

II. Progressive Christianity in Biblical Perspective
Historic Biblical Christianity and Contemporary Progressive Christianity
“Its Motivation; Its Mission; Its Message—Part 2”

Matthew 28:16–20

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I'd like to start by looking first at Acts 20:17 which says [17] *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.* Paul is currently in a small port city known as Miletus. This city has developed over the years because of the silt that comes out of the river. Ephesus used to be the port city but due to this silt building up about five miles down now the port city is Miletus. Paul wants the elders in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus because he has a ministry of the Word for them. So, let's continue in the text.

As a side note Acts 20:18 is the reason I don't believe in multi-site pastoring. I believe elders and the pastor need to minister together in the church, not scattered to different sites.

Acts 20:18–21 says [18] *And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, [19] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; [20] how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, [21] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You can see the pulpit ministry with the Word of God is to teach the whole counsel of God with the Gospel of God at the center, circumference and the substance of it as the Gospel becomes the contours of teaching the whole counsel of God. Can you see how that would match up with the Great Commission? “Make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus) have commanded you.” We don't just selectively disciple people. You put the first things first but you build out because all of Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16). So Paul here had brought to them the whole counsel of God.

Notice the two venues for this is something we have maintained here at Briarwood – there were the large groups where they would gather for worship and then house to house. House to house meant they were broken into small groups like our Bible study groups that flow out of our Sunday school communities. So there is the dynamic of the small group and the large group at work within the church. We also see this in Acts 2 where it says they gathered with one mind in the temple and then house to house (Acts 2:46). You can't fit 3,000 in a house and maybe they Disciples and Paul learned this from Jesus, who would gather the multitudes and then He would have the 70, the 12 and the 3. At Briarwood, we try to follow that pattern of the large group on the Lord's Day morning and evening and then small groups that meet throughout the week and in the Sunday school communities so we can bring more dialogue, focus and discipleship because discipleship is both informational and relational, which is why Paul is emphasizing this.

Paul also expresses he is not a professional because he says he does this with tears (Acts 20:19). One preacher said Paul ministered with tropical eyes as he called upon the Lord for the well-being of His people and to reach the lost in Ephesus. We also see he testifies to both Jew and Greek because both are in need of the Gospel. They are under the judgment of God and need the saving grace of God. Paul calls them to faith and repentance here. Faith and repentance

are the Siamese twins of the work of the Spirit to bring you to salvation in Christ. You are saved by faith in Christ but faith has an inevitable accompaniment which is repentance. Repentance means a radical change of mind and heart. So we repent of our sins when we come to Christ and we turn to Christ. Biblical repentance is not just sorrow over the consequences of our sin, it is sorrow over the sinfulness of sin. It is confessing that sin and turning from that sin, not simply to do better for you turn from that sin to Christ who forgives, renews and transforms. Therefore, you have demonstrated that you put your trust in Christ and have faith in Him. You can't have saving faith without Godly repentance and the purpose of Godly repentance is to demonstrate faith in Christ.

Paul spoke in large groups and small groups. He spoke in a great theater in which out came a riot. As people are converted there we are told that people began to give up idolatry. Ephesus was a culture center of idolatry, most notably Artemis and Diana. As they were giving up idolatry they were doing *latria* instead of *idolatria* which is instead of false gods being worshipped it is the one true and living God that was being worshipped. What happens to the economy, the social fabric and the society when that happens? It gets turned upside down.

If we did evangelism and discipleship, training people in the Word of God, peoples' lives would change. What would happen if Christian men began to fill their heart with the love of Christ as they grew in grace and there was no room for the insidious death, despair and fabrications of pornography, immorality, drunkenness? How many industries in America would turn upside down? In Ephesus silversmiths and merchants were out of jobs because no one was buying their idols and this happened because of the work of the Gospel in the hearts of the men and women. Paul didn't come in to start an organization to remove statues of Diana and Artemis. He came in with the Gospel and the hearts of men changed. Instead of being deceived into idolatry they now worship the one true and living God. A casualty of this was the idolatry industry. When this happens then you know the evil empire will strike back so they did with riots, even to the point of attempting to kill Paul. That is the story behind this text. Let's continue in the text.

