Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What Is an Evangelical? A survey of how the term has been used and abused
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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My topic for this hour is technically a question: What is an evangelical?

That title was assigned to me, and I was given the assignment by e-mail sometime last fall. I'm absolutely thrilled to get a topic like this to deal with. The guys who plan these seminars usually give me wildly popular—but really lousy—books to review. Or they give me really controversial topics to analyze—usually dealing with whatever the latest evangelical fad happens to be—and I've been complaining for a few years that doing nothing but critiques makes me look mean-spirited. I always have to be negative.

So I think assigning me this topic was their attempt to give me a subject I could be more positive about. And I want to say that I greatly appreciate the effort. At least they didn't ask me to review *The Shack.*

So why did they pick *this* topic for me? I'm not sure. I did a couple of seminars a few years ago dealing with the fundamentalist movement, and perhaps they were thinking this seminar could be the other side of that topic. (That's more or less my plan, by the way. If you've listened to those seminars on fundamentalism, I hope this will be a nice bookend to what I said there.)

But I don't know: maybe the guys who planned the conference schedule were confused themselves about how to answer the question *What is an evangelical?*—because frankly these days practically everyone is confused by that question. So perhaps they just wanted to see what I would do with it.

And I'll confess to you at the outset that in one sense, I find that question as confusing as anyone. I've seen all kinds of people trying to explain what an evangelical is—ranging from the political pundits on the cable news networks to clueless spokespeople from the Emerging Church. There are definitions of evangelicalism on the internet reflecting hundreds of different perspectives—from Anglican evangelicals such as Alistair McGrath and John Stott to Joseph Tkach. He is heir to the religious empire of Herbert W. Armstrong, and he has managed to convince no less than the Bible answer man that the former cult of Armstrongism is now thoroughly evangelical. And I have never heard any two experts completely agree on their definitions of evangelicalism.

So *"What is an evangelical?"* It's frankly one of those questions you can answer almost any way you want and defend your answer as articulately as you like, and most people are still going to tell you you've got it wrong. Because it seems these days everyone has his own personal idea of what constitutes an evangelical. Ask 100 evangelicals to define what they mean by the term and odds are you're probably going to get 100 different answers—some of them so *wildly* different as to be virtually contradictory.

Evangelicals have been trying hard to be all things to all men for at least two or three generations, and in this regard they have completely succeeded: The evangelical movement is now so broad and diverse that you can define it practically any way you want. In an article celebrating their 50th anniversary a couple of years ago, *Christianity Today* said they think diversity is in fact the *dominant* feature of evangelicalism.

And that's probably true if you are talking about the contemporary evangelical *movement.* If we can discern the contours of evangelicalism at the moment by looking at the constituency of *Christianity Today* magazine, I think it would be fair to say that it's one of the largest mixed multitudes ever known in the realm of human religion. And that's not a compliment. It's not a good thing. You'll find that expression "mixed multitude" three times in the King James Version of the Bible, and each time it is a disparaging expression used to describe the backslidden, spiritually eclectic, morally compromised majority of Israelites during the times of their worst apostasies.

Now, I know this is not a popular opinion, and in all likelihood some of you right here in this room will disagree with me when I say this, but in my assessment we are living in a time of apostasy not all that different from some of the eras described in the Old Testament, where the worship of Jehovah was so compromised that good men, including Elijah, sometimes wondered if there were any knees left that had not bowed to Baal.

There you go. I'm already starting to sound pretty negative despite everyone's best efforts to help me be positive. So let me say it this way: *I'm positive that the broad evangelical movement today is abominable.* The brand of Christianity (or should I say "the assorted brands of Christianity"?) represented by *Christianity Today,* The National Association of Evangelicals, and the Christian Coalition—the spiritual heirs of Billy Graham, Fuller Seminary, and the Urbana Conferences—that large movement that most of our spiritual parents identified with—that vast movement is now as utterly backslidden and spiritually degenerate as Israel was in her most backslidden state during the times of apostasy described in the book of Judges. We have reached that point where "Everyone

[does] what [is] right in his own eyes." And lots of so-called evangelicals think that's just fine. The current editors of *Christianity Today* seem to think that's just fine. They never tire of celebrating their constituents' "diversity."

I frankly don't like to identify with the contemporary evangelical movement. I'm strongly tempted simply to stop calling myself an evangelical altogether, just to keep from being associated with every infamous religious scoundrel from Ted Haggard to Joel Osteen. What does it actually mean to say we're *evangelical* when the menagerie of heretics and charlatans appearing nightly on TBN all insist they are evangelical, too? Tony Campolo, who has renounced practically everything that's *distinctively* evangelical, insists on calling himself an evangelical. Lots of Roman Catholics call themselves evangelical. Lately even Mormons have begun arguing that they have a right to the label as well. None of them would agree on what the term means, of course, but they *all* want to wear it, because it gives them an artificial connection with the rich heritage of evangelical history.

