

## **Progressive Christianity**

What will characterize life at the end before Jesus returns?

- 1) Deception by false prophets (Matt. 24:4-5, 10-11)
- 2) A church that is asleep (Matt. 25:1-5)
- 3) False Doctrine in the church by false religious people (I Tim. 4:1)
- 4) A religious, but spiritually bankrupt society (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

What is Progressive Christianity? (*Bethel Congregational United Church of Christ; [bethelbeaverton.org](http://bethelbeaverton.org)*)

### **Origin of Progressive Christianity**

In keeping with our “reformed and reforming” identity, we have embraced a movement that began in 2006 called Progressive Christianity. The movement was a part of a larger movement called “the emerging church.” At the heart of these movements was the desire to articulate a way of being Christian that was an alternative to the Christian faith portrayed in the public realm. The leaders of Progressive Christianity had grown weary of defining their Christian faith in negative terms: “We aren’t fundamentalists. We don’t believe the Bible is the inerrant or infallible word of God. We don’t agree that Creationism should replace the science of evolution in public schools. We don’t believe that God hates gays. We don’t believe that people of other faiths are going to hell unless they convert to Christianity. We don’t deny the right of women to choose what happens to their bodies.”

### **Biblical Foundation**

The Bible is read at every one of our progressive Christian worship services and is the foundation of our beliefs, faith, and values.

Progressive Christian Beliefs Are Rooted in Jesus

We believe in the Trinity: God the Creator, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus’ commandment to “love one another as I have loved you” is foundational.

We are more comfortable acting on our faith than talking about it.

Saint Francis of Assisi’s wisdom: “preach the gospel always, and when necessary use words” resonates deeply. We believe that Christian faith is a journey, not a destination. We think of ourselves as “work in progress” Christians.

We believe that God’s will and way were revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. We believe that the historical Jesus, the Jewish Rabbi carpenter who lived in ancient Palestine, became the Christ as his followers encountered him in their midst after his earthly death. The Holy Spirit awakened them to the power of Jesus’ presence in their midst. Jesus came alive when they trusted that his love, guidance, support, comfort and challenge remained with them even though his physical body did not. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, provide the inspiration and challenge for us to live as followers of Jesus today.

### **Our Progressive Beliefs**

1. The Christian faith is founded on three primary calls we see through Jesus;

To love God, to love our neighbor, and to love ourselves.

2. The Christian faith is our way of being faithful to God. But it is not the only way.

Christianity is the truth for us. But it is not the only truth.

This principle stems from the reality of the 21st century. We share our lives with people who are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist. We experience these people as loving and caring by following their religious traditions. To deny that is to deny that God can only draw people with one way. That simply isn’t born out in our experience.

The power of the Christian faith to transform lives does not require it to be exclusively true. Exclusivity is born out of fear. The fear that there is one train to God and if you aren't on the right train, you'll go to hell. We believe there are many trains and God welcomes them all.

### 3. Love of God involves all aspects of life, not just human life.

Care of the Earth and its ecosystems is an expression of Christian faith and stewardship.

This principle stems from our ever-widening understanding of climate change and influence our "carbon footprint" has on the quality of the air, water and soil. Science and religious faith are friends – each informs the other. Wisdom and insight from both are essential for Christian faith.

### 4. Love of Neighbor means extending kindness and care...

To those in our family and in our local and global communities.

Further, love of neighbor includes affirmation of the LBGTQ community, immigrants, people of other faith traditions and even those who are enemies.

### 5. Love of self means engaging in spiritual disciplines

Worship, prayer, music, study of the Bible and other literature feeds the mind, heart and spirit.

Love of self also includes giving time for rest, recreation, nurturing friendship, a healthy diet and physical exercise. Love of self requires humility and humor

## Analysis

Alisa Childers is the author of *Another Gospel: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*.

Progressive Christianity is a movement that is infiltrating and influencing the Evangelical church. Some of the most high-profile Christian leaders are a part of it. This movement seeks to re-interpret the Bible, re-assess historic doctrines, and re-define core tenets of the faith. While claiming the title "Christian," and boasting a high view of the Bible, it is sweeping up many unsuspecting Christians into a false view of who God is and how he saves people.

But it can be very difficult to spot. It's not like progressive Christians typically introduce themselves like, "Hi! I am your friendly neighborhood progressive Christian, and I'm here to preach a different gospel!" The slow slide into progressive Christianity is so subtle it is almost imperceptible. Unless you know some basics.

The following lists are not comprehensive, and they aren't a catch-all for every progressive Christian. However, progressive Christians will typically deny one or more of the doctrines in the first list, and affirm one or more in the second.

## Denials

### 1) The Atonement

Often, progressive Christians will refer to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as horrific or unnecessary. The idea that God the Father would require the blood sacrifice of his Son is perceived to be an indictment on God's character, turning him into a divine abuser. This is sometimes referred to as "Cosmic Child Abuse."

