

# A Downward Spiral Into the Abyss

by Gregory Alan Tidwell,  
Editor



**A**lmost 30 years ago, I visited with some friends who were part of a progressive congregation. With them, I attended a Bible class. The discussion topic for the morning was “What do you have to believe to be a member of our congregation?”

The teacher wrote the question on the board, and immediately, a response came: “You don’t have to believe that the King James Bible is the only Bible.” The teacher wrote this on the board. “You don’t have to believe using instrumental music is wrong,” another voice cried out. “You don’t have to believe the church of Christ is the only church,” another affirmed. The list continued, highlighting all of the various and sundry things you do not have to believe.

Finally, a young lady spoke up. She could not have been more than a freshman in college. “You have to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

“Well,” I thought, “finally we have a starting point – the Good Confession.” The teacher began writing on the board, “You must believe that Jesus Christ is ...” But he was cut short.

“Just a minute,” cried a man from the back of the room. “I don’t think we should say that.” It was one of the elders of the congregation. “Many of us have come to believe in the grace of God, and who am I to say that a Jew or Hindu or Muslim is not right with God?”

The teacher wiped Jesus Christ from the board. I told my friends I would not be visiting their congregation again.

## Lowering the Bar

Most progressives among churches of Christ have not yet gone as far as the congregation I visited. Having abandoned the absolute authority of Scripture, however, nothing is holding them back.

“You’re making a mountain out of a molehill,” my more progressive friends would say. They assured me a decade ago that no one among churches of Christ intended to use instrumental music as worship. Over the ensuing years, however, these same friends have begun using instrumental music in their worship services.

“No one among churches of Christ doubts inerrancy,” my more progressive friends assured me. “Certainly,” they scoffed, “anyone denying inerrancy would leave the church.”

These same friends now publicly deny the total accuracy of the text of Scripture.

My more progressive friends have likewise shifted their position concerning the role of women in the church and God’s fixed plan of salvation. Everything seems to be in play, and nothing seems certain.

Continually and on every issue imaginable, the progressive element in the church has shifted further to the left. Dialogue with proponents of the community-church approach has become like playing football against a team that has the luxury of moving the goal post any distance they choose.

Their guiding principle is not fixed and objective, but fluid and subjective. The overriding issue is not *what* is right, but rather *who*. My more progressive friends, as a matter of policy, are unwilling to drive a stake in the ground and set boundaries on any point of doctrine.

They now deny the reality of eternal punishment in hell, the essential nature of baptism for salvation, and the need for biblical authority to structure the work and worship of the church. Some, flirting with Unitarianism, are even questioning the full deity of Jesus. Like watching a limbo contest, I keep asking, “How low can you go?”

## The Full Assurance of Faith

There is nothing to hold the progressives back from embracing every vile error imaginable. Apostasy is cumulative by nature, a duplicitous downward spiral. As the apostle Paul warned, “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13 ESV).

Consider the Disciples of Christ and the Episcopal Church. A generation ago, no one would have imagined either group embracing homosexual activism. However, the same disregard for Scripture that opened the door to the ordination of women has paved the way for practicing homosexuals to fill the pulpits of these apostate denominations.

I agonize over my progressive friends. Compromising with the unbelieving world, they abandon the eternal assurance of the gospel. Denying truths they find unpleasant, they are losing the framework that upholds all truth. In the end, having compromised everything, they will find themselves left with nothing. □