

# CONVERSATIONS

Social Awareness, Living Truth

Series 1, Paper 4

## WORLDVIEW: WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY & HOW TO RESPOND

### WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Today, it's all about being inclusive and tolerant. Christians are often seen as the opposite – people following a religion which encourages bigotry and discrimination. For instance, the teaching that marriage is for a man and a woman is seen as outdated and discriminatory, a teaching that could only fuel hate. Another example is the teaching that Jesus is the only way to God. It is an exclusive claim which to critics of Christianity must, therefore, encourage Christians to feel superior. From their view, Christian teaching must be causing a hostile, “us vs them” mentality.

Progressive Christianity (PC) is a movement of believers concerned with criticisms like these. PC argues traditional Christianity is due for an overhaul to be inclusive and loving. The goal of PC is to get Christians to “deconstruct” their traditional biblical beliefs and “reconstruct” them to reflect today's modern sensibilities.

It is true that traditional Christianity has been used to support harmful ideas and policies. We might argue these actions were contrary to the faith. But progressive Christians argue these acts are inherent to traditional Christianity. If Jesus is the only way, then doesn't that make Christians inherently superior and judgmental? Doesn't that mean evangelism is just an excuse to push one's beliefs on someone else? It is true, some Christians are judgmental and pushy when sharing faith, but before we wholesale change our beliefs and doctrines, we need to first ensure we know what intolerance and judgment are and whether they are really the awful things progressives would have us believe.

**“we need to first ensure we know what intolerance and judgment are and whether they are really the awful things progressives would have us believe.”**

We should be open to critique, ensuring we present our witness of Christ winsomely, with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). But we must remember intolerance isn't necessarily bad. An oncologist must be intolerant of every bit of diseased tissue if she wants to cure her patient of cancer. Likewise, judgment isn't always bad. In a court of law, we depend on judges to be objective and judge fairly when sentencing a criminal. There are many circumstances where intolerance that leads to judgment is necessary and the same holds true in the spiritual realm. God is the Creator and has based morality upon His good character which is concerned for human flourishing. If God is good, and rebellious acts against His authority are destructive, God's intolerance and judgement of sin is in our best interests.

We humans are not capable of dealing with evil very well ourselves.

How many times have we complained about sentences that are a “slap on the wrist” or that someone “got away with murder”? We need God to render ultimate justice since He is the only one with the wisdom and power to do so. If God is intolerant of sin, then we must pay attention to what He says about its remedy if we want freedom from its oppression and death. We don't help anyone by avoiding difficult topics or changing scripture to suit our own feelings or ideas. And we shouldn't shy away from sharing the good news about salvation. Evangelism is not about cramming your beliefs down someone's throat—it is “telling a hungry person where to find bread.”

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

Christianity comes from the teachings of the Bible. Its basic teaching is that God created the world (Genesis 1:1) to be a kingdom He rules with goodness, truth, and beauty (Revelation 11:15). That world will be filled with people who, together, make up an eternal companion for His Son, Jesus. We humans rejected His rule and chose to go our own way which is “sin,” and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). God's plan for His Son's bride to be pure is accomplished by having His own Son, come to earth as a human. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and died in our place, taking the consequences we deserve and conquering death (1 John 4:9-10). He rose from the dead and returned to heaven. If we acknowledge our sin, turn away from it and follow Him (1 John 1:9; Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19), we have freedom from sin's grip and from guilt. We have the hope of the resurrection of our bodies when Christ returns to restore the earth and life in the renewed creation as Jesus' companion for eternity.

Although specific examples are for a separate discussion, there is much historical evidence that we can trust the Bible is authentic. And through supernatural or personal evidence (e.g. fulfillment of prophecies, God's miraculous work in our own lives, etc.) and through faith we can be assured its claims and teachings are revealed to us by God Himself, through His chosen spokespeople. Jesus taught that He Himself, was the only way to God (John 14:6) and that the pathway to heaven would be difficult (Matthew 7:13-14), requiring much effort. He told people to repent and warned them about the consequences if they did not (Luke 13:3; Mark 9:42-44). Jesus routinely criticized the religious leaders of His day for their hypocrisy and inability to lead people in the ways of God (Matthew 23:13-29).

