FRANK VIOLA

BEYOND EVANGELICAL



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Frank Viola

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Description

Recent studies indicate that evangelical Christians are known by the world as people who are narrow-minded, judgmental, self-righteous, legalistic, callous, hard-hearted, politically partisan, and quick to attack their own. Why is this, and is there a viable cure?

The evangelical Christian world has fractured into four main streams. One of these streams has grown weary of the Christian Right vs. Christian Left squabbles and vitriolic disputes. If this describes you, then you are not alone. And you will be encouraged to know that God is raising up a new breed of orthodox Christians who are breaking free from the Christian Right vs. Left quagmire.

Beyond Evangelical explores the changing face of evangelicalism and introduces readers to a growing segment of the Christian population who do not fit into the Right or Left categories, but who are marked by an uncommon devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ as this world's true Lord.

Introduction

The Birth of This Book

In May 2011, I began a series of posts entitled Beyond Evangelical, short for beyond evangelical*ism*.

Hundreds of thousands of people read the series from all over the world and many asked me to turn it into a book. That request is the genesis of this work.

In addition to the original series, I've added new chapters that haven't been published anywhere before. I've also added some blog posts from my old, dusty archives that go along with the theme.

Beyond that I've added a list of source materials that delve deeper into the subjects, including a list of quotes, blog posts, and books written by various authors (mostly theologians, scholars, and pastors) who are saying many of the same things.

I've also added a chapter where I respond to questions and objections to the original series. (Be sure to read that chapter as it will help clarify the content and prevent misunderstanding.)

The overwhelming majority of people who read my original series resonated strongly with it. The series captured the yearning of many Christians who wish to see the face of evangelicalism changed.

In short, a growing number of Jesus-followers are tired of the Christian Right vs. Christian Left wars. They don't fit neatly into either camp, yet they don't want to leave the evangelical fold. They simply want to see a higher expression of evangelicalism for the 21st century.

Historians and semioticians agree. The face of evangelicalism is changing rapidly and the fissures in the movement are becoming more obvious each day. Civil discourse among evangelicals is rare. The norm is to draw battle lines and throw rocks at one another across those lines.

Some authors have argued that evangelicalism has been co-opted by the Republican party. Others have argued that mainline churches have been co-opted by the Democratic party. And the turf war is getting increasingly uglier. All told, countless Christians are weary of the intramural squabbling and vitriol that

comes from both camps (right and left), and they are looking for a higher, deeper, more Christocentric expression of evangelicalism.

That's where this book comes in.

It seeks to give vision and language for a new kind of evangelicalism.

Note that I am not alone in taking a "beyond evangelical" position on numerous theological and social issues. Scot McKnight, Roger Olson, David Fitch, N.T. Wright, and the late Michael Spencer are some of the more prolific writers of our time who have been calling the body of Christ to a newer expression of evangelicalism that better bridges the horizons of Scripture and culture. (You can read quotes by them in Chapter 18, along with many others.)

Unfortunately, the writings of all of these men have been grossly misrepresented by some of their detractors. Consequently, if you read a critique of this book (or the blog series that inspired it), be sure to read the pages that follow carefully to make sure that the critique accurately reflects the content of the book and is not a work of straw man argumentation.

While I welcome disagreements with what I've written, disagreeing with things I've never said or believe is a different matter. The latter is intellectually dishonest to say the least. So if you disagree, be sure that you're disagreeing with what I've actually written in context.

My hope is that the Lord would use this little book to give encouragement, clarity, language, and inspiration to all Jesus-followers who are disaffected by the right vs. left wars, believing within their hearts that a higher way exists. If that describes you, then you are certainly not alone.

Frank Viola

June 2012

Psalm 115:1

P.S. Should you have any questions about this book, just go to my FAQ page and post your question in the comments section.

Chapter 1

What Does “Beyond Evangelical” Mean?

“Be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”

~ Deuteronomy 5:32

The title of this book is *Beyond Evangelical*. But what does that phrase mean? And what does it *not* mean?

First, “beyond evangelical” doesn’t mean “non-evangelical.”

The phrase “beyond evangelical” is short for “moving beyond evangelical*ism*,” which is a theological movement (not people or persons).

I am an evangelical. What is more, I stand with the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed (just in case anyone was wondering). In this regard, I agree with Alister McGrath’s statement that “evangelicalism is historic Christianity. It’s the standard bearer of historic, orthodox Christianity.”

But the term “evangelical” embraces a wide canopy. So much so that the word is becoming increasingly vague and open to interpretation. *Evangelicalism has become a hyphenated movement.* For instance, “old-evangelical,” “neo-evangelical,” “conservative-evangelical,” “post-evangelical,” “post-conservative evangelical,” “ecumenical-evangelical,” “charismatic-evangelical,” “young-evangelical,” etc. are all in common use today. American historian Mark Noll rightly points out that evangelicalism is made up of “shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals.”

The word “evangelical” has become so generalized that people like Jim Wallis and Al Mohler stand on the oppose sides of the evangelical spectrum. The same is true for Rob Bell (on the left) and John MacArthur (on the right), both of

whom claim to be “evangelical.”

As western culture has balkanized and changed the meaning of words over time, the same is true for religious vocabulary. We can no longer take for granted the meaning of terms like “evangelical” or “evangelicalism.” The evangelical formulas that worked in the past have evolved. So there’s very little consensus today as to their exact meaning.

Second, “beyond evangelical” doesn’t mean “post-evangelical.”

Popularized by Dave Tomlinson, the term “post-evangelical” is often equated with the emerging church movement/phenomenon. While I have close friends who identify themselves with this movement, I do not. I appreciate my emergent friends and applaud some of their concerns, while freely disagreeing with other concerns.

In our book Jesus Manifesto, Leonard Sweet and I address what we believe to be some of the critical weaknesses of “emergent” Christianity as it relates to the Person of Jesus Christ (see Chapter 7). We also address some of the critical weaknesses we see in “the Religious Right” (see Chapter 8). Right or wrong, you know where I stand on those issues.

Now here’s something I’d like to say to my friends who are analyzing evangelicalism today. *The future of evangelicalism is not restricted to a choice between the left or the right.*

Another direction exists: It’s forward. As Sweet and I say in our book,

> The body of Christ is at a crossroads right now. The two common alternatives are to move either to the left or the right. It’s our observation, however, that we are living in a unique time, when people are frozen as they look in either of those directions. When they look to the left, they decide that they cannot venture there. When they look to the right, they feel the same. Whether they realize it or not, people are looking for a fresh alternative—a *third way*. The crossroads today, we believe, is one of moving forward or backward (*Jesus Manifesto*, p. xiii).[1]

Those of us who are moving “beyond evangelical” resonate with that statement. The only gear we have is “forward.”

Third, for many evangelicals, the historical use of the word “evangelical”

includes four key notes.

The British evangelical historian David Bebbington has defined the word "evangelical" by the following four notes. Mark Noll also uses this description as well as a host of others.[2] Bebbington's "evangelical quadrilateral" includes:

Biblicism - being Bible-centered, which would include the belief that the Bible is the Divinely inspired authority for life and faith; it is trustworthy and sufficient.

Conversionism – being conversion-centered, which would include the need for being converted to Jesus Christ.

Crucicentrism - being cross-centered, which would include emphasizing the death of Jesus for salvation.

Activism – being activist-centered, which would include living the Christian life, evangelizing, and helping those in need.[3]

I hold to all of the above. Therefore, I am an evangelical in the historic sense. But going "beyond evangelical" means asking some incisive questions like . . .

*In what sense is the Bible authoritative? And how exactly does a person hear and encounter God through the Scriptures? What's the main point of the Bible . . . the grand narrative?

*How is a person converted? And what does conversion give an individual? What does it include?

*What happened at the cross exactly? How does Jesus' death save us? Does His death on the cross do more than just forgive sins? If so, what?

*How should Christians present the gospel? What is God's central mission exactly? And what does the Scripture teach concerning how we are to fulfill that mission? (I predict that the question "What exactly *is* the Mission?" is going to define the missional church conversation over the next five years. This is always assumed . . . grossly so. So hide and watch.)

Since my blog's existence in 2008, I have weighed-in on some of these questions. My books also address them. But I've only scratched the surface. This leads us to the next point.

Fourth, those of us who have moved "beyond evangelical" have expanded the evangelical quadrilateral with four additional notes.

Christ-centered – a recovery of the Bible's consistent and razor-sharp emphasis that Jesus Christ is supreme, preeminent, sovereign, the center of biblical revelation, and the practical, living head of the church. In today's evangelicalism, countless religious "themes" and "subjects" have replaced Christ as the centrality and supremacy.[4] My message Epic Jesus: The Christ You Never Knew illustrates and expands what I mean by "Christ-centered."

Resurrection Life-centered – what stands beyond the cross is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection means so many things. It means the beginning of the new creation. It means the triumph of God over all things, including death, His greatest enemy. But it also means that God's people can live in the foretaste of our future resurrection, participating in its life and power here and now. It means that Jesus Christ is *still* alive, can be known, and has come to live out His resurrected life in and through us. Learning to live by the indwelling life of Christ in a *corporate* context and all that it involves is a missing note in modern evangelicalism. (The latter is focused on imitating Jesus as an *individual* through one's own efforts.) Living by the life of Christ also means being radically sold out to Jesus without being legalistic on the one hand or libertine on the other.[5]

Body Life-centered – the typical evangelical holds to the idea that the Christian life is an individual pursuit. "Church" is something Christians attend in order to be motivated to go out and serve as an individual Christian and live a strong individual Christian life. But those who have gone "beyond evangelical" believe that the church is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, Christ existing as community. Church is not a denomination, a service, or something you attend. It's the *experience* of the body of Christ, a la, "body life." In fact, the Christian life doesn't work outside of a local, shared-life community that's meeting under the headship of Jesus Christ as His body on the earth. Consequently, how a local church functions and expresses itself is eminently important.[6]

Eternal Purpose-centered – God has an eternal purpose, or grand mission, that provoked Him to create. That purpose goes beyond the saving of lost souls and making the world a better place. God's purpose transcends evangelism and social action (both of which are focused on meeting human needs). The eternal purpose is primarily by Him, through Him, and to Him. Meeting human needs is a

byproduct, not the prime product.[7]

Contemporary evangelicalism in America is essentially a reactionary movement.[8] As a result, it has
produced an “us” vs. “them” mentality.

Those of us who have gone “beyond evangelical” have moved on from the early 20th-century fundamentalist vs. modernist debate that our forefathers passionately fought . . . a fight that continues to rope many contemporary Christians into today, some 100 years later.

This fight leaves people with a false choice between left or right. The alternative direction of “forward” doesn’t appear on the radar screen.

Those who are “beyond evangelical” have moved on from that battle
to *discovering, exploring, and displaying the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ with our brothers and sisters in Christ.*

(How often do you hear that language in evangelical circles? The vocabulary we find in books like Ephesians emerged from a living experience. An experience that is available to Christians today, though it be rarely found.)

I am not alone in observing the trend of moving “beyond evangelical.” Before his passing, Michael Spencer famously wrote about “the coming evangelical collapse.”[9] Scot McKnight has written prolifically and intelligently on the present crisis that evangelicalism faces and the pressing need to reshape it. David Fitch has also written on the subject (though more for an academic audience). And a host of others have as well.

In this book, we will explore all of these matters more deeply.

Notes

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[1] The middle structure of evangelicalism collapsed long ago (as early as Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible*), leaving only the left wall and the right wall of the building. This collapse distorted the evangelical response to the rise of postmodernism by forcing it into the mold of the modern left vs. the modern right. In this regard, the “new Reformed” and “Emergent” movements are really as modern as the fundamentalist vs. liberalism groups that preceded them. For this reason, neither one is capable of salvaging evangelicalism. In

addition, the third direction of “forward” is not based on the idea that evangelicalism needs a better theology. It’s instead based on the question of how the Christian faith is to be *lived out* in its proper context, that is, as a kingdom community discovering and displaying Christ. The scourge of evangelicalism is that it has centered itself on making correct propositional statements rather than on a way of living in, through, and for the Lord Jesus in a shared-life local community.

[2] The Anglican evangelical scholar Alister McGrath stretches his definition to six hallmarks, but Bebbington’s quartet is much more popular. The Reformed Canadian John Stackhouse uses six also, but they are different from McGrath’s. American historian George Marsden adds a fifth element to Bebbington’s list: transdenominationalism. All of this just underscores the fact that the term “evangelical” has become a clay word. Donald Dayton in his *The Variety of American*
Evangelicalism rightly points out that the variety within evangelicalism defies a single description. It should also be noted that historians trace evangelicalism back to the revival movements of the 18th and 19th centuries under George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. Others trace it back to the Reformers.

[3] Winston Churchill said that Britain and America were two countries separated by a *common language*. The same can be said about the evangelical camp. Using the same terms does not equal agreement on their meaning.

[4] Jesus Manifesto is dedicated to this note.

[5] Revise Us Again is dedicated to this note. Books by other authors listed in the Spiritual Growth Shelf also address it. See also my post, Legalism, License, Lordship, and Liberty.

[6] Pagan Christianity, Reimagining Church, and Finding Organic Church are dedicated to this note. Also the messages Vantage Point and Who is This Woman? Books by other authors listed in the Church Life Shelf also address it.

[7] From Eternity to Here is dedicated to this note. Also the message entitled The Eternal Purpose. Books by other authors listed in the Mission of God Shelf also address it. I realize that Calvinists will equate what I’m saying in this last point to be reduced to “the glory of God.” But there’s something higher

in God's heart that He is after, and "glory" is often misunderstood.

[8] Another aspect of evangelicalism, though often unspoken, is that it builds its theology on the basis of apologetics. This raises an important question: should our theology be built on apologetics or on the intention to know God in Christ and live by His life?

[9] Evangelicalism's social, cultural, and political influence has waned greatly and continues to do so. The popular perception of evangelicals should also be noted. Many view "evangelical Christians" as closed-minded, judgmental, self-righteous, condemning, hypocritical (deeming their own sins as less serious than that of others), unloving, and plagued by internal hostility and conflict (they often attack their fellow brethren). This is yet another reason why many Christians are moving "beyond evangelical."

Chapter 2

Four Divergent Streams in the Evangelical Fold

"All labels have their problems, and, to be sure, 'evangelical' is fraught with them. But I am not giving it up."

~ Roger Olson

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the center of evangelicalism is collapsing. Countless evangelical Christians are moving to the left or to the right. Namely, they are moving toward liberalism or they are moving toward high church or low church traditions. They are moving toward individualism or communitarianism.

In this chapter, we will briefly survey the four major streams within evangelicalism with an eye to Christians in their 20s, 30s, and 40s – often called Mosaics and Busters or Generation X and Generation Y (Millennials).

My analysis is based on what I've observed in my extensive travels worldwide, speaking in a variety of conferences represented by the different streams (wherein I've interacted with the other speakers and attendees), and corresponding with thousands of evangelical Christians in their 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Like anything else, there are always exceptions, overlaps, and sub-groups that don't fit neatly into these four evangelical streams. So don't regard this survey as an exact science.

Yet based on my observation and experience, what follows are the four largest and most influential streams within evangelical Christianity today that are populated mostly by people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. The characteristics I've outlined below represent the tendencies of *most* of the people within each stream.

Note that the labels I'm using are simply handles I created to communicate intelligibly about the subject. They are necessary for distinguishing each stream from one another. However, they do not represent any denomination or formal tribe. And they shouldn't be used to denominate any particular individual.

The four streams are . . .

Stream 1: The Systematizers

* political: tend to be on the right.

* appeal: drawn to propositional truths; seek strong discipline and order in their daily lives.

* search: in quest for theological certainty. Systematizing truth in both thought and life attracts them.

* identification: populates much of the "New Reformed/Calvinist" movement. There is a great deal of theological uniformity within this stream.

* reach: very large online presence; above average on-the-ground presence.

Stream 2: The Activists

*political: tend to be on the left.

*appeal: drawn to causes.

*search: bettering people's living conditions. Attracted to social causes like acts of mercy, social justice, helping the poor, caring for the environment, etc.

* identification: populates much of "the Emergent Church Conversation," the "New Monasticism," and a segment of "the Missional Church Movement." There is a great deal of theological diversity within this stream.

*reach: above average on-line presence; above average on-the-ground presence.

Stream 3: The Emoters

* political: tend to be on the right.

* appeal: drawn to supernatural encounters.

* search: demonstrations of the miraculous; the healing of emotional wounds.

* identification: populates much of the contemporary "Charismatic Movement"

in all of its forms. Strong emphasis on restoring the supernatural: signs, wonders, casting out of demons, healing, etc. and what God will do in the future in terms of revival and miracles. There is significant theological uniformity and diversity within this stream.

*reach: weak online presence; very large on-the-ground presence.

All three streams are part of mainstream Christianity. Consequently, each stream has been featured in the voices of establishment (popular) Christian magazines and e-zines.

Each stream holds conferences that receive wide publicity, being advertised in establishment Christianity magazines and e-zines.

Each stream can be viewed as emphasizing mind, will, and emotion respectively in their approach to God. (Systematizers emphasize the mind; Activists emphasize the will; Emoters emphasize the emotion.)

The fourth stream flies under the radar of establishment Christianity because it is not part of it. Yet it's just as large as the other three streams.

Stream 4: Those Moving Beyond Evangelicalism

*politically: tend to be apolitical, believing that the local ekklesia (body of Christ) is the new *polis* and the kingdom of God is the true government. Beyond that, their political positions are enormously diverse.

*appeal: believe that there has to be something more to Christ and the church than what the first three streams present.

*search: discovering and displaying Jesus Christ in authentic, deep, and profound ways.

*identification: Most have come out of one of the other three streams. They belong to no particular movement, tribe, or denomination. And they do not belong to any single expression of church. Those who have moved beyond evangelicalism can be found in all church forms and structures.

They are not seeking a theological system (stream 1). Concepts and ideas don't appeal to them. They are seeking spiritual reality. They view Scripture as fully inspired and true, but approach it as a narrative rather than a system of propositional ideas.

They are not seeking any specific cause (stream 2). Religious duty doesn't

appeal to them. They view “good works” as being the natural outflow of living by Christ. They regard pursuing Jesus Christ and seeking causes that are related to Him as being two different things.

They are not seeking a supernatural experience (stream 3). They believe that the emotions (as well as the mind and will) can either reflect or hinder the work of the Spirit. One’s feelings are not synonymous with the Spirit’s leading. Miraculous demonstrations don’t appeal to them either, unless they supremely unveil and glorify Jesus Christ.

They are in pursuit of a Person above and beyond ideas (stream 1), activities (stream 2), or feelings (stream 3). They emphasize God’s work in and through the human heart, and believe that mind, will, and emotion are to be governed by the Holy Spirit.

Those who have moved beyond evangelicalism want to know Jesus Christ in reality and in the depths. They aren’t quietists, pietists, passive mystics, or gnostics. Outward activity is important, but it’s like fruit falling off a tree. It’s the natural result of living by the life of Jesus.

As stated in Chapter 1, those who have moved beyond evangelicalism emphasize four key themes:

*The centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.
*Living by the indwelling life of Christ.
*Experiencing church as a Christ-centered, shared-life community.
*Living for the eternal purpose of God.

