



The New Evangelicalism



by Dr. Charles Woodbridge

New Evangelicalism explained by Dr. Charles Woodbridge
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**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences
contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (*Romans 16:17*)**

The New Evangelicalism is a recent theological phenomenon. It has appeared on the horizon during the last 15-20 years. The father of it is Dr. Harold John Ockenga, formerly pastor of the Park Street Church in Boston who coined the expression “The New Evangelicalism.” The very title implies a thorough discontent with the old evangelicalism— evangelicalism of men like R. A. Torrey, Harry Ironside, William R. Newell, these great men of God.

We have to have a New Evangelicalism

Now what is this exactly? It is a spirit of compromise with unbelievers.

In the old days, there was no give and take. For example, in the theological struggles of the 1920s and the 1930s, there was no middle of the road position. You were either a modernist or you were a fundamentalist—period. There was no making common cause with the enemy. There was no spirit of toleration. You either believed the Bible or you didn’t. You either accepted the inerrancy, the infallibility, the finality of inscripturated revelation or you did not—one of the two.

A New Mood

But now, this new evangelicalism started as a shift in mood—a new mood toward the liberals, the unbelievers. The new test today, according to the new evangelicals, is whether or not we love these people, these unbelievers.

One reason I left the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in 1957 was that the newly inaugurated

president, Dr. Edward John Carnell, in his inaugural address, stated on a formal occasion, “We must systematically inculcate in the minds of our students the spirit of toleration toward those who, because of their cultural heritage, entertain the heretical position.” Now those are long words, but in simple English, they mean “Toleration toward heretics.”

Toleration. What does that mean? That means entering into dialogue with these people. Where do you find that in the Bible? Did you ever hear of the Apostle Paul entering into dialogue with the Galatian Judaizers? No! He rebuked them. Did you ever hear of the Apostle Paul entering into dialogue with the people against whom he wrote, the Gnostics, in the Epistle to the Colossians? Did you ever hear of the Apostle John, when he wrote against the Gnostics in his first epistle, entering into dialogue with the Gnostics? No, he rebuked them.

But the new mood of the new evangelicalism is a shift. The test, according to these people, is no longer doctrine; it is love. It is a pious form of sentimentalism. We must join forces with these people. The basic error behind Key ‘73, Campus Crusade, Youth for Christ, Young Life—all these theological aberrations of our day—the basic reason behind all of these is the entrance of the new evangelicalism. It’s a new mood.

In the old days, when I was newly ordained as a minister, for example, there was a knock-down, drag-out fight between the liberals and the modernists. Harry Emerson Fosdick was on one side. Did you ever read any of the writings of Dr. Fosdick? He openly

repudiated the blood atonement. He said officially, “I do not know of one minister any more who even holds to that.” And there really was a great debate. But now there is a new mood, and if you don’t go along with this mood, woe be unto you.

Part of this new mood is directed not only toward the left, but is also directed toward the right. It’s directed against men like the pastor of this church [*Pastor M. H. Reynolds Sr., Grace Fundamental Church*], and the speakers at this conference [*M. H. Reynolds Jr., Charles Woodbridge, Perry Rockwood and Mark Buch*]. It’s directed against us. Shame on us! The culture of the day has passed us by. If you don’t go along with this new mood, you are untutored, you are uncultured, you are uneducated. That’s a new mood.

Now please look at Romans 16:17 and see whether or not we are supposed to fool around with unbelievers in the promotion of the Gospel. Just take a look at it again. Romans 16:17 says, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and join up with them!” What kind of a version is that? Make common cause with them; invite them to your platform to pray; put yourself under their auspices; enter into dialogue with them! What does the apostle Paul, writing in the Spirit of God, declare? Affirmatively, positively, “avoid them”!