We best see the differences between biblical Christianity and PC by using a table (pictured on the next page).

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

The teachings of PC are contrary to orthodox teaching in many subtle, yet important, ways, leading people further from God, not towards Him. Bible believing Christians need to recognize these differences and help each other recognize them. This requires commitment to balancing both truth and love. There is a danger of focusing on facts so strongly that we simply engage in arguments and focus on winning.

## TRADITIONAL TEACHING

### Bible

The Word of God (given through humans) that reveals truth and is authoritative over human beings.

### Jesus

The Second Person of the Trinity; fully divine and fully human except without sin.

### Salvation

We can be citizens of God's restored and perfect world, by repenting of our sins and trusting in the work of Christ on the cross.

### Cross

Christ's sacrificial giving of His life, dying in our place (Romans 6:23) to spare us the eternal conscious punishment of hell and ultimately defeating death by rising from the dead.

### Humanity's Basic Problem

Sin – our inclination toward selfishness and the immoral acts that we commit; the problem is within people.

Or, as is the trap of PC, we may focus so much on loving that we fail to speak truth to avoid conflict. Here's how we can respond to the PC movement:

#### 1. Study

The best way to guard against false teaching is true teaching. Christians ought to be diligent about learning and teaching the fundamentals of the faith. This will give them a clear idea of what they believe and why, so they can pass on these truths. We should also learn about other religions and belief systems so that we may be the first ones to introduce these topics to our children. Also, cultivating non-Christian friendships brings opportunities for important conversations with those of differing beliefs.

#### 2. Practice

We must be diligent in living out our faith. A merely intellectual grasp of doctrine can't survive the storms of life – fellowship, community, and hospitality are needed to provide a safe and loving context for growth. Worshipping together, praying together and discussing matters with other Christians stimulates faith; serving others, pursuing peace and justice, and prayerfully sharing our faith with others provides ways for us to make a difference in the world.

#### 3. Respond

We must extend grace, kindness and generosity toward those with opposing beliefs. A friend and fellow Christian may have adopted some progressive beliefs – a good response must:

- » prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and guide our conversations.

## PROGRESSIVE TEACHING

### Bible

The word of humans that reveals each author's understanding of God at the time; its teachings may be updated according to new knowledge.

### Jesus

A good moral teacher; some might say He is divine as well as human.

### Salvation

We can all be citizens of heaven. Salvation is available to all; you don't have to be a Christian to be saved.

### Cross

The highest example of love and forgiveness that all humans ought to emulate; the death of a good man murdered for speaking truth to power. His death was the price, not for our sins, but for rejecting injustices in the oppressive status quo. Hell, as eternal conscious punishment, is an abhorrent idea based on outmoded views of God.

### Humanity's Basic Problem

Oppression – systems that are unequal, resulting in power for the few and suffering for the many; the problem is outside people.

- » truthfully acknowledge criticisms of our beliefs and critique others' beliefs winsomely.
- » relationally maintaining friendships and ongoing dialogue without allowing disagreements to take center stage.

Finally, we must remember, we've been entrusted with a gift, and must be "watchful to this end with all perseverance..." (Ephesians 6:18) for, as Paul said, "I declare to you the gospel...by which also you are saved...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15: 1-3)

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Childers, Alisa, *Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth In Response to Progressive Christianity*. Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2020.

Alisa Childers Podcast, [alisachilders.com/podcast.html](https://www.alisachilders.com/podcast.html)

Dr. Sean McDowell, interview, "How Progressive Christians Help Evangelicals Shift Beliefs"; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4K-GYOgodI6w>

Urbanowicz, Elizabeth. *Foundtionworldview.com*; *Comparative Worldview* (curriculum ages 8-12)

McDowell, Sean. (2009). *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical & Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking About God*. Harvest House Publishers.

