

# THE PROGRESSIVE “GOSPEL”

## PROPOSERS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE PROGRESSIVE GOSPEL

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- Progressive Christianity is a movement in which many in the rising generation are becoming convinced is superior to old-fashioned, close-minded, bigoted Christian faith they grew up with
- “Progressive ‘Christianity’ is a current theological movement that is rooted in mainline protestant liberal theology, which rejects the fundamentals of the Christian faith, denies the exclusivity of Christianity, and emphasizes social justice and tolerance—using the modern-day woke vocabulary.”<sup>1</sup>
- In short, it is liberal Christianity in a new package
- Proponents include:
  - James Rowe – retired Episcopal priest who founded the Center for Progressive Christianity (TCPC) in 1996
  - Richard Rohr
  - Rachel Held Evans
  - David Felton and Jeff Procter-Murphy
  - Kristen Kobes du Mez – author of *Jesus and John Wayne*
  - Rob Bell
  - Brian McLaren
  - N.T. Wright
  - Rachel Hollis – author of *Girl, Wash Your Face*

### What They Deny

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#### The Atonement

- PCs will often refer to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross as both horrific and unnecessary
- They cannot conceive of a God who would require a blood sacrifice from his Son as punishment for sin
- As such, they perceive this idea of substitutionary atonement as a form of “cosmic child abuse”
- Orthodox Christianity has always taught that Christ’s death was a penal, vicarious, substitutionary atonement, what he did in his life and death to bring about our salvation
- To atone is to make amends, to set things right...theologically, it is what Christ accomplished on the cross through his suffering and death to secure the salvation of sinners
- The English word “atonement” comes from the two words “at” and “onement,” suggesting unity or reconciliation, especially between God and men, or how we are brought into oneness with God through Jesus Christ
- Central to this idea is that when Christ died on the cross, he died as our substitute

**Isaiah 53:4, 11-12** ~ Surely **our** griefs **He** Himself bore, And **our** sorrows **He** carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted...As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As **He** will bear **their** iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet **He Himself** bore the **sin of many**, And interceded for the transgressors.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forgingbonds.org/blog/detail/progressive-christianity-is-capturing-our-kids-hearts>

**1 Corinthians 15:3** ~ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

**2 Corinthians 5:21** ~ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- This great doctrine of the substitutionary atonement is the heart of the gospel
- When God looked at Christ on the cross, he saw our sin...now when God looks at us, he sees Christ's righteousness
- However, sadly, many within PC have termed the substitutionary death of Christ "primitive and obscene"
- The idea that God would require the blood sacrifice of his only Son is seen as immoral...nothing more than a pagan idea early Christians adopted from the culture around them
- Jesus didn't die as a blood sacrifice offered to God for the sins of the world...he died to show us how to forgive our enemies by allowing himself to be crucified by an angry mob
- "The sheer, hideous inanity of a god that demands a blood sacrifice from an innocent in repayment for the sins of the guilty...is a theology that captures the worst aspects of an archaic moral worldview, one that promulgates the barbaric idea of blood guilt and blood sacrifice. Modern Christians gasp in horror at those cultures that carried on the cultural values of this mindset, such as the Aztecs and their human sacrifices, or the honor killings practiced by many Islamic cultures today. Yet their central theological mystery, the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ, is premised on the very same archaic view of honor and morality as these throwback cultures represent. I don't get it. How does a modern Christian, brought up in an ethos of personal responsibility and individual dignity spout sentiments like the above without a hint of moral vertigo?"
- "...a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement that 'God is love.' If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God toward human kind but borne by His Son, then that makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil."<sup>2</sup>
- "People are simply no longer moved by the notion that they are horrible sinners from birth, redeemed only by the sacrifice of an impossibly perfect man at the hands of a bloodthirsty, tribal God."<sup>3</sup>

## The Trouble with Easter: How To (and not to) Talk to Kids About Easter<sup>4</sup>

Public execution! Child Sacrifice! Rising from the dead!

