

IX. Progressive Christianity in Biblical Perspective  
*Historic Biblical Christianity and Contemporary Progressive Christianity*  
“Christ’s Church On Mission–On Message–In Ministry”

Matthew 28:16–20

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My grandfather always told me that if I was going to build something and put nails in, I wasn’t finished until I set the nail. It wasn’t enough just to hammer them in. That is what preachers try to do as they sneak up on you with repetition, bringing something to you that we have already brought two, three or four times but we want to set the nail. So in this study you will hear some things I have already said in the previous studies. In this matter of Christ’s Church on mission, on message and in ministry, as Christ purchased the church with His own blood, I believe we need to set for a couple of reasons.

We are in a season in our culture in general and in the church itself, of sifting, shifting and sorting out. What is happening now is very similar to what happened at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century at the onslaught of what was known as Christian liberalism that eventually produced liberal theology that utterly bankrupted and eviscerated the mainline protestant church. Now the evangelical church is under a similar assault, not bad intentioned by many, in fact well intentioned but while maybe right hearted in some cases, it is wrong headed in terms of what God’s Word would say concerning Christ’s church.

The current progressive Christianity is going to do to the evangelical church what liberal Christianity did to the mainline protestant church, because progressive Christianity and liberal Christianity are ‘first cousins’ and maybe even ‘sisters’ in some way. The reason why this will happen is because they have the wrong motivation and mission. The motivation of liberal Christianity was to make the church relevant to the culture. The modern mind had risen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with that was the notion that the church needed to update itself doctrinally and life style wise so that the culture would find the church relevant. It was as if they were going to usher in the Kingdom in the 1900s, but first the protestant church had to be updated and culturally relevant.

The reason the protestant church had to be culturally relevant was that new motivation had led to a new mission. That new mission was that the church existed to transform the culture. There is no doubt that when the church does its ministries that cultures get changed, but is that the mission of the church or the consequence of the church that is on mission? They said it was the mission of the church to do this. Remember, that whatever becomes the functional motivation and mission of a church will eventually determine both its message and its ministries. The desire for cultural relevancy for the purpose of cultural transformation will eventually put the church at a point of cultural accommodation for its message.

This is what happened with liberal Christianity – they wanted to be relevant and have its seat at the table of the culture shapers so the church began to accommodate what the culture said it needed to believe. Liberalism then began to go into the bank of Biblical theology and vacuum out everything that the culture said was not believable – all those supernatural doctrines that confronted humanity in the name of Christianity. So, gone was the virgin birth, the resurrection, the miracles, the atoning death of Christ on the cross, the exclusivity of the Gospel – which were those things that would offend the culture in order to be relevant and an instrument to transform

the culture. First, our theology was adulterated and then it apostatized. Then the ministries begin to follow.

So, instead of the preaching of the Gospel there now became the preaching of the social gospel. Instead of pastors who were leaders of the flock and shepherds/elders who governed the flock, now became community organizers that were looking to the culture to tell them what to do and what the agenda of ministry is for the church. So, the message and ministries of the church were shaped and the very movement that said they were going to save the church from the dustbin of history actually put mainline Protestantism into the dustbin of history. We are seeing history repeated now in the evangelical church. The evangelical church hears the call of the progressive Christianity leadership, celebrities, apologists and preachers saying 'you're going to lose the next generation if you don't modify' or 'you will be put on the dustbin of history.' The same slogans are being used. They are hearing that they need to become more culturally relevant as they move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the church which means their mission has to be to transform the culture.

Nobody wants the culture to transform more than me, but that is not the mission of the church. It is a consequence of the church of being on mission. We cannot have mission creep because once you have the wrong motivation and mission, then you will adulterate the message. Just as liberal Christianity produced liberal theology with the wrong motivation and mission, therefore adulterated its message to the point of apostasy, the same thing will happen with progressive Christianity as it becomes more relevant to the culture is now becoming engaged in the accommodation of the culture and the modification of the message. So, the pulpits of progressive Christianity will preach on the issues the culture says to preach on and will preach on them with the message that the culture gives. Instead of Biblical justice there is now social justice, instead of Biblical sexuality there is managed sexuality, instead of understanding the effects of sexual promiscuity and perversity there is the attempt to baptize it with Biblical terms and modify the very effects it has because instead of killing sin there is the management of sin. It the most amazing thing we've seen in the culture – this predominance of sexuality and the destruction of Biblical sexuality.