Despite the fact that this fourth stream is largely ignored by mainstream Christianity at the present time, it is growing and becoming more visible.

The common link that ties all four streams together is this: Each group believes that classic evangelical Christianity is inadequate. It has failed to give robust answers to their most serious theological questions and depth to their deepest spiritual longings.

Chapter 3

Clearing the Terrain

"Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

I'd like to do two things in this chapter. First, highlight someone's comment from my original blog series. Second, interact with some of the other remarks I've received from the original series.

A Comment Worth Underscoring

I was encouraged to read so many insightful comments on the posts I wrote in the original series. But there was one in particular that stood out. It was from Jonathan Cottrell. Here's what he said:

Christ is all. My wife and I have been having a conversation of late that revolves around how people would summarize their faith in one word. That one word speaks more than a thousand words, if you ask me. I imagine that the groups would summarize as:

Group 1 [Systemtizers]: "Grace" or "Truth"
Group 2 [Activists]: "Love" or "Mission"
Group 3 [Emoters]: "Spirit" or "Power"
Group 4: [Beyond Evangelicals] "Jesus" or "Christ"

Is there any word that should summarize our common faith other than His Name? I think not.

Interacting With Other Comments

Certainly, one of the push-backs to what Jonathan said is, "Are you saying that the other streams don't love Jesus? Or that they aren't Christ-centered?"

I can't speak for Jonathan, but I suspect he would say "absolutely, not." The point of his comment is that other words and concepts often tend to be more dominant in one's vocabulary and thinking than Jesus Himself. Here's what I wrote to another person on another blog regarding this same question:

> In my observation, all streams would say they are "Christ-o-centric." And in reality, some of the leaders of the first, second, and third streams would definitely fit the bill – though *many* in stream 1 would better be described as "God-centered" over/against "Jesus-centered" by their own admission. And in stream 3, many would be better described as "Holy Spirit-centered" over/against "Jesus-centered." Some (not all) in stream 2 are more "Mission-centered," arguing that missiology comes before Christology (so they've said).
>
> With stream 4, the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ is front and center and permeates everything else, almost to the point of obsession. It comes to close to Larry Crabb's immortal words: "Our passion for Jesus is the only passion that will not destroy us." Or as I've put it elsewhere: *Christ is All, everything else is commentary.*
>
> It's all too easy to replace Christ Himself with a "thing" that's related to Jesus. I know that from experience. And we are all subject to doing it without realizing it. I'm not sure if you're familiar with my book Jesus Manifesto written with Leonard Sweet. But the overwhelming response to the book, which was hugely humbling to me, provoked some of the analysis in my series. Many readers said they believed that they were Christ-centered, but realized that they really weren't. Everyone's mileage may vary of course; but this response was eye-opening.
>
> Jesus Manifesto is somewhat of a manifesto of sorts for people who have moved beyond evangelicalism . . . since that's the best way I know how to describe such people (and we really do exist) 😉 . I hate labels myself, but shamelessly admitted in the beginning of Chapter 2 that I don't know how to communicate intelligibly about the divergent streams within evangelicalism without employing them.
>
> The "eternal purpose of God" (how I believe Scripture unfolds it, at least) and "living by the *indwelling life* of Christ" are, in my experience and observation, missing notes in the others three streams. I say that speaking as one who has been part of all three streams myself before moving

"beyond" (so to speak), and in dialoguing with some of the recognized "leaders" of these other streams in private conversations.

Anyways, that's how the terrain looks from my hill. But I may be looking at the back of the rocks while others may be viewing their fronts.

Further Observations

*"Beyond Evangelicalism" isn't a movement. Nor do we have a "leader." And I don't know anyone who is interested in the job. A number of people (myself included) have been articulating the four notes of beyond evangelicalism. But that doesn't make them/us "leaders" of the tribe. Not in any formal sense anyway.

*With respect to Chapter 2, there is no better/worse . . . gooder/badder . . . among the four streams. Each stream represents a segment of the body of Christ that is just *different* from the others. Those who have read my work are well aware that elitism, exclusivism, and sectarianism are at the top of my "hate list." *Different* doesn't mean better or worse.

*Discussing the changing shifts within evangelicalism today encourages dialogue.

*As I stated in the beginning of Chapter 2, labels and categories are necessary to communicate distinctions within a contemporary evangelicalism. There's nothing inherently evil in using a label. The word "Christian" is a label. And so is "Asian," "Italian," "American," "engineer," "Democrat," "Libertarian," and "blogger." Labels and categories don't have to divide people. So whether you object to using (or hearing) "labels" or not, the fact remains: *Scores of Christians in their 20s, 30s, and 40s (Mosaics and Busters) share something in common. They have grown tired of the state of modern evangelicalism and what it has produced. These followers of Jesus are evangelical Christians, but they don't fit the template of either the Religious Right or the Religious Left.* I've chosen to call this group people who are moving beyond evangelicalism. If you want to call them by another name, feel free. Call them "Christians" if it makes you happy. Or just say "those people" if that suits you better. 😀

*As I pointed out in Chapter 1, evangelicalism has become a hyphenated movement. Just the other day Zondervan mailed me their new book, Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism. In it, Kevin Bauder traces fundamentalism;

Albert Mohler traces confessional evangelicalism; John Stackhouse traces generic evangelicalism; and Roger Olson traces postconservative evangelicalism. This book cuts the line of contemporary evangelicalism using theological viewpoints. By contrast, my series focuses on Mosaics and Busters who don't fit into classic evangelicalism.

**Evangelicalism* shouldn't be confused with *evangelism*. The former is a classification of belief within Christianity. The latter is an activity. The two are different.

*I wish to repeat what I said at the front of Chapter 2: *"Like anything else, there are always exceptions, overlaps, and sub-groups that don't fit neatly into these four evangelical streams. So don't regard this survey as an exact science. Yet based on my observation and experience, what follows are the four largest and most influential streams within evangelical Christianity today that are populated mostly by people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s . . . the labels I'm using are simply handles I created to communicate intelligibly about the subject. They are necessary for distinguishing each stream from one another. However, they do not represent any denomination or formal tribe. And they shouldn't be used to denominate any particular individual."*

Chapter 4

A Collective Confession (You Are Not Alone)

"The desperate need today is not for a great number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

~ Richard Foster

In this Chapter, I want to provide a platform for the sentiments of those who have moved "beyond evangelicalism" (or whatever you wish to call it).

Countless Christians I've met have uttered these statements in face-to-face conversations, over emails, over coffee at conferences, and on this blog. I've compiled them all, editing them slightly for consistency. Together, they form a collective confession of sorts reflecting the thoughts and feelings of those of us who have moved beyond evangelicalism.

–

*We have grown tired of the media routinely characterizing "evangelicals" as if we were all part of "the Religious Right."

*We have become weary of Christian progressives deeming themselves to be the "new evangelicals" in reaction to the Religious Right.

*We are turned off by the left vs. right posturing and the left vs. right political/theological debates.

*We've looked to the right and do not wish to venture there. We've looked to the left and do not wish to venture there either. The direction we feel pulling our hearts is above and forward.

*We believe that both the Religious Right *and* the Religious Left have vital truths to contribute. We also believe that they are both missing vital truths. We believe their focus is mainly "issues" rather than Jesus Christ.

*We want to see the Christian Right and the Christian Left learn from one another as well as learn from those of us who are not part of either stream. We feel that *all* Christians should be open to learn from one another, for we are all

parts of the Body of Christ. None of us has the lock on all truth. Each member of the Body has a portion of the riches of Christ.

*We are sickened that so many evangelical Christians are either legalists or libertines (see Chapter 10). We want Christ's lordship and we want His liberty as well. We wish to follow Jesus without being legalistic or libertine.

*We hold to the orthodox teachings of Scripture regarding the Person of Christ, His work on the cross, the inspiration and truth of the Bible, the Triune nature of God (the Godhead), but we are weary of Christians dividing over peripheral doctrines and their own private interpretations of Scripture on non-essentials. We passionately agree with Augustine's sentiment: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, *in all things charity.*"

*We've grown weary of the way that Christians routinely mistreat their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, being quick to judge their motives, thinking the worst of them, condemning them, slandering them, gossiping about them, etc. We believe that being a Christian means treating others the same way you want to be treated (Matt. 7:12)—the forgotten words of Jesus (see Chapter 20). With deep remorse, we empathize with the words of Gandhi: "If it weren't for the Christians, I'd be a Christian."

*We've grown tired of the shallowness that marks so much of evangelical Christianity today. The same sermons, the same principles, the same teachings, etc. We are looking for depth in the Christian life. We know there's more to Jesus Christ, more to His church, and more to the spiritual life than what's been promoted in establishment Christianity. There is a cry in our hearts that says, "There's got to be more than this."

*We are saddened that the doers, feelers, and thinkers of the body of Christ have separated and isolated themselves from one another instead of learning from each other.

*We've grown sick of the entertainment-driven, duty-driven, guilt-driven message that's laced in most Christian sermons and books today. Human-induced guilt and the conviction of the Holy Spirit are two very different things.

*We are tired of the tendency of some Christians to elevate certain sins that others commit while minimizing or justifying their own sins.

*We've grown tired of Christian leaders attacking and competing with one

another, instead of networking together and supporting one another.

*We're weary of the "good ole' boy system" that's present in much of establishment Christianity today because it ends up elevating and protecting the status quo and silencing the voices of the prophets.

* We've grown sick of Christians saying nasty things about their fellow brethren (whom they don't know personally) on social media networks. And then justifying it in the name of God.

*We are saddened that so many Christians will believe what they hear about other believers second or third-hand, instead of going to those believers themselves and simply asking them questions in good faith.

*We've grown weary of some Christians falsely branding their fellow sisters and brothers in Christ with the words "heretic" and "apostate" when those same believers actually uphold the orthodox creeds of the faith.

*We've grown tired of Christians trying to rope us into the liberal vs. conservative battles of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

*We abhor elitism and sectarianism. We are open to all Christians of all stripes, receiving all whom Christ has received (Rom. 15:7).

* We stand for the unity of the Body of Christ. At the same time, we fiercely and passionately stand firm on our convictions regarding the absolute and unvarnished supremacy of Jesus, His indwelling life, God's timeless purpose, and the church as a Christ-centered community.

*We want the Lord. We want spiritual depth and reality. We want HIM in all of His fullness. Everything else is secondary to us, and often, we find them to be largely a distraction.

If you resonate with any of the above sentiments, then be encouraged: *You are not alone.*

Chapter 5

A Replay of History

"The hallmark of an authentic evangelicalism is not the uncritical repetition of old traditions but the willingness to submit every tradition, however ancient, to fresh biblical scrutiny and, if necessary, reform."

~ John Stott

Some Christians today are using the phrase, "the new evangelicals."

Last year, Gabe Lyons (author of The Next Christians) called me on the phone to ask me what I thought about his new book (which he kindly mailed to me). What I'm writing in this chapter and in the next is what I said to him in that conversation.

I dare suggest that there are two main types of new evangelicals today. One is not new at all. The other is, well, new in a sense.

Let me first address the evangelicals that are not new. This group of Christians used to be called "neo-evangelicals" during the 1950s through the 1980s.

F.F. Bruce, G.E. Ladd, Bernard Ramm, Harold Ockenga, and Carl F. Henry were just some of the movers and shakers of the neo-evangelical movement.

The neo-evangelicals criticized fundamentalism as being separatist and confrontational with the culture.

In 1947, Carl F. Henry wrote his famous book, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. Henry's book ignited the spark, and in the 1950s through the 1980s, neo-evangelicalism thrived. The neo-evangelicals lamented the way in which fundamentalism isolated evangelical Christians from the culture. Neo-evangelicals wanted evangelicals to penetrate the culture, redeeming it for Christ, rather than eschewing it.

The neo-evangelicals were fiercely committed to the Scriptures, but they criticized the fundamentalist view that the Bible had some sort of journalist

accuracy that would yield an answer to every question posed to it. This made fundamentalists break out in hives.

The neo-evangelicals passionately believed in the reliability, truthfulness, and divine inspiration of the Scriptures, but they balked at certain affirmations of biblical authority (like “plenary” and “inerrancy”).

F.F. Bruce (the modern-era equivalent to N.T. Wright) once remarked that he was content to just say that the Bible was “true.” (This statement made some fundies break out in boils. Hives, now boils. Sigh.)

The neo-evangelicals also stressed that the gospel contains a strong social component. Social activism, therefore, is part of the gospel message (they said). The gospel should be exhibited in both word *and* deed.

In the 1980s, “the Religious Right” emerged on the Christian landscape, bringing into being a new form of fundamentalism. The resurgent fundamentalism of the Religious Right beat back the neo-evangelical movement into obscurity. The net effect was that Christians forgot that neo-evangelicalism even existed. It virtually disappeared from the radar.

What is more, the resurgent fundamentalism captured the attention of the media. And so in the eyes of today’s media, evangelicalism = the Religious Right.

In reaction to the Religious Right, neo-evangelicalism is reemerging again, being incarnated in the evangelical left and the moderate wing of the emerging church movement. Yet many of its proponents aren’t aware of the history of neo-evangelicalism. They think that it’s something brand new.

But the “new evangelicals” aren’t new at all. The main difference between the neo-evangelicals of the past and today’s “new evangelicals” (or “next Christians”) is that the latter is sprinkled with a good measure of post-modern terminology.

But strip it back to its core, and it’s essentially the same thing.

Don’t miss my point.

I’m not critiquing neo-evangelicalism. F.F. Bruce, one of my favorite scholars of all time, was a neo-evangelical. I’m simply saying that it’s not “new.”

So who are the evangelicals that would be more accurately described as “new”?

They are those who have gone *beyond evangelicalism*. I've already spelled out the four notes that represent their burden, passion, and belief.

But to put it in a sentence, those who have moved beyond evangelicalism are aligned neither with the left nor the right. They believe the gospel goes beyond the old categories of personal salvation and social justice.

Don't misunderstand. Such people have existed for a long time. But as a phenomenon (or "tribe"), they are quite new.

All of this sets up the tee for Chapter 5 . . . which I'm hugely excited about.

Chapter 6

The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Evangelicalism

”Evangelicalism is like a swimming bath: most noise at the shallow end.”

~ J. Blanchard

In this chapter, I’m featuring an article entitled “The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Evangelicalism” by my friend Hal Miller.

Read it carefully. It’s a mind blower. I make a few important comments at the end.

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Every form of Christianity tries to be faithful in its time. The problem comes in trying to discern when its time has passed.

Forty years ago, Carl F. Henry made that discernment in The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. In his eyes, fundamentalism had become trapped in a mire of antagonism toward the world around it. Fundamentalism had become closed to the world and therefore irrelevant to the world. Its time had passed.

Back when the movement began in the early twentieth century, fundamentalism saw itself as an ark of refuge from the intellectual floods of the modern age. Critical study of the Bible was making it seem more and more a human book—perhaps a merely human book. Nineteenth century science had cast doubt on the Christian account of reality.

True, Christianity had survived the new astronomy of the sixteenth century and the new physics of the seventeenth century with renewed vigor. But when Darwin’s new biology came into vogue, some Christians began to wonder whether things had gone too far; the fundamentalists gathered up some gopher wood and started building.

They withdrew into the ark, closing the door after them against the scientific

paganism of “the world.” They dealt with the flood of modernity by removing themselves from its waters. Fundamentalism spoke a resounding “No!” to the modern world, preferring the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual security of their ark.

But in so doing, they became culturally closed, looking on every new insight or approach to life with suspicion. In their own minds, they were being faithful to God by shunning their world’s scientific paganism. But because they were culturally closed, they became increasingly isolated and irrelevant.

YET FUNDAMENTALISM HAD an “uneasy conscience.” Its more articulate children had become uncomfortable with its irrelevance because they felt the bible pulling them in a different direction—toward openness to the world. Among them were the youthful discontents of postwar Christianity in America: Carl Henry, Harold Ockenga, Billy Graham, and Harold Lindsell. They launched out on a new experiment that sought to overcome the cultural isolation they saw in fundamentalism.

These “evangelicals” had a simple goal. The fundamentalists, they reasoned, may have saved themselves and their families by boarding the ark, but they did so at great cost. The floodwaters had not risen as high as the fundamentalists had feared, and so the world sat on the hills around the ark and gawked at it as an irrelevant relic of a past era.

By refusing to be culturally open, the fundamentalists had removed Christianity from the only place where it can thrive—the world. The evangelicals wanted to come out of the ark and live a culturally open Christianity once more.

Spiritual ghettos, they said, were not healthy places for Christians, so they chafed against fundamentalism’s rejection of “worldly” activities like movies and dancing. Political problems, they said, were indeed the Christian’s business, so their periodical *Christianity Today* began its life in Washington, D. C.

Intellectual problems, they said, could not be ignored, so they worked vigorously to engage the cultured despisers of Christianity with reasons for their faith. All this gave evangelism a new vigor and left us indebted to the evangelicals for their labors.

They breathed a far less sectarian spirit than did the fundamentalists. The latter anxiously wanted to preserve the theological purity of those in the ark, so they tried to silence divergent opinions. They seemed bent on cutting off all creative thinkers before they had a chance to infect others, even though this radical

surgery meant amputating limb after limb of the body of Christ. Fundamentalism had sought doctrinal purity at any cost; the evangelicals sought to build a diversified alliance of those who were "close enough" on the crucial issues.

And the evangelicals brought a new interest to the Christian task in the world. They refused to envision Christians as fundamentalism had: a saved remnant plucked out of a dying world. Christians were this, in one sense, but they were also the vanguard of the kingdom of God, sent back into that world to work for reconciliation and justice there.

THE EVANGELICALS ACCOMPLISHED much. But now they too have an uneasy conscience. Oddly they seem to have failed at the central task they set for themselves. Paradoxical as it might sound, they became culturally open but remained culturally irrelevant. They shook off fundamentalism's closed attitude toward "worldly" things only to find themselves "open" in a way that gave them nothing relevant to offer their world.

Think about why you find something relevant. When my car is running well, for instance, I ignore the automotive section of the newspaper. I already have transportation, so it offers me nothing new. But when my car increasingly shows its age, that same section becomes highly relevant to me because it offers me something I need. In the same way, being culturally relevant requires offering your culture something it does not already have.

The evangelicals failed to do this because they did not examine their own culture's values closely enough. We all carry the deeply ingrained patterns of our culture, but the evangelicals did not bring those cultural assumptions up for examination or criticism.

Take the meaning of "success," for example. American culture understands it in quantitative terms like dollars and cents or number of cars. The evangelicals assumed this idea of success was adequate, so they treated the church with a growth-industry mentality.

The bottom line was souls saved (rather than dollars earned) but the concept was the same—we measure success quantitatively. But what if success ought to be measured qualitatively, by things like "love, joy, peace…?" Questioning the meaning of success did not occur to them; they simply accepted the meaning they found in their culture.

They assumed other cultural values, too. The evangelicals shared the American penchant for the "quick fix," and so articulated a spirituality heavy on immediate

healing, light on long-term discipleship, and blissfully ignorant of problems that refuse to go away. They shared the American enthusiasm for flash and gadgetry, and so outfitted their bookstores and TV studios with the latest trinkets and gizmos.