Just the kinds of stories you want to tell your kid(s), right? Yeah...me either. As a Children's Pastor in a Progressive Christian church, Easter is...well...it's rough. For me, anyway. I am responsible for children birth-5th Grade and teaching this central Christian story to kids is one of my biggest challenges. No matter what I do with the Easter story, someone is likely to be upset. If I tell it flat-out, I not only go against my ethos in regard to nurturing children's spirituality but I'd also be confusing boatloads of kids and the message of my ministry as a whole. If I don't tell it at all, I'll certainly have folks (more outside the church than within) wondering what sort of heretical witchcraft I'm having the kids do instead (because abandoning a central narrative of our faith

<sup>2</sup> Chalke, Steve and Mann, Alan, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Felten and Jeff Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity*, (Harper Collins, New York, NY, 2012) Kindle location: 3329.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/unfundamentalistparenting/2017/04/trouble-easter-not-talk-kids-easter/>

would obviously mean I've turned my children's ministry into Hogwarts. Though, now that I think about it...that could be fun.) If I *kind of* tell the story, you know, reframe it, leave the icky stuff out, "simplify it" for the kids – the story becomes hollow (because it's not meant to be a moral-of-the-story kind of narrative) and I would argue this jeopardizes the integrity of the text.

**That said, there are things I know I DON'T want to teach:**

**“Jesus died for you/your sins.”** *While I realize that statement won't psychologically damage every kid, if it damages ONE, it's not worth using. Period. To that end, I can list hundreds of people for whom this sentiment was harmful. We have to find better words and be VERY intentional with our language. And the reality is, Jesus didn't die specifically for your kid. I know that's a bit blunt but technically – Jesus died publicly and grotesquely because he was a political and religious threat to those in power. Philosophically/Theologically – I believe Jesus submitted to the judicial system of the day because he felt it was the right thing to do and perhaps the most powerful way to communicate the notion that God's presence follows us – even unto death. All that to say, using language of “Jesus died for you” is misleading, at best.*

**That God killed Jesus/wanted Jesus to die/intended for Jesus to die as the primary purpose of his life.** *To attempt to teach the concept of a loving God while also delivering this narrative (along with many other Biblical narratives) is confusing and jarring. This also makes the concept of “following Jesus” much more ominous and threatening than it should be.*

**Jesus died to save them from God's judgement/hell.** *This suggests that these children exist in a way that is displeasing or unsatisfactory to God, which further suggests that God is a being sitting on some shiny throne literally evaluating every individual life from afar, casting judgement and glaring in disdain. There is nothing inherent to these children's humanity from which they need to be saved. Therefore, an atonement theology of inborn corruption in need of redemption has no place in a conversation with kids about Easter. (Of course, when you don't believe in a literal, eternally-flaming hell, this point is easier to deal with.)*

**Coming back from the dead is something you can expect to happen.** *While there is much beauty to be mined from the resurrection narrative (I'll touch on this later), I don't think it's helpful or healthy to suggest that resurrection is a present-day reality that our children can hope/wish for in their own lives. This idea, I believe, hinders the grief process and doesn't help them to effectively process death. It's important for our children to learn to face loss gracefully, accepting the reality of that loss while being held as they grieve.*

### Biblical Authority and Inspiration

- Most PCs claim to take the Bible seriously but they reject taking it literally
- Traditionally, orthodox Christianity has taken God's Word to be authoritative, inerrant, infallible, and fully sufficient for all of life and practice

**Psalm 19:7-9** ~ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

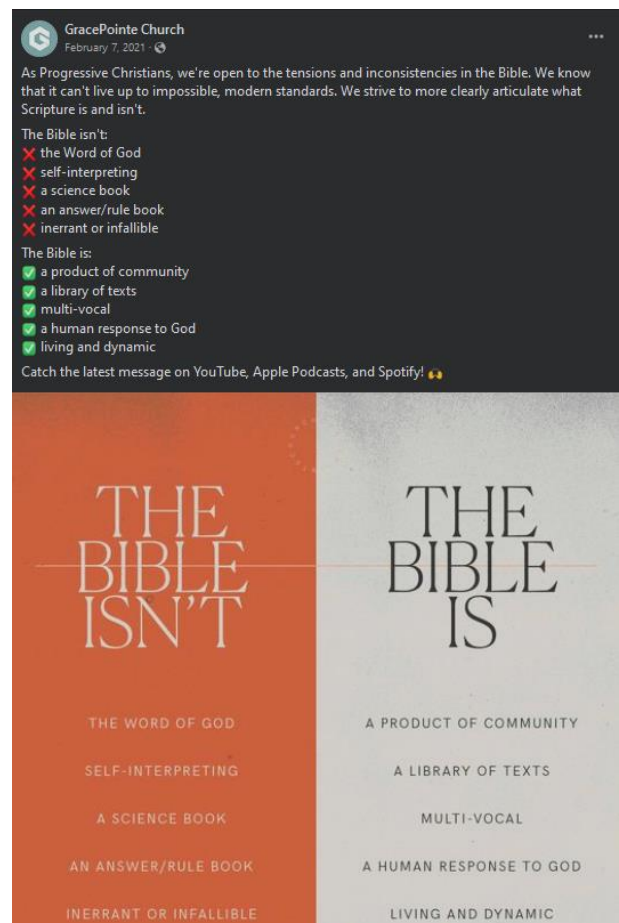
**John 17:17** ~ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** ~ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