Now turn in your Bible to the epistle to Titus. Titus was bishop of Crete. Turn to chapter three, verse 10. If a man is a heretic, are we supposed to enter into dialogue with him? Titus 3:10 says, “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.” Reject! Reject! Reject! When Bishop Gerald F. Kennedy, bishop of the Methodist Church of Los Angeles, wrote a book in 1956 entitled *God’s Good News*, in that book he openly and flatly spurned the doctrine of the deity of Christ. So, then, what are we supposed to do? Reject! But now we have a new mood!

A New Method

This was unheard of in old days, but this new mood leads to a new method, or strategy, and if you fool around long enough with these modernists, if you play ball with them long enough, do you know what’s going to happen? Something is going to happen to you. If

you sleep beside a dog, chances are you’re going to get fleas. That’s right. It doesn’t work the other way around. If you put a good apple into a basket with rotten apples, the rotten apples don’t become good. Guess what happens? The good apples becomes rotten. There is a lot of theological rottenness around. Why? Because we have been sitting in the apple basket too long with these rotten apples. That’s right.

New strategy. First of all your mood changes until you have a very kindly attitude towards these people who are called in the Bible “the enemies of the cross of Christ.” Now, we enter into dialogue, so what happens? New strategy. Let’s join forces with them now. Let’s join forces with Bishop Kennedy. Who cares what Romans 16:17 says? Who cares what Titus 3:10 says? Well, who cares? Let’s join forces now with them. And I understand that when Carl Barth came over here to Chicago, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary went to Chicago to have a dialogue with him. Dialogue—the very word dialogue implies that he has something to contribute to me and I have something to contribute to him. Will you pardon a little facetiousness? Dialogue!—I don’t want to “die a log”; I want to live a tree! We should be like a tree, planted by the water. Where do you find from Genesis to Revelation, I challenge you, any place where it says that we are supposed to enter into dialogue with these unbelievers? Where do you find it? He that is an heretic among you after the first and second admonition, you’re supposed to admonish, reject.

J. Vernon McGee was on the committee of Billy Graham’s 1963 crusade right here in Los Angeles. Who was the honorary chairman of the committee? I just mentioned him— Bishop Gerald F. Kennedy. And McGee defended his membership on that committee. He defended it. I heard the tape of his defense before the students of Dallas Theological Seminary. And the students cheered. Do you know what his defense was? Something like this, “If you’re riding on a bus and you’re going somewhere, you don’t always ask who you’re fellow passenger is.” If you’ve been a theologian for years, you tremble when you hear that. The English have a good word for it, commonly called tripe. He that is an heretic among you, after the first and

second admonition, reject!

Ecumenical Evangelism

A new strategy. This is where your whole ecumenical evangelism comes in. It was bad enough 10 or 15 years ago, but now all of the sudden, it is full blown. We've been warning, warning, warning; I've been warning since I resigned from the faculty of Fuller Seminary. Since 1957, I've been warning, warning, warning; I wrote a book on it. This has been translated now into Japanese; people have asked to translate it into other languages. I have been warning, warning. And now, the whole thing is full blown, and they are calling it Key '73. We started fooling around with the small defectors. Now, we're fooling around with the whole thing. "Come on in, the water is fine! Who cares whether they're heretics or not?" Over against that, we have the Word of God. I want to emphasize one thing—the whole question is this: "What does the Bible say?" You've just read it. Romans 16:17, "Avoid them." Titus 3:10, "Reject them." After duly admonishing them, reject them.

Please turn to the Second Epistle of John—the apostle of love wrote this. Is it possible to be an apostle of love, and yet to write like this? The Second Epistle of John—don't stop at the gospel of John or you'll get confused—the second epistle of John, verse 9, states, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." Second John, verse 10 now, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine"—What doctrine? The doctrine of Christ—"Receive him not into your house neither bid him God speed." Now note verse 11: "For he that bideth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." If somebody denies the doctrine of Christ what are you suppose to do? Boycott him! "Receive him not into your house." If you haven't found it yet, it's in the New Testament. "Receive him not into your house." Why? If you do, you are a partaker of his what? His evil deeds!

