

# Denison predicts cultural confusion but gospel expansion

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WACO—In the next decade, American Christians can anticipate chaos, divisiveness and major cultural shifts away from biblical morality, but they should not give up hope, Jim Denison told a Texas Baptist gathering.

“Bad times for the culture are good times for the gospel,” Denison, founding chief executive officer of the Denison Forum, told a workshop held in conjunction with the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

He and Mark Turman, senior pastor of Crosspoint Church in McKinney, led a session on “Cultural Issues for the Next Decade.”

## Cultural meta-narratives

Denison cited three false meta-narratives—overarching accounts that provide structure for understanding—that dominate culture today:

- “Truth is personal and subjective.”
- “Sexuality is your choice, and your body is yours to do with it as you wish.”
- “Religion is dangerous.”

Those meta-narratives are evidenced in a variety of moral and ethical issues, from same-sex marriage to genetic engineering to attempts to limit religious speech outside of houses of worship, he insisted.

Denison asserted the arguments cited in the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling that guaranteed same-sex couples the legal

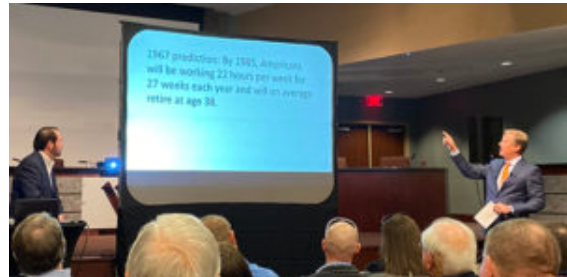
right to marry could be applied next to overturn prohibitions on polyamory, polygamy and even zoophilia.

Regarding euthanasia, he predicted a major effort to assert physician-assisted death as a civil right. Most likely, he said, its proponents will follow an approach similar to one some advocates for LGBTQ rights took in the last couple of decades: “First normalize the behavior, then legalize it, and finally criminalize those who disagree.”

## ‘How our story fits into a bigger story’

While pessimistic projections regarding American culture in the short term might prompt fear and anger, they should instead lead to brokenness and acknowledgement of God’s grand redemptive purpose, Turman insisted.

“The gospel does not shrink in the face of any of this,” he said.



Mark Turman (right), senior pastor of Crosspoint Church in McKinney, joined Jim Denison in presenting a workshop session on “Cultural Issues for the Next Decade.” (Photo / Ken Camp)

In contrast to the prevailing cultural meta-narratives, Turman encouraged Christians to consider what he presented as the overarching biblical meta-narrative: creation, crash (fall), Christ’s redemption, new community and

new creation.

“We think about how our story fits into a bigger story,” he said.

Rather than responding to dramatic cultural change with terror and hostility, Turman urged Christians to choose another path.

“We will never be a redemptive influence until we start loving and stop railing,” he said.

He challenged Christians to demonstrate the compassion of Christ, be clear about the gospel, exercise courage in their lives and speech, and be creative in presenting biblical truth.

## **‘God is not surprised’**

Denison likewise encouraged Christians not to surrender to pessimism, saying, “God is not surprised by any of this.”

He pointed to Matthew 16, when Jesus took his disciples to Caesarea Philippi—a place historically linked to the worship first of Baal, later to the Greek god Pan and eventually that became the site of temples erected to Caesar Augustus and Zeus.

Ancient people referred to it as the “gates of hades,” and it was the place where Peter replied to a question about Jesus’ identity by saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus responded by saying, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not withstand its assault.”

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is remarkably like the first century—sexually permissive, religiously pluralistic and spiritually seeking, Denison noted.

“God called you not only where you are but also when you are,” he said.