

What does the word “evangelical” mean in Christendom today?

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There have been three main historic divisions of Christianity:

- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Protestant

All of these groups have had three types of adherents at some time in their history:

- traditionalists (they follow a set of traditions, more than the Bible)
- liberals (they basically create their own beliefs, based on their own opinion)
- true believers

•The original meaning of the word *evangelical* applied to Protestant true believers, distinguishing them from Protestant liberals and traditionalists. It had nothing to do with a specific denomination.

Who is a true believer?

- believes in the triunity of the one true God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- believes that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is true
- believes that Mary, being a virgin, conceived of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ
- believes that all mankind has sinned and that sin has separated man from God
- does not desire to continue living a lifestyle of unrepentant sin
- believes that there is nothing that can be done to earn eternal life by human effort
- believes that Jesus died on the cross to take upon Himself the just punishment for our sins
- believes that Jesus rose from the dead
- believes that Jesus offers eternal life to anyone that places personal faith in Him
- has eternal life because he has placed his faith personally in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior
- has experienced a new life as a result of that personal faith (true faith produces works)
- desires to live in obedience to God

Some Catholics, some Protestants, and some Orthodox are true Christians... but not all Catholics, all Protestants, or all Orthodox are true Christians. This is because many have been born into these groups and continue in them because of tradition, but have never experienced a true, life-changing faith in Christ. Others in these groups have created their own religious beliefs based primarily on what seems right to them. They have never experienced a true life-changing faith in Christ either.

Some Catholics, some Protestants, and some Orthodox are true believers because they have placed personal faith in Jesus Christ. They believe that He died on the cross and rose from the dead to save them personally. They have repented of their sinful lifestyle and have personally invited Jesus to come into their life to forgive their sin and save them from eternal damnation. This true faith results in a changed life.

Everyone should do a self-evaluation of his/her own life. Going to a particular church will never save anyone, nor will changing to a particular church save anyone. Salvation is an act of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God's forgiveness is an act of grace that we cannot earn or deserve.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away;
Behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17 - NKJV)*

An example of a prayer that expresses true faith in God is the following:

Lord God Almighty,

I admit to you that I have sinned and that it was wrong. I understand that there is nothing that I can do to escape the consequence of what I have done... which is eternal separation from you.

But I also understand that Jesus died in my place so that I would not have to suffer the consequence that I deserve. I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that He now offers me eternal life through His death and resurrection.

Please forgive me. Whatever it means to believe in you, that is what I want to do right now. I need you.

From this time forward, I want to change the direction of my life and follow you. Give me a hunger for your Word and a desire to spend time with you every day. I pray that I would love you with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength. Help me to obey you without hesitation and be faithful to you until the day that I die. Help me to love others and to demonstrate my love through concrete actions. Protect me from all evil. Give me wisdom to make right decisions that honor you.

Thank you very much for all that you have done for me.

Some historical considerations:

Among the Protestant groups, as things moved more towards traditionalism and liberalism, some people began to call themselves fundamentalists. They insisted that we must not depart from some basic fundamental principles:

- Inerrancy of the Scriptures
- The virgin birth and the deity of Jesus
- The doctrine of substitutionary atonement by God's grace and through human faith (not by works)
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus
- The authenticity of Christ's miracles
- In many circles, the pre-millennial second coming of Christ

As the fundamentalist movement began to focus on the concept of separation from everyone who did not hold to the same ideas, part of this group of fundamentalists did not want to take an isolationist approach so they started to call themselves evangelicals and distanced themselves from the title *fundamentalist*. Therefore, in this definition that I am using, a fundamentalist would be part of the evangelical family, although they themselves would consider themselves to not be a part of the evangelical family.

Some issues where evangelicals basically agree:

1. Belief that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are...
 - verbally inspired by God (1 Cor. 2:13),
 - without error in the original writings (2 Pet. 1:21; Ps. 12:6, Mat. 5:18),
 - and that they are the final authority in all matters relating to everyday life and to all truth... whether it be doctrinal, theological, historical, or scientific (2 Tim. 3:16, Ps. 19:7-11).

2. Belief in the triunity of the one and only true God (Deut. 4:39; Isa. 42:8; Mat. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14):
 - the Father (Jn. 6:27; 1 Pet. 1:2)
 - the Son (Jn. 3:13, 31; 8:58; Jn. 10:30)
 - the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16; Jn. 16:7-11; Rom. 8:26; Ps. 139:7).

3. Belief that the eternal Son became a man in the person of Jesus, the Messiah (Dan. 9:25; Phil. 2:5-11; Jn. 1:1, 14, 41)...
 - He was born of the Virgin Mary, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit in order to take on a natural, physical, human form (Mat. 1:18-25).
 - He is fully God and completely and perfectly human (Jn. 20:28-29; Heb. 4:15; 1 Corinthians 15:20).
 - Jesus died in our place, in order to save us from the eternal consequences of our sin. This is both a personal sin and an inherited sin nature that has its origin in the disobedience of Adam and Eve (1 Pet 3:18; Rom. 3:23, 5:12; Jn. 3:16).
 - Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and He will return again exactly as the Scriptures indicate (Mat. 20:19, 28:6; Jn. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; Acts 1:9-11; 1 John 3:2-3).

