

Five Signs of a “Drifting” Church

Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Apologist Alisa Childers has identified five warning signs that indicate a church is drifting toward so-called “Progressive Christianity”....

1. There is a lowered view of the Bible .

One of the main differences between Progressive Christianity and Historic Christianity is its view of the Bible. Historically, Christians have viewed the Bible as the Word of God and authoritative for our lives. Progressive Christianity generally abandons these terms, emphasizing personal belief over biblical mandate.

Comments you might hear:

- *The Bible is a human book...*
- *I disagree with the Apostle Paul on that issue...*
- *The Bible condones immorality, so we are obligated to reject what it says in certain places...*
- *The Bible "contains" the word of God...*

Deuteronomy 4:2 (ESV)

2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

Psalms 119:89 (ESV)

89 Lamedh Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

Matthew 5:17-19 (ESV)

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2. Feelings are emphasized over facts.

In Progressive churches, personal experiences, feelings, and opinions tend to be valued above objective truth. As the Bible ceases to be viewed as God's definitive word, what a person *feels to be true* becomes the ultimate authority for faith and practice.

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)

12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Proverbs 3:5-7 (ESV)

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

Comments you might hear:

- *That Bible verse doesn't resonate with me....*
- *I thought homosexuality was a sin until I met and befriended some gay people....*
- *I just can't believe Jesus would send good people to hell....*

1 Timothy 1:8-11 (ESV)

8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully,
9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,
10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,
11 in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (ESV)

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,
10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 21:8 (ESV)

8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

3. Essential Christian doctrines are open for re-interpretation.

Progressive author John Pavlovitz [wrote](#), “There are no sacred cows [in Progressive Christianity]....Tradition, dogma, and doctrine are all fair game, because all pass through the hands of flawed humanity.” Progressive Christians are often open to re-defining and re-interpreting the Bible on hot-button moral issues like homosexuality and abortion, and also cardinal doctrines such as the virgin conception and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The only sacred cow is “no sacred cows.”

Comments you might hear:

- *The resurrection of Jesus doesn't have to be factual to speak truth....*

1 Corinthians 15:16-20 (ESV)

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

- *The church's historic position on sexuality is archaic and needs to be updated within a modern framework...*

1 Peter 1:24-25 (ESV)

24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

- *The idea of a literal hell is offensive to non-Christians and needs to be re-interpreted....*

Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Hebrews 12:25 (ESV)

25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

4. Historic terms are re-defined.

There are some Progressive Christians who say they affirm doctrines like biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority, but they have to do linguistic gymnastics to make those words mean what *they want them to mean*. I remember asking a Pastor, "Do you believe the Bible is divinely inspired?" He answered confidently, "Yes, of course!" However, I mistakenly assumed that when using the word "inspired," we both meant the same thing. He clarified months later what he meant—that the Bible is inspired *in the same way and on the same level* as many other Christian books, songs, and sermons. This, of course, is not how Christians have historically

understood the doctrine of divine inspiration.

Another word that tends to get a Progressive make-over is the word "love." When plucked out of its biblical context, it becomes a catch-all term for everything non-confrontative, pleasant, and affirming.

Comments you might hear:

- *God wouldn't punish sinners—He is love...*

Romans 6:23 (ESV)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- *Sure, the Bible is authoritative—but we've misunderstood it for the first 2,000 years of church history...*

1 Peter 1:23-25 (ESV)

23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

- *It's not our job to talk to anyone about sin—it's our job to just love them...*

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Colossians 1:28 (ESV)

28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

5. The heart of the gospel message shifts from sin and redemption to social justice.

There is no doubt that the Bible commands us to take care of the unfortunate and defend those who are oppressed. This is a very real and profoundly important part

of what it means to live out our Christian faith. However, the *core message* of Christianity—the gospel—is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and resurrected, and thereby reconciled us to God. *This* is the message that will *truly* bring freedom to the oppressed.

Many Progressive Christians today find the concept of God willing His Son to die on the cross to be embarrassing or even appalling. Sometimes referred to as "[cosmic child abuse](#)," the idea of blood atonement is de-emphasized or denied altogether, with social justice and good works enthroned in its place.

Comments you might hear:

- *Sin doesn't separate us from God—we are made in His image and He called us good...*

Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Genesis 3:17-19 (ESV)

17 And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

- *God didn't actually require a sacrifice for our sins—the first Christians picked up on the pagan practice of animal sacrifice and told the Jesus story in similar terms...*

John 3:16-18 (ESV)

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Hebrews 13:9-14 (ESV)

9 Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

- *We don't really need to preach the gospel—we just need to show love by bringing justice to the oppressed and provision to the needy...*

1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 (ESV)

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Conclusion:

Identifying the signs is not always obvious—sometimes they are subtle and mixed with a lot of truth. Progressive Christianity can be persuasive and enticing, but carried out to its logical end, it is an assault on the foundational framework of Christianity, leaving it disarmed of its saving power.