

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

What are the Cultural Signs of Progressive Christianity?

A History of Progressive Christianity - 2

ALISA CHILDERS

1



What are the Cultural Signs of Progressive Christianity? Have you ever picked up a popular book at your local Christian bookstore, only to be confused when you read statements like, “The Bible is *primarily* a human book”? Or perhaps you’ve listened to a prominent Christian speaker only to be stopped in your tracks by their ambiguity regarding [biblical sexuality and same-sex relationships](#). Maybe you’ve read a blog post written by a Christian pastor who portrayed the doctrine of substitutionary atonement as immoral and abusive. Maybe you’ve come across a tweet that claimed we need to “decolonize” our interpretations of Scripture. These are common ideas promoted within progressive Christianity.

Progressive Christianity can be a bit difficult to spot because typically speaking, progressive Christians aren’t united around an official creed or set of beliefs. In fact, [progressive Christianity](#) emphasizes action over belief; what you *do* over who you place your faith in. They use much of the same vocabulary as historic Christians, practice many of the same sacraments—like baptism and communion—and may even sing hymns and recite ancient creeds and liturgies. However, for progressive Christians, these words,

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

© 2022, LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

phrases, sacraments, and traditions take on a whole new meaning. This is why it can be confusing and frustrating to identify their ideas in popular books, blogs, podcasts, and sermons. However, there are some very concrete beliefs and assumptions that undergird this growing movement, even if they aren't recorded in an official creed. Moreover, there are certain warning signs to look for that can be cultural or [theological](#) in nature. In this post, we'll look at the cultural signs.

Cultural Signs

From their refusal to offer a pinch of incense in worship of Caesar to [their views on marriage and abortion](#) from the first century until now, Christians have been marked by their refusal to capitulate to the false ideas of culture. However, one of the hallmarks of progressive Christianity is its tendency to flow with societal norms.



“Christians have been marked by their refusal to capitulate to the false ideas of culture. However, one of the hallmarks of progressive Christianity is its tendency to flow with societal norms.”

@alisachilders

Sexuality – Biblical boundaries are removed

In early 2019, progressive Lutheran minister Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote a book about sexuality called, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*. In it, she argued that the idea that sex should be between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage for life was not just incorrect, but harmful. She recommended reinventing the Christian sexual ethic to allow Christians to pursue sexual fulfillment as defined by the World Health Organization as being grounded in consent and mutuality. With the biblical boundaries for sex removed, she writes, “Whatever sexual flourishing looks like for you, that’s what I would love to see happen in your life” (p. 60) With this redefinition of sexual flourishing, Bolz-Weber approves of sex outside of marriage (even one-night stands), homosexual sex, and moderate use of pornography. And she isn’t a lone voice in the wilderness. *Shameless* was endorsed and promoted by many other prominent progressive Christian leaders such as Rachel Held Evans, Glennon Doyle, Sarah Bessey, Richard Rohr,

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

and Austin Channing Brown. With prominent progressive Christian personalities like [Jen Hatmaker](#), Sarah Bessey, Rob Bell, and Jim Wallis all speaking out in favor of same-sex marriage within the last couple of decades, one of the key goals of progressive Christianity is to change the church's mind on this hot-button issue.

Relativism – What's true for you is true for you



Relativism essentially claims that truth cannot be discovered, known, or argued for. In other words, no one can claim to understand reality, which you might hear more commonly summarized in the mantra, “what’s true for you is true for you and what’s true for me is true for me.” The problem is that Christianity doesn’t give us the option to be [relativists](#). Christianity is a belief system that is deeply rooted in absolute truth. In fact, it stands or falls based on a historical event being true...or false. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” If Jesus wasn’t [raised from the dead](#), we might as well pack it up and call

it a day.

Generally speaking, the progressive Christian mindset has largely accepted a relativistic view of reality, which is why we often see progressive Christians refer to the resurrection as a non-literal metaphor and Old Testament historical narratives as mythical stories from which we can learn good moral lessons.

Critical Theory – A Social Gospel in Disguise

One cultural trend that has become more and more accepted in the progressive Christian movement is a philosophical concept called critical theory. Critical theory sees the world as a struggle between oppressed groups and their oppressors and seeks to recalibrate power in favor of the marginalized. (This power is understood along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and many other factors.) It downplays the idea that truth can be determined by rational thought and prioritizes “lived experience” and identity. In other words, those who have experienced greater oppression have a greater ability to discern truth than those who are more privileged.