**Hebrews 4:12** ~ For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- For PCs, affirming biblical inerrancy would require impossible beliefs including God’s support of slavery, genocide and oppression of women.
- Although they turn to Scripture, they ultimately embrace reason, tradition and experience as higher authorities
- “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.”<sup>5</sup>

- “What comes to mind when you hear the phrase Word of God? For most people, first association that pops into mind is the Bible. Many of us were raised with the lens that taught us that the Bible was the inerrant, infallible Word of God, that contains no errors or issues (in the original autographs). That’s quite the expectation, which is one of the problems when it comes to the way we approach the Bible: We place expectations on the Bible that it isn’t equipped to bear.”<sup>6</sup>
- Rob Bell once called the Bible “a profoundly human book”
- In their understanding, the term 'divinely inspired' means something similar to the way the writings of C.S. Lewis were inspired...but not in any special kind of way
- Although they would say that wisdom can be found in the Bible, since it was written by men they didn’t necessarily get everything right
- Since the Bible was written by fallible men, it can’t be trusted



## Original Sin

- PC roundly rejects the idea that people are sinners or possess an inherent sin nature...rather, they hold that people are perfect the way they are
- The nature of the true Gospel begins with understanding that believers are dead in sin and at the core opposed to God

<sup>5</sup> <https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/what-do-progressive-christians-believe/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gracepointe.net/blog/2020/6/28/word-of-god-re-series>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story\\_fbid=10157495440607015&id=95449497014&paipv=0&eav=AfYlXMSSEtKHMruy57eNgefWiY16zAGiUyZJT9JsuAlhie1cY2-t9qWd-M15jTxXjEIU&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=10157495440607015&id=95449497014&paipv=0&eav=AfYlXMSSEtKHMruy57eNgefWiY16zAGiUyZJT9JsuAlhie1cY2-t9qWd-M15jTxXjEIU&_rdr)

**Genesis 6:5** ~ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

**Psalm 51:5** ~ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

**Isaiah 59:2** ~ But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

**Ephesians 2:1-3** ~And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

**Colossians 1:21** ~ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

- However, PCs deny that we have a corrupt nature passed down to us from Adam and Eve
- Rather than sin separating us from God it is our own self-imposed shame  
In their view, the highest goal in the Christian life is to be a good person...sin is not a problem in this scheme because people are basically good...people are not really that fallen or bad
- Sin is not something people need to be saved from...we just need to be better by following Christ's example
- There is little interest in talking about sin or the wrath of God on sin...and God is not seen as a holy God who reacts against the sin of mankind
- We simply need to realize that we were never separated from God...but we have always been beloved and accepted by him just as we are...because we all possess "original goodness"
- Although most progressive Christians admit that humans are "broken," they won't call that brokenness "sin," but rather, attribute it to immaturity
- "Far from being 'fallen' creatures trying to return to a mythical Eden, human beings are 'emerging' as a species from more primal and baser instincts to become more responsible and mature beings."<sup>8</sup>

### The Deity of Jesus

- PC rejects the idea that Jesus is the divine Son of God, God in human flesh, the One sent to rescue us from our sin
- They deny that Jesus is worthy of our worship or praise or adoration
- Orthodox Christianity has always viewed Christ as the God-man, the incarnation of God in human form

**John 10:30** ~ "I and the Father are one."

**Philippians 2:6-8** ~ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**Hebrews 2:14-17** ~ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

- However, in PC there is a tendency to focus only on the human work of Jesus "the activist"

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<sup>8</sup> Felten and Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions*, Kindle location: 1839-1840.

