

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN FEMALE INFLUENCERS:
A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

By Alicia W. Garcia

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Worship Studies

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

May 12, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Many Christian female influencers have large followings of Christian women, although many influential Bible study authors, teachers, motivational speakers, musicians, worship leaders, social media, and online influencers may not be instructing Christian women in the core beliefs of Christianity. As a result, many Christian women are not defending the Christian faith, but are rejecting core Christian beliefs and are identifying with the diverse beliefs of progressive Christianity. Christian women who have embraced progressive Christianity are therefore no longer worshipers of the God of the Bible but are idolaters who practice the progressive ideologies of relativism, pluralism, and cultural tolerance. In order to guide Christian women into true worship, it is necessary that influencers of Christian women clearly articulate biblical truth. This qualitative historical research will identify core Christian beliefs that refute the primary ideologies of progressive Christianity. Through exploration of existing literature, perspectives on regeneration, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation, biblical authority, and evangelism have emerged as primary Christian beliefs that refute dominating progressive beliefs. The study will inform Christian women, and their influencers, of the tenets of foundational biblical beliefs, and warn Christian women of the dangers of progressive Christianity.

Keywords: Theology, Biblical Worldview, Christian Worldview, Progressive Christianity, Biblical Authority, Biblical Inspiration, Moral Truth, Exclusivity of Jesus Christ, Christian Women Influencer, Rachel Held Evans, Rachel Hollis

List of Abbreviations

CFI: Christian Female Influencer(s). CFI includes women who exercise a speaking or communication gift when communicating Christian truths to Christian women. CFI includes Bible teachers, authors, singers, songwriters, podcasters, bloggers, editors, publishers, and media personnel. The CFI may or may not be a Christian, but in the context of this research, CFI have a strong following of Christian women. The abbreviation CFI is not an indication of all CFI. CFI is an indication only of the faith and practice of some CFI who engage in the activity of the given discussion.

CW: Christian women. The term Christian women is defined as women who have experienced the new birth, believe and practice as the habit of life, the teachings of Jesus Christ. Note that the abbreviation CW is not an indication of all CW. It is only an indication of the faith and practice of some CW who engage in the activity of the given discussion.

NA: North America or North Americans.

NAE: National Association of Evangelicals

NT: New Testament. The NT consists of the books in the Bible from Matthew to Revelation.

OT: Old Testament. The OT consists of the books in the Bible from Genesis to Malachi.

PC: Progressive Christianity. Progressive Christianity is a post-modern, post-liberal philosophical system of beliefs that rejects the authority and objectivity of the biblical canon, and focuses on a social, and cultural interpretation of the Bible. PC reaches beyond the fixed structure of biblical Christianity and seeks to reform Christianity beyond the bounds of the biblical narrative. Some practices within PC are relativism, liberalism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

PE: Progressive Evangelicals

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The relationship between Christianity and culture has endured a history of conflict that reaches back to that worship altering moment when the serpent of old planted seeds of doubt into the mind of the woman by asking the question, “Yea, has God said?” (Gen. 3:1). Throughout the ages, the tenets of true biblical belief have been intellectually challenged, and the conflict between reason and faith remains unresolved. Today, many Christian female influencers (CFI), including but not limited to influential Bible study authors, Bible teachers, motivational speakers, musicians, worship leaders, social media and online influencers are distributing a message that gives a false interpretation of the clear message proclaimed throughout the biblical text.

As a result, many Christian women (CW) are not able to defend the Christian faith (Jude 3), nor are they living as true worshipers of God (John 4:24). Instead, some CFI and their followers are rejecting core Christian beliefs and are identifying with the diverse beliefs of progressive Christianity (PC). CW who have embraced PC are therefore no longer worshipers of the God of the Bible but are idolaters who practice the over-arching progressive ideology of relativism in place of absolute moral truth. The embrace of PC can be likened to the idolatry of the nation of Israel. G. K. Beale writes:

Israel’s problem was idol worship, and the idea in Isaiah 6:9-10 is this: Isaiah is to tell these idolaters that they have been so unrepentant about their idol worship that God is going to make them as spiritually insensitive, as spiritually inanimate and lifeless, as the idols. God is saying through Isaiah, his prophet, “You like idols, Israel? Alright, you are going to become like an idol, and that is the judgment”. So in verse 9, through Isaiah, God commands the idolatrous people to become like the idols they have refused to stop loving. In verse 10, he commands Isaiah to make the people like their idols through his prophetic

preaching. This is a paramount example of the *les talionis* notion of the Old Testament—an eye for an eye. People are punished by means of their own sin.¹

This is a picture of God’s holiness, and His righteous judgment regarding sin, unbelief, and rejection of His covenants. Therefore, it is with intense urgency that CFI know and speak the oracles of God with clarity, passion, and an awesome reverence for God. CFI must know and repeat the message of God’s deep love, His grace, His judgments, and His plan of redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The tenets of historical Christianity and the worship of Jehovah are anchored in biblical salvific claims, and objective truths regarding God’s redemptive acts as revealed in the Scriptures. Historical Christianity asserts the inherent doctrine of Scripture as the foundation of all Christian belief. “The doctrine of Scripture is absolutely foundational and essential because it identifies the only true source for all Christian faith.”²

Inaccurate interpretations of the biblical narrative deflect the clarity of Scriptures and lead to false worship. The Scriptures state that false worship leads to separation from God, and ultimately, eternal destruction. Therefore, the responsibility of CFI is to proclaim with clarity the message of Scripture. The message offered by CFI should reprove, rebuke, and exhort, (2 Tim. 4:2) affirming the validity of Scripture, that CW might believe the claims therein, and ultimately believe in the Person and the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Jn. 20:31), through whom the biblical narrative reaches its redemptive pinnacle.

¹ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 47.

² John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 69.

Theoretical Framework

The text of Scripture has exposed and refuted cultural philosophies that have stood in opposition to the true meaning of its content. The Old Testament (OT) counters the messages of false prophets, while the New Testament (NT) follows the same tradition, repudiating the philosophies of antinomianism, the false teaching of Judaizers, and the manipulative intellectual interpretations of Scripture known as Gnosticism. The first four centuries A.D. marked the establishment and growth of Christianity, along with the finalizing of the biblical canon. The medieval period, from 5 A.D. – 1500 A.D. was saturated with heretical movements, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which led to the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Protestant Reformation.

Though the Reformation brought a return to the doctrine of Scripture, the Enlightenment Period which followed, also known as The Age of Reason, once again emphasized intellectual philosophies that became precursors to the ideologies of liberalism, progressivism, and religious tolerance. Enlightenment relaxed (slackened) the idea of absolute dogma and ultimately, philosophically, diminished the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Modernism, the philosophical age that followed, in response to cultural traumas, such as The Great Depression in America and World Wars, gave further expressions of intolerance toward fixed traditional values, clearly establishing the idea that there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. These claims ushered in a philosophy called modernism, an ideology which gave definition to relativism. Post-modernism therefore further advanced the ideologies of modernism, giving rise to liberal and emergent theologies, which are forerunners to the philosophy, ideology, and theology of progressive Christianity.

The tenets of postmodernism are diametrically opposed to the Bible, which is absolutely true and, therefore, fundamentally *intolerant*. But that hasn't

stopped many in the church from foolishly attempting to blend the two opposing worldviews. The result is what some have called the hermeneutic of humility- the notion that believers shouldn't hold too tightly, too dogmatically to an interpretation of God's Word, especially not to the exclusion of other views and perspectives. Such a mind-set undermines the authority and the absolute truth of Scripture, as well as any hope of confronting the spiritual and theological errors of the lost.³

The Bible is God's revelation of the condition of humanity. Scripture says as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). The human soul, comprised of the heart and mind, the intangible self, is therefore the great battle ground for truth. From Genesis 3:1, until there is a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-2), the question will continually be raised, "Indeed, has God said". The first Adam (1 Cor. 15:22-49) disobeyed the Word of God (Gen. 3:8), and the Scriptures say through him, sin entered the world, and death (physical and spiritual) through sin (Rom. 5:12). The human mind is therefore held captive to sin and can be rescued only by the grace of God, for "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Rom. 8:7).

Thus human philosophy is in a constant struggle with the fixed dogma of the biblical order. Such is the case with progressive ideologies and the philosophical reasoning regarding Scripture that preceded it.

In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict: the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. The modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or liberalism.⁴

Those words by J. Gresham Machen were first published in 1923. Modernism and liberalism are the "non-redemptive religions" from whence progressive Christianity gets its

³ John MacArthur, *Final Word*, 22.

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, (Louisville, KY, GLH Publishing, 2019), 1.

roots. Progressive religious thought has now infiltrated the minds of uninformed, unassuming Christians and is challenging the tenets of historical Christian beliefs. The new progressive Evangelical (PE) movement, also known as Evangelical Progressives, (EP) has brought theological division between evangelicals on core biblical beliefs and is using a public dais, along with broader interpretations of Scripture, in hopes of bringing about social and cultural change. EP Michael Herbert recognizes these ideological differences when indicting:

...the rigid and unyielding “foul lines” of evangelicalism... [Though individual evangelical circles are myriad in their particular theological expressions, there are a few issues that, no matter how conservative you are in *every* other element of your theology, will automatically get you ostracized from almost any current evangelical network and branded liberal, dangerous, or the ultimate Christian-eze slam, a heretic.] These issues, in descending order of sacred-cow-ness, are:

- 1) Gay and transgender affirmation
- 2) Hell/afterlife as annihilation of the wicked/universal salvation as opposed to the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment of the unrighteous, and to a lesser extent, but still very much untouchable in many circles
- 3) The inerrancy of Scripture
- 4) The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement.⁵

In a message posted on August 6, 2015, titled “For The Exclusive Claims of Christ,” John MacArthur shares a personal testimony of why he was compelled to author several books, more precisely, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, that became “firestorms” within the realms of evangelicalism. MacArthur explains that his seminary training prepared him to defend inerrancy, biblical inspiration, and the paradigms of sanctification. “Never did I believe that I would spend my life trying to defend the gospel from evangelical attacks. That was a total shock.”⁶

⁵Joel Michael Herbert, “Widening the Gap Between Evangelical and Progressive Christians”, medium.com, (Jan. 3, 2018), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://medium.com/@joelherbert/the-widening-gap-between-evangelical-and-progressive-christians-190ed161d1fa>

⁶ Ligonier Ministries, “John MacArthur: For the Exclusive Claims of Christ,” August 6, 2015, video, 49:30, https://youtu.be/MExTc_SpQ0Q.

Influential evangelical women with very large followings now operate in tandem with elements of the PE movement, using mass media as venues to propagate progressive ideologies. Podcaster Todd Starnes reported that Christian Female Influencer (CFI) Beth Moore as saying that American evangelicalism is dead. “Evangelicalism as we knew it, as imperfect as it was because we are imperfect, passed away in 2016... History will plant its grave marker there.”⁷

Problem Statement

Many CFI have large followings of Christian women, although many CFI who are influential Bible study authors, teachers, motivational speakers, musicians, worship leaders, social media, and online influencers may not be instructing Christian women in the core beliefs of Christianity.⁸ As a result, case studies are showing that many CFI are not defending the Christian faith, are rejecting core Christian beliefs, and are choosing to identify with the diverse beliefs of progressive Christianity. CFI and their followers who have embraced progressive Christianity are therefore no longer worshipers of the God of the Bible but are idolaters who practice the progressive ideologies of relativism, pluralism, and cultural tolerance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative historical study is to inform CFI and their followers of the tenets of core biblical beliefs, namely, regeneration, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation, the authority of Scripture, and evangelism, along with hermeneutical methodology for the purpose of true biblical worship and spiritual formation. Second, the study will expose

⁷ Todd Starnes, “Beth Moore: American Evangelicalism Died in 2016,” Todd Starnes, toddstarnes.com, (Dec. 27, 2019), <https://www.toddstarnes.com/show/beth-moore-american-evangelicalism-died-in-2016/?fbclid=IwAR2mz7wzjYuk82BgtxCEykKFsGzC4rjQFtnxxYWqCpH4i43No26T24iLRmA>.

⁸ Pew Research Center, (May 12, 2015), “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Appendix B: Classification of Protestant Denominations, 100, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

progressive beliefs, examine the progressive impact on CFI and their followers, and warn of the dangers of progressive Christianity. Finally, the study will show statistical data between those who have a biblical worldview and those who do not; along with percentages of those who are biblically illiterate and the rate of decline.

Significance of the Study

Little research exists in direct correlation between North American (NA) spiritual formation and PC, yet current statistical data shows that spiritual formation, biblical worldviews, and biblical literacy are at an all-time low in NA. Data regarding a biblical worldview has been gathered and reported since 1995 when Barna.org first reported on the percentages of those in NA who held to a biblical worldview. The research was reviewed in 2000, 2005, 2009, and the results were approximately the same. A new report from Barna.org in 2018 shows decline in American biblical worldview among every generation.

Some very influential CFI are self-proclaimed progressive ideologists.⁹ Case studies show that the books and blogs of some CFI have been and still are top sellers in the Christian market. Studies also show that the message of such CFI does not align with biblical Christian doctrine, thereby influencing CW in a philosophy that is diabolically opposed to biblical Christianity. The research will survey and analyze the message in such materials, along with the decline of Christian spirituality in NA culture.

The mission of PC hinges on “8 Points”¹⁰ that exist within its belief structure. The 8 Points were updated on the progressivechristianity.org website at the beginning of 2020. The

⁹ Emily McFarlan Miller, "Rachel Held Evans," *The Christian Century*, June 5, 2019, 19. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed April 3, 2020), https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A591395034/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=a4ae2e65.

¹⁰ “*The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity*”. *Progressivechristianity.org*. (2020). <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>.

research will show how biblical truth is in objection to PC, giving reason for progressive philosophy to separate itself from the name and tenets of historical, biblical Christian beliefs and practices.

The research also includes an observation of inductive methodologies as a hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Scriptures. Inductive methodologies will support accurate hermeneutical practices, whereby CFI can rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The study will clarify the biblical mandate for Christian leadership and will inform CFI and CW of the necessity of refuting anti-biblical progressive ideologies. These core concepts are the primary doctrines, principles, and methodology CFI need in order to understand and pronounce Christian claims that guide CW in the truths of biblical Christianity and biblical worship.

Research Questions

In order to address the responsibility of CFI toward the prevailing PC movement, the following research questions must be answered:

Research Question 1: What are the most significant biblical doctrines, principles, and methodology needed for CFI to lead Christian women (CW) in true biblical worship and spiritual formation?

Research Question 2: What are the critical cultural challenges currently facing CFI in teaching, worship, and discipleship ministries?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The primary responsibility of CFI toward CW in response to PC is to follow the commission of Jesus Christ in teaching the principles of regeneration, the

exclusivity Jesus Christ in salvation, biblical authority, and evangelism, along with inductive hermeneutical methodologies.

Hypothesis 2: The ideologies of PC, which are influencing Christian women, are primarily in terms of relativism, pluralism, and cultural tolerance.

Core Concepts

In order to guide Christian women into true worship, and away from PC, it is necessary that CFI clearly articulate biblical truth. This qualitative historical research will identify core Christian beliefs that refute the primary ideologies of PC. Through exploration of existing literature, perspectives on regeneration,¹¹ the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation,¹² biblical authority,¹³ and evangelism¹⁴ have emerged as primary Christian beliefs that refute dominating progressive beliefs.

Definitions

Canon: The biblical canon is the collection of sacred writings known as the Bible, ranging from Genesis to Revelation - thirty-nine OT books and twenty-seven NT books - that Christians believe are given by inspiration of God. The writings are distinguished by their 1) divine qualities, 2) acceptance by Christian believers, and 3) apostolic affiliation. Canonicity is the church's recognition and acceptance of the sixty-six books of Scripture, collectively called the Bible, as the inspired Word of God.¹⁵

¹¹ John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We are Born Again*, (The Desiring God Foundation: Christian Focus, 2009).

¹² J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity in Conflict*, (New York: Round Table Press, 1932).

¹³ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*.

¹⁴ David Wheeler, and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011).

¹⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, 119-126, 926.

Christian: The word Christian is the Greek word *Christianós*. Acts 11:26 says, “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” The preceding verb “were called” is *chrēmátsai*, which means to be directed by God as if by divine oracle. The term Christian is historically rooted in the divine call of God,¹⁶ and evidenced by the new birth.¹⁷ A Christian therefore, is a person who has experienced the new birth, evidenced by a life of faith in and obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Christianity: Christianity is a term not found in the Scriptures therefore, it is not defined in biblical dictionaries nor lexicons. Christianity however is culturally defined as the theological system rooted in the definition of Christian.¹⁸ The characteristics of Christian, defined through the different names and beliefs of biblical followers of Jesus Christ, define the theology of and the term Christianity.¹⁹ The most distinguishing mark of a Christian is the new birth experience which brings about belief in the Person, practices, teachings, and commands of Jesus Christ²⁰

Biblical Authority: Biblical authority is the Christian belief that the biblical text in its entirety is inspired by God, and therefore has the “power and right to enforce

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, TH. D., ed., *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, “Lexical Aids To The New Testament,” (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 968.

¹⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, 360.

¹⁸ Elwell, 236.

¹⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, Second Edition*, “What Is Theology?” (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1983), 21.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

obedience; moral or legal supremacy; right to command or give a final decision”.²¹

Gruden says the authority of Scripture carries the belief that the words of the biblical text are God’s words, and to disbelieve and disobey them is to disbelieve and disobey God.²²

Biblical Inerrancy: Biblical inerrancy is the Christian belief that because the words of Scripture are inspired by God, there are no errors or falsehoods, nor doctrinal inconsistencies.²³ “The Bible is completely true and truthful in all that it teaches”.²⁴

Biblical Worship: Biblical worship is the practice of offering reverence²⁵ to Jehovah, the God of the Bible, according to biblical directives (John 4:24).

Deconstruction: Deconstruction is a new, progressive hermeneutic that undermines and dismantles the contextual meaning of Scripture in favor of progressive post-modern agendas.²⁶

Doctrine of Scripture: The term doctrine of Scripture refers to a belief or set of beliefs about the Scriptures that Christians hold.²⁷ There is no set list of doctrines that make up the

²¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, 100-101. The quote in *Biblical Doctrine* is taken from *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), s.v. “authority.” MacArthur and Mayhue use this definition in reference to the Bible and its power to rule in life and practice.

²² Wayne Gruden, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1236.

²³ John MacArthur ed., *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2015), 222.

²⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, 931.

²⁵ Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God’s Call*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), xiv.

²⁶ Brian Neil Peterson, "Postmodernism’s Deconstruction of the Creation Mandates". *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 1 (03, 2019): 125-40, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2214888401?accountid=12085>.

²⁷ John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Electronic book, 1851.

doctrine of Scripture. The Christian doctrines of Scripture include but are not limited to inspiration, authority, inerrancy, infallibility, clarity, and sufficiency.

Inductive Methodology: the hermeneutical process of interpreting Scripture primary from within the text.

Chapter Summary

The author considered relevant existing literature pertaining to biblical doctrine, church history, and philosophical eras of reason, as applied to progressivism in the 21st century church. Further, the author considered the background of what has come to be recognized as acceptable beliefs within the realm of Christianity, to compare these beliefs with the biblical foundations of Christianity. Finally, the chapter briefly introduced statistical data of spiritual formation along with the philosophical strategies of PC and its effect of CFI and CW. The author also noted that the abbreviations CFI and CW are not an indication of all CFI nor all CW. The abbreviations only apply to CFI and CW who engage in the activity of the given discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

TAXONOMY

Though progressive philosophy has subtly crept into women's ministry, a boldface assault was unleashed in 2010 beginning with the writings and message of the late Rachel Held Evans. Before her death, Evans left several volumes of passionate literature regarding her views of the Bible and historical Christian beliefs. Other CFI began to accept and expound on the theological ideals that Evans heralded, and today, some top-selling Christian books for women are authored by CFI with further expressions of self-propelled progressive ideology.

Many other CFI who are perhaps not outwardly progressive, are weak (2 Tim. 3:6-7) and ambiguous in their exposition of the true meaning of Christianity. Though women's ministry is over saturated with a vast amount of Bible study and discipleship literature, there is still very little biblical doctrine taught in women's ministry, and this void has left many CW with unanswered questions. This lack in biblical knowledge holds CW captive of true revelatory worship.

In response to the doctrinal void in women's ministry materials, and to the increasing need for CFI to more clearly articulate, expose, and defend the Sacred Text against alien philosophies that have crept in amongst women's ministries, the literature in this chapter is partitioned into seven sections that attempt to address the following areas. 1) The Authority of Scripture 2) Biblical and Historical Foundations of Worship 3) Progressive Christianity and Liberal Philosophy 4) Christian Women and Biblical Worldview 5) Evangelism and Public Leadership) 6) Spiritual Formation and Worship 7) Christian Apologetics.

Section I: The Authority of Scripture

At the very core of Progressive Christianity is the age-old question of the authority of Scripture. Within the philosophy of PC, the question is still presumably asked with negative assumption, “Yea, has God said” (Gen. 3:1). Careful observation shows that progressive philosophy does not embrace absolute moral truth, thereby getting its name, “progressive”. Therefore, the resources in this section have been chosen to equip CFI with a better understanding of the doctrines of Scripture, which include but are not limited to inspiration, authority, inerrancy, infallibility, clarity, and sufficiency.

Biblical Theology

We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry by G. K. Beale is a clear biblical description of idolatry. Beale’s discussion focuses the CFI on the object of her worship, that which she esteems most highly and most reverently. Beale says, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration.”²⁸ In answering the question, “What is idolatry”, Beale quotes Martin Luther from the larger catechism discussion of the first commandment. “You shall have no other gods before Me” [Ex. 20:3] included “whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God; trust and faith of the heart alone makes both God and idols.”²⁹ Beale adds a personal comment, “whatever your heart clings to or relies on for ultimate security” is an idol. Therefore, an idol is “whatever claims the loyalty that belongs to God alone.”³⁰

²⁸ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.