In little ways like these, evangelicalism was a thoroughly American business. But in one very important way, evangelicalism was so much a reflection of American culture that it became irrelevant: the evangelicals accepted the American assumption of individualism.

Americans see the isolated individual as the source of all moral virtue and society as nothing more than a collection of these individuals. Evangelicalism implicitly agreed. It spoke eloquently of saving individuals; but it did not take seriously what these individuals were to be saved into. They preached the gospel to individuals rightly enough; but as true Americans, they did not see that God might intend to go further and make a people out of these persons.

Christianity is culturally relevant when it offers a qualitatively different society. Jesus called it “the kingdom of God.” Paul saw its first outlines in the gathered disciples of Jesus, and so he called them ekklesia—we translate it “church”—a Greek word denoting citizens assembled to attend to their common project, their city.

The evangelicals missed this. Evangelicalism sought to transform people and so transform the world. They did not see that something might be missing from this vision, something their assumption of American individualism would hide from them. The true Christian vision is to transform people, transforming them into a people, and so transform the world.

The evangelicals missed that middle term. They could not see the church as a foretaste of the new society; it was a club for the new individuals. The evangelicals simply dressed American individualism in Christian clothing. They ended up with new isolated individuals, but in the old society. Since their expression of Christianity did not take form as a new society, it quickly became culturally irrelevant, even though it was admirably culturally open.

Fundamentalism, at least, had offered an alternative—a culturally closed, intellectually crippling alternative, but at least an alternative. Evangelicalism sought to overcome this closedness but did so at the cost of its relevance.

THE EVANGELICALS WERE faithful in their time. We need to find a way to be faithful in our time as they sought to be faithful in theirs.

This means we cannot jettison the past. The evangelicals wisely learned from the accomplishments as well as the mistakes of fundamentalism. Evangelicalism has accomplished much, and we need to take that seriously. The evangelicals gave us an important gift in their cultural openness. As John 3.16 says it, the world is the object of God's love. It is not a hopelessly alien and threatening place for Christians; it is the place where God has chosen to be active to redeem.

Yet being culturally open, in itself, is not enough. We also need to be culturally relevant. We need to be open to take the world seriously as God's world and the place of our own tasks; but at the same time we need to offer the world a real alternative to its present forms. That means creating an alternative society.

The problem is, America is a society at arm's length. We feel alone here, and other persons (except in the tiny enclave called "family and friends") are often at best resources for personal goals, at worst mere limitations on personal freedom.

We measure our worth by our success in this jungle and pin our hopes and satisfactions to personal achievements here and to a handful of one-to-one relationships with some friends or family. Evangelicalism became culturally irrelevant because it failed to offer a social alternative to this dehumanizing aspect of its world.

To be culturally relevant, Christianity must offer an alternative. God has indeed chosen to deal with persons as individuals—in this the evangelicals were right. Yet they are not simply individuals; they become members of a social reality called ekklesia, which is the entering wedge of the new society of God's making.

Too often, for example, we assume that evangelism involves the simple aggregation of more and more new individuals. If enough people are "born again," the world's problems will diminish. But the experience of the last twenty years in which we had more and more people "born again" as well as more and more marital tragedies, more and more international tension, and more and more bondage to the demons of our age—seems a perfectly contrived counter-example to this theory.

The Christian calling requires being reconciled with God, to be sure. But it also requires being a new, reconciling society characterized by forgiveness, acceptance, and responsibility in a common task—a society qualitatively different from its culture, yet engaged with it. Little gatherings of Christians for worship and mutual help in being disciples become the seeds of God's coming new society.

Such a new society will be culturally relevant because it springs from God's

movement among God's people. The persons who make up this new society live their faith in the face of day-to-day problems that they share with the world around them.

They face the same questions as unbelievers: finding joy and meaning in work, living at peace both personally and globally, raising responsible and compassionate children. And in facing those questions, Christian faith becomes relevant even for unbelievers.

As Christians confront the problems of living their faith in work, family, public and private life, their faith will have to be culturally relevant or else atrophy and die. As they engage each other in the new society which they make up, they will naturally be both open and relevant because the real world—and not a spiritual ghetto—is the place of their calling and task.

Imagine a group of people gathering to help each other in the common task of seeing God's kingdom incarnated in their work, in their families, in their towns, in their world, in their midst, and (rather than only) in their individual lives. This gathering is ekklesia. It will be relevant to its world because it lives the life of the kingdom in the world, not apart from it.

The goal of such a culturally open and culturally relevant form of Christianity, of course, is to be faithful in its time. Will it ever develop an uneasy conscience? Of course. But if it is genuinely open and genuinely relevant, when its time has passed, it will know and can be faithful in its new time as well.

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Commentary from Frank:

This essay is one of the best articulations of what it means to move beyond evangelical that I've ever read by another individual. The punch-line is that it was written in July 1986! This confirms my point in the last chapter: That the so-called "new evangelicals" of today aren't new at all.

What Hal writes here applies to them perfectly, as they were around in the 1980s in a slightly different form (minus the postmodern language).

By the way, I had no idea who Hal was back in the 1980s as I was quite young then and wasn't terribly interested in evangelicalism as a movement. In addition, I was only beginning to understand what he was talking about when he spoke of the ekklesia as "the new society."

As I pointed out in Chapter 5, Christians who have moved beyond evangelicalism have been around for a long time. But today, they are finding one another and increasing in number and influence.

May God raise up more such voices in the present hour . . .

By the way, if “The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Evangelicalism” strikes a chord in you, Reimagining Church, From Eternity to Here, and Jesus Manifesto take the arguments much further.

Chapter 7

Why the Christian Right and Left Won’t Adopt Me

"From Issachar's descendants there were 200 leaders who understood the times and knew what Israel should do."

~ 1 Chronicles 12:32

Why the Christian Right Won't Adopt Me

1. Like F.F. Bruce, I believe words like "plenary" and "inerrant" are unnecessary when speaking about the truthfulness of Scripture.
2. I don't believe the Bible clearly addresses the question of the eternal destiny of those who have never heard or understood the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. I don't believe Scripture answers every question posed to it. And there are many questions, including theological ones, which are shrouded in mystery.
4. I believe that racism and sexism are serious problems in the USA and shouldn't be viewed as "lesser" than other moral evils.
5. I believe that slander, hatred, greed, and fits of rage are just as sinful as fornication and stealing (so did Paul – 1 Corinthians 6:10-11; Galatians 5:19-21).
6. I don't know whether to whistle or wind my watch, to laugh or cry at The American Patriot's Bible.
7. I believe that God loves the poor and taking care of them should be just as high a priority as other social issues, if not more.
8. While I don't believe the theory of evolution with respect to human origins is air-tight, many genuine and devout Christians (past and present) believe it to be fact ("theistic evolution"). And because Christ has received them, so do I.
9. I believe a narrative approach to the Bible is a far superior way to understand Scripture than a systematical approach.
10. While I disagree with him on many things, I find some of what Brian McLaren teaches to be valuable.

Why the Christian Left Won't Adopt Me

1. I believe the Bible – all of it – is divinely inspired, completely true, fully authoritative, and wholly reliable.
2. I believe that when Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no man comes to the Father but by Him, He wasn't lying. Nor was He being narrow minded. (And I believe Jesus of Nazareth actually uttered those words.)
3. Though I possess neither, I don't believe it is a sin to own a Cadillac Escalade or a private jet.
4. I believe that accusing people of racism and sexism when they aren't racist or sexist is just as wrong as racism and sexism.
5. I sometimes think that there is too much talk about rights and not enough talk about taking responsibility.
6. I believe that Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 still hold true today.
7. Postmodern deconstructionism, while helpful in discounting modernity (whose fundamental tenants challenge Christianity), is inadequate for bringing one to the Truth, who is Christ.
8. I believe there is a big difference between the world system and the ekklesia, and the former is God's enemy (1 John 2:15-17).
9. There are still many first-rate scholars who argue that there are sound historical and scientific reasons for believing that Adam was a real, historical person. And it is wrong to ridicule and scorn them.
10. While I disagree with him on many things, I find some of what John MacArthur teaches to be valuable.

The Family to Which I Belong

Note that I could easily lengthen the list and expand each point. But this is a chapter, not a book.

Of course, not everyone who aligns themselves with the Christian Right affirms each point I've listed above. Yet many do. The same is true for those who align themselves with the Christian Left. Yet many do.

And just for good measure, I don't believe in making a fetish out of political or theological centrism.

That said, it's okay if the Christian Left and the Christian Right movements won't adopt me. You see, I belong to the Family of God, which is made up of all who have the Lord's life within them. And that includes my sisters and brothers in Christ who are on the left and the right.

It may surprise some that I have close friends and family members who are on the far right on the political and theological spectrum, and they are intensely and passionately involved in the political process.

I also have close friends and family members who are on the far left on the political and theological spectrum, and they are intensely and passionately involved in the political process.

I'm glad that they are following their vision, conscience, and passion as I believe all believers should.

Let me say two things parenthetically at this point:

(1) It's fascinating to me that people who are part of the Christian Left and the Christian Right routinely accuse one another of accommodating the culture and supporting Caesar and Empire.

(2) As a generality, the Left believes in speaking to "power." However, when it does, it's usually in the areas of contra racism, alleviating poverty, protesting against unjust war, etc. In general, the Right also believes in speaking to "power." However, when it does, it's usually in the areas of the fight against abortion, pornography, etc.

Very rarely do we see leaders or movements today in the spirit of Joseph Cardinal Bernardine who advocated "the seamless garment," protesting against abortion *as well as* the causes which produce poverty and unjust war. To Bernardine, to fight against abortion, war, poverty, and the death penalty was to

be *consistently* pro-life.

Let me add a postscript: Being a liberal Democrat doesn't make one "cool" any more than being a conservative Republican makes one "moral." So it seems to me anyway.

End of parenthetical statement.

Again, I've always encouraged Christians to follow their vision, conscience, and passion regarding what they believe God's will is for the world. And I applaud believers who are laboring in the trenches with respect to God's Kingdom work. As I've written and spoken elsewhere, such work is important to me, and it's something in which I'm actively engaged myself.

For that reason, while I may disagree with my friends and family members on various theological, social, and political points, we love, respect, and support one another. Especially in the work of helping those who are needy and suffering, both on the justice side and on the mercy side.

And our differences have never affected our relationship.

So even if the Right and Left movements won't adopt me, I happily declare that I am kin to all genuine followers of Jesus, regardless of their political or theological bent. 

And they will know we are Christians by our love for one another.

> "They drew a circle that shut me out — a heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win. We drew a circle that took them in" (Edwin Markham).

Rick Warren and N.T. Wright

In closing, I really appreciate what Rick Warren said recently in an interview with ABC News:

> "The coarsening of our culture and the loss of civility in our civilization is one of the things that concerns me most about our nation. We don't know how to disagree without being disagreeable. The fact is, you can — you can walk hand-in-hand without seeing eye-to-eye. And what we need in our country is unity, not uniformity. There are major differences, politically, religiously, economically in our nation. We have many different streams in our nation . . . What is solvable is how we treat each other with our differences . . . In fact, the Bible tells me in I Peter, show respect to everyone, even people I totally disagree with. So I'm coming from that viewpoint in that we must return civility to our civilization in order to get on. But the reason I do that is because of the deeper reason, there's a spiritual root to my reason for civility."

On a related note, not long after I wrote this post (it's been in the queue for over a month), I learned that N.T. Wright just wrote a piece that lists how both the "left wing" and the "right wing" (his words) misread the Bible. His approach is "beyond evangelical," and it serves as a great companion essay to this chapter.

Chapter 8

Sinning Differently Than Others

"Christians get very angry toward other Christians who sin differently than they do."

~ Philip Yancey

I grew up in a denomination that made homosexuality the gravest of all sins, trumping every other transgression (except murder, maybe).

Many of the people in that church were dutifully self-righteous when it came to certain sins. Those who didn't commit the sins they deemed the worse (externally, that is) saw themselves as more "pure" than their fellow brethren who may have stumbled in those areas. I regret to say that in my early years as a Christian, I adopted this same attitude.

Ironically, these same people winked at the sins of gossip, slander, outbursts of rage, judging the motives of others, and lying. Excuses were routinely made in an attempt to justify these "lesser" sins (so the thinking went).

In addition, most of us were monumentally disinterested and unmoved by things like poverty, racism, sexism, genocide, and homelessness.

Later in my journey, I started to give attention to these other problems. And I became friends with a group of Christians who viewed the worst kinds of sins as being societal. These people regarded failure to try and alleviate poverty, stop genocide, and curb homelessness to be the worst kinds of sins, while (unfortunately) sexual sins were almost winked at.

Their view on sin was the exact opposite of the first group I mentioned.

In this regard, James makes an eye-opening statement: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).

In the same vein, Jesus turns the conversation on its head when He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment . . . and anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22).

And again:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who
looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Then there's Paul, who places sexual sins in the same list as "fits of rage," "discord," "dissensions," "selfish ambition," and "slander" – all of which bar one from inheriting the kingdom of God if not repented of (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

In these texts, James, Jesus, and Paul level the playing field on sin, showing that every believer is guilty of so-called "dirt" (1 John 1:8).

For Jesus, lust and adultery are on the same par. The same with rage and murder.

For Paul, slander and outbursts of rage are no less serious than fornication.

One of my favorite stories underscores this point with clever wit.

Allegedly, Charles Spurgeon invited D.L. Moody to speak at an event he hosted. Moody accepted and preached the entire time about the evils of tobacco, and why the Lord doesn't want Christians to smoke.
Spurgeon, a cigar smoker, was surprised at what seemed to be a cheap shot leveled by Moody, using the pulpit to condemn a fellow minister.

When Moody finished preaching, Spurgeon walked up to the podium and said, "Mr. Moody, I'll put down my cigars when you put down your fork."

Moody was overweight.

This story makes the point brilliantly.

George MacDonald famously said, "I understand God's patience with the wicked, but I do wonder how He can be so patient with the pious."

Let me close this chapter by saying that if we're going play the "your sins are worst than mine" game, we shouldn't be remiss in looking at what made Jesus' blood boil when He walked this earth.

Who was He the angriest at? The answer is a lead-pipe cinch for any student of Scripture. It was the self-righteous, pious, condemning, judgmental Pharisees. The self-appointed monitors of other people's righteousness.

Who was Jesus the most patient with? The very people whom my first denomination looked down their noses at as being the worst "sinners."

In Jesus, the pyramid is inverted yet again.

The person who is adept at calling "dirt" in others, but fails to see the dirt in themselves, is in a very dangerous place. Such is the nature of a Pharisee. Those sins which blind a person from seeing the weight of their own transgressions against that of others are treated as more serious by God.

In short, every sin comes off the same tree. All sin is serious. All sin put Jesus on the cross. Therefore, we are deluded whenever we lessen the sins we've committed and magnify the sin of others . . . whatever they might be.

Thank God that Jesus has paid the price for all our sins and given us the power to walk free from their dominion. Let us, therefore, be harsh with ourselves in the matter of sin and compassionate to everyone else.

When it comes to the issue of sin, the New Testament puts the emphasis on a person's present walk. Is a person continuing in a certain sin? This is where the issue of repentance comes in. (To repent means to stop doing it. It means to "Go and sin no more," as Jesus put it.)

So if we know a brother or sister who has been "overtaken in a fault" presently, let us seek to restore them in Christ. But it is paramount that as we do, we treat them the same way we would want to be treated if we were standing in their

shoes, knowing that we are just as sinful as they are, "taking heed, therefore, lest we fall into the same thing or worse."

If you want a footnote for that, you can find it in Paul.

Chapter 9

Cutting the Moral Line

"You can assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out God hates all the same people you do."

~ Anne Lamott

Within evangelicalism today, there are two subcultures that are war with each other.

Using the language of *Newsweek*, the war is between the "unhinged right" and the "purist left."

To simplify, the evangelical right wants to return to the good ole' days.

The evangelical left wants to leave behind the good ole' days because (for them at least) they weren't so good.

I have a friend who is part of the Christian Left. Here's what he said to me:

> "The evangelical right can be likened to the jellyfish that clings to the rock in the midst of shifting waters. In one respect, the evangelical right is the religious equivalent of the new atheist movement in the secular world. That is, it relies on and employs rationalistic modes of modernity in a shifting postmodern world."

When I shared my friend's remark (above) with another friend who is on the Christian Right, his reply was:

> "As a movement, the evangelical left seeks to break away from modernist rationalist thinking, believing that such thinking leads to bigotry and intolerance. But unlike the jellyfish that clings to the rock, the evangelical left is often and unwittingly tossed by the shifting currents of postmodernism away from safe harbor. The left is just as modernistic as they claim we are."

Putting aside these opinions, I believe that both the evangelical left and the evangelical right are moralistic. That is, both frame the gospel with a certain kind of morality. But each cuts the moral line in a difference place. And each limits its own morality to what its adherents can handle or what they personally prefer.

Take a look at this list, for instance:

Homosexual behavior
Drinking from water bottles
Driving SUVs
Supporting oil drilling in the USA
Voting Republican
Cutting Medicare
The right of homosexuals to marry
Teaching the theory of evolution in public schools
Smoking cigarettes
Having sex outside of marriage
Defending a woman's right to choose an abortion
Voting Democrat
Forbidding a woman from preaching and teaching men in a church
Watching R rated movies
Drinking alcohol
Teaching that the only view of the atonement is penal substitution
Watching pornography
Getting angry and using profanity
Defending a woman's right to preach and teach in a church
Using profanity without being angry
Teaching that the Bible teaches many complimentary models of the atonement

We can extend the list of course. But here's my point. Many Christians on the left view some of these behaviors as sinful, while viewing others as being perfectly fine.

While many Christians on the right believe the exact opposite. The behaviors that those on the left say are fine are deemed sinful by the right and vice versa.

I'm speaking in generalities here. There are always exceptions.

It should be noted that I have friends who are ultra-conservative fundamentalists (and that's the language they use to describe themselves). I also have friends who are liberal emergents (and that's the language they use to describe themselves).

In addition, I have good friends with whom I disagree on ecclesiology, eschatology, and politics. In fact, one of my closest friends is an Episcopalian who believes capitalism is evil and Christians shouldn't vote.

That said, look beyond the specific examples I've given so you don't miss my point.

The point I'm making is that both groups are moralistic. They just cut the moral line in a different place.

As we've established in previous chapters, those who have moved beyond evangelical align themselves neither with the left nor the right.

They are neither modern nor postmodern.

They are neither fundamentalist nor emergent.

They are neither pietists nor activists.

And they are not *moralistic.*
Don't misunderstand. The question is not, "does morality exist?" It certainly does. But morality from a biblical standpoint is not a utilitarian calculation (situational ethics) nor is it a code of rules that people must mindlessly follow.

Instead, biblical morality is rooted in the cross of Christ and living by the life of Christ which transforms our moral characters and shapes our thoughts in harmony with Scripture.

