the priority of the moment, currently racism and diversity, but previously global missions, adoption, finances...etc.*

Ecclesiology

- *We believe the mission of the church is contained in the Great Commission – to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them everything that Jesus taught [all biblical doctrine – a lifetime of teaching for EACH disciple].*
- *We believe the church needs a clear plan to make disciples and then to systematically teach every one of them sound doctrine.*
- *It is very concerning to see so much time and effort put into a fatally flawed GCJR “discipleship resource” in one very narrow area of social justice, while no attempt seems to be underway to make a general discipleship resource based on sound biblical principles.*
- *It is a distortion of the mission of the church to chase after “social justice” in the kingdom of this world, rather than maintaining focus on adding citizens to the Kingdom of Heaven.*
- *Changing secular “systems and structures” is not the mission of the church, as we pointed out in our previous paper concerning the GCJR class and Discipleship Resource.*
- *Individuals may choose to be involved in social matters, but we must be clear about the purpose of the Church.*
 - *Matt 26:11 – Jesus – “The poor you will always have with you”. The focus must be on Christ, as the clear priority.*
- *Congregational diversity is a potential byproduct, not the immediate goal of the church. Judging by the 108 nations that are (or were) represented at MBC, the church would seem to be exceptionally diverse.*
 - *It is a mistake for MBC to have elevated Rev 7:9-10 to a strategic objective as opposed to a natural outcome, where the focus of the passage is Christ Himself.*

Theology Proper

- *In rightly stressing the importance of personal evangelism and global missions we have wrongly compromised biblical teaching on God’s sovereignty, overemphasizing man’s responsibility over God’s unilateral action in regeneration and election.*
 - *“An antinomy is a contradiction between two equally valid biblical principles. One can accept the truths of an antinomy and live with them, accepting by faith what cannot be reconciled; or one can try to harmonize the apparent contradictions in an antinomy, which inevitable leads to overemphasizing one truth to the neglect or even denial of the other.” – Charles Ryrie*
 - *“All who did receive him, who believed in his name ... were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12–13)*
 - *We’ve led our congregation to believe that people are going to hell because someone didn’t go on a mission trip, which is antithetical to the sovereignty of God. Believers can certainly and sadly forego the rewards of personal evangelism and global missions, but no one will forego a heavenly eternity as a result of disobedience on the part of a believer. To teach thus, falsely makes God dependent upon man in gathering His elect.*

- *We are not properly teaching our congregants the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty and our contentment in His will for our lives.*
 - Taken to its logical conclusion, (ethnic, gender, sexuality) “oppressed individuals/groups” ultimate issue is with God’s placement of each individual in their gender/ethnicity/class and circumstances.

Shepherding

- *The lack of availability of pastoral staff to even do such basics as answer the phone or return calls shows the lack of a shepherd’s heart to even be aware of needs and suggestions of the flock, much less minister to them.*
- *We believe the preaching and teaching is failing to equip MBC members to enter the marketplace of religious ideas in our culture, and present a credible case for the truth claims of Scripture. This is evidenced, most recently, in the omission of comforting and equipping the congregation through this tumultuous year with the beginning and ending of Scripture.*
 - The topic of Eschatology has been largely absent for a number of years, thereby failing to disciple and encourage congregants to look beyond this world, and to long for the heaven of eternal life with Christ and His people.
 - As our society increasingly embodies the depravity of Romans 1, Christians should never import the sociology of the culture into the Church. We would be wise to return to a study of Genesis, in addressing sociology from a biblical foundation, thereby ministering to congregants amidst cultural warfare.
- *During the GCJR class, there were many opportunities to point out the anti-biblical foundation of sociological tools like Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, or the danger of heresies like Liberation Theology. Yet none of these ideas were subjected to biblical scrutiny.*
- *Believers have a new fellowship that transcends cultural and ethnic divisions.*
 - Because we have been born again through God’s imperishable Word of truth, we are able to demonstrate a new love within the family of God (1 Peter 1:22-25); however, teaching from the pulpit and within the GCJR class fostered division, as a result of emulating cultural narratives as opposed to declaring biblical truths.
- *During the GCJR class we failed to breed a Berean spirit in class participants, instead it was a top-down exercise of imposing the “social justice” interpretation of Scripture on the class.*
 - We have missed an opportunity to forcefully speak out as a church against the horrific violence, looting and rioting that has been occurring across our country in the wake of the death of George Floyd. This silence by church leadership gives the appearance that MBC condones violent looting and rioting, if it is in support of a favored cause.
 - God has established two realms on earth: the church and the state. Each one has its own sphere of authority, and neither is to infringe on the rights of the other. And as Christians, we are to show great respect and concern for them both. – RC Sproul

- Additionally, following the class a sermon was preached on contentment from Philippians 4:13. However, it was a message that, while biblical, was in stark contrast to a 5-week GCJR class that, sadly, as a result of its content, had bred discontentment in a large portion of its participants.
- *Of all people, Christians understand that we who have been forgiven much need to be patient, merciful, and forgiving of others.*
- *While we disagree with, and had no part in, the email sent to the congregants regarding some of the concerns articulated in this document, the response by leadership, overall, was not one in keeping with shepherding a flock. It was defensive, as opposed to measured and reflective, taking into consideration what level of frustration and concern would have led individuals to take such drastic action.*

IMPACT OF STAFF HIRING AND TRAINING, AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