Progressive Christianity is not abandoning the same doctrines that liberal Christianity did but it's abandoning the doctrines that the culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century want them to abandon. It is not the inerrancy of Scripture but the sufficiency of Scripture that is under attack. It is not the blessings of the Gospel in justification and adoption but it is the claims of the Gospel of regeneration where when you're born again the power of sin is broken in your life that is under attack. While you will never get rid of all of the sin in your life, you do have the power to say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to Christ and you can grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ – thus regeneration and sanctification are on the altar of adulteration in the message within progressive Christianity as it takes over pulpit after pulpit. Instead of the preaching of the Word there is now the consideration of the Word from pulpits. Instead of the proclamation of Christ, there is the offering of Christ as an option that may be if you come to it, it's really going to make this life much easier and better. It is the focus on the life now managed with Christianity, instead of the life that is given in Christ so that we live it with the glorious hope that our hope is secure in eternity and our best life is not now, but is to come. But we have new life now to lead us to eternal life.

So, we are seeing now the church contextualizing. Instead of being in the world and not of the world, the church becomes in the world and of the world, because the world now gets into the church – into its pulpit, teaching, its message and its ministries. It redefines everything.

Contextualization is the ability by the Spirit of God to speak the Word of God meaningfully in terms that are understandable to the culture. It is not speaking on the terms that the culture demands – that is surrender, it's capitulation. So cultural transformation leads to cultural accommodation which then leads to cultural magisterium. Magisterium means rule. Instead of the Bible ruling what we believe and practice, it becomes the culture and the Bible is manipulated to accommodate the culture and then it becomes cultural magisterium that begins to define the church.

That means the ministries change. Worship is no longer God-centered, it is attendance centered. Evangelism is no longer a call to faith and repentance, but it is a call to joining something. Instead of the love of the brethren where we consider others more important than ourselves, it is the call and manipulation of brothers to simply bow to what we desire and want so it becomes the use of others. Fellowship is now ruined. Instead of the unity of the brethren there is this polarization that this culture develops because of its tools that has infiltrated the pulpit.

We need to be asking the Lord, what is it that Your church is supposed to be? We don't look to the culture to give us our motivation, mission, message and ministries but we look to Christ. What does Christ say? This is where it is very simple. We're just setting the nail that has already been driven in. Our founding pastor was committed to what I'm going to be developing in this study and his 40 year faithful ministry was committed to this. By in large, the people in leadership for over 60 plus years have been faithful to the basic truths of Scripture through preaching and policies of this congregation that we would be on mission, on message and in ministry. I do believe in light of what is and what is coming it wouldn't hurt to put the nail set one more time.

So, where do we go for the mission of the church? There are five times in the Bible where Jesus speaks specifically to the church after His resurrection and prior to His ascension as to what our motivation, mission, ministries and means are to be. He does it in the book of Acts and in all four of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Perhaps one of the most definitive ones is Matthew 28. I've heard so many sermons on this due to the fact I grew up in a church that was utterly committed to world missions so we heard the Great Commission on a regular basis. Go is not the most powerful word in this text for there is something else and that's what I want us to see for this is Christ's direction to us.

From this Matthew 28 text I want to draw out our motivation, our mission, our message, our ministries and our means to accomplish it, from the authoritative, sufficient, inerrant Word of God. This is what we need to follow and have to follow for we don't reinvent Christ's church. He doesn't say to pray for architects and engineers. Jesus says to pray for workers. This is His church, His design, this is why He has us here and this is what we are to do, be, preach and proclaim until He comes again. Therefore, we need to understand it, embrace it and stay with it by showing love to one another as we attempt to accomplish this by the Spirit of God together. So, let's look at this passage together.

