

Theological Equipping Class

Evangelicalism

November 7, 2021

What is Evangelicalism?

What depends on when

"The challenge of defining evangelical identity remains one of the most important challenges for the movement—and one that entails no small amount of controversy. This much is clear—there is no way for any responsible evangelical to avoid this challenge. To do so is to consign the word to eventual meaninglessness, and to deny evangelicals the right and responsibility to define themselves in theological terms. That is far too high a price to pay." (Al Mohler)

- Bebbington's quadrilateral
 - Biblicism: a high regard for the Bible as the supreme religious authority
 - Crucicentrism: a focus on Jesus's crucifixion & its saving effects as the heart of true religion
 - Conversionism: a belief that humans need to be converted or born again
 - Activism: the belief that faith should influence one's public life

- "An evangelical, at his best, is a person who believes the good news found in the New Testament, that God has sent his Son to die on the cross and rise from the dead, ascend to glory, seated at the right hand of God, coming at the end of the age to redeem his image-bearers from their sin, their condemnation, pouring upon them his Spirit to justify them, sanctify them, and one day glorify them in perfection. It's all the good news of what *God* has done, and this demands a response of obedience, repentance, faith." (Don Carson)

- "An evangelical is a plain, ordinary Christian. We stand in the mainstream of historic, orthodox, biblical Christianity. So we can recite the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed without crossing our fingers. We believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Having said that, there are two particular things we like to emphasize: the concern for authority on the one hand and salvation on the other. For evangelical people, our authority is the God who has spoken supremely in Jesus Christ. And that is equally true of redemption or salvation. God has acted in and through Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners... [W]hat God has said in Christ and in the biblical witness to Christ, and what God has done in and through Christ, are both, to use the Greek word, *hapax*—meaning once and for all. There is a finality about God's word in Christ, and there is a finality about God's work in Christ. To imagine that we could add a word to his word, or add a work to his work, is extremely derogatory to the unique glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (John Stott)

- *By what authority do we believe what we believe?*
 - Catholics emphasize the church, the magisterium and the role of tradition.
 - Liberals emphasize reason, conscience, and experience
 - Evangelicals recognize tradition and reason, but as subordinate authorities to the only supreme authority, Scripture

- *How can I, a lost and guilty sinner, stand before a just and holy God?*
 - Catholics emphasize the priesthood and the sacraments as necessary to mediate salvation between God and us
 - Liberals emphasize good works, individual and social righteousness, as at least contributing to our salvation
 - Evangelicals affirm ministry, sacraments, and good works, but our focus is on the cross—what God has done in Christ for us

The History of Evangelicalism

Semantic Shift: connotation and denotation

The Meaning of Evangelical in the Reformation

- Martin Luther

- Evangelical | Catholic

The Meaning of Evangelical in the 18th-19th Centuries

- First Great Awakening

- Evangelical | Status Quo

- "a man who believes in the fall and its consequences, in the recovery and its fruits, in the personal application of the recovery by the power of the Spirit of God, and then the Christian will aim, desire, endeavour, by example, by exertion, by influence, and by prayer to promote the great salvation of which he himself is a happy partaker." (William Marsh)

The Meaning of Evangelical in the Early 20th Century

- Theological liberalism
 - "Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the symbols of Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and to theologies based on external authority. Specifically, liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people." (Gary Dorrien, Union Seminary)
- So whereas historic orthodox Christianity focused on truth and doctrine, liberal theology tends to focus on morality, feelings, social work, and personal experience.
- It replaces the traditional authority of Christianity (the Bible, creeds, confessions, tradition, etc.) with the enlightenment ideals of human rationality and experience and thus removes all of the supernatural parts of Christianity and retains those things which adhere to modern sensibility, reason, and experience.
- Responses to modernism: neo-orthodoxy and fundamentalism
- Fundamentalism fractures
- The birth of evangelicalism
- So, by the middle 20th century, being an evangelical generally meant that you:
 1. Were not a theological liberal.
 2. Were not a Catholic.
 3. Were not a fundamentalist.
- The evangelical tent

- Evangelical institutions: Fuller Theological Seminary | Christianity Today

The Meaning of Evangelical in the Late 20th Century

- 1973
- 1976: "the year of the evangelical"
- Communism
- Result: politicized...connotation change

Who are Major Evangelical Organizations and Leaders?

Who has an office?

TGC, T4G, SBC, PCA, 9 Marks, CBMW, ETS, etc.

J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, John Piper, Tim Keller, etc.

Challenges Facing Evangelicalism

1. Political connotations: pros and cons
2. Cultural derision
3. Secular assumptions
4. Theological vacuity
5. Anti-intellectualism
6. Ambiguous borders

Should we reject or redeem the term?