And that's precisely the problem for me. That's why I'm not quite ready to relinquish the term yet. I *do* affirm historic evangelical principles. The original evangelicals are my spiritual ancestors. I believe what they believed, and I'm passionate about the things they were passionate about. We share a common faith, and I happen to believe it is the same faith proclaimed by apostles and the early church. But in the broad sweep of church history, the set of convictions I hold is best known by the name *evangelicalism.* And I'm not ready yet to concede that label to people who in fact have no spiritual connection—and nothing whatsoever in common—with historic evangelical beliefs.

Incidentally, there are some who would try to tell you everything wrong with the visible evangelical movement today is rooted in the original set of beliefs that gave birth to evangelicalism. The pope would head the list of those who would make that argument. He'd say that evangelicalism today is diverse and doctrinally chaotic precisely because the original Protestant evangelicals departed from the magisterium of Rome. He'd say that without an infallible interpreter of Scripture and a bishop who can speak with absolute *ex-cathedra* authority, it was predictable that evangelicalism would disintegrate into a jumble of contradictory teaching.

For whatever reasons, a lot of erstwhile evangelicals have found that argument compelling. A couple of years ago, Frances Beckwith, who was president of the Evangelical Theological Society at the time, announced that he was converting (or de-converting) to Roman Catholicism. And this was one of his arguments: He had concluded that Evangelicalism lacked any compelling tradition. Looking at evangelicalism in the big picture of church history, he had decided that it was an anomaly, and a dangerous set of ideas to boot.

Oddly enough, that did not keep Beckwith from continuing to insist that he was in fact still entitled to call himself "evangelical," and he originally seemed to think there was no reason he shouldn't be able to retain his post as president of the Evangelical Theological Society.

I have been amazed and appalled over the past decade or so to see a number of young men follow paths similar to Francis Beckwith's. Rightly fed up with the superficiality and doctrinal confusion that dominates the modern and postmodern evangelical movement, they wrongly conclude that evangelical principles are to blame. So they abandon evangelicalism altogether—not just the evangelical *movement* (which frankly deserves to be abandoned) but also the core beliefs of historic evangelical conviction. Some of them (like Beckwith) run to Rome; others (like Franky Schaeffer and Peter Gillquist) have gone to Eastern Orthodoxy; many more have run after various strains of the Emerging Church Movement—buying into the lie that because emerging churches burn candles and talk about contemplative spirituality, they somehow have a stronger tie to historic Christianity than their parents had in seeker-sensitive churches—where the only liturgy they knew was trivial choruses led by bad rock bands and sermons based on references to pop culture. Frankly, the liturgy of the average Emergent gathering is ten times worse than *that*—but still, lots of young people are abandoning evangelical beliefs because they think those *beliefs* are what made the evangelical movement of today as wacky and embarrassing as it is.

Now, *I'm* convinced that the evangelical movement went astray not because they followed historic evangelical principles, but because they abandoned them. Frankly, contemporary evangelicalism has no right to the label. For the most part, the evangelical movement is not evangelical at all, and it hasn't been since the 1950s.

I want to use our time in this session to explain why that's my point of view—by surveying the history of evangelicalism. I have no outline, really—just a very long *time*line, which we have to move through very quickly. But I'll try to move in a straight line without jumping around, and I'll do my best to make it easy for you to stay with me.

By the way, let me recommend a book for you. It's a small book—91 pages, and you can read it in a single evening. The title is the same as this seminar: *What Is an Evangelical?*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, published by the Banner of Truth Trust. (It's actually an excerpt from a longer book, *Knowing the Times,* so if you have that book, you already have "What is an Evangelical?") It's a lightly-edited transcript of three lectures Lloyd-Jones gave in 1971 at the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Britain. He probes this question in detail, *What Is an Evangelical?* and for the most part it

would be hard to improve on his analysis of the question.

In the providence of God (and totally unrelated to the fact that I'm doing this seminar today), Kevin Deyoung is summarizing the Lloyd-Jones lectures on his blog this week. Kevin DeYoung is Senior Pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, MI, and he is half of the writing team that produced a great book titled *Why We're Not Emergent (by Two Guys who Should Be)*. He summarized the first of Lloyd-Jones's lectures yesterday and posted the second of his three summaries today. If you can't read the book itself, be sure you read Kevin DeYoung's summaries at revkevindeyoung.com.

I don't know if there are copies of the Lloyd-Jones book in the bookstore, but I hope so. If not, order it. I'll try to quote from it a few times if the clock permits.

Now let me explain I mean when I speak of *evangelical principles*—the core and the bedrock of evangelical belief. As I said, I have in mind primarily two things: the authority of Scripture and the truth of the gospel. I think it really as simple as that.

Evangelicals, historically, have regarded the Bible itself as the very Word of God and therefore the highest of all authorities on earth; and they have regarded the gospel of salvation by grace through faith through the work of Christ on the cross as the non-negotiable center of everything we believe and teach.

