

# The Miraculous Transformation of a Progressive Christian Antagonist

Last week, a remarkable email was forwarded to me by my staff. It was from Sarahbeth Caplin, someone I had previously interacted with when she was a hostile, “progressive” Christian writing for an atheist website.

Why was she contacting me now?

I share all this with you here with her full permission and blessing.

Sarahbeth wrote in her email, “Dear Michael, This article recently came up in a Google search when I was trying to find something else I wrote: [The article was written by me on May 23, 2019, titled, “Misrepresent and Demonize: The Weapon of ‘Progressive’ Christians.”]

She continued: “It’s so funny to read this now, because I no longer recognize the person you’re talking about. At the time, I was going through a period of deconstruction. All the downtime in 2020 forced me to reevaluate everything I believe and why, and I’m happy to say I’ve returned to biblical orthodoxy—including in matters of sexuality. I just thought you would be interested to know that.”

What great news! You can be sure I was quite interested to receive this report, especially in light of the article that she linked which I began with these words: “Last week, I encouraged Christian parents in California who had children in public schools to defy the law and pull their kids from the state’s extreme sex-ed curriculum. How did the Friendly Atheist’s resident Episcopalian blogger respond?”

“According to Sarahbeth Caplin, I want these parents to teach ‘their kids that transgender people don’t exist.’ (Yes, she actually wrote this.)”

She added (back in 2019), “This is just faith-based, hate-fueled fear-mongering. It’s the only subject in which Michael Brown is an expert.”

In response I wrote, “What a sad commentary on the nature of liberal illogic. And what a misrepresentation of the facts.”

And I ended the article with this appeal, to which I received no response: “If the state wants to force trash like this on their children, then the righteous, moral and responsible thing to do is pull their kids out of those classes.

“The only thing hateful is the response of ‘progressives’ like Caplin.

“That being said, Sarahbeth, if you read this, let’s talk. Join me on the air one day, and we can discuss the differences plainly but without vitriol.

“I’m willing if you are.”

That was then, with the old Sarahbeth. What happened to change her views so dramatically? What led to such a wonderful transformation?

When I inquired as to what happened in her life, she shared this with me (which, again, I’m sharing with her full permission):

“I’m not sure how the transformation started exactly, except that at some point I started praying for God to reveal the truth to me—no matter how uncomfortable it made me. And then I started noticing some inconsistencies within the LGBT movement: like how you’re apparently ‘born this way,’ but at the same time, sexuality is also fluid? And for a same-sex attracted person to reject a trans person for a date is

apparently transphobic (because the 'parts' don't match the gender identity), even though, according to a sex-positive philosophy, no one is supposed to be shamed for what they are into? That means the logic of gender ideology is actually homophobic! And it sort of spiraled on from there.

"I realized much of my objections to Christian theology in this area were reactionary rather than based on Scripture, so I started studying 'the clobber verses' again with a more open mind. And once I finally understood them, I couldn't go back. Progressive Christianity is entirely built on doubts and questions with little to no foundation of certainty and truth. It was a temporary dwelling place for me to figure some things out, but ultimately not a healthy place to stay. And many of the 'friends' I made in that circle dropped me once I started to regain my spiritual footing. They liked me when I questioned things and my faith was struggling, but not when I found it again.

"At that time, I stopped writing for Patheos [and the Friendly Atheist website] ... I have since joined the Anglican church (affiliated with ACNA, not the Episcopal branch), and have built a healthy spiritual community there."

In our subsequent interaction, she also wrote this to me: "I reached out to you specifically because I probably sparred with you more than most, and definitely went out of my way to misrepresent your views. I was wrong to do that. I apologize for the version of me you had to deal with!"

How many of us have the maturity to realize that we are reacting rather than processing, responding emotionally rather than based on truth? And how many have the humility—and integrity—to change course so dramatically after we have become known for espousing a particular position or being a particular person? God truly does give grace to the humble!

And what a great summary of "progressive Christianity." As she

wrote, it “is entirely built on doubts and questions with little to no foundation of certainty and truth. It was a temporary dwelling place for me to figure some things out, but ultimately not a healthy place to stay.”

This is the exact opposite of the real gospel faith, which is built on eternal foundations, filled with certainty and truth, foundations that have stood the test of time.

My interaction with Sarahbeth also reminds us of the importance of being gracious to those we differ with, even if our differences are sharp and require strong and clear articulation. As Paul exhorted, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6).

We can be unashamed of our faith without being nasty, meanspirited, demeaning, insulting or self-righteous. And while we may impress our online echo chambers with our so-called boldness (our spiritual justification for acting like jerks), in the end, we will only discredit the Lord and drive away those for whom He died.

In my new book, “Why So Many Christians Have Left the Faith: Responding to the Deconstructionist Movement With Unshakable, Timeless Truth,” I have a whole chapter devoted to the question, “Can Deconstruction Be Healthy?”

My answer is that if we have honest questions and a right attitude, our faith will be strengthened rather than weakened in the pursuit of truth. But if our attitudes are not right—meaning, if we are looking for an excuse to ditch the Bible or have already become proud in our thoughts about God—we will likely end up in a spiritual ditch.

Sarahbeth is a great example of a public, “progressive” Christian having a change of heart because of a change of mind. In the days to come, may she be just one among many.  
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