MBC management of partnerships with outside organizations

- *The elders should carefully consider the parameters and limitations for MBC cooperation and partnership with organizations outside of MBC.*
 - The church can, and should, cooperate with other churches; however, it should do so at the direction of the elders, in keeping with the MBC constitution and doctrinal positions. It should not do so at the expense of our autonomy as an independent, non-denominational church body, and certainly not sacrificing doctrinal purity for ecclesiastical unity.
 - There should be a formal process for the elders to approve/disapprove pastoral staff partnering with outside organizations, and ministering outside of their MBC function, as, formally or informally, they represent the MBC church body.
- *The Gospel Coalition (TGC) uses its platform to push a “social justice” agenda.*
 - MBC is listed as a member on the TGC website.
 - The elders should have carefully considered, debated and voted on MBC joining TGC, but it appears that this did not happen. Nevertheless, MBC leadership should now remove MBC from its membership.
 - TGC sadly epitomizes the many individuals and organizations within evangelicalism that, while once solidly orthodox, have forsaken biblical fidelity and succumbed to cultural pressure, and cumulatively ushered in a modern downgrade controversy, like in Spurgeon’s day.
- *The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has been pushing a “social justice” agenda, drifting in recent years from orthodoxy, resulting in prominent esteemed professors and trustees speaking out, and an entire organization (www.conservativebaptistnetwork.com) formed to halt the theological downgrade.*
 - We believe that it is essential that the elder board stay abreast of developments within evangelicalism. Failure to do so, leaves our congregation vulnerable and MBC potentially complicit in contributing to doctrinal drift.

- Serious vetting and consideration should be given to avoid promoting once solid resources and conferences, which sadly would now prove detrimental to our staff and congregants, given infection from worldly ideologies.
- As we mentioned above, MBC is listed as a member church on the SBC website.
- The MBC Constitution clearly forbids MBC from joining a denomination, and since the SBC is a denomination under the ordinary understanding of the term, e.g., “a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices” (Merriam-Webster), and since most Americans, including most members of MBC, would consider the Southern Baptist as a denomination, the elders should have taken steps to forbid this. They should take steps now to remove MBC from the SBC.
- *Thabiti Anyabwile, despite promoting progressive talking points at the expense of Christian truth, dividing the body of Christ across racial lines, and promoting the political agenda of Black Liberation Theology, has been used to train the MBC staff and played a prominent role within MBC church life.*
 - Despite having been compelled to ask forgiveness for his writings and actions in 2019, he was still a featured speaker at the New City Network Gala. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/errata-apology-some-evangelicals/>
 - Sadly, his conduct has only proved more contentious and controversial at times, including recent endorsement of the clearly problematic, unbiblical appointment of a transgender man as Assistant Secretary of Health.
 - By partnering with him and maintaining ties with him, the elders have affirmed his unbiblical views? (2 John 10-11)
 - It is our opinion that Thabiti Anyabwile should not be given access to MBC staff nor our pulpit, and ties should be severed with him. (II Cor. 5:18)

Oversight of staff hiring decisions and staff training

- *The MBC Constitution (Article VIII, Section 2, Sentence 3) says, “Pastoral staff members shall be appointed by the Board of Elders to an indefinite term by unanimous vote, with their duties defined by the pastor-teacher and the Board of Elders.” The elders have neglected this responsibility for many years, perhaps decades, in delegating this essential function to the pastoral staff themselves. In doing so, they have created a scenario where priority is given to assembling a pastoral staff comprised of those in keeping with the executive team’s preferences, as opposed to ensuring doctrinal fidelity.*
- *The elders should take a much more assertive role in setting up a process to ensure that each staff member is theologically and doctrinally sound before they are hired.*
 - A previous pastor at MBC communicated that a pastor could be hired at MBC who did not hold to certain official positions of the statement of faith, provided they agreed to publicly teach and promote MBC doctrine. This could clearly have adverse effects, over time, weakening the orthodoxy and unity of the church body.
- *Every member of MBC is interviewed one-on-one by an elder, but not people who are hired as pastoral staff.*

- *The elders should take a much more assertive role in setting up a process to vet and approve outside individuals and organizations to come and train the MBC staff, to include the training materials that will be used.*
- *Additionally, key trainings should be attended by the entire elder team themselves, when possible, or at least, have adequate elder representation. It appears that a number of the elder team did not participate in the GCJR class, which proved to differ substantially in many respects from the preview they were given. Accordingly, elders were not adequately equipped to address parishioner concerns.*

CLOSING STATEMENT

The foregoing is not exhaustive, but sufficient to demonstrate a glaring pattern of issues that require immediate elder oversight, and, sadly, have led many faithful, discerning members to depart MBC. Church staff have reported approximately 3,000 members and non-members have departed MBC for a more Biblically based church this past year. It appears, church leadership is not concerned about large portions of the congregation leaving.

Charles Spurgeon said in his 1888 sermon “Hold Fast the Faith,”

“Here is the day for the man, where is the man for the day?”

This is our call to the elder board, given our belief that MBC, once alive and powerful, has courted the world, tolerated sin and incorporated worldly ideologies, and, as a result, has become, like Sampson, weak, blind and unaware that the Lord has departed.

We fear that, like the church at Sardis, despite MBC’s prominence and outward activity, the Lord may declare her “deeds not complete in the sight of God” (Rev. 3:2) for compromising her all-important, inner orthodoxy.

As Erwin Lutzer notes in his recent work, *“We Will Not Be Silenced,”*

What concerned Jesus about this church that its leaders had failed to notice? The answer isn’t explicitly stated in the letter, but it’s not too difficult for us to figure out where the deception lay. This church that had a reputation of being alive was now dead because the people had submitted to the surrounding culture... Thankfully, not everyone in the church succumbed to the temptations of the sensual culture. Jesus went on to say, “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”

Christ called the leaders at Sardis to “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die.”

We look forward, as part of that process, to an opportunity to discuss further these issues with the full elder board. Thank you, in advance, for your prayerful consideration.