If you affirm those truths in the evangelical sense, you will instantly understand that the implications of those two principles are very far-reaching and not superficial. For example, authentic evangelical belief has always stood firmly for the primacy of divine grace, the exclusivity of Christ, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, and faith alone as the sole instrument of our justification. I would also argue that evangelical conviction regarding the authority of Scripture has also always included the truth of biblical inerrancy. It's my personal conviction that someone who denies the inerrancy of Scripture places himself outside the mainstream of historic evangelical belief and doesn't really deserve to be called an evangelical. But inerrancy is not a truth I'm *adding* to the authority of Scripture; that's just what evangelicals *mean* when they affirm the authority of Scripture.

But at for simplicity's sake, I want to stress that all historic evangelical essentials are subsumed under those two heads: the authority of Scripture and the centrality of the true gospel. Or if you prefer Reformation terminology, *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. (If you're not clear on what the Reformers

meant by *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*, or if you're unfamiliar with the weight the Reformers placed on those two principles, I'll try to clarify those things when we get to that point on the timeline.)

But let's start with the apostles and the New Testament church. I've already said it's my conviction that evangelicalism dates back to the apostolic era, and in very simple terms, here's why: Survey the theology of the New Testament and you will discover that these two vital evangelical principles—the authority of Scripture and the importance of getting the gospel right—are repeatedly stressed. You will find no emphasis whatsoever on the things that are important to the institutional, hierarchical systems of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Apostolic succession, episcopal structures, liturgical formulae, and most of the other doctrines those traditions tend to stress most of all—including the veneration of Mary, the doctrine of purgatory, the confessional booth, and whatnot—you won't find any mention of those things in the New Testament at all.

On the other hand, most of the epistles in the New Testament were written *precisely* to defend those two *evangelical* essentials. Most of the epistles have a polemical thrust. It is clear as you read the New Testament epistles (as well as the book of Acts) that even in the very earliest apostolic churches, early gnostic influences were already attacking the authority of Scripture. These really were just embryonic forms of ideas that later developed into gnosticism—but they came against the church even before the canon of Scripture was complete. The apostle John dealt with them in the first two of his three epistles. He basically epitomizes the evangelical spirit in his second epistle, where in the midst of stressing the importance of love for the true brethren, he tells the elect lady that if someone comes to her with a message that's anything other than the teaching of Christ as proclaimed through the apostles and recorded in the New Testament, she was not even to give that person a formal greeting—which was a ceremonial show of respect and brotherhood. Such a person is not a brother at all, but a false teacher to be avoided, even if he calls himself a Christian.

Second John 7-11:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,

11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

That kind of careful differentiation between truth and falsehood is classically evangelical. And don't miss the point that what John was defending there was the authority of revealed truth against the dreams and imaginations of these proto-gnostics.

Specifically, that text affirms the importance of a sound christology (against a doctrine that clearly entailed a denial of some aspect of the incarnation). John says someone who denies the incarnation—the deity of Christ and His eternal preexistence—is not a Christian at all. All the fundamentals of trinitarian doctrine are of course implied in that.

But what's *distinctive* about *evangelical* conviction is summarized in the principle of *sola Scriptura*. We believe these things to be essential Christianity not because some pope or church council declares them to be so, but because that is what *Scripture* teaches. The basic doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation are so woven into the warp and woof of the New Testament that if you deny them and play games with your interpretation of Scripture in order to get around them, you have in effect thumbed your nose at the authority of Scripture. That is the point of 2 John, and that is one of the pillars of evangelical conviction.

Or to state the fact more simply, 2 John 7 expressly says that those who deny the incarnation—"those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh"—are deceivers and antichrists. Evangelicals accept that differentiation because they implicitly accept the authority of Scripture.

Or consider the book of Galatians. The entire message of that epistle is rooted in evangelical principles. At the very start, the apostle Paul makes this clear. Chapter 1, verses 8-9, he writes: "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." There's that classic evangelical differentiation again between authentic Christianity and all the false varieties. Paul states it twice for emphasis in the span of two verses. (As an editor, that's the kind of redundancy I would normally edit

out.) But the repetition is deliberate and emphatic for a reason. Paul is purposely drawing a clear line in the sand. And here the focus is specifically on the gospel. There's one true Gospel, Paul says. It's "the one we preached to you" (v. 8). It's "the one you received" (v. 9). It's the gospel given to us in Scripture. There are lots of *false* gospels, but only one *authentic* gospel, and that is what defines and establishes the boundaries of authentic Christian faith. Paul could not be more emphatic: "even if we or an angel [or] anyone is preaching to you a [contrary] gospel ... let him be accursed." The gospel is the central issue. And as Paul goes on to argue in Galatians, justification by grace alone through faith alone—apart from works—is the very heart of the gospel. The better you understand the doctrine of justification, the better you understand the gospel.

Now, if you wanted to boil the evangelical principle down to one and one only statement, that would be it: the core truth of the gospel is embodied in the doctrine of justification by faith.

In fact, I have a book in my library that makes the argument that there ultimately is only *one* true evangelical essential. In fact, That's the title of the book: *The Evangelical Essential,* by Philip Janowsky. And he argues, very convincingly, too, that a survey of historical theology would suggest that the one the belief that defines our doctrine as truly evangelical is the principle of *sola fide.* Justification by faith—and specifically the imputation of righteousness to the believer apart from any works or ceremonies.

