

NEW EVANGELICALISM: What Is It?

A very simplified explanation

New Evangelicalism isn't "new" anymore! It has been around for over 70 years now. It can be a very complicated subject.

Back in the early part of the last century, professing Christianity among Protestants (churches, denominations, schools, mission boards, etc.) gradually became controlled by those that did not truly believe the Bible. These people were known as liberals or modernists. Many true Christians became very upset over the way organizations were no longer teaching and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The "Gospel of Good Works"—the "Social Gospel"—was gaining popularity. People didn't want to hear about Hell and God's wrath. They claimed the idea of sins being cleansed by the blood of Christ was too gory and belonged to the superstitions of the Dark Ages.

The true Christians did what they could to preach and publish teachings from the Bible. They said certain Bible teachings had to be believed if you were to be considered a genuine Christian. These teachings were referred to as the "fundamental" doctrines—such things as the virgin birth and deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and His actual return to earth (the Second Coming). These Christians became known as **Fundamentalists**.

The leaders of the Fundamentalists worked and preached hard to win the battle, but humanly speaking they lost. They could not retain control of many churches, nor of the denominations, religious schools, and mission boards. Many fundamentalists knew the Bible teaches separation from false teaching (apostasy), so they left these organizations and founded new ones. Some saw the dangers and inconsistencies of denominations and sought to get back closer to the New Testament pattern of independent local churches.

The battles over whose teachings would be accepted and who would control the churches and organizations created a climate of controversy and hostility. In the 1940s, some Christian leaders thought that many things could be patched up between the Fundamentalists (sometimes called Conservatives) and the Liberals. They felt that non-Christians in the world, especially scientists and intellectuals, would think that Christianity was a lot of bologna when they saw all this controversy going on. It was suggested that in order to **evangelize** the world for Christ, they would have to develop a new image, hence Dr. Ockenga of Boston coined the term "New Evangelical" to describe this change in 1948. Instead of declaring what the Bible taught, they would seek to enter into discussions (dialogues) with people of different religions (or no religion).

Because New Evangelicalism claims to win people to Christ, it is very confusing. Its goal seems terrific—so terrific in fact that it causes people to overlook disobedience to what the Bible tells us to do. Even though the Bible clearly warns about the need to separate from false teaching and disobedient Christians, the New Evangelicals said that that teaching is wrong and that the way to reach the Liberals is to join in with them as much as possible. They hoped to regain control of organizations by infiltrating them.

Not too many people like to fight. They want to avoid hassles. New Evangelicalism has been very popular and successful. The idea of making Christianity seem pleasant to the world has led to many changes. Year after year, fewer and fewer things are distinctive about Christians. More and more Christians are becoming like the world. In many ways old fashioned **worldliness** and New Evangelicalism go hand-in-hand.

Doctrines have changed, too. What began as a compromise with the theories of modern science (*forms of theistic evolution and the documentary sources of the Bible*) has led to abandoning the

doctrine of inerrancy (*no errors in the Bible*). More people have become involved in the Charismatic movement (*speaking in tongues, slain in the Spirit, healing meetings, etc.*) because of this attitude of compromise. Current theories of psychology are widely accepted. Often it is questionable whether the Gospel is really being preached. The message that “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” so just “invite Jesus in and He’ll solve all your problems” leaves out conviction of sin, eternal punishment, repentance, and the importance of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

New Evangelicalism tends to be *man-centered* and *success oriented*. It says in effect, “Whatever it takes to get people to say ‘yes’ to Jesus, do it!” and this will please God. This is pragmatism (*the end justifies the means*). What you do is okay as long as the goal that you’re trying to achieve is good.

Biblical fundamentalism is *God-centered* and *obedience oriented*. We are to obey God, bring glory to His Name, and do His will. We believe that we must not only test our **goals** but also our **methods** by the Word of God. The Bible teaches **separation** so we should practice it. The New Evangelical says that separation doesn’t work (*doesn’t win people to Jesus*) so just forget it. Those parts of the Bible probably aren’t too important anyway.

The Fundamentalist believes that all aspects of our lives and ministries should be in harmony with the Bible, especially consistent with the holiness of God. God honors faithfulness and rewards it. **Our** efforts (*achievements*) are “wood, hay, and stubble” and, no matter how huge the volume, will be “burnt up” in the fires of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

New Evangelicalism believes in compromise and allowing mixture. It is thought that it’s okay to tolerate unbiblical ideas and practices. If these things aren’t really from God, they reason, they’ll eventually be beaten in the competition— the theory of the survival of the fittest. The truth will always win out. What **wins** (= *is acceptable to most “Christians”*) then must be the truth. For example, if most Christians accept rock music as a legitimate way of praising God or presenting the Gospel, then it must be okay, so they think.