- He is primarily a moral example for us to follow...a good moral teacher...a big brother of sorts who models what we could and should be in our conduct
- He is a model for living more than an object of worship
- “In his 2016 ‘Everything is Spiritual tour,’ Rob Bell gave a lecture in which he described God in terms of an ‘energy’ and ‘force’ that connects all things. When he got to the Jesus part of his story, he declared that when the apostles referred to ‘the Christ,’ they were referring to ‘a universal animating energy that holds the universe together.’ Here, Rob loosely referred to Colossians 1:17 ‘He existed before anything else and he holds creation together.’ Rob described this as Christ consciousness.”<sup>9</sup>

### The Physical Resurrection of Jesus

- The idea that Jesus was bodily raised back to life is often deemed less important than the meaning we can draw from the idea of resurrection
- In other words, the resurrection doesn’t have to be historical to be meaningful
- The proper understanding of the resurrection is that it was a historical event and the open tomb and the risen Christ were witnessed by many

To Mary Magdalene and the other Mary: **Matthew 28:9**

To the two on the Road to Emmaus: **Luke 24:13-35**

To the Eleven: **Luke 24:36-43**

To the Eleven including Thomas: **John 20:19-29**

To the 500, James, Paul: **1 Corinthians 15:4-8** ~ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

- However, many with PC reject it as a historical fact, being viewed as non-literal by many within the PC movement
- Felten and Procter-Murphy claim that none of the resurrection accounts in the NT can be taken as historical
- “Stories don’t have to be factual to speak truth. And it’s okay to question a literal resurrection – questions are how we learn. And there is always truth to be found in curiosity, even if the answers don’t turn out to be what you thought they’d be...Enjoy this season of rebirth and new life with your kids. I’m experiencing that sentiment more deeply this year than ever in my life. There truly is something divine about the turning of the seasons and the life that comes during this time of year and it’s certainly no coincidence that we celebrate this holiday during the springtime. To everything there is a season – and this is the season of life. Breathe it in. Explore. Create. Play. All we have is this life – let’s live it well, even unto death.”<sup>10</sup>

### The Existence of Objective Truth Claims

- In PC, questions are more important than answers
- Historically, biblical Christianity has held to a sound doctrine as it relates to Christ, the Gospel, etc.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.forgingbonds.org/blog/detail/progressive-christianity-is-capturing-our-kids-hearts>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/unfundamentalistparenting/2017/04/trouble-easter-not-talk-kids-easter/>

**1 Timothy 6:3-5** ~ If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

**Titus 2:1** ~ But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

- However, in PC, certainty about doctrinal and theological issues is seen as a “sin” and inviting questions is more valuable than supplying answers
- In their scheme, uncertainty is prized since no one can be fully confident about what to believe
- Peter Enns published a book in 2016 entitled “The Sin of Certainty”
- “Simply put, Progressive Christians see their unity as coming from their shared love for Christ, not from a shared set of doctrinal statements or shared theological certainties...Progressive Christian Theology is accepting of those outside of its theological boundaries...Progressive Christian Theology is not dogmatic... Progressive Christian Theology is about the practice of faith [Orthopraxy] more so than about having the right beliefs [Orthodoxy]...Progressive Christian Theology seeks to love others more than to correct others...Progressive Christian Theology is more concerned with healing and serving people than with indoctrinating them...Progressive Christian Theology strives to behave more like Jesus did than to define who Jesus was...Progressive Christian Theology is open to mystery and celebrates uncertainty... Progressive Christian Theology celebrates the unanswered questions of faith without insisting that everyone arrive at the same answers.”<sup>11</sup>
- “By calling ourselves Progressive Christians we mean we are Christians who: Commit to a path of life-long learning, believing there is more value in questioning than in absolutes.”<sup>12</sup>
- The result of this is that Christians should stop being so judgmental...that gracious behavior is more important than right belief...and that theology doesn’t matter but what does matter is being a good person

## What They Affirm

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### LGBTQ Relationships and Marriage