Now Philip Janowsky is a United Methodist, and I don't normally recommend books by United Methodists, but this one is quite good. The book was published by Vision House in 1994, so I imagine it's out of print by now, but if you can get a copy, it's a helpful little book.

And I would agree with the stress Janowsky puts on justification by faith in this sense: of the two pillars of evangelical conviction I'm giving you—the authority of Scripture and a sound, biblical understanding of the gospel—the point about the gospel goes more to the heart of what defines an evangelical than anything else.

In fact, that's reflected in the word *evangelical.* Obviously, it's derived from the Greek word for gospel—the *evangelion;* the good news. So the name *evangelical* itself is a reference to the gospel. And the reason Janowsky says the heart of evangelical belief is summarized in that one distinctive truth (instead of the two I have given you) is this: While there are non-evangelicals and even some cults who might share our commitment to the authority of Scripture—or *claim* that they do—*no one* but evangelicals thoroughly and consistently grasp the principle of *sola fide* and all its implications. So doctrine of justification by faith is in fact both the defining doctrine of historic evangelicalism and the

very heart of the gospel message.

And the reason I believe the true apostolic church was classically evangelical is that's precisely the argument Paul makes in the book of Galatians. It is also the theme of Romans, Hebrews, and Ephesians. It is likewise reflected to one degree or another in virtually every book in the New Testament.

Bishop NT Wright's so-called New Perspective on Paul notwithstanding, what you see in Paul's battle with the Judaizers is a classic defense of evangelical principles. What Paul was defending in Galatians and elsewhere was *the gospel,* not a postmodernized notion of racial and ethnic diversity. He was defending the evangelical simplicity of the true gospel against the legalizing influence of the Judaizers. (If you doubt that, I'm sorry. My advice would be to read a little less of what's currently in vogue in the academic community and a little more from the rich heritage of evangelical commentators.) But let's not get sidetracked.

Remember, the apostle John drew a line between evangelical truth and incipient forms of gnosticism. Paul was erecting a different boundary—between the true gospel and the false soteriology of the Judaizers. Both apostles embodied the evangelical spirit.

Now we have to move on. And this is going to be a very quick birds-eye view if we're going to finish. That means I have to skip through the centuries and hit only the highest of high points. But the next major all-out, worldwide battle for the gospel occurred during the time of Augustine and was embodied in the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius (and his sidekick, a man named Coelestius), were in love with the notion of human free will, and they took that doctrine to the furthest extreme possible. They denied the doctrine of original sin (because they couldn't understand how we could inherit both guilt and a bent towards sinning from Adam and still be responsible for our own evil deeds). *Responsibility* demands *ability,* they insisted, and their refusal to see any other possibility forced them to the conclusion that all any sinner really needs to do overcome our sinful tendencies is exercise human willpower. Salvation, they said, is purely a choice you make. All you have to do to save yourself is decide to stop sinning. That's what pure Pelagianism ultimately boils down to.

Or to say it another way—Pelagianism is a denial of the necessity of grace. Pelagius himself claimed grace came into play only in the forgiveness of *past* sins. He said we don't need grace to empower us to choose good or even to perform good works, because we have the power of our own free wills.

And Pelagius's main target was Augustine. Augustine pointed out that Scripture everywhere attributes our salvation to the grace of God and nowhere gives credit to our own willpower. On the contrary, Scripture repeatedly says we were slaves to sin—*dead* in sin—until God by grace saved us. Incidentally, Augustine went to Scripture, not to the bishop of Rome, to make those points. He insisted not only on the necessity of divine grace, but also the primacy of grace. If God did not first grant grace, no sinner would ever make the first move toward God. Augustine was defending the very spirit of evangelical conviction.

Now I'm not suggesting that Augustine was classically evangelical in the sense we speak of evangelicalism after the Protestant Reformation. I'm saying he kept the spirit of evangelicalism and a commitment to evangelical truth alive, even though he himself was in places inconsistent with his own evangelical convictions. For example, it is patently and grossly inconsistent to teach (as Augustine did) on the one hand that divine grace always precedes and initiates the sinner's positive response to the gospel—so that even our faith is the fruit of God's work in our hearts; not a decision we concoct for ourselves out of sheer willpower—and yet to teach on the other hand that the sacrament of baptism (a human work) somehow frees us from the taint of Original Sin and causes regeneration *ex opere operato.*

So Augustine was somewhat inconsistent, but a strain of evangelical conviction dominates all the aspects of his teaching that he spent the most time and energy on.

Skip to the medieval church, and one of the brightest lamps of evangelical truth was Anselm of Canterbury and the work he did with regard to the atonement. After 1,000 years of neglect and inconsistency, he took up the doctrine of atonement and brought a major dose of clarity to the subject, arguing that the atonement was a substitutionary offered to satisfy God, not the devil. Christ died to appease the Father, not to pay a ransom to Satan.