Recently, progressive leader Jen Hatmaker wrote a post on Facebook illustrating views which seem to be informed by critical theory. She wrote, “When white, mostly male, straight married, able-bodied people with a certain threshold of money and power are at the center of the narrative, we will never correctly identify good fruit...privilege is a reliable enemy of discernment.” Interestingly, Hatmaker is in all of those categories

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

except for one, which according to her statement, identifies her as highly privileged. However, this post displays the logical incoherence of critical theory. According to her own statement, we should doubt *her* discernment.

Aside from its logical inconsistency, critical theory stands in opposition to the gospel at several points. It functions as a worldview that sees our identity as being how we relate to other groups defined by our race, class, and gender, rather than as being image-bearers of God. According to critical theory, sin isn't what is wrong with the world, but oppression, which is fixed by activism, raised awareness, and the overthrow of oppressive systems, rather than the blood atonement of Christ.

“According to critical theory, sin isn't what is wrong with the world, but oppression, which is fixed by activism, raised awareness, and the overthrow of oppressive systems, rather than the blood atonement of Christ.”

@alisachilders

We can all look around and see that something is terribly wrong with the world. As Christians, we observe the brokenness around us and are rightly grieved by things like racism, poverty, exploitation, and systematic oppression. This is why utilizing critical theory can be an attractive option to solve some of these problems. It can seem like the loving and just thing to do. However, critical theory isn't just a list of things we can do to make the world better. It isn't simply a philosophy that gives us practical tools for standing up to injustice as we fulfill the great commission. Critical theory actually functions as a worldview, and when you lay it side by side with the Christian worldview, it stands in opposition at several points. Consider some questions every worldview accounts for and compare those to the answers given by the Christian worldview:



1. **Who are we?** According to the Christian worldview, human beings are a special creation made in the image of God Himself. According to critical theory, our identity is not found in who we were created to be, but in how we relate to other groups as defined by our class, gender, and sexual preference etc.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

2. **What is wrong with the world?** According to the Christian worldview, God created a good world that has become marred by sin. Critical theory sees oppression, rather than sin as the core of what's wrong in the world.
3. **How is this problem fixed?** According to the Christian worldview, the problem of sin is cured by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to pay for our sins, reconcile us to God, and secure victory over the powers of sin and death. According to critical theory, the problem of oppression is fixed by activism, raised awareness, and the overthrow of oppressive systems and their power.
4. **What is the meaning of life?** The Christian worldview teaches that the meaning of life is to glorify God, whereas critical theory teaches it's to free groups from oppression.

As Christians, we are called to do good works. There's no question about it. In fact, James 2:26 tells us that "faith without works is dead." But when someone begins to adopt the ideas of critical theory, it can slowly start to erode their Christian worldview by taking their eyes off the eternal truths of who God is and what He has done in the world. For example, critical theory classifies the biblical definition of sexuality as oppressive—a problem to be solved. This has confused many an unsuspecting Christian and even caused many to slowly slide into progressive Christianity, which exchanges a grace-based gospel for a works-based gospel.

As you can see, progressive Christian beliefs regarding culture are heavily influenced by secular thought rather than biblical revelation. When biblical teachings become socially unacceptable, progressive Christianity tends to ebb and flow with culture, rather than following the historic Christian tradition of upholding [biblical truth](#). In our [next post](#), we'll look at some theological signs and how those points fail to align with historic Christianity.

Go Deeper:

- [The History of Progressive Christianity: Progressive Christianity Part 1](#)
 - [How to Spot Progressive Christianity – Cultural Signs: Progressive Christianity Part 2](#)
 - [How to Spot Progressive Christianity – Theological Signs: Progressive Christianity Part 3](#)
 - [Original Sin or Original Blessing?: Progressive Christianity Part 4](#)
 - [How to Reach our Progressive Friends: Progressive Christianity Part 5](#)
-

© 2022 Impact 360 Institute, Retrieved September 19, 2022.

<https://www.impact360institute.org/articles/progressive-christianity-2/>

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

© 2022, LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297