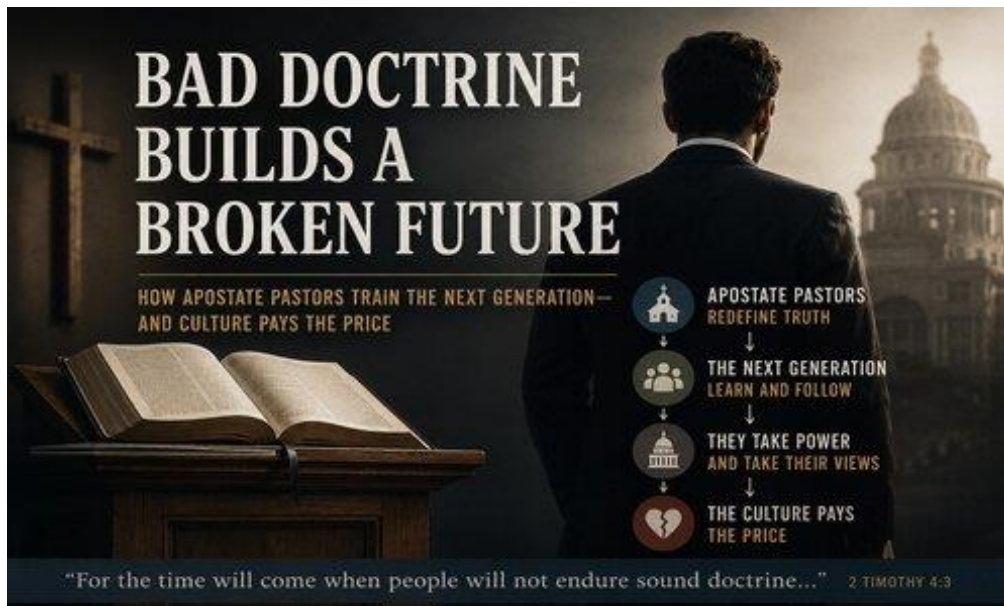


While on vacation, I ran across an article from Prophecy News Watch that I want to share because it ties directly to our current discussions on What Baptists Believe. Some of the ideas and questions that naturally arise in our discussions are given real-life visibility in this article.

When Apostate Pastors Make Disciples: The Dangerous Legacy of Progressives



BY PNW STAFF | JUNE 03, 2026

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Article Summary

- The article argues that pastors and church leaders leave a spiritual legacy by shaping the beliefs of the next generation.
- It warns that progressive Christianity, as represented by Jim Rigby and his influence on James Talarico, reinterprets Christian faith through modern cultural values rather than historic biblical teaching.
- The article presents criticism of the Apostle Paul within Rigby's church as evidence of a broader rejection of biblical authority.
- It contends that once Scripture is treated as flawed, outdated, or optional, human opinion begins to replace God's Word as the final authority.

- The article criticizes efforts to revise traditional language for God, arguing that biblical descriptions such as Father and Lord are part of God's self-revelation.
 - It identifies progressive positions on sexuality, gender, abortion, and inclusive Bible translations as examples of theological accommodation becoming theological transformation.
 - The article connects church teaching to public life, arguing that what pastors teach eventually influences political leaders and cultural institutions.
 - It emphasizes that doctrine matters because ideas spread through discipleship, education, social media, politics, and public leadership.
 - The article concludes by urging Christians to remain vigilant against false teaching, apostasy, and the erosion of biblical truth within the church.
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Every generation leaves a spiritual inheritance to the next. Faithful pastors pass on sound doctrine, a love for God's Word, and a commitment to biblical truth. But what happens when pastors abandon those foundations? What happens when church leaders begin treating Scripture as something to be corrected, edited, or explained away rather than believed?

The answer is now playing out in real time across America.

One of the clearest examples may be found in **Austin, Texas**, where progressive pastor Jim Rigby has spent decades reshaping Christianity according to modern cultural values.