This brings us back to the choice of two trees. Much of the Christian Right vs. Christian Left debate is an indicator of living by the same tree: *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* The tree of life puts us on a different plane altogether. When we eat from the tree of life, we no longer sound identical to non-Christian pundits when we discuss (or argue) issues. And the moral

reasoning by which we reach our conclusions is different.

The morality envisioned in Scripture doesn't interpret itself. It must be interpreted. A person who is following the Lord's life is able to interpret Scripture in a way that God envisioned. A large part of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is rooted in this problem. Both were using the same Bible, but they were interpreting the texts very differently.

(In *Jesus Manifesto*, I argue that Jesus often responded to the Pharisees on a very different level from which they were operating. They were *asking* their questions on the basis of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; Jesus was *answering* on the basis of the tree of life.)

The issue, then, is not the conclusions reached. It's the process by which they are reached. The process I'm challenging is *moralistic reasoning.* And it comes from living by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is where much of the problem lies on both sides.

Note that I'm not arguing for one of the positions that I've listed in the beginning of this chapter. (That's a different subject altogether.) I'm rather arguing that the way in which those positions are reached are often the same for the leftward edge of evangelicalism and the rightward edge of evangelicalism.

As such, evangelical Christians (on both the right and the left) often sound just like their non-Christian counterparts when arguing "issues." And oftentimes, Jesus Christ is utterly left out of the conversation.

> "If Christianity is to receive a rejuvenation it must be by other means than any now being used" (A.W. Tozer).

Those who have moved beyond evangelicalism believe that the gospel is not about adopting a certain morality; *it's rather about living by the indwelling life of Jesus Christ.* And that life is neither legalistic nor libertine (see Chapter 10).

The life of Christ is concerned with justice *and* justification. Yet it moves, not according to a static ethical code or the shifting trends of the surrounding culture, but according to the spiritual season and the impulses of the Head, who is Christ Himself.

And the Spirit of Christ and the Scriptures always agree.

In addition, those who have moved beyond evangelicalism are strong on the new society of the ekklesia as a Christ-centered community (in whatever form that may take) rather than raw individualism (see Chapter 6).

And they always, always, always seek to treat others the same way they wish to be treated. For the nature of the life of Christ is love (see Chapter 20).

Chapter 10

Moving Beyond Legalism & Libertinism

"The problem with legalists is that not enough people have confronted them and told them to get lost."

~ Chuck Swindoll

When my editor read the pre-publication manuscript of Revise Us Again, he told me that the chapter called “The Three Gospels” had a huge impact on him.

“History,” Martin Luther said, “is like a drunk man on a horse. No sooner does he fall off on the left side, does he mount again and fall off on the right.”

The same can be said about the Christian life. (So it seems to me anyway.)

In the chapter entitled “The Three Gospels,” I discuss three distinct “gospels” (messages) that many contemporary Christians have accepted.

Some have accepted the gospel of legalism. Reformed people tend to restrict legalism to be the attempt to earn salvation by human works. But for the genuine Christian who is saved by grace, legalism goes much deeper than that.

Legalism

Legalists are people who believe that salvation is by grace alone, but sanctification comes by their own efforts of trying hard to be a “good Christian.” Legalists tend to push their own personal standards onto everyone else. They are quick to judge other people’s motives, thinking the worst of them and their intentions. They confuse obedience with trying to serve God in their own strength.

They demand other people do things that they themselves would never carry out. They regard the sins of others as more severe and grievous than their own. (Philip Yancey described the legalist perfectly when he said, “Christians get very angry toward other Christians who sin differently than they do.”)

Legalists also feel that it’s their right to become intrusive meddlers, or as Paul put it condemningly, “busybodies in other men’s affairs.” They are blind to their own self-righteousness, and they pride themselves on being “clean” on the outside (without realizing that they are defiled on the inside). For all of these reasons, they unwittingly bring a lot of pain and heartache into the lives of others, yet sadly they seem to be out of touch with this.

Forgive the personal reference, but when I was in my teens, I came to the Lord through a legalistic denomination. I was fed a steady diet of the gospel of legalism and was surrounded by legalists. Thus I used to be a legalist without realizing it. But God was merciful.

Libertinism

In reaction to legalism and the devastation that it brings to other people, some have accepted the gospel of libertinism. Libertines are folks who live the way they want and have skirted the Lordship of Christ and all that it means. They are apt to justify carnality by pulling the "grace card," the "I'm free in Christ" card, and the "don't judge me" card. For the libertine, grace becomes license to live in the flesh and silence their conscience.

(Regarding the "judge not" card, the Bible gives us a sharp paradox on the matter of judging. There are scores of texts that exhort us to judge and scores of texts that forbid us to judge. I have written a blog post that I will release sometime in the future that resolves this paradox. It's tentatively called *To Judge or Judge Not?*)

Some libertines have rationalized to themselves that they can continue to practice a particular transgression and God is "kewl wit dat," regardless of the carnage it brings. (A mark of sin is that it produces unnecessary pain in the lives of others. Sin and love are the exact opposites. Love is benefiting others at the expense of yourself. Sin is benefiting yourself at the expense of others. Sin is selfishness; love is selflessness. Love is a greater force than sin – God's life is more powerful than satan's nature – and "love covers a multitude of sins.")

Some libertines have gone so far into deception that they have reinvented Jesus in their own image to justify their rebellion against the Lord and clothe it with spiritual talk. Others have gone further off the beam and have become practical atheists.

Note that there are degrees of legalism and degrees of libertinism. But these descriptions should give the general flavor of each.

In short, the libertine lives as if there is no God. The legalist lives as though she/he is God to everyone else.

Both attitudes are incompatible with the life of Christ.

Complicating Factors

What complicates the situation further is that . . .

The legalist doesn't know that he/she is a legalist and tends to view all non-legalists as libertines.

The libertine doesn't know that she/he is a libertine and tends to view all non-libertines as legalists.

Without the Holy Spirit's illumination, this deception is difficult if not impossible to break.

The truth is, we have *all* sinned and come short of the glory of God. And we all need Jesus Christ to forgive, deliver, and keep us each day from both the defiling acts of the flesh *and* the self-righteousness of the flesh.

Lordship & Liberty

In “The Three Gospels,” I discuss both the gospel of legalism and the gospel of libertinism in great detail, comparing and contrasting them and giving examples for each.

I then contrast these two “gospels” with the gospel of Jesus and Paul, which I call the gospel of Lordship and Liberty. And I explain how those two words go hand-in-hand.

But the gospel of the New Testament is rooted in reality – the real Jesus – and it sets us free from the defilement of the flesh *and* the self-righteousness of the flesh—both of which come off the same tree. Both of which bring bondage and cause untold pain to others. For both violate love, the nature of God’s own life.

One of the things I’ve learned in my spiritual journey is that the closer someone gets to Jesus Christ, the less judgmental, self-righteous, harsh-toward-others, and selfish he or she will be.

Again, we have *all* sinned and come short of the glory of God. And we all need Jesus Christ to forgive, deliver, and keep us each day from both the defiling acts of the flesh *and* the self-righteousness of the flesh.

Chapter 11

Moving Beyond Deconstructionism

"A woman's guess is much more accurate than a man's certainty."

~ Rudyard Kipling

Certainty? I'm a Christian: thus I'm absolutely "certain" of that which it is impossible to be "certain." (2 Timothy 1:12)

It's hip among some Christians today who have imbibed deconstructionism to believe that certainty is an unnecessary evil. Certainty is the cause of bloodshed, wars, persecution, etc. Yes. Certainty is the root of all evil (so they say).

As a Christian, I'm certain of that which none of us can be certain.

I believe in the kind of certainty in a Resurrected Christ that led Paul of Tarsus to untold suffering, imprisonments, and even death.

I believe in the kind of certainty in a Resurrected Christ that led Peter to a horrid death.

I believe in the kind of certainty in a Resurrected Christ that led James to be executed by the sword.

I believe in the kind of certainty in a Resurrected Christ that led John to be exiled on an island.
I am certain of that kind of certainty.

Empiricism is overrated. It's profoundly limited in the kind of knowledge it can provide.

Revelation transcends the realm of the physical senses. Descartes said, "I think, therefore, I am."

The disciple of Jesus says, "I have seen, therefore, I know."

> The Pharisees reasoned; but Jesus perceived.
>
> We know in part.
>
> I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep

> that which I have committed unto Him against that day.

And of this I am certain: that Peter, James, John, and Paul did not create wars or persecutions or bloodshed by their certainty in a Resurrected Jesus. No, they were rather the victims of such.

> All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, except the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will REVEAL Him. Matthew 11:27
>
> To REVEAL His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. Galatians 1:16

Chapter 12

Moving Beyond Self-Righteousness

"The deceitfulness of the heart of man appears in no one thing so much as this of spiritual pride and self-righteousness."

~ Jonathan Edwards

When the nativity story is told, we mostly hear about Mary, the mother of Jesus. For centuries, Mary has been extolled and honored, as she should be. Joseph, however, has often been regarded as a mere footnote to the story.

Today, I'd like to give Joseph his due.

By my lights, Joseph was one of the most righteous men who ever lived. Now when most modern Christians think of a "righteous man," they think of things like being a good husband, a patient father, a trusted and successful employee who lives a good clean life (doesn't "smoke, drink, chew or run with those who do," as the old saying goes), and so on.

I have no doubts that Joseph was upright in the area of personal piety. But the Bible gives us a much deeper peek at what a righteous person is and how he or she reacts to certain situations. Consider Matthew 1:19-20:

> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to put her away quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Matthew says that *because* Joseph was a righteous man, he chose not to publicly disgrace and shame Mary, even though (according to his knowledge at the time) she deserved it. Wow!

Let that marinate a few moments.

How many Christians today would react the same way that Joseph did if they were standing in his shoes?

Joseph wasn't out for blood. He didn't justify in his mind the act of bringing public disgrace upon Mary. Instead, he took the high road and put her away privately, lest she face public humiliation and shame.

I'm sure Joseph's blood boiled when he heard that the woman who was betrothed to him in marriage was pregnant . . . and not by him. But because he was a righteous man, he showed mercy. He treated her as if he were in her own shoes and was guilty of what he had assumed she did.

Perhaps Joseph thought to himself what his step-son would say to a woman worthy of death almost thirty years later, "He who has never sinned, let him cast the first stone" (John 8:7).

Perhaps after the initial anger, pain, and rage subsided, Joseph took a good, hard look at his own life and recalled the many times where he himself missed the mark.

Perhaps he reflected on his lineage and recalled the many grievous sins that his own kinfolk committed in the past (see Matthew 1:1-16; Joseph's lineage is populated by those who committed murder, adultery, prostitution, etc. Beyond that, this is the very lineage that God the Father selected for His own Son, Jesus).

In Joseph, we find no self-righteousness at all. And therein do we find a wonderful definition of righteousness. It is to react like Jesus, living void of self-righteousness. As I've often said, there is only one Person in the universe who has the right to be self-righteous, and He isn't.

Consider for a moment the people whom Jesus spent most of His time with, whom He ate with (which in that day was a sign of union, friendship, and acceptance), whom He showed mercy to, whom He extended grace to, and whom He removed shame from. These were the very people who the religious leaders of His day regarded as the most sinful. Their sinful deeds being at the top of their lists. This is why Jesus earned the title "the friend of sinners."

Some specific examples:

*He broke bread in the home of a tax-collector who was siding with Rome in oppressing his own people (Zacchaeus).
*He completely forgave a woman caught in the act of adultery.
*He allowed a prostitute to anoint His feet with her hair in the presence of judgmental Pharisees.
*He communed with and later broke bread with a multiple-divorcee who was

living in sin.
Granted, all of these people later repented of their sins and followed the Lord, but Jesus loved them, received them, and their sinful lives didn't put Him off. The harshest word He said to any of them was "go and sin no more."

Now . . . shift gears and look at the sins that literally made Jesus angry and provoked Him to issue hot-boiling, scathing rebukes. It was the sins of self-righteousness. And it was aimed at those who sought to shame and humiliate others because of their wrong-doing.

The pure and spotless Lord Jesus Christ turned the pyramid upside down.

Back to Joseph.

Note that Matthew says that while Joseph was considering doing this righteous deed (putting Mary away privately to spare her public disgrace), the angel appeared to him.

How many angels have passed us by because we chose to take the low road of shaming other people because of their sins or shortcomings, without any regard to our own sins and shortcomings?

(At this moment, someone reading that last line is thinking of Matthew 18:15ff. where Jesus says that a local assembly can excommunicate a person because of sin. But please consider two things about that passage. First, Jesus said to go to the person *privately* so as *not* to shame them, but to bring reconciliation in a private way. Second, the person in view had stubbornly refused to stop sinning after being approached multiple times in private. Only then was it to be "told to the assembly.")

Joseph's decision to take the high road and spare Mary public shame is echoed throughout the entire Scriptural narrative. Even beginning at the beginning in Genesis.

Remember Noah's night of binge drinking? His son, Ham, uncovered his father's nakedness. Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, walked into the tent backwards with a blanket, refusing to see the shame, but covering their father's disgraceful state. Ham's lineage was cursed as a result.

It's hard on our flesh to walk into a tent backwards, holding a blanket. But that's God's way. It's the way of righteousness.

> He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. (Prov. 17:9)
>
> Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. (Prov. 10:12)
>
> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8)

Jesus Christ, your Lord, is in the business of removing people's shame.

Our Lord's first miracle at Cana demonstrated His heart to remove public shame from a bridegroom who had miscalculated how much wine to provide for his wedding. Jesus remedied the situation by providing the best wine at the very end, covering the social disgrace that would have been leveled at the bridegroom's feet because of his error. (See Jesus Manifesto, p. 164 for the historical context.)

If you've done something in your past that you have repented of (ceased from practicing), but it still haunts you with regret, take heart. Peter, whose many sins grew in their severity until the most grievous of all—the betrayal of his Lord—was not only fully forgiven and restored by Jesus, but he was used mightily by the Master, even earning the title "the greatest apostle." (See Remember Peter: Rethinking the Love of Christ.)

Echoing the promise of the New Covenant in Hebrews 8:12, A.W. Tozer rightly says, "When God forgives, He forgets."

Let us take our cue from God Himself.

I am blessed by Joseph. I am encouraged by Joseph. And I am challenged by Joseph. It's no wonder that God picked him to be the father of Jesus. (Joseph was also from the line of David, fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah's lineage.)

So let's remember Joseph. The Life that dwells in every Christian . . . the Life of Joseph's step-son, Jesus the Christ . . . will always lead us to treat others the same way we would want to be treated if we were standing in their shoes. No one wishes to be shamed and disgraced if they've repented of wrong-doing. And self-righteousness is not in His nature.

Chapter 13

Moving Beyond Sectarianism

"My brothers and sisters, because God in his mercy has made room for all of us at the cross, there's room enough for all of us on the village green. Grace would make it so."

~ Scot McKnight

Those who have moved beyond evangelicalism are sickened by all forms of sectarianism (and the elitism that goes with it).

I've described sectarianism elsewhere saying,

> Let's consider the meaning of the word *sect* as it appears in Scripture. The Greek word translated sect is *hairesis*. It's used nine times in the New Testament, and it's translated "sect," "party," "faction," and "heresy." A sect is a division or a schism. It refers to a body of people who have chosen to separate themselves from the larger whole to follow their own tenets. The classic example of the sin of sectarianism is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:
>
> *My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:11–13)*
>
> In God's thought, the Corinthian church included all the Christians who lived in the city of Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). Yet some were drawing a circle around themselves that was smaller than the body of Christ in Corinth.
>
> Instead of making the body of Christ their basis for Christian unity, some in Corinth were making their favorite apostolic worker the basis for their fellowship. With loving severity, Paul rebuked the church for its sectarian spirit, condemning it as a work of the flesh (1 Cor. 3:3–4; Gal. 5:19–20; Jude 19). *Reimagining Church*, p. 120.

When I was in my early 20s, I had wonderful fellowship with an older brother in Christ who was part of the Plymouth Brethren.

We disagreed on a few doctrines (I didn't buy into the pretribulational rapture theory, and I believed that God still healed people supernaturally). That aside, we both held to the orthodox creeds of the faith (The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, etc.) as I still do today.

Never having stepped foot in a Plymouth Brethren chapel, I was interested in visiting his church. So I did. But I was shocked when he told me that I couldn't partake of the Lord's Table.

This both surprised and saddened me greatly.

He received me as a brother in Christ, but because I didn't toe the line on PB doctrine, I wasn't allowed to partake of the bread and wine with the others in his church.

When I shared my feelings with him — that this action was a flat-out denial that I was part of the Body of Christ — he retracted his position and said I could partake of the Table.

However, his initial sectarian decision left its wound.
I wish I could say that I've never met this same sectarian attitude since, but I'd be lying if I did.

I've met it a number of times.

The fact is, every devoted Christian will be tested on whether they really believe in the oneness of the Body of Christ or whether they deny it deep in their hearts . . . especially when there is pressure from others to embrace a sectarian spirit and exclude other members of the Body.

Religious pressure is a powerful thing. And it is most often contrary to Jesus Christ.

In that connection, I'm posting some excerpts from a letter written by Watchman Nee (and some of his friends) to some of the Plymouth Brethren in his own day who excluded him from fellowship after he associated himself with T. Austin-Sparks (someone of whom they didn't approve).

In my judgment, these excerpts reflect the mind and heart of Jesus Christ on the matter of unity and receiving other believers into fellowship.

I thank God that Nee stood strong on his position and didn't break fellowship

with Sparks due to religious pressure from his Plymouth Brethren friends.

While Nee lost the fellowship of these Plymouth Brethren due to his decision, he gained a lifelong friend in one of the greatest servants of God to ever breathe oxygen – T. Austin-Sparks.

I believe the Lord was pleased with Nee's position, and he benefited enormously from his relationship with Sparks.

–

The Scriptures plainly show us that the basis of our receiving one another is "even as Christ also received you" (Rom. 15.7). The reason why we receive anyone is because "God hath received him" (Rom. 14.3). Hence the command of God to us is: "him that is weak in faith receive ye" (Rom. 14.1). This command is explicit, distinctive and irrevocable. It is a sin to refuse acceptance of him whom God has received, however weak or lacking in light he may be.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the defeated [who are unrepentant] may have fellowship with God and with God's people. Not only the world, the flesh and sin may deprive the Church of its characteristics and hinder its fellowship, even a slight deviation from the will of God and from the leading of the Holy Spirit may cause the believer to lose contact with God.

Who among any of us is really worthy to undertake this work of selection—this act of determining who is fit for fellowship? From what we learn in the Bible, our responsibility is to judge only on moral corruption (1 Cor. 5.10-13) or on heresy regarding the Person of Christ (2 John). Difference in interpretation of truth alone must not be the ground of division. Thus we receive all whom God has received for the sake of Christ.

But [so called] sins such as "denominational connection" and apparent errors of interpretation on prophecy do not cut off fellowship with God. This fact you cannot deny: that many who have not yet departed from what you call "evil association" and who, moreover, differ with you in prophetic views have most intimate fellowship with the Lord, even more intimate than we have.

We are doubtful about your current way of reception. We wonder if this is a practice truly handled by the Holy Spirit or is simply a method received by men?

