

## Progressivism / Progressive Theology

### [What is Progressive Christianity? The Alisa Childers Podcast #1 \(32 minute\)](#)

- Progressive Christianity is not just seeking to develop and grow in our understanding of God, it's the view that the revelation of God is progressing (not just our understanding of it). This means that Christians from Jesus' day had a degree of understanding that was still in its infancy. And we now know more about God than they did.

### [5 Signs Your Church Might Be Heading Toward Progressive Christianity \(Alisa Childers blog\)](#)

#### **1. There is a lowered view of the Bible**

One of the main differences between Progressive Christianity and Historic Christianity is its view of the Bible. Historically, Christians have viewed the Bible as the Word of God and authoritative for our lives. Progressive Christianity generally abandons these terms, emphasizing personal belief over biblical mandate.

#### **Comments you might hear:**

- *The Bible is a human book...*
- *I disagree with the Apostle Paul on that issue...*
- *The Bible condones immorality, so we are obligated to reject what it says in certain places...*
- *The Bible "contains" the word of God...*

#### **2. Feelings become the ultimate authority**

In Progressive churches, personal experiences, feelings, and opinions tend to be valued above objective truth. As the Bible ceases to be viewed as God's definitive word, what a person *feels to be true* becomes the ultimate authority for faith and practice.

#### **Comments you might hear:**

- *That Bible verse doesn't resonate with me....*
- *I thought homosexuality was a sin until I met and befriended some gay people....*
- *I just can't believe Jesus would send good people to hell....*

#### **3. Essential Christian doctrines are open for re-interpretation**

Progressive author John Pavlovitz wrote, "There are no sacred cows [in Progressive Christianity]....Tradition, dogma, and doctrine are all fair game, because all pass through the hands of flawed humanity." Progressive Christians are often open to re-defining and re-interpreting the Bible on hot-button moral issues like homosexuality and abortion, and also cardinal doctrines such as the virgin conception and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The only sacred cow is "no sacred cows."

#### **Comments you might hear:**

- *The resurrection of Jesus doesn't have to be factual to speak truth....*
- *The church's historic position on sexuality is archaic and needs to be updated within a modern framework...*

- *The idea of a literal hell is offensive to non-Christians and needs to be re-interpreted....*

#### **4. Historic terms are re-defined**

There are some Progressive Christians who say they affirm doctrines like biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority, but they have to do linguistic gymnastics to make those words mean what *they want them to mean*. I remember asking a Pastor, "Do you believe the Bible is divinely inspired?" He answered confidently, "Yes, of course!" However, I mistakenly assumed that when using the word "inspired," we both meant the same thing. He clarified months later what he meant—that the Bible is inspired *in the same way* and *on the same level* as many other Christian books, songs, and sermons. This, of course, is not how Christians have historically understood the doctrine of divine inspiration.

Another word that tends to get a Progressive make-over is the word "love." When plucked out of its biblical context, it becomes a catch-all term for everything non-confrontative, pleasant, and affirming.

#### **Comments you might hear:**

- *God wouldn't punish sinners—He is love....*
- *Sure, the Bible is authoritative—but we've misunderstood it for the first 2,000 years of church history...*
- *It's not our job to talk to anyone about sin—it's our job to just love them....*

#### **5. The heart of the gospel message shifts from sin and redemption to social justice**

There is no doubt that the Bible commands us to take care of the unfortunate and defend those who are oppressed. This is a very real and profoundly important part of what it means to live out our Christian faith. However, the *core message* of Christianity—the gospel—is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and resurrected, and thereby reconciled us to God. *This* is the message that will *truly* bring freedom to the oppressed.

Many Progressive Christians today find the concept of God willing His Son to die on the cross to be embarrassing or even appalling. Sometimes referred to as "cosmic child abuse," the idea of blood atonement is de-emphasized or denied altogether, with social justice and good works enthroned in its place.

#### **Comments you might hear:**

- *Sin doesn't separate us from God—we are made in His image and He called us good....*
- *God didn't actually require a sacrifice for our sins—the first Christians picked up on the pagan practice of animal sacrifice and told the Jesus story in similar terms....*
- *We don't really need to preach the gospel—we just need to show love by bringing justice to the oppressed and provision to the needy...*

#### [A Grand Illusion Lectures](#)

Two disciple making ditches:

1. Ineffective traditionalism (legalism)

## 2. Unfaithful progressivism (liberalism)

Mainline Protestant denominations which have embraced liberalism have been dying and yet there is a concerning shift today to progressivism by evangelical Christians.

Theological progressivism:

- A reflective posture to contemporary cultural questions and issues
- Adapts faith to try to help people become Christians (they see it as an on ramp)
- Tends to shrug off previous authorities including Scripture at times
- Tends to be a white, elitist, North American movement
- Seeking a utopia

A fully developed form changes orthodox teachings/emphases:

- The authority of Scripture is downplayed or replaced
- Feelings are elevated as determining what's right
- The Bible is postured as questions not answers
- Jesus' role as a social reformer is emphasized over his divine nature
- Human nature is viewed primarily as good vs. fallen, broken, and needing redeemed
- Therapy is emphasized over forgiveness of sin
- The atoning nature of Jesus' death is downplayed compared to Jesus' example as a martyr
- Resurrection is treated as a metaphor
- Authenticity is more important than salvation
- The second coming is downplayed
- Hell is denied
- Affirmation is more important than holiness
- Sexual purity is replaced with sexual freedom
- The mission to save and disciple is replaced with social justice
- Developing state policies is emphasized over building church community

What's admirable or helpful about progressive tendencies?

- Questioning traditions can be a good thing
- Diversity is an important biblical value
- The call to love, show compassion/mercy, and pursue justice needs prophetic emphasis
- Social justice and care for the poor/oppressed is a key tenet of Jesus' teaching and the Gospel
- Environmental stewardship is a biblical commission

The church's attempt to keep up with the world is always a loss.

Our best move is Jesus and his Lordship, emphasizing both Word and Spirit.

Possible responses to those who may be leaning into progressivism:

- "I love that you focus on Jesus. Do you see Him as God who came in the flesh?"

- “To what extent do you see it as inconsistent to appeal to the prophets’ call for justice but not for sexual ethics?”
- “What was Jesus’ commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures? If he emphasized their authority, why would we minimize it?”
- “I’m just going to try to practice what God’s Word says even when it’s not what I personally want.”
- “Why follow a Galilean peasant if he’s not of God?”

What can we do individually and collectively?

- Maintain and weave a high view of Scripture into everything.
- Preach expository sermons emphasizing hearing and obeying.
- Clarify what issues are “essential” for the Gospel and if this is being undermined or if the issue is secondary.
- Be careful WHO we read (include world Christian authors not just white, American ones) and how much we read others not Scripture.
- Don’t ever underestimate God’s power to win progressives back to Scripture.