

VIII. Progressive Christianity in Biblical Perspective
Historic Biblical Christianity and Contemporary Progressive Christianity
“Five Evidences Produced by the Seven Marks of Progressive Christianity”

Jude 1–3

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Jude 1:1–3 says [1] *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: [2] May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.*

[3] *Beloved (talking to believers), although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*

In this text, we see that we are going to have to contend for the faith. James teaches us how to contend without being contentious. Peter teaches us to defend without being defensive as Jesus teaches us how to speak truth in love. Part of the life of the Christian and the duty of the church, which is a bulwark and pillar of the truth, is to be built upon the truth, support the truth, and contend for it, why? It is because there will always be the work of Satan opposed to it, to distract us from the truth, to dilute the truth, to bring discouragement and lead us away from the truth. That is why Jude says it was necessary to write to you to contend for the truth.

Notice, this truth is not something of the evolution of man’s discovery for the truth is that which has been delivered. It is a matter of Divine revelation. Contend for the faith – that body of truth that gives glory to God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and is delivered to us. The Holy Spirit brought that truth to us, carried to us through chosen Apostles and Prophets – 40 plus human agents that He then inspired to give us the truth that is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16).

Why is it important to contend for the faith? There are certain people at times that we have to even mark out by name. Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation – ungodly people. What do they do? They pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and they deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. I wish I could tell you that people who teach false doctrine come to the church with a neon sign and with a uniform that says ‘false teacher’ but they don’t. They creep in. Now God is sovereignly in control of this, because God knows in such times comes our greatest advances in understanding and articulating the truth.

Except for a few of the early confessions that are given to you in the Scripture and perhaps arguably the Apostles’ Creed, almost every single one of them in the 2000 years of the church has been developed in the context of having to stand firm against error. The most notably would be the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was under duress by an apostate king. Rulers and legislators called them together for this multi-year project which is what I think we now have as the premiere confession with the instrument of teaching from the larger and shorter catechisms. In other words, when these things happen it’s not that God has been taken by surprise so let’s now scurry to hold the rampart. God is sovereign and His truth will triumph and it will break error. Truth will always stand. The Spirit of truth will bear its fruit and the spirit of error will be exposed, but we always have to be ready to contend.

Right now, I believe our most trenchant adversarial movement against the Gospel is contemporary progressive Christianity. One of the ways to understand it is to go back about a hundred years. Here we are at the turn of the 20th to the 21st century as we see the insidious,

penetrating, creeping movement of progressive Christianity into the evangelical church. One of the things that struck me was how much, dare I say a first cousin, it was like liberal Christianity, meaning that they were both cut from the same fabric. It begins with their motivation and their mission. In liberal Christianity the motivation in the 20th century was that they said they needed to save the protestant church from cultural irrelevance so we need to make the church relevant.

Here we are in the turn of the century and almost the very same slogans are being used that liberal Christianity used back then. Progressive Christianity feels it needs to save the evangelical church from cultural irrelevance. They are saying we're going to lose the next generation and be on the wrong side of history if the church doesn't become culturally relevant. That motivation is also accompanied with a new mission. So, the new motivation is to make the church culturally relevant, why? It's because its new mission is cultural transformation. It is going to seek and redeem the city, seek the welfare of the city, change the culture and bring in that next advancement. Christianity century is now upon us. A post millennial utopia is about to begin in this century. The evangelical church will bring it in now that it's culturally relevant but we know that is not the case.

What happened? Whatever your motivation and mission is, will eventually determine what your message and ministries are. It will eventually control it, define it and direct it. Why is it that we have these movements? Why do we have to be on the alert for these false teachers and false teachings – contend the faith without being contentious and defend the faith without being defensive? I want to give you three reasons why we always have to be in this battle. It comes in varying degrees of intensity but we always have to be ready for it.