²⁹ Beale, 17. In his footnotes, Beale acknowledges B. S. Rosner’s directive in pointing him to “Idolatry” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove, ILL.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 571.

³⁰ Beale, 17. Beale’s footnote indicates the reference by J. A. Motyer, “Idolatry,” in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Leicester U.K.: InterVarsity Pres, 1980), 2:680.

Beale's definition shows that PC is a form of idolatry, therefore those who follow progressivism are not worshipers of the God of Scripture but worship a god of ideas created in the soul of those who have not embraced the biblical criteria of what it means to be Christian. Not only does Beale help CFI understand where, when, and how she and the CW she influences are being biblically idolatrous, he also offers biblical truth, showing how idolatry can be avoided.

For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship by Daniel I. Block is a balanced theological discussion of worship between the Old and New Testaments. Instead of giving a chronological approach to biblical worship, Block arranges the discussions topically. Each article or chapter is a strong biblical teaching from both testaments on acceptable worship and how the principles of worship and spiritual formation can be practiced in the most common areas of daily living.

Though Block spends more time discussing the OT, he consistently reaches into the NT showing how and if old practices are observed today. Block's work is a clear Christ-centered discussion of the biblical pattern of worship, offering the reader foundational principles of worship whereby she is able to cultivate a biblical view of worship and spiritual formation.

The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures, edited by D.A. Carson, is an encyclopedia of discussions regarding the authority of Scripture and the way the text has been viewed throughout the history of the church. There are discussions regarding inspiration, truthfulness of Scripture, epistemology, comparisons of the Christian Scriptures with the sacred texts of other traditions, and much more. Carson says the arguments in this volume are not new but are fresh because new questions are asked from a new perspective and worldview. Carson's

manuscript informs this thesis by giving CFI historical data regarding the doctrine of Scripture and how faithful believers have fought for its truthfulness, and authoritativeness.

One Foundation: Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture edited by Jeremiah Johnson is another group of essays, these addressing the sufficiency of Scripture. The essays are excerpts from larger works penned by each author. The book is assembled in honor of John MacArthur's fifty years as pastor of Grace Community Church.³¹

R. C. Sproul's article is first, defending the Bible, with the words of Martin Luther in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, "Unless I am convinced by Sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe."³² Sproul's chapter title is "Based On God's Word Alone", and he expounds on the historical reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, referencing Scripture's inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, and authority. Sproul's chapter ends with a call to hermeneutical research as a means of interpreting the Scripture with honor and with integrity. This paper will present an overview of the hermeneutics of inductive research, which has its findings in *sensus literalis*, meaning the Bible must be interpreted according to the context in which it is written.

Voddie Baucham is the author of chapter two, "Why You Can Believe The Bible". Christians will face a lifetime of defending biblical belief. Dr. Baucham's essay shows that a non-believer who deconstructs the biblical narrative may be as the Bible describes a fool or may not have experienced divine regeneration, which brings life to the soul and faith in the Word of God.

³¹ Jeremiah Johnson, editor, *One Foundation: Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture*, (Valencia, California: Grace to You, 2019). Each chapter remains the intellectual property of its author.

³² Johnson, *One Foundation*, 1.

John MacArthur is the author of the essay, “The Finding of an Old Book.” The essay is from MacArthur’s sermon on 2 Kings 22:8-10. The central idea is the Word of God had been “found” in the house of God. MacArthur expounds on the fact that the Word of God is lost in the house of God, that is, in the hearts of Christians. “Have you lost your Bible? You can lose your Bible. I’m not referring to the printed copy that you possess. The Bible can be lost, first of all, by neglect”.³³

MacArthur continues by delving into Satan’s deceptions of what God has said, while hammering a defense for the authenticity of Scripture with objective self-claims throughout the biblical text. MacArthur covers the topic from many different angles, including an opportunity to show that the Bible should be taught in schools because biblical knowledge is necessary to understanding the allusions of truth taught in literature, music, and art.³⁴ In support of MacArthur’s observations, there is empirical data regarding why parents send their children to Christian schools. This research will note those findings in chapter four.

MacArthur is also the author of chapter four, “The Sufficiency of Scripture”. The essay is extrapolated from MacArthur’s book, *The Inerrant Word*. The essay expositis Psalm 19, and upholds the authority, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the written Word of God.³⁵

The Scripture Cannot Be Broken: Twentieth Century Writings on the Doctrine of Inerrancy, edited by John MacArthur is another group of essays written in regard to Scripture. MacArthur writes the Introduction and speaks of the importance of church history stating that in its two thousand year history, “no leader, movement, or idea that has questioned the authority or

³³ Johnson, 44.

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ Ibid., 55.

inspiration of Scripture has ever been good for the church”.³⁶ MacArthur arranges the work topically in five parts. 1) Historical Perspective 2) Scripture 3) Inspiration 4) Inerrancy 5) Infallibility. The uniqueness of *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken* is the deeper treatment of each attribute of Scripture. Each attribute hosts three to five essays.

Though MacArthur did not name PC specifically, he described the makings of PC, and stated the nature of its current ever-shifting philosophy. Consistent with MacArthur’s statement is Laura Edles article, “Contemporary Progressive Christianity and Its Symbolic Ramifications,” which gives the 8 Points of PC in 2013.³⁷ At the writing of this document, spring of 2020, on the website of progressivechristianity.org there is an updated version of the ever-progressing 8 Points of PC.

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue are the authors of *Biblical Doctrine*, an intense and exhaustive, encyclopedia like arrangement of biblical doctrine. The book opens with a discussion and explanation about theology, more precisely, systematic theology, and how it is applied to personal life as well as to public ministry. The book also includes prayers, poems, hymn lyrics, along with a generous source of bibliographical resources for on-going study. Its resource of charts for quick referencing is extensive and beneficial when a topic is being overviewed. *Biblical Doctrine* will provide this research with a systematic overview of doctrines of Scripture and will address the core concept of biblical authority.

³⁶ John MacArthur, *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, 9.

³⁷ Laura Desfor Edles, “Contemporary Progressive Christianity and Its Symbolic Ramifications,” *Cultural Sociology* 7, no. 1 (March 2013): 3–22. doi:10.1177/1749975512453659.

The Canon

Michael J. Kruger has written two profound books on the canon. First, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* is a tool that engages the familiar questions of the canon. Discussions regarding the canon are not new in contemporary theology. Kruger evaluates the questions of canon from different views, while offering contemporary language to draw conclusions regarding the ancient issue of canon. In five chapters, Kruger expounds upon five familiar canonical questions.

- 1) The Definition of Canon
“Must We Make a Sharp Distinction Between the Definitions of Canon and Scripture”?
- 2) The Origins of Canon
“Was There Really Nothing in Early Christianity That May Have Led to a Canon”?
- 3) The Writing of Canon
“Were Early Christians Averse to Written Documents”?
- 4) The Authors of Canon
“Were the New Testament Authors Unaware of Their Own Authority”?
- 5) The Date of Canon
“Were the New Testament Books First Regarded as Scripture at the End of the Second Century”?

Kruger’s additional work is *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Whereas *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* covers a broader debate, *Canon Revisited* focuses on origin and authority, mainly of the NT books. “No one has come up with a satisfactory solution as to how we determine which books should be in the canon,”³⁸ is a quote from Ernest Best, and is the opening statement of *Canon Revisited*.

³⁸ Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 15.

This book (*Canon Revisited*) is about a very specific problem confronting the Christian faith. It is certainly not a new problem (though there are plenty of those) but is perhaps one of the oldest. For the infant church, it was one of its earliest and most potent challenges. It continued to be a serious point of contention even during the time of the Reformation. And still today it endures as one of the perennial questions faced by any believer in our modern (and postmodern) age. It is what D. F. Strauss has called the “Achilles’ heel” of Protestant Christianity. It is what many still consider to be, as Herman Ridderbos has observed, the “hidden, dragging illness of the Church”. It is the problem of canon.

The problem of canon (at least as we are using the phrase here) refers to the fundamental question of how we, as Christians, can know that we have the right twenty-seven books in our New Testament.³⁹

The “problem” of canon is one with which CFI should be familiar, because in her audience are women who question the validity of the Word of God, “Yea, has God said?” The questions of canon are valid, and believers have to come to a conclusion within themselves as to whether or not the book called the Bible is what it says it is. *Canon Revisited* brings an awareness of the on-going historical debate over the canon.

Biblical Worship

The Truth War by John MacArthur is a work aimed at biblically responding to post-modern ideas in the battle for absolute moral truth. MacArthur introduces the book by profiling the Emergent Church and its leaders, stating how their unrest with the modern-day evangelical church has left them “uncomfortable with church”. From an article in *Christianity Today* magazine, MacArthur mentions Emergent Church leader Rob Bell and his wife Kristen as being among those who found themselves uncomfortable with church as they had come to know it.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kruger, 15.

⁴⁰ John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), ix-x.

In both *The Truth War*, and *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*, MacArthur lays out a defense for the Christian faith, mainly from Jude 1-5. MacArthur's argument is that truth is objective, which supports biblical authority, and the Christian's responsibility to stand firm in it. MacArthur also uses Barna research in observation of the spiritual formation of Americans in regard to the question of truth?⁴¹ Barna research will be used extensively in this research to show the status of NA spiritual formation.

The Jesus You Can't Ignore: What You Must Learn From the Bold Confrontations of Christ, by John MacArthur, surveys the entire public ministry of Jesus Christ.⁴² MacArthur states that the inspiration for writing *The Jesus You Can't Ignore* came as he was doing research for *The Truth War*, a study that dealt with the changing evangelical dispositions toward truth and certainty. MacArthur endeavored to discover the influences of postmodernism, doctrinal minimalism, and various Emergent trends⁴³ that were evolving among evangelicals. MacArthur says the authors he read were suggesting that Christians address other worldviews with "conversation, not conflict". MacArthur found that the common theme suggests that Christians who want to reach unbelievers in a postmodern world should be "less militant, less aggressive, less preachy, and less sure of our own convictions."⁴⁴

In his research, MacArthur also found suggestions that Christian corporate worship should replace sermons and biblical teaching from one person, with conversations from various viewpoints. MacArthur quotes one of the authors: "It's important to note that dialogue is not

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, xvi.

⁴² John MacArthur, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore. What You Must Learn From the Bold Confrontations of Christ*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008) vii.

⁴³ Ibid., ix

⁴⁴ Ibid., ix.

debate; for dialogue to be effective, we need to resist the urge to cut people off and fix what they say. Healthy dialogue involves entering into the reality of the other...In dialogue you are not allowed to stay right where you are; you must move toward the perspective of the other person.”⁴⁵

MacArthur responds with, “So much for verse 3 of Jude”.⁴⁶ It is from this vantage point that MacArthur builds a defense for contending for the faith by showing throughout the gospels how Jesus dealt with the postmodern and progressive philosophies of His day. *The Jesus You Can't Ignore* explores the pattern Jesus set for dealing with heresies, and informs the core concepts of biblical authority, the necessity of the born again experience, the discussion of exclusivity, and Christ's call to make disciples.

Extending the discussion of regeneration is John Piper's work, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We are Born Again*. Piper gives a biblical account of God's plan for redeeming mankind from the fallenness that is documented in Genesis 3. Beginning with the testimonies of St. Augustine and C. S. Lewis, Piper tells the soul-stirring message of the born-again experience. Piper also includes a statement regarding the data collected by the Barna organization and a bias it shows toward biblical regeneration. Barna statistics along with Piper's argument will be included in the discussion of regeneration in chapter four of this research. MacArthur and Mayhue will also weigh in on the biblical criteria of what it means to be born-again.

Jesus Christ, the One from whom Christians derive their identity, necessitates the born-again experience in John 3:7, “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’”. Regeneration is a strong biblical and decisive argument against PC and any

⁴⁵ John MacArthur, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*, xi.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

philosophy that positions itself alongside Jesus Christ but denies the new birth. *Finally Alive* teaches biblical truth about how God works in the heart of mankind, as the Author of Christian faith and worship. *Finally Alive* informs the process, the necessity, and the effects of the new birth.

Recalling the Hope of Glory is a masterful presentation of worship practices and their deep biblical meanings. The Bible states that there are both right and wrong ways to worship the Christian God. Ross' work accentuates the fallenness of humanity in the Garden of Eden, then tells the story of how humanity is restored to God, and thereby engages in true worship. Ross discusses the strength of the serpent's craftiness and the sovereignty of God, working together to unveil God's plan of revelation and redemption. In the foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), His plan of redemption would culminate in the Person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Christians therefore recognize and bear witness to the redeeming work of God in the soul. Redemption is not an attribute articulated in PC.

Ross' work also gives a thorough description of biblical worship. In the opening chapter, Ross explains the meaning of several biblical words for worship.⁴⁷ Within those definitions it can be seen that worship is not defined in musical terms, although music and musicianship are tools that ignite passionate expressions of worship. "The Bible itself does not give a comprehensive definition of worship; it simply describes things that people have done or should do when they receive the revealing words and works of God".⁴⁸

Worship: The Ultimate Priority is John MacArthur's guide for genuine biblical worship. MacArthur's work masterfully undergirds theological doctrine for worship. MacArthur and Ross

⁴⁷ Allen P Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006), 50-60.

⁴⁸ Ross, 50.

echo each other in terms of biblical truth regarding right and wrong ways of worshiping the God of the Bible. Both works give solid biblical theologies of worship, which is the ultimate priority of the Christian (Romans 4:11). *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* informs true spiritual formation and the biblical meaning of Christian worship.

The Doctrine of Scripture for Every Woman by Keri Folmer, is a practical guide to understand what the Scriptures are and how they function in the life of the believer. Every chapter title is a question that CW would ask in today's post-modern, PC influenced culture. Folmar offers biblical answers, along with historical support of biblical Christianity. Folmar also offers case studies that support the doctrines being discussed.

Folmar's voice blends well with MacArthur, Ross, and other theologians cited in this research. Folmar's comments will be used in sections referring to the doctrine of Scripture, methodological systems, and hermeneutical practices, along with case studies of how the principles prove true in the lives of true Christians. Folmar offers support for biblical authority, regeneration, Christian exclusivity, and the call to evangelism, which are key principles for CFI in their calling to lead CW.

SECTION II: Biblical and Historical Foundations of Worship

Walter A. Elwell's *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* is a key resource in understanding the tenets of biblical and historic Christianity. Portions of his articles are used throughout the research to strengthen the biblical response to PC. "Throughout its history, Christian orthodoxy has been forced to define itself in response to heretical teaching. During the second century, two movements-Gnosticism and Montanism forced the church to define its source of authority, by beginning the process of canonizing the books which comprise the New

Testament, a task which took more than a century.”⁴⁹ His historical timeline in the article on heresy is especially helpful when relating to progressive ideologies.

The article continues with an historical account of biblical heresy into the twentieth century. Elwell ends by saying, “Because Christianity’s historic truth claims rest on authoritative Scriptures that speak of the objective reality of God’s redemptive acts in history, especially Jesus Christ, objective revealed truth is an inherent Christ doctrine. Consequently, despite contemporary disparagement of the concrete, heresy represents the very real error of departure from that truth”.⁵⁰ Elwell’s dictionary is a valuable resource for CFI, and because it is encyclopedic in nature, covers a vast amount of information that would be helpful to CFI in preparation for ministry to CW.

The Oxford History of Christian Worship by Geoffrey Wainwright is an exhaustive look into Christian Worship throughout history. *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* traces Christian worship and its winding course and describes its varied manifestations in ways suited to the general reader as well as to historians, theologians, and scholars of religion in a much broader sense. The resource offers a global, trans-cultural timeline of Christian worship, from the Old Testament into the twenty-first century.

The first of thirty-four articles is written by Wainwright, “Christian Worship: Scriptural Basis and Theological Frame”. The overall message of Wainwright’s article is the necessity of understanding and believing in the Scriptures as authoritative and foundational to Christian worship. “In expounding the first commandment thus given to the people of God, Martin Luther in the Large Catechism proposed a pragmatic definition of divinity: “What your heart clings to

⁴⁹ Elwell, 549.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 550.

and trusts in, that is really your god”⁵¹ Quoting John Calvin, Wainwright states, “For His part, John Calvin observed in the *Institutes* that ‘just as waters boil up from a vast, full spring, so does an immense crowd of gods flow forth from the human mind,’ and these ‘specters’ take concrete form as ‘idols’ (1.5.12).⁵² That statement alone awakens the mind to the idolatry within PC when CFI are well informed of the formation of Christianity and Christian worship.

Wainwright also walks through the book of Romans, the constitution of the Christian faith, and offers it as foundational to true Christian worship. The article is basic, in-depth information that CFI should know rather early in their calling to lead God’s people into Christian worship. After the conclusion of each article, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* offers a generous bibliography and reference notes. The book is a resource of resources, offering a global, historical timeline of intensive discussions of worship through the ages.

Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal by Don P. Hustad is a history book about American evangelical music traditions over the past 300 years. This second edition contrasts the music and worship in the church with that of the American music in the concert hall, as well as the music in the church that some have grown up with and that which is being promoted today within the community of faith. CFI, musicians, songwriters, bloggers, podcasters, all seem to reflect on the musical component of Christian influence. Therefore, Hustad’s work becomes a needed commentary for historical and biblical precision regarding worship.

Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva by Karin Maag explores the worship practices within the Reformation period, specifically in

⁵¹ Geoffrey Wainwright, and Westerfield Tucker Karen B., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

Geneva, under the influence and direction of John Calvin. Because the period of the Protestant Reformation was a return to biblical authority, CFI would benefit richly by understanding the battle fought and won by brave men who contended for the faith. This book explores and expounds upon specific worship practices, sermons, prayers, church discipline and policy, giving the reader understanding of the shifting winds of worship during this time period.

The resource's primary focus is on worship practices in Geneva after the city had officially accepted the Reformation in 1536.⁵³ Maag offers CFI the opportunity to delve into a time period where Christian worship practices were different, but there was an overall consensus to worship God rightly.⁵⁴ CFI have the same calling and responsibility. Christianity is rooted in the Person Jesus Christ, and the Words He affirmed as authoritative, inspired, inerrant, clear, and sufficient.

Walking Where Jesus Walked by Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk and John D. Witvliet is a snapshot of worship during the fourth century, specifically in Jerusalem. Giving a basic understanding of the general practices of worship, *Walking Where Jesus Walked* is the story from a nun's journal as she visited and documented worship encounters within the city of Jerusalem.

Christian history, coupled with biblical truth, are tools that give CFI the greatest impact in ministry. *Walking Where Jesus Walked* is not necessarily critical to this research, yet more and more, CFI are engaging in touring ministries to the nation of Israel. *Walking Where Jesus Walked* can serve as a significant study guide before and during tours in the land of the Bible.

Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship by Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley is a historical snapshot of worldwide worship revivals.

⁵³ Karin, Maag, *Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Beginning with biblical worship, the authors develop a timeline of worship trends and practices that marked worldwide worship awakenings into the twenty-first century. CFI should know and have a resource of the history of worship and worship practices through the ages. Towns and Whaley offer exciting stories, charts, and timelines⁵⁵ that CFI can use to further their ministry to CW.

In *Called to Worship: From the Dawn of Creation to the Final Amen*, Vernon Whaley tells the biblical story of worship from eternity past to eternity future. Whaley systematically builds a biblical timeline of worship practices from Genesis to Revelation. Whaley's presentation offers CFI an opportunity to focus on the impact and influence of biblical leaders, coupled with an opportunity for personal application through the pedagogical component offered at the end of each chapter.

Section III: Progressive Christianity and Liberal Philosophy

Progressive Christianity is still a relatively new term that many if not most mainstream protestant Christians are not really aware of. Traces of PC appear in conservative congregations when the language of the spiritual leaders turns away from declaring biblical truth, to embracing the culture and the idea of inclusivism becomes dominant. Christian beliefs that were once held as objective truths are now being dismantled in open platforms of persuasive speech. The 8 Points of PC position the Scriptures as a subjective social message opposed to the objective redemptive message that it claims to be. In his most recent books that confront postmodernism, John MacArthur does not name PC specifically, but does mention post-modern and liberal theologies. The resources in this section provide more information regarding the development of

⁵⁵ Towns, and Whaley, 375-382.

PC and the impact progressive and liberal philosophies are having on a post-modern American Christian culture.

Historical Developments of PC

Three books by Gary Dorrien trace liberal theology in American culture from 1805-2005:

- 1) *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imaging Progressive Religion 1805-1900*
- 2) *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900-1950*
- 3) *The Making of American Theology: Crisis, Irony and Postmodernity, 1950-2005.*

Dorrien's trilogy contains an exhaustive historical timeline of the rise, impact, and influences of liberal theology, which is the seedbed for PC. Dorrien's work supports the history of PC as well as the foundation of many of its beliefs and sentiments today. Therefore, Dorrien's materials will be used to inform the background of PC and support "Philosophical Implications of PC and Contemporary Cultural Influences" in chapter four.

"Shifting the Sacred: Rob Bell and the Postconservative Evangelical Turn", by Robin D. Willey, is an article predominantly about Rob Bell and his impact on the Emergent church. Though the article takes a deep sociological dive, this research will focus on Bell and his impact on the Emergent Church Movement. Willey's article is supportive of narratives that show the influence of liberal theology on the Emergent Church movement, and on to the more recent progressive Christianity movement.

Laura Desfor Edles' article, "Contemporary Progressive Christianity and Its Symbolic Ramifications", surveys the impact of PC in the American public sphere. In spite of PC's growing influence through websites, books, and theologians, according to Edles, their influence

is limited at best. Edles argues that the structural disadvantages leave progressives in a dilemma regarding biblical authority, rationalization, mysticism, enchantment, charisma, and heretical doctrine.⁵⁶ Though the issues are not insurmountable, they are at best not easily resolved.