Matthew 28:16–20 says [16] *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, **I am** with you always, to the end of the age."*

This is given to us from that mountain until Jesus comes again to the Mount of Olives and when He returns. I actually am changing my verbiage when I said that Acts 15 gives us the first General Assembly in Scripture for I now believe it was the second General Assembly of the church. I believe this Matthew 28 text is the first General Assembly of the church. Christ went to the cross to purchase His church with His own blood and before He ascended He called the embryonic New Testament church together at this mountain. We don't know which mountain it is but we do know it's at Galilee. It could actually be the mountain He had done the Sermon on the Mount from. I'm going to use two more texts to illustrate how this text gives us the motivation, mission, message, ministries and means so let's walk through this.

What is our motivation? It is clearly our allegiance, our adoration and our affection to Jesus Christ our Redeemer. "All authority has been given to Me, now you go." We are under His orders and we follow them out of our God-given ardor to do His orders for His glory. Here is the glory of the Triune God declared in the risen Savior and we want to be faithful to Him. This risen Savior who has bound the strong man, go plunder his house. This risen Savior who has accomplished the purchase of His people at the cross, who is about to ascend, will ascend to work on the redeemed through body number two – His church. Our risen Savior is continuing to seek and save the lost through us, the redeemed, His church. Not only do we love the lost to go for them but we go for them and love the lost because He has loved us. He came and sought us and therefore we love Him.

Here is a command that is being given to us. Jesus says 'if you (plural, the redeemed, His church) love Me, you will keep My commandments' (John 14:15). Here is His risen commandment given prior to His ascension. Our motivation is because we love Him, not what the world thinks of us or that the world approves us. Now that doesn't mean we live stupidly, obnoxiously or with bad form. No, we seek to be at peace with all men as far as it lies within us (Romans 12:18). Our motivation is not the applause of the world and their acceptance. Jesus pretty much tells us if they persecuted Him, they will persecute us so it is out of love to Me (our motivation) go. It is not whether the culture says we're relevant or approves of our ministries, but have we lovingly to Christ sought to be faithful in a gracious way that shows conviction, courage, compassion and confidence in Christ?

Secondly, what is our mission? Here is the imperative – make disciples. Our mission is to make disciples of all the nations. When we make disciples from all the nations to send the light of the Gospel to all the nations, if we're thinking both Biblically and logically, where is the greatest intensity of the light to be seen? The closest it is to you, therefore that is why Jesus said 'go back to the upper room, pray, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will receive power and you will be My witnesses to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.' They were in Jerusalem.

The book of Acts records the Great Commission in the first 33 years of the church. Now we have what Christ is doing in His indwelt body, the church of Christ. We see what He is doing in Jerusalem in Acts 1 through 8, in Judea in Acts 9 through 12 and then out to the world in Acts 13 through 28. So we see the Gospel moving out but it starts with its greatest intensity right where they are, but you don't stop there for we're committed to Birmingham mission, Alabama mission, North America mission and to world missions (all the nations) because that is what has been commanded to us through this Great Commission.

One of the things I really appreciated when I got here was that whenever a ministry started it always looked at how they could be faithful to the Great Commission and if it couldn't be faithful to the Great Commission, it wouldn't be done. We're not the state or the family,

we're the church and this is our mission, it's what we do. We are faithful to the mission and to the message but one of the things I love is the understood commitment was, when you develop the ministry to be faithful to the mission and the message of the church, develop it to give it away. But don't give out there what we're not doing here. When you do it here, you do here to give it away there. So we have this progression for our ministry is progressive. Just like your sanctification – Jesus saved you and now He is progressively maturing you to be more and more like Him. These are basically the only times I use that word progressive. This is one of the only reasons I encourage families to read this book many times to their children before they leave home and that's Pilgrim's Progress. Here is the progress of the pilgrim in Christ growing in grace and here's the progress of the church serving Christ in its Jerusalem to its Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.

The mission of the church exists to make disciples of all the nations. We do affect the state and the family, but not by trying to be the state or the family. We are not a political party. We are Christ's church. When we equip Christians, they know how to go into the state, the culture, business and family, when we do our job as the church. I'm trying to get you to see that the church's mission is narrow and focused – we make disciples. You are about to see that our message is comprehensive and broad. Therefore, we turn out Christians who have a broad and comprehensive mission. The Christian's mission is to be the salt of the earth, light of the world, do Biblical justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God. I Corinthians 10:31 says *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* Your mission is that in all things that Christ might have preeminence, but we can't do our broad, comprehensive ministry unless the church stays focused on its mission to evangelize and disciple us and grow us in Christ so that we are then sent as ambassadors for Christ into every sphere of society.