Number one, this battle is always before us because Satan, in this season of him being defeated but not yet destroyed, is going about like a roaring lion. He has been bound of what he can do but he has certain movements he is allowed to do that a sovereign God is ultimately using. The Bible tells us that Satan is so surely working that we are not to be caught unaware of his snares and we're not to be ignorant of his schemes. It is my conviction after studying the Bible that Satan has three schemes. One is intimidation in which he uses to silence the church through intimidating. Secondly is imitation as he uses false religions – man-made religions that imitate Christianity. The third scheme is infiltration in which he does two ways. One is he infiltrates the membership and fellowship of the church with gossip, slander, envy, jealousy, etc., all those things which true Biblical love combats. Two is, he infiltrates the leadership with false teachers and false leaders – those who twist the Scriptures and lead others astray to themselves.

In other words, when Paul says in Acts 20:29–30 to the church at Ephesus, *[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*, we know Paul fought this while he was there. We fight it all the time. Satan is always creeping in, as an angel of light bringing the message of death and darkness.

The second reason we're always having to be on the alert is because of the Biblically revealed and historically affirmed cycles of apostasy. You will see this in the Bible but particularly in the book of Judges. Every 40 to 80 years there was an apostasy movement that could only be counter acted by alert, courageous, compassionate and convicted leadership that God would send to rescue the people of God back to faithfulness. It seems to me that every church, Christian organization, Christian denomination, has that moment of alertness at 40 to 80 years of their existence. My own denomination is rapidly approaching that 50th year. I just went through this battle at Westminster Seminary and it took ten years but God gave us victory there and it was right at its 70th year of its existence when that battle came. That 40-to-80-year mark is the danger period and we need to stay alert for it. I'll go even a step further that every 500 years

in church history there is a significant theological downgrade and we are in need of a significant Gospel reformation or awakening – about every 500 years.

The third reason to be on the alert is the Bible warns us of the two beasts who do the work of the serpent, Satan. There is the beast that comes up out of the sea and the beast of the land. The beast of the land stands to do the bidding of the beast of the sea and both do the bidding of the evil one. The beast of the sea is tyrannical authoritarian government that superintends the culture of the era. The beast of the land is false man-made religion – the dragon/beast as it looks like a lamb as it stands and it stands ready. That has been at work since the very beginning of time – through the Old Testament and the New Testament rises empire after empire after empire with its authoritarian tyrannical rule of what it accomplishes with a sovereign God at work and there is an apostate church ready to do its bidding of man-made religion.

Now we see it in our day and time. We are seeing what I would simply call a progressive, secular, fascist, authoritarian government that is going to have its way to spread what I would call a cultural Marxism throughout society. That is what is happening with the beast of the sea now. Over here is progressive Christianity ready to do the bidding of the progressive, secular, fascist state with all the right terms and accoutrements but the reality is it serves the cultural movement of authoritarianism in terms of the government power rather than accomplish its own purposes. It creeps in through the insidious strangle hold of cultural directives whereby the pulpit becomes more directed by what the culture says it can say than what the Bible calls us to say. The point is, the Biblical church isn't supposed to try and go be the state. The Biblical church is supposed to be the Biblical church. We are the true church who serves Jesus Christ which is historical Biblical Christianity.

In historical Biblical Christianity we are to have the right motivation, the right mission, the right message and the right ministries. What are those? I will tell you what those are in the next study which will be our last study on progressive Christianity but in this study, we will take one more time to look at this issue in a fresh way, in terms of the issues that are before us.

To recap, there are five marks in the lives of progressive Christians. There are seven marks of progressive Christianity in the life of a church that has surrendered to contemporary progressive Christianity. You can review those from the last three studies from our website at briarwood.org/sermons. When those seven marks are present, there will be five evidences in a church that is surrendering to progressive Christianity. This is something that happens over a period of time. It's an insidious penetrating movement. Sometimes it's wolves in sheep's clothing that bring it and sometimes it's well-meaning people that have been captivated by it for a season that we're trying to rescue, teach and capture to show them that it is not accurate.

