

Will Progressive Christianity Destroy The Church?

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I want to talk about something that's been on my mind for a while. Some time ago, I watched a commentary by a 'Christian pastor' that totally shocked me. In fact, I haven't really stopped thinking about it since.

I found it disturbing; equal parts ridiculous and horrifying, and I really couldn't believe it was being presented under the guise of legitimate Christianity.

For me, it highlighted a disturbing and, frankly, heartbreaking direction that modern Christianity, or at least a part of it, has taken; a wild trip sideways down the labyrinth-like rabbit hole of progressive Christianity*. And I believe this pervasive ideology, left unchecked, could signal the death knell of the church as we know it.

Here's the commentary and then I'll get to discussing it (this video has been removed from YouTube since the writing of this article, only the transcript is available, which is below):

"There's a part of the gospel where Jesus uses a racial slur [for context, the story of the syrophenician woman in Mark 7 and specifically Mark 7:24-30]...what's amazing about this account is that the woman doesn't back down, she speaks truth to power. Her boldness and bravery to speak truth to power actually changes Jesus' mind. Jesus repents of his racism and extends healing to this woman's daughter. I love this story because it's a reminder that Jesus is human. He had prejudices and bias and, when confronted with it, he was willing to do his work..." | [Brandan Robertson](#)

Brandan Robertson, poster boy for the progressive Christian movement, is, by his own declaration, 'spreading the good word of an inclusive, modern gospel'. Progressive Christianity, part of a larger movement called "the emerging church", claims that at the heart of this movement is the desire to articulate a way of being Christian that is an alternative to the traditional Christian faith portrayed in the public realm.

Brandan is a "noted author, pastor, activist, and public theologian working at the intersections of spirituality, sexuality, and social renewal" (taken directly from his website). He currently serves as the Lead Pastor of Metanoia Church, a "digital progressive faith community". In July 2021, *Rolling Stone* magazine included Robertson in its annual "[Hot List](#)" of top artists, creatives, and influencers who "*are giving us reason to be excited about the future.*"

Well, I, for one, am not excited in the least.

There's a lot to unpack in his words and, to be honest, it's hard to know where to start. The problem with progressive Christianity is that it is, by nature, slippery and hard to pin down at a glance; it comes so prettily packaged and cleverly articulated.

Words like inclusivity, deconstruction, equality, and truth-seeking are marched out in quick succession and used in such a way so as to sound noble but humble, and demonstrative of authentic faith.

Issues such as social justice or economic disparity and the marginalisation and discrimination of certain social or ethnic groups are highlighted and cited as key issues for which the progressive Christian will boldly campaign.

While these kinds of issues are certainly addressed within the biblical texts, they do not stand alone from the sound theology or biblical context in which they sit.

And this is one of the core issues with progressive Christianity; seemingly meritable values are affirmed and offered up as convincing proofs of a reshaped and reimagined 21st-century gospel, but, the reality is, they've been cleverly detached from the context or theological truth in which we find them in scripture.

For example, progressive Christianity **affirms the right of women to choose what happens to their bodies****. Initially, we might chorus a resounding yes; surely this is speaking to the unarguable value we place on free will and the intrinsic liberty of every human to choose their own destiny...until we realise this is really another way of supporting the legalisation of abortion, in any circumstances and for any means.

Progressive Christianity offers the statement that **Christianity is the truth for us. But it is not the only truth. 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. We believe there are many trains [to God] and God welcomes them all***.

Again, we may begin to agree. Many religions affirm values in which we see merit (such as love and care for others)...but this is not what is really being said. This is really another way of advocating the post-modern ideology that there is more than one truth, that, in fact, there are many truths, different from each other but all true nonetheless. Critically, this statement asserts that Jesus is not the only way to God and that *being a good person* – “loving and caring” [of others] – will do the job just as well.

Not only that, personal experience is given primary authority in determining truth. Instead of the Word shaping the conclusions we draw from our experiences – *sola Scriptura*, our experiences become the primary authority in determining truth, requiring the Word of God to conform to and find agreement

with our own conclusions and experiences.

Our experiences certainly form part of a raft of resources that provide value in decision-making or conclusion-drawing, but only when the conclusions we draw or the decisions we make are first and foremost shaped by the sound theology expressed in God's Word and in light of the truths expressed therein. Our experiences are not to be considered reliable in and of themselves; scripture warns us that the heart of humanity is deceitful above all things and that our way of viewing the world is shaped by a mind that defaults to our own self will and not the will of God.