St Andrews Presbyterian Church – Austin Texas

Now one of his most prominent disciples, Texas politician James Talarico, is taking those same ideas beyond the walls of the church and into the public square as he runs for the US Senate.

This is how theological drift works. It rarely stops with one pastor. Ideas reproduce. Beliefs spread. Teachers make disciples who become teachers themselves.

And eventually, entire generations inherit the consequences.

The recent profile of Rigby and Talarico reveals far more than a simple pastor-congregant relationship. It provides a window into how progressive Christianity trains the next generation to embrace a faith that increasingly bears little resemblance to historic biblical Christianity.

Consider the environment in which Talarico was spiritually formed.

During a Sunday service at Rigby's church, congregants were asked what came to mind when they heard the name of the Apostle Paul. The responses included "villain," "homophobic," and "he's a jerk."

Imagine that for a moment.

The Apostle Paul was not merely an influential Christian thinker. He was chosen by Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and responsible for much of the New Testament. Through his writings, God gave the church foundational doctrines concerning salvation, grace, sanctification, marriage, church leadership, and Christian living.

Yet in this congregation, one of Christianity's greatest apostles is openly ridiculed.

This should alarm every Bible-believing Christian.

The problem is not merely disrespect toward Paul. The problem is what such attitudes reveal about the authority of Scripture itself. Once believers are taught that biblical authors were morally defective, culturally backward, or fundamentally wrong on important issues, it becomes easy to dismiss any biblical teaching that conflicts with modern values.

The authority shifts from God's Word to human opinion.

That shift becomes even more evident when examining Rigby's theology.

He reportedly avoids referring to God as "Lord." He avoids masculine pronouns for God. He says he does not particularly care for the word "God" itself. In sermons, he has referred instead to a vague "creative impulse of the universe."

This language may sound spiritual, but it is a far cry from the God revealed in Scripture.

The Bible does not describe God as an undefined force. God reveals Himself personally and specifically. He identifies Himself as Father. Jesus repeatedly refers to Him as Father. Christ Himself is called Lord. These are not accidental descriptions that modern believers are free to rewrite. They are divine revelations.

Yet progressive Christianity increasingly treats God's self-revelation as something that must be adjusted to fit contemporary sensitivities.

The consequences become evident in the positions being promoted.

Rigby played a significant role in pushing his denomination toward affirming same-sex relationships. His church has hosted ceremonies affirming transgender identities. The church uses an "Inclusive Bible" that alters traditional wording in an effort to accommodate modern ideological concerns.

What began as theological accommodation has become theological transformation.

And now those same ideas are appearing in politics through figures like Talarico.

Talarico frequently frames progressive political positions using biblical language. He has argued for abortion rights using the story of Mary. He has promoted interpretations of Scripture that critics say blur or redefine biblical understandings of gender. He regularly presents progressive political priorities as natural extensions of Christian teaching.

This is precisely why doctrine matters.

Ideas have consequences.

What pastors teach on Sunday eventually shapes what leaders advocate on Monday. When pastors teach that Scripture is flexible, politicians learn to use Scripture as a tool to support whatever cultural cause they favor. When pastors question biblical authority, future leaders become comfortable reinterpreting God's Word to fit contemporary ideologies.

A generation ago, many Christians assumed progressive theology would remain confined to declining mainline denominations.

They were wrong.

The influence of these ideas now extends through social media, seminaries, universities, political movements, and increasingly visible public figures who speak the language of Christianity while redefining its content.

Perhaps the most sobering aspect of this story is that Rigby himself expressed delight at seeing Talarico "taking the ideas out there."

That statement captures the heart of the issue.

Every pastor is making disciples.

Every church is producing a next generation.

The question is not whether ideas are being passed down. The question is which ideas are being passed down.

Will the next generation inherit a faith anchored in the authority of Scripture, the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the historic truths of the Gospel?

Or will they inherit a Christianity that treats biblical authors as villains, Scripture as optional, doctrine as negotiable, and God's revelation as something to be revised whenever culture changes?