Cultural transformation happens where families change, lives change, businesses change and all kinds of stuff changes when we get the salt and light out there, but the salt isn't going to change anything unless it's salty. We get to salt the salt and that's what we do with our mission of making disciples. We get to turn on the flame, the light and the fire so that the light can go out there and that is what God has put His church here to do.

What's our message? The message is to teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded us. We teach and preach the whole counsel of God – God's Word. II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[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.* After Paul left the church at Ephesus after serving there three years he said 'I'm innocent of your blood' now why did he say that? Paul says to them in Acts 20:18b–21, *[18b] "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."* He did not shrink from sharing with them the whole counsel of God and that's why he was innocent.

That whole counsel of God is held together, is bound together and is invigorated by its primary pulsating message called the Gospel. I Corinthians 2:2 says *[2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* It is the Word of the cross. I Corinthians 15:3–4 says *[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* Everything is important in God's

Word but of first importance is the Gospel. The Gospel is the center, circumference, summation and the substance of God's Word. The Gospel penetrates every doctrine of every page of Scripture that points to the glory and majesty of Christ and Him crucified.

When we proclaim the whole counsel of God and the Gospel, don't treat the Gospel as that piece of the Word of God that you give to unsaved people for you also give it to saved people. Paul opens up the book of Romans by saying he is eager to preach the Gospel to the saints in Rome – the saints are the redeemed so we not only preach the Gospel to the lost but to each other and ourselves. It keeps us calibrated, on track, founded and Biblically centered.

The fourth question is what is our ministries? Let's look back at the text. Matthew 28:16–20 says [16] *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.* [17] *And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted.* [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.* [19] *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, **I am** with you always, to the end of the age."*

The word 'go' is missional and the word missional is not a bad word if you get the mission right. Missional is living for the mission and our mission is to make disciples. We do that through evangelism so our first ministry is we want to do the ministry of outreach – evangelism/national and world missions. We are going, we're not waiting for people to come to us. One of the gigantic mistakes is we're putting pressure on worship services to be the evangelistic instrument. I am all for evangelism in worship for we try to do it every Lord's Day but the real weight bearing of evangelism is not when the church gathers but when it scatters. Go to the hi-ways and bi-ways. Seek the lost for they are not going to seek – there is none who seek Him, no not one (Romans 3:11). We seek them for Christ to bring Christ to them that Christ might lay hold of their heart.

Secondly, we have the ministry of in-reach. When people come to Christ we are to Trinitarian baptize them and once they are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit they are added to the church as it says in Acts 2:41. This is the ministry of in-reach so let's love one another well. Let's embrace one another with truth and love, giving judgments of charity, giving words of encouragement and even if we have to deal with sin, we're the most attractive people in the world. The Holy Spirit can give us the ability to communicate tough things in a loving way when necessary. Truth without love is barbarity and love without truth is cruelty. So, we want to enfold people into the body of Christ.

Thirdly, we want to do the ministry of down-reach. We are to be teaching them all that He has commanded us which is discipleship. Small group discipleship begins to take place. Who is Jesus talking to here in Matthew 28? He is talking to Disciples and who went to get these Disciples? Did Jesus **go** get them? Yes! Then did He enfold them? Yes! Then did He teach them for three years? Yes! So, when they saw Him what did they do? They worshipped Him.

The fourth ministry is worship. So, we have the ministries of evangelism (outreach), enfolding (in-reach), equipping (down-reach), and exalting (up-reach). We are to boast in the Lord for it's all about Him and that's why I think the church is the great example of the one sanctified sport – baseball. How do you get to first base? Evangelism. Then you go to second base by enfolding. Then you go to third base by equipping them and you know you have scored when sinners who once fell short of the glory of God now delight to gather with God's people to give glory to God – now you have hit the homerun, you have scored. When sinners who were

crushed by sin, now crush sin in Christ and lift Him up in praise and glory, now you know you are scoring in fulfilling the mission through those four ministries.