4. Belief that any person who places saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10, Titus 3:5)...
 - has been purchased and set free from slavery to sin (1 Cor. 6:20; Rom. 6:18),
 - has been reconciled to God, and is no longer under His wrath (2 Cor. 5:18; 1 Thes. 1:10),
 - has been declared righteous before God (Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 6:11),
 - has passed from death to life... a true transformation (Jn. 5:24, 2 Cor. 5:17),
 - has received the permanent, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13),
 - has become a member of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; Col. 3:15),
 - continues in a process of sanctification in this present life (Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 2:6-7), and will ultimately spend all eternity with God (Jn. 14:2-3; Phil. 3:20-21; Rev. 21:1-22:5).

5. Those who reject this divine plan of redemption will spend all eternity separated from the presence of God, in a place that was originally created for the devil and those angels that followed him in rebellion against God (Mat. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).

(Those who in the past were considered to be evangelicals,
but now do not agree with the above basic doctrinal statement,
would be considered by most evangelicals to be neo-evangelicals.)

Some issues where evangelicals have different opinions:
(the reality of current thinking - not an exhaustive list)

1) the relationship between the Old and New Testaments

- Is the church a continuation of Israel or are they two different entities?
- Does the Mosaic Law continue in full force, or does it not continue in full force?

2) future things

- amillennial, postmillennial, or premillennial
- post-trib, mid-trib, pre-wrath, or pre-trib

3) salvation/sanctification

- election by God's foreknowledge / election by God's sovereignty
- cannot lose your salvation / can lose your salvation
- can or cannot attain a level of perfect sanctification in this present life on Earth

4) the Holy Spirit

- all gifts are in full use today / not all gifts are in full use today
- baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at salvation / can occur at some point after salvation
- God's revelation is complete in the Bible / God's revelation continues today through dreams, visions, listening prayer, prophets, apostles, etc.
- there are private prayer tongues / there are no private prayer tongues
- evangelism does or does not have to include signs and wonders
- music and style of worship

5) church government

- hierarchical
- congregational
- federal (the group elects some to rule)
- dominant control by one person
- plurality of elders

6) the role of women

- women cannot be pastors or elders / women can be pastors and elders
- women should wear a head-covering / do not need to wear a head-covering
- women can wear pants / women cannot wear pants
- women should submit to their husbands / women do not have to submit

7) baptism

- by sprinkling / by pouring / by immersion
- administered only to believers of an age of understanding / administered to babies
- administered by any believer / administered only by certain officials

8) Lord's supper

- every week, month, quarter, or year
- includes foot washing / does not include foot washing
- administered with real wine / administered with grape juice
- administered by any believer / administered only by certain officials
- many different ways of celebrating it

9) Bible versions

- KJV is the only true version of the Bible and must have priority
- OR
- all translations are useful, but the original language documents must have priority

10) the creation account

- literal days, literal account

OR

- indefinite periods of time, yet still seeing it as the direct creation of God

11) social issues/politics

- separation of church and state / uniting church and state
- Christianizing government to bring all under the rule of God / transforming individuals who will be able to have an impact in a secular society
- government laws should/should not be exactly the same as the Law in the Bible
- an evangelical must be a Republican, an evangelical does not have to be a Republican
- evangelism does or does not have to include satisfying physical and social needs

Evangelicals have now split into conservative evangelicals and neo-evangelicals.

Some characteristics of neo-evangelicalism:

- no longer holds to the sufficiency of Scripture or to Biblical inerrancy
- acceptance of evolution and science, even when in conflict with the Bible
- acceptance of a social gospel and a hesitance to talk about sin and hell
- some have taken a liberation theology approach
- cooperative evangelism and other agreements of cooperation (unity at the expense of all doctrine)

Today the word “evangelical” is losing its original meaning and does not necessarily refer to a true believer who holds to the inerrancy, authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures.

Postmodernism is causing some who were conservative evangelicals to redefine their beliefs and basically become neo-evangelical, or, in some cases, to actually depart from the historic Christian faith (i.e. questioning or denying the Trinity, etc).

2 Timothy 4

*1 Therefore I solemnly witness before God and the Lord Jesus Christ,
who is going to judge the living and the dead according to His appearance and His kingdom,*

*2 preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season,
reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.*

*3 For the time will be when they will not endure sound doctrine,
but they will heap up teachers to themselves according to their own lusts, tickling the ear.*

4 And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to myths.

5 But you watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fully carry out your ministry.”

6 For I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is here.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

*8 Now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge,
shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but also to all those who love His appearing.*