When the motivation of the church is to be culturally relevant and the mission is cultural transformation, inevitably that leads to message and ministry adulteration. If I want to be relevant to the culture – a culture player for the transformation of the culture – that means I need a seat at the table and to have a seat at the table will adulterate the message. There are certain things they are not going to accept at that table. A hundred years ago they wouldn't accept the virgin birth, the Incarnation, the miracles, etc., so liberal Christianity with its motivation to be relevant and an agent of transformation, then vacuumed out of the message anything that was offensive to the modern mind so that they could have a seat at the table. Thus, liberal theology and the same thing is happening with progressive Christianity. It is not the same doctrines for it's not the same issue of the inerrancy of Scripture but it's the issue of the supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture. True Biblical teaching, preaching and leadership unifies around the truth of God's Word, not around the person or the movement. Secondly, it is edifying,

constructive and fills people up. Even when it has to tear down sin, it's to build people up. Thirdly, it encourages and enhances the death of sin and the growth of grace in the lives of God's people.

Remember, one, false teaching doesn't promote unity, it promotes divisiveness, not around issues of truth but issues of preference or personal considerations or individuals. It is like when the church at Corinth started lining up behind certain leaders.

Two, progressive Christianity, instead of constructive edification, deconstructs. They are deconstructing what they have learned in their evangelical faith. That language came from the pulpits they were in.

Three, it diminishes and discourages, not enhancing and encouraging. Politically progressive Christianity may use left or right, for it's just trying to get its agenda accomplished against the Gospel of saving grace and the whole counsel of God. So, we have to stay on mission, on message and in ministry and remember how progressive Christianity deconstructs and diminishes.

So here are the five evidences if those seven marks of progressive Christianity are at work in the life of an institution, seminary, church or denomination. Progressive Christianity like liberal Christianity is parasitic for it only lives off the host as long as the host lives. Secondly, it is deconstructing and thirdly, it is diminishing.

The first evidence is there will be the diminishment of the prominence, power, priority and posture of the ministry of prayer and Biblical preaching and teaching. It won't be the absence of it but the diminishment of it. In the Reformation the functional cause was justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone but by the third year he said the issue was really the supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture and the proclamation of the Word of God for it's through the foolishness of the message preached that we are being saved (I Corinthians 1:21). We must hold to the ministry of prayer and the Word – the Reformers grabbed a hold of those two life line from earth back to heaven that God has established and that is by the Spirit of God and the Word of God it is the ministry of prayer and the Word.

In Acts 6 the church realized they needed to correct the inequities of how they were doing mercy ministry but they knew they couldn't create a bigger problem by neglecting the ministry of prayer and the Word. If you neglect prayer and the Word you will not have any resources to give or a heart to minister or people that are looking to you for ministry so they stayed with prayer and the Word. In a progressive church you will find over a period of time a functional diminishing of the priority, the power, the posture and prominence of prayer and the ministry of the Word. When the ministry of the Word is raised up it allows us to give praise to God because faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

I can't help but believe as I watch what is happening to the evangelical church and see a darkened room where the church is gathering, there's a sense of no gravitas. There are perhaps props for the preacher but one thing you won't find in there is a pulpit. I know you can preach without a pulpit for I do it all the time, but that pulpit made a statement in the Reformation when they moved it from the side to the center and elevated it. I also think the removing of the pulpit these days is also making a statement. I think its absence or replacement, almost like it's a bother but we do have to have something to put our notes on. One thing I love about the pulpit is it blocks the man, along with the Reformation gown, because it's not the man we look to but the preaching for it's through the foolishness of the message preached that people are being saved. In contemporary progressive Christianity it's the celebrity doing the talk and there is the loss of expository preaching. There is the loss of protracted intercessory prayer. Why are these things gone? It is because we're much more interested in our social organizations and our endeavors

than we are the preaching of the Word, whereby people are saved, sanctified, sent and secured. We have a lot more confidence in the leader than we do in the preaching and in the programs than we do in the proclamation.