Anselm was actually beginning to lay the foundation for the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers were as indebted to Anselm for their understanding of the atonement as they were to Augustine for their understanding of Grace. And here is the vital point: Anselm and Augustine before him *both* were concerned primarily with the need to understand the gospel correctly. That passion for getting the gospel right is the very lifeblood of authentic evangelicalism.

Some four centuries after Anselm, William Tyndale gave us the earliest recorded appearance of the word *evangelical.* In 1531, in his commentary on the gospel of John (published 5 years before

Tyndale died and just 16 years after Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg), Tyndale wrote, "He exhorteth them to proceed constantly in the evangelical truth." Tyndale was not using the word to describe a theological position. It was simply an adjective meaning "of or pertaining to the gospel."

But just a year later, you have the first known published use of the word *evangelical* in English where the word refers to a specific theological point of view. Sir Thomas More seems to have first used it in a derogatory and descriptive sense to speak of Tyndale and his followers. More, of course, was a devoted Roman Catholic. He was Lord Chancellor of England during the reign of Henry VIII, known for burning many of the first English Protestants at the stake because they questioned the precepts of the pope. In 1532, in his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer,* More spoke of "Tyndale [and] his evangelical brother Barns."

More was referring there to Robert Barnes, an early English Reformer who had fled to Wittenberg to escape More's persecution just one year before. As a matter of fact, Barnes spent about four or five years with Luther and returned to England five years later. He was later burnt at the stake in 1540. Carl Trueman has a great book, based on his doctoral dissertation, which you can read freely on line, in which he argues that Tyndale, Barnes, and others weren't even truly Protestant in their soteriology until *after* their contact with Luther. They began their careers as Catholic humanists who had more in common with Erasmus—until Luther got them thinking about the gospel. That's when they became true *evangelicals,* and the first Englishmen to wear that title. The timing of their awakening to the truth of the gospel almost exactly coincided with Sir Thomas More's coinage of that term as a derogatory expression.

Reformation theologians began to embrace the term. Luther used the German equivalent to speak of gospel truth, and Lutheran churches throughout Europe soon were called Evangelical—actually, the German version of that word—to stress their common belief regarding the gospel.

All the major Reformers were evangelical. Here's an interesting fact: you can survey all the major Protestant creeds—Lutheran, Calvinist, English, Dutch, or whatever—and you will discover that while they disagreed on many secondary things and sometimes the distinctions between their opinions are stark, the one doctrine all the Reformers and all their creeds consistently held in common was the doctrine of justification by faith. They stressed the imputation of righteousness to the sinner.

In other words, the evangelical doctrine could be summed up in this idea: Our standing before God is secured by a righteousness that is imputed to us—credited to our account; reckoned in the courtroom

of God as if that righteousness were our own, even though justification is only a forensic or legal transaction, distinct from the *sanctifying* work that will eventually make us practically righteous. Justification itself is a legal decree that takes place in an instant, whereby we are declared by God Himself to be righteous—fully justified on the spot.

Roman Catholicism, by contrast, said the ground of our justification is a real righteousness that must be inherent in us. Therefore, Rome said, justification is a long process that isn't even finished in this life. That's the point of purgatory.

The term *evangelical* therefore became a way of designating someone who believes justification is a forensic past-tense reality grounded in a righteousness that is imputed to those who believe. Anyone who saw justification as an unfinished work that must be perfected by the believer's own faithfulness was (by definition) not evangelical.

At first, then, the term *evangelical* was simply a synonym for *Protestant.* An evangelical Roman Catholic is a contradiction. By the way, here is where the twin pillars of evangelical conviction become most prominent. Most of you are familiar with the *solas* of the Protestant Reformation—five latin slogans that summed up the heart of Reformation truth: *Sola fide,* meaning "faith alone"; *sola Scriptura*, "Scripture alone"; *sola gratia,* "grace alone"; *solus Christus,* Christ alone; and *soli Deo gloria*; "glory to God alone." All Reformation doctrine was summed up in those five slogans: On the authority of Scripture alone, we know that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And all the glory and credit for our salvation goes to god alone. Those are usually known as the five *solas.*

The most basic of those five principles are the first two—those two evangelical essentials: *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide.* The Reformers themselves recognized that, and they designated those two truths the formal and material principles of the Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* is the formal principle—meaning that the Bible alone is the authoritative source of our doctrine. *Sola fide* is the *material* principle, because justification by faith alone is the essential substance of the whole Protestant idea. Protestant teaching, then, was simply evangelicalism come to full flower. The Protestant Reformation represented the triumph of the gospel. Evangelicalism finally congealed in that movement.

Incidentally, the term *evangelical* was also sometimes used to differentiate between Reformers and Anabaptists (or more precisely, radical reformers). The radical reformers usually objected to the principle of *sola fide* just as strongly as the Roman Catholics did. They regarded it as an antinomian

principle. They stressed the moral teachings of Christ and the necessity of obedience over the doctrine of justification by faith. That's not an evangelical characteristic. In fact, it's one of the things that made them so radical.