- PC represents largely a rejection of Biblical sexuality
- Faithful believers have always understood marriage to be between one man and one woman for life...and that God’s gift of physical intimacy should be experienced within the bounds of marriage

**Genesis 2:24** ~ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

**Matthew 19:4-6** ~ And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? 6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

**1 Corinthians 7:2-5** ~ But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

- However, PC argues for a new “Christian” sexual ethic which rejects cisgender norms and affirms premarital sex, same-sex “marriage,” and the validity of transgenderism

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2022/07/what-is-progressive-christian-theology/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://progressivechristianity.org/>

- In general, what make someone feel happy and fulfilled is important rather than a focus on God's holiness
- In other words, we should care more about love and less about sex since God doesn't care what you do in the bedroom if your heart's in the right place
- "In her book Shameless, Nadia Bolz-Weber argues for a new Christian sexual ethic that allows for moderate pornography consumption, one-night stands, same-sex encounters, and virtually any sexual activity that demonstrates a 'concern for each other's flourishing.'"13
- "By calling ourselves Progressive Christians we mean we are Christians who: Seek community that is inclusive of all people, honoring differences in theological perspective, age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, class, or ability."14
- They would affirm full inclusion of LGBTQ people into the church, including same-sex couples and gay clergy
- They point out that the Bible says little about homosexuality and that Jesus never mentioned it...but the Bible says much about love, grace, kindness, inclusion, and justice

### Social Justice and Critical Theory

- Within the PC movement, there is a widespread acceptance of and focus on social justice
- Solid churches and pastors have seen the dangers of this Marxist movement and have spoken out against it
- However, PCs care deeply about social issues...as such they support gun safety laws, advocate for full equality for women at home, work, and church, welcome immigrants, fight against racism
- "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."15

### Pluralism

- PCs also believe that all roads lead to heaven and that no one religion holds the ultimate truth when it comes to spiritual realities
- Their mantra is "Everyone has a seat at the table"
- As is clear, progressive Christianity constitutes a neo-liberalism which denies many basic tenets of Christian orthodoxy
- "This particular version of Christianity is not really Christianity. It is a man-made system of morality that lacks any real hope or vision for the future. Put differently, it is not good news. It is not good news to tell someone that it is all up to their good works, and that there is no eternal value to what they do, and that you can't be certain it matters because we cannot be certain of anything. What we need, then, is not to go forward to Christianity 2.0, but to go back to the original, historic Christian faith. And that faith is, indeed, good news."16

## **DECONSTRUCTION AS A RESULT OF THE PROGRESSIVE GOSPEL**

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- The obvious effect of this false gospel is an undermining of the faith which usually (although not always) leads to a rejection of the true Gospel

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.forgingbonds.org/blog/detail/progressive-christianity-is-capturing-our-kids-hearts>

<sup>14</sup> <https://progressivechristianity.org/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/what-do-progressive-christians-believe/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://michaeljkruger.com/what-is-progressive-christianity/?utm\\_source=pocket\\_mylist](https://michaeljkruger.com/what-is-progressive-christianity/?utm_source=pocket_mylist)