The Apostle Paul warned that a time would come when people would no longer endure sound doctrine but would gather teachers who tell them what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).

That warning feels increasingly relevant today.

The church's greatest threat has never been opposition from outside. It has always been corruption from within.

And when apostate pastors train the next generation, the damage rarely ends with one congregation. It spreads into institutions, communities, and even governments.

That is why Christians must remain vigilant.

Because today's progressive pastor may be producing tomorrow's influential leader.

And what is planted in the pulpit today may shape an entire culture tomorrow.

All of these ideas began to take shape during the What Baptists Believe discussion. In talking about prophetic scripture and warnings about the future, we constantly run

into the ideas of Apostasy, False Teachers, False Pastors, and Biblical values and teachings being watered down until we find ourselves so far away from traditional, Biblical teachings that we wonder how we got here.

How does this start, and how does it continue? Both good questions, and unfortunately, they both share common roots...Biblical Illiteracy. Christians do not take the time to study their Bibles and let the Holy Spirit speak to them about how to interpret and apply what they read. So many times, we heard Bible stories as children or in short sermons and never bothered to either revisit them or make the points and truths embedded in our minds.

A few definitions and understandings of terms can help.

Study Guide: False Teachers, Apostasy, and Religious Cults

False Teachers in Scripture

This guide brings together key biblical and theological material on false teachers, the marks of apostasy, and the meaning of religious cults and new religious movements. The sections are arranged to move from biblical warning, to spiritual diagnosis, to theological classification.

Scripture addresses false teachers in both the Old and New Testaments, warning about their nature, methods, and consequences.

New Testament passages provide the most direct instruction. Jesus warns to *“beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves,”* (Matt 7:15–20) and instructs that *“you will recognize them by their fruits.”* (Matt 7:15–20) John urges believers to *“test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* (1 John 4:1) Peter warns that false teachers *“will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them,”* (2 Pet 2:1–3) while they *“will exploit you with false words.”* (2 Pet 2:1–3)

Paul addresses false teaching repeatedly. He expresses alarm at those who *“distort the gospel of Christ”* and declares that anyone preaching a contrary gospel should *“be accursed.”* (Gal 1:6–9) He predicts a time when *“people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”* (2 Tim 4:3–4) He identifies *“false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ,”* (2 Cor 11:13–15) and notes they *“deceive the hearts of the naive”* through *“smooth talk and flattery.”* (Rom 16:17–18)

Jude warns of those who “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 3–4) John’s second epistle identifies “deceivers who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh” (2 John 7–11), instructing believers not to receive such teachers. Acts records Paul’s warning that “fierce wolves will come in among you” and that “from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things.” (Acts 20:28–31)

Old Testament passages establish the pattern. Jeremiah condemns prophets who “fill you with vain hopes” and “speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.” (Jer 23:16–22) **Ezekiel pronounces woe on “foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing”** (Ezek 13:1–9) while Deuteronomy warns against prophets who perform signs yet lead people toward other gods. (Deut 13:1–5)

Having established the biblical warnings about false teachers, the next section turns to apostasy itself—how spiritual departure develops, what marks it, and how it differs from ordinary struggle in the Christian life.

Signs of Apostasy

Growing apostasy displays itself through a progression of spiritual decline: sin’s pleasures increasingly outweigh the satisfaction of holiness; repentance gets postponed; correction from others meets resistance; conscience grows quiet about wrongdoing; and sin becomes defended rather than confessed.¹

Apostasy often emerges when believers stumble under persecution and affliction, turning away from their faith.² The pressure of external hostility and the apostasy of professing Christians themselves create significant temptations—both the cruelty of opponents and the unreliability of fellow believers cool the zeal of those who remain.²