Acts 20:22 says [22] *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, [23] except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.* Paul may not know what is going to happen to them there but he knows he is going to evangelize and make disciples there. Paul doesn't know what will happen to himself when he gets there but he does know he has a mission, a message and a ministry. In verse 23 he has just laid out for us that when he goes to the city with this mission, message and ministry there will be persecution and affliction, not a parade and he doesn't go there for that. He goes there to bring the Gospel and the whole counsel of God to evangelize and disciple sinners to be brought to Christ. This is what he does in every city he goes to and we know of approximately 28 cities that he goes to. Plus, he picks the tough ones and goes eager and unashamed to preach the Gospel.

Acts 20:24 says [24] *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* Being on mission enables Paul to be on message. As Paul preaches the Gospel of God sinners are saved forensically, which makes them right legally before God through the blood and righteousness of Jesus, they are saved experientially and transformationally, because they are also regenerated as well as justified and sanctified as well as being adopted. There is the declarative work of the Gospel and there is the transforming work of the Gospel which means a changed life and that means everything else starts changing

around those lives. Paul's irrevocable Christ-given mission and message is to preach the Gospel, evangelize and disciple until he dies. Now we'll see Paul begin to address the elders, the leaders in the church and warn them.

Acts 20:25–31 says [25] *And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. [26] Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, [27] for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. [28] Pay careful attention to yourselves (Paul speaking to the elders) and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. [29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. [31] Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.*

Paul says very clearly two times 'among you will come wolves' and they will be marked out by two things. One will be false teaching – off message, and two false leadership – off mission. They are not there to draw people to Christ but to themselves (these wolves in sheep's clothing). They will twist the Scriptures to accomplish that mission. Let's continue in the text.

Acts 20:32–35 says [32] *And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. [33] I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. [34] You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. [35] In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*” As Paul came with this Gospel Word ministry it was manifested with Gospel deeds ministry from the mission and the message as one of the ministries. Paul was a model for it as well.

In this series we are looking at historic Biblical Christianity and contemporary progressive Christianity. I have already made mention that it is my conviction that this is another gospel, not the gospel of saving grace. I believe there are the same errors with the same framework as the errors that had to be confronted at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, which was the movement of Christian liberalism. Christian liberalism made its appearance in terms of what was happening in the culture and its stated motivation was, we are going to save the church from being cast away to the trash bin of history. In essence they were going to save the church from cultural irrelevance and make the church relevant. Why? It was because their mission was the transformation of the culture. Magazines were written in that time reflecting their mission, like Christian Century magazine.

We just saw in Acts that the culture in Ephesus was changed by the ministry of the Gospel and it was clear that Paul didn't come to Ephesus to transform the culture for he came to Ephesus with the Gospel message to transform sinners and cultural transformation was the blessed effect not the mission. What happens if you get the wrong mission, even if it's a good mission? For instance, do we want the church of Christ to grow? Absolutely, but statistical increase is a consequence of the mission, it's not the mission. If statistical increase becomes the mission, it's just a matter of time that the Gospel of grace will be replaced by the pragmatic gospel of entertainment – how do I get the people in and how can I get them what they want? Therefore, the Gospel gets adulterated and eventually apostasy.

The same thing happens when they come to a church in order to get successful in this world, the things that are passing away. It's not that I don't believe that God blesses some when they become Christians with success and wealth and then there are those who decide to become

faithful to Christ and it ends up costing them what they have. The resources we have in life are not our objective, they are what God's gives us to achieve the objective and our objective is to make disciples, not to be successful in the terms, measurements and metrics of this world. If you do go to a church that has success in life as their mission then it's only a matter of time that the Gospel becomes adulterated and becomes a prosperity gospel. If a church makes their mission as one that better one's self esteem it's just a matter of time before the Gospel becomes adulterated and is a therapeutic gospel. I believe that the Gospel of God gets you right with God and a right view of yourself before God, but that's a consequence. You have to be right with God to understand what it means to live right before God and how to see yourself before God.