Lastly, what are the means to do this? The means to accomplish this are the lifelines of God's Word proclaimed and the Holy Spirit, salt and prayer. Do not neglect prayer and the Word. Where is the first church planted out of this General Assembly? Jerusalem and it was conceived in a prayer meeting when the Holy Spirit came upon them. It was birthed in a sermon in Acts 2. They said later when they were handling tough issues that they could not neglect prayer and the Word (Acts 6). Our lifelines are the Spirit of God and the Word of God and that's why we give ourselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word.

Jesus says at the end of the Great Commission 'I'll be with you' so has He been bodily resurrected? Yes. Is He bodily ascended? Yes. So where is He right now? He is at the right hand of the Father – the glorified body of Jesus. How is He going to be with us? You wait, I'll send the Holy Spirit to you. He is with us to the end when He comes for us and He has been with us by the Spirit of Christ who indwells us – the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. When He is with us by the Spirit of God then we are able to serve Him and to give Him glory, honor and praise. You see a church that is Spirit filled when they are lifting up Christ through the Word of God in worship and witness to the glory of God.

Now I'd like to close by looking at Acts 2. Here they have been in the upper room and they go out into the streets and start preaching, what happens? This is what we want to happen among us, through us and in the churches we plant here and throughout the world. Acts 2:37–41 says [37] *Now when they heard this (Peter's preaching, so he is evangelizing) they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself."* [40] *And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* [41] *So those who received His word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* The 3,000 was just counting the men so this church went from 120 to probably about 8,000 that day. Now what happens? Let's continue in the passage. Here is the life of the church.

Acts 2:42–47 says [42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (You get saved individually but you live together for Christ.) [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Do you see the four ministries in this passage? They are going – evangelizing. People are coming to Christ and day by day more are coming. The believers and their households are enfolded into the church. They are loving one another. Then what happens? They are in small groups as it says they were day by day breaking bread in their homes (small group discipleship) and realize 3,000 people could not get into a house so they broke off in small groups to do this. So, they are being equipped and lastly, we see they are praising God – exalting/worshipping Him in the temple. This church is on mission, on message, and in ministry.

Here is my exhortation, my takeaway. In humble reliance upon the grace of God and in the power of the Spirit of God together, we desire a great commitment to fulfill the Great Commission as we live the Great Commandment – to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves, on mission, on message and in ministry. Church growth is a consequence, not the mission. Cultural transformation is a consequence, not the mission. I have three illustrations on this but I'll just give you one. On the sanctity of life Sunday, we have ten ministries in front of the church that we were praying for and eight of those ten had been started by Briarwood members. How did they know to do that? That is cultural transformation! That is going not to where the culture says you can go, but that's is going to where God says to go and they were equipped. We are by no means perfect for we are somewhere between zero and a hundred percent on this but at least there was one right there and people got disciplined. They said this is what God called us to do – here's our salt, our light, let's go and they made a difference. At one time we had every abortion clinic shut down in this city and I'm praying for it again. It was because of the impact that was taking place through those who were being disciplined.

I'm not giving you this because I'm opposed to cultural transformation. I'm giving you this because I don't want our message to get culturally accommodated by having the wrong mission. Let's stay on mission on message and in ministry and then watch what God does as He turns the world upside down when His church turns sinners right side up. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for the time to be together in Your Word and the privilege to set the nail on this – what historical, Biblical Christianity is. So help us be aware and alert to the other gospels that are no gospels with the wrong motivation, wrong mission that leads to the wrong message and the wrong ministries. God, most of all, just help us by the Spirit of God in humble reliance be on mission on message and in ministry through the means of the Word and the Spirit of God, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

CHRIST'S CHURCH

The Motivation

The Mission

The Message

The Ministries

OutReach – InReach – DownReach – Upreach

The Means

The Spirit of God and the Word of God

LIFE TAKEAWAY

*In humble reliance upon the grace of God and the power of the Spirit of God together we desire...*

*A Great Commitment to fulfill the Great Commission as we live the Great Commandment*

*On Mission – On Message – In Ministry*