We would now make our position crystal clear. We do not stand on an open ground which overlooks matters that might bring reproach to the Lord. No, we absolutely do not take that position. Nor do we stand on the exclusive ground

which is according to man’s thought and not according to the Holy Spirit.

We stand instead on the spiritual exclusive ground which means that we want our fellowship to be wholly in the Holy Spirit without any mixture of the flesh. To enjoy such kind of fellowship as this, the flesh must be thoroughly dealt with by the cross of Christ.

For the flesh has absolutely no place in this fellowship. It is not sufficient merely to terminate so-called “evil association.” The total life of the flesh must be dealt with. The power of the cross must be experienced by all through the working of the Holy Spirit. Mental knowledge is of little use.

This, then, is our fellowship. Accordingly, we are as open as the early Church that received all Christians, yet we are as exclusive as the Holy Spirit in rejecting all that is of the flesh. Many whom you reckon as in your fellowship are actually not so.

Possibly the number of such people far exceeds our expectation. How very sad this is! For many believers, though they have passed your test of strict receiving, do not live in the Holy Spirit. Yet they consider themselves in the fellowship and freely partake of the loaf because they have not manifested sins! We cannot but regard such a standard of fellowship as too low.

In order to unify interpretations and practices, you tend to divide God’s children.

Beloved, may we humbly suggest that you carefully and prayerfully consider what we have here laid before you. We believe this that we have written is of God. Are you willing—as though knowing nothing at all—to lay aside your former preconceived thoughts written by you, and at the same time to ask the Lord to reveal to you whether or not what we have said is right and according to His will?

Now is the time for us to make this matter clear before the Lord as eternity draws near. We thank you for all that you have done for us. May God bless you.

Your brothers in the Lord,

Representing the brethren met in

Hardoon Road and North Szechuan Road, Shanghai

Excerpted from *Back to the Cross* by Watchman Nee (Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1988), Chapter 6.

P.S. If this chapter doesn’t cure you of a sectarian spirit, Rethinking Christian

Unity should do the trick. 😉

Chapter 14

Moving Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism

"You can be straight as a gun barrel theologically and just as empty as one spiritually."

~ A.W. Tozer

The great theologian Karl Barth once wrote that truth walks the razor edge of heresy. Indeed, the road to truth is surrounded by a ditch on either side.

> Be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left (Deuteronomy 5:32).

Sectarianism and elitism have been in the drinking water of the body of Christ ever since the fault lines of the Corinthian church began to fracture over their favorite apostle.

"I'm of Apollos . . . I'm of Peter . . . I'm of Paul" still lives in our bloodstreams. We simply exchange the names for that of others.

I've met some Christians who promoted the idea (though not in these exact words) that "unless you receive John Calvin into your heart, you cannot be saved."

While others preached the gospel of "unless you receive John Wesley into your heart, you cannot be saved."

I tip my hat to Calvin and Wesley as being great men of God (though both were not without their flaws as are all servants of God, including Paul and Peter).

But to enshrine them . . . or Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or John Howard Yoder or Watchman Nee or (fill in the blank) beyond mere mortal status is to err.

I have a blog post brewing entitled (tentatively) *Why I'm a Calvinist and an Arminian.* But that will have to wait.

Lynyrd Skynyrd (a.k.a. Leonard Sweet) and I put it this way in Jesus Manifesto:

The truth is, most Calvinists live like Arminians (they hold themselves and others responsible for their actions). And most Arminians pray like Calvinists (they submit their requests to the will of God) . . .

The Christ who is truly (but only partially) present in our doctrine and experience is the true substance of the Christian faith. As for us, we will always "know in part" until we meet Him "face to face."

Concerning the reality of Christ Himself, all the fullness of God dwells within Him. It is for this reason that every theological system breaks down somewhere. Every systematic theology, no matter how coherent or logical, eventually meets some passage of Scripture or passage of life that refuses to fit into it. Such passages have to be bent, twisted, and forced to fit the system.

Why is this? It's because Christ is too immense, too imponderable, and too alive to be tied into any immovable system of thought constructed by finite humans.

Thus, He will always break out.

As Jeff Goldblum's character said in the hit movie *Jurassic Park*—"Life will find a way." (That was his response to the idea that scientists had created an ironclad, airtight system to keep dinosaurs from reproducing.) Jesus Christ is too alive to be caged in any human system. As Paul exclaimed in holy exasperation, "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

Life will find a way.

Jesus is not just one way, a better way, a pleasant way on a good day. He is *the* way.

Jesus is not just one truth, a higher truth, or a more personal truth. He is *the* truth.

Jesus is not just another life, a nicer life, a more abundant life. He is *the* life of God Himself.

In short, following Jesus doesn't mean trying to create a weapons-grade theological system to analyze, explain, and contain Him. Neither does it

> mean trying to obey His teachings by the power of our own volition . . .
>
> So, Christianity is not an allegiance to a complex doctrinal or ethical system, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that's rooted in living by Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Our theologies, doctrines, and subjective experiences are designed to flow organically from our loving relationship to Christ, but they are never to substitute for it.
>
> Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living (Thomas à Kempis).

Calvinism and Arminianism are imperfect theological systems, both of which have their strengths. As a model for prayer and devotion, Calvinism excels. As a model for taking responsibility in life, Arminianism excels.

Notwithstanding, every Calvinist I've ever met takes responsibility for their choices just like Arminians do. (I've never met a Calvinist who said, "It doesn't matter what I do because God's will is going to get done regardless.")

In like manner, every Arminian I've ever met prays like their Calvinist brethren. (I've never met an Arminian who prayed, "Lord, bring Jethro to the point of making a decision for you." Instead, Arminians pray things like, "Lord, open Jethro's eyes, change his heart, convict him of his sin, etc.").

While there are exceptions to everything, this has been my observation and experience over the years.

You can go through your Bible carefully and find biblical texts that better fit the Calvinist model, while others have to nearly be bent to fit it. The same with Arminianism. Some texts refuse to fit neatly into its mold.

Why is this? Because the Bible wasn't written to Western minds shaped by Aristotelian logic. And so it's difficult for us (Westerners) to embrace paradox.

Yet Scripture is full of paradox, and Jesus Himself is the Ultimate and Absolute Paradox. He is God. He is Man. He is Divine *and* Human.

From that paradox flows all others.

Since Christ is Truth incarnate, spiritual truth contains the element of paradox.

The old story of John Wesley and Charles Simeon highlights this point in bold relief. After Simeon (a Calvinist) quizzed Wesley (an Arminian) on what he

believed about those points that were important to Simeon, Simeon responded to Wesley's answers with, "In that case I put up my sword, for this is all my Calvinism."

Those two men had more in common than they assumed at first blush.

The same is true for countless Calvinists and Arminians today.

Chapter 15

The Turning Tide

"I am prepared to go anywhere . . . provided it be forward."

~ David Livingston

We are living in a day when modern evangelicalism is in ruins. The four notes of evangelicalism – being bible-centered, cross-centered, conversion-centered and evangelistic . . . have taken on meanings so diverse that Albert Mohler (on the right) and Rob Bell (on the left) call themselves evangelical.

But the tide is turning.

Christians in their 20s, 30s, and 40s are tired of the shallowness of modern evangelicalism. They are tired of the self-righteousness, callousness, and judgmentalism that marks much of the movement.

They are tired of the libertinism (grace=license to sin) that marks much of the movement.

They are neither left nor right.

They are Christians who have a deep allegiance and devotion to Jesus Christ.

They believe that Jesus alone is this world's true Lord and He stands above all systems and personalities, even religious.

They love, desire, and stand for the ekklesia, a local body of believers who are enthroning Christ as Head . . . and they believe that the church is Christ existing as a shared-life community, not two hours on Sunday and Wednesday. They don't advocate any particular church form or structure. They simply want to follow the Lord with others.

This hearty band of Christians from every nation, tribe, kindred and tongue stand for the four notes of classic evangelicalism. But they have gone beyond them.

In addition, they are . . . intensely Christ-centered, Jesus is not only the supreme Lord. Not only the wonderful Savior. But He is All (Col. 3:11).

They are Resurrection life centered. They believe that Jesus, by his resurrection,

is still alive and indwells every believer. But more, every believer can live by His indwelling life . . . and this is the meaning of the Christian life. They are also body centered. Christ in known in and through the shared life community called the church, which is His body.

And they are eternal purpose centered. God has a timeless purpose that goes beyond salvation, and He's never let go of it.

They have gone *beyond evangelical.*

To repeat: The following can be said about those who have moved "beyond evangelical."

They are neither fundamentalist nor emergent.

They are neither postmodern nor modern.

They are neither pietistic nor activist.

They are neither legalistic nor libertine.

They believe in morality, but they are not moralistic.

Those who have moved beyond evangelical embrace elements of each theological/political position, yet they have gone beyond them.

Chapter 16

The Coming Evangelical Collapse

"There is of course much debate as to what the current state of evangelicalism is. What cannot be denied, however, is the negative trajectory of both the influence and perception of evangelicals in North American culture as a whole."

~ David Fitch

Michael Spencer (a.k.a. iMonk) was one of my favorite bloggers. I remember skimming through his blog some years ago. His podcast section intrigued me, so I gave a listen to one of them.

The result: *I was monumentally impressed.*

In the podcast, he tackled some difficult issues. I agreed with everything he said, and I found his insights stimulating.

To my surprise, Michael took time to review my books, Pagan Christianity & Reimagining Church, and later, From Eternity to Here. And he was fair, honest, and kind (smile) in his assessments.

While I never met Michael in person nor talked with him on the phone, three descriptions come to mind based on my reading of his blog and my interactions with him via email:

1. Intellectually honest

2. Christ-centered

3. Insightful

May his tribe increase.

It's no wonder that his blog was one of the most popular among Christians in our day.

In 2009, Michael wrote an article entitled The Coming Evangelical Collapse.

Within a few days, six different people forwarded the article to me. It was picked up by *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Drudge Report*. Even Mark Galli from *Christianity Today* weighed in.

I thought Michael's article was superb. And I agree with his observations. Although I have no idea what will happen on the Christian landscape in the next 10 years, his predications map very closely to George Barna's.

That said, I'd like to make four brief observations about the article and the discussion surrounding it:

1) Michael foresees the two main types of churches growing heavily in the next 10 years as being the house church and the high church denominations (Catholic, Orthodox, and as Mark Galli rightly observes, Anglican).

I agree with this. George Barna's research has already shown that the house church (or micro-church) is among the fastest growing segment of the Christian world today. And according to his data, it will be even more-so in the next 10 years.

The world I have lived in over the past 20 plus years is the world of organic Christian communities, which has some similarities with the incredibly diverse "house church movement." (I've mapped out the main features of the organic church phenomenon elsewhere.)

On first glance, one may think that there isn't much in common with house churches and high churches. But that's not the case. There's one common feature that is central to both: *Their strong emphasis on community.*

Both high churches and (many) house churches strongly emphasize the importance of Christian community in their theology.

On this score, a good number of Anglicans and Catholics have read my book *Reimagining Church*. And their main comment is that my *theology* of the church is identical to theirs.

By that they mean the strong focus on the fellowship of the Godhead, the intimate connection between the Trinity and the believing community, the

incredibly close identity of Jesus Christ with His church, the strong emphasis on Christian community and the corporate (collective) nature of the ekklesia.

God's people are crying out for authentic community. It's in our blood and the marrow of our bones. It's a spiritual instinct that all devoted Christians have. Some are more in touch with it than others, but it's there.

High church denominations are highly communitarian in their theology, and some are quite good at practicing it. House churches try to embody it; some do it better than others.

It's part of the DNA of the ekklesia.

2) I thought Mark Galli's response to Spencer's article was very good. However, I feel that Galli is defining evangelicalism much more broadly than Spencer is. To my mind, Spencer is speaking of "evangelicalism" more in terms of a religious ("church") system and a cultural and political movement. Galli, on the other hand, seems to be speaking of it as a set of theological beliefs and (more) a spiritual mood.

Here's a quote from Galli's piece:

> *Evangelicalism is a word that describes a phenomenon that transcends time and place. British historian David Bebbington talks about it in terms of certain theological emphases and behaviors (crucicentrism, conversionism, biblicism, and activism). I think of it more as a religious mood. It is a spiritual sensibility that includes pessimism about human nature, a longing to be converted from the worst of our selves, mystical moments when Jesus Christ is experienced, a conviction that nothing can be redeemed without suffering and that resurrection is ultimate reality, and a passion to make a difference in the world.*

If we define evangelicalism this way, then I would agree that it's not going to go away any time soon.

3) I consider myself to be an evangelical theologically in the way that Galli defines it. That said, I believe that evangelicalism (much like classic Pentecostalism) was born with certain birth defects.

Namely, it rooted itself in modernity, it failed to fully grasp and teach God's

Eternal Purpose (Eph. 3:11), and it retained the Western individualistic bent that marks historic Protestantism.

This was true for the post-war shapers of early evangelicalism as they broke from the isolated fundamentalism of their time (Carl F. Henry, Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, Harold Lindsell, etc.). It was also true for the neo-evangelicals (F.F. Bruce, Bernard Ramm, George Ladd, Donald Bloesch, John Stott, etc.).

To borrow a phrase from Carl F. Henry, "the uneasy conscience" of evangelicalism is just now beginning to surface. So it seems to me anyway.

My friend Hal Miller has made some astute observations on this score (see Chapter 6 of this book for Hal's observations.)

4) One of the questions I was left with after reading Spencer's article was, "Michael very rightly puts his finger on some of the key problems of modern evangelicalism, but why those problems? What is the cause of many of them?"

It's my conviction that since evangelicalism's inception, we have focused on the *symptomatic* problems instead of trying to go to their roots.
The *systemic* problems have been largely ignored.

George Barna and I have tried to challenge evangelical Christians with the idea that one of the systemic problems is the very *system* of organized Christianity – particularly as it relates to the expression of the local church.

In the past, many Christians would never hold that out as a possibility. In fact, ten years ago, no Christian publisher would have published books like *Pagan Christianity* and *Reimagining Church.*

That has changed.

The uneasy conscience of evangelicalism is beginning to cry out. God's people are looking for answers. And they are looking in some new, and sometimes, terrifying places.

I think John's Stott's famous quote is where we need to pitch our tents today.

> *The hallmark of an authentic evangelicalism is not the uncritical repetition of old traditions, but the willingness to submit every tradition, however ancient, to fresh biblical scrutiny and, if necessary, reform.*

Thank you, Michael, for stirring up our thoughts and our hearts. May your article cause all of us to return to the living Person of Jesus Christ as the Center and the Reality of the church. Not just in theory, but in experience.

Chapter 17

Answers to Questions and Objections

"People understand me so poorly that they don't even understand my complaint about them not understanding me."

~ Kierkegaard

Someone made the accusation that anyone who uses the word "beyond" to describe a group of people is claiming that they are beyond everyone else. I personally think this suggestion is crazy, but what is your response?

Frank: You are right. If this were true, then James Barr thought he was better than (or "beyond") everyone else when he came out with his book, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Jonathan Merritt thought he was better than everyone else with his *Following Jesus Beyond the Culture Wars*, and Brian Harris thought he was better than David Bebbington with his *Beyond Bebbington*, just to give a few examples.

This accusation is a judgment of motivations, which only reveals the heart of the accuser.

As was already stated, "beyond evangelical" is short for "beyond evangelical-ism" which is a theological movement and ethos (as Roger Olson points out). There's no suggestion or thought that those who take a position that goes beyond (or that's "post") evangelicalism are better than or ahead of others. It simply means that (for them) the conversation has moved past certain ideals to other issues.

The truth is, Christians who have moved beyond evangelicalism (or those who are "post-evangelical" as Michael Spencer used the term) are sick of the elitism that is connected with certain segments of the evangelical coalition. Scot McKnight and I have taken dead aim at the spirit of elitism and sectarianism in our writings. (See Scot's discussion of it in Chapter 18 and my discussion in

Revise Us Again and Jesus Manifesto.)

Aren't you using labels, and isn't it wrong to use labels?

Frank: As Roger Olson once put it, "labels all too often are perceived as libels." Yet they are necessary to talk about groups of people who are unified around a common idea or purpose. It's virtually impossible to communicate about people groups without using labels. "Christian," "American," "Republican," "European," "women," "male," etc. are labels that we all use in conversation. Of course, it's wrong when labels are used in a derisive manner or when they are used to misrepresent specific individuals. I'm against both and thus am very careful not to engage in either.

Are you the only voice who is influencing those who are moving beyond evangelical?

Frank: No, and I'm happy about that. I'm one of many voices. Chapter 18 underscores some of the diverse voices who have taken beyond evangelical positions on various issues. In that connection, my blog (titled, Beyond Evangelical) draws people from both the Christian Right and the Christian Left. But the majority do not fit neatly into either camp. Most of its readership resonates strongly with the four notes of beyond evangelicalism outlined in the first chapter.

Someone told me that the words "fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism," "religious right," and "left wing / right wing" are derogatory terms. I don't think this is true. I have read a lot of stuff by evangelical writers who use these terms readily. Am I right?

Frank: You are dead right. I suppose that any term, even "Christian," "American," or "Muslim," can be used derisively. But fundamentalist/fundamentalism – Religious Right/Religious Left – left wing/right wing are used by historians and evangelical scholars all the time.

Just read Chapter 18 and you will find that Roger Olson, Scot McKnight, N.T. Wright, the late Michael Spencer, *The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*, and the representative authors of *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* all use these terms as neutral descriptions.

In addition, the voice of establishment evangelicalism – *Christianity Today* – uses these terms frequently, along with countless other writers including George Mardsen and Mark Noll (the foremost American historians on evangelicalism).

That said, no term in this book (or in the original series that gave birth to it) has been used derisively. All terms have been used historically and analytically. Any rational person who reads this book will easily recognize that.

When did things go wrong in the evangelical movement?

Frank: I think that Roger Olson's analysis (cited in Chapter 18) of when evangelicalism went wrong is perfectly on the mark. He rightly explains that Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* was the opening shot in the resurgence of fundamentalism and the fracturing of the evangelical coalition. Until then, *Christianity Today* was the flagship publication for evangelicals and Billy Graham was the symbolic figure.

But after the *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell (in effect) pushed those evangelicals out who didn't agree with his version of biblical inspiration (a la, inerrancy). This led to the big rift between Lindsell and Carl F. Henry. (Henry was an inerrantist, but he didn't believe inerrancy should constitute the dividing line between evangelicals.) The same rift occurred between John Stott and J.I. Packer. (Packer insisted that factual inerrancy was a dividing line. While Stott held to inerrancy, he disagreed that an evangelical Christian must hold to it.)

Conservative evangelicals argued that an inerrant Scripture (a Bible that is free from any errors whatsoever) is necessary to establish the truth of the gospel. Neo-evangelicals said "nonsense." Non-consequential errors (like the diverging numbers in Chronicles and Kings, for example) does not put the gospel at stake, and no doctrine hangs on such discrepancies.

Neo-evangelicals believe that the Bible is true, reliable, and inspired. They just don't hold to factual inerrancy. To the neo-evangelicals, the inerrant position created a situation that if a kid went to college and began to doubt that the world was created in six literal days, the kid was forced to assume that he had to throw out his faith in Jesus Christ.