The second evidence will be the diminishing commitment to world missions. What about local missions? It's hard to say on that because that is usually what they do and no longer look at world missions. I'm all for that for if we take the light out there it ought to be shining bright right here, but why do we have to give up world missions? I believe they give up world missions because the culture does not affirm it for world missions is in the category of cultural imperialism. So, if you're engaged in world missions, they think you're a cultural imperialist and we don't want to be called that. Therefore, it's not prioritize from local to regional to national but it's a matter of cutting that off because we don't want the criticism. Regional missions is no longer church planting for now it's all about social endeavors and I'm not opposed to this, but the best way to get mercy ministry done is to plant a church that has a good diaconate.

I remember helping a church for three years in Mississippi that had gotten blown away in a storm. I loved our deacons who went over there every week giving stuff out of their trucks. The pastor there wanted people to write thank you notes to Briarwood but one of the deacons who I believe had a righteous anger said you don't need to do that for this is your diaconal ministry and these people need to come to you right here. So one of the evidences is that world missions and personal evangelism is gone along with church planting. Instead of personal evangelism they say we'll just live in such a way that people will be attracted to Jesus – this is known as attractional evangelism. I love friendship evangelism, hospitality evangelism and attractional evangelism but here is the bottom line – you get saved by faith in Christ and faith comes by hearing the Word. You have to personally share the Gospel with people. Up until then they may be attracted and admire your Christian life but they are mainly seeing religion and could end up in a Mormon church thinking that's what you have. Our lives can open doors and give opportunities but we have to share the Gospel with people for they can't get saved without hearing the Gospel and the Gospel Jesus speaks to the hearts of people through His Gospel Word when you share it with them.

The third evidence is that there will be the absence of Gospel multiplication, maturation and mobilization. There will be a diminishment of Gospel multiplication – people aren't getting saved. There will be a diminishment of maturation – people aren't growing in grace through the Gospel as the foundation, formation and motivation of a Christian life. We see the lack of maturation when there is no joy. If you are saved your joy ought to be bigger now than when you were converted. You ought to be more amazed at grace now than you were that day and that's why we need Gospel evangelism and Gospel discipleship. We need Gospel multiplication, maturation and mobilization to go and win the world for Christ.

Instead with contemporary progressive Christianity we're telling people that there are some sins that will never change in their life – there will be no progress in those areas of their lives. So we don't show them they can kill that sin, mortify it and grow in grace but they are told and taught therapeutically how to manage that sin. Forget sin as a sin for it's a syndrome to be managed instead of a sin to be killed and a new way of life to be put in place. That's a loss of the Gospel. Progressive Christianity goes at the most foundational doctrine of all from that which Paul said is of first importance which is the Gospel – the declarative blessing and transformational blessings that people experience in evangelism and discipleship. The power of sin has been broken and one says 'but I have this besetting sin' and Jesus tells us we will have besetting sin, but it can be broken and killed. My answer to one who says it's a sin they can't get

rid of is that they are either not converted yet, we haven't gotten intense discipleship in your life or you don't know how to measure your progress.

If you are saved the power of sin has been broken. If I can't believe that, then I can't believe I have been declared justified. No where does it say you will be perfect after you are converted for the Bible is clear that if you say you have no sin, you're a liar and the truth is not in you (I John 1:10). No longer do I live in sin and yes, I still have sin living in me, but it does not reign in your life. Now, we need to teach people with discipleship and the means of grace how to push sin out and cut it off – how you grow in grace by getting saturated in God's Word and cutting out that which would feed sin in your life. So we are in desperate need of Gospel multiplication, maturation and mobilization.

Gospel multiplication, maturation and mobilization will be seen by a people who are intentionally pursuing holiness, not to be saved but out of love for their Savior and a desire to be more effective in the lives of others. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching that you may ensure not only salvation for yourself and grow in grace but that you may be effective in the lives of others. When you see that work of grace in people's lives know this; when you understand the Gospel you know definitive sanctification by God's grace through Christ in His blood and righteousness and I am holy. Here is the one time use the word progressive in our era; I am experiencing progressive sanctification. I am growing in grace and it's called the pilgrim's progress. Praise the Lord for its that which brings me home to glory because of the cross.

