



David Young

TRANSCRIPT

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Welcome to the post COVID church podcast with your host, Stuart Kellogg.

Stuart Kellogg 0:12

Welcome. Today we're looking at progressive Christianity, social justice, what those terms mean, its impact on the faith in America, and how you can make sure your church stays true to its biblical foundation in the face of increased hostility.

My guest, Dr. David Young, senior minister at North Boulevard Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He's pastored in several cities, taught New Testament at several universities, and is author of several books, the most recent "A Grand Illusion, How Progressive Christianity Undermines Biblical Faith." David holds multiple degrees in religion, including a PhD in New Testament from Vanderbilt University. He and his wife, Julie, have two married children. Welcome.

David Young

Thank you.

Stuart

What's your definition of progressive Christianity?

David: 1:16

Progressive Christianity is an adaptation of the Christian faith to the larger progressive movement, which is a largely North American movement that was built over the last 100 120 years on the conviction that a civic religion that gave people a certain direction, a certain set of policies, the idea that we can build a better world is, is an adequate religion for North America. So progressivism, you know, led to all sorts of things a new deal, the civil rights movement, any number of things in the 20th century progressive Christianity tries to adapt the Christian faith to those principles.

Stuart:

The proof that there are many interpretations of parts of Scripture is just looking at how many denominations we have. Where's the line between a Bible believing church and one that's not?

David:

Actually that's a I think that's probably the most important question and in so many ways. So disagreements over what the Bible text means is natural and we'll even disagree with ourselves, you know. Over time, you'll change your own opinion about what you think the Apostle Paul meant here, or Moses meant there. But when someone says, it's not really important, what the text means, because we actually are better authorities than the text itself. Now, you've, you've exited the contract. So if you went to a law court, for example, with a contract dispute, the courts going to say, you can we can argue, but we can only argue the four corners of the contract. And we don't leave the contract.

Progressivism leaves the contract and says, "We don't really care what the contract says, we're going to do something different from that." And so they may try to interpret, reinterpret the contract, but don't really need to, because they've already really decided that there's a different source of authority than the scriptures. So an appropriate place to draw the line is to suggest when you start to say that the scriptures are not relevant to this question, or they're wrong, or they're suspicious, or we now know better, than you really exited the contract of the Christian faith.

Stuart:

Have you ever seen such a split within Christianity in the United States?

David:

I don't know that North America has. You know, you can think of the middle 20th century and there were sort of anti Catholic scares going around where Protestantism was, was anxious about Catholicism. But I don't know that there's ever been a division quite like this unless, you know, unless you went back to sort of the rise of modernism in the 1920s and 30s, where a lot of denominations began to go back then there would say liberal liberal, that we would say progressive. What's the answer? Well, the answer is for us to do a couple things. One thing is to remind ourselves that God didn't make a private contract with us, he didn't invite us to rewrite the faith whenever we disagree with something in it, or whenever we think that it's no longer attractive, or it doesn't sort of appeal to our sentiments.

The solution is to suggest that when Jesus came, and when he ordained His apostles and His prophets, He gave them authority once and for all. And if if we're to be Christians, we're going to follow the orthodoxy. I mean, that with a little O, the orthodoxy that they lay down in the sacred scriptures, that has to be our ultimate authority for interpreting who Jesus is and what God wants us to do.

Stuart:

So it's focusing

David: 4:51

Yeah, absolutely. So when I was at one of my last years in graduate school, we had a Dr Barrett, who at the time was probably one of the best known English speaking New Testament scholars. He came in and the students were asking a variety of questions. So he is meeting

with the New Testament PhD students. And one of the students question, you know, "What do we do if we don't agree with what the Bible says about sexuality?" And he said, "Well, there is really no disagreement. We know what it says." And the students said, "Well, what if I don't like what it says?" And he said, "Well, there's just not any disagreement."

And I decided to sort of push on it myself, because I wanted to see how far I could push him. But I said, "What if I just can't agree with it." And he said, "Then you need to find another faith, because the Christian faith is not open for negotiation." And in a lot of ways, that's really where we find ourselves: Is the Christian faith open for private negotiation or not? If you think it is, then you don't really need the Christian faith. Go and write your own religion, you can set yourself up as your own God, you can use your own sentiment as your source of authority, you can change whenever the culture tends to go this way or that way.