### 2) Biblical Authority or Inspiration

In the progressive church, the Bible is viewed more like an ancient spiritual travel journal than the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. The Biblical writers are viewed as well-meaning ancient people who were doing their best to understand God in the times and places in which they lived, but they were not necessarily speaking for God. Scripture is also seen as contradictory, not internally coherent, and not authoritative for Christians.

### 3) Original Sin

The doctrine of Original Sin is roundly rejected in progressive Christianity, with the idea of Original Blessing put in its place. Progressive Christians don't typically deny that sin exists or that it is a bad thing. But they often deny the idea that we have some sort of a sin nature that was passed down to us from Adam and Eve. Instead, progressive Christians often teach that sin isn't what separates us from God, but our own self-imposed shame. In the progressive view, it's often taught that we simply need to realize that we were never separated in the first place...that we are beloved and accepted by God just as we are.

#### 4) The Deity of Jesus

Certainly not all progressive Christians will deny Jesus' deity, but this doctrine tends to be downplayed. The concept of "Cosmic Christ" is sometimes presented as our ultimate goal...that Jesus is a model and exemplar of someone who was christened as both human and divine, and we can follow his example by finding the divine within ourselves.

#### 5) The Physical Resurrection of Jesus

Again, not every progressive denies the physical resurrection, but the idea that Jesus was bodily raised back to life is often deemed less important or significant than the meaning we can draw from the idea of resurrection.

#### 6) The Virgin Birth

In the progressive church, the virgin birth and other miraculous events can be downplayed, ignored—or like the resurrection—viewed as less important than the life-lessons we can learn from these stories.

#### 7) The Trinity

A denial of the deity of Jesus would naturally be a denial of the Trinity. But some progressive Christians take it further and affirm the view of pantheism, which states that the universe is God. Others will affirm a slightly less radical view called panentheism, which is the belief that God and the world are inter-related. God is in all and all is in God. This implies that God is somehow dependent upon creation, which casts serious aspersions on the nature of the Trinity.

#### 8) The Sinlessness of Jesus

You probably won't find many progressive Christians who outright declare that Jesus was a sinner. However, Jesus' humanity tends to be emphasized. For example, in Matthew 15, Jesus tells the Syrophenician woman, "It's not good to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs." This is viewed as Jesus' having racial biases that were recognized and corrected during this exchange.

### **Affirmations**

#### 1) LGBTQ Relationships and Marriage

One of the hallmarks of progressive Christianity is the shift on issues of sexuality and gender. There is an almost universal acceptance of same-sex relationships and marriage, a belief in the validity of transgenderism, and a rejection of cisgender norms.

#### 2) Universalism / Universal Reconciliation

The primary view of heaven and hell in the progressive church is Universalism, which is the idea that no one will be punished in hell, and everyone will eventually be saved and restored to right relationship with God. Some progressive Christians will still say that Jesus is the only way, but believe he will save everyone.

#### 3) The Gospel of Social Justice and Critical Theory

In progressive Christianity, the gospel is not seen primarily as the good news of God saving sinners and reconciling them to Himself. Instead, social justice issues become the heart of the gospel message, with what one does being viewed as more important than what one believes. Often, the secular framework of critical theory is embraced, where the world is viewed through the lens of oppressed vs. oppressor.

#### 4) Pluralism

Religious pluralism is the idea that all roads lead to God, and no one religion holds ultimate truth when it comes to who God is and how he reveals himself to the world. Often, progressive Christians will tout the mantra, "Everyone has a seat at the table," meaning all creeds and religions are true in their own way and the people who embrace them are equally accepted by God.

#### 5) Pantheism, Panentheism or Perennialism

As stated above, many progressive Christians affirm pantheism or panentheism. Another view that is promoted in the progressive church is perennialism, the idea that although different religions look different on the outside, at their core they share the same truth. In other words, they share the same source and come from the same ultimate or divine reality. This divine reality can be discovered through mysticism and contemplative practices.

## Interpretation of Luke 16:19-31

Progressive Christians might be taken aback by the vivid imagery of hell (its Greek version, called Hades) in this passage. But note that the modern evangelical formula for hell-avoidance is missing! In this parable, you don't have to "accept Jesus as your personal Lord and savior". All that's necessary to get to the bosom of Abraham is to follow the law of Moses and the guidance of the prophets. And there's no mention of "heaven". Genesis 25 tells us that "Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people." The people of early Israel did not believe in an afterlife: being "gathered to his people" meant being buried with them. Lazarus' reward for following the law and the prophets was to die in peace and be gathered to Abraham and the rest of his people. The cultural context of this parable makes it clear that it is not to be taken literally as a description of life after death.