Edles says, “Contemporary Progressive Christianity is best understood as a continuum between two ideal types (see Figure 1). At one end is what I call ‘self-proclaimed progressive Christians’. These folks pointedly embrace the term ‘progressive’ and define themselves in opposition to the religious right, as the following statement from the website of the organization Progressive Christians Uniting makes clear.”⁵⁷ Edles work is more recent than Dorrien’s; yet supports the fact that though the progressive moment has anticipated a much greater impact, its influence is held at bay mainly by those who hold to a biblical interpretation of Christian.

An article by Barbara Immroth and W. Bernard Lukenbill, “Marcus Borg’s Emerging Paradigm for Christianity: The Interplay of GLBT Readers, Religious Text, and Social Environment” is a report on the results of a survey that a Christian church participated in while reading Marcus Borg’s book, “The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith.” Borg argues that traditional American Christianity should align more with Progressive Christianity. One of ten groups, from this church that is largely GLBT, reacted positively to accepting higher levels of social constructionism. The other nine groups reacted negatively.

In “Scholar Marcus Borg, in *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, Immroth and Lukenbill articulate Borg’s proposal to a new paradigm for Christianity in North America (NA). It is a paradigm that requires traditions, beliefs, and behaviors inherited from older paradigms to be replaced with different understandings and practices of Christianity,

⁵⁶ Edles.

⁵⁷ Edles.

especially in NA” (Page 88).⁵⁸ Within the theories of progressivism the age-old question of the validity and authority of the Word of God continues. According to Immroth and Lukenbill, for the progressive, the Word of God is not enough -- there must be a different set of beliefs established and Christianity would do well to incorporate the distinct adjective “progressive.”⁵⁹

Kevin McCaffree’s article, “When Secularism: Becomes a Religion: The Alt-Left, the Alt-Right, and Moral Righteousness” overviews the ideologies of groups he calls the Alt-Left and Alt-Right in secular communities in American society. His article underscores the historical panorama of the secular movement in America. It also heavily emphasizes the social impact of secularism, statistically measured. His overall outlook toward community between these two groups is grim.

McCaffree’s report can be compared alongside other statistical material showing the decline in American spirituality. The Bible offers a concrete solution to the lack of spiritual formation in the truthfulness of its authoritativeness, the born-again experience, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, and the commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples. This information will help CFI understand the need for objective biblical truth, opposed to a “feel good,” inoffensive message for CW.

Gresham Machen was a theologian in the early 19th century who wrote about the tensions between Christianity and other religions. In *Christianity & Liberalism*, Machen elaborates on foundational doctrines of historic Christianity in comparison to non-doctrinal religion. This

⁵⁸ Barbara Immroth, and W. Bernard Lukenbill. “Marcus Borg’s Emerging Paradigm for Christianity: The Interplay of GLBT Readers, Religious Text, and Social Environment.” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 13, no. 3-4, 2014.

⁵⁹ Immroth.

research is not focused on liberalism, but because liberalism is the soil in which progressivism is rooted, some of Machen's comments are worth noting.

Machen refers to the Protestant Reformation with a wishful anticipation of another Reformation. Perhaps that reformation is now, with the exhaustive amounts of biblical truth being globally absorbed through the vehicle of Internet services. Like the 16th century Protestant Reformation, ministries with a widespread global presence are calling for a return to the Doctrine of Scripture and are leading the theological discussion back to biblical truth.

In *Christianity in Conflict* Machen gives his personal observation of the question, "How it is that a number of persons have been led to resist the current of the age and to hold with mind and heart to that religion of supernatural redemption which has always hitherto been known as Christianity".⁶⁰ Machen boldly and quickly responds, "I am a believer in the truth of the Bible and an adherent of the redemptive religion which the Bible presents."⁶¹ Having a case study of Machen's Christian faith, adds a greater depth of appreciation for his research on liberal theology.

The perfect follow up to Machen is Michael J. Krueger's *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity*. Krueger says he noticed the lingering impact of liberal Christianity when he heard a devotional series by Richard Rohr, who listed ten principles he thought should embody modern-day Christianity. Krueger notes that the principles were actually adapted from Philip Gulley's book, *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Value of Jesus*. The devotional was entitled "Returning to Essentials", and according to Krueger, included a list of

⁶⁰ Machen, *Christianity In Conflict*, 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

ten confessional statements of modern liberalism. Krueger says, “they are, in effect, a Ten Commandments of PC”.

“Progressive Christianity Is Christianity” by John Pavlovitz is a blog expressing his view of PC, God, and the Bible. Pavlovitz’s blog will be used as a case study that gives a personal, subjective view of PC.

Section IV: Statistical Data and Biblical Worldview

In 2006 Josh McDowell published *The Last Christian Generation*. In it, McDowell shared startling statistics showing the lack of spiritual formation and biblical knowledge held by Americans who say they are Christians. These early findings reported that the vast majority of Americans who claim to be Christian do not hold a biblical worldview. Research at Barna.org and Pew Research show very similar results. The most recent statistical data regarding a biblical worldview in America shows that fewer now than over the past decade hold to a biblical worldview.⁶²

In 2010, Christian women’s ministries began to hear the claims of Rachel Held Evans and other CFI who held a progressive approach to Christianity. Before passing away in 2019, Evans had a very strong impact on CW. Yet biblically minded males and females have spoken out against the progressive position held by certain CFI. Therefore, the resources in this section inform the statistical data that shows the potential impact that progressive ideologies have had on contemporary NA Christian culture.

⁶² George Barna, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago,” George Barna, [georgebarna.com](https://www.georgebarna.com), (October, 18, 2018), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.georgebarna.com/research/7622/survey-reveals-that-fewer-adults-have-a-biblical-worldview-now-than-two-years-ago>.

Statistical Data

There are several reports from Barna.org that will inform Philosophical Implications of a Biblical Worldview section in Chapter Four. The Barna.org reports include, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago,” “The End of Absolutes: America’s New Moral Code”, “Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years”, and “Barna: How Many Have A Biblical Worldview?” George Barna’s report “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago”, from March 2018 gives an updated report regarding spiritual formation in NA culture. Barna’s report “Barna: How Many Have a Biblical Worldview?” was first published in 1995, again in 2000 and in 2005.⁶³ The most current data shows a drop in the number of Americans who hold a biblical worldview.⁶⁴

Josh McDowell also offers extensive statistical research in his book *The Last Christian Generation*. Ed Stetzer reports on biblical illiteracy in his blog “The Epic of Biblical Illiteracy in Our Churches”. The research in this project contains reports from Pew Research with findings on the religious landscape in NA culture. Therefore, the research in this section is designed to help CFI recognize and improve on the problem of declining spiritual formation and unacceptable worship by being aware of the statistical data and upholding the responsibility to thoroughly and clearly speak biblical truth.

⁶³ Ed Stetzer, “Barna: How Many Have a Biblical Worldview?” *Christianity Today*, The Exchange with Ed Stetzer, (March 9, 2009), accessed August 9, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/march/barna-how-many-have-biblical-worldview.html>

⁶⁴ Barna, George. “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago.” George Barna. Georgebarna.com. (Oct. 18, 2018). Accessed August 9, 2019. <http://www.georgebarna.com/research-flow/2018/10/17/survey-reveals-that-fewer-adults-have-a-biblical-worldview-now-than-two-years-ago>.

Section V: Evangelism and Public Leadership

Not only do CFI serve in various full-time and part-time ministries, CFI can also be found in every occupation, and their influence as a Christian is always required of them. Therefore CFI should maintain a biblical worldview, bringing the Christian message of life and hope to the workplace. Paula White is a CFI currently serving President Donald Trump as leader of his faith initiative. She has the responsibility to speak what is true to the President of the United States, and to the people of faith who support him.

There are CFI who work for large corporations and have very large platforms for public influence, while others serve in smaller spheres of influence. Nevertheless, be it sacred or secular, CFI have the moral responsibility of living out Christian principles and speaking truth through the way they live and through the way they serve around others.

CFI in Christian ministry are usually public speakers and authors, as well as worship leaders, songwriters, bloggers, Podcasters and more. Therefore, the resources in this section will inform CFI of how to keep the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ clear and vibrant in different venues of ministry and public service.

Sacred Ministry

In *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song*, Constance Cherry gives in-depth support to the CFI who are worship leaders in the discipline of choosing and presenting the proper songs in the proper way, in any given worship environment. Cherry's observations inform CFI who are involved in worship planning, and worship ministry.

Another work by Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* offers detailed design principles for worship, from securing a

firm biblical and spiritual foundation, to effective presentation and relational transformation. Cherry's work supports a biblical, methodological approach to corporate worship.

Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship by Hughes Oliphant Old is a collection and historical discussion of written prayers. *Leading in Prayer* can be used as a guide or historical case study showing worship leaders the effectualness of leading worship with congregational prayer. Though this resource is directed more toward CFI who lead congregationally from the platform, it is a workbook for worship, with history, readings, and principles of worship that apply to every area of Christian influence. Old also offers a litany of worship expressions the CFI can incorporate in her ministry, blogs, Podcasts, throughout the church calendar year.

Two resources provide excellent information regarding leadership toward worship ensembles. Tom Lane's book, *The Worship Band Book: Training and Empowering Your Worship* delivers a holistic approach to the art of leading and serving in a worship band. Lane's work provides theological, philosophical, methodological, even historical support for worship band members, and worship ensembles in general.

In *God's Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century*, Dave Williamson mentors choir leaders with instructional principles for worship regarding God's purpose for choirs, singers, and singing. Relevant to this research is Williamson's discussion showing the required spiritual formation for priests and those who lead in temple worship. The NT says that Christians are the new priesthood (1Pet. 2:9), and holiness is required in the life of Christians today. CFI in all occupations will benefit from the principles of spiritual formation Williamson addresses.

Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions is John Piper's noted work regarding the relationship between missions and worship. "Missions is not the ultimate goal of

the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man."⁶⁵ Every CFI is on mission for God and Piper's work will remind CFI of the authority of Scripture, while emphasizing the responsibility of speaking the Word of God thoroughly and with clarity.

In *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism*, Dave Wheeler and Dr. Vernon Whaley unpack five missions of Great Commission worship: Formational, Transformational, Relational, Missional, Reproducible. Wheeler and Whaley inform the research with the CFI's responsibility toward the Commission of Christ. *The Great Commission to Worship* and Piper's *Let the Nations Be Glad* give a well-rounded view of how CFI can use their influence to bring CW into what John MacArthur calls, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*.

Secular Ministry

Steven Covey's *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*, is written to a secular market, but the principles he uses can be found in the objective truth that the biblical narrative speaks of. In *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*, Covey provides a thorough and intense discussion and guide, filled with practical principles that help CFI in the skills of building trust, building teams, and building relationships.

Mentoring 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know, is John C. Maxwell's philosophical guide to leaders who are ready to make mentoring precise and intentional. Maxwell's work is used to help establish guidelines for effective leadership and mentoring at any and all levels. Maxwell's *How Successful People Lead* establishes five levels of leadership, beginning with position, and increasing in influence through permission, productivity, people development, and

⁶⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, Third Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.

pinnacle. Maxwell gives practical advice as to how leaders can move from the lowest level of leadership to the highest by properly cultivating relationships along the way. CFI in all areas of influence will find Maxwell's work highly beneficial.

Section VI: Spiritual Formation and Worship

Spiritual formation is the on-going process by which CW should be engaged in as they follow the leadership of CFI. The research exposes empirical data regarding the current state of spiritual formation in NA. Therefore, the resources in this section inform CFI of how to encourage spiritual formation in the hearts of those who follow her influence.

Spiritual Formation

In *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship*, Rory Noland writes as a mentor to worship teams through common scenarios that all teams experience, at one time or another. *The Worshiping Artist* can be used as a weekly devotional reading, talking points in a blog or Podcast, in any secular or sacred atmosphere. The principles for spiritual formation are practical and easily adapted to spiritual life and practice.

Speaking with much experience, and from a pastor's heart, in *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*, Bob Kauflin's practical guide, in short concise chapters, remind CFI of the things that really matter in worship. *Worship Matters* is designed to focus CFI on worship practices that make for great worship, and to let go of everything that distracts from living for the glory and the greatness of God. Though Kauflin speaks in the context of congregational worship, the principles for worship he offers benefits CFI in both sacred and secular venues.

Two volumes from Dr. Robert Morgan offer practical biblical directives for spiritual formation. In *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation*, Morgan provides a ten-day guide to biblical meditation. Emphasizing the need to cultivate and practice the art of biblical meditation, throughout the book, Morgan gives practical measures by which biblical meditation can be established in personal worship. Meditation should be a part of every CFI's life, and perhaps personal convictions will lead her to encourage her followers to cultivate the same discipline.

The Kneeling Christian by an unknown Christian address the power of prevailing prayer. The unknown Christian exhorts that the greatest power humankind has, is the power of prevailing prayer. The resource informs CFI regarding Christ's commission to make disciples through the Christian discipline of prayer.

The Knowledge of the Holy, by A.W. Tozer was published in 1961 as a response to the growing philosophy of modernism, which was sweeping across NA. Secular, pagan, and low views of God began to infiltrate the hearts and minds of those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. Tozer says that the low view of God equates with idolatry. Idolatry imagines things about God and responds as if they were true. Therefore, the first "step down" for a believer is his surrender of his high view of God.⁶⁶ *The Knowledge of the Holy* is Tozer's classic on the attributes of God, helpful to CFI in a growing knowledge of God and His divine ways.

Hermeneutics

Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible, by J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays is an instructional workbook that helps the worship leader or CFI evaluate Scripture and interpret it with systematic integrity. *Grasping God's Word* is

⁶⁶ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York, New York: HarperOne, 1961), 4.

a hermeneutical tool that will help CFI know how to study and apply the Word of God, from its original context to the context of contemporary culture. The research informs methodological systems and hermeneutical practices in Section I of Chapter Four.

Section VII: Christian Apologetics

In *The Beauty of Intolerance: Setting a Generation Free to Know Truth and Love*, McDowell and McDowell take a tough stand against social tolerance. The McDowell's gently impose the message of the gospel, showing the beauty of intolerance and the power of the gospel in setting a generation and culture free from the ideologies that contradict biblical truth.

The Unbelievable Gospel by Jonathan K. Dodson, calls believers to know and to think. Dodson gives graphic illustrations showing the impact of transitional conversations and relationships with people who have not professed personal faith in Jesus Christ. The work also offers biblical strategies and suggestions that can help CFI emit the gospel of Jesus Christ in a progressive, post-modern culture. *Defending Your Faith* by Dan Story is also an apologetic approach to sharing the scriptures in a post-modern culture. Each chapter is a strong biblical defense for pertinent theological questions that engage teens and millennials.

Dallas Willard challenges believers to develop the discipline of Christian apologetics. In his work *The Allure of Gentleness: Defending the Faith in the Manner of Jesus*, Willard encourages a deep knowledge of Scripture, so that the believer can embrace a deductive hermeneutic when interpreting what the text means or does not mean. Willard encourages believers to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within them, and to do so with gentleness and meekness as commanded and modeled in the biblical narrative.

The Church in an Age of Crisis: 25 New Realities Facing Christianity is James E. White's analysis of transitions in belief in contemporary culture that have brought about biblical

abandonment in the modern-day church. *The Church in an Age of Crisis* exposes modern-day cultural shifts in faith, and missions, while making the appeal to glorify the Lord in personal belief and character, as well as in proclamation from the platform.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

In 1995 Barna began reporting on how many Americans held a biblical worldview. The study was repeated in the years 2000 and 2005. When asked if the percentages had dropped or increased over the years, Barna reported in 2009 that the numbers were fairly the same.⁶⁷ From 1995 to 2005 Barna reported that only 9% of all Americans have a biblical worldview. And of those professing to be born-again, only less than one out of every five, (19%) held such claims. A more recent report from the Barna organization shows that fewer adults now have a biblical worldview than were reported two years prior.⁶⁸

In 2007 some CFI began to speak out and publish materials that challenged the tenets of biblical Christianity and began to share a progressive message that went beyond the limitations of the biblical narrative. Leading authors include, but are not limited to, the late Rachel Held Evans, Rachel Hollis, and Jen Hatmaker. Each is a bestselling author with the *New York Times* and collectively have sold millions of books. Each also have very large followings in social networks. It is therefore critical that CW, and CFI understand the difference between the message of these and other progressive authors and the message of the text of Scripture. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative historical study is to analyze the historical data of spiritual formation in America from 2010 to 2020 and compare it with the insurgence of PC during that same time.

⁶⁷ Ed Stetzer, “Barna: How Many Have a Biblical Worldview?”

⁶⁸ George Barna, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago,”

Design

This qualitative historical study will analyze the existing literature pertaining to American spiritual formation and percentage of Americans who hold a biblical worldview, between 2010 and 2020. Because there is little data regarding the direct result of PC on CW, the data (and case studies) regarding declining Christianity in America and worldviews that compete with Christianity⁶⁹ will be used to show the biblical responsibility of CFI in response to the rise of PC in American society. The study will use Christ's commission (Matt. 28:19-20) as a methodological guide for teaching core Christian belief that refute the claims of PC.

Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions for this study are:

Q1: What are the most significant biblical doctrines, principles, and methodology needed for CFI to lead Christian women (CW) in true biblical worship and spiritual formation?

Q2: What are the critical cultural challenges currently facing CFI in teaching, worship, and discipleship ministries?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The primary responsibility of CFI toward CW in response to PC is to follow the commission of Jesus Christ in teaching the principles of regeneration, the exclusivity Jesus Christ in salvation, biblical authority, evangelism, and inductive hermeneutical methodologies.

Hypothesis 2: The ideologies of PC, which are influencing Christian women, are primarily in terms of relativism, pluralism, and cultural tolerance.

⁶⁹Jeff Meyers and David A. Nobel, *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2015), 12-14.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses the account from Genesis chapter three concerning biblical validity as experienced in the Garden of Eden. The chapter then presents the findings of the two research questions. The first research question was, “What are the most significant biblical doctrines, principles, and methodology needed for CFI to lead Christian women (CW) in true biblical worship and spiritual formation?” The second research question was, “What are the critical cultural challenges currently facing CFI in teaching, worship, and discipleship ministries?” The author has also noted that the abbreviations CFI and CW are not an indication of all CFI nor all CW. The abbreviations only apply to CFI and CW who engage in the activity of the given discussion.

Progressivism in the Garden

The battle over the validity of the Word of God began in the Garden of Eden when the serpent asked the woman, “Indeed, has God said,…” (Gen. 3:1).

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”⁴ The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die!⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings (Gen. 3:1-5).

In Genesis 2:16-17, God commanded the man saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die”. In chapter three the serpent appears to the woman and delivers the first question in the biblical narrative, a question that not only tested the woman’s knowledge of the Word of God, but one that also challenged the authority of the Word of God. “Indeed has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’ (Gen. 3:1)? This first question “introduces the first dilemma in human history”.⁷⁰ Though the question seems innocent enough, it was not a question only about eating from a tree, the question was about the character of God, and the extent of the truthfulness of His Word.

The serpent’s question caused the woman to have to think about God. A. W. Tozer says, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us”.⁷¹ The woman’s response indicated that she had been exposed to the Word of God, but that she did not fully believe she nor the man would surely die, but rather, perhaps they would die.

Like modern day progressivism, the mishandling of the Word of God led to an interpretation that progressed beyond the absolute boundary of what God had said. After hearing her response, this most crafty of all the beasts of the field said to the woman, “You surely will not die!”

This woman who had walked in pure worship and fellowship with God all her life, had come face to face with the great deceiver who intentionally caused her to doubt the Word of God and the character of God.

The knowledge of good and evil belonged to God. ... Eating from this tree, the appeal ran, would bring a special kind of knowledge, a knowledge that was the

⁷⁰ John MacArthur, *Final Word*, 4.

⁷¹ A. W. Tozer, 3.

prerogative of divinity.⁷² Such knowledge would bring power over life, the kind of power God has; in short, the temptation was to obtain the wisdom of God (cf. Gen. 3:6, Job 15:7-9; 40; Prov. 30:1-4). To try to wrest divine knowledge from God, or more specifically, in defiance of God, is to try to assert spiritual autonomy.”⁷³

The serpent convinced Eve that God is selfish and controlling, limiting them in their freedom (Rev. 2:16) to enjoy the garden, limiting them in knowing all that God knows. The same principles are found in progressivism today, as progressives renounce the authority of Scripture and its claim of being absolute moral truth. Where God says yes, progressives say no. Where God says no, progressives say yes.

Furthermore, in the Garden, not only did the serpent influence the woman’s thoughts about God, he also appealed to her affections toward God. Again, PC appeals to the affections of the worshiper and asks the same questions but in a different form. Progressives ask why a loving God would not accept all people as His worshipers, regardless of their spiritual associations, and why does a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people. This is the great deception.

From there, progressives deconstruct the biblical narrative and apply their own personal, ever-progressing interpretations, until they are convinced that the Scriptures mean what they want them to mean. The serpent of Genesis 3, the first deconstructor of truth, was all too familiar with the character of God, for it was he who had been thrown out of heaven because of his desire to be equal with God (Ez. 28:14-17).

Many progressives at one time professed to be Christians according the tenets of biblical Christianity. Many were leaders in mainline Christian organizations. Yet, these once biblically minded people somehow began to listen to and believe a lie. Many have left the objective truths

⁷² Ross, 102.

⁷³ Ibid.

of the Christian faith and are professing extraneous interpretations of a narrative that can be clearly understood. Yet, philosophical reasoning is no surprise to God. Since He is sovereign, He was in complete control over the event in the garden. He allowed it to happen, just as He allows progressives today, many times, to comprehend His Word, and violently reject it.