In short, evangelicalism evolved into a label without a reality. Studies continue

to show that evangelicals can have almost nothing in common with one another except a subcultural ambience. Today, there really is no longer a clear understanding of what "evangelical" means. And for that reason, some evangelical authors are wondering if the term is useful anymore.

Are Christians who have moved beyond evangelicalism postmodernists?

Frank: No. I've found that most post-evangelicals appreciate that postmodernism did a good job of deconstructing the arrogance of Enlightenment empirical modernity which is contrary to Christianity. (Empiricism says that anything which cannot be proven by the five physical senses is unfalsifiable, and thus, is not real. God, spirits, angels, demons are all unfalsifiable and hence should be seriously doubted.) Postmodern thinkers shredded that way of thinking.

At the same time, the deconstructionism and relativism that are part of certain kinds of postmodern thinking is not fully compatible with the claims of Jesus Christ and His followers. Those who have moved beyond evangelical, I've found, are neither modernist nor postmodernist in their thinking. See Chapter 11.

Are beyond evangelicals pietistic and against civil engagement and involvement in politics?

Frank: Negative. Those who have moved beyond evangelicalism are all over the map with respect to politics. Some accept the views of Yoder and Hauerwas; others accept those of N.T. Wright and Scot McKnight. But none of the above are pietistic positions, and all engage the culture in different ways.

I've made my position clear in Chapters 7 and 19 of this book (as well as in Jesus Manifesto), which is pro cultural engagement and contra (against) isolation.

Commitment to a moral and social position is not the same as devotion to a political party. Nor is it pledging allegiance to Caesar. Political partisanship is something different, however. In my observation, those who are moving beyond evangelicalism are against political partisanship and against sitting at Caesar's table. They also cannot endorse employing Caesar's weapons of power. They opt to embrace the power of the cross instead. What that looks like exactly differs among them.

Is beyond evangelicalism new?

Frank: No and yes. No, because you can find the four keynotes I've outlined in Chapter 1 in people like Barth, Bonhoeffer, Watchman Nee, T. Austin-Sparks, DeVern Fromke, and others. Yes, because in our time there is a fresh sense of a new kind of evangelicalism that is surfacing on the horizon. The contours of the evangelical landscape are changing fast, and a new expression is coming to the fore amid the shifts on the right and the drifts on the left. The authors I quote in Chapter 18 all witness to the fact that something new and exciting is appearing on the landscape.

Are "beyond evangelicals" anti-institutional church?

Frank: Some are and some aren't. A particular form or expression of church doesn't define the viewpoint. As noted in Chapter 1, beyond evangelicalism puts a strong emphasis on Christian community and a Christocentric expression of church. But that emphasis can take many different forms with respect to size, location (meeting place), leadership, liturgy, etc. Consequently, beyond evangelicalism should not be confused with missional church, organic church, or institutional church. It's much broader than all of them.

One of the things I appreciated about *From Eternity to Here* and *Jesus Manifesto* is that you present Jesus in a way that blows away all of our little boxes that we try to force the Lord in, showing that Jesus is much larger than our boxes and that we need to embrace all the parts of the body that give aspects of the fullness of Christ. Do you talk about this anywhere else than in those books?

Frank: Thank you. Yes, on the podcast right now I'm releasing some messages I delivered on Colossians that show us a greater Christ than we can ever imagine. You will also find this theme in some of the blog posts listed in the Afterword of this book. It's a subject I write about often.

For those who haven't read it, in *From Eternity to Here*, I use the analogy of Christ being the land of Canaan, which contains all the riches that flowed in the land. But many Christians (staying with the metaphor) camp out on various parts of the land that have been allotted to them. So some pitch their tents where the olives grow, so everything is about the healing ministry of Jesus. Others pitch their tents where the iron and copper are mined, so everything is about spiritual

warfare. Others pitch their tents where the wine is made from the grapes, so everything is about the joy of the Lord. It's easy for us to make a portion of the land (the portion that we have inherited) the total of Canaan. But Christ is the whole land. Hence Paul's phrases "Christ is all . . . " and "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Much of my work is focused on presenting a greater unveiling of Christ.

Why did you name your blog *Beyond Evangelical*?

Frank: Because all the subjects I discuss on the blog cannot be put into any theological or ideological box, whether that of the Christian Right or the Christian Left. As I've stated in Chapter 1 of this book, I am an evangelical. Albeit, I'd probably be better described as a moderate evangelical (as Scot McKnight describes himself).

But my theology goes beyond classic evangelicalism to the four keynotes that I am passionate about. And those keynotes inform every other theological and spiritual subject I wrote about. They also inform Bebbington's evangelical quartet.

If you think about it, Bebbington's quartet is somewhat vague: Bible-centered; cross-centered; conversion-centered; activist-centered. You can gather 100 people in a room who agree with these four notes and profess to be evangelicals, yet discover that no two of them understand the four notes the same way.

In Jesus Manifesto, I argue for a Christocentric reading of the Bible. I believe that reading the Bible Christologically clears up a lot of the questions that arise with Bebbington's quartet. For instance, what kind of authority does the Bible have? Answer: Its authority lies in Jesus Christ. He gave authority to the Scriptures Himself, and they all witness to Him, who holds all authority in heaven and earth in His hands.
What is conversion? Answer: It is turning to God in Christ, etc. Evangelicalism, then, is reoriented and reshaped by the four keynotes of Christ-centeredness, Resurrection Life-centeredness; Body Life-centeredness; and Eternal Purpose-centeredness.

What's happening today is that a segment of the evangelical coalition is adopting these additional notes, all of which go beyond the original four and at the same time are imparting new substance and meaning to them.

What is your opinion of evangelical apologetics?

In endnote 8 of Chapter 1, I wrote:

> "Another aspect of evangelicalism, though often unspoken, is that it builds its theology on the basis of apologetics. This raises an important question: should our theology be built on apologetics or on the intention to know God in Christ and live by His life?"

I know some Christians who agree with Bebbington's quartet, but they don't consider themselves to be evangelical because they cannot go along with the apologetical way of framing theology that marks classic evangelicalism. These individuals point out that Pre-Reformation Christians didn't think along those apologetical lines.

They view evangelicalism as a modern movement that reflects modern ways of thinking. To them, evangelicals are inclined to fall into either the pattern of Cartesian deduction or a Lockean belief in the analysis of experience. In both cases, evangelicals think that an epistemology – an understanding of how we philosophically authorize and legitimate knowledge – is key to theology.

They also feel that we really don't need a theory of truth. Most people live perfectly fine lives without constructing any theory of truth, they argue.

In addition, they argue that the attempt on the part of philosophers ever since modernity to come up with a theory of truth that everyone can accept has failed. There is still no consensus on the subject. All of this is an involved conversation, but it sets us up for my following statements.

While the old-school rationalistic apologetics of Josh McDowell and C.S. Lewis still work for some people today, they are pretty ineffective for most people under age 40. I still maintain that the local visible gathering (ekklesia) – when she's functioning as God intended – is the greatest apologetic on the face of the earth. That's one of the reasons why I wrote the ReChurch Series – which demonstrates how the local assembly (when properly functioning) is the new *polis* and its leadership and leadership models, community life, relationships, love and care, etc. is profoundly different from the world.

The person who says “the church isn’t important” or “the way a church functions or operates doesn’t matter” either doesn’t care about evangelism or isn’t in touch with how the expression of a local body of believers is deeply bound-up with the Christian witness in the world, as well as the heart of God.

Properly conceived and functioning, the local ekklesia is the true apologetic of the gospel and the setting in which the true meaning of our theology becomes clear. It is the compelling witness to the world of who Jesus is. As such, the ekklesia is called to carry “the testimony of Jesus” in the earth.

The traditional evangelical and liberal notion of the church as a place where people go to get help, to get teaching, to get counseling, etc. is no longer compelling. That notion brings the church down to the level of a religious business that produces commodities for consumers. And it’s in deep trouble today. Most people are no longer interested in that commodity. But church as spiritual community is far more attractive and compelling. And it’s what the New Testament envisions the church to be, I believe.

What do you see as the major disputes in Christian theology today, and where do you see it all heading?

Frank: I see two main categories of disputes. In the first category, one group has a huge online megaphone, so they appear much larger than they really are. The other group is smaller, but they too have a decent sized megaphone.

These two groups are trying to carry out the old theological disputes and causes. The two groups I speak of are the *Jesus Seminar* on the one hand, who are trying to fight for an old fangled liberalism and the NeoReformed on the other hand, who are trying to fight for old fashioned orthodoxy. While these two groups are masters at getting attention, they tend not to be as large as they once were. In fact, they both appear to be shrinking over time.

This brings us to the second category.

On the one side, there is a type of liberalism that seems to show some strength today. I’d call it “new age liberalism.” It is represented by Christians who have adopted new age thinking in their theology. They take a lot of categories of thought that are connected to the old “new age movement.” Namely, that the whole world is a manifestation of a vast spiritual reality that undergirds it. This

viewpoint tends to reduce God's work to nature and sees nature itself as an ongoing miraculous thing (in this regard, it's almost pantheistic).

It also tends to be quite individualistic in its spirituality and is drawn toward a type of relativism that appears in the sort of postmodernism that would be better called "hyper-modernism," so that truth is whatever is true for you. Spiritual experiences are regarded as the real source of truth, and since spiritual experiences vary with individuals, then truth varies for individuals.

This group doesn't really represent the old rationalistic liberalism. At bottom, it's an attempt to state new age liberalism in as orthodox a fashion as can be managed and make it *sound* orthodox.

I disagree with this viewpoint, of course, and feel it is spiritually toxic.

On the other side, there is some interesting work being done by post-liberal theologians, post-conservative theologians (which takes up much of what used to be neo-evangelicalism), and radical orthodoxy. I am not suggesting that these three theologies are echoing all the notes I'm passionate about, nor am I suggesting that I agree with them all. I'm simply saying that some of the work they are doing ("the economy of the gift," for instance) is interesting. No time to get into all of this, but that's a general sketch.

All told, I plant my flag on what I've called "beyond evangelicalism" due to its Christocentricism in all things theological and the heavy emphasis on God's eternal purpose as *the* mission. My next book will unfold this in great detail.

Chapter 18

How Evangelicalism Lost its Way (Other Voices)

"Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

~ Proverbs 11:14

As I stated at the beginning of this book, I am not the only writer who has argued that seismic shifts are underway that will affect the future of evangelicalism and Christianity in general.

I thought it would be instructive, therefore, to end this book by listing a series of insightful quotes – as well as articles and books – from various scholars, authors, pastors, and bloggers, all of whom have weighed-in on the disintegration of modern evangelicalism.

While I don't agree with everything stated by these authors (and they would no doubt say the same about my writings), the following clearly shows why a new expression of evangelicalism is needed in our time.

The author and source are located underneath each quote.

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When did evangelicalism start to go wrong (right)? By "go wrong" I mean–go too conservative for its own good. I think I have an answer to that and I've been telling people this for 25 years. I'll say it again.

The turning point was the publication and subsequent furor over the book *The Battle for the Bible*, written by *Christianity Today* editor Harold Lindsell, in 1976. Of course, the book didn't just pop out of Lindsell's head like Athena from Zeus. It had a pre-history. Lindsell and a few other evangelicals had been sounding alarms for some years–about alleged evangelical defections from evangelical orthodoxy.

Lindsell had taught at Fuller Theological Seminary and, by some accounts, at least, was angry that Fuller did not offer him its presidency. Whether that's true or not, and whether if it is true it played any role in Lindsell's bitter book, we may never know for sure.

Probably, however, Lindsell's jeremiad was caused by what he perceived to be Fuller's defection from full faith in biblical inerrancy in the 1960s.

In any case, Lindsell was not content to present a defense of inerrancy; he named names and declared that no one can be authentically evangelical without affirming inerrancy. Few outside separatistic fundamentalist circles had said that before Lindsell. After all, one can point back to James Orr, the eminent Scottish evangelical theologian, who wrote for *The Fundamentals* and was a close friend of B. B. Warfield's. Orr did not believe in biblical inerrancy.

Again, let me repeat. The turning point in *The Battle for the Bible* was NOT belief in inerrancy. It was Lindsell's claim that one cannot be evangelical and deny inerrancy. And it was the vitriolic attacks he launched on evangelical colleges, seminaries and individuals . . .

[Carl F.] Henry's final "Footnotes" column in *Christianity Today* was on September 9, 1977–about one year after the publication of *The Battle for the Bible*. He made clear that he was being fired as a guest writer for the magazine he co-founded. Here's what he wrote:

> "Across the years I have had reason to remember an experience in my pre-Christian teenage days. I once lost a job as a painter's helper when I tried to straighten a three-story ladder. Perched uneasily aloft, my boss was retouching some windows when the ladder moved disconcertingly to the right. My instinctive effort to rectify the misalignment separated me from my job more quickly than it takes to say good-bye. I thought I had learned that lesson well, I thought: don't straighten tilting ladders, particularly not if they tilt too far right."

There can be no doubt to what he was referring–evangelicalism leaning too far right. It has continued to do so ever since. *The Battle for the Bible* was the crucial turning point–when evangelicalism began to return to its fundamentalist roots.

Roger Olson: Click here to read the rest of the post.

Evangelicalism is up for grabs. The evangelical coalition of the 1950s-1990s is behind us, the fissures in the movement are everywhere apparent, and the future of evangelicalism … well, I'm not a prophet. I don't know what will happen, but I do have a sense of where we are and where we were, and it does not appear to me that the future will be like our past. That concerns me . . .

There is no simple explanation for evangelicalism's theological thinness, but I want to anchor the development of theological superficiality in the essence of evangelicalism as it was practiced in the 1970s-1980s. Here was its core: it was a coalition of evangelicals committed to evangelism, both at home and abroad, and that evangelistic message was what held it together. Well, that's an overstatement: what held it together was the commitment to evangelism as embodied in major evangelical leaders and institutions: Billy Graham, Wheaton College, *Christianity Today*, John Stott, and the massive parachurch ministries that were evangelicalism's "web" and "network."

But it was right here that something good became a problem: the coalition's evangelistic message was (sometimes) reduced to God is holy, you are a sinner, God's grace and holiness are manifest in the atoning cross of Christ, believe in him and you will be saved (and go to heaven) — and you also need to get busy in the evangelistic mission yourself. A populist "who cares about theology?" also developed. Not good.

A reduction of the gospel to these basics as well as [the] decision by many "successful" churches to make that the major theological basis for a local church led to a depreciation of a more robust theology and created a vacuum, a yearning for a more robust theology. I see that vacuum filled today in some ways by seminaries, by pastor conferences, by the rise of the NeoReformed (who sometimes are looking more like NeoFundamentalism), and by progressive evangelicalism's working with the 20th and 21st Century's greatest thinkers, not the least of whom would be folks like B.S. Childs and Brueggemann and Moltmann and Pannenberg and NT Wright and Miroslav Volf et al. Exploring these minds leads evangelicalism into new horizons, not all of them comfortable to many.

Scot McKnight: Click here to read the rest of the post.

Much of the character of new evangelicalism is determined by a reaction to the politics of the Religious Right and this reaction is resulting in an identity crisis of their evangelical faith. Many of these Christians are abandoning the term "evangelical" altogether and seeking new ways of expressing their religious commitments to personal and social transformation. Many scholars are attempting to reconnect these Christians to the deeper religious heritage of evangelicalism and demonstrate how they might consider themselves committed evangelicals without adhering to the narrow conservative politics of the Christian Right (e.g., Olson).

As young evangelicals struggle to define themselves in a religious sense, many seem to lack a historical understanding of early evangelical reaction to the growth of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S. This understanding is critical because, in many ways, the early reaction to the fundamentalists is like the present-day reaction to the conservatism of the Religious Right.

Paul Markham: Click here to read the rest of the post.

Evangelicalism predates the Religious Right and represents a variety of political views, even if many now vote Republican in America. Besides, evangelicals are not so much political activists as ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven, where Jesus Christ reigns and sustains the world . . . Yet all is not so clear within the evangelical camp either. Simply labeling ourselves evangelical no longer suffices. We are conservative, progressive, postconservative, and preprogressive evangelicals. We are traditional, creedal, biblical, pietistic, anticreedal, ecumenical, and fundamentalist. We are "followers of Christ" and "Red Letter Christians." We are everything, we are nothing. If the descriptor *evangelical* cannot stand on its own, then it has little use. There is no coherent movement, only an endless collection of self-styled labels created by Christians for their Facebook profiles.

Collin Hansen: *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, p. 9.

As modern American evangelicals, we are first, the product of revivalism; second, we are the beneficiaries of the American separation of church and state, which for all its blessings in other respects, did not do as much for the intellect; we are third, the heirs of a Christian-American cultural synthesis created in the wake of the War for Independence; finally our mental habits are profoundly influenced by the fundamentalist movement at the start of the twentieth century. Each of these influences is ambiguous – each preserved something

essential in the Christian faith, but each also undercut the hereditary Protestant conviction that is was a good thing to love the Lord with our minds.

Mark Noll: *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, pp. 59-60

I mean evangelicalism as a twentieth century movement meeting the following qualifications:

1. Protestant, even strongly anti-Catholic
2. Baptistic, even in its non-Baptist form
3. Shaped by the influence of Billy Graham and his dominance as an symbol and leader
4. Shaped by the influence of Southern Baptist dominance in the conception of evangelism
5. Influenced by revivalism and the ethos of the Second Great Awakening
6. Open to the use of technology
7. Oriented around individualistic pietism and a vision of individualistic Christianity
8. Committed to church growth as the primary evidence of evangelism
9. Committed to missions as a concept and a calling, but less as a methodology
10. Asserting Sola scriptura, but largely unaware of the influence of its own traditions
11. Largely anti-intellectual and populist in its view of education
12. Traditionally conservative on social, political and cultural issues
13. Anti- Creedal, reluctantly confessional
14. Revisionist toward Christian history in order to establish its own historical legitimacy
15. Attempting, and largely failing, to establish a non-fundamentalist identity
16. A low view of the sacraments and sacramental theology
17. A dispensational eschatology, revolving around the rapture and apocalyptic views of imminent last days . . .

I do not recognize the boundary lines of American evangelicalism as the boundary lines of true Christianity . . .

Words like “postmodern,” “emerging” and “missional” are in the process of being defined and filled with meaning, and are not to be ridiculed and rejected out of hand because some who use them are out of step or even heretical.

I reject the idea that the primary role of a minister is to define other Christians as

wrong. I reject the idea that ministers, no matter how large their profile in their own subcultures, are immune from the death of evangelicalism.

The death of evangelicalism opens the door for a return to the sources and a fresh examination of the meaning of Jesus.

Michael Spencer: Click here to read the rest of the post.

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 . . . I want to shift conviction from a book, if you like, to a person. As Jesus himself said, the Scriptures bear witness to *me*. Their main function is to witness to Christ.

John Stott: *Christianity Today*, October 2006, p. 95.

There is of course much debate as to what the current state of evangelicalism is. What cannot be denied, however, is the negative trajectory of both the influence and perception of evangelicals in North American culture as a whole. The rise of the Evangelical Right in the first decade of the new millennium is now largely behind us. In its aftermath there is a severe backlash against evangelicals from various media and cultural influences in the following years . . . I seek to provide an opening for evangelicalism to be renewed and to flourish into the missional calling that lies before us in the new post-Christendom West.