I could go on with this but Christian liberalism has the motivation to save the church from cultural irrelevance in order that the church could fulfill its mission of cultural transformation. What happened to the message? To be relevant, they listened to the culture. To be at the seat at the table with the culture shapers, they listened to the culture and the message no longer was determined by the Word of God. Sola Scriptura – the Scripture alone, is our rule of faith and practice. The message was one of cultural accommodation. The modern mind isn't going to believe these supernatural things – the virgin birth, the resurrection – and it will remove those things so then came theological apostasy because the mission controlled the message. Motivation, mission and methods will ultimately determine the message.

I have done a deep dive on this topic in the last year and the more I went in the more relevant I saw what J. Gresham Machen said in his book Christianity and Liberalism. The progressive Christianity is basically Christian liberalism 2.0. Because of what I saw in this book I began to recommend it and immediately I got push back from it. I was told that the progressive Christians are not telling us to remove the virgin birth or arguing against the inerrancy of Scripture or pushing back on the doctrine of the Trinity. It's not this way and I wished I had said 'au contraire.' I would say that they are wrong on that and to look a little bit closer. They are not coming to take out the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the virgin birth, the inerrancy of Scripture and the only reason they are not doing that is because the culture isn't demanding it.

When the culture demands it they will do it and why do I believe that? I believe that progressive Christianity has the same motivation – we're going to rescue the church from irrelevance. If you don't change you will lose your young people. They are not coming to destroy the church because the motivation is to save the church, not by being faithful to the mission and the message, but editing the mission and the message. When that mission gets edited, even if it's a possibly good thing which would come as a blessing if we were on mission, it will edit the truth. It will first adulterate the message and then it will cause it to apostatize. There is also the matter of sexual ethics. They say how will you reach young people if keep up with this; sex is a gift from God within a marriage defined by one man and one woman for one life, for you on the wrong side of history. Notice how many sermons will be preached in progressive churches on many issues – which they should be preached on rightly – but they only preach on the ones that the culture applauds. They are strangely silent on the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, and the sanctity of gender.

I would suggest that if you look a little bit closer, while we haven't accommodated the culture in our message on the supernatural doctrines as liberal Christianity did when it vacuumed those things out to be acceptable to the cultural elite, but what they are vacuuming out are the things that are distasteful to the present culture of progressivism in society. I recently did a radio program on my Today in Perspective where another Christian school now embraces the

implementation of the LGBTQIA plus and there is more to come, agenda. Then they say they still hold to the Biblical position and my response is ‘no you don’t.’ Practice ultimately determines your true confession. It’s what you do that reveals the integrity of what you say. They say they are going to hold to that but here is how they create charters for the LGBTQIA sexual agenda and the resulting sexual anarchy; this culture we have called progressivism in society has now said to the church in order to have the free practice of religion you need to conform and if you don’t, we’ll shut you down. We are about to find out in this season of sifting and shifting who is on the Lord’s side.

I am very deeply concerned about denominations that will not speak forth the truth of where we are confessionally, teaching the whole counsel of God, because they believe if they make the deal with the culture the culture will let us keep our IRS deductions, our church freedoms on Sunday and what I tell everyone of those pastors – you may think they are going to let you keep your freedom, but that will be short lived. Here’s the other problem. While you’re protecting your organizational church you just sacrificed all the Christian business men and women in your church who have to go do battle in the culture on these issues, instead of calling for their protection as well. Are they going to be faithful to Christ or will they bow to the culture?

We can’t not just make this a political issue, for this is a deeply spiritual issue. So the progressive secular culture has the power of the state and serves as the hand maiden to the tyrannical state, the apostate church. Now you are seeing this as progressive Christianity moves throughout the professing evangelical church in order to be accepted by the cultural elite of academics, entertainment, media, the political world of the bureaucrats and the big business of our day that has found a way to make money on all of this. I believe progressive Christianity has the same motivation as Christian liberalism and it’s wrong. It has the same mission of cultural transformation and it’s wrong. It is going to end up having an adulterated apostate message and that’s wrong. That is what I do not believe progressive Christianity is a subset of Christianity for I believe it is in opposition to Biblical Christianity.