Biblical Implications of True Worship

In order to guide Christian women into true worship, and away from PC, it is necessary that CFI clearly articulate biblical truth. Through exploration of existing literature, perspectives on regeneration,⁷⁴ the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation,⁷⁵ biblical authority,⁷⁶ and evangelism⁷⁷ have emerged as primary Christian beliefs that refute dominating progressive beliefs. In 2015, LifeWay Research and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), saw the need to have a unifying definition of evangelical so that research naming evangelicals would have more accuracy and consistency. The newly crafted definition contains four statements that responders to research must strongly agree on in order to identify as an evangelical.

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ John Piper.

⁷⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity in Conflict*.

⁷⁶ John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue.

⁷⁷ David Wheeler, and Vernon M. Whaley.

⁷⁸ LifeWay Research, "NAE, LifeWay Research Publish Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition," LifeWay Research, lifewayresearch.com, (November 19, 2015), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/11/19/nae-lifeway-research-publish-evangelical-beliefs-research-definition/>.

Though this research is not designed to compare and contrast evangelical belief with progressive beliefs, the definition of evangelical is established in the tenets of the biblical narrative and are representative of the core concepts presented in this research. Regeneration is the lead principle, for without it, there is no Christian formation. The regenerated heart is given power to believe in Jesus Christ, and to believe what the Scriptures say about Him. Thus the principles of the authority of the Scriptures, the exclusive claim that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, and the command to evangelize the world, become the key principles for spiritual life for CW. These four concepts are discussed in Section I of Chapter IV of this research.

Section I: BIBLICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL WORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Research Question 1: What are the most significant biblical doctrines, principles, and methodology needed for CFI to lead (CW) in true biblical worship and spiritual formation?

Hypothesis 1: The primary responsibility of CFI toward CW in response to PC is to follow the commission of Jesus Christ in teaching the principles of regeneration, the exclusivity Jesus Christ in salvation, biblical authority, evangelism, and hermeneutical methodologies.

The Commission of Christ

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave one final commission to His disciples. Matthew 28:18-20 is well-known as the Great Commission.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

“All authority” refers to Jesus’ sovereign authority and Lordship over all things in heaven and on earth. John Piper notes that not only has all authority been given to Jesus, He actually uses that authority and rules the universe. A man rules over world affairs, the God-man, Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

“When people get a handle on the absolute total authority of Jesus Christ over His world and over His mission they are released to be the most radical, dangerous, wonderful, loving, sacrificial, soul-winning, mission advancing, justice upholding people in the world”.⁸⁰

“Therefore” asserts Christ’s authority. Christ delegated His authority, and that authority was licensed in His Word.⁸¹ The verb “make disciples” is the only imperative in the passage. The other verbs, go, baptize, and teach are subordinate participles that take imperative force.⁸² Jesus clarified that the disciples were to “teach them to observe,” some translations say, “teach them to obey.” The disciples were commanded to teach the nations to obey “all that I have commanded you.” This directive left no room for selective Scripture or topics of teaching; all of Jesus’ words were to be proclaimed and obeyed, and none were to be denied or ignored. Núñez acknowledges a statement from Daniel Doriani, who makes a poignant observation of the word “all”. Doriani notes: “The Greek expression that is translated ‘everything’ [“all”] is actually two terms. One

⁷⁹ Worship Hymns, “All Authority on Earth, John Piper Sermon, Christian Revival, Bible Teaching”, October 30, 2017, video, 49:39, <https://youtu.be/SF7nh3fjgF8>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016) Kindle Location 7778, Essay by Miguel Núñez, “All That I Have Commanded: Inerrancy and the Great Commission”.

⁸² Ibid.

means ‘all things’ and the other means ‘as much as.’ The effect is to intensify the command. We must teach potential disciples to obey every last thing Jesus said”.⁸³

Jesus’ call to global missions included the methodological directive of teaching within the boundaries of His commands in order that the nations would become completely committed to Him and His Lordship.⁸⁴ “Christians are responsible to proclaim the truths the Bible makes clear”.⁸⁵ Therefore, Christ’s commission is the foundational principle from which CFI should teach CW regarding true biblical worship and spiritual formation.

Regeneration

Regeneration, also called the new birth, is a primary doctrine, which CFI should know and refer to when leading CW in true biblical worship and spiritual formation. The new birth is the primary Christian distinctive, which provides faith to believe in Jesus and the claims of Scripture. The indwelling of the Spirit of God happens during regeneration (Ez. 36:25-27). The indwelling of God’s Spirit within those who believe in Jesus, is the distinct quality and separateness which justifies the title, Christian.⁸⁶ Theologians also use the term regeneration⁸⁷ when referring to the born again occurrence. Born again people and regenerate people are the

⁸³ John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016) Kindle Location 7926-7931, Essay by Miguel Núñez, “All That I Have Commanded: Inerrancy and the Great Commission”.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Idea Pump, “Is the Exclusivity of Jesus Unjust”, October 31, 2013, video, 49:49, <https://youtu.be/nRWtUTrxYAs>.

⁸⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, 360.

⁸⁷ John Piper, *Finally Alive*, 48.

same.⁸⁸ Therefore, in this research the terms born again, new birth, and regeneration will be used interchangeably.

The Necessity of the New Birth

In John 3:1-7 Jesus speaks of the new birth in a discourse with a Jewish Pharisee named Nicodemus.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;
² this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

³ Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus was a “ruler of the Jews,” a member of the Sanhedrin, a powerful ruling body over the Jewish nation. Nicodemus would have heard Jesus’ claims, and would have seen His miracles.⁸⁹ A Pharisee would have understood salvation to be something earned by good works. Pharisees were “hyperlegalists” who externalized religion: they epitomized the pursuit of righteousness but denied its power (2 Tim. 3:5). The Pharisees held to more than six hundred laws that progressed beyond the laws of Moses and were so enamored with religion and with the law, that when Jesus offered salvation through grace to the vilest sinner, the Pharisees rejected

⁸⁸ Piper, 16.

⁸⁹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 53.

Him. Nicodemus could have expected Jesus to commend him for his strict keeping of the Law, but instead, Jesus confronted the futility of his religion.⁹⁰

Nicodemus initiated the conversation with a statement of faith that indicated he had not received saving faith in Jesus Christ.⁹¹ Jesus seemingly ignored Nicodemus' recognition that God was with Him and responded to Nicodemus with a statement that revealed His omniscience and also reached the heart of Nicodemus' true identity.⁹² Three times in seven verses Jesus emphasized the necessity of the new birth.

Jesus described the new birth as a mysterious work of the Spirit, much like the coming and going of the wind (Jn. 3:8). He said without this supernatural work of the Spirit, one could not “see the kingdom of heaven” (Jn. 3:7).

This is exactly what the Thessalonians experienced. The people “received the word of God . . . [and] accepted it not as the word of men [merely] but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13). How so? Because the “gospel came . . . not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1:5). The joint testimony of the Spirit with the Word reaches into the hearts of hearers/readers with the result that they are enabled to *see the kingdom* (italics for emphasis) although they have been blind, and to hear the voice of Christ although they have been deaf.⁹³

Thus, the new birth is a necessary work of the Spirit causing spiritually blind eyes and spiritually deaf ears to hear the Word of God, the Words of Jesus, and spiritually see the kingdom of God.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

⁹¹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 52.

⁹² Ibid., 53.

⁹³ MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, (Kindle Locations 5646-5647).

The Work of God in Regeneration

Nicodemus picked up on Jesus' symbolism and rabbinical language of using figures of speech to teach spiritual truth, and asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (Jn. 3:4)? Nicodemus was asking, "How can a man be born again."⁹⁴

Jesus was demanding that Nicodemus forsake everything he stood for, and Nicodemus, knew it. Far from offering this man an easy conversion, Christ was challenging him with the most difficult demand He could make. Nicodemus would gladly have given money, fasted, or performed any ritual Jesus could have prescribed. But to call him to a spiritual rebirth was asking him to acknowledge his own insufficiency and turn away from everything he was committed to.⁹⁵

Nicodemus could have understood the symbolism from Ezekiel 36:25-27, an OT articulation of the new covenant and the promise of God to give a new heart.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ez. 36:35-37).

Note the spiritual work of God to cleanse from all filthiness and from all idols, to give a new heart and put a new spirit within, to remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, to put My Spirit within you, to cause you to walk in My statutes. This is the OT promise of regeneration by water and by the Spirit.⁹⁶

In her book *Inspired*, Rachel Held Evans, (RHE) writes,

The more I learned about Scripture, they said, the more confident I would grow in my faith and the better I would be at answering the world's questions. But their

⁹⁴ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 54.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

assurances, however sincerely intended, proved empty when, as a young adult, I started asking those questions for myself. Positions I'd been told were clearly "biblical"—young earth creationism, restrictions on women's roles in the home and church, the certainty of hell for all nonbelievers—grew muddier in the midst of lived experience, and the more time I spent seeking clarity from Scripture, the more problems I uncovered.⁹⁷

Unfortunately "they" in RHE's life were incorrect. The Scriptures teach that the born-again experience is necessary for one to see and understand the Christian message, not religious practices, not even reading and studying the Bible (Jn. 5:39-40). "Marvel not that I say to you, you must be born again" (Jn. 3:7).

Jesus confronted Nicodemus' fallenness and thereby his failure to recognize who Jesus actually was. "The declaration of Jesus that we must be born again (John 3:7) is either deluded or devastating to the one who would be captain of his soul."⁹⁸ Jesus wanted this Pharisee to know that outward religion, baptism included, do not lead to eternal life.⁹⁹ The work of God alone is necessary in order for one to see the kingdom of God.

Religious fakes were no surprise to Jesus. He prepared his most stinging words for them. They do not contradict the new birth. They confirm it. What could possibly change a "brood of vipers": (Matt. 12:34)? Reformation is not what vipers need. They need regeneration. Religious fraud does not make the new birth nonsense; it makes it necessary.¹⁰⁰

The new birth is a necessary qualification for future glorification in the eternal kingdom of God.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Evans, Rachel Held. *Inspired* (series title) (pp. xvi-xvii). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁹⁸ Piper, 9.

⁹⁹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Piper, 191.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

The Effects of the New Birth

Both Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-14) and Ezekiel (Ez. 36:25-27) prophesied regeneration through the new covenant. The covenant promised a new heart “of flesh” that would be able to sense the work of God. It also promised the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and God’s power to walk in His statutes. Ephesians 2:1-9 describes regeneration with the language of passing from death to life.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2: 1-9).

Twice Paul tells the believers that they were dead in trespasses and sins. In verse four, Paul speaks of the grace of God being extended toward them, causing them to become alive together with Christ. “But however it be manifested, the beginning of the Christian life is an act of God. It is an act of God and not an act of man”.¹⁰² Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing *be* upon Your people! (Ps. 3:8). My soul *waits* in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation (Ps. 62:1). “Salvation is from the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

Many ask, “What is the gift of God?” (Eph. 2:8) B. F. Westcott calls the gift “the saving energy of faith.”¹⁰³ Though there are many discussions about the grammatical structure of this

¹⁰² Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 119.

¹⁰³ B. F. Westcott, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, n.d., reprint of 1906 volume), 32.

text, the phrase “that not of yourselves” has no clear antecedent. The word “that” in the Greek is neuter and the word “faith” is feminine. Taken in context of the entire paragraph, the good news is God intervened and awakened those who were spiritually dead through the gracious gift of salvation, of which faith is an integral part. Therefore, this is faith that God imparts so that the spiritually dead can believe in Jesus and grow in a personal, spiritual relationship with Him.¹⁰⁴

The Gift of Faith

The Bible states that faith is not conjured up from a dead human spirit. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him: (John 6:44). “No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (v.65). Acts 3:16 speaks of “faith which comes through Him”. “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake... to believe in Him” (Phil. 1:29). Also, Peter wrote to Christian brethren as “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours”.¹⁰⁵

The Scriptures say that left to self, no one would ever believe. “There is none who understand, there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:11). “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Romans 9:16). “God draws the sinner to Christ and gives the ability to believe. Without that divinely generated faith, one cannot understand and approach the Savior.”¹⁰⁶ “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised: (1 Cor. 2:14). Thus Jesus confirmed Peter’s faith, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona,

¹⁰⁴ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 189.

because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17).

Faith is a gracious gift given by God during the divine act of regeneration.¹⁰⁷

But how is the redeeming work of Christ applied to the individual Christian man? The answer in the New Testament is plain. According to the New Testament the work of Christ is applied to the individual Christian man by the Holy Spirit. And this work of the Holy Spirit is part of the creative work of God. It is not accomplished by the ordinary use of means; it is not accomplished merely by using the good that is already in man. On the contrary, it is something new. It is not an influence upon the life, but the beginning of a new life; it is not development of what we had already, but a new birth. At the very center of Christianity are the words, “Ye must be born again.”¹⁰⁸

Faith in Life and Practice

The faith God gives during regeneration is an enduring faith that shapes the Christian life and practice. “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). The gift of faith also creates the desire and ability to obey the will of God. Philippians 2:13 says “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” The gift of faith generates obedience, and the two are inseparable in Christian practice. The promise of the new covenant was that God would put His Spirit within the heart of those He regenerates, and He would cause the born again to walk in His ways, and the believer would be careful to observe the Lord’s ordinances (Ez. 36:27). Berkhof speaks of three elements of genuine Christian faith.

- 1) “An intellectual element (notitia), which is “a positive recognition of the truth”
- 2) An emotional element (assensus), which includes “a deep conviction [and affirmation] of the truth”

¹⁰⁷ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 188-189.

¹⁰⁸ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 115.

- 3) A volitional element (fiducia), which involves “a personal trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, including a surrender... to Christ”.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, Christian faith is true regenerative faith if it adheres to the authority of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁰

For accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives. What, then, is involved in being a Christian? James Orr put it well: “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny found only in Christianity”.¹¹¹

The New Birth and PC

Though Jesus Christ, the Lord of Christianity, necessitates the new birth which produces faith to believe in and follow His authoritative (Matt. 28:19-20) Word, within the creeds and claims of PC, there is no mention of the new birth, nor biblical faith in following the objective commands of Jesus Christ. Many progressives take on the philosophies of relativism, universalism, and pluralism. Progressives have a strong criteria for social justice and cultural change, but there is no message of salvific change through the grace of God and the atoning work of Jesus Christ. PC is always evolving and progressing. Their creeds are taken, “lightly but seriously. They (creeds) (added) are not dogma, they are simply a starting point to establish conversations and a foundation of values and beliefs that we have observed progressive Christians generally share.”¹¹² Yet, it is the new birth that justifies the title Christian.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 189.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹¹ Erickson, 21. The quote is from James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans). 4.

¹¹² Progressivechristianity.org, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>.

¹¹³ MacArthur and Mayhue, 360.

Someone may say: “I know religious people-Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, cultic—who act like vipers. They aren’t part of the renewal.” Jesus knew them too. But he did not infer from this that the new birth doesn’t work. He infers that they are hypocrites. “You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matt. 23:25). “You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones” (Matt. 23:27).¹¹⁴

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 Jn. 5:1-4).

Exclusivity of Jesus Christ in Salvation

Exclusive Christological Assertions

In a message titled “Is the Exclusivity of Christ Unjust” Alistair Begg said, “One of the reasons people turn away from Christianity is because of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ who proclaimed that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Him.” Begg explains that there is little to no issue with the first part of the verse, but the second part of the verse causes problems within the religious philosophies of humankind.¹¹⁵ Machen gives voice to the post-modern mind regarding the exclusivity of Christ’s atonement as the one and only means of salvation.

Liberal preachers reveal only too clearly what is in their minds. They speak with disgust of those who believe “that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner.” Against the doctrine of the Cross they use every weapon of caricature and vilification. Thus they pour out their scorn upon a thing so holy and so precious that in the presence of it the Christian heart melts in gratitude too deep for words. It never seems to occur to modern liberals that in deriding the Christian doctrine of the Cross, they are trampling upon human hearts. But the modern liberal attacks upon the Christian doctrine of the Cross may at least serve the purpose of

¹¹⁴ John Piper, 191.

¹¹⁵ Idea Pump.

showing what that doctrine is, and from this point of view they may be examined briefly now.¹¹⁶

Machen argues that the biblical claim of salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is good news. Good news is therefore dependent upon history. Good news is the proclamation that something has happened in history that will alter the common good to some degree or another. All humanity is held in the grip of sin, and the good news is the work of Jesus releases humankind from the perils of sin. The historical event happened in the first century and the story is still being reported today as good news. “Very different is the message of the Christian evangelist. He offers not reflection on the old but tidings of something new, not exhortation but a gospel”.¹¹⁷

Machen also explains that if the report is true, it then effects the present and can be tested. The gospel has been tested and the Christian has found its message to be true. Yet experience does not validate the message; experience only affirms the message. “The word of the Cross no longer seems to the Christian to be merely a far-off thing, merely a matter to be disputed about by trained theologians. On the contrary, it is received into the Christian’s inmost soul, and every day and hour of the Christian’s life brings new confirmation of its truth”.¹¹⁸

A second objective is that the Christian doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ is criticized on the ground that it is narrow. It binds salvation to the name of Jesus, and there are many men in the world who have never in any effective way heard of the name of Jesus. What is really needed is a salvation which will save all men everywhere, whether they have heard of

¹¹⁶ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 103.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Jesus or not, and regardless of the religious system in which they have been reared. The objection therefore is thought the Christian gospel offers only one way of salvation, there still could be other ways.¹¹⁹

The obvious problem with the objection is the gospel is released of its exclusiveness. Early observers were astonished at the exclusiveness of the gospel message. Not only were early observers of the Christian gospel astonished that salvation was offered only through Christ, but all other means were “resolutely rejected”.¹²⁰ The early Christian missionaries demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion to Christ, an exclusivism that ran counter to the prevailing syncretic culture. Pluralism was widely accepted in pagan cultures, but Christianity renounced the “courtly polygamies of the soul” and demanded exclusive devotion to Jesus Christ alone.¹²¹

Cultures then and now were and are willing to tolerate Jesus as a god but were and are not willing to accept Him as the only God. The offense of the cross is removed if Jesus were aligned with other gods. Yet, if the offense is taken away, the message becomes futile, defenseless, powerless, and void of its glory. The Christian message, the good news, the gospel is that salvation is through Jesus Christ, alone.

The necessity of faith in Christ as opposed to sincerely believing in anything or anyone else, including ourselves, will always cause offense. But it will especially cause offense in a country such as ours in which the only and last virtue is “tolerance.” How could it be otherwise? If the only virtue is tolerance, then anyone who makes a claim that is exclusive will be seen as some sort of bigot. As David Yeago observes, “To modernity, the oddness of the church’s Christological confession was simply barbarism; to persist in making that confession unabridged was to exile oneself from the community of civilized men and women”.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 104.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²² Rod Rosenblatt, *Christ Alone*, (1517 Publishing: Irvine, CA, 2015), Kindle Edition, 360-525.

Yet the offense remains. With the Christian proclamation of salvation being exclusively through Jesus, how does the good news get to every person, everywhere? The answer is Christ gave the worldwide mission to His disciples. Therefore, Christ's commission cannot be evaded, it must be met.¹²³

The name of Jesus is discovered to be strangely adapted to men of every race and of every kind of previous education. And the Church has ample means, with the promise of God's Spirit, to bring the name of Jesus to all. If, therefore, this way of salvation is not offered to all, it is not the fault of the way of salvation itself, but the fault of those who fail to use the means that God has placed in their hands.¹²⁴

“And it's the foolish heart of unbelief that argues against the exclusivity of the gospel in favor of a 'wider mercy' that paves other avenues for entrance into the kingdom of God”.¹²⁵

But the Christian religion which is meant is certainly not the religion of the modern liberal Church, but a message of divine grace, almost forgotten now, as it was in the middle ages, but destined to burst forth once more in God's good time, in a new Reformation, and bring light and freedom to mankind. What that message is can be made clear, as is the case with all definition, only by way of exclusion, by way of contrast.¹²⁶

But this method of meeting the objection relinquishes one of the things that are most obviously characteristic of the Christian message—namely, its exclusiveness. What struck the early observers of Christianity most forcibly was not merely that salvation was offered by means of the Christian gospel, but that all other means were resolutely rejected. The early Christian missionaries demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion to Christ. Such exclusiveness ran directly counter to the prevailing syncretism of the Hellenistic age. In that day, many saviors were offered by many religions to the attention of men, but the various pagan religions could live together in perfect harmony; when a man became a devotee of one god, he did not have to give up the others. But Christianity would have nothing to do with these “courtly polygamies of the soul”; it demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion; all other saviors, it insisted,

¹²³ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 104.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²⁵ MacArthur, *Final Word*, 24.

¹²⁶ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 13.

must be deserted for the one Lord. Salvation, in other words, was not merely through Christ, but it was only through Christ. In that little word “only” lay all the offence. Without that word there would have been no persecutions; the cultured men of the day would probably have been willing to give Jesus a place, and an honorable place, among the saviors of mankind.¹²⁷

Without its exclusiveness, the Christian message would have seemed perfectly inoffensive to the men of that day. So modern liberalism, placing Jesus alongside other benefactors of mankind, is perfectly inoffensive in the modern world. All men speak well of it. It is entirely inoffensive. But it is also entirely futile. The offence of the Cross is done away, but so is the glory and the power. Thus it must fairly be admitted that Christianity does bind salvation to the name of Christ.¹²⁸

Authority of Scripture

Doctrine of Scripture

“The doctrine of Scripture, where in lies the authority of Scripture, is absolutely fundamental and essential because it identifies the only true source for all Christian truth”.¹²⁹ The term doctrine of Scripture refers to a belief or set of beliefs about the Scriptures that Christians hold.¹³⁰ Each belief has been and still is a major topic of debate among theologians, none of which progressives adhere to.

