

What is a Progressive Christian?

What do you think of the word “progressive.” As a Christian, I like to think of myself as progressive. I’m generally in favour of progress. Progressive reminds me of growth, of overcoming obstacles, of being accepting of others despite possible differences. After all, it’s being progressive that changed our country from a horse and buggy country to having bitumen roads (even if they have potholes!) and highways with 100-110km/hr speed limits.

But, there is another use of the word progressive that raises some flags! Sometimes, I hear the term “Progressive Christianity.” What does this mean? Here is a brief definition: “Progressive Christianity is a recent movement... that focuses strongly on social justice and environmentalism and often includes a revisionist (or non-traditional) view of the Scriptures.”

Uh-oh! “Non-traditional view of the Scriptures!” What does that mean? Well, in my research regarding progressive Christianity, it appears that it means exactly what it sounds like it means. Progressive Christianity looks at the Bible not as an inspired book (2 Timothy 3:16) but as a book loaded with fanciful stories, and (sometimes!) insightful lessons and parables, but it is not inspired or infallible. It merely contains God’s Word, but isn’t God Word, which in my opinion makes it almost useless, for how do you know God’s Word from man’s word?

And there’s another thing about this definition that bothers me. Now, understand that I am totally in favour of justice. And I have it on good authority that God is also. Psalm 89 describes the Lord this way: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne. Mercy and truth go before You” (v.14). So, if God is interested in justice, I should also be. And I am. I am interested in taking care of our environment as God is also (Genesis 1:28- 31). I don’t throw rubbish in the street and am in favour of protecting endangered species, etc. But something is wrong.

In this definition, where is the Gospel? Where is our concern about saving people from hell and opening the doors of heaven to sinners through the blood of Jesus Christ? It seems to be either missing or on the low priority list of things that “progressive Christianity” is interested in. And that is a BIG problem for me!

St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, who were having major problems with false teachers, wrote this: “So now I say again: If anyone is telling you any other gospel than the one that you have received, let him be anathema!” (Gal. 1:9).

I have to say, while I like being “progressive,” I am not “progressive” in the manner of modern “Progressive Christianity.” Progressive Christianity does not really seem to be particularly Christian. It has a low view of the Scriptures (the Bible contains God’s Word, but isn’t God’s Word in its entirety) and the Gospel (Good News) it proclaims is largely Christless with its focus on temporal justice and environmentalism.

So, what is a Progressive Christian? It seems to me that such people see Christ primarily as a social activist and environmentalist, not the One who died for the sins of the world and, through His Word and Sacraments, brings forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Call yourself a Progressive Christian if you wish, but stay faithful to God’s Word and the importance of Christ, not just temporal issues. “Dearly loved people, although I have been very eager to keep writing to you about our common salvation, I have found it necessary to write to you and urge you to contend for the faith that has once for all been delivered to God’s holy people” (Jude 1:3).