- This process has been described as deconstruction which “is the process of systematically dissecting and often rejecting the beliefs you grew up with. Sometimes the Christian will deconstruct all the way into atheism. Some remain there, but others experience a reconstruction. But the type of faith they end up embracing almost never resembles the Christianity they formerly knew. Traditional understandings of the Cross, the Bible, and the gospel get taken out with the trash.”<sup>17</sup>
- It is “the process of questioning, doubting, and ultimately rejecting aspects of Christian faith...[and] usually means replacing uncomfortable tenets with culturally or personally popular ideas...Deconstruction claims to explore [issues of the faith], though its ultimate motivation is often not to understand, but to undermine.”<sup>18</sup>
- “Deconstruction almost always means adopting views palatable to the unbelieving world. All too conveniently, it means moving away from positions on sexuality, gender, salvation, sin, hell, and other issues not embraced by popular culture. The vast majority who claim to be deconstructing move with the flow of their surrounding culture, not against it. This movement demands ‘safe space’ to ask difficult questions. Yet, ironically, modern deconstruction often settles for easy, comfortable answers. Or it simply chooses which aspects of faith to retain based on personal preference.”<sup>19</sup>
- Another term for this is “exvangelical”...a term that doesn’t simply mean “no longer evangelical” but rather a leaving behind the particular understanding of what evangelical actually means
- Blake Chastain, founder the Post-Evangelical Post and the Exvangelical podcast provides a working definition of the term “exvangelical”
- He characterizes what exvangelicals are leaving behind under 5 basic points (which essentially constitutes his definition of evangelicalism):<sup>20</sup>
  - A “literal” reading of the Bible and a belief that is inerrant.
  - A belief that women are to be submissive to men. Men are God’s chosen leaders in the home, the church, and all other areas of life. (This is dependent upon a “literal” reading of 1 Timothy and other texts.)
  - Heterosexuality & heteronormativity are sacrosanct, and homosexuality is a sin. (Again, this is based on a “literal” reading of Romans 1:26 and other texts.)
  - An assumption that the American way of life is also sacrosanct and – quite nefariously – the best way of life on Earth.
  - Political and social conservatism is assumed, and has been made manifest over decades through strong identification and partnership with the Republican party in the United States.
- Reasons so-called believers are deconstructing:
  - An unwillingness to allow for genuine questions and doubt about spiritual matters
  - Hurt caused by the church in the form of neglect, rejection, or abuse...or because they feel hurt by God
  - An overreaction against a fundamentalist background
  - A conviction that Christianity or the Bible is not intellectually viable...this could come from numerous sources such as perceived biblical inconsistencies, conflict with “science,” issues with biblical moral or truth claims, or any number of other areas where matters don’t make sense cognitively
- The rise in deconstruction stories may be explained by a variety of factors:
  - Postmodern culture where there is a deemphasis of objective truth in favor of a subjective reality
  - Capitulation of pastors to secular theories and cultural trends
  - Social media which makes finding a community of deconstructing Christians much easier, removing fears or stigmas that might be associated with it

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<sup>17</sup> Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/deconstruction.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.postevangelicalpost.com/p/exvangelical-a-working-definition>

- Usually deconstruction leads to deconverting...deconversion is “the loss of faith in a given religion and return to a previously held religion or non-religion (typically atheism, agnosticism, or rationalism)”<sup>21</sup>
- The Biblical term for this is “apostasy” which is a turning away from the gospel having once known it
- Apostates are those who have been in the church, heard the gospel, and rejected it in favor of false doctrine
- Their rejection of the faith demonstrates that they were never truly saved in the first place

**Matthew 13:20-22** ~ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

**Matthew 24:12-13** ~ Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

**1 Timothy 1:18-20** ~ This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

**2 Timothy 4:10** ~ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

**1 John 2:19** ~ They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

## **Responding to Those with Doubt About Faith**

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- It is helpful to look at the ways the Bible deals with doubters
  - John the Baptist expressed “faithful doubt” in Matt 11:2-3...Jesus didn’t shut down his questions but answered them clearly (Matt 11:4-6)
  - Nicodemus asked Jesus honest questions he had about spiritual matters and Jesus responded with honest answers, even if it was not entirely what Nicodemus wanted to hear (John 3:1-15)
  - Thomas doubted the resurrection and Jesus took the gracious step of giving him more time, attention, and evidence than the rest received (John 20:24-28)...Jesus did not applaud Thomas for being skeptical; rather he dealt graciously with his skepticism
- Believers should sympathize with those struggling under doubts and be ready to graciously, but clearly and firmly, answer their questions
- “Are those who deconvert examples of apostates who were never born again (see 1 John 2:19), or are they simply Christians going through a crisis of faith? Only God knows for sure, and only time will tell. We should patiently engage questions from seekers, doubters, and those in the process of deconversion. Not all challenges to faith come from a point of antagonism. Some come in the form of curiosity, some in the form of skepticism, and some with personal pain and a complicated history... We can never, in ourselves, turn anyone away from deconversion, completely address the hurt others feel, or reassure a doubting heart, but God can... When we encounter Christians who behave badly or we face a difficult teaching in the Bible, the response should not be to abandon Christianity altogether. Instead, we should study harder, pray more, and look to Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).”<sup>22</sup>
- “While being respectful of doubters, the church needs to hold its ground on principles that are truly clear or fundamental to faith. That means insisting on truths even if they are controversial to the world at large.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/deconversion#English>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/deconversion.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/deconstruction.html>