As you look at the doctrine of Scripture, it is vital that you pay attention to what the Bible says about revelation and about inspiration; it is essential to pay attention to the claims of the Bible about itself. I have seen many, many evangelical scholars start out with a high view of Scripture, but then they study the so-called phenomena of Scripture and lose their confidence in the Word of God. When that happens, you can bet that they have tried to construct a doctrine of Scripture from their own provisional answers to the phenomena of Scripture and have not adequately taken into consideration what the Bible says about itself in regard to revelation and inspiration. You cannot learn what the Bible is, you cannot form a correct doctrine of Scripture, without paying attention to the claims of Scripture. So as you wrestle with the doctrine of Scripture, begin with its claims about revelation and inspiration, then deal with the phenomena of

¹²⁷ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 103-104.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue, 69.

¹³⁰ John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word*: electronic book, 1851.

Scripture. Do not begin with the phenomena of Scripture and then try and read its claims and what it teaches about revelation and inspiration in light of your provisional answer to the phenomena. If you do, you will become a liberal.¹³¹

This project will not attempt to enter into the doctrinal debates but will offer an overall explanation of Christian beliefs regarding the Scriptures, so that CFI are aware and can articulate Christian beliefs to their audiences of CW. There is no official list of beliefs that makes up the doctrine of Scripture, therefore the following list is more a general consensus of biblical claims Christian theologians accept as the doctrine of Scripture.

Inspiration

The Apostles and the Early Church believed in the doctrine of Inspiration. Second Timothy 3:16 makes the claim that “all Scripture is breathed out by God”. Second Peter 1:20-21 explains the process: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”. Zechariah 7:12 also gives expression and clarity to the process of inspiration:¹³² “the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit”.

Over 2500 times in the OT the Scriptures claim that they are the spoken words of God. In the NT, the parallel phrase “word of God” appears over forty times. According to MacArthur and Mayhue, Jesus preached the inspiration of Scripture, (Luke 5:1). The apostles taught the inspiration of Scripture (Acts 4:31; 6:2). Peter preached the word of God (Acts 11:1). It was the word of God that Paul preached (Acts 13:5, 7, 44, 48-49; 15:35-36; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11; 19:10). The inspired word of God was a focal point for Luke in the book of Acts (Acts 6:7; 12:24;

¹³¹ MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, 1851-1852.

¹³² MacArthur and Mayhue, 71.

19:20). “It is eminently logical to believe that the God who formed man’s body, with all of its intricate biological facilities, who created the wonder of man’s mind, with all of its amazing intellectual capacities, and who instilled man’s very ability and desire to communicate, would Himself be capable of communication with His creatures”.¹³³

Paul proclaimed to the church at Corinth that he spoke the word as it was given from God, that it has not been adulterated, and that it was a manifestation of the truth (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). Paul accredited the word of God as his source of preaching (Col. 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:13).¹³⁴ The Scriptures model the Christian faith in inspiration. Because the Word came from God, the Word is self-authenticated. We do not sit in judgment over the revelation of God; it is the other way around.¹³⁵ Thus Christians believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

Authority

Because Christians believe in the inspiration of Scripture, they also believe in the authority of Scripture. Christians believe the Word of God is authoritative and is given to be the rule of faith and life.

For a Christian, there can be no better witness to a correct understanding of the character, nature, and authority of Scripture than Christ himself. His view must be the believer’s view. As one works through the many references Jesus makes to Scripture, a clear perspective emerges. Jesus used Scripture in all matters of doctrine and practice. He based his own identity and mission on it. He defined it personally as truth. All this confirms that Jesus understood the Scriptures to be the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God in both Testaments. It can be shown from Scripture that Jesus (1) affirmed the OT as

¹³³ James R. White, *Scripture Alone*, (Minneapolis, MN: Baker House, 2004), Kindle Locations 185.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹³⁵ John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Kindle Locations 7885-7886. Essay by

Scripture (by affirming its authority, inspiration, and historicity) and (2) preauthenticated the NT as Scripture.¹³⁶

Affirming the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms as Scripture, Jesus Christ had recognized and never contradicted the thirty-nine books of the OT as the inspired, authoritative word of God (Luke 24:44-47).¹³⁷

Jesus Affirms the Authority of the Old Testament

When confronted by Satan, the tempter, the deceiver, the father of lies, the serpent of old, Jesus appealed to the authority of the OT canon in His rebuke to His ancient foe (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). When confronted with issues of faith and worship practices¹³⁸, Jesus once again resorted to the authority of the OT. Jesus responded with biblical justification to the accusation against His disciples when charged with breaking the Sabaoth (Matt. 12:1-8). “So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the Bread of the Presence, which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away” (1 Sam. 21:6).

When questioned about divorce, (Matt. 19:3-9), Jesus’ question in turn was, “Have you not read”, referring to the OT canon of Scripture. Jesus responded from Genesis 2:23-24 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as an authoritative argument regarding divorce. When Jesus cleansed the temple the second time (Matt. 21:12-13), he justified His actions by building an argument from the OT canon of Scripture, (Is. 56:7; Jer. 7:11).¹³⁹ Each time Jesus referenced the OT, and there

¹³⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, 88-89.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

are many, He never corrected it,¹⁴⁰ nor did He take away from it, nor did He add to it, indicating that the canonized Word of God is fixed, absolute truth.

Jesus Affirms the Scriptural Authority Regarding His Identity

Jesus validated the OT as authoritative by using it to identify Himself.¹⁴¹ When challenged by religious leaders for his act of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus “claimed equality with God”¹⁴² (John 5:15-18). He mentioned the witness of John the Baptist, (John 5:33-35), the testimony of His works (John 5:36), the witness of His heavenly Father (John 5:37-38), and the witness of the OT Scriptures, (5:39-47). In saying this, Jesus affirmed that what Moses wrote is equal to what God has said.¹⁴³

After His resurrection, Jesus maintained the same view of the OT Scriptures.¹⁴⁴ Luke records two post-resurrection appearances where Jesus once again affirmed the authority of the OT. In Luke 24:13-35 Jesus appears to two of His disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they conversed about the current events in Jerusalem, Jesus said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken? Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory” (Luke 24:25-26)? Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all

¹⁴⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, 89.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, 90.

the Scriptures (Luke 24: 27). “All the Scriptures” could only have been a reference to the entire OT.¹⁴⁵

Jesus Submitted to the Authority of Scripture

Jesus also submitted Himself to the authority of the OT Scriptures. In Matt. 5:17 Jesus stated that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Jesus also stated that there would be eternal consequences for those who violated the OT Scriptures or who led others to do so (Matt. 5: 18-19). In Matt. 7:12, Jesus affirmed the central point of the OT: “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets”. The reference to the Law and the Prophets is a reference to the entire OT.

Authority was a major issue between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, because the Jews felt their authority was being challenged. Historically, scribes established authority for their teaching by quoting others. Jesus quoted no one. He was the Word of God (Jn. 1:1). He was His own authority (Matt. 21:23, Mark 1:22; 11:28–33; Luke 4:32; 20:2–8; John 12:49–50; 14:10), yet in order to fulfill the Law, He submitted to the authority of the OT.¹⁴⁶

In Luke 24:36-47, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ stood in the midst of His disciples in Jerusalem. He showed them His hands and His feet and declared to them that He had indeed risen from the dead. MacArthur and Mayhue note: “Jesus’ view of the Old Testament, its inspiration, inerrancy, and authority has not changed as a result of his glorification. This very fact goes a long way toward refuting the errant theories of accommodation.”¹⁴⁷ Inspiration,

¹⁴⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, 90.

¹⁴⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1135.

¹⁴⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, 90.

authority, and inerrancy are all a part of the doctrine of Scripture. Jesus taught and modeled these; therefore Christians believe, live, and teach the same.

The Authority of the New Testament

The NT writers also affirmed the OT, referencing it nearly three hundred times in their writings to the church. Recognition of the NT began within the writings that are now readily recognized as inspired Scripture, as Peter acknowledged the writings of Paul as inspired Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). Peter also affirmed that writers other than the original apostles would also author books that would be included in the NT (Eph. 3:5, 1 Tim.5:18).¹⁴⁸

Within the first century church, though small and heavily persecuted, with much difficulty communicating with each other, there arose a common consensus that affirmed most of the books of the NT. The four gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter and 1 John were widely recognized as inspired texts, given to the church by God. During the second century, Christian writings were being collected and treated with the same reverence as the canon of the Old Testament.¹⁴⁹ By A.D. 365 Bishop Athanasius had assembled the first known list of the twenty-seven books recognized most widely today as the NT. By the end of the fourth century, scholars conclude that the list compiled by Bishop Athanasius was the full and complete, twenty-seven book canon of inspired NT Scripture.¹⁵⁰

There is still much debate about the canon, and there probably always will be. Yet, the question of the canon must inform the doctrine of Scripture. The canon of Scripture today

¹⁴⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, 99-100.

¹⁴⁹ N. T. Wright, *Scripture and The Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today*, (United States, HarperOne, 2011), 2.

¹⁵⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, 124.

affirms the fulfilling of all its covenants. The canon affirms its truthfulness (John 17:17), and authoritativeness (John 10:35). Jesus said the “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Also, the canon proclaims it is the breathed-out, inspired Word of God for the church.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Jesus Pre-authenticates the New Testament

Not only did Jesus affirm the inspiration and authority of the OT, He also pre-authenticated the writing of the NT. First, Jesus proclaimed that His words were the Father’s words:

“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (John 8:26-28).

On many occasions Jesus stated that His words were the very words His Father had given Him to speak. He therefore positioned His words equal with the OT which He had affirmed as authentic and inspired by God. Therefore, based on what Jesus said, His words, recorded by the NT writers are authoritative and inspired by God.¹⁵¹

In the upper room, Jesus told His disciples that the words He spoke were a part of the work the Father had given Him to do. Jesus words revealed the Father to men: His words also

¹⁵¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, 95.

verified the oneness of the Father and Son to the disciples.¹⁵² “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10).

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus’ prayer distinguished His true disciples from Judas and from all those who did not believe, in that His disciples received His words from the Father. “Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me (John 17:7-8). It is therefore clear that the words Jesus gave the disciples were from the Father, who in turn, gave the disciples true understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ. “I (Jesus) have given them (disciples) Your (Father) word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:14,17).

Jesus pre-authenticates the NT because He was the promised prophet like Moses. “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him” (Deut. 18:18-19). Scripture says God spoke to Moses and gave revelation to him face to face (Ex. 33:11; Deut. 34:10). Jesus, the prophet like Moses, is the Word incarnate, therefore His words are the revelation of God. Seeing Jesus face to face, was seeing the Father face to face.¹⁵³

In his essay, “The Witness of Scripture to Its Inspiration,” Alan M. Stibbs notes Christ’s work in the writing of the NT. “Christ also promised apostles similar divine cooperation in the

¹⁵² MacArthur and Mayhue, 95.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 96.

recording of his own work and teaching when he said of the Spirit, ‘He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you’.¹⁵⁴

Finally, Jesus also pre-authenticated the NT by promising the disciples additional revelation. First, Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would help them recall His words. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit would actually come and grant the disciples a two-fold blessing. He would guide them into all truth, and He would remind them accurately of all that Jesus had said. “As such, this is a preauthentication of the veracity and inspiration of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark (based on Peter’s testimony), and John”.¹⁵⁵

Jesus also promised His disciples that their testimony of Him would come by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27). The disciples’ witness therefore, was an eyewitness account of having been with Jesus from the beginning, and well as a testimony inspired by the Holy Spirit. Their testimony would be true¹⁵⁶ because the context of John 16 states that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and He would guide the disciples in all truth (John 16:13).

Third, Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive revelation beyond what He was able to tell them during His earthly ministry. “I have many more things to say to you, but

¹⁵⁴ MacArthur, *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, 213.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, 96-97.

you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you” (John 16:12-14). Three things can be observed. 1) Jesus had more revelation to give, but the disciples were not ready to receive it. 2) Jesus says the Agent revealing the revelation would be the Spirit of truth. It is noteworthy that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. “By preauthenticating the New Testament, Jesus showed that it would be characterized by the same truthfulness that characterized the One who would inspire it”.¹⁵⁷

Also, the New Testament would glorify the Son of God in a greater way than the Old Testament Scriptures. “It (the NT) would be an equally authoritative, inspired, and inerrant revelation from God but would complete the divine message of Scripture. It would be, as the Old Testament was, the word of the Trinity (John 16:14-15).¹⁵⁸

One final revelation to include in this document is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1) to the Apostle John. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw”. The revelation meets the criteria of John 16:12-15. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the testimony of Jesus Himself, and is in addition to what He spoke to His disciples during His time on earth.¹⁵⁹ “It seems very reasonable

¹⁵⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, 97.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

to conclude that he viewed his personal message to John in the last book of the New Testament as a portion of the additional revelation he promised.”¹⁶⁰

But the Christian view of the authority of Scripture also runs much deeper than, ‘I believe it because the Bible says it.’ The authority of Scripture is rooted in our view of God Himself. God created the universe and everything in it. He not only knows how everything works, He designed everything to work the way it does. God’s crowning achievement in creation was the human race. He has created and redeemed a people to be in relationship with Him. The Bible tells us what God is like, how His creation works and how we can be reconciled to Him. Not only that, but God also instructs us in the paths of wisdom that please Him and lead to our flourishing. God exercises His authority over us by His loving provision of the Bible. Accepting the authority of Scripture means that we believe that all our beliefs about God and His creation should be shaped by the Bible, and that our behavior should be directed by the truth of Scripture.¹⁶¹

Other doctrines of Scripture include the doctrines of infallibility and inerrancy, which proclaim the truthfulness of the Scriptures.¹⁶² The doctrine of clarity makes the proclamation that the Scriptures are clear and understandable.¹⁶³

Evangelism

Wait for Power

Before ascending to heaven the Lord commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father had promised. Upon receiving the promise, they would be empowered with the Holy Spirit to fulfill Christ’s commission of teaching all nations to obey all that He had commanded.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also

¹⁶⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, 97.

¹⁶¹ Keri Folmar, *The Good Portion: Scripture: The Doctrine of Scripture for Every Woman*, Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition, 1140.

¹⁶² MacArthur and Mayhue, 109.

¹⁶³ Johnson, 67-68.

presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” *He said*, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:1-5).

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus promised the disciples power to fulfill the mission He had entrusted to them. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of the regenerated believer who “fuels” the Christian passion for evangelism.

The Power of Regeneration

Acts 1:14 states that while the apostles waited in Jerusalem to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, they were joined by “the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’ brothers”. There in the Upper Room, on the Jewish day of Pentecost, the promise came. Christ’s disciples, who would later be called Christians, were all filled with the distinguishing power and promise of the Holy Spirit and began to speak of the mighty deeds of God.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. ... we (the men of Judea) hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:1-4, 11).

That day, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached from the prophet Joel (Acts 2:1-21), explaining to the men of Judea that the promise of God had been fulfilled: the Holy Spirit

had come to indwell those who believe in Jesus Christ. The remainder of the book of Acts shows how Spirit-filled Christians carried out the commission of Jesus Christ.

The remaining Epistles also give evidence of how the apostles and disciples of Christ fulfilled Christ's commission to evangelize the world. The following quote is an explanation of Christ's commission to His disciples.

When we proclaim the gospel in Christ's name, baptize, and teach what he has commanded in his name, that is part of the obedience of the Son to the Father. But it is also part of the Father's glorification of the Son. In the ministry of preaching and teaching that we perform in Christ's name, Christ is glorified. Human hearts are changed, and disciples are made of all nations.¹⁶⁴

Called to Discipleship

Making disciples by teaching others to obey what Christ commanded is the one task Christ commissioned. J. Gresham Machen said, "It is with the open Bible that the real Christian preacher comes before the congregation. He does not come to present his opinions. He does not come to present the results of his researches in the phenomena of religion, but he comes to set forward what is contained in the Word of God."¹⁶⁵ The commission stands today, as Christians continue to obey the commands of Jesus Christ.

As the world becomes more secular and resistant to the good news of the gospel, taking those steps of faith will make all the difference. When you start praying, "Here I am, Lord, send me" (Isaiah 6:8), he will send you, and he will send others, too. It begins with one step of obedience, one yes to God. We can't tell people to reach their neighbors if we aren't first doing it ourselves, going across the street or next door.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 16.

¹⁶⁵ John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), (Kindle Locations 1988-1990), excerpt from Alistair Begg's essay, "Let The Lion Out", quoting J. Gresham Machen, Introduction to J. Marcellus Kik, *The Narrow and Broad Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1934), n.p.

¹⁶⁶ Ed Stetzer, *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst* (p. 191). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 191.

Methodological Systems and Hermeneutical Practices

In women's ministry, case studies show that there is a lot of self-focus in Scriptural discussion and not enough exegeting of Scripture and focusing on historical foundations of biblical truths, and biblical worship. Much time in women's ministry is spent answering the question, "What do you *think* this Scripture means?" Women proceed to give their opinion regarding what the Scripture means, with no regard to first studying the passage to determine as best she can what God meant when He spoke the passage to the author. In a case study of women's Bible study Keri Folmar says, "Bible study is not a social club, a counseling session, or a place to meet "felt needs." "Fellowship, counseling, and meeting needs are often the choice fruits of a good Bible study as women get to know one another and shaped by the Word, But these fruits should never overcome the goal of studying the Scriptures together".¹⁶⁷ This violation of basic hermeneutics easily makes the CFI or CW a "deconstructor"¹⁶⁸ of the text, progressing beyond its intended meaning, into a meaning she "thinks" is right, or one that is comfortable for her and her culture. Therefore, the research suggests that CFI teach CW how to engage in inductive methodologies in order to form a systematic way of studying the Scriptures so that CW are led into true biblical worship and spiritual formation.

¹⁶⁷ Keri Folmar, "7 Mistakes We Make in Women's Bible Study," Bible and Theology, [thegospelcoalition.org](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org), (March 3, 2014), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-mistakes-we-make-in-womens-bible-study/>.

¹⁶⁸ Deconstruction term to denote the process by which tradition and traditional values—specifically those espoused in the text of Scripture—have been undermined and dismantled in favor of post- modernist agendas.

A Case Study of Christian Women's Bible Study

In a case study regarding CW's Bible studies, Keri Folmar acknowledges seven mistakes CW make. Folmar begins with the affirmation that Jesus wants women to be theologically sound. In the narrative at Luke 10:38-42, Jesus affirmed Mary for sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching. Jesus said Mary had chosen the "good part" and it will not be taken from her.¹⁶⁹

The first of mistake Folmer mentions is CW lose sight of the goal. CW forget that the goal of Bible study is to study the Bible. Folmar encourages CW to keep focused on the Scriptures and not allow "tangents and rabbit trails" to take away a clear explanation of the Scriptures. The second mistake is wrong answers are allowed. Many times tangents and rabbit trails lead to wrong answers. The Words of the text are God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:17) and were penned by men who were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), therefore, the leader, or CFI, should guide the study back to the Scriptures, and rely on the Holy Spirit to bring understanding to the intended meaning. "As the leader of a Bible study, you certainly don't need to be a lioness ready to pounce on wrong answers. Someone else in the group may give the right answer, and you can simply affirm it".¹⁷⁰

"The 'hermeneutic of suspicion' that characterizes so much of [the] scholarship and that has infiltrated the church is a dangerous undertaking because it undermines the principle of trust. When we as creatures begin to view God and His revelation through the lens of doubt and suspicion, it becomes easy not only to question the content of the message but the intent as well". For this reason, the loss of confidence in the Bible in the South (USA) did not come through the front door of challenges to inerrancy, but through the back door of alleged extrabiblical revelation, which represents a denial of the sufficiency and finality of the canon. ...But once we yield to extrabiblical revelation, the denial of the inerrancy of the Bible is simple. Extrabiblical revelation presupposes an open canon and therefore an incomplete Bible, which someone needs to complete. Moving from a Bible in

¹⁶⁹ Folmer, "7 Mistakes".

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

need of completion to a Bible in need of correction (the denial of inerrancy) is only one step.¹⁷¹

The third mistake CW make is relying on the wrong material. “The primary text for Bible study is the Bible.”¹⁷² Study guides are meant to help, but not all study guides are created equal.¹⁷³ Folmar also warns of relying too heavily on videos that “neglect to teach women how to study the Bible for themselves and leave them thinking they need a dramatic speaker to make the Bible interesting and relevant to their lives”.¹⁷⁴ The right study materials will help women personify sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to His teachings. The result is a life of true, biblical worship.

Mistake number four is CW neglect the gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus is foundational in CW’s daily lives. As CW look into the Scriptures for deeper meaning, Folmar suggests they look for Jesus. “We can find Him on every page of Scripture.”¹⁷⁵ The fifth mistake is CW can elevate method over meaning. Here Folmar acknowledges inductive methodologies where the text is systematically observed, interpreted, and applied. Folmar warns that too much concentration on the method could lead CW away from the true meaning of the text. “The process leaves some women frustrated and others unaware that there is any meaning to Scripture at all.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Kindle Locations 7845-7848. Essay by Miguel Núñez, “All That I Have Commanded”.

¹⁷² Folmar, “7 Mistakes”.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

The sixth mistake is jumping to application. CW go from reading the text, directly to asking how the text can be applied to life, without engaging inductively by first observing the text to discover what it says, then allowing the text to interpret the text. Without a systematic methodology, CW are more likely to leave CW with a false meaning of the text and thereby a false application of worship and life.¹⁷⁷

When we neglect the true meaning of a passage and attempt to apply it to our lives, we end up not really applying Scripture at all. Scripture loses its power to renew our minds and transform us and instead becomes a quick fix to an easier life. When we don't dig in and think hard to find the meaning of a text, we end up trivializing it and become man-centered in our application rather than having our eyes opened to the greatness of God. We must work hard to find the true meaning of texts and then think through how they apply to our lives.¹⁷⁸

The seventh and final mistake Folmar mentions is CW divorce study from the church. Folmar affirms that not all Bible study is church-based. There are outreach Bible studies within neighborhoods, schools and workplaces that are bearing much fruit. Folmar also strongly affirms that CW study the Bible within their local church. The advantage to coming together in the local church is being like-minded theologically when difficulty arises.¹⁷⁹

At the United Christian Church of Dubai, I have the privilege of studying the Bible with women from Africa, the Middle East, India, Europe, Australia, East Asia, and North and South America. We come from a wide variety of cultures and religious backgrounds. We speak with varying accents and don't have the same colored skin. We come to the Scriptures with different views on politics, parenting, and many other secondary issues. Our differences have caused us to dig deeper for universal truth in the Word of God to apply to our varying stages of life and circumstances. We have found it to be true that when women in a local church gather to study the Scriptures together, it promotes unity and ignites spiritual growth.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Folmar, "7 Mistakes".

