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## False Apostles - False Doctrines

Liberal / Progressive / Secularism / Cultural

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### What is Liberal Christian Theology?

In liberal Christian teaching, which is not Christian at all, man's reason is stressed and is treated as the final authority. Liberal theologians seek to reconcile Christianity with secular science and modern thinking. In doing so, they treat science as all-knowing and the Bible as fable-laden and false. Genesis' early chapters are reduced to poetry or fantasy, having a message, but not to be taken literally (in spite of Jesus' having spoken of those early chapters in literal terms).

Mankind is not seen as totally depraved, and thus liberal theologians have an optimistic view of the future of mankind. The social gospel is also emphasized, while the inability of fallen man to fulfill it is denied. Whether a person is saved from his sin and its penalty in hell is no longer the issue; the main thing is how man treats his fellow man. "Love" of our fellow man becomes the defining issue. As a result of this "reasoning" by liberal theologians, the following doctrines are taught by liberal quasi-Christian theologians:

- 1) The Bible is not "God-breathed" and has errors. Because of this belief, man (the liberal theologians) must determine which teachings are correct and which are not. Belief that the Bible is "inspired" (in that word's original meaning) by God is only held by simpletons. This directly contradicts 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- 2) The virgin birth of Christ is a mythological false teaching. This directly contradicts Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 2.
- 3) Jesus did not rise again from the grave in bodily form. This contradicts the resurrection accounts in all four Gospels and the entire New Testament.
- 4) Jesus was a good moral teacher, but His followers and their followers have taken liberties with the history of His life (there were no "supernatural" miracles), with the Gospels having been written many years later and merely ascribed to the early disciples in order to give greater weight to their teachings. This contradicts the 2 Timothy passage and the doctrine of the supernatural preservation of the Scriptures by God.
- 5) Hell is not real. Man is not lost in sin and is not doomed to some future judgment without a relationship with Christ through faith. Man can help himself; no sacrificial death by Christ is necessary since a loving God would not send people to such a place as hell and since man is not born in sin. This contradicts Jesus Himself, who declared Himself to be the Way to God, through His atoning death (John 14:6).
- 6) Most of the human authors of the Bible are not who they are traditionally believed to be. For instance, they believe that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible. The book of Daniel had two authors because there is no way that the detailed "prophecies" of the later chapters could have been known ahead of time; they must have been written after the fact. The same thinking is carried over to the New Testament books. These ideas contradict not only the Scriptures but historical documents which verify the existence of all the people whom the liberals deny.

7) The most important thing for man to do is to “love” his neighbor. What is the loving thing to do in any situation is not what the Bible says is good but what the liberal theologians decide is good. This denies the doctrine of total depravity, which states that man is incapable of doing anything good and loving (Jeremiah 17:9) until He has been redeemed by Christ and given a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

There are many pronouncements of Scripture against those who would deny the deity of Christ (2 Peter 2:1)—which liberal Christianity does. Scripture also denounces those who would preach a different gospel from what was preached by the apostles (Galatians 1:8)—which is what the liberal theologians do in denying the necessity of Christ’s atoning death and preaching a social gospel in its place. The Bible condemns those who call good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20)—which some liberal churches do by embracing homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle while the Bible repeatedly condemns its practice.

Scripture speaks against those who would cry “peace, peace” when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14)—which liberal theologians do by saying that man can attain peace with God apart from Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and that man need not worry about a future judgment before God. The Word of God speaks of a time when men will have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5)—which is what liberal theology does in that it says that there is some inner goodness in man that does not require a rebirth by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ. And it speaks against those who would serve idols instead of the one true God (1 Chronicles 16:26)—which liberal Christianity does in that it creates a false god according to its own liking rather than worshiping God as He is described in the whole of the Bible.

Liberal — unknown. Liberal Christianity teaches a way of interpreting the Bible that is less literal. They tend to emphasize the social gospel and de-emphasize Jesus’ miracles. Liberal theology is more common among mainline denominations.

## **What is Progressive Christianity, and is it Biblical?**

Progressive Christianity is a recent movement in Protestantism that focuses strongly on social justice and environmentalism and often includes a revisionist (or non-traditional) view of the Scriptures. Since the movement entails a number of different beliefs and views on various topics, it is difficult to label the whole movement decisively as “biblical” or “unbiblical.” Each claim and belief of any movement should be filtered through the Word of God, and whatever does not line up with Scripture should be rejected.

The Bible is replete with instructions to “visit orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27, NASB) and to protect the environment that God has entrusted to us (Genesis 1:28). Insofar as Progressive Christianity is a movement that seeks to emphasize and honor these principles, it certainly lines up with Scripture.

However, there are some aspects of Progressive Christianity that contradict a biblical worldview. In general, members of this movement do not ascribe to the biblical doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, and, again, in general, do not believe that the Bible is the literal Word of God. Progressive Christianity also tends to emphasize what is known as “collective salvation” over the biblical concept of personal salvation. The Bible is clear that God redeems those individuals who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and rescues them from an eternity of being separated from Him in torment.

Collective salvation, by contrast, emphasizes the restoration of whole cultures and societies to what progressive Christians believe is the correct socioeconomic structure, namely, Marxism. Marxism, in turn, is a theory of economics and politics developed by an atheist (Karl Marx) from unbiblical assumptions.

In this sense, then, the views of many progressive Christians do not fit with biblical principles. In the end, however,

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discretion is needed in evaluating a particular claim or belief in terms of Scripture; the whole spectrum of beliefs identified by the term “Progressive Christianity” is too broad to permit an unequivocal conclusion as to whether or not it can be labeled unbiblical. As with all uncertain issues, the Christian would do well to compare each claim of those in the Progressive Christianity movement with Scripture, asking God for the wisdom to discern truth from error. He has promised wisdom to all who seek it (James 1:5).