David Fitch: *The End of Evangelicalism*, pp. xii, xvii.

The single biggest mistake of the neo-evangelical coalition, and here I'm thinking of the late 70s through the 80s and into the 90s, was its decision to glue itself to the Republican Party. Led by the architects — Francis Schaeffer, James Kennedy, Jerry Falwell, and James Dobson — neo-evangelicalism lost its single-minded evangelical focus. Instead, it was intoxicated with the potential power in winning the culture war, and nothing represented its hope more than overturning Roe v. Wade. (That never happened, as you know.)

In 1981 I showed up at the University of Nottingham, and in one of my first sessions with my professor, Jimmy Dunn, he observed to me that what was going on in the culture wars in the USA was a huge mistake for the evangelical movement. He further observed that politics has its swings — now GOP soon Dem and back and forth — and that when it swung the other way, it would be the church — not the Republicans — that would lose.

The evangelical movement lost its Faustian bargain. It is everywhere evident. It has been scolded, shamed, and it has tried to recover. Will it learn that it cannot sustain the confidence of the public if it aligns itself politically? Will it learn that the way to change culture is through faithful witness and not through the grasping at power? Will it learn that the church — I mean a gospel shaped church, and by gospel I mean the Jesus and apostolic gospel — is a politic? A different politic? Not one marked by power, but by the cross and resurrection and where we follow the enthroned Lord of all? . . .

Yes, evangelicals are sitting in the lap of the GOP; but the Protestant liberal movement is even more in the lap of the Democrats. Take your political stance, that's fine… just don't make it the Christian way of being.

Scot McKnight: Click here to read the rest of the post.

Liberalism believed that you had to change Christianity to make it acceptable. Orthodoxy believes that the gospel stays the same; we need to find better and more effective ways of presenting it. Christianity does not need to be made attractive; it is attractive. If there has been a failure in this regard, it is that Christians have failed to appreciate this attraction for themselves and to take the trouble to explain it to others . . . That attraction is supremely the person of Jesus Christ. It is a "pearl of great price," something that is recognized to be worth seeking and possessing, and whose possession overshadows everything else.

Alister McGrath: "Why Evangelicalism is the Future of Protestantism," *Christianity Today*, June 19, 1995.

I am rejecting the "team sport" approach to theology that has dominated the attempt to define evangelicalism down to the minutia . . . So to be post-evangelical is to reject evangelical culture in favor of a more catholic, diverse and ancient expression of the Christian faith, while adhering to evangelical

doctrine without becoming part of team or faction operating under the illusion of superiority to others and a closure of the Christian conversation**.**

Michael Spencer. Click here to read the rest of the post.

The NeoReformed have come to equate the meaning of "gospel" with Calvin's "Reformed theology." And those who aren't Reformed are somehow or in some ways denying the gospel itself. When gospel is equated with double predestination, often said in harsh terms, we are seeing a good example of the spirit of a NeoReformed approach. This leads, inevitably, to seeing what they call the "doctrines of grace" as defining both "gospel" and "evangelical."

The groups they've chosen to exclude witness to the new kind of Reformed. The sweeping impacts of the Finney revivals and Wesleyan gospel preaching and the charismatics are simply not, in the view of the NeoReformed, evangelicals. Anabaptists aren't even on the map. A number of historians have clearly demonstrated that evangelicalism in the USA cannot be properly understood without reference to the powerful revivals of the Wesleyans; one thinks of David Hempton or Donald Dayton. Their careful studies on the rise of American evangelicalism are often ignored.

The approach of Mark Noll and David Bebbington, which is broader based than just a list of Reformed theological ideas, is also rejected as inaccurate … If I had to sum it up I'd put it this way: the NeoReformed are those who are obsessed with God's holiness and grace and have not learned that grace makes people gracious. These folks are America's newest religious zealots and they are wounding, perhaps for a generation or two, evangelicalism.

My brothers and sisters, because God in his mercy has made room for all of us at the cross, there's room enough for all of us on the village green. Grace would make it so. We might not be able to agree on theology or in some of the finer points of our confessions, but the village green — evangelicalism — is covered by a big tent, and there's room for all of us who call ourselves evangelicals.

Scot McKnight: **Click here to read the rest of the post**.

Evangelicals have been strong in relying on the Bible but weak in their premature judgments about the Bible . . . Some evangelicals believe their own way of understanding the Bible is right and other differing views are not only

wrong, but evil.

Mark Noll: Source.

Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, anti-gay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders, they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who does not believe what they believe.

David Kinnaman: *UnChristian*, p. 26

We are in the midst of a shift in American Christianity, as Evangelicalism is failing to reach a new generation . . . There are three major reasons that a younger generation is leaving Evangelicalism: pernicious sexism, religious intolerance, and conservative politics. The term "Evangelical" is a broad brush that colors a large and diverse movement, so these characteristics may not be true of every Evangelical. But as long as those in the movement allow themselves to be represented by Pat Robertson and James Dobson, then these spokesmen will continue to whitewash the entire group's values . . .

Finally, the conservative politics drove us away. There were some progressive Evangelicals, yet their voices were sidelined far too often. For the last couple of decades, a majority of the movement began to find great power as the Christian Right. Partnering with the Republican Party, they began to extol an idealized view of the family, rallying against abortion and homosexual rights.

Often the fixation on these two issues came at the expense of feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless. Many Christian Right leaders brushed aside caring for the earth and mocked global climate change. Health care became demonized and wars glorified. So many Christian teachings became sacrificed for the Republican agenda that we hardly recognized our faith any longer. And so we left our congregations. Where are all of the young Evangelicals going? That's hard to say.

Carol Howard Meritt: Click here to read the rest of the post.

I believe most of this conversation is misplaced. In my view, there never was a true evangelical coalition, there is no such thing as “big tent” evangelicalism, and it is past time for a new generation of leaders to move decisively beyond the fundamentalist-modernist debates from which capital-E Evangelicalism was born. Forget the myth of “big tent evangelicalism” – let’s build something new . .

. In the eighteenth century, “evangelicals” were deeply divided over Calvinism (and Calvinists were divided among themselves between the Old Lights and New Lights). These were not friendly in-house conversations. They were bitterly fought divisions separating Christians who did not consider each other to be living in the same tent . . . Henry, Packer and other post-World War II “neo-evangelicals” sought to soften the hard edges of fundamentalism, and in particular to recover the “activist” strain of evangelical cultural engagement. On doctrine, however, they essentially took a side – the side of the Fundamentalists. To be an Evangelical today in the tradition of Henry and Packer is to be doctrinally a Fundamentalist. *This* is what united American evangelicalism in the post-war era: not Bebbington and Noll’s broad quadrilateral, but rather the Fundamentalist’s fight against the Modernists . . . Nevertheless, for many contemporary left wing liberals and right wing culture warriors alike, the key dividing line remains fundamentalism versus modernism.

David Opderbeck: Click here to read the rest of the post.

What will evangelical theology look like in the next century? Only God knows for sure. But there is a great and glorious future for it if two things happen soon: first, the almost-warring parties of traditionalists and reformists must lay down their polemical weapons and enter into constructive dialogue toward a new, unified, and energized evangelical academy; second, evangelical theology must throw open the stained-glass windows of the academy to let the Holy Spirit blow in and across its dusty desks and volume-lined shelves with the new life of unexpected freshness.

Roger Olson, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998.

If we define "evangelical" as those who faithfully sustain the Reformation's central impulses, like justification by faith and the solas, I would contend that evangelicalism will be here for a long time. There are plenty who will keep the Reformation's gospel and theology alive. If we define "evangelical" as those who are faithful to the Great Awakening(s) and revivals of America, who carry on the work of people like Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and D.L. Moody, along with the missionary movement that flowed from that kind of evangelicalism, I would say that movement is sputtering along but is not likely to go away anytime soon.

Yet I would caution that the great drive for the act of evangelism has

substantially waned on American soil; the promptings that created missionary work all over the world have fallen on dry days. Finally, if we define "evangelical" as the coalition that gathered in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s around such luminaries as Billy Graham, Carl Henry, John Stott and J.I. Packer – of that evangelicalism, I would say the days are numbered.

More needs to be said about the nature of the evangelical coalition I see falling apart. The evangelicalism that formed in the 1940s and 1950s, more accurately called "neo-evangelicalism," was a reaction to strident forms of fundamentalism, a call to serious intellectual engagement so that evangelicalism could gain both theological and academic credibility again, and a formation of a big tent coalition to work together for evangelism and theological development. By and large, this big tent coalition combined the Calvinist and Wesleyan segments of evangelicalism, found places for Christian colleges, parachurch ministries, missionary societies, and a plethora of magazines and radio stations, and gave a privileged place to evangelical leaders like Billy Graham and Carl Henry.

This big tent evangelicalism did not spend its energies fighting over theological issues so much as it galvanized those energies for missional and theological work. One reason it did not fight theologically is because its theology, although it clearly embraced believers across a wide spectrum, was more or less grounded in a common affirmation of the centrality of the Bible, the necessity of conversion, the clarity of an atonement-shaped gospel message, and an expectation that real Christians were hard at work in local churches, in evangelism, and in community-focused activism.

Now that coalition has all but broken apart, and not just because theology is less central. It is only heritage-rich institutions like *Christianity Today*, and memories in 50- and 60- somethings that perceive both what neo-evangelicalism was yesterday and what it has become today. The only way the older coalition can survive is if *Christianity Today* – and I see no other genuine alternative – can continue to attract consensus-shaped evangelicalism … Today the average evangelical is spread across a global array of influences and resources. The average evangelical today is a bricoleur, one who cobbles together his or her theology from a variety of sources.

Scot McKnight: **Click here to read the rest of the article**.

Ten Things I Wish Evangelicals Would Stop Doing by Efram Smith

10.) Act as if justice is simply a social issue and not a biblical one.

9.) Reduce the Christian life to individualism.

8.) Major in the minors theologically.

7.) Stop saying “hate the sin, but love the sinner” when we don’t do it.

6.) Feel comfortable with segregated church.

5.) Confuse political ideology with biblical theology.

4.) Act as if race, class, and gender are no longer issues to be dealt with.

3.) Avoid prophetic preaching.

2.) Missing out on being blessed by women in pastoral leadership.

1.) Ignoring the biblical mandate of reconciliation.

Efrem Smith: Source.

When did “evangelical” become a problem for me and many others who proudly wore that label for decades? First, when Jerry Falwell began calling himself an evangelical and, second, when the mass media began depicting Falwell and Pat Robertson and people associated with the Religious Right as “the” evangelical–i.e., as the leading spokesmen for the movement . . .

Most stories I see and hear in the media about “evangelicals” are so distorted and uninformed that I can hardly stand to watch them or read them. Most journalists (with a few notable exceptions) have come to use the term for anyone or group they consider religiously fanatical or theocratic.

So, I understand why some of my friends and acquaintances want me to give up the label. However, I’m stubborn and don’t want to give the media (and fundamentalists) the privilege and power to define good religious labels wrongly. I also don’t know what label I would turn to to begin to define my particular kind of Christianity. Whatever label I use will need some explaining. And it’s just naive to think we can get away from all labeling.

Roger Olson: Click here to read the rest of the article.

In my estimation, Mohler’s “story” of who we are and where we’ve been and

where we're headed is compelling, and it's compelling enough to convince many of the younger leaders to such a degree that they don't even know that there's no longer room for John Stott and barely room for J.I. Packer. In other words, the Story they tell skips the Neo-evangelical era from Billy Graham to the years immediately following Reagan — who helped create the culture wars that have influenced evangelicalism so dramatically in the last generation.

This new story of evangelicalism is sad for people like me who have always believed Evangelicalism was a Big Tent coalition of those committed to the basics of the gospel but more than willing to tolerate differences on all kinds of levels. Evangelicalism for many of us has been a generous evangelicalism. As I said above the numbers are on the side of the older Big Tent coalition, but there is a major, major problem: the old guard coalition is not composed of fighters. They've only known peace and cooperation. What is perhaps the secret here is that many of us became evangelicals to escape fundamentalism. For us, there's no turning back, which means we may find ourselves disenfranchised from evangelicalism.

Scot McKnight: Click here to read the rest of the article.

Usually the terms "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" are used with distinctive meanings. Fundamentalist would be one variety of evangelical Christianity. Fundamentalists historically have been defined as those who are especially influenced by the revival traditions of the nineteenth century, especially influenced by the turn toward dispensational premillennialism as a theology in the late 19th century, and sometimes by their attitudes of separation and militancy toward the rest of the religious world and the rest of the world. Evangelical Christianity as a whole would include some fundamentalist tendencies, some fundamentalist groups, but probably most evangelicals would not want to be called fundamentalists themselves.

Mark Noll: Source.

American adults, looking for but not finding examples of vibrant Christianity, are questioning the underpinnings of faith itself.

George Barna: *Futurecast,* p. 149.

Evangelicals 10 Fads and Fixtures by Joe Carter:

1. Making converts (not disciples)
2. The Sinner's Prayer [Frank: I explore the historical roots of this in Pagan Christianity]
3. Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior?
4. Tribulationism
5. Testimonies
6. The Altar Call [Frank: I explore the historical roots of this also in Pagan Christianity]
7. Witnessing
8. Protestant Prayers
9. The Church Growth Movement
10. Chick Tracts

Joe Carter: Click here to read the full article with explanation.

Christianity Today: What term would you prefer to use in describing the Bible?

F.F. Bruce: Truth. What's wrong with that word? The truth of Scripture is what we're talking about. If one says that the Scripture is the Word of God, why bother about terms like 'infallibility' and 'inerrancy'?

***Christianity Today*, April 7, 1989, p. 24.**

Since the 1980s, we developed three kinds of new legalisms:

First, there is a **political legalism**. In the 1980s and 1990s American evangelicalism got so wedded to the Republican Party that one could easily sniff it in the air. That is, one could easily know if one was "in" or "out" on the basis of whether they wore the red tie or the blue tie.

Second there is **theological legalism**, which has always been around. The newest forms of legalism are found among the NeoReformed, who have somehow managed to get complementarianism, Calvinism and young earth creationism … well, if not in it's very close to the inner circle. Sometimes this group sounds like Elijah who thought he alone was faithful. Hooey.

I poke at these guys often, but they're hardly alone. Indeed, alongside this

legalism is the progressive, emergent/emerging form of legalism, which says you can't embrace traditional evangelical views (be they political or theological), especially something like evangelism for the purpose of salvation, if you are intelligent and 'with it.' This is why I liked Brett McCracken's *Hipster Christianity*, and the fierce reaction he got from those who see themselves as 'with it' showed to me he was at least pointing in the right direction about a good concern.

Third is the **social legalism**. This one is odd. Evangelicalism from the 1900s to about the 1960s was more or less silent when it came to social issues. Evangelicals were intoxicated with the fear of the Social Gospel. Then in the 60s and 70s, think Jim Wallis as a young firebrand, started to get socially involved. But Jim was very much alone, and he can tell you that story. But something happened in the 90s in the most ironic of ways: when everyone was beginning to carp about right-wing evangelicalism's over indulgence in political causes (read: Republic Party and their form of political legalism), another group of evangelicals shifted more to the left politically (they joined Jim Wallis) and they began to see themselves as the Jesus Party — that is, they thought they had embraced the kingdom vision, the justice vision, the peace vision, while "evangelicals" were obsessed with penal substitution and going to heaven.

That, too, became a form of legalism. The irony is that while progressive evangelicals were carping about right-wingers being in bed with the Republicans, the progressives climbed in bed in another room with the Democrats and are reading the liberation theologians.

Now I want to point my finger at the political legalism a little more sharply, and do some finger wagging.

Evangelicalism's worst move, and its potentially destructive decision, was to politicize itself in the 1980s and 1990s and use it as a litmus test of who was in and who was out. The rise of the Moral Majority, and one has to factor in folks like Francis Schaeffer and Jerry Falwell and James Kennedy and James Dobson, has been the undoing of the evangelical coalition and not just by creating a new kind of legalism. Instead of focusing on unity for the sake of mission, evangelicalism became increasingly connected to a political party (Republicans). Instead of the Lausanne Covenant, which is one of the finest evangelical theological statements ever, we've got theological waffling and theological narrowing — instead of focusing on mission, we've turned on one another.

Scot McKnight: Click here to read the rest of the article.

Historians usually use two ways of defining evangelical Protestant Christians. One feature is the things that evangelicals historically and traditionally have believed and practiced. Evangelicals usually stress conversion to Jesus Christ. Evangelicals stress the authority of the Bible as their chief religious authority. Evangelicals are activist in some areas of life, principally in trying to share the good news about Jesus. And evangelicals usually stress the death of Christ and his resurrection as the key, central Christian teaching. Historians trace back to the eighteenth century and the revivals that are associated with the Wesleys, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and other figures, a continuous genealogy of ecclesiastical and voluntary association development that also provides some perspective on evangelicals. So to have the genealogy and the characteristics gives us a triangulation that is a good definition, for most purposes, of evangelicalism.

Mark Noll: Source.

The term evangelical first came to fame during the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. It was used almost synonymously with the word "Protestant." In fact, even today in places like Germany you'll hear "evangelical" being used as another word for Protestant. The biblical world for gospel is evangel, and because the Reformers saw what they were doing as being closer to the biblical gospel, they called themselves evangelicals. Because of this close connection between the word evangelical and the Protestant Reformation, there are two primary elements at the heart of being an evangelical—authority and justification.

Brent Cunningham: Source.

The evangelical movement is like a teenager coming of age in which she is now facing major decisions about adulthood . . . we should never forget that the evangelical church emerged out of a bloody battle with modernism. We should be grateful to our forebears.

Darrell Bock, quoted in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995.

I am an evangelical. It defines the way I think (my orthodoxy), how I act (my

orthopraxy), and how I relate to God, to others and my world (my orthopathy). This is a joyful and hopeful way of being a Christian. An evangelical loves God greatly, and seeks to serve others and bless the world. An evangelical is eager to engage in a community of faith that worships and encourages discipleship, and engages in mission around the world and in a neighborhood. This is that faith that is part of my heritage. This is the brand of Christianity that I have chosen. I am proud to be an evangelical.

But a crime has been committed. I am an evangelical, and I have been robbed.

American culture is eager to talk about religion, and this becomes very apparent as national politics heat up. In this cycle, I am hearing the term “evangelical” bantered around more frequently. Unfortunately this term is used to describe a wide range of people:

*Those eager to decide who is in and who is out

*Those who see God as stingy

*Those who hold tightly to a strict set of doctrines and question anyone outside of their fenceposts

*Those who are certain who goes to heaven, and who goes to hell

*Those who ascribe to well defined and narrow moral and social values

*Those who see evangelical as a synonym for Republican

I am proud to be an evangelical both theologically and genealogically, but the term has been hijacked.

Kurt Fredrickson: Source.

Taken as a whole, the Church clearly can’t live without the Bible—but it doesn’t seem to have much idea how to live with it, either.