The conclusion expressed in the statement that **because we experience people as loving and caring therefore their expression of religion [without the need for Jesus] is still an acceptable path to God** is in direct contradiction to what scripture teaches. *Sola Scriptura*, therefore, demands that this conclusion must be reworked and submitted under scripture; reason, logic, tradition, and experience are valid but subordinate to what God's Word teaches.

Dig a little deeper and you begin to see that progressive Christianity has an agenda, one that claims to be supported by biblical truth but is, in reality, a radical reappraisal and, often, rejection of traditional Christianity in favour of what is largely a human rights agenda.

The words employed and issues raised are used in ways that are deceiving, that relegate Jesus to simply a remarkable helper, spiritual teacher or life guru, that advocate for the inherent divinity in humanity, and that change the meaning of the gospel and its call on believers' lives entirely.

The primacy of personal experience, as expressed by progressive Christianity, propounds the idea that *our truth is true* and therefore cannot be argued against but must be accepted as valid, irrespective of God's Word saying

differently.

Progressive Christianity teaches that you can find God within yourself, that sexuality and gender are fluid, that morality is relative, and that the primary call of Christian faith is to “love God, love our neighbour, and love ourselves”, which is simply a clever reworking of Jesus’ words in order to redefine ‘love of neighbour’ as including “affirmation of the LGBTQ+ community...”

“The significance of the word ‘progressive’ in a sociological sense is rather deceptive in that it misrepresents and downplays the very gospel the church exists to proclaim. It implies and claims that the traditional Christian faith has served its purpose, it is now old-fashioned, restrictive, irrelevant and even repressive.” | Rev E.A. Curnow

“At its core, progressive Christianity is a different religion. It gives you a different God and a different Jesus. It’s not a Jesus who can save you.” | Alisa Childers

I want to analyse some of the ideas inferred in Brandon Robertson’s commentary, who, by the way, states that he “cannot know if Jesus was the incarnation of God with any degree of certainty”, and who “sometimes, believes in the divine claims Christians have projected back onto the historical Jesus and sometimes doesn’t.”

1. Jesus Was A Racist

I’m appalled even typing that sentence. However, it has been said so it must be countered.

Racism is defined as *prejudice against or antagonism towards a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalised.* However, throughout the Bible, God makes no distinction between people based on their social

status ([Jeremiah 22:3](#)), their ethnicity ([Acts 10: 34-35](#)), or their gender ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

He sends rain on the just and the unjust and causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil (Matthew 5:45). His message of good news, first preached to Abraham, was intended to be a blessing for all humanity (Genesis 12:3). The whole world is separated from God by sin and His salvation through the sending His Son is for the whole world to receive, if they will (Romans 5:12, Ephesians 2:12, 2 Peter 3:9).

God is just, holy, perfect, generous, impartial, and good. If this is who God is, then this is also who Jesus, God-With-Us, is. Jesus was no racist.

2. Speaking Truth To Power

While the woman mentioned in this story 'spoke truth' and while Jesus certainly was 'power', the use of this phrase is intended to convey something else entirely. The idea behind the phrase *speaking truth to power* is that of an individual courageously confronting (possibly corrupt) authority, calling out injustices, and demanding change. It presumes that the one speaking is the true moral authority in the matter, someone who is willing to proclaim 'what is right' in the face of criticism or consequence.

Again, if we've seen Jesus then we've seen God and any display of power sits alongside absolute morality, justice and truth. Jesus himself *is* truth (John 14:6) and the use of this phrase here to imply he manifests injustice or untruth is plainly ridiculous.

3. Jesus Was Willing To Do His Work

This phrase *willing to do his (or her) work* is another favourite in progressive circles and is used to imply there is some character deficit or lack in an individual (in this case, Jesus), which needs adjusting or repenting of (a word which

Brandon also employs in his commentary regarding Jesus).

Jesus was certainly prepared and “willing to do his work”, but it wasn’t the work of self-improvement or repentance.

The Lamb, without spot or blemish, sent into the world to reconcile the world again to God, his work was to do the will of his Father (Luke 2:49, John 5:36). Though he entered into our human experience and is, therefore, able to understand us in every way, right down to the alluring call of sin and the temptation to choose self will that we experience, his life and character were perfect. It could not have been otherwise, else our forgiveness and reconciliation could not have been obtained (Hebrews 9:14, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22).