Some of you have heard of Dr. Martin DeHaan. When he celebrated his 25th year on the radio, he telephoned me and he said, "Will you broadcast for me for a month?" And I said over the telephone, I said, "Martin, I don't want to embarrass you. I've been speaking against the New Evangelicalism, I've written

a book about it, and I don't want to do this unless you agree with my theological position." He said, "Send me your tape!" So I sent him my tape. He called back in a week and said, "Praise the Lord!" So I broadcast for him for a month during his 25th anniversary.

Well, Dr. DeHaan and I were at a Bible conference in Miami Beach. Two speakers. And after my session one morning, a very nice lady came up, you know, fancy lady wearing furs in Florida, you know. She said, "Dr. Woodbridge, I'd like to ask you a question."

I said, "What's the question?"

She said, "What do you think about the ecumenical evangelism?"

I said, "How do you know long words like that?"

She said, "Well, I mean the Graham crusades. What do you think?"

I said to her, "It's unimportant what I think. I'm just a man." I said, "The important thing is, what does the Bible say?" Then I said, "Lady, will you forgive me if I'm rather blunt with you?"

And she said, "What do you mean?" By that time there were 30 ladies around. This is an exciting subject!

I said, "If you'll forgive me, I very rarely discuss theology with ladies.

"What do you mean?" she said.

I said, "Because you kind ladies usually lead with your hearts rather than with your heads."

"I don't do that!" she replied.

By the way, since that day I have changed my opinion in this area. I now believe (this is a personal opinion that comes from observation) that when a Christian woman, really a believer, grasps Roman 16:17, Titus 3:10, the second epistle of John, and kindred passages, and holds to them, she is more tenacious than the average young pastor who is thinking about his salary. Having said that, I shall now continue.

I said, "Do you promise that you'll not backtrack but that you'll listen? Don't be like a rabbit and change courses if you want an answer, sit down!" So all thirty of them sat down.

“Open your Bible to the second epistle of John and read it.” So they were fooling around in John’s gospel. I said, “The second epistle of John! Take your time. The next service isn’t yet for 45 minutes. Take your time. Find it.” So, they found it. I said, “Now will you please read it?” She read it. I said, “Now where is that passage found?”

She said, “John.”

I said, “No, the second epistle of John.” I said, “What does it say about those who deny the doctrine of Christ?”

She said, “We ought not to have fellowship...”

“Who said that? John? Do you think he was writing in the spirit?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe it?”

“Yes.”

“Are you willing to act on it?”

“Yes.”

“All you ladies willing?”

“Yes.”

Then I had them. “1956, Bishop Gerald F. Kennedy of the Methodist Church of Los Angeles wrote a book

called *God’s Good News* in which he denied the doctrine of Christ. What should we do with him when he comes to Los Angeles? Should we have him on a committee?”

“No!”

I said, “Why not?”

“Why John says, ‘He that bideth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds’.”

“Do you believe it?”

“Yes!”

“When the Graham crusade came to Los Angeles, the honorary chairman was Gerald F. Kennedy.” I said, “I have nothing further to say, it’s been nice to see you, I’ll see you at the next meeting.”

But the whole thing started with this new mood of compromise toward unbelievers, and that thing has spread across this globe. Now, I’ll say this as I close. When Dr. Ockenga first started this thing, he said, “This movement (the **New Evangelicalism**) has its outreach. It has its association—the National Association of Evangelicals. It has its magazine—*Christianity Today*. It has its theological seminary—Fuller Theological Seminary. And it has its evangelist – Dr. Billy Graham.



Charles Jahleel Woodbridge (1902 – 1995) was an American Presbyterian missionary, minister, seminary professor, founding member of the National Association of Evangelicals, and author of *The New Evangelicalism*. Charles Woodbridge was born in Chinkiang, China on January 24, 1902, to Presbyterian missionaries Samuel Isett and Jeanie Wilson (Woodrow) Woodbridge, Senior. His father traced his ancestors to John Woodbridge, a Lollard preacher in 15th century England.