Willful persistence in sin after encountering the gospel’s power, particularly when one shrinks back from faith in Christ, marks an apostate condition.³ Apostasy manifests not only in internal disbelief but also in external words and deeds that contradict faith, since confession itself is an act of faith.⁴ When faith—the life of the soul—is removed, disorder spreads through all dimensions of a person’s existence: their speech reveals their mind, their eyes betray their intent, their actions lack direction, and their will turns toward evil, ultimately working to draw others away from faith.⁴

Apostasy includes deserting Christ for alternative gospels and perverting the true gospel message.³ It also encompasses the condition of those with “itching ears” who turn from truth toward myths.³ A key distinction: genuine believers remain concerned about God, whereas apostates are not.¹ This inward orientation—whether one still cares about one’s standing before God—provides the crucial dividing line between temporary spiritual struggle and genuine apostasy.

Apostasy manifests in two forms in the Christian Faith:

- A slow drift away from Biblical teachings. It starts with what to say and don’t say. This drift increases in a world where Biblical thoughts, precepts, and beliefs are routinely criticized and openly punished in society. Stay quiet to stay out of any trouble. This is the frog in a slowly boiling pot discussion. After a time, we have drifted far away from Biblical Truth.
- A rapid pulling away in a visible means. Most commonly seen where Pastors, leaders, teachers declare that they do not believe the Bible, or its key teachings on an important (cultural) issue. They can pull a large segment of the church or denomination away from a Biblical Worldview. As mentioned in the article, this has a profound downstream effect on the people being taught a different Gospel and a different “truth”.

1. E. L. Johnson, “Apostasy,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 92.
2. Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 3:113–114.
3. R. C. Ortlund Jr., “Apostasy,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 385.
4. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.), 9:161.

After considering apostasy at the personal and doctrinal level, this final section addresses how theology and the social sciences describe cults, new religious movements, and related groups.

Religious Cults and New Religious Movements

The term “cult” carries multiple meanings depending on perspective. How one defines it depends largely on one’s frame of reference, though most definitions emphasize unconventional and nonnormative dimensions with negative connotations.

From a sociological standpoint, cults operate outside mainstream religious traditions, with members viewing themselves as a minority group unified around a person, ideology, or cause¹. Cult movements represent minority religions that are novel rather than schismatic—they haven’t broken from an established parent tradition but emerge as new religious developments within particular social contexts².

A theological approach offers a more specific definition: a cult is a religious movement whose doctrines and practices conflict with biblical Christianity, with primary focus on issues of truth and error as theologically defined¹.

Psychologically, cults display distinctive structural features. This approach examines group dynamics (especially leader-follower relationships), recruitment and indoctrination practices, members’ assumption of new identities, and methods of thought control¹. Leadership proves particularly crucial: virtually all cultic movements center on a single living founder-leader who occupies a position of prominence, and these leaders are typically highly authoritarian, extracting loyalty through awe, charisma, and psychospiritual intimidation¹.

Since the late 1960s, there has been a notable increase in new religious movements, aberrational Christian groups, and self-improvement cults¹, many influenced by Eastern or mystical worldviews, including groups claiming to focus on personal transformation or human potential rather than explicit religion¹. The diversity of contemporary cults resists simple categorization, spanning everything from audience cults with minimal organization that disseminate ideas through literature² to client cults offering services like astrological readings for a fee².

1. R. Enroth, “Cults,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 302–303.
2. C. Partridge, “New Religions,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al. (London; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2016), 614.

Examples and Classification in Modern Theology

Modern theology identifies specific groups as cults based on their doctrinal departure from biblical Christianity and their organizational characteristics.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Science—all founded in the nineteenth century—are considered cults (new religions) in that they rose to prominence within the last hundred years. The Hare Krishna movement, while rooted in ancient Hindu tradition, qualifies as new in Western contexts since it migrated to the West in the 1970s. UFO religions emerged following the first wave of UFO sightings in America in 1947.