They have the wrong mission, wrong motivation, wrong message and wrong ministries, instead of the ministries and means God has ordained – preaching, fellowship, worship, prayer. Progressive Christianity reaches for everything else with all the social, demographic and tools of the state, thus they embrace tools that were written to destroy Christianity such as critical theory and its subsets of critical race theory, critical law theory, etc. I would strongly recommend you read two books and one is more popular where the other is more scholarly, but both are important. One of them is Fault Lines by Voddie Bauchman, Jr., and the other which is more scholarly is by my friend Carl Trueman titled The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self. Both of these books show you how we have adulterated the Bible by canonizing the books that come out of intersectionality, critical theory, and critical race theory. Those are the things our seminarians are reading instead of the Biblical solutions to the sins of the age.

How does all this get a foothold? First of all, when you see this, you should not be amazed when we are fighting this battle. As a Christian you are always fighting a two-front war – the war outside of Satan, the world and temptation and the war inside of the old man that you have. The way to win that war is to flee temptation and kill the old man. The church has a two-front war as well. The two-front war of the church is outside and inside. This is a spiritual battle for us and it should not surprise us. In Matthew 16 Jesus gives us a promise and at the same time a prophecy. The promise is in Matthew 16:18 which says, *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. I love this promise for Jesus builds His church and I don’t

need the culture to maintain the effectiveness of Christianity. I just need Jesus, His Word, His Spirit and the means of grace. I am more than happy to have a culture that welcomes that, but I do not need the applauds and parades of that culture. There will be churches like we read about in Revelation where five of the seven churches will fall away, but Christ's everlasting church will prevail.

So, if Christ's everlasting church will prevail against the onslaughts of the gates of hell, then what does that tell you? It tells you there is a hidden prophecy in that. It's not so hidden. Jesus has promised that His church will prevail and the reason this promise is important is because it means His church will be assaulted. Jesus is letting us know that this is a battle. Spiritual warfare is not a momentary event in the life of a Christian or a church – it is our life. Spiritual warfare is conducted knowing Jesus has won the war, but we still have battles. In the Book of Revelation, after the ascension of Jesus it says that Satan went off to make war with the woman, that is the covenant bride of Christ.

Secondly, if Satan assaults and Jesus keeps us, how does Satan assault and how does Jesus keep us? Jesus keeps us by the Spirit and with the Word through the means of grace – preaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, etc. He has given us the armor of Christ and the Divine weapons of the Spirit that are fashioned to tear down every speculation raised up against God.

Satan attacks/assaults the church and through the church the individual believer, with three strategies – imitation, intimidation, and infiltration. With intimidation Satan goes about like a roaring lion and the reason a lion roars is because it freezes you with paralysis and with this he wants to cause shame and silence as well. Christians say 'no' to fear, 'yes' to concerns, but 'no' to fear and anxiety. We say this recognizing valid concerns with thoughtfulness in life but we are not to be under the dominion of fear. The only fear we embrace and rejoice in, is the One who begins wisdom in our life which is the fear of Lord. Here is an assignment for you – quit saying 'awesome' unless you are talking about the only One who is full of that which causes our awe. You might be thinking 'but what about my grandson?' Just find another word. Just stay focused on what it means – that this God is glorious – big God, a lot more peace in your life. Our confidence is in the Lord, for He will be our strength, therefore we will not fear but most of all the greatest instrument to slay fear is to know and immerse yourself in the love of Christ. Perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18).

Secondly, be aware of Satan's work of imitation. Yes, he can create the tares. I believe there are real Christians found in progressive churches and real Christians who are getting drug into progressive Christianity. Have you been hearing about these Christian celebrities that are deconstructing their evangelical faith? That's not accidental language for that's what progressivism does. New mission, wrong motivation, wrong mission, then comes not the invention of a faith but a deconstruction of the evangelical faith. You hear things like 'I don't believe everything in that Bible is true or that all the answers to life are just found in the Bible' so now we're going to canonize some other works that you have to have for the Christian life. So we see that progressive Christianity is like liberal Christianity as it not only produces an apostate theology, it apostatizes those once who held to theology by deconstructing their theology piece by piece. It is parasitic and terminal. It lives off those things that are there. You don't see progressive churches planted. You see evangelical churches succumb to insidious leadership produced in some seminaries to get people off mission, off ministry and they sell it with terms/words as they say they are going to save Christianity. They go to the cities to make them a utopia.

