

# Evangelicalism

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"The term **Evangelicalism** is a wide-reaching definitional "canopy" that covers a diverse number of Protestant groups. The term originates in the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning "the good news," or, more commonly, the gospel. During the Reformation, Martin Luther adapted the term, dubbing his breakaway movement the *evangelische kirke*, or "evangelical church" -- a name still generally applied to the Lutheran Church in Germany. In the English-speaking world, however, the modern usage usually connotes the religious movements and denominations which sprung forth from a series of revivals that swept the North Atlantic Anglo-American world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." <sup>[1]</sup>

## Multimedia

- What Is Evangelicalism? (<http://mp3.sa-media.com/filearea/21108149255/21108149255.mp3>) (MP3), given 1-28-08 at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, by D. A. Carson
- Changes in Evangelicalism (<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/MediaPlayer/2750/Audio/>) , a discussion at Wheaton College with Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and John Piper

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In this period, the First Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards was deeply influencing American religious life, while at the same time John Wesley, George Whitefield, and the Methodist movement were renewing British Christianity. Much of this religious fervor was a reaction to Enlightenment thinking and the deistic writings of many of the western philosophical elites.

In its early years, what was to become known as evangelicalism was largely a hybrid of the Reformed emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy, and the pietist emphasis on the heart and a "personal relationship" with God. The movement saw a variety of liturgical styles and ministry approaches, though strong preaching, personal conversion, and evangelism were common features.

Not a formally organized movement, **modern evangelicals** usually represent conservative elements from within

numerous mainline protestant denominations as well as independant Baptist churches and Bible churches. While there is no established set of beliefs which define one as an *evangelical*, in general, evangelicals hold to:

- an orthodox Christology and emphasis on Christ's atoning work and bodily Resurrection;
- the belief that salvation is the result of God's grace through Christ rather than any human works;
- the authority and inspiration of Scripture, usually holding to the inerrancy of the original autographs;
- an emphasis on biblical preaching and teaching;
- an emphasis on the conversion experience, typically referred to as being "*born again*" or experiencing a "*new birth*";
- and an emphasis on evangelism and the importance of mission work.

Evangelicals who are part of various traditions of Christian thought (Calvinism, Methodism, Lutheranism, Baptists, etc.) may also emphasize other doctrinal stances important to their own traditions, but all typically agree with the above listed items.

Evangelicals consider *evangelicalism* as an emphasis on reviving the true historic faith of the Church and the Bible. They do not consider their positions to be innovative or new.

## Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism

The Christian fundamentalist "movement" is usually seen as the late 19th - early 20th century reaction to liberalism among conservative evangelicals, which some term the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. The movement inherited its name from *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915), a twelve-volume set of essays designed to combat Liberal theology -- 94 essays by 64 British and American conservative Protestant theologians.

However, a growing element of the movement during the early-to-mid 1900s became more separatist in nature and more characteristically dispensational in its theology. As Dispensationalism and separatism began to overwhelmingly characterize the most popular "fundamentalist" leaders, other "evangelicals" began to distance themselves from this brand of fundamentalism.

This led to what some have termed the **Evangelical-Fundamentalist break-up** in the mid 1900s.<sup>[2]</sup> The movement broke up along very definable lines within conservative Evangelical Protestantism as issues progressed. Neo-evangelicalism, as well as Reformed and Lutheran Confessionalism among others, began to developed distinct identities within evangelicalism and none of them acknowledge any more than an historical overlap with the Fundamentalist Movement. They are fundamentalists in a broad sense, but they sought to distance themselves from the cultural separatism which was increasingly identified with "fundamentalism." Hence, they no longer referred to themselves as fundamentalists. In contrast, today's Fundamentalists look to the earlier Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy for its identity and as its primary historical point of reference.

Consequently, many Evangelical groups may be described as "fundamentalist" in the broad sense, who do not belong in the "Fundamentalist movement" in the narrow sense. Many Evangelicals continue to hold the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, a basic issue of difference in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy a century ago. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, for instance, was signed in 1978 by nearly 300 conservative scholars, including James Boice, Norman Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry (founder of Christianity Today), Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, John Warwick Montgomery, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, Robert J. Siders, Earl Radmacher, Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and John Wenham. Very few if any of these men fit the definition of or identify themselves with today's Fundamentalists.

## Notes

- ↑ Defining Evangelicalism ([http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining\\_evangelicalism.html](http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html)) from The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals.
- ↑ The Fundamentalist-Evangelical Split ([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/167/story\\_16774\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/167/story_16774_1.html)) from *The Beliefnet Guide to Evangelical Christianity*.

## Resources

- D. A. Carson, *Evangelicalism: What Is It and Is It Worth Keeping?* (Crossway, 2009) ISBN 1433511223
- George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Eerdmans, 1991) ISBN 0802805396
- D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, New Ed edition (Routledge, 1989) ISBN 0415104645
- Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Baker Academic, 2005) ISBN 080102658X.
- Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (IVP, 2004) ISBN 0830825819
- David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon And Moody* (IVP, 2005) ISBN 0830825835
- John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (IVP Academic, 2007) ISBN 0830825827

## See also

- Protestant Reformation
- Neo-evangelicalism

## External links

- Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (<http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/index.html>)
- National Association of Evangelicals (<http://www.nae.net/>)
- Statement of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals ([http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.statement\\_of\\_faith](http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.statement_of_faith))
- A Few Critiques of Contemporary Evangelicalism (<http://www.wscal.edu/clark/evangelicalism.php>) (bibliography by R. Scott Clark)

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