Perhaps a simplified separation of these terms is this:

Sects and new religions represent fundamentally different departures from established faith traditions. Sects break away from a parent religion—they've separated from an existing body—while new religions emerge as novel movements without schismatic origins. Both may hold unorthodox beliefs, but their genealogies differ significantly. The most extreme sects and cults display distortions where leaders are treated as having infallible knowledge and absolute authority over followers' beliefs and behavior, though tendencies in these directions are quite common and always dangerous.

Cults function as a broader category encompassing both sects and new religions, though the term carries pejorative weight. From a theological perspective, cults are movements whose doctrines conflict with biblical Christianity. From a sociological angle, they're minority religions operating outside mainstream traditions. Psychologically, cults typically center on a single authoritarian founder-leader who maintains control through charisma and intimidation.

The practical distinction matters: Christian sects and sub-Christian cults have multiplied in recent decades worldwide, and they often appeal through similar mechanisms—perpetrators of various religious notions or Christian deviations press their unbiblical or distorted teaching into spiritual vacuums. Young adherents of sects are sometimes disillusioned with the church, which raises questions about whether churches have offered the warmth, friendship, acceptance, and sense of community that attract people to these groups.

Scholars increasingly prefer “new religious movements” or “alternative religions” over “cult” due to its **negative connotations**, though the theological criterion—departure from biblical truth—remains the decisive factor for Christian assessment. This trend away from “orthodox” religions to these fringe movements is a result of the existing churches' laissez-faire attitudes towards doctrine and discipleship.

Q: What is the negative or pejorative connotation of the word “Cult”?

The pejorative connotation surrounding the term “cult” stems from several interconnected factors.

- First, the word has become associated with groups that employ manipulative and coercive control tactics—particularly authoritarian leadership structures where founders or leaders demand absolute loyalty and obedience. This connection to psychological manipulation and exploitation has made “cult” carry inherently negative implications.
- Second, the term carries baggage from high-profile cases involving abuse, financial exploitation, sexual misconduct, and in extreme instances, mass violence or suicide. These dramatic incidents

have cemented the word's association with danger and harm in popular consciousness, making it function almost as a condemnation rather than a neutral descriptive category.

- Third, the label “cult” implies theological error and spiritual danger—suggesting that members are deceived or following false teachings. This doctrinal dimension adds moral judgment to the classification, distinguishing it from more neutral academic language.

Because of these accumulated negative associations, scholars increasingly prefer terms like “new religious movements” or “alternative religions” when conducting objective analysis. These alternatives allow for descriptive categorization without the built-in judgment that “cult” carries. The shift reflects a methodological commitment: studying these groups requires some distance from the pejorative freight the popular term has accumulated, even when the theological assessment of their doctrines remains critical.

Q: Does this really matter what we call them?

As an academic, the terms may matter because of the desire to be objective and neutral in writing about them, but as a teacher or pastor committed to Biblical Worldview, and seeing the imminent danger these ideas and systems present, it is our duty to call them out as a “watchman on the wall” for the danger and theological and spiritual problems they present to the true church.

Cultural and Sexual Issues

These issues seem to dominate the ever-changing environment for Christians in today's world. Issues like Homosexuality, Sodomy, polygamy, more than 2 genders, transgender individuals, marriage, and so many other strange ideas have become a wave of dissent and conflict in the faith communities. Whole denominations have split off to maintain, celebrate, teach, and display these ideas. Christians are ignorant of the Bible teachings, and sometimes are easily persuaded by their personal relationships with people who espouse these errant beliefs.

How do we deal with all these issues?

- First, we must get a Biblical understanding of what God's Word teaches about these topics
- Second, if we believe the Bible is truly God's inerrant word, we must decide that we will not stand for these ideas and concepts. This may mean we correct and reproof others. Most likely we will lose friends over our stands, but who are you trying to impress? God or Man?
- Third, we must tell lovingly those who are in these false churches, under false teachers, or in a state of apostasy or normalizing sin, that they are going against God's Word and Will
- Fourth, we must lead, teach, and disciple those in our sphere of influence in the Truth, both by word and our walk with the Lord.