

F. LaGard Smith answers the question: What can be done to turn a church away from a progressive downward slide?

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*Facilitators may want to preface this video and discussion with defining what progressive thoughts or movements or changes are considered to be. There may be some in the audience who have experienced progressive 'church-life' or progressive culture. There may be others who think they know what this is but have never really 'been in it'. And still others who may be unaware of what this is and why it is even of concern. (See Wikipedia definitions of progressive Christianity below as an aid if desired or for further research).*

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Discussion and study guides / questions / topics for your consideration.

1. In the opening discussion there are at least two connections that appear to shape the balance of the video regarding progressivism:
  - a. It affects the church, nations, individuals, and cultures.
  - b. It is something that requires 'rescue' from.
  - c. What do you think? Is this something that affects everyone and everything and is rescue needed?
2. The answer given with respect to 'can they be rescued' from progressivism, is a resounding "No". Why?
  - a. What do you think about the metaphor of the ship which cannot be turned around?
  - b. What do you think about the metaphor of going too far down the path? (If it is not the path in Ps 119.105 then what path is it?)
  - c. Do you think progressivism is small and inconsequential in the overall scheme of things? Discuss James 3.4ff – the ship and rudder. Discuss seemingly insignificant actions and their consequences (Lev 10.1ff; Num 20.8ff; 2 Sam 6.1-10; 2 Sam 24.1-17; Acts 5.1-11).
  - d. Does or can progressivism minimize the will of God? (Matt 6.10; 12.50; Jo 5.30, 7.16-19; Ro 12.1-3; 1 Jo 2.15-17). Discuss. What or who's 'will' is being pursued?
  - e. Does or can progressivism minimize the consequences when the will of the creation becomes 'the way'? (Prov 10.29; 12.15; 12.28; 14.12)
3. Restoration. Throughout this video series as well as this last lesson, there is a call – sometimes subtle sometimes overt – for restoration. With respect to this topic, what is the warning being sounded about progressivism and restoration?

- a. Do you think the modern (post-modern?) mind thinks about judgment very often?
  - b. Is it a biblical truth that God – the Creator – restores, or offers restoration, only after judgment? Have we ever thought about this? Discuss.
  - c. What do you think about the idea of the “cycle of nations” and the historical risings and fallings of civilizations? Are they connected to God?
  - d. In these current times, are they / would they be connected to God? If not, why?
4. What does progressivism do and why is it considered by some to be a downward, falling slide and by others as enlightened thinking, moving upward and progressing? Progressing toward what? Or, progressing away from what?
5. What is discussed as the church’s possible responses to the relentless progressive wave?
  - a. The word ‘traditional’ and the action of becoming “less traditional” implies what?
  - b. The word ‘remnant’ and the action of becoming “a remnant” implies what?
  - c. It is asserted that persecution of the church is coming and will intensify; and that persecution is coming from culture. What do you think? (Matt 5.10-12; 2 Tim 3.12,13; 2 Pet 4.12-19)
  - d. What is the irony briefly mentioned about what is to come? That the Lord’s church will likely become ‘less traditional’ and that in spite of this, a great persecution will still occur. What does this imply?
6. Discussion questions:
  - a. Do you think “the church” is set on a particular course or pattern going forward in time?
  - b. Do you see a revival in the church occurring? Do you think a revival is necessary? A revival of what? Where? In the US? Europe? The “non-western” world?
  - c. Within this topic of progressivism, can we see relationships and connections between nations and the church?
  - d. Do you think the United States of America is invincible? Does history inform us of anything?
    - i. Without the Lord and His church?

- e. Regarding 'tradition', can we reconcile these passages:
  - i. Mark 7.1-13
  - ii. Col 2.6-8
  - iii. 2 Thess 2.13-15; 3.6
- f. Progressive thinking appears to embrace the notion of "equity" as if it is something that is new. As if it is something that is lacking in 'religion' or government or society. Explore these passages and discuss. Psalms 98.9; 99.1-4; Prov 1.2-7 esp. 3, 2.1-11 esp. 9; Is 11.1-5; 59.1-15; Micah 3 (v.9); Mal 2.1-7. And then consider Hos 14.9. What then, is true equity, and where is it found?
- g. Progressive thinking often prides itself on tolerance and acceptance. Can we determine what that means? Is there anywhere in the word of God (which is truth according to Jesus Christ Himself in John 17) that discusses tolerance and acceptance the way that progressive thinking presents it? What about Acts 17.22-31 esp. 30.
- h. Progressive thinking appears to elevate itself in response to the perception that "the old" and the tired and the rigid are holding us back; they are outdated; they ossified; they must be replaced. "pharisee-ism" is often cited as a reason to "move forward". There are many biblical passages that appear as though they support this movement. However, look at some of some them, and take some time to consider what God is really telling us.
  - i. 1 Sam 15.22, 23. What is pleasing to the Lord?
  - ii. Ps 51.1-17. What does the Lord want? (see also Is 66.1,2)
  - iii. Eccl 5.1. What happens when we, the creation, come near to God to listen? (see also Jam 4.6-10).
  - iv. Hos 6.6. What does God delight in? (see also Hos 4.6).
  - v. 1 Cor 7.17-20. What is the important thing here? v. 19. What is required of an individual?
  - vi. Rom 14.13-19, esp v.17. What is (and is not) the kingdom of God? (see also Jo 18.36,37 and Eph 6.10-12).