The fourth evidence is there will be a diminishing of confessional fidelity and moral clarity. I am absolutely astounded at the reports I hear in progressive churches of how they will technically embrace our constitution, our confession, but in reality circumvent it, for that destroys the unity of a denomination in a church. We say what we mean, we mean what we say and we're never to be mean when we say it. Now there is a lack of moral clarity, interesting. When progressive Christianity comes through the pulpits will preach like never before on the cultural sins that the culture affirms to be preached against, but they will be strangely silent on those sins which the Bible says we are to identify in the whole counsel of God, but the culture tells us to be silent.

The fifth evidence is that Biblically masculinity and femininity ministries are diminishing. You can forget men's ministries and women's ministries being robust in a progressive church. In this day of the LGBTQ agenda that would be unacceptable to the culture. There are a lot of toxic men but Biblical masculinity is not toxic. Actually, when you see all these horrendous stories of men and what they are doing, the problem is not men, the problem is the heart – it's a toxic heart in the man or a toxic heart in the woman. When you see that it is all the more that we need to disciple with the Gospel – men to be men, act like men, women to be women, older women to teach younger women, older men to teach younger men how to be men of God according to the Scripture.

The toxicity of the culture is not the problem with the gender any more than it is the DNA of your skin. Racism is a heart issue. Toxic sexuality, harassment, perversion – those issues are issues of the heart and the only thing that can change it is not cosmetic mutilation surgically of men, but it is the glorious work of the surgical work of the Spirit to take out the heart and make us right with God and help men to become men of God, not men of the world and women who are women of God and not women of the world.

Whenever you decide that cultural relevance is your motivation and cultural transformation is your mission, it is going to define your message and your ministries, why? It is because of cultural accommodation. We just passed two overtures at the General Assembly – overture 23 and 37. Many voted against them and the words coming back through social media

was ‘if we hold to sexual purity and chastity and these declarations concerning men who are ordained to the ministry, it’s going to thwart our outreach ministry in certain arenas.’ If you ever wanted to see progressive Christianity, just go read that statement on social media. What you ought to be asking yourself is not if we hold to the truth will it thwart our ministry according to the world telling us ‘We’re not going to listen to you,’ but what we ought to be asking ourselves is, what does the Bible say and what does it mean to be above reproach, not what the culture will accept.

Once you do cultural accommodation it becomes cultural contextualization and cultural contextualization is not Biblical contextualization. Biblical contextualization is speaking the truth lovingly in terms that the culture and people can understand. Cultural contextualization is only speaking the terms and words that the culture accepts and that leads us to cultural capitulation and that means, the church instead of Biblical magisterium where the Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice, is cultural magisterium where the culture is defining our message and our ministries. That’s why progressive Christianity is a cousin to liberal Christianity for progressive theology is the result of the progressive motivation and mission, even as liberal theology was the result of motivation and mission.

I have tried to lay out these five evidences of a progressive church that I think are accurate and I would encourage you to look even closer at them. The last one I just want to reiterate in that whenever you find Biblical Christianity, it’s honest with grief and the battle but the joy of the Lord will ultimately shine forth and overflow. May the joy of your salvation fill you. Your Savior reigns! Let’s pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Please bless my brothers and sisters as they serve You. We give You praise, glory and honor, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

SEVEN MARKS OF PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

The Motivation to be Culturally Relevant and the Mission of Cultural Transformation inevitably leads to Message and Ministry Adulteration...

Cultural Accommodation

Cultural Contextualization

Cultural Capitulation

Cultural Magesterium–Biblical Magesterium

FIVE EVIDENCES OF THE SEVEN MARKS OF PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

The Diminishment of the...

1. Prominence, Power, Priority and Posture of the Ministry of Prayer and Biblical Preaching
2. World Missions and Personal Evangelism
3. Gospel Multiplication–Maturation–Mobilization
4. Confessional Fidelity and Moral Clarity
5. Biblical Masculinity and Femininity Ministries