We will always have the poor and we'll always be in a broken system, but do I want to bring truth through Christians that causes a culture to do away with the industries of sin for the flourishing of humanity? Absolutely! But I don't get that by becoming a community organizer. I may in my ministry produce some community organizers but that's not my job. My job is to pastor a church and a church is to go into the community on mission, on message and in ministry and it turns out Christians that are salt and light in all of life. Progressive Christianity imitates by living off evangelical Christians and churches and destroying previous evangelical Christian's lives, their ministries and their churches as well. You have no idea how much time I spend responding to churches and how they interview people now. When you interview, they are using our vocabulary but not our dictionary. You can no longer do it the same way. Imitation is at work. The tares and now saying they are wheat.

Thirdly, Satan uses infiltration. That's where he ends up, right there among yourselves. Satan loves to infiltrate churches in the membership with grumbling, polarization, adopting the factions of society, the political world, the cultural world and cause division. Paul says there is only one time that division is acceptable – when those who are holding to the truth of the whole counsel of God that of necessity that will divide. Paul says 'I hear there are divisions among you and you are acting like the world, this should not be! Have this mind in yourselves that was also in Christ Jesus that you are to be humble in your boldness for truth. In one case I believe it that those who are holding to the truth might be approved.' Otherwise say 'no' to political division, personality divisions, and celebrity division. That ought not to be named among you. (I Corinthians 1:10–17). Otherwise we do not let Satan get in and divide us with a party spirit and a factious spirit. We learn to love one another well with the truth.

If I'm going to present the truth with necessity, I have to attack error, but when I present truth and attack error because it's against the truth, I have to do it in love and I want to have clarity and charity when I do it. We will also see Satan infiltrating the pulpit. Right now progressive Christianity is infiltrating the pulpits of previously evangelical churches by already infiltrating the pulpits of many of educational institutions – many of our seminaries and we're turning out ministers who are not ministers of the Gospel. They have bought in with the wrong motivation and the wrong mission and now increasingly the wrong message.

Here is one example. "Pastor, don't you understand people who battle sexual addiction is a besetting sin and is deeply embedded." I do understand that and I have ministered to those with the besetting sin of homosexuality and I am doing that right now. I am not telling them that God made them that way because the Bible says it's unnatural and I'm not telling them it's the same as a natural appetite gone awry, both are sinful but it's not the same. I'm also not telling them that this testimony of a sin nature came as a designed sin nature to cause you to do this for this is what you are doing working out that sin nature. Then I am telling them the Gospel. Jesus will take you right where you are if you will repent of your sins and put your trust in Him, you can be forgiven, justified and adopted and there is no condemnation. We don't have to resort to euphemisms. We can actually confess our sins and He wipes away our sin, guilt, shame and gives us His righteousness.

I then tell them something else about the Gospel. You will be born again. You can grow in grace and grace is greater than sin. I don't know whether this sin will get eradicated immediately or the next day or you fight it until you go home to be with Him, but I tell you the power of the Gospel can so declare for such were some of you. I am not going to tell you the Gospel says you gets the benefits of declaring you without guilt but you don't have to kill the desire just manage it – no, we kill it by cutting it off and by pushing it out. And we love each

other through that process. But we are being told now that if we preach this Gospel then we don't have compassion and we're unfeeling – if you tell people they can have victory over the desire and the practice. I have been called to kill sin and pursue Him.

If you decide the culture has to approve the gospel you preach, you will keep the blessings of the declarations of justification and adoption, but you will remove the promises of regeneration and sanctification. Regeneration brings the power of sin – I have sin living in me but I do not have to live in sin anymore. The blessings of sanctification – we can grow not for grace but in grace and our God is persistent. When you fall down, He picks up. Praise His Name forever!

I didn't get to the part about what it means to seek the welfare of the city and how we can learn from Paul when he was in Ephesus. Secondly, I want us to understand that while we have to be aware of these things you don't win these battles on defense, but you win them on offense and so in the next study or so we will address these two things I didn't get to in this study. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word together. Please keep us faithful, focused, open and encouraging. Where we see wolves in sheep's clothing help us identify it. Where we see sheep, who are being drawn into wolves clothing, Father help us reach out so that they would be unstained by the evil garments, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.