But progressive Christians ought to take it seriously. Those of us with the resources to help those who lack them must pay attention and respond meaningfully to their needs – not just with traditional charity, but with a commitment to structural social and economic change.

Progressivechristianity.org

---

### Personal Observations

- 1) Doctrinal statement does not include that 66 books of the Bible are the inerrant, infallible Word of God and the final authority in all matters of faith and life. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- 2) They present that the apostles wrote only to their current generation – Not by inspiration to all generations  
Their words are not Jesus' Words and we are free to decide which ones apply to our culture today and which ones do not. (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:14-16)
- 3) They claim that acceptance of LGBTQ life and gay marriage because Jesus never said anything about homosexuality and the apostles' teaching is not binding upon us today (Matt. 19:1-6)
- 4) They claim that even if we disagree – We are supposed to love those with whom we disagree  
Matt. 22:37-39, I John 4:7-8, John 3:16

#### Analysis of Love in Scripture

- 5) Another Gospel – 2 Cor. 11:1-4
  - 1) Satan is out to deceive you from believing in the true Christ (v. 3)
    - a) Yes there is an evil one out there who is set upon severing your bond with Christ
    - b) He is the arch enemy of God and of Jesus and every Christian devoted to Jesus
    - c) His goal is to remove you from Christ  
Because if he can do that – Then he has you without you even knowing about it  
Notice how powerful the Scriptures describe him in doing this work (v. 3) – craftiness  
This means tricking you and deceiving you into believing what is wrong  
Because when someone is deceived – They don't know any different or think anything is wrong with their error
  - 4) Just as he deceived Eve – So will he deceive her children
    - a) Because he lied to Eve and she believed it – And this led to her downfall
    - b) And that is what he will do to you – Lead Your Mind astray from the truth (v. 3)
    - c) Because what you think in your mind as the truth is what you will act upon

#### **AND MAKE SURE YOU DON'T MISS THE DECEPTION HE IS AFTER**

- 5) The simplicity (singleness) of purity and devotion to Christ (v. 3)

- a) The very bond that Paul likened to the marriage bond

Because this is the bond that keeps us in Christ

If Satan can lead your mind away from that – Then it really doesn't matter what else you go after – Even if it is good

B) The Scriptures also tell us who he is going to use to do this (v. 4) – **Preachers!**

- 1) There will be preachers who will come to you who are not the genuine article
- 2) They appear on the outside as genuine ministers – But they only appear that way outwardly
- 3) In truth they are servants of Satan and they are full of lies (vv. 13-15)
  - a) Not everyone who stands in a pulpit or appears in a religious broadcast is a genuine minister
  - b) There are deceivers who will come and bring lies from the devil himself to youDoes this sound like some ranting from a fanatic?

C) Paul isn't talking about those out promoting a false religion – Like Islam or Buddhism

- 1) He is talking specifically about those who will twist the Scriptures
- 2) He also tells us in advance what they will preach to do this

**Another Jesus (v. 4)**

- 1) The Jesus that these imposters bring to you is not the Jesus of the Bible
- 2) They will talk about Jesus and that is what makes them so deceptive
- 3) But the Jesus they believe in and preach is a counterfeit to the real  
The Jesus of the Bible is the Lord God Almighty in true sinless humanity  
He is worthy of all honor, praise, adoration, worship and surrender of life
- 4) The Jesus that these people will bring is a friend of sinners – But never a judge of them
  - a) He is a helper to mankind but not One who would ever do anything to condemn anyone
  - b) The Judgment and Wrath of God are all removed and God is Love ONLY

**A Different Gospel (v. 4)**

- 1) The Gospel that they will focus on is your feelings and social issues
- 2) It is designed to make you happy and fulfilled in your life
- 3) There are no demands placed upon your life in terms of sins to overcome – You can live any way you want
- 4) Everyone is welcome regardless of how they live  
Or suffering you must endure for the sake of Christ
- 5) So this gospel leads people to social action to help free people from any societal oppression
- 6) It brings in everything that appeals to people's self – Music, entertainment, fun, recreation
- 7) It removes everything in Scripture which attacks the flesh
  - a) The Cross, Preaching on repentance, the call to deny yourself and take up your cross, Brokenness, Surrender of your will and life, Coming out and Not being conformed to the world
- 8) It is a gospel That invites Christ to come in to help you with life's problems  
But is is not **THE Gospel** that brings forgiveness of sins and freedom from life dominating sins and changes the lives of those who embrace it

**A Different spirit (v. 4)**

- 1) There is a spirit that accompanies the imposter's ministry – But it is not the Holy Spirit
- 2) This spirit will stir the **emotions** of the listeners – But not the heart
- 3) People can go home from the meeting with a smile on their faces and happiness in their soul  
But emptiness in their heart  
Because it is only the presence of the Spirit of God that truly brings spiritual life

This will be very popular – You bear this beautifully