Also, I don't really have time to develop this, but the original arminians likewise were not truly evangelical. They tended to drift easily into semi-pelagianism and socinianism. Early Arminianism bred deism and drove some of its adherents straight back to Rome. Early Arminianism was an exit for multitudes of its followers who basically left the Reformation altogether. Search the record and you'll see what I mean. Archbishop William Laud in the early 1600s is a classic example of what I am describing.

But in the mid-1700s, John Wesley's contribution to the Arminian cause was that he found a way to be Arminian and stay fairly solidly within the boundaries of evangelical conviction. He stressed the principle of *sola fide.* It's frankly not easy to do that and retain your Arminianism, but Wesley was blessedly inconsistent. Remember that his conversion came in that Aldersgate experience in 1738 when he was listening to a reading of the preface to Luther's Commentary on Romans, and Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. That preface he was listening to is a treatise on justification by faith and the principle of *sola fide*—a doctrine Wesley never drifted very far from. So Arminianism after Wesley is often called *"evangelical* Arminianism," in contrast with the works-orientation you see so pronounced in earlier, semi-pelagian strains of Arminian teaching.

The earliest English Baptists (who began to be prominent only in 17th century) argued that they did not deserve to be lumped with the anabaptists or Arminians for this very reason: They were thoroughly evangelical. And they produced confessions of faith designed to prove that very thing. The both the first Baptist Confession in 1644 and the Baptist Confession of 1689 affirmed the principle of *sola fide* unequivocally.

So here's my whole answer to the question being raised in this seminar, based on what we learn from church history: To be evangelical in the historic sense of the word is to affirm unequivocally both the formal and material principles of the Protestant Reformation—*sola Scriptura* and *sola fide.* It means unconditional submission to the authority of Scripture, over and above all the theories of science, the teachings of philosophy, the customs of religious tradition, and the rulings of any episcopate. Historic evangelicalism also entails a very clear and narrow understanding of the gospel—which is first and foremost all about what Christ has done for the sinner; not about what sinners do to imitate Christ, or whatever.

I want to stress that the idea of evangelicalism is much more complex than the definition might suggest at first glance. The two central principles of evangelical conviction are *full* of very specific implications. Take biblical inerrancy, for example. I don't think a credible case can be made to show that any evangelical—or anyone who *claimed* to be an evangelical—prior to 1840 or thereabouts ever questioned the inerrancy of Scripture. It's true that you wont find a lot of evangelicals writing about the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. But that's chiefly because evangelicals as a rule would never think of questioning such a thing. That's why I said earlier that if you abandon inerrancy, you've moved outside the historic evangelical mainstream. The denial of biblical inerrancy is really a neo-orthodox idea, not an evangelical one.

Another doctrine strongly implied if not overtly affirmed in the principle of *sola fide* is the truth that the atoning work of Christ was a penal substitution. That is, the cross represented the outpouring of God's wrath on His own Son. Christ stood in our place as our substitute and took the punishment we deserve for sin. I frankly don't think the principle of *sola fide* works with any other theory of the atonement because if Christ was not my substitute then He died chiefly as my example. And if His death was merely an example for me to follow rather than payment in full for my guilt, then there's something more I have to do to acquire my justification—and that's a denial of the principle of *sola fide*. In other words, those hordes of Emergent[ing] people who recoil from the principle of penal substitution are not really evangelicals at all.

And just so that you know I'm not making up a definition out of thin air, listen to the definition of *evangelical* from the Oxford English Dictionary. I think this definition was probably written several decades ago (may be as much as a hundred years ago), when there were lots of intelligent men in England who truly understood what an evangelical really is. Notice especially the stress they place on the efficacy of Christ's atoning work. This, again, is the *Oxford English Dictionary:* "evangelical—an adjective designating that school of Protestants which lays particular stress on salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ, and denies that good works and the sacraments have any saving efficacy."

If you concede, as I would argue, that the authority of Scripture is assumed in that definition, the *Oxford* dictionary has given us pretty decent definition of historic evangelicalism. That's an adequate summary of what I mean when I call myself an evangelical. And sometimes, when I feel it's necessary to distance myself from the mixed multitude of the contemporary evangelical movement, I like to refer to myself as a paleo-evangelical. That's a label that's not likely to be commandeered anytime soon by any postmodernized, emergentized religious hack. No neo-orthodox church leader or *Christianity Today* editor would wear that label, either. I'm a paleo-evangelical, and firmly fixed in that position.

Now we need to discuss the contemporary evangelical movement and where it went astray before time gets totally away from us.

Since the mid-1800s there has been a concerted effort to broaden the definition of evangelicalism so that more people can fit in the tent. That happens on the one hand because the adjective *evangelical* has always been a kind of seal of approval in Christianity—and everybody wants to get into the tent. It's a shorthand way of signifying that someone really believes the Bible and takes the gospel seriously.

Naturally, false teachers who want to smuggle in false doctrines would love to be thought of as *evangelicals,* because that minimizes the criticism and suspicion that gets aimed their way.