## **What is Secularism?**

Essentially, secularism says that man does not need God. It can be defined as “a system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship. Its primary objective is the total elimination of all religious elements from society.” Secularism, also known as secular humanism, teaches that there are no objective or absolute truths defining right and wrong. In essence, to secularize something is to make it worldly and unspiritual. Its intent is to deprive something of its religious character, its spiritual influence and significance.

Secularism permeates all facets of our society: education, government, the criminal justice system, the news media, the entertainment industry, etc. Secularists believe that man is the measure of all things, that morals are man-centered, not God-centered. Therefore, no one is entitled to determine right from wrong, and morality is best determined by what is good for today’s culture. Secularists do not believe that mankind can have a set of permanent values such as are taught in the Bible. Secularism pays lip service to tolerance and diversity, yet many times secularists are intolerant of those who look to the Bible as God’s standard for morality.

When the things of God are removed from schools, courtrooms, and congressional hallways, it naturally leads to a deterioration of personal morality. The acceptance of situational ethics does away with moral absolutes and dictates that there are no limits, no values, no real standards.

The more our nation embraces secularism, the more it becomes like ancient Israel, where “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). When the mindset is “if it feels good, do it!” wickedness, perversion, and sin become the norm. In a completely secularized society, marriage is disparaged, morality is mocked, and human life is devalued.

The truth is that, left to his own devices, man always descends to a lower level. Following the Bible’s precepts lifts us to a higher moral plane (Deuteronomy 4:7-8; 10:12-13; Proverbs 14:34). However, man has hardened his heart against God (John 12:40; Romans 1:18-22). We have sown to the wind and are in danger of reaping the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

Even the church is being impacted by secularism. Many churches are dealing less and less with the moral conduct of its membership for fear of offending them. After all, accommodating a wayward member is much easier than correcting him. However, the church cannot allow itself to become secularized. Jesus taught that, though we are in the world, we’re not of the world (Romans 2:2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15).

Secularism promotes the idea that religion is nothing but a relic of the past. But the truth is, God exists, and we do need Him. Despite the claims of secular humanism, the Bible is God’s truth (John 17:17). As believers living in a secular society, we must “become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15, NKJV).

## **What is cultural Christianity?**

Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as “Christianity” but does not truly adhere to the faith. A “cultural Christian” is a nominal believer—he wears the label “Christian,” but the label has more to do with

his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord. Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual.

A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian. Some people consider themselves “Christians” because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as “Christian” as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being “Muslim” or “Buddhist.” Famed scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins refers to himself as a “cultural Christian” because he admires some of the ceremonial and philanthropic aspects of Christianity. Dawkins is not born again; he simply sees “Christianity” as a label to use.

In free nations, the gospel is often presented as a costless addition to one’s life: just add churchgoing to your hobbies, add charitable giving to your list of good deeds, or add the cross to the trophies on your mantle. In this way, many people go through the motions of “accepting Jesus” with no accompanying surrender to His lordship. These people, who do not “abide in Christ,” are cultural Christians. They are branches that hang around the True Vine but have no true attachment (John 15:1–8).

There was no such thing as cultural Christianity in the days of the early church. In fact, to be a Christian was to more than likely be marked as a target of persecution. The very term Christian was coined in the city of Antioch as a way to identify the first followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). The first disciples were so much like Jesus that they were called “little Christs” by their detractors. Unfortunately, the term has lost meaning over the years and come to represent an ideology or a social class rather than a lifestyle of obedience to God.

Cultural Christianity is not true Christianity. A true Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior (John 1:12). Christ’s death and resurrection has been appropriated to that person as his or her substitute for sin (Romans 10:8–10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The Holy Spirit indwells that person (Romans 8:9). “Receiving” Christ is far more than a mental acknowledgment of truth. Satan acknowledges the identity of the Son of God (Mark 5:7).

The faith that saves us also changes us (see James 2:26). Jesus said that anyone who wishes to become His disciple must “deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). While we cannot earn salvation by sacrifice or good works, a lifestyle transformation and desire to please the Lord are direct results of being “born again” (John 3:3).

The following are some identifying marks of cultural Christianity:

- Denying the inspiration of Scripture or parts of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
- Ignoring or downplaying true repentance as the first step toward knowing God (Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38).
- Focusing on Jesus’ love and acceptance to the exclusion of His teaching on hell, obedience, and self-sacrifice (Matthew 4:17; 23:33; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5).
- Tolerating or even celebrating ongoing sin while claiming to know God (Romans 1:32; 1 Corinthians 5:1–2; 1 John 3:9–10).
- Redefining scriptural truths to accommodate culture (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6).
- Understanding Jesus to be primarily a social reformer, rather than God in the flesh who is the sacrifice for our sin (Matthew 10:34; Mark 14:7).

- Claiming God's promises while ignoring the requirements included with them (Psalm 50:16; Jeremiah 18:10).
- Denying or minimizing Jesus' claim that He is the only way to God (John 3:15–18; 14:6).
- Performing enough religious activity to gain a sense of well-being without a true devotion to Jesus (Galatians 5:16–17; Romans 8:9).
- Talking much about "God" in a general sense, but very little about Jesus Christ as Lord (John 13:13; 14:6).
- Seeing protection and blessing as goals to be achieved, rather than byproducts of a love relationship with God (Mark 12:30; Deuteronomy 11:13–17).
- Choosing a church based upon any or all of the above (Revelation 3:15–17).

Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:21–23 should be a wake-up call to cultural Christianity: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

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