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Progressive ideologies would emphasize that there is no fixed meaning to the text;¹⁸¹ therefore, one's opinion is a valid explanation and interpretation of Scripture. MacArthur asserts that truth is never determined by looking at Scripture and asking what the text means to any individual person. MacArthur says when he hears this type of biblical interpretation, he in turn asks the question, "What did the Bible mean before you existed? What does God mean by what He says? The true meaning of Scripture has already been determined in the mind of God. The task of the interpreter, namely, the CFI, is to engage a proper hermeneutical approach that gives the most accurate meaning of the text."¹⁸²

When studying inductively, accurate observation and interpretation must proceed proper application.¹⁸³ Observation, interpretation, application; these are the hermeneutics involved in inductive methodology, which CFI should engage in to lead CW in biblical worship and spiritual formation.¹⁸⁴ MacArthur says,

"Amazingly, Christians in our generation need to be reminded of these things. Truth is never determined by looking at God's Word and asking, "What does this mean to me?" Whenever I hear someone talk like that, I'm inclined to ask, "What did the Bible mean before you existed? What does God mean by what He says?" Those are the proper questions to be asking. Truth and meaning are not determined by our intuition, experience, or desire. The true meaning of Scripture or anything else, for that matter has already been determined and fixed by the mind of God. The task of an interpreter is to descent that meaning. And proper interpretation must precede application."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ "The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity," Point 5.

¹⁸² MacArthur, Truth War, xx-xxi.

¹⁸³ Ibid., x-xxi.

¹⁸⁴ Folmar, "7 Mistakes".

¹⁸⁵ MacArthur, The Truth War, xx.

Section II: PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PC AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Research Question 2: What are the critical cultural challenges currently facing CFI in teaching, worship, and discipleship ministries?

Hypothesis 2: The ideologies of PC, which are influencing Christian women, are primarily in terms of relativism, pluralism, and cultural tolerance.

The author of this research has also noted that the abbreviations CFI and CW are not an indication of all CFI nor all CW. The abbreviations only apply to CFI and CW who engage in the activity of the given discussion

Ideology of Relativism

According to Rev. Roger Wolsey;

“Progressive Christianity is a post-liberal movement that seeks to reform the faith via the insights of post-modernism and a reclaiming of the truth beyond the verifiable historicity and factuality of the passages in the Bible by affirming the truths within the stories that may not have actually happened. Progressive Christians are open to the reality that God is vitally at work in other world religions; that Christianity doesn’t have a monopoly on the truth; and that it’s best to take the Bible seriously, but not always literally. Progressive Christians also tend to be pro-gay and view salvation more as a here and now phenomenon and not merely “where we go after we die.”¹⁸⁶

Roger Wolsey gives an even broader definition of PC in his book *Kissing Fish:*

Christianity for People Who Don’t Like Christianity.

Progressive Christianity is a post-liberal approach to the Christian faith that is influenced by postmodernism and: proclaims Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; emphasizes the Way and teachings of Jesus, not merely His person; emphasizes God’s immanence not merely God’s transcendence; leans toward pantheism

¹⁸⁶ Rev. Roger Wolsey, “Progressive Christianity Isn’t Progressive Politics”, The Holy Kiss: Roger Wolsey, patheos.com, (September 24, 2012), accessed June 11, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogerwolsey/2012/09/progressive-christianity-isnt-progressive-politics/>

rather than supernatural theism; emphasizes salvation here and now instead of primarily in heaven later; emphasizes being saved for robust, abundant/eternal life over being saved from hell; emphasizes the social/communal aspects of salvation instead of merely the personal; stresses social justice, environmental protection, and non-violence as integral to Christian discipleship; takes the Bible seriously but not necessarily literally, embracing a more interpretive, metaphorical understanding; emphasizes orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy (right actions over right beliefs); embraces reason as well as paradox and mystery — instead of blind allegiance to rigid doctrines and dogmas; does not consider homosexuality to be sinful; and does not claim that Christianity is the only valid or viable way to connect to God (is non-exclusive).¹⁸⁷

PC has evolved from liberal Christianity, which has its roots in the bounty of the Enlightenment era which embraced academic biblical scholarship, deferring to the authority of contemporary science. There is ambiguity of terms between liberal and progressive because modern-day media uses the terms interchangeably.¹⁸⁸ Dorrien writes:

Regarding the relation of liberal and progressive, many religious thinkers ... employ these terms interchangeably. This usage has historical weight, because for many years liberalism was the progressive tradition in theology. The idea of a progressive Christianity was first imagined and developed by theological liberals. However, I (the author) believe that “progressive” should be treated as a wider category than “liberal” and that the fundamental divide in Christian theology is between various forms of conservative orthodoxy and progressivism.¹⁸⁹

From its original character Dorrien defined liberal theology primarily as an attempt to create a progressive Christian alternative. Fundamentally, liberal theology was and is a new philosophical approach to the Christian perspective based on human reasoning and life practices, not on external authority.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Roger Wolsey, “Progressive Christianity Isn’t Progressive Politics,” *The Holy Kiss*: Roger Wolsey, Patheos.com, (January 17, 2014), accessed June 11, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogerwolsey/2014/01/progressive-christianity-isnt-progressive-politics-2/>.

¹⁸⁸ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1050-2005*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

The PC movement is also described as “...an open, intelligent and collaborative approach to the Christian tradition and the life and teachings of Jesus that creates a pathway into an authentic and relevant religious experience.”¹⁹¹ Also stated on the PC website is a fuller statement of intent.

“Progressive Christianity is inherently always evolving and progressing. Please take these lightly but seriously. They are not dogma, they are simply a starting point to establish conversations and a foundation of values and beliefs that we have observed Progressive Christians generally share. It’s ok if you don’t agree with all the words or all the parts. We support your authentic path. You can use these in your faith communities and with family and friends to talk about what it means to you to be a Progressive Christian in today’s world. Here is to always progressing!”¹⁹²

PC has established “8 Points” that serve as a statement of beliefs for the movement. The “8 Points” were updated as of January 2020. PC say they are Christians who...

1. Believe that following the path of the teacher Jesus can lead to healing and wholeness, a mystical connection to “God,” as well as an awareness and experience of not only the Sacred, but the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience “God,” the Sacredness, Oneness and Unity of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom, including Earth, in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek and create community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to:

Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
Believers and agnostics,
Those of all races, cultures, and nationalities
Those of all sexual orientations and all gender identities,
Those of all classes and abilities,
Those historically marginalized,
All creatures and plant life;

4. Know that the way we behave towards one another and Earth is the fullest expression of what we believe, therefore we vow to walk as Jesus might have

¹⁹¹ “What Is Progressive Christianity?”, “About the Movement”, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>.

¹⁹² Progressivechristianity.org, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>.

walked in this world with radical compassion, inclusion, and bravery to confront and positively change the injustices we experience as well as those we see others experiencing;

5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning with an open mind and open heart, than in absolutes or dogma;
6. Work toward peace and justice among all people and all life on Earth;
7. Protect and restore the integrity of our Earth and all of Creation;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion, and selfless love on this journey toward a personally authentic and meaningful faith.¹⁹³

There are both political and spiritual liberals and progressives. This research will use case studies from CFI who identify as progressives to show how the mantras of PC are being heralded both spiritually and socially from their venues of missional influences.

Progressive CFI Case Studies

Rachel Held Evans

Many CFI have large followings of CW, although many influential Bible study authors, teachers, motivational speakers, bloggers, musicians, worship leaders, social media, and online influencers may not be instructing CW in the core beliefs of Christianity.¹⁹⁴ Noted progressive author,¹⁹⁵ blogger, and conference speaker, Rachel Held Evans, was known as a leading CFI who expressed progressive ideologies of Christianity. In an article in *The Washington Post* titled,

¹⁹³ "The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity". *Progressivechristianity.org*. (2020). <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>.

¹⁹⁴ George Barna, "Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago,". George Barna, [georgebarna.com](http://www.georgebarna.com), (Oct. 18, 2018), accessed August 9, 2019, <http://www.georgebarna.com/research-flow/2018/10/17/survey-reveals-that-fewer-adults-have-a-biblical-worldview-now-than-two-years-ago>.

¹⁹⁵ "People," *The Christian Century*, Jun 05, 2019. 19, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2231399948?accountid=12085>.

“Rachel Held Evans, Progressive Christian Author Who Challenged Evangelicals, dies at 37”, Columnist Sarah Pulliam Bailey states that Evans was “unafraid to wade into fierce theological battles over issues such as the role of women, science, LGBT issues and politics on her blog and social media”.¹⁹⁶ Baily remarks that Evans made a comment toward her church’s activism on a Tennessee ban on same-sex marriage that eventually led her to leave her evangelical church. According to Baily, Evans “continued to write about her love for her church and the Bible” and joined an Episcopal church.¹⁹⁷

In a report concerning Evans’ book *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, published in 2012, Bailey states that, prior to publishing the book, Evans spent one year literally following her concepts of the biblical role of a woman. In her book, thereafter, Evans encouraged women to engage in church leadership roles and hold to an egalitarian approach to marriage.¹⁹⁸

Justin Taylor’s Response

In response to *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, Justin Taylor wrote an article for The Gospel Coalition titled, “A Year of Ridiculous Biblical Interpretation”.¹⁹⁹ Taylor notes that Evans’ book, published by Christian publisher, Thomas Nelson, is warmly welcomed in

¹⁹⁶ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Rachel Held Evans, progressive Christian author who challenged evangelicals, dies at 37”, *The Washington Post*, (May 4, 2019), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/05/04/rachel-held-evans-progressive-christian-author-who-challenged-evangelicals-dies/>.

¹⁹⁷ Bailey.

¹⁹⁸ Bailey.

¹⁹⁹ Justin Taylor, “A Year of Ridiculous Biblical Interpretation”, The Gospel Coalition, (October 30, 2012), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/a-year-of-ridiculous-biblical-interpretation/>.

mainstream media, including an appearance on *The Today Show*. Evans' work also received accolades from Peter Enns of Patheos.

Yet, the evangelical response has been less welcoming. Trillia Newbell, noted author and public speaker, comments, "In this book Evans is trying to build a bridge, but I wonder if it is not rather a comfortable bridge for shaky evangelicals to find their way into theological liberalism."²⁰⁰ Trillia concludes that Evans' work was nothing more than a mockery of the biblical narrative.²⁰¹

Kathy Keller's Response

Also commenting on Evans' book is Kathy Keller, author and wife of apologist Tim Keller. In her commentary, Keller inserts Evans' statement of why she wrote *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*.

I've long been frustrated by the inconsistencies with which "biblical womanhood" is taught and applied in my evangelical Christian community. So . . . I set out to follow all of the Bible's instructions for women as literally as possible for a year to show that no woman, no matter how devout, is actually practicing biblical womanhood all the way. My hope is that the book will generate some laughs, as well as a fresh, honest dialogue about . . . biblical interpretation.²⁰²

According to Keller, Evans shows that following biblical womanhood does so in a "cherry picking" fashion, choosing to follow some rules and ignoring others. Evans also wants to "open a

²⁰⁰ Taylor.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Kathy Keller, "A Year of Biblical Womanhood", *Bible and Theology*, (October 30, 2012), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/year-biblical-womanhood/>.

fresh, honest dialogue about biblical interpretation, that is, how to do it rightly and well”.²⁰³ It is from the vantage point of biblical interpretation that Keller presents her argument.

First, Keller states that Evans has ignored a basic rule of interpretation that all Christians agree upon, and that is the sacrificial system and ceremonial laws of Old Testament worship became obsolete at the cross of Jesus Christ. Keller comments on Mark 7:19, Acts 11:9, and points to the books of Galatians and Hebrews, stating that all Christians no longer observe the “clean laws” of the Old Testament.²⁰⁴

Furthermore, Keller points to Jesus as the climax of the redemptive narrative. Noting John 2:21 where Jesus speaks of Himself as the final temple, and John 1:29, where Jesus is portrayed as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. “This most fundamental rule of interpretation is based on the fact that the Bible is the story of God’s salvation coming into the world, climaxing in Jesus, and therefore we can’t read the first part of the Bible as if Jesus never came in the last part”. Keller assures Evans that Christ is the final temple and His death the final sacrifice for sin. Therefore, temple worship is no longer a required practice in the New Covenant, nor do Christians offer any other sacrifice to God except the precious blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Additionally, Keller points out that Evans also broke another rule of interpretation by choosing narrative passages rather than prescriptive or doctrinal passages upon which to model her actions. Evans wrote about the stories of polygamy, concubinage, rape, adultery, and many other sins against women as if the Bible condones those behaviors. Evans says in her book, “If you were a slave or concubine, you were expected to be sexually available to your master.”

²⁰³ Keller.

²⁰⁴ Keller.

Keller remarks that though the Bible is very descriptive of the sinful behaviors of humanity, it never condones those behaviors.

“It (the Bible) is the record of human sin and of God’s intervention in history to save His people. Much of it should be read as news, just as we read the newspaper. Horrible acts are recorded in my copy of *The New York Times* every morning, but I don’t commit the hermeneutical error of supposing the editors of the *Times* are approving or endorsing such behavior.”²⁰⁵

Therefore, the biblical stories with such behaviors are told to show the awful sinfulness of humanity, the desperate need for a Savior, and the need for the extraordinary grace of God.²⁰⁶

Moreover, Keller points out two additional hermeneutical errors Evans makes. There are instances in the book where Evans overlooks the intended meaning within the text’s historical context. Evans also says it was not her intent to expose what the biblical authors were saying, but to see and expose “what I am looking for.”²⁰⁷ Quoting Evans, Keller writes, “Are we reading with the prejudice of love or... of judgment and power, self-interest and greed?”²⁰⁸ Keller responds by asking Evans if love were her reason for rejecting portions of Scripture and embracing others? Keller challenges Evans’ origin of love, stating Evans has secured a definition of love from outside of the Bible, and from within modern-day sensitivities. Keller charges that cultural influences have become Evans’ ultimate authority and rule.²⁰⁹

Ironically, Rachel Held Evans was living in Dayton, TN, the hometown of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial, a debate between creationism and the authority of Scripture when her first

²⁰⁵ Keller.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

book, *Faith Unraveled*, originally titled, *Evolving in Monkey Town*, was published on June 4, 2010.

In the nineteenth century, liberal theologians denied that God created the world in six days, commanded the genocidal extermination of Israel's ancient enemies, demanded the literal sacrifice of his Son as a substitutionary legal payment for sin, and verbally inspired the Bible. Most importantly, they denied that religious arguments should be settled by appeals to an infallible text or ecclesial authority. Putting it positively, nineteenth-century liberals accepted Darwinian evolution, biblical criticism, a moral influence view of the cross, an idea of God as the personal and eternal Spirit of love, and a view of Scripture as authoritative only within Christian experience. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century liberals expected these views to prevail in Christianity as a whole, but in the twenty-first century they remain contested beliefs.²¹⁰

In *Faith Unraveled* Evans speaks of her Christian upbringing and of her instilled love for God, the Bible, and the church, all the while expressing her crisis of faith, and voicing protests against the rigidity of traditional American evangelicalism. In the final chapter, Evans writes: "If I've learned anything over the past five years, it's that doubt is the mechanism by which faith evolves. It helps us cast off false fundamentals so that we can recover what has been lost or embrace what is new. It is a refining fire, a hot flame that keeps our faith alive and moving and bubbling about, where certainty would only freeze it on the spot."²¹¹ On the surface, Evans' statement is sentimentally appealing, but Michael Kruger, in his argument against PC says that progressives assert half-truths regarding the Christian faith, and this is the danger of PC.²¹² Going through Evans' book, point by point, and giving a biblical response would perhaps take volumes. Therefore, this project identifies and explains four key principles that uphold the Christian belief.

²¹⁰ Dorrien, 3.

²¹¹ Rachel Held Evans, *Faith Unraveled*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 237.

²¹² Kruger, *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity*, 115.

Foundational knowledge of the core meaning of the doctrine of regeneration, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation, the authority of Scripture, and the commission of Christ for world-wide evangelism, will shine a light on the craftiness of progressive thinking and will cause the born-again to guard against the anti-biblical philosophy of PC.

There never has been a time when the integrity and the authority of the Word of God has suffered more at the hands of erstwhile theologians than today. ... Theories of biblical inspiration range all the way from an extreme liberalism that rejects, entirely, infallible revelation and reduces the whole expression of Scripture to mythology, to the vagaries of enigmatic neo-orthodoxy, that equates the Scriptures with some kind of a mysticism, promoting a definition of inspiration that becomes absolutely incomprehensible.²¹³

An Interview with Evans

In an interview with Religion News Service, RNS, Evans answered questions about her beliefs. When asked why she left evangelicalism to worship at the Episcopal church, Rachel responded:

RHE: Just about every denomination in the American church is seeing a decline in numbers--including many evangelical denominations--so if it's a competition, then we're all losing, just at different rates! I felt drawn to the Episcopal church because it offered some practices I felt were missing in my evangelical experience, like space for silence and reflection, a focus on Christ's presence at the communion table as the climax and center of every worship service, opportunities for women in leadership, and the inclusion of LGBT people.²¹⁴

But I know plenty of folks who were raised Episcopalian who have become evangelical, drawn by the exciting and energetic worship or the emphasis on personal testimony and connection to Scripture. It's common in young adulthood, I think, to seek out faith traditions that complement the one in which you were

²¹³ Johnson, 40.

²¹⁴ Jonathan Merritt, "Rachel Held Evans Defends Exit From Evangelicalism, Calls Christians to Celebrate Sacraments", Religion News Service, religionnews.com, (March 9, 2015), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2015/03/09/rachel-held-evans-defends-exit-evangelicalism-calls-christians-celebrate-sacraments/>.

raised. It's not about rejecting your background, just about finding your own way. I don't want to project my experience onto all millennials.²¹⁵

When asked about evangelical criticism of the liberal theology of the Episcopal church, Evans replied:

Every Sunday morning, I stand in my Episcopal church and join in a chorus of voices publicly affirming the Apostle's Creed. Together, we declare that there is a good and almighty God who is the creative force behind all things seen and unseen; that this God is One, yet exists as three persons; that God loved the world enough to become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived, taught, fed, healed and suffered among us as both fully God and fully human; that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born to Mary; that he was crucified on a Roman cross and buried in the ground; that after three days dead, Jesus came back to life; that he ascended into heaven and reigns with God; that he will return to bring justice and restoration to our broken world; that God continues to work through the Holy Spirit, the church, and God's people; that forgiveness is possible, resurrection is possible, and eternal life is possible. If that's not Christian orthodoxy, I don't know what is.²¹⁶

Evans passed away in May of 2019, but her books are still in circulation, and her blog site, with posts from December 2007 – October 2019 is still available at Rachelheldevans.com.

Evans was a new voice, speaking to an age-old campaign, primarily against evangelicalism, but ultimately against the ancient debate over the authority of Scripture. MacArthur offers a response to those who have chosen to be removed from biblical belief and practice.

Our dialogue with people of differing faiths and conflicting worldviews now needs to be a give-and-take exchange. That means listening sympathetically, always being flexible with our own point of view, affirming as much as we possibly can, agreeing more than we disagree, carefully avoiding points of truth that are likely to offend, and always seeing common ground. In other words, because we live in a highly sophisticated but epistemologically challenged culture, certainty about spiritual things automatically comes across as either arrogant or naïve. We should therefore now approach differing faith perspectives as peacemongers rather than as preachers.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Jonathan Merritt.

²¹⁶ Merritt.

²¹⁷ MacArthur, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*, x.

Ideology of Pluralism

Rachel Hollis

Rachel Hollis is a very successful author and influencer of CW, daughter of a Pentecostal preacher, and very well-known for her book *Girl, Go Wash Your Face*. At the close of LGBT Pride week in 2019, Hollis reported in social media how her publisher, Thomas Nelson, one of the longest established and largest Bible publishers worldwide, had encouraged her to cut the chapter that celebrated gays and other groups, from her popular book.

Girl, Go Wash Your Face has been on the bestseller list for over a year, and Hollis shared with her millions of followers that chapter 19 was nearly cut because the Christian publisher believed the content “would offend a conservative audience.”²¹⁸ Thomas Nelson is further quoted, “You don’t understand how many fans you’ll get, you don’t understand how famous you’re going to be. But NOT if you include this. You can believe whatever you want to believe, just don’t tell everybody what it is.”²¹⁹

On July 3, 2019, Hollis reported the story on social media to her millions of followers. Hollis was flooded with responses and replies, most of which were very positive. Chapter 19 is titled: “Lie: There’s Only One Way to Be,” Hollis writes:

“I am a Christian, but I fully love and accept you and want to hang out with you and be friends if you’re Christian or Muslim or Jewish or Buddhist or Jedi or love the opposite sex or love the same sex or love Rick Springfield circa 1983 . . . One of my best friends is gay, African American, and Mexican American. Three incredibly powerful narratives have shaped the woman she is, and there is much

²¹⁸ Nora Krug, “Rachel Hollis says that her publisher asked her to cut a chapter celebrating gays”, *The Washington Post: Democracy dies in darkness*, washingtonpost.com, (July 3, 2019), accessed May 29, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/rachel-hollis-says-that-her-publisher-asked-her-to-cut-a-chapter-celebrating-gays/2019/07/03/258b5fda-9d05-11e9-b27f-ed2942f73d70_story.html.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

strength, history, beauty, confidence, pain, empathy, anger, truth and courage in her story. What if I'd never heard it? . . . Doing life with people who don't look or think or vote like us is the whole point — it's our call to arms! Love thy neighbor wasn't a suggestion; it was a command, you guys."²²⁰

Hollis had threatened to sue the publisher. She reports that they finally agreed to keep chapter 19 in the book.²²¹

Comments from online followers include:

“This post means the world to me.” “Thank you for advocating for the lgbtq community.”