Mixture (*which by the way, God hates*) can lead to horrifying confusion. The messages of the famous evangelist Billy Graham from the crusade platform were usually acceptable. Most points of the Gospel were brought in— a Gospel which says that there is only ONE way of salvation. However, the way he invited unsaved religious leaders to help him in the crusades, the way “converts” were channeled back into churches teaching false doctrine, the way he visited religious leaders of “all faiths” and told the press how wonderful they were, and the way he used worldly entertainers to give their “testimonies” created an impression that the Gospel he preached really wasn’t any different than the beliefs of the unsaved. It came through that it’s not a “commitment to Christ” that’s important, it’s just the “commitment” that is. Just “keep the faith” (*faith in what?*)!

Roman Catholic leaders now welcome evangelists like Billy Graham and encourage their people to attend such crusades. They aren’t worried that folks will hear the **true** Gospel and stop trusting their church to save them. Even if they hear the Gospel, they will only get the message that they’re supposed to be more committed. The bishops and priests then instruct their people to become more dedicated to the Roman Catholic Church, particularly to the Mass and the Blessed Virgin Mother of God.

The mood of the New Evangelicalism is like a virus— it’s very catching. Human nature being what it is, we all want to be successful, we want the world to accept us, we don’t want controversy. New Evangelicalism tends to make worldliness (*which is very attractive to the flesh*) less evil, even to the point of making it acceptable. Sad to say, but even we Fundamentalists have been known to adopt the “end justifies the means” philosophy or have let down our standards under the pressure of temptation.

THE INHIBITED MIND

To be inhibited is to be restrained, restricted, held back or suppressed. An inhibited mind is not free to think but is slanted. Society thinks that the Fundamentalist is “narrow-minded” and has an inhibited mind because he believes the Bible is God’s Word.

Modern man, though, is inhibited in his thinking because he cannot accept absolutes. He has been taught to believe that truth is relative, that there is no such thing as absolute truth. He can only be dogmatic when claiming that the truth cannot be really known!

The Fundamentalist Christian believes that God has made His truth known by **revelation**— by giving us His written Word. The Christian can have a sense of security and confidence based on the Bible. There are things that he can be dogmatic about. His mind is clear!

The new-evangelical, influenced by the world’s way of thinking, is not free to accept God’s revelation with conviction. His mind is inhibited. He cannot be dogmatic. He tends to seek scientific confirmation or to check popular opinion and resists humble submission to Scripture. Quoting Bible references is just the beginning of debate rather than the satisfactory end.

The Apostle Peter responded to the religious leaders of his day, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). God places a premium on obedience. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Faithfulness is more important than apparent “success” (1 Cor. 4:2. See also 1 Cor. 3:13).

The New Testament gives clear instruction that believers are to have a pure, distinctive witness for the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:14-16). It also gives specific admonition in regard to dealing with teachers of false doctrine, those who are willfully disobedient to God’s Word, and/or those who lead believers to stray from God’s will.

- (Rom. 16:17) Now I urge you, brethren, **note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and **avoid them**.
- (2 Cor. 6:14) **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers**. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?
- (2 Cor. 6:17) Therefore “Come out from among them and **be separate**, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”
- (2 Thess. 3:6) But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly** and not according to the tradition which he received from us.
- (2 Thess. 3:14-15) And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, **note** that person and **do not keep company with him**, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.
- (1 Tim. 6:3-5) If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵ useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. **From such withdraw yourself**.
- (2 Tim. 3:2-5) For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And

from such people turn away!

●(Titus 3:10) **Reject** a divisive man after the first and second admonition.

●(2 John 10-11) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, **do not receive him** into your house **nor greet him;** ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

–*New King James Version* with emphasis added

The Scriptures warn, “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully” (Jeremiah 48:10). Therefore, it is frightening to contemplate the two-faced posture of New Evangelicalism. On the one hand assuring the conservatives and fundamentalists that the Old Fashioned Gospel is being preached, while on the other, patting the liberal and Roman Catholic on the back and saying, “You’re OK.”

Of deepest concern, we fear that far more souls have been deceived into trusting in a false christ, a false spirit and a false gospel (2 Corinthians 11:2-4) through Mr. Graham and other New Evangelicals than have been brought to the true and living God. It is also evident that “converts” have been referred back to be “nurtured” by liberals and Roman Catholics. Many may have been given a false sense of salvation which is based on an unscriptural “commitment to Christ.”

Unfortunately, many professing Christians may welcome the implied message of the “testimonies” of professionals, athletes, businessmen, and especially entertainers, namely, that faith in Christ solves all problems and enables one to enjoy the sinful pleasures of the world without guilt or without being harmed by them. Acceptance of such a message is an affront to a holy God and incurs His displeasure.

Our church leaders need to be ever alert to the dangers of New Evangelicalism in its influence on evangelists, Bible teachers, Christian literature, missionaries, and Christian schools. We also need to be watchful and keep in the Word of God, because the kind of philosophy and attitude that we’ve been talking about can creep in without being introduced by an organized system. Between our rebellious, sinful, Adamic nature and the deception of Satan, any of us can drift away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

To understand better what this is all about you really ought to read Pastor Carlton Helgerson’s booklet THE CHALLENGE OF A NEW RELIGION, available online at www.middletonbiblechurch.org

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

–*Jude 3 NKJV*

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

–*Col. 2:8 NKJV*

– *John C. Helgerson*

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