**At the end of the day; at the end of your study; as we draw near to God to listen to Him in His precious word:**

**Do you find words of comfort**

**Do you find words of warning**

**Do you find both –**

**for you, Christian, and for the Lord's church?**

**Think, study, and pray on these things.**

**Progressive Christianity** represents a [post-modern](#) theological approach, and is not necessarily synonymous with [progressive politics](#).<sup>[1]</sup> It developed out of the [liberal Christianity](#) of the [modern era](#), which was rooted in [the Enlightenment](#)'s thinking.<sup>[1]</sup> Progressive Christianity is a "[post-liberal](#) movement" within [Christianity](#) that "seeks to reform the faith via the insights of post-modernism and a reclaiming of the truth beyond the verifiable historicity and factuality of the passages in the Bible by affirming the truths within the stories that may not have actually happened."<sup>[1]</sup>

Progressive Christianity, as described by its adherents, is characterized by a willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity, a strong emphasis on [social justice](#) and care for the poor and the oppressed, and environmental stewardship of the earth. Progressive Christians have a deep belief in the centrality of the instruction to "[love one another](#)" (John 15:17) within the teachings of [Jesus Christ](#).<sup>[2]</sup> This leads to a focus on promoting values such as compassion, justice, mercy, and tolerance, often through political activism. Though prominent, the movement is by no means the only significant movement of progressive thought among Christians.

Progressive Christianity draws influence from multiple theological streams, including [evangelicalism](#), liberal Christianity, [neo-orthodoxy](#), [pragmatism](#), [postmodernism](#), progressive [reconstructionism](#), and [liberation theology](#).<sup>[3]</sup> The concerns of feminism are also a major influence on the movement, as expressed in [feminist](#) and [womanist](#) theologies.

Examples of statements of contemporary Progressive Christian beliefs include:

the Eight Points produced by The Center for Progressive Christianity: a statement of agreement about Christianity as a basis for tolerance and human rights;

the [Phoenix Affirmations](#) produced by Crosswalk (Phoenix, AZ) - include twelve points defining Christian love of God, Christian love of neighbor, and Christian love of self.

the working definition utilized in Roger Wolsey's book *Kissing Fish: Christianity for People Who Don't Like Christianity*:

Progressive Christianity is an approach to the Christian faith that is influenced by post-liberalism and postmodernism and: proclaims Jesus of Nazareth as Christ, Savior, and Lord; emphasizes the Way and teachings of Jesus, not merely His person; emphasizes God's immanence not merely God's transcendence; leans toward [panentheism](#) rather than supernatural theism; emphasizes salvation here and now instead of primarily in heaven later; emphasizes being saved for robust, abundant/eternal life over being saved from hell; emphasizes the social/communal aspects of salvation instead of merely the personal; stresses social justice as integral to Christian discipleship; takes the Bible seriously but not necessarily literally, embracing a more interpretive, metaphorical understanding; emphasizes orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy (right actions over right beliefs); embraces reason as well as paradox and mystery — instead of blind allegiance to rigid doctrines and dogmas; does not consider homosexuality to be sinful; and does not claim that Christianity is the only valid or viable way to connect to God (is non-exclusive).<sup>[13]</sup>

As Wolsey mentions, Progressive Christianity "leans toward panentheism rather than supernatural theism..." The role of panentheism in Progressive Christianity shifts the emphasis from belief to contemplative practice and experiential faith. So Progressive Christianity is often characterized by contemplative or meditative forms of worship. This finds perhaps its most poignant expression in *Finding God in the Body: A Spiritual Path for the Modern West* by Benjamin Riggs:

The Kingdom is literally hidden in plain sight. It is hidden in basic awareness. When seen through the light of God's awareness, the ordinary is revealed to be the extra-ordinary. The world is set ablaze by the fire of direct experience. The walls are awake, the ground is breathing, and mere mortals shine with the radiance of the sky. It is as if the world is looking back at us through the same eye with which we see it. We live in the Mind of God... The whole of creation exists within the fullness of God's Will.<sup>[14]</sup>

In [panentheism](#), the universal [spirit](#) is present everywhere, which at the same time "[transcends](#)" all things created. While pantheism asserts that "all is God", panentheism claims that God is greater than the universe. Some versions of panentheism suggest that the universe is nothing more than the manifestation of God. In addition, some forms indicate that the universe is contained within God,<sup>[2]</sup> like in the [Kabbalah](#) concept of [tzimtzum](#). Much of [Hindu thought](#) is highly characterized by panentheism and [pantheism](#)