Charles Spurgeon noticed this phenomenon in the nineteenth century, and he pleaded with the true evangelicals of that era not to accept the claims of those who say they are evangelicals but aren't. He warned the Baptist union that the plan of the enemy was (in his words) "to lay the egg of error in the nest of our churches." And he warned that people who called themselves evangelicals but rejected evangelical principles had already infiltrated the Baptist Union. These pseudo-evangelicals took label for themselves, but they refused to define what they meant by it. (Just like today.) In 1888, Spurgeon wrote, "It is mere cant (meaning hypocrisy—a pious pretense) to cry, 'We are evangelical; we are *all* evangelical,' and yet decline to say what evangelical means. If men are *really* evangelical, they delight to spread as glad tidings the truths from which they take the name."

By the start of the 20th century, modernists had gained a foothold in virtually all the evangelical denominations by posing as evangelicals when they really weren't. The neo-orthodox followed suit. Karl Barth's called his magnum opus *Evangelical Theology.*

The *historic* evangelicals (paleo-evangelicals) were more or less driven out of the mainline denominations in the first half of the 20th century in order to preserve the purity of their evangelical fellowships. And one of the great lessons we *ought* to have learned in the course of the twentieth century is about the vitality of evangelical conviction. The gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation.

Evangelicals may have lost virtually all the mainline denominations, but evangelical churches grew and multiplied nonetheless, so that (despite the current mess evangelicals have made of their movement) in the broad sweep of the twentieth century evangelicalism was more successful (by every measure) than all the liberal denominations combined.

That *should* have strengthened our confidence in evangelical principles. But instead, my assessment would be that authentic, historic evangelicalism today, is an endangered species. Evangelicals sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, and the average evangelical church leader hasn't yet even awakened to that fact.

How did this happen?

I need to give you the really short version if I'm going to finish on time, so let me summarize by saying I think there were two disastrous turning points in the 20th century that sealed the doom of the evangelical movement. Either one of these events would have done serious, potentially fatal, damage to the movement. Both of them combined virtually guaranteed that the movement would become what it is today—a mess that frankly no authentic, historic evangelical wishes to be associated with.

The first unfortunate turning point was a parting of ways between evangelicals and fundamentalists. This wasn't an abrupt rift that you could easily put your finger on and date. The division actually began, I suppose, when the original fundamentalists defined themselves. Instead of two principles that embodied both the formal and material principles of the Protestant Reformation, the fundamentalists published a long series of close to 100 tracts, later compiled into 12 hefty volumes, defending the essential doctrines of Christianity. They brunt of their defense was against the higher critics, and I personally would not quibble with any of the doctrines they deemed fundamental. The one complaint I would have with early fundamentalism is that I think they gave short shrift to justification by faith. In those large volumes of tracts on the fundamentals of Christianity, there is (if I recall correctly) only one article devoted completely to the doctrine of justification by faith. If memory serves me right, it was written by Handley Moule, and it wasn't one of the more energetic essays in the collection. I've said this before, but I think *that* marked the beginning of fundamentalists' losing sight of the biblical hierarchy of what's truly essential. From before the 1920s on, fundamentalist energies were increasingly invested in things other than fundamental *doctrine.* Prohibition, intramural squabbles over personalities and politics, end-times speculation, and so on. By the 1960s fundamentalists were obsessed with dress codes and rules of conduct. Later, it was Bible versions and music styles. The fundamentalist movement lost its grip on the evangelical essential. Not that they overtly denied *sola fide* or the doctrine of justification by faith, but as a movement, they frankly

haven't given it due stress or attention.

It's my conviction that from the very beginning, before there was even any animosity involved, the parting of ways between evangelicals and fundamentalists weakened and impoverished both groups. Evangelicals tended to be uncomfortable with the nonstop militancy of the fundamentalists; fundamentalists thought the evangelicals' desire to be as *positive* as possible was a sign of weakness and compromise. The truth is that both temperaments were valid, and each side's unique contribution was needed in almost equal measure.

The two groups moved steadily further apart for some 40 years or longer. Deprived of so much evangelical warmth, the fundamentalists grew increasingly contentious. And deprived of so much fundamentalist conviction, the evangelicals grew increasingly willing to compromise. Anything and everything eventually became negotiable.

The wider the rift grew, the more eager to fight the fundamentalists became, the more willing to compromise the evangelicals were. Each side, reacting badly to the temperament of the other, unwittingly exaggerated their own faults.

By the 1970s the rift between evangelicals and fundamentalists grew so wide that our fundamentalist Baptist brethren ran out of people close to them to fight, so they turned on one another. That movement (which in the early 1970s had nine out of ten of the largest churches in America) is now so fragmented, and sectors of it are so bizarre today, that it's almost as hard to define the fundamentalist movement as it is to define evangelicalism. I won't go further than that, because my fundamentalist friends think I have already criticized their movement too much.

But the second thing that spelled the doom of the evangelical movement in America was the rise of so-called neo-evangelicalism. This was a movement strongly influenced by the early drift of Fuller seminary, led by men who were affiliated with *Christianity Today* and the National Association of Evangelicals, and driven mainly (I think) by a desire for academic respectability, even at the expense of a clear and consistent testimony.