But if you want to call yourself a Christian, there's a certain definition to that term. We stand in a strong orthodox stream, and to be a Christian is to embrace those things and to confess them.

Stuart:

A good friend of mine, Charles Brooks, once said, "Hey, if I'd written the Bible, there are some things that I probably wouldn't have put in there either. But the fact is, I did. God did."

David: 6:28

Yeah. A good question to ask ourselves is, when we come across a scripture that we really just have a hard time believing to be true. A good question to ask ourselves is what might what might be wrong with us? That, that we don't really want to embrace this teaching? What what's, what's fallen in me? What's broken in me? What what maybe secret sin do I have? Or secret rebellion am I harboring that makes me not want to just embrace what the Word of God says? What and what makes me think that 21st century, elite American culture has finally found all the answers now and all other cultures were all wrong. And we were even wrong 20 years ago, and will be wrong. 20 years from now. There's a certain arrogance about progressivism that suggests that whatever we think is true right here and right now is the timeless, eternal truth. And everything else must be measured by that. It's actually it's not only, not only a chronological arrogance, it's a cultural arrogance as well, because it nullifies the experience of hundreds of millions of people who are not North American elites.

Stuart:

My guest, Dr. David young pastor and author, most recently of "A Grand Illusion, How Progressive Christianity Undermines Biblical faith." Een before COVID, attendance and membership in US churches was down. One out of five, now it's one out of four Americans have no religious affiliation. The pandemic has just sped this all up, right?

David:

Yeah, that's, I think, a pandemic accelerated a lot of things in the US, but for churches, it accelerated things that were already happening. So many of our churches were already in decline. You know, the mainline Protestant denominations are seven big ones in America, we're in a freefall. And I don't want to predict that not that one of them or that some of them may not survive. But I will say that churches like the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church of America, I mean, they're their numbers are going to come out of the pandemic so small, I think

all of us will be surprised. But even evangelical churches were already in decline, many of them not all. And this has accelerated that.

Stuart 8:43

I think, for the last year amidst protests and riots about police brutality, more focus than ever on that term social justice. Christ was certainly for justice. That term is very divisive. It's misunderstood. How best should Bible believers use the term justice in a biblical way?

David:

Yeah, that's a good question. So justice is a really important issue, mentioned many times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and then also in the New Testament, as well. So I will say that I think for a lot of white American Christians, we haven't heard that much about justice until recently. And I suspect that's because we were probably on the winning side of justice. So it wasn't a big deal to us. And now that America has become more racially diverse, we're hearing a whole lot more about justice. And it's probably healthy for us to hear that.

Social Justice is the is an argument that social structures also have to be just so that justice is not simply how I relate to you. But it's the whole system that facilitates our relationships. Social Justice, is the belief that certain policies can make the world a more just place. And I just want to say that's true. Social Justice, actually is an important concept. It's a concept that has been with us for years, even though the phrase is probably maybe only 150 years old, the concept has been with us.

The problem that arises for the Christian is when we allow social justice to take the place of the gospel. So that's where I think we really find ourselves at a crossroads. There are a lot of Christians, progressive leaning Christians, even denominations who show very little interest in the Gospel and sin and salvation and our need for redemption, the fallenness of humanity. You know, the brokenness of our will, our addictions, our sins, they show very little interest in that, and instead spend most of their time talking about political policies on the assumption that if we can fix enough policies, somehow we'll achieve a utopia here on Earth. It won't happen. And it's a huge distraction from the from the gospel message of salvation from sin and foolishness.

Stuart 11:00

Has the Evangelical Church become too political, to captive to the Republican Party.?

David 11:05

Wow. I think that there have been a number of evangelical leaders who really closely aligned themselves with the previous president. And I understand that. I understand why you would want why you would appreciate the President's policies, maybe some of his positions, I can get that actually, you know. As Christians, we have a stake and in good governance, we shouldn't shy away from it. but when we start to align ourselves with an individual politician, and we, we use exaggerated language about, you know, who this person is, and so forth, then we in a lot of ways, we we've started to compromise our witness.

And that's true on the left as well. So we want to make sure that we understand that the mainline Protestant denominations in America; I'm talking about the PCUSA, the United Methodist Church, Disciples of Christ, the United Church of Christ, they've done the exact opposite by aligning themselves with left leaning politicians. In fact, if you go to the website of the PCUSA, there's nothing on there about sin and salvation, everything on there is some kind of political position. And it's usually just a talking point straight from the left from, you know, progressive, secular progressivism, indicating that the left is also aligning themselves with politics, so both sides are guilty of it.