“This straight white semi-conservative girl loved that chapter! It was one of my favorites! Thank you for fighting for it and standing up for what you believe in!” Others added: “I am a very conservative Christian; I was not offended by chapter 19 at all. I am of the belief that you do not have to agree with someone in order to love and respect them. Jesus did not agree with everyone's lifestyle, but he showed the same love to ALL.”²²² “I still find myself naively shocked that this is an actual 21st century conversation. Thank you for not compromising the seats around your table.”²²³ There were others who took issue with Hollis' perspectives, and raised discussions about Jesus, the Bible, and sin.²²⁴

²²⁰ King.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Alisa Sanders Responds

Sanders credits Hollis as a great writer, storyteller, connector with her audience and so much more. Sanders gives accolades for Hollis' having survived a difficult past and finding the strength to move forward in life. After being abused by an ex-boyfriend, Hollis came to herself and decided she was done with that life and was ready to move on. Hollis began to encourage herself with high-fives and, "You go, girl!"

Sanders goes on to show that though Hollis is to be celebrated and has a great story to tell, she does not attribute any of her success, or wisdom to her identity in Jesus Christ.

"Sadly, Hollis doesn't attribute this wisdom to knowing who she is in Christ. She credits self-love. Hollis is a self-proclaimed Christian, and the book is published by Thomas Nelson (a Christian publisher). References to the Bible, Jesus, her faith, and Christianity are peppered throughout the book. It's not some kind of devotional—but it *is* marketed as Christian. And yet much of Hollis's advice isn't Christian, though some of it is still good."²²⁵

Sanders credits Hollis for the good advice she gives but challenges the premise from which Hollis shares her message. Foundationally, the how and the way are critical for CW. Sanders unveils five common lies that seem to lace Hollis' pseudo-Christian platform.²²⁶ The first lie is, "You Come First, and Your Happiness Depends on You." Sanders notes that *Girl, Wash Your Face* is "littered" with references to self, self-love, self-care. Self-help is how Hollis manages life. Sanders says there is no mention of surrendering to Christ and trusting in Him. There are cultural solutions but no biblical ones. "Make no mistake, sisters. This book is all about *you*. Your happiness, your success, your everything—it's all up to you, ladies."²²⁷

²²⁵ Alisa Sanders, "Girl, Wash Your Face? What Rachel Hollis Gets Right and Wrong", TGC, U.S. Edition, [thegospelcoalition.org](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org), (September 24, 2018), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/girl-wash-face/>.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

Sanders does not see self-help as good news, but rather true joy and peace that comes from the Lordship of Jesus Christ. “If anyone would come after me,” he says, “let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).²²⁸

The second lie is “Never Give Up on Your Dreams”. Hollis encourages women to never let go of their big dreams. Sanders quickly rebuts this comment with an example from American Idol, stating that everyone knows when an idol hopeful should give up on his dreams. The statement is unrealistic.²²⁹

Sanders lists Hollis’ dreams. “I’m a big fan of displaying visuals inside my closet door to remind me every single day of what my aim is. Currently taped to my door: the cover of *Forbes* featuring self-made female CEOs, a vacation house in Hawaii . . . and a picture of Beyoncé, obvi”. Sanders comments that Jesus never called us to chase after any of these things but calls us to follow Him. “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).²³⁰

The third lie is, “The Religious Pluralism Is True”. Hollis makes the proclamation that all religions are valid and true. Pluralism is the belief that all religions lead to the same place: there is no incorrect way to think about God. Sanders quickly notes the problem with this lie is it excludes every religion that does not affirm this view. “Religious pluralism is a dogmatic religious belief—and it contradicts Christianity”.²³¹

²²⁸ Sanders.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

Hollis says, “Just because you believe it doesn’t mean it’s true for everyone. . . . Faith is one of the most abused instances of this. We decide that our religion is right; therefore, every other religion must be wrong”.²³²

The logic here cannot be true because all religions contradict each other. Jesus Christ is exclusive to Christianity. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6) “Religious pluralism is a dogmatic religious belief—and it contradicts Christianity”.²³³

The fourth lie is, “Judgment Is Bad”. Sanders calls Hollis out for being guilty of judging. In a story Hollis tells about not being able to trust a friend who is unsuccessful with diets, Hollis states that that friend cannot be trusted. Sanders says Hollis at that point is being judgmental. Everyone makes judgments. Scriptures says judge with the right judgment (John 7:24).²³⁴

The fifth and final lie is, “Sin Isn’t the Problem”. Sanders emphatically states that this is the biggest lie of all. “This is the deepest and most pervasive lie that coils its way around the book like a python choking its prey”. Sanders gives the truth regarding the fallenness of humanity, and the fact that humankind cannot save itself. Everything wrong in life is the result of sin, and sin must be paid for.²³⁵

Sanders gives a final analysis:

Don’t read this book for rest. Reading *Girl, Wash Your Face* exhausted me. It’s all about what *I* can be doing better and what *I’m* not doing well enough. How to be better at work, parenting, and writing. How to be less bad at cardio, sex, and, you know, changing the world. But grasping the good news of who I am in

²³² Sanders.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Christ—and nothing else—is what brings true rest. So rest from striving, my friend. Yes, wash your face. Take care of yourself. Make good choices. But know who you are in Christ Jesus. If you let this truth become the foundation of how you see the world, you'll be content to glorify him in every situation—whether cleaning bathrooms or relaxing at your beach home, changing diapers or crushing your career goals.²³⁶

Alisa Sanders, a popular blogger on the new progressive movement, and former member of a progressive church, gives the following characteristics of PC. 1) A lowered view of the Bible 2) Feelings are emphasized over facts 3) Essential Christian doctrines are open for reinterpretation 4) Historic terms are redefined 5) The heart of the gospel message shifts from sin and redemption to social justice.²³⁷

Ideology of Cultural Tolerance

Progressive philosophy rejects dogma and the idea of absolute truth. As stated in their “8 Points,” as well as in their definitions and statements of belief, progressives do not take the Scriptures literally, but embrace a more interpretive, metaphorical understanding.²³⁸

The idea of a liberal approach to Christianity—that theology should be based on reason and critically interpreted religious experience, not external authority—has an ironic history in the United States. In the nineteenth century it took root and flowered; in the early twentieth century it became the founding idea of a new theological establishment; in the 1930s it was marginalized by neo-orthodox theology; in the 1960s it was rejected by liberation theology; by the 1970's it was often taken for dead. But liberal theology remained more significant than was indicated by the unusual story of its rise and fall. The entire field of modern theology employed critical tools and theories that the liberal tradition developed. Both of the movements that overtook liberal theology were offshoots of the liberal tradition. The idea of a liberal Christian third way between conservative orthodoxy and secular disbelief retained its original relevance. And in the late twentieth century liberal theology experienced an unnoticed renaissance in the

²³⁶ Sanders.

²³⁷ Alisa Sanders, “5 Signs Your Church May Be Headed Toward Progressive Christianity”, Alisa Childers, [alisachilders.com](https://www.alisachilders.com/blog/5-signs-your-church-might-be-heading-toward-progressive-christianity), (5.8.2017), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.alisachilders.com/blog/5-signs-your-church-might-be-heading-toward-progressive-christianity>.

²³⁸ Wolsey, “Progressive Christianity Isn't Progressive Politics,” Jan. 17.

decades following its supposed demise. It describes the irony, decline, renewal, and ambiguity of a still important theological tradition.²³⁹

Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity

In his book *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity* Michael Kruger responds to ten principles that Richard Rohr believes should be embodied by modern Christianity. The principles were developed from Philip Gulley's book, *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus*. Rohr's series is titled "Returning to Essentials" and are equivalent to what would be confessional statements of modern liberalism. Kruger says the statements in effect are a Ten Commandments of PC.²⁴⁰

Indeed, these ten sound like they were gathered not so much on the mountaintop as in the university classroom. They are less about God revealing his desires and more about man expressing his own—less Moses, more Oprah. But take note: each of these commandments is partially true. Indeed, that is what makes this list, and progressive Christianity as a whole, so challenging. It is a master class in half-truths that sound appealing on the surface until you dig down deeper and really explore their foundations and implications.²⁴¹

Below are Rohr's half-truths that Kruger biblically defends in *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity*.

1. Jesus Is a Model for Living More Than an Object for Worship
2. Affirming People's Potential Is More Important Than Reminding Them of Their Brokenness
3. The Work of Reconciliation Should be Valued Over Making Judgments
4. Gracious Behavior Is More Important Than Right Belief

²³⁹ Dorrien, 1.

²⁴⁰ Kruger, *Ten Commandments of PC*, 5-6.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 6.

5. Inviting Questions Is More Valuable Than Supplying Answers
6. Encouraging the Personal Search Is More Important Than Group Uniformity
7. Meeting Actual Needs Is More Important Than Maintaining Institutions
8. Peacemaking Is More Important Than Power
9. We Should Care More About Love and Less About Sex
10. Life in This World Is More Important Than the Afterlife

Progressive Christianity is Christianity?

In his blog, “Progressive Christianity is Christianity,” John Pavlovitz says PC is Christianity. Pavlovitz mentions how fashionable it is for conservatives to pass off PC as a watered down religion of convenience, or a cheap imitation of the Christian faith, or even the assumption that “real Christianity” is too difficult or demanding for those who identify as PC. Pavlovitz says PC know the authenticity of the PC faith, PC know the depth of their study, and sincerity of their prayers. They know the road they’ve traveled, and they find no need to justify their personal testimony. Pavlovitz says that PC is so diverse that it is difficult to define or summarize but offers a list of beliefs that all PC hold.

1. We believe that a God who is eternal, isn’t land locked to a 6,000 year-old collection of writings, unable to speak in real-time to those who seek. Revelation can come within and independent of the Bible.
2. We believe that God isn’t threatened or angered by our questions, our doubts, or our vacillation born out of authentic pursuit, even when those things are labeled heretical by other people. God is more secure than they are in who God is.
3. We believe that Christian tradition is embedded with thousands of years of misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia, and that our task as Christians in these days is to remove those cumbersome layers and uncover the very essence of what it meant to follow Jesus.
4. We believe that in the Scriptural command to “watch one’s life and doctrine closely” (1 Tim 4:16), the former is as important as the latter; that faith isn’t only about what you believe, it’s about whether or not your life reflects what you profess to believe.

5. We believe that social justice is the heart of the Gospel, that it was the central work of Jesus as evidenced in his life and teachings; the checking of power, the healing of wounds, the care for the poor, the lifting of the marginalized, the feeding of the hungry, the making of peace.²⁴²

Pavlovitz continues by stating issues on which PC widely differ. Those include the inerrancy of Scripture, the existence of Hell, intercessory prayer, salvation by atonement, abortion, the death penalty, and gun control. Pavlovitz notes that progressive Christians are not in unity politically. Progressive Christians identify as Christ-followers, characterized by what they do; caring for others and living the best they can in resemblance of Christ. According to Pavlovitz, progressive Christians are all Christians, moving, listening, learning, believing, and progressing.²⁴³

Kruger honors Machen's work in *Christianity and Liberalism*. The book was written in 1923 when Machen was a professor at Princeton Seminary. Machen wrote in response to the rising liberal philosophy in mainstream denominations of his day. Machen argued that the liberal mindset toward Christianity was not a simple variant of different denominational ideology, but liberalism as a completely different religion. "Put simply, liberal Christianity is not Christianity."²⁴⁴ Kruger says liberalism's modern components, (e.g., "emerging" or "progressive" Christianity), are not new but are a restatement of a familiar system that has lingered for many generations.²⁴⁵ In his own words Machen says,

²⁴² John Pavlovitz, "Progressive Christianity Is Christianity", John Pavlovitz – Stuff That Needs to Be Said, johnpavlovitz.com, (October 5, 2016), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://johnpavlovitz.com/2016/10/05/explaining-progressive-christianity-otherwise-known-as-christianity/>. Each declaration is accredited to Pavlovitz.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Kruger, *Ten Commandments*, 5.

²⁴⁵ Kruger, *Ten Commandments*, 5.

“In my little book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1923, I tried to show that the issue in the Church of the present day is not between two varieties of the same religion, but, at bottom, between two essentially different types of thought and life. There is much interlocking of the branches, but the two tendencies, Modernism and supernaturalism, or (otherwise designated) non-doctrinal religion and historic Christianity, spring from different roots.²⁴⁶

Dangers of Progressive Ideologies

The Apostle Paul gave fair and clear warning to the church at Colossae. “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col. 2:8). Paul’s statement acknowledges that even in the days of the Early Church, there were worldly philosophies that focused on the human rather than on the divine (Gal. 5:15, Heb. 3:12, Eph. 5:6, Col. 2:23, 1Tim. 6:20, Gal. 4:3, Col. 2:20). After warning the believers at Colossae, Paul makes a bold theological statement about Jesus Christ.

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:9-12).

Elwell explains that the foundational issues of secular, often anti-Christian philosophy has not changed over the centuries. Yet, solutions to secular tensions have not always been compatible to historic Christian belief. Thus Christianity must be clearly rearticulated in every era of philosophy, informing an unbelieving or unintelligible society of the salvific claims of Christianity. “This goal of contemporary Christian philosophy cannot be attained apart from the assistance of biblical scholarship and theology, however, since orthodox Christianity is grounded

²⁴⁶ Machen, *Christianity in Conflict*, 29.

upon, and intended to be consistent with the events recorded and interpreted in Scripture, the Christian philosopher must come to understand Scripture as it understands itself”.²⁴⁷

“As this mission statement reflects, ‘self-proclaimed’ progressive Christians call attention to the fact that they are ‘progressive’, and they describe and define themselves by noting how they differ from conservative Christians; that is, they welcome ‘all peoples’ to the communion table, including those ‘who have other names for the way to God’s realm’, those ‘of all sexual orientations and gender identities’, and ‘agnostics’; and they embrace ‘questioning’ and ‘understanding’ rather than ‘dogmatic certainty’ and ‘absolutes’. Of course, this celebration of religious pluralism, indeterminacy and inclusivity is a not so subtle jab at conservative Christianity’s notorious ‘dogmatic certainty’ that salvation (and Holy Communion) is not for those of other faiths (let alone those of no faith); and homophobia.”²⁴⁸

Empirical Data Reflecting Cultural Tolerance

Many CFI have large followings of Christian women, although many influential Bible study authors, teachers, motivational speakers, bloggers, musicians, worship leaders, social media, and online influencers may not be instructing CW in the core beliefs of Christianity.²⁴⁹

Biblical Illiteracy

Surveys in 2016 show that whereas Americans identify as Christians, they seem confused regarding theology and the details of the Christian faith. There is a deficit in theological knowledge in North America (NA). Most NA say God wrote the Bible, but they are not sure whether or not everything in it is true. Six in ten Americans say everyone will eventually go to

²⁴⁷ Elwell, 921.

²⁴⁸ Edles.

²⁴⁹ George Barna, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago.”

heaven, while seven in ten say there is only one true God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and two-thirds say God accepts worship of all faiths.²⁵⁰

Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, says about two-thirds of Americans believe Jesus is God while half say Jesus is a being created by God. McConnell says those two beliefs do not seem to match. Yet, “Contradictory and incompatible beliefs are OK for most people.”²⁵¹

An online theological survey, hosted by Ligonier Ministries asked forty seven questions on the Bible, prayer and hell. The research showed that Americans believe God likes all religions. Sixty-four percent of North Americans agree that God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Twenty-four percent disagree. Twelve percent are not sure. Americans of all ages hold this belief, from those eighteen to thirty-four years old, to those fifty and older. More than half of African-Americans, sixty-nine percent, Hispanics sixty-five percent, whites, sixty-three percent, and Asian-Americans fifty-seven percent agree.²⁵² American evangelicals, forty-eight percent, who are less likely than Americans who don’t have evangelical beliefs, sixty-seven percent hold this view.²⁵³

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has defined evangelicals as those who strongly agree that; 1) Biblicism: The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe,

²⁵⁰ Bob Smietana, “What Do Americans Believe About God? New Study Explores Our Theology”, Facts and Trends, factsandtrends.net, (September 27, 2016), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://factsandtrends.net/2016/09/27/what-do-americans-believe-about-god-new-study-explores-our-theology/>.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Bob Smietana, “Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details,” Lifeway Research, lifewayresearch.com, (September 27, 2016), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/09/27/americans-love-god-and-the-bible-are-fuzzy-on-the-details/>.

²⁵³ NAE, National Association of Evangelicals, “What is an Evangelical?”, (Not Dated), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>.

2) Activism: It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior 3) Crucicentrism: Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin, 4) Conversionism: Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.²⁵⁴

Evangelical believers say hell is real. Other Americans are not so sure. Eighty-four percent of those who hold evangelical beliefs say hell is a place of eternal judgment, where God sends all people who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only thirty percent of NA who do not have evangelical beliefs hold that view. Overall, fewer than half, forty percent of Americans say those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will go to hell.²⁵⁵

Many evangelicals believe that everybody goes to heaven. They also believe that only those who trust Jesus as their Savior are saved. Two-thirds of those with evangelical beliefs (64 percent) say heaven is a place where all people will ultimately be reunited with their loved ones. That percentage is slightly higher than Americans in general at sixty percent. By definition, all those with evangelical beliefs affirm that only people who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation. Overall, about half of Americans, fifty-four percent say only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone receive eternal salvation.²⁵⁶

Everybody sins but it's no big deal. North Americans admit they are not perfect, but they give each other the benefit of the doubt. Two-thirds, sixty-five percent, agree that everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. More than half, fifty-seven percent, say it would be fair for God to show His wrath against sin, but that wrath seems to be reserved only for the worst

²⁵⁴ NAE, National Association of Evangelicals, "What is an Evangelical".

²⁵⁵ Smietana, "Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details."

²⁵⁶ Smietana, "Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details."

sinner. Three-quarters, seventy-four percent, of NA disagree with the idea that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation. That includes almost two-thirds, sixty two percent, who strongly disagree.²⁵⁷

NA believe the resurrection really happened, but other things in the Bible did not. More than half of NA, fifty-eight percent, say God is the author of the Bible. Approximately half say the Bible alone is the written Word of God, fifty-two percent. Two-thirds of NA, sixty-four percent say the biblical accounts of the physical (bodily) resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. One quarter, twenty-three percent disagree. Thirteen percent are not sure. Almost all of those with evangelical beliefs, ninety-eight percent agree, as do more than half of Americans who do not hold evangelical beliefs, fifty-six percent.²⁵⁸

Fewer than half of Americans (forty-seven percent) say the Bible is 100 percent accurate in all it teaches. Forty-three percent disagree. Ten percent are not sure. Americans are also split over whether the Bible is literally true. Just under half (forty-four percent) say the Bible contains helpful myths but isn't literally true. Forty-five percent disagree. Half of Americans (fifty-one percent) say the Bible was written for each person to interpret as he or she chooses. Forty percent disagree. Nine percent are not sure.²⁵⁹

The report showed that NA believe in a Triune God, but it is complicated. Though NA are unsure of the details, seven out of ten NA, sixty-nine percent agree there is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Six in ten NA say Jesus is

²⁵⁷ Smietana, "Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details."

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

both divine and human, sixty-one percent. Fifty-two percent say Jesus is the first and greatest created being.²⁶⁰

The Holy Spirit is particularly confusing. Fifty-six percent say the Holy Spirit is a force, not a person. Twenty-eight percent say the Spirit is a divine being but is not equal to God the Father and Jesus. Fifty-one percent disagree. Twenty-one percent are not sure.²⁶¹

NA also disagree about sex, abortion, homosexuality, and gender. Nearly half of NA, forty-nine percent say sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin. Forty-four percent say sex outside of traditional marriage is not a sin. Seven percent are not sure. Forty-nine percent say abortion is a sin. Forty percent say abortion is not. Eleven percent are not sure. Almost four in ten, thirty-eight percent say gender identity is a matter of choice. Fifty-one percent disagree. One in ten or eleven percent are not sure. Forty-two percent of Americans say the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply today. Forty-four percent disagree. Fourteen percent are not sure.²⁶²

Eighty-seven percent of NA evangelicals are more likely to say abortion is a sin than other NA at forty-one percent. Evangelicals are also thirty-two percent less likely to say gender identity is a choice than forty-percent of other NA.²⁶³

Regarding personal salvation and works, three-quarters of NA, or seventy-seven percent say people must contribute their own effort for personal salvation. Half of NA, fifty-two percent

²⁶⁰ Smietana, "Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details."

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

say good deeds help them earn a spot in heaven. Sixty percent agree that Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of their sin.²⁶⁴

Regarding communion, sixty-two percent of churchgoers disagree with the statement, “My local church has the authority to withhold the Lord’s Supper from me and exclude me from the fellowship of the church.” Twenty-nine percent agree. Nine percent are not sure. Men are more likely to agree than women. Churchgoers with household incomes over one hundred thousand dollars, sixty-five percent, are more likely to disagree than those with incomes less than twenty-five thousand dollars, fifty-six percent. NA with evangelical beliefs, thirty-eight percent are more likely to say a church can withhold communion or exclude people than churchgoers who do not hold evangelical beliefs, namely twenty-five percent.²⁶⁵

McConnell said Christian theology is both simple and complicated. Most Americans agree with simple truths like “Jesus arose” and “Jesus saves,” but few believe they need saving or they are not good by nature. “Basic Christian theology is easy to find on a church’s beliefs webpage, yet most Americans don’t understand how the pieces are related.”²⁶⁶

A more recent LifeWay survey showed that almost fourteen percent of the adult population in NA is illiterate. The issue is compounded with biblical illiteracy because NA do not read the Bible. The research shows that only twenty percent of Americans say they have read through the Bible at least once, and only twenty-two percent say they systematically read through a portion of the Bible each day. One third of NA never read the Bible.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Smietana, “Americans Love God But Are Fuzzy On the Details.”