Harold John Ockenga was an extremely influential voice in mid-20th-century evangelicalism. He helped found Fuller Seminary, Cordon Conwell, and the National Association of Evangelicals. He was pastor for many years of Park Street Church in Boston. He's the one who introduced the idea of neo-

evangelicalism and proposed that name, in a 1948 meeting at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. The vision as he outlined it was driven by three priorities: First, it was a repudiation of the fundamentalists' separatism (which, ironically, amounted to a final declaration of separation from the evangelicals' own fundamentalist brethren at the same time it opened the door to fellowship and cooperation with non-evangelicals). Second, it was a summons to social involvement—which frankly was ill-defined, and evangelical "social involvement" never really materialized on any grand scale, unless you count the rise of the religious Right after the 1970s. And third was (in Ockenga's words) a "determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day."

At the inception, you had a few men like Harold Lindsell, Carl Henry, and perhaps Donald Grey Barnhouse, who were qualified and willing to engage in theological dialogue. But by the end of the century, the evangelical *movement* could hardly care less about theological dialogue. Evangelical megachurches were best known for their pursuit of shallow entertainments and superficial fads. And *Christianity Today*'s editorial board apparently came to the conclusion that engagement in theological dialogue meant giving a platform to practically every theological anomaly that came along *except* the old evangelical orthodoxies. You hardly ever hear anyone but fundamentalists talk about neo-evangelicalism these days, but the fact is that neo-evangelicalism completely overwhelmed and commandeered the entire evangelical movement, and that is the primary reason the movement itself is no longer truly evangelical.

In short, the evangelical movement imploded because it nurtured its own deficiencies. Neo-evangelical principles ultimately eradicated historic evangelicalism, and those of us who are paleo-evangelicals frankly have no *movement* that we really belong to.

Now we're nearly out of time and I haven't said half of what I intended. I haven't even given you a single quote from Lloyd-Jones's book *What is an Evangelical?* So let me strongly recommend again that you read those lectures. In essence, those lectures were Lloyd-Jones's answer to neo-evangelicalism. He was a classic *paleo*-evangelical without a neo-evangelical bone in his body.

Here's a sample quote:

One of the first signs that a man is ceasing to be truly evangelical is that he ceases to be concerned about negatives, and keeps saying, We must always be positive. I will give you a striking example of this in a man whose name is familiar to most of you, and some of whose books you have read. This is what he has written recently: `Whether a person is an evangelical is to be settled by reference to how he stands with respect to six points', which he then enumerates. His definition is by reference only to

what a person is for rather than to what he is against. He goes on: `What a man is, or is not, against may show him to be a muddled or negligent or inconsistent evangelical, but you may not deny his right to call himself an evangelical while he maintains these principles as the basis of his Christian position.'

Now that is the kind of statement which I would strongly contend against. I believe it is quite wrong. The argument which says that you must always be positive, that you must not define the man in terms of what he is against, as well as what he is for, misses the subtlety of the danger.

Lloyd Jones saw that *doctrinal indifferentism* was inherent in the neo-evangelical agenda, and he knew that would spell the ultimate demise of the evangelical movement as a truly evangelical entity.

He was right. In many ways and in several contexts, he predicted with spot-on accuracy what was coming. Check his books *Preaching and Preachers* or *Puritanism*—or almost anything Lloyd-jones wrote. He warned that neo-evangelical compromise would lead to neo-orthodox doctrines. That's what the Emerging Church movement signifies, by the way—the triumph of neo-orthodoxy in the evangelical movement. He predicted the demise of preaching in evangelical circles. He saw forty years ago that doctrinal indifferentism was eating away the foundations of evangelical conviction. And he was right.

In summary, the evangelical *movement* that our grandparents and great-grandparents new is *dead.* Evangelical principles live on here and there, but the label has been commandeered by people who have no right to it. It has been bartered away by those who promised to be the movement's guardians and mouthpieces—*Christianity Today* and the National Association of evangelicals being among the chief culprits. But rank-and-file evangelicals are to blame as well, because they were content to abandon their own heritage and run after cheap amusements. The average American today thinks evangelicalism is a political position or a religious ghetto rather than a set of biblical beliefs.

The task for paleo-evangelicals like me is to remain faithful and remember that the gospel—not the combined clout of a large politically-driven movement—is the power of God unto salvation.

Church history teaches us another important lesson: The gospel has only rarely made great gains on the back of massive, popular movements. It's the quiet, sometimes unrecognized and unsung labors of faithful individuals that often result in the most profound, long-term impact for the kingdom of God.

We see that embodied in Charles Spurgeon's life and legacy, right? The whole movement he did more than anyone to build turned against him and even tried to portray him as an evil, divisive influence. But Spurgeon shows us that if we're faithful to the truth, in the long run we'll be blessed for it, and the truth will eventually defeat every error and outlast them all, no mater how popular might be whatever error is currently in vogue.

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Executive Director
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