

WORLD RELIGIONS AND OTHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

CLASS 1: INTRODUCTION AND NEW THOUGHT/PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this series is not just to look at all the religions which are out there, but to look at what others believe and how it has infiltrated the church.
- There are many subtle beliefs which have come into the church and have been believed and practiced without regards to their origin or consequence.
- As we look through these various beliefs and systems which are put in place, it would benefit us to notice why they came about, when they came about and what is the overall goal.
- It is by having a better understanding of where people are coming from and where they think they are going that Christians can show them the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ.
- Just like Paul, we can go to the unsaved world, not agreeing with them but acknowledging their desire for religious or spiritual things.
- **Acts 17:22** “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”
- From this observation, Paul was able to show them who the true and living God was.
- From the onset, it is vital to understand that one cannot be “reasoned” into heaven.
- It is not upon their agreement with you that they are wrong that their standing before God will change from enemy to friend.
- We know that the only truth which can rescue people from their sin is the truth of the gospel.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
 - **March 2nd: Introduction and New Thought / Progressive Christianity**
 - March 9th: Deism (God exists but is more of a clockmaker than an involved God)
 - March 16th: New Age Movement / Eastern Mysticism / Animism
 - March 23rd: Moralism / Humanism (as distinct from religion)
 - March 30th: Universalism / Annihilationism (all are saved and there is no hell)
 - April 6th: Hyper-dispensationalism / ultra-dispensationalism / KJV only
 - April 13th: Molinism / Middle Knowledge of God (Sovereignty and Free Will)
 - April 20th: Resurrection Sunday Celebration–No Class

INTRODUCTION

- This morning, we are going to discuss two areas which have come into the Christian church.
- Though not identical, they are related.
- The first is what is called New Thought and then we'll discuss Progressive Christianity.
- While having differing origins and / or application, their teachings (affirmations and denials) are similar in how they have infiltrated the church.

WHAT IS NEW THOUGHT?

- The New Thought movement is based on the teachings of a 19th-century thinker by the name of Phineas Quimby. Quimby was a self-proclaimed healer and a follower of Mesmer, the hypnotist. Quimby believed that illness in the body originated in the mind and that bodily illnesses could therefore be overcome with the "Truth." His idea was that, if the mind was corrected of wrong thinking, the body would be cured of its diseases and problems.¹
- The New Thought movement was among the more notable movements that emerged in the 19th century to help people achieve a [better understanding](#) of divine mysteries, through the power of their thoughts. The term "New Thought" signified that one's thoughts could unlock secrets to living a better life, free from the constraints of religious doctrines or dogmas.²
- The reason it is vital to understand this ideology is that it is made to look just like normal, mainstream Christianity.³
 - **Christ...** This doesn't mean the same thing within Christianity. In New Thought, "Christ" and "Jesus" are two different things. Jesus was a man, and Christ is the inner divinity that all mankind can awaken to. Jesus was the Way-shower to how this can be done. He obtained the "Christ Consciousness," the awakening to his True Self, his inner divinity, and you can too. In this way, you are the I AM just as much as Jesus was.
 - **Atonement and Salvation...** This means "At-One-Ment," a mixing of the words to mean that you're awakening to a higher level of consciousness. Salvation is found in your finding your True Self.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/New-Thought-movement.html>

² <https://theconversation.com/why-you-should-know-about-the-new-thought-movement-72256>

³ <https://crossexamined.org/whats-the-difference-between-new-age-and-new-thought/>

What / who has come from this teaching?

- His most famous student was Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, another religious movement that emerged in the latter half of the 19th century. Eventually, Eddy distanced herself from Quimby, focusing her movement on reforming what she saw as the errors within Christianity. However, what Eddy shared with the New Thought movement was a belief that curing illness was connected to the mind's power to restore health.⁴
- By the 1890s, the New Thought movement had shifted attention away from curing disease. Instead, it focused upon the mind's power to create material success.
- **Speaking things into existence:**⁵
 - I believe we all want a good life, whatever good means to you. Unfortunately, our words don't reflect that. If words have power, that means everything you say is shaping your life. You may not feel it or see it the minute you speak it, but those words are planting seeds.
 - Just look back on your life or even where you are now. Do you remember speaking certain things about what you want or don't want to happen and now you are living it?
 - Because words have power, we clearly have to be intentional with what we speak.
 - **Only focus on the things you want/desire.** Give no energy to the things you do not want. Watch how things start to shift.
 - Joel Osten: I Declare, 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life
 - Keith Ellis: One Minute with God: Sixty Supernatural Seconds that will Change Your Life
 - Kenneth Hagin: Words
 - Joyce Meyer: Power Words: Words You Say Can Change Your Life
- **Norman Vincent Peale**⁶
- During his lifetime, Peale authored 46 books, and the most successful by far was *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Published in 1952, it stayed on the New York Times list of bestsellers for 186 consecutive weeks and sold 5 million copies, making it one of the bestselling religious books of all-time. It began words:
 - *This book is written to suggest techniques and to give examples which demonstrate that you do not need to be defeated by anything, that you can have peace of mind, improved health, and a never-ceasing flow of energy. In short, that your life can be fully of joy and satisfaction.*