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ken Braddy, “Discipling in an Age of Biblical Illiteracy,” Facts and Trends, factsandtrends.net, (July 10, 2017), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/07/10/discipling-in-an-age-of-biblical-illiteracy/>.

The report also shows that three-quarters, seventy-seven percent, of NA say people must contribute their own effort for personal salvation, half, fifty-two percent say good deeds merit an eternal destiny in heaven, and forty-five percent believe there are many ways to get there. Three-quarters, seventy-four percent disagree with the idea that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation. Fewer than half, forty-seven percent say the Bible is one hundred percent accurate in all it teaches, half, fifty-one percent say the Bible was written for each person to interpret as he or she chooses.²⁶⁸

In 2018 Ed Stetzer published a report from LifeWay Research showing that biblical literacy in America is at an all-time low.²⁶⁹ The report stated that NA Christians claim to believe the Bible is God's Word: divinely inspired and inerrant. Yet, research shows that NA do not read the Bible, much less study it. A study with LifeWay Research found only forty-five percent of regular church attenders read the Bible more than once a week. Over forty percent of church attenders read the Bible occasionally, meaning once or twice a month. Almost one in five churchgoers say they *never* read the Bible, equating with the number who read it every day.²⁷⁰

Biblical Worldview

In his book, *The Last Christian Generation*, copyright 2006, Josh McDowell says, “I sincerely believe unless something is done now to change the spiritual state of our young people-

²⁶⁸ Braddy.

²⁶⁹ Ed Stetzer, “The Epic of Biblical Illiteracy in Our Churches” The Exchange, Christianitytoday.com, (July 6, 2015), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/july/epidemic-of-bible-illiteracy-in-our-churches.html>.

²⁷⁰ LifeWay Research, “LifeWay Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read It,” lifewayresearch.com, (April 25, 2017), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

you will become the last Christian generation.”²⁷¹ McDowell made the predictions prior to 2006 and parents feared that their children, who had been reared in church, would walk away from the church unchanged. Parents feared that they would be the last Christian generation, and their children would walk away from the claims of Christianity.²⁷² In his 2006 publication, McDowell wrote that those parental fears had become a reality.

McDowell reports, “Over the last generation the number of students who say that the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home has dropped from 66% to 55% down to 33%.” McDowell continues by saying that, “between 69% to 94% of young people are leaving the traditional church after high school and few are returning.”²⁷³

McDowell reports that there is some good news. “65 % of this generation wants a close relationship with God; and 49% want to make a difference in the world.”²⁷⁴ Most say that God is still important to them, but, “they just believe some different things from you and I.”²⁷⁵ The not so good news is, McDowell continues:

- 63% don’t believe that Jesus is the Son of the one true God
- 58% believe all faiths teach equally valid truths
- 51% don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead.
- 68% don’t believe that the Holy Spirit is a real entity.
- 65% don’t believe Satan is a real entity.²⁷⁶

In an attempt to save this generation from unbelief, parents began to remove their children from public schools, and enroll them in Christian schools, in hopes that their children

²⁷¹ Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, (Holiday, Florida: Green Key Books, 2006), 11.

²⁷² McDowell, 13.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

would be undergirded with a biblical worldview.²⁷⁷ As a result, the Nehemiah Institute did a study to determine whether or not placing a child in a Christian school actually changed the child's worldview. The test was structured to assess a student according to one of four worldviews, Biblical Theism, Moderate Christian, Secular Humanism, and Socialism. The report showed that there was no major belief difference between students in public schools and those who were in Christian schools. 85% of students in public schools, from Christian homes, did not have a biblical worldview. Whereas Christian school students scored higher, the study showed that only 6% of Christian school students held to a biblical theism worldview.²⁷⁸

McDowell makes clear that this generation, now in their late twenties and early 30's, is just as interested in God, and as passionate for spiritual things as previous generations.

McDowell notes the problem: The fundamental question is:

“How are they forming their view of God?” And what brand of religion are they adopting? In other words, our kids are departing from the faith of their fathers... and mothers. They are believing “some different things from you and me.” Much of what they believe about Christianity, truth, reality, and the church, comes from a distorted view they have gleaned from the world around them. It's not that they haven't embraced a version of Christianity; it's simply that the version they believe in is not built on the true foundation of what biblical Christianity is all about.”²⁷⁹

Some of McDowell's reports have come from the statistical work of the Barna organization. In 1995 Barna began reporting on how many Americans held a biblical worldview. The study was repeated in the years 2000 and 2005. When asked if the percentages had dropped

²⁷⁷ Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, 15.

²⁷⁸ McDowell, 14.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 15.

or increased over the years, Barna reported that the numbers were fairly the same.²⁸⁰ From 1995 to 2005 Barna reported that only 9% of all Americans have a biblical worldview. And of those professing to be born-again, only less than one out of every five, (19%) held such claims. The Barna organization describes a biblical worldview as believing:

- that absolute moral truth exists
- the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches
- Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic
- a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works
- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth
- God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.²⁸¹

According to Barna, anyone holding all these beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.²⁸²

In 2007, Barna clarified the meaning of the terms born-again and evangelical, noting that,

The Bible does not refer to any person as an ‘evangelical,’ this is the contrast created within the religious community many years ago to differentiate a group that possesses a distinctive theological perspective. Over time, people have become sloppy in the measurement process, as evidenced by the fact that one out of every four self-identified evangelicals has not even accepted Christ as their Savior. Responsible analysts, researchers and journalists should be encouraged to re-examine the term and the measures they are using. Political commentators, reporters, educators and researchers continually make important claims about the spiritual life, lifestyle patterns, voting preferences and issue stands of evangelicals even though it is clear that the criteria they use for identifying evangelicals are misleading, at best.²⁸³

Barna defined born-again Christians as people who 1) said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and that relationship is still important to them today, 2) indicated

²⁸⁰ Ed Stetzer, “Barna: How Many Have a Biblical Worldview?,” *Christianity Today*, The Exchange with Ed Stetzer, (March 9, 2009), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/march/barna-how-many-have-biblical-worldview.html>.

²⁸¹ Stetzer, *Worldview*.

²⁸² *Ibid*.

²⁸³ Barna, “Survey Explores Who Qualifies As an Evangelical,” Barna, barna.com, (January 18, 2007), <https://www.barna.com/research/survey-explores-who-qualifies-as-an-evangelical/>.

they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Evangelicals have the same qualifications as those who say they are born-again, plus seven other credentials Barna has identified.

- 1) Their faith is important in their life today.
- 2) They have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians
- 3) Believe that Satan exists
- 4) Believe that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works
- 5) Believe that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth
- 6) Asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches
- 7) Describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

A more recent report from the Barna organization shows that fewer adults now have a biblical worldview than were reported two years prior.²⁸⁴ The objective in Barna's studies over the years was to determine what percentage of Americans based their beliefs primarily on biblical principles.

There is an integral connection between what you believe to be true, right and appropriate, and how you act. We all work hard to make sense of life that many challenges and opportunities we face from moment to moment. Your worldview is your response to how you understand all of those situations and their implications, based on your core beliefs, values, morals, assumptions, and expectations.²⁸⁵

Barna continues:

Behavior is not random. It is an outgrowth of our understanding and interpretation of reality and its consequences. Identifying the prevailing worldview held by

²⁸⁴ Barna, "Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago."

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

people enables us to better comprehend their life choices, and even to predict what is likely to happen in our society. Knowing which worldviews dominate a society – and thus the behaviors we can expect as a result – enables us to either reinforce that worldview or to create a process to alter it.²⁸⁶

In 2010, using the data that there are less than one percent of twenty-somethings in NA who possess a biblical worldview, Debbie Norris Lanier surveyed individuals ages 18-32, measuring the results of a seven-week biblical worldview study with successive three-week peer-mediated gatherings. Lanier reports that the pre-survey results among participants, as well as nonparticipants, displayed a higher percentage of biblical worldview beliefs than average twenty-somethings. In Lanier’s study, one hundred percent of the population professed a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important to their lives as is the belief that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator. The focus group discussions demonstrated higher levels of biblical perspective by the more regular participants. Students who attended the focus group less often contributed minimally to the conversation and were less passionate and confident than those who had attended regularly.²⁸⁷

In 2018 the survey for the percentage of American adults, age eighteen or older, who held a biblical worldview had dropped from 10% in 2006, to 9% in 2017, to 7% in 2018. Barna found that adults under the age of 35 are half as likely as older adults, to have a biblical worldview. Lastly, only 4% of millennials, 8% of Gen Xers, 9% of Baby Boomers, and 9% among Elders were found to hold a biblical worldview. In totality, Barna asserts, “just 10% of adults who identify themselves as Christian have a biblical worldview. Among people whose beliefs about

²⁸⁶ Barna, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago.”

²⁸⁷ Debbie Norris Lanier, “Twenty-somethings in the Church: The Impact of a Biblical Worldview,” Asbury Theological Seminary, (March 25, 2010), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1452&context=ecommonsatsdissertations>.

salvation qualify them as born-again Christians, less than one out of every four, twenty-three percent has a biblical worldview.”²⁸⁸

“Fewer people than ever have a biblical worldview in NA. Our new Gen Z research (those born between 1999 and 2015) with the Barna Group confirms what many have suspected for a while—the number of those with a biblical worldview continues to decline”²⁸⁹. This report shows that 10% of Boomers have a biblical worldview, 7% of Gen X, 6% of Millennials, 4% of Gen Z have a biblical worldview.²⁹⁰

A 2015 report from Barna Research shows decline in the number of women who attend church. The report showed that the majority of unchurched women, eighty-five percent, are actually *dechurched*. Women are not unfamiliar or inexperienced with church. The research shows that at some point women decided church was no longer for them. Five contributing factors to this church for women are: 1) competing priorities 2) busyness 3) lack of emotional engagement and support 4) changing family structures 5) change in belief.²⁹¹

Regarding emotional engagement, less than half of the women received any indication of emotional support at their local church or synagogue. Only seventeen percent felt “very” supported at church, and twenty-three percent said they feel “somewhat supported”. Forty-three percent of women said they felt no emotional support from church. Without strong relationships

²⁸⁸ Barna, “Survey Reveals that Fewer Adults Have a Biblical Worldview Than Two Years Ago.”

²⁸⁹ Barna and 360 Impact Institute, “Only 4% of Gen Z Have a Biblical Worldview,” (2018), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.impact360institute.org/articles/4-percent-gen-z-biblical-worldview/>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Barna, “Five Factors Changing Women’s Relationship with Churches,” Barna, barna.com, (June 25, 2015), accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-factors-changing-womens-relationship-with-churches/>.

within the church, a woman's absence can go unnoticed. The research then asks, "Where are women finding such support?"²⁹²

Although there is a limited body of literature specifically concerning the spiritual formation of CW in America, knowledge now exists that the far greater portion of Americans who claim to be born-again, do not hold to a biblical worldview. Though women are not named specifically in most of the existing data, CW are included in the current data; therefore, there is reason to believe that many CFI who have large followings of CW, including Bible study authors, teachers, motivational speakers, bloggers, musicians, worship leaders, social media and online influencers may not be instructing CW in the core beliefs of biblical Christianity.

Kevin McCaffree offers the following information.

"Declining Religiosity. Americans born between 1971 and 1994 are over three times more likely to leave the religion of their parents than people born before 1925, and the likelihood that someone will return to religion in later life is miniscule. The most recent and clever scientific methodologies demonstrate that as many as 40% of the American population may be atheists."²⁹³

Religions provide people with an existential scaffolding of meaning and order within a community of social support. Declining commitment to Christianity thus produces a social and existential vacuum. Alt-Left and Alt-Right Millennials lathered in secular political ideologies avoid the antiquated supernatural Christianity of their parents. Yet, as with all young people, they are hungry for an overriding worldview, for devils to punish, and for a Utopian cause to strive toward. As inequality rises, and declining social trust congeals ideological in-groups more rigidly, these devils and this Utopia appear ever more real".²⁹⁴

²⁹² Barna, "Five Factors Changing Women's Relationship with Churches."

²⁹³ Kevin McCaffree, "When Secularism: Becomes a Religion: The Alt-Left, the Alt-Right, and Moral Righteousness," *Skeptic* [Altadena, CA] 22, no. 4 (2017): 36+. *Gale In Context: Science* (accessed July 27, 2019), https://link-galegroup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A520714005/SCIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=SCIC&xid=e37b579c.

²⁹⁴ McCaffree.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is a brief summary of the study, its purpose and procedure. It also includes a discussion regarding the findings as they relate to prior research. The statement of limitations is also included, along with recommendations for further study and research.

Summary of Study

A qualitative historical study was conducted to compare and contrast the creeds and claims of PC and PE, along with the message of progressive CFI with the doctrines and creeds of the biblical narrative. Empirical data was also collected to measure the rate of spiritual formation and biblical belief in America since some CFI with large CW followings began to distribute the progressive message. The study identified core differences between the belief systems of biblical Christianity and progressive Christianity. The research also identified core biblical beliefs and hermeneutical methodology that would help CFI guard against the oppositional rationale of PC.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to compare the teachings of progressive CFI with core biblical beliefs regarding spiritual formation and worship belief, in order to show the diabolical differences between the two systems of belief.

Summary of Procedure

Data was gathered regarding core Christian beliefs and the beliefs of those who hold a progressive Christian worldview. Data was also gathered to show the actual teaching of those who hold to a biblical worldview and those who hold a progressive worldview. Statistical data was also gathered to show the percentages of those in NA who held to a biblical worldview from 2010 to 2020 that could possibly relate to the effects of progressive teaching of some CFI with large CW followings.

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

The research findings show the tenets of progressive Christianity do not coincide with tenets of the biblical narrative. Whereas progressive CFI uphold the ideologies of relevance, pluralism, and cultural tolerance, while biblical ideology upholds regeneration, the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ in salvation, biblical authority, and the compelling commission of Jesus Christ for worldwide evangelism, as core doctrines of Christian life and practice. Whereas progressive beliefs are rooted in human philosophy, Christian beliefs are rooted in the truthfulness of the biblical text. The data shows that progressive Christian belief and practice violates biblical Christian belief and practice. PC statistical data shows a marked decrease in NA spiritual formation from 2010-2020 in the percentages of NA who hold to a biblical worldview. Research also showed that when a biblical worldview is taught, there is increase in the percentage of those who hold to a biblical worldview. Therefore, the research concludes that the doctrines of progressive Christianity are not biblical but are a human philosophical system positioned against the doctrines of biblical Christianity, and CFI should teach and speak biblical truth, and warn CW of the dangers of progressive Christianity.

Limitations

This project does not address the role of women in church leadership, neither is it a discussion of evangelicalism; whether or not evangelical ideologies are biblical, hyper-biblical, impacting, or in decline. The study is not a direct response to the 8 Points of (PC), though they are referred to in various places of the research. Other limitations included the facts that the project does not conduct a quantitative or qualitative research investigation into specific behaviors or sentiments of particular leaders or ministries. The project consists of biblical and

philosophical research and literature survey, ascertaining perspectives based on biblical proclamation, and printed data from Christian ministers, statisticians, and cultural philosophers.

Recommendations for Further Study

The current study is based on existing literature pertaining to the two research questions; therefore, future researchers may extend the knowledge by interviewing several Christian female influencers in order to obtain their personal responses to the research question. Further, it is recommended that future researchers consider large groups of Christian women's personal perceptions of teachings of Christian female influencers by conducting a focus group study that determines whether or not CW are able to distinguish good advice from biblical truth. The same focus group could be used to determine CW responses to a motivational message versus a biblical message.

Further research can be done where large gatherings of CW with at least one motivational speaker and one gospel centric speaker by evaluating the amount of product that sells per each speaker. Research can also be done regarding what pieces of product actually sold the most and the least.

It is also recommended that further research be done in regard to church history, specifically the theological debates regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture. It is recommended that CFI and CW study the reformation and the philosophical systems that followed, that have led to the current crisis of biblical belief.

Further research can be done inside evangelical groups to determine how aggressive PC is impacting evangelicals.

It is also recommended that CFI and CW research the element of a gospel centric message within ministry materials intended for CW spiritual formation and ministry

development. It is also recommend that further research be done in the area of gospel centric songwriting, intended for the female voice.

Conclusion Summary

According to D. A. Carson, pertaining to the application of Scripture:

Our reading will be deepened when we understand the world and ourselves better; when we love God and hunger to be conformed to his Word; when we keep trying to apply the Scriptures to ourselves and others in responsible ways; when faith and obedience become increasingly instinctive. None of these developments runs along a one-way axis (e.g.. more Bible knowledge produces more obedience). Rather, these various components in living Bible study manage to cycle round in a beautiful spiral in which Christian virtues are both the fruit and the enablers of faithful Bible reading.²⁹⁵

The study explored, compared, and contrasted progressive Christian belief with historical biblical belief to determine whether or not the message of progressive CFI holds to true biblical Christian meaning and promotes biblical spiritual formation. The challenge between the two systems of belief is a matter of faith in the biblical narrative. Progressive faith allows for self-interpretation, changing or progressing interpretation, and acceptance of all interpretations of Scripture, with the exception of the dogma of absolute moral truth. The research discovered that biblical faith is a part of God's gift of grace through regeneration and continues to be strengthened as the regenerated believer studies the Word of God with hermeneutical intelligence.

Recommendations for Christian Female Influencers

Therefore, it is recommended that CFI trust in Scripture alone for doctrine and practice. The Bible teaches that prayer is essential and should be a daily practice of worship and spiritual formation. CFI should therefore come to the Scriptures with an open heart and open mind, letting

²⁹⁵ D.A. Carson, editor. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.

go of preconceived ideologies, seeking for what was meant when the author penned the sacred text.

It would be beneficial for CFI to study the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of regeneration, the exclusive claims regarding Jesus Christ, and Christ's commission for worldwide evangelism. CFI should also be well-versed in the doctrines of salvation. Knowledge of these doctrines will equip CFI to distinguish between biblical truth and progressive ideology.

Further, it is recommended that CFI learn to study the Bible inductively and commit to an inductive Bible study that engages in hermeneutical precision. CFI should consider studying the text in canonical order.

CFI would benefit from studying the Scriptures purposely focusing on how God reveals Himself throughout the biblical narrative. Revelation leads to true biblical worship, and worship is the sole purpose for the giving of sacred text.

CFI must give assessment to her personal system of belief and evaluate it in accordance with the biblical narrative. (2 Cor. 13:5, 2 Pet. 1:10-11). CFI should profess and practice faith in the true meaning of the Text and make biblical directives her personal and public praxis of faith and life.

Because ministry should reflect biblical content, CFI have an obligation to know what the Scripture says about itself. This self-proclamation will help CFI establish a biblical perspective of truth, allowing CFI to recognize and avoid the perils of cultural relativism. It is also important that in public ministry CFI clearly verbalize the biblical narrative and its true meaning. CFI will be able to direct her ministry biblio-centrally, which will lead to true biblical worship.

CFI must prepare her heart for vigorous cultural resistance to biblical truth. CFI are to remain culturally aware of false teaching, and worship practices that violate the biblical

narrative. CFI should reject, refute, and warn against the false biblical teachings of PC, PE, liberal theology, and all human philosophy that violates the biblical narrative. Because culture is filled with human philosophy, CFI should be equipped with apologetic responses that biblically address cultural trends and progressive half-truths that violate the truth of Scripture. It would be beneficial if CFI teach what it means to hold a biblical worldview.

It is also recommended that CFI remain culturally aware of false teaching, and worship practices that violate the biblical narrative. CFI should reject, refute, and warn against the false biblical teachings of PC, PE, liberal theology, and all human philosophy that violates the biblical narrative.

CFI should recognize and fully submit to the supernatural, omni-presence of Jesus Christ and His full authority to judge the living and the dead. The Bible teaches that CFI are required to limit her teaching and interpretations of Scripture to what Christ commanded the disciples, which includes the arrangement of Scripture, now canonized from Genesis to Revelation. CFI are not to verbalize extraneous interpretations that go beyond the clear meaning of the Text, keeping in mind that Christ measured the content and context of the message when He gave the final commission before ascending to heaven (Matt. 28:19-20). CFI should avoid mysticism.

It would be helpful if CFI had a biblical knowledge of how to interpret world events and human behavior, and how they align with the biblical language of the last days. CFI should be able to teach the Parousia and Christ's authoritative judgment of all the deeds of humanity.

CFI should consider purchasing, distributing, and creating Christian materials that hold to hermeneutical integrity. "Clearly, the existence of absolute truth and its inseparable relationship to the person of God is the most essential tenet of all truly biblical Christianity. ...Speaking

plainly: if you are one of those who questions whether truth is really important, please don't call your belief system 'Christianity', because that is not what it is".²⁹⁶

CFI, evangelize and fulfill your ministry. You are an ambassador for Christ: God is making His appeal through you (2 Cor. 5:20). Yet, let not many *of you* become teachers, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

The Bible teaches that CFI are to contend earnestly for the Christian faith which Christ has entrusted to her. CFI are to know biblical prophecies regarding false teachers. "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4).

"In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved (CFI), building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Have mercy on some who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (Jude 17-23).

A CFI Blessing

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 24-25)

²⁹⁶ MacArthur, *The Truth War*, xx.

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