It's not surprising that all kinds of misreadings of Scripture have grown up, both among those who count themselves as Bible-believers and among those who distance themselves from that label while claiming some continuity at least with the biblical tradition. Many of these misreadings are now so common they are taken for granted in large segments of the Church.

At the risk of sustaining a polarization I regard as misleading, we might instance them in two blocks. What follows is a short list; many more examples could be found. (I here summarize wildly for reasons of space, and at the obvious risk of caricature. Each of the categories could of course be explained and exemplified

at much greater length.)

To begin with, I offer the many positions regularly thought of as “right wing” which are based on, or involve, a serious misreading of Scripture . . . The preceding list is balanced by the equally routine misreading by what is thought of as the “left wing.”

N.T. Wright: Click here to read the rest of the article.

The evangelical tent is big enough to welcome to the table Calvinists and Arminians, anabaptists and charismatics, and I love it when Catholics and the Orthodox join us. This is not a personal battle for me with Calvinists; it’s a particular kind of divisive Calvinist that I have in view.

Formerly the disagreements with Calvinists or the ones they had with others didn’t stop us from gathering inside the big tent. But in the last decade something happened, and I call it the rise of the NeoReformed. Here we go but first a question or two:

Are you seeing a rise of reformed folks? Do you see some militancy — whatever their strengths? What are your thoughts? Why do you think some youth are attracted to this new form of Reformed theology?

One of my favorite Reformed theologians is Michael Horton. We don’t agree on theology but I like this guy and I like to read his stuff. Michael recently wrote a piece that uses a different image than the big tent image above. He says evangelicalism is like the village green of early American communities. It was where folks, all folks, gathered to chat and share commonalities.

He says *evangelicalism is the village green* but evangelicalism is not the church. Churches have confessions, and his confession is Reformed. He says we need to worship in our churches and that the village green is not enough; it is where we join with Christians most like us. The key point I make here is the *distinction* between being evangelical and being Reformed. Michael Horton, I am assuming, thinks the best form of evangelicalism is Reformed; and he probably thinks Arminians and Anabaptists are wrong at some important points. Fine. (I think the same of Reformed, and I think they are sometimes wrong at central points.) But Michael Horton knows that a local church (or denomination) is not the village green. I agree with him 100%.

But … and here’s our problem…

The NeoReformed, for a variety of reasons, some of them good, don't recognize that evangelicalism as a village green. Instead, they want to build a gate at the gate-less village green and require Reformed confessions and credentials to enter onto the village green. Put differently, they think the only legitimate and the only faithful evangelicals are Reformed. Really Reformed. In other words, they are "confessing" evangelicals. The only true evangelical is a Reformed evangelical. They are more than happy to call into question the legitimacy and fidelity of any evangelical who doesn't believe in classic Reformed doctrines, like double predestination. The palpable observation here is that many of us think the NeoReformed are as attached to Tradition (read Westminster, etc.) as they are to sola scriptura.

In effect, the NeoReformed are a new form of Fundamentalism, so one might describe them accurately as the NeoFundamentalists. Which means they seem to need a trend or an opponent upon whom they can vent their frustrations (see Rene Girard). This results in two clear traits: the exaltation of some peripheral doctrine to central status and the demonization of a person. The goal in such cases seems to be to win at all costs . . . I recently wrote to a friend of mine, a Reformed theologian, and described what is the essence of this post and this is what he wrote back:

The problem, as I see it is these, whom you are calling neoreformed, are to me simply the old fundamentalists in nicer clothes with better vocabularies. They are just as mean-spirited, just as graceless, and just as exclusive. I believe that the fundamentalism of my youth was harmful to the gospel. I believe that anyone who refuses to come out of his "room" (confessional church) and into the hall of "mere Christianity," to use Lewis's term, is doomed to a narrow and problematic exegesis of the text. Who is going to tell us that we are wrong if we only stay in our room and speak to people who agree with us all the time?

Scot McKnight: Click here to read the rest of the article.

I believe in the trustworthiness and sufficiency of Scripture, and that's where all evangelicals are, really.

Alister McGrath quoted in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995.

“I hope the Lord takes me home before I see a piano in this meeting,” sobbed one of our elders in a Sunday evening sermon. A piano in a church service. A piano. In a church service. The piano, if it were to come, would be accompanied by a fight. Drinking beer was a sin, and most of pop culture, including dancing or movies, was forbidden. Unless it was “evangelism night,” the only night that justified moving pictures, and only those in which the earth shook, asphalt roads split, fire rained, and God plucked from the earth a precious few of his chosen Calvinists. This was my, and many others’, I assume, experience with Christian fundamentalism. More than that, it was all I knew the church to be.

I’ll never forget when my Mom’s husband sat me down with Proverbs 1:7 and the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. “Don’t ever forget that boy,” he said in his southern accent. I love that man for sharing his faith. That verse shaped my reverence for God and my approach with my own children. What I’ve come to realize, however, is that fear, a driving force behind Christian fundamentalism, can carry me only to a point. Fear can inform wisdom, but it can also incapacitate, render one couch-bound, cross-legged, moaning, head-bobbing, wallowing in depression. Fear can wake you in the night, fraught, sweaty, vividly imagining burning lakes. That of course, is not God’s endgame, not the response God desires. He desires our love, and if the fear is too heavy, it can crush love.

Taylor George: Click here to read the rest of the article.

When evangelicalism became 20th century Herodianism collaborating with the powers that be in order to influence the nation (“take America back for God”) via political action, evangelicalism lost its primary mission of being a *kingdom of God* community. Co-opted by USAmerican politics evangelicalism slid toward being a neutered civil religion.

John Frye: Source.

The Pharisees separated themselves, the Herodians accommodated, the Sadducees completely embraced, and the Zealots tried to violently overthrow. It seems to me evangelicalism and classic liberalism are more like the Herodians and the Sadducees as opposed to Pharisee and Sadducee.

Darryl: Source.

Sweet and Viola, who are hardly theological twins, have detected something

seriously amiss in the post-evangelical/emerging church understanding of the Gospel: the centrality of Christ. I think I have a nose for this sort of thing, and I know it can be very rhetorical, but Sweet and Viola are crucially and significantly right. And not just about Christianity becoming politics, but about theology that puts Jesus into an assigned "place" in someone's version of Christianity and doesn't make him the "all" of the Gospel. As I will say in one chapter of my book, unless you do great damage, there's not going to be any escaping the narrowness of Jesus when it comes to putting the focus onto himself rather than anyone else's agenda. So whatever we have to say about "narratives," or "sources" or "confessions," we must be a people radically identified with Jesus. No "Jesus Disconnect" allowed.

Michael Spencer: Click here to read the full article and explanation.

More Articles on the Subject

The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals: Evangelicalism

The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals: Fundamentalism

The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals: Politics & "The Religious Right"

Pew Research Center on What Evangelical Leaders Believe: Wide Diversity Exhibited in Belief & Lifestyle

Evangelicals Behaving Badly with Statistics: Christian Smith

Dear Conservatives, Stop Trying to Define Evangelicalism Theologically: Carson Clark

Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era: Brian Harris

On Evangelicalism: David Fitch

You Might Be an Evangelical Reject If . . . : Kurt Willems

The Coming Evangelical Collapse: Michael Spencer

The Religious Right Turns 33: Jonathan Merritt

7 Reasons Christians Should Change Their Political Tone: Jonathan Merritt

Irrepressible Culture Wars, Past and Present: Mark Tooley

Books on the Subject

While I don't agree with everything stated in the following books, they are all worth checking out as they touch on the issues explored in this book. I give some commentary on a few of the books.

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Everything You Know about Evangelicals is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything) by Steve Wilkens and Don Thorsen. Argues that evangelicalism is a "big tent" including those committed to the Bible, the cross, personal conversion, and an active Christian life (this is in line with Bebbington and Noll). Calvinists and Arminians are both welcome in the big tent of evangelicalism and neither has the right to thrust the other out. However, the common misperception today is that evangelicals are:

* All mean, stupid, and dogmatic
* All waiting for the rapture
* All anti-evolutionists
* All inerrantists
* All rich Americans
* All Calvinists
* All Republicans
* All racist, sexist, homophobes

Great discussion on the meaning of "inerrancy." Sketches three different types.

Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism by Kevin Bauder (Representing Fundamentalists), Albert Mohler (representing Confessional Evangelicals), John

Stackhouse (representing Generic Evangelicals), and Roger Olson (representing Postconservative Evangelicals). The book shows the tensions at work within evangelicalism and argues that evangelicalism can be defined sociologically, theologically, descriptively, or prescriptively. Bebbington and Noll define it sociologically while D.A. Carson, David Wells, and Al Mohler define it theologically.

The End of Evangelicalism by David Fitch. Argues that evangelicalism is based on three major signifiers: The Inerrant Bible, Decision for Personal Salvation, and the Christian Nation. The obsession with making a "decision for Christ" dilutes personal transformation and a robust ecclesiology. In other words, as long as you've "said the prayer," no further change is required and you can live the "individual Christian life" (which I've argued in Reimagining Church, doesn't exist in the New Testament). In addition, Fitch points out that the church has become an "empty politic" fashioned by modernity. It is supposed to be a politic of the kingdom, not supporting a political party (which forces the church into serving two masters).

No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? by David Wells. Wells contends that the theological bottom is falling out of much of contemporary populist evangelicalism. The book contends that evangelicals have done a poor job educating the public (media and culture) about what it really believes. It's instead permitted a minority viewpoint to become the defining term and association.

The Variety of American Evangelicalism by Don Dayton. Argues that Western evangelicalism has Arminian roots, disproving the notion that the Reformed wing of evangelicalism is the only true evangelical expression.

Discovering an Evangelical Heritage by Don Dayton.

Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity by Alister McGrath. Defines evangelicalism by six controlling convictions:

1. the supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living.
2. the majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and as Savior of sinful humanity.
3. the lordship of the Holy Spirit.

4. the need for personal conversion.
5. the priority for evangelism for both individuals and the church as a whole.
6. The importance of Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth.

UnChristian: What a Generation Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. Documents how the average young American adult sees evangelical Christians as arrogant, judgmental, self-righteous, duplicitous, and dispassionate.

The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind by Mark Noll. Noll decries the anti-intellectualism of evangelical religious culture.

The Rise of Evangelicalism by Mark Noll.

A Faith of Our Own: Following Jesus Beyond the Culture Wars by Jonathan Merritt.

Beyond Fundamentalism by James Barr.

The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism by Carl F. Henry.

The Dominance of Evangelicalism by David Bebbington.

Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want by Christian Smith.

American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving by Christian Smith.

How to Be Evangelical without Being Conservative by Roger Olson.

Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology by Roger Olson.

Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century by Stanley Grenz.

Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era by Stanley Grenz.

American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us by Robert Putnam and David Campbell.

The Advent of Evangelicalism by Michael Haykin and Ken Stewart.

Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism by George Marsden.

Fundamentalism and American Culture by George Marsden.

Reforming Fundamentalism by George Marsden.

God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right by Daniel Williams.

The Faith Once Trusted to the Saints: Engaging with Issues and Trends in Evangelical Theology by Geoffrey Grogan.

The Protestant Evangelical Awakening by W. Reginald Ward.

Early Evangelicalism by W. Reginald Ward.

A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World by Henry Knight.

The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience by Ron Sider.

After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology by Bernard Ramm.

The Bible Made Impossible by Christian Smith.

Answers to Questions by F.F. Bruce.

The Next Christians by Gabe Lyons.

The Grammar of Faith by Paul Holmer.

Chapter 19

A Beyond Evangelical Approach to Reaching the World

"Some wish to live within the sound of a chapel bell; I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell."

~ C.T. Studd

I have often stressed that the church's calling to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world (a la, Luke 4:18-19) is just as much a part of God's Eternal Purpose as living as a face-to-face community that makes a home for the Lord to lay His head.

(I'm speaking here of the church in local expression . . . a tangible, touchable, locatable body of believers in a locale, in whatever form or shape it may take.)

We Christians seem to fall off one side of the horse or the other on this subject.

Some make the church a shallow "soul-winning" / "world-improvement" station with little depth, relational life, or spiritual substance. Others make the church an insular, isolated, navel-gazing community.

I believe the church must know both inreach and outreach . . . it must know what it means to be "built together" as well as "being Christ" for the world. And it must learn how to discern the season for each.
As I've argued in From Eternity to Here, the ekklesia is called to embody Jesus Christ as a bride, a house, a body, and a family. This is God's Eternal Purpose.

What follows is a collection of the best blog posts I've written over the years on the subject of how the church continues the ministry of Jesus in the world.

Some of these posts include audios and book excerpts. I'm creating this special post for two reasons:

(1) Some of these posts have provoked countless Christians and churches to reach out beyond themselves — not out of guilt, duty, obligation, or their own natural energies (which is almost the norm today) — but by and through the life

of Jesus Christ Himself.

(2) Having a list of related posts on this topic in one place will make it easy for readers to access.

So here they are. Take a look at the descriptions, check out the posts, enjoy, and share!

The Missio Dei - covers the four aspects of God's grand mission.

20 Reasons Why the Christian Right & the Christian Left Won't Adopt Me – **encourages Christians to engage the culture and affirms all types of engagement (social, civil, political, etc.) without necessarily aligning with the Christian Right or the Christian Left.**

Living in the Divine Parenthesis – **a challenge against the tendency to become insular, isolated, and ingrown.** Explains how the New Testament calls us to engage in "good works," but explains what good works are and aren't. (In the New Testament, "good works" have to do with alleviating oppression and helping those who are hurting.) The source of good works is also discussed as well as the meaning of the Kingdom of God being present yet future. Includes audio.

Rethinking the Gospel – **explains what the New Testament means when it uses the word "gospel" as well as "Jesus is Lord" and "Christ is ALL." Jesus of Nazareth is Lord, not just over our private spiritual lives, but over the whole world.**

Following Your Spiritual Instincts Regarding the Poor – explains how much God cares for the poor and what our attitude should be toward them.

Wavin' Flag: Remix – a song I wrote that expresses Christ's love for the world through the church.

Rethinking How We Present the Gospel – affirms yet rethinks how we present the gospel to non-Christians.

N.T. Wright – my exclusive interview with N.T. Wright where we discuss church, mission, culture, and the church's prophetic role in speaking to "power."

Epic Jesus – **Jesus is much larger than our traditions, personal tastes, and**

theological systems. Includes audio. E. Stanley Jones said, "A reduced Christ is the same as a rejected Christ." *Epic Jesus* unfolds that thought.

A Vanishing God – **Jesus has an interesting habit of breaking out of our expectations, imaginations, preferences, and ideas. A challenge against sectarianism and elitism, something I speak about often.**

The Eternal Purpose – explores the four aspects of God's timeless purpose. Includes audio.

The Anatomy of the Church – outlines 14 metaphors for the church, some of which depict its nature to reach out to the world around it.

The Presence of the Future – a meditation on the Kingdom being "already, but not yet." HT to George E. Ladd.

Kingdom Confusion: Part I – rethinking the Kingdom of God in the world.

Kingdom Confusion: Part II – dismantles the fallacy of pitting the Kingdom against the church. If you've heard people say, "Jesus mentioned the church only twice, but He mentioned the Kingdom over 100 times" you need to read this.

Thoughts on the Coming Revival – a reflection on past and future revivals.

Helping the Family in this Economy – an encouragement to help others in need, "especially those of the household of faith."

20-Somethings Share What Attracted Them to Jesus Christ – over 250 twenty-something Christians explain what attracted them to Jesus. (Read the comments.) Insightful and instructive.

Chapter 20

Forgotten Words of Jesus

"It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

~ Mark Twain

As long as I’ve been a Christian, I’ve noted two spiritual pillars that are incredibly difficult to keep in mind. They are all-too easy to forget. One is to rejoice in our suffering. The other is to put ourselves in the shoes of another person whenever we’re dealing on the level of human relationships.

I will confess that I’ve had a hard time remembering these two things. And I’m in need of constant reminding of them.

And so is every other Christian.

So often, you and I are put in situations that involve other people, whether they be Christians or non-Christians. Our spiritual instincts always urge and prompt us to love . . . for God is love. But what does love look like on the ground? And how do we know if we’re really loving others?

I believe it will always look like this . . . “Treat others the way you would want to be treated if you were in their situation.”

In the words of our Lord:

> So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

Consequently, if you don’t wish for your motives to be imputed with evil, then don’t impute others with evil motives. If you don’t wish to be judged, then don’t judge others. If you don’t wish to be gossiped about, then don’t gossip about others. If you don’t wish to be personally attacked, then don’t attack others personally.

If you wish for others to give you the benefit of the doubt and think the best of you, then give others the benefit of the doubt and think the best of them. If you wish to be treated with kindness and understanding, then treat others with

kindness and understanding. If you wish to be forgiven, then forgive others, etc.

I believe that in whatever situation we find ourselves, if we would simply ask ourselves this question before God . . . "How would I wish to be treated if I were in this situation?" . . . His mind would become quite clear to us.

That simple question would cut down so much of our prayers where we "seek God," asking, "Lord, how do I deal with such-and-such . . . what's your mind on this situation which involves so-and-so?"

Now here's a wild thought. What would happen if beginning today, every Christian on the planet would treat everyone else the way they would want to be treated? What would it do for the church, for the Kingdom of God, for the world, and for those non-Christians who are turned off by Christianity because of how Christians treat one another? (You know, like Gandhi who said: "I would become a Christian if it weren't for the Christians").

Consider that for a moment.

Undoubtedly, this won't happen until Christ sets the world right. But each of us can begin to ask the Lord to make this real in our own lives now . . . today.

Living by Christ . . . living by Divine life . . . manifests itself in this way: *Treating others the way we would want to be treated in every situation.* For that is the conduct of Divine life. And the nature of Divine life is love.

Related:

Have You Heard?

We Have Not So Learned Jesus Christ

An Important Insight from President Obama

Things Aren't Always What They Seem

Hearing One Side of a Story

Christians Are . . .

Anyway

Afterward

Continuing the Conversation

The following posts on the Beyond Evangelical blog continue the conversation by expanding some of the subjects covered in this book.

Christianity in Crisis: A Response to Andrew Sullivan's *Newsweek* Article

Exclusive Interview with N.T. Wright

Exclusive Interview with Scot McKnight

Exclusive Interview with Christian Smith

Exclusive Interview with David Fitch

Interview with Modern Reformation Magazine

Interview with Rethink Monthly

10 Reasons Why Leonard Sweet and I wrote JESUS MANIFSTO

Ed Stetzer and I Discuss God's Grand Mission

On the Atonement

Rethinking the Five-Fold Ministry

Rethinking Christian Unity

Rethinking Women in Ministry

Rethinking the Gospel

Rethinking How We Present the Gospel

Rethinking the Love of Christ

How (Not) to Correct Another Christian

Appendix

Three Ways to Be Connected

1. Join over 30,000 others and subscribe to the *Beyond Evangelical* blog, become part of the blog community, and receive "The Next Reformation" seminar free.



2. Subscribe to the Christ is ALL podcast which focuses on the themes outlined in this book.



3. Sign up to be notified about *Beyond Evangelical* conferences in the future. Receive in-depth teaching on the four keynotes of *Beyond Evangelicalism* and connect with others of like mind and heart.



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