⁴ <https://theconversation.com/why-you-should-know-about-the-new-thought-movement-72256>

⁵ <https://bernettastyle.com/2015/11/5-scriptures-about-speaking-things-into-existence.html>

⁶ <https://www.challies.com/articles/the-false-teachers-norman-vincent-peale/>

- His foremost contribution to the world was this notion that *thoughts are causative*, that our thoughts can change our lives, our health, our destiny. Readers were thrilled with this notion that if they believed it, they could have it, or be it, or do it.
- New Thought might be best known through the popular concept of positive thinking that we see in the self-help section at your local bookstore. Faith is a power to make things happen. We can wield this power through our minds. Because New Thought teaches that God only allows good things to happen, if we have enough faith, we can proclaim health and wealth, and it *must* manifest itself in our lives. The Law of Attraction is probably the most popular New Thought belief that most would recognize. Your words have power and can create. God is a creative force. Since you're a manifestation of God, you're able to create with your words as well.⁷

PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

- Progressive Christianity is an open, intelligent and collaborative approach to the Christian tradition and the life and teachings of Jesus that create pathways into an authentic and relevant religious experience.⁸
- While it might look like a new and shiny version of the faith—Christianity 2.0 if you will—it turns out to be something the church has faced, and rejected, before.⁹
- Progressive Christianity is sneaky...it seems like it could be the right thing. It looks as if there is something that we should be paying attention to; but upon closer consideration...it is found wanting.
- There is an overemphasis on what one does (think moralism) and not that one must be saved.
- They hold that while Jesus was a good person, He was not the Savior but someone who was to be emulated today in our life.
- There is a heavy emphasis on our own experiences being greater than what we know the truth to be.
- Searching for meaning, not settling for what the institution has said is virtuous. Each person is going to have their own journey, what is real to them is real.
- Progressive theology broadly rejects historic views of the Bible. That usually means discarding concepts such as [biblical inspiration](#), [inerrancy](#), and [preservation](#). Progressive-minded readers may attempt to insert their ideas into passages where such ideas were never meant to be found. When [eisegesis](#) becomes inconvenient or impossible, the progressive may dismiss certain texts or ideas as outdated and thus safe to ignore.¹⁰

⁷ <https://crossexamined.org/whats-the-difference-between-new-age-and-new-thought/>

⁸ <https://progressivechristianity.org/about-us/>

⁹ <https://michaeljkruger.com/what-is-progressive-christianity/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gotquestions.org/progressive-Christianity.html>

Things to watch out for within the church.¹¹

- **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...
- **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.
- **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....
- **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....
- The church's historic position on sexuality is archaic and needs to be updated within a modern framework...
- The idea of a literal hell is offensive to non-Christians and needs to be re-interpreted....
- **Historic terms are re-defined**

¹¹ This list taken in its entirety from <https://www.alisachildersblog.com/blog/5-signs-your-church-might-be-heading-toward-progressive-christianity>

- 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....
- Sure, the Bible is authoritative—but we've misunderstood it for the first 2,000 years of church history...
- It's not our job to talk to anyone about sin—it's our job to just love them....
- **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....
- 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....
- 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...

WHAT IS A BIBLICAL RESPONSE?

- Firstly, it's important to understand that each group, New Thought and Progressive Christianity, are looking for answers to fixing problems they see.
- They both see a problem, know there is a solution that is beyond them, but are just looking in the wrong place. They know something is off, but since they are blinded, they are not looking to Christ.
- Just like we said before about Paul's preaching at the Areopagus.
 - **Acts 17:22-23** "So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."
 - Paul did not shy away when talking with them about their idols and false beliefs. He knew they were searching, but just in the wrong place.
 - He went on to point them in the right direction about their sin and need for a savior.
- **New thought's** belief that we can create our own reality is obviously false when held up in the light of the Scriptures.
- We know that our outer man is decaying and that there is nothing we can do about it.
 - **2 Corinthians 4:16** "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."
- We also know that it is because of sin that death was brought into the world.
 - **Romans 5:12** "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned..."
- This means that there is nothing we can do about the outer man perishing, but there is something we can do about the sin problem.
- No person can escape the curse and all fall under God's judgment.
- We do not have the power to declare ourselves healthy when we want. This is proven by the fact that every person dies.
- **Progressive Christianity** says that they can bend God's Word to mean what they want it to.
- God's Word is not *progressing* towards the truth, but *it is* the truth.
- It is a good thing to care about social issues and loving the outcast of society. But that ideology does not make one a good person or right in the eyes of the Lord.
- We cannot redefine sin to make it more palatable and then hope the Lord accepts it.

- When we put our own thoughts into the Bible, and then live by that truth, we are no longer seeking to please the Lord but what we really want.