This is just a poor attempt to reinvent Jesus into a caricature that serves the cultural slogans and trends that the progressive Christian movement wants to advance, and which bear no resemblance to the real Jesus of the scriptures; perfect lord, saviour, king.

4. Brandan Robertson’s Conclusion: ‘A Reminder That Jesus Is Human’

It’s sad but unsurprising that this is Brandan’s take-home point from this story. In reality, the story in Mark 7 marks a significant turning point in Jesus’ ministry of kingdom-preaching and repentance-calling, where the mission is expanded to include the Gentiles; obviously super good news for you, me, and anyone else of non-Jewish heritage!

The world that we see in the Bible and all around us still is one where all of creation, including humanity, groans to be set free from the bondage of sin. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

The story of Mark 7 is about the inclusive call of the gospel,

the invitation extended to all to come out of the dominion of darkness, ruled over by the prince of this world, and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, a kingdom of light and life. A call to *come as you are...but not stay as you are*; a challenge to surrender, to receive forgiveness and renewal, and to be transformed into the kind of human God always intended you to be (John 5:24, Acts 26:18, Luke 24:47, Colossians 1:13).

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"Progressives are not just a group of Christians who are changing their minds on social issues and politics...they often deny core essential doctrines of the faith, which leads them to preach an entirely different gospel." | Alisa Childers

Despite the descriptor, I don't believe progressive Christianity to be Christian at all. The movement often denies key tenets of the Christian faith; the primary authority of the Bible as God's inspired Word, the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus, the dark reality of sin and the resultant separation it creates between God and humanity, and the need for Jesus' atoning sacrifice as a means of reconciliation with God.

Sin itself is often redefined, simply becoming *"all of our greedy impulses that create inequity in the world"* (Brandan Robertson), rather the biblical definition of rebellion against God's law, *"a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God"* (Augustine of Hippo) (1 John 3:4), *"evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, false testimony and slander and the like."*

The truly dangerous reality is that the insidious ideology of

progressive Christianity is infiltrating and hijacking genuine Christianity, silencing the church's ability to speak into and about the real-life situations for which she exists.

We are becoming less comfortable about naming sin and preaching the need for true biblical repentance and more concerned about being labelled as intolerant, judgmental, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. When did morality become simply degrees of relativity and we became afraid to speak up and say, "*that is wrong*", or conversely, "*this is right*"?

We are becoming confused by cries of inclusivity, tolerance, and *love of the other*; mistaking the inclusive call of the gospel for the exclusive reality of the church.

We are uneasy repeating the biblical truth that "*narrow is the way and few there be that find it*", preferring instead the idea that multiple superhighways of every description will surely lead to God. The discovery of our *true, inner self* through spiritual evolution seems a more palatable message for the masses than the sombre alternative; the biblical narrative of *death to self* and radical rebirth in Jesus.

Despite her flaws, the church still needs to be the voice, the hands, the beating heart of Jesus in a dark and sin-enslaved world. We need to speak with sensitivity and compassion, yes, but we ought not to shy away from talking about the things people may not want to hear about but desperately need to; sin, estrangement, sacrifice, surrender, death, reorientation, transformation. We need to speak about these things too, with boldness and conviction.

Will progressive Christianity be the death of the church? No, I don't think so. I think the blood of Jesus, by which his church was purchased, is more powerful than that.

But I do think the church is facing one of her greatest challenges yet; not through external persecution as in times past, but through subtle, internal perversion. There is a

desperate need for discernment and a deep commitment to the gospel of the Bible, in doctrine and practice.

I think we need to pay attention, to have our wits about us, wary of those who may come in sheep's clothing, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. We need to be unafraid to boldly and confidently lay their claims and teachings alongside the sound words of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, for scrutiny and assessment, acceptance or rejection.

And I think we need to courageously recommit to our commission that, collectively, we, the church, the 'woman of valour' for whom Jesus died, will shine brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ.

"But test everything; hold fast what is good." | 1 Thessalonians 5:21, BSB

* <https://www.bethelbeaverton.org/progressive-christianity>, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Christianity

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/05/progressive-christians-abortion-jes-kast/590293/>