So we should not absolve ourselves of political responsibility. We are stewards of the government, but I would be really cautious not to tie our fortunes to any particular politician, and to appear as though we think of some politician as a Messiah. They're not gonna say nobody's gonna save America, except Jesus .

Stuart

Chuck Colson said, our salvation is not coming on Air Force One.

David:

That's right. Yeah, that's a good way to put it.

Stuart:

One of our focus points at the Post COVID church project is preparing churches and believers to face increasing persecution and hostility. How do you recommend folks do that in the most Christ like way?

David: 13:02

Well, it's coming, it's already on us. We're going to be censored, we're going to be harassed, we're going to be marginalized. It's entirely possible that there'll be some career paths that will not be open for Christians. We already have individuals in our area, very Christian area here, Middle Tennessee, who have lost their jobs for not toeing the line on progressive ideology. We're likely to use lose our own children, some of our own children. And you know, they're they're being pressured and bullied into believing things that are contrary to the Christian faith.

You know, there are laws that are deliberately designed to force churches to do things that are contrary to our own faith and public accommodation laws. Laws that would require certain artists to create art that would celebrate what they consider to be sin. All of this is already here, It's already on us.

So I would say a couple of things. First thing I would say is this, you need to decide once and for all, that you follow Jesus, and you're not going to back down from that. If you wait to make that decision, until you're actually in the hot water, you waited too long. So we need to decide I'm not going to back down and I'm not going to betray Jesus. When we do that, we need to remember that this is a holy, it's a Spirit. It's a spiritual battle, Holy Spirit battle. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, as Paul says in Ephesians, six, our battle is against these principalities and powers and these these spiritual forces. So we have to think not in terms of, you know, how loudly we can tweet something, but instead, are we are we deeply involved in prayer? Are we fighting with those spiritual tools Paul articulates in Ephesians chapter six, Are we understanding that this is actually a cosmic battle between the forces of evil and the forces of good and God is going to win. And when we recommit ourselves to witnessing Jesus even to

our enemies. We look at every enemy as a possibility. To Jesus as a, as an apostle Paul waiting to happen. So we just have a very different style from the way that the world fights. And if we if we lose that style of compromise that style, well, we're just mudslinging with everybody else. And there's no win to that.

So I would start there.

Stuart: 15:16

And it's also to remember that no matter the political affiliation or behavior, that person is made in the image of God, right?

David:

Oh, yeah. So I've been interviewing leaders and persecuted areas in deeply persecuted Muslim areas, Hindu areas, and in, in Communist China. And two things strike me. The first one is that they're the happiest people I know, super happy. Which is just really odd. But the second thing is, they're always plotting how they're going to convert their persecutors. So they're not thinking of how they can rise up and get a bunch of guns and, you know, overthrow the government. They're thinking about how they can they win the guys who are persecuting them over to Jesus. And in many cases, they're successful.

So in our congregation we baptize hundreds of Muslims. So you know, we didn't bomb them. If the government has to bomb them, I let the government worry about that. We're discipling them. That's our job. Our job is to disciple, the government's job is to execute justice. My job is to make disciples.

Stuart

That's kind of a biblical priority, isn't it?

David:

Again, it's a beautiful thing. We have a whole different set of weapons, spiritual weapons that are given to us from God that are far more effective than the weapons that that the enemy is using against us.

Thank you, Dr. Yo, foungr joining us today on the post COVID church podcast. Pastor and author most recently of "A Grand Illusion, How Progressive Christianity Undermines Biblical Faith". Where can folks get your book? I

David

It's available@renew.org, or on Amazon or Barnes and Noble. It's available, I think, pretty much where books are sold.

Stuart

Thank you.

David

Absolutely.

Stuart

And thank you for listening to the post COVID church podcast.

You can find a transcript of today's conversation at our website, www.thepostcovidchurch.com. And please let me know what you think about this podcast or anything else having to do with the project. Just write to me at stuart@thepostcovidchurch.org. Our mission, "Helping the church share more of the good news in the face of persecution, hostility, and disinterest!". I'm Stuart Kellogg. Thank you for listening.

Announcer17:39

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