

The Declining State of Postmodern Evangelicalism

So "*What is an Evangelical?*" It's frankly one of those questions you can answer almost any way you want and defend your answer as articulately as you like, and most people are still going to tell you you've got it wrong. Because it seems these days everyone has his own personal idea of what constitutes an evangelical. Ask 100 evangelicals to define what they mean by the term and odds are you're probably going to get 100 different answers—some of them so *wildly* different as to be virtually contradictory. Evangelicals have tried hard to be all things to all men for at least two decades and have by and large achieved this accolade. But it encompasses a multitude of sins, because of the assorted brands of Christianity that are the evangelical movement. What now passes as acceptable in post modern Christendom, is morally wrong and many of its participants are abominable heretics.

Tony Campolo, who has renounced practically everything that's *distinctively* evangelical, insists on calling himself an evangelical. Lots of Roman Catholics, Joel Osteen, Ted Haggard, all call themselves evangelical. Lately even Mormons have begun arguing that they have a right to the label as well. None of them would agree on what the term means of course, but they all want to wear it, because it gives them an artificial connection with the rich heritage of Evangelical history. Now I call myself a Messianic Jew, but even that is becoming tainted with many messianic congregations leaning toward the heavy rabbinic side of Judaism, as appose to the Early Church doctrine of New Testament Holy Writ.

However, what we find about Evangelicalism, is it has disintegrated into a jumble of contradictory teaching. A couple of years ago, Frances Beckwith, who was President of the Evangelical Theological Society at the time, announced that he was converting (or de-converting) to Roman Catholicism. And this was one of his arguments: He had concluded that Evangelicalism lacked any compelling tradition. Looking at evangelicalism in the big picture of church history, he had decided that it was an anomaly, and a dangerous set of ideas to boot.

Now, *I'm* convinced that the Evangelical Movement went astray, not because they followed historic evangelical principles, but because they abandoned them. Frankly, contemporary Evangelicalism has no right to the label. For the most part, the Evangelical Movement is not evangelical at all, and it hasn't been since the 1950s.

Evangelical Protestantism emerged in Britain during the 1730s with the conversion of John Wesley who is often regarded as the beginning of the Evangelical Movement. Evangelicals like Wesley insisted on rigorous standards of personal conduct, frequent examination of conscience, the infallibility of the Bible, detailed Bible study and lay activity. Unwelcome in Church of England pulpits, he was forced to preach out of doors in town and village squares and to eventually develop an organisation of his own. As well as the Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Methodists, Evangelicals came from older bodies of none conformism such as the Congregationalists and Baptists .

At the end of the 18th century Evangelicalism had even spread to the Church of England, where Charles Simeon at the University of Cambridge began encouraging the training of Evangelical clergymen. Simeon argued that there was a great need to raise moral enthusiasm and ethical standards among the clergy.

The Clapham set whose group included such people as William Wilberforce and Granville Sharpe was another centre of the Evangelical Movement in the Anglican Church. Their primary interest was in the moral improvement of the working classes. This involved some Evangelicals such as Lord Ashley and Michael Sadler becoming involved in the campaign against child labour. Evangelicals also played an important role in the Anti-Slavery Movement and Temperance Society.

Wealthy individuals such as Angela Burdett-Coutts were inspired by the Evangelical Movement to give away their money to good causes.

1848 saw the emergence of the Christian Socialist Movement, Preachers such as Frederick Denison Morris and Thomas Hughes, began to influence many that Jesus Christ was the world's first socialist. One of those who became convinced of this was James Kier Hardie, a trade union leader and lay preacher for the Evangelical Union.

Later, Hardie was to become the founder of the Labour Party, and would turn in his grave if he could see what they now have become.(1)

Clearly sharing the message of the Gospel is as important now as it ever was through all strands of society, but that importance is all about **where, when, and how**. Latterly, this modern Evangelicalism, whether guilt driven, in order to fulfill scripture as they understand it, or simply because they feel it is their duty, have a tendency to push the gospel down peoples throats which has the opposite effect of conversion. They also in many cases have a tendency toward triumphalistic and emotional pursuits of signs and wonders, which is strangely encroached in other quarters by rabid cessationism and replacement theology. Many churches today display both ends of this spectrum in their effort to win or convince souls.

Now many would take their premise from Mark 16:15-16 which says;

“ And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Now as I see this there is a grave error in using this text alone as a general mandate for your actions. First of all, because here Yeshua (Jesus) is speaking to the eleven apostles alone, as it was their job to make sure the Gospel went out to the indigenous people groups, and this was not a general command to the whole church which is what it has become. This is precisely why the tongues of fire were seen on their heads alone and nobody else since. So we see people having recently been regenerated trying to preach the gospel before they have learnt to live it out in their lives. It was Jesus who also said in Matthew 7:20;

“Therefore by their fruits you will know them”

The Apostle Paul also says in 1Tim 3:6-10

“Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.” Now this is for the ministry of a bishop and a deacon, why should we take a lesser stance for anyone else who shares the Gospel,

since they are potential spiritual parents and their conduct afterwards will be on display as a representative of the Kingdom of God.

What we should do is live in this world with a life that expresses so much Holiness, that people want to know why and how you got it. Then you give an answer for the hope that is within you, encouraging them to seek the Lord and to forsake their sinful lives.

Scripture teaches us to [“always give an answer for the hope that is within you ,with meekness and fear” \(1Peter 3:15\)](#) The meekness and fear is about not bringing shame on the gospel. Instead we find that people from all quarters are preaching and brow beating their message down peoples throats. The truth is that this error and many others have turned many people in general, away from the message of the gospel and as far away from church as they can get. And as a result many searching souls have been badly hurt dealing with novices. In fact many will say that this is the reason they want nothing to do with religion, because of the hypocrisy, and we are all branded because of such liberal attitudes.

In 1957 Billy Graham conducted his first ecumenical crusade, he was immediately taken to task by Fundamentalists. John R. Rice the editor of "Sword of the Lord" of which Graham was a co-operating member of the board, wrote to Graham asking him if he could still sign the doctrinal statement of "...verbal inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ , His blood atonement , salvation by faith... opposing modernism, worldliness, and formalism. Graham replied that he could not, and resigned. The impact of "mass evangelism" was to bring people together who otherwise would not have had any doctrinal unity. Doctrine slowly became a non issue as the impact of "pragmatism" in overriding Biblical principles for the sake of unity cannot be understated.

Pragmatism essentially derives conclusions based on results, no matter how subjective the results are. Mass evangelism produced quick and deceptively convincing results. Yet the long term fruit of such has proved nothing short of devastating to the Western Church. Graham further distanced himself from true Evangelicalism with his remarks about Charismaticism, a movement not considered "Evangelical" at the time. In Christianity Today he stated that ["By and large, it \[Charismaticism\] has been a positive force in the lives of many people"](#). So too his remarks concerning Roman Catholicism and the Pope, further distanced him from Evangelicalism. In 1979 Graham called The Neo-Evangelical Movement with Pope John Paul II ["the moral leader of the world"](#), (Religious News Service, Sept. 27, 1979). In an article about the Pope in 1980, Graham said: ["Pope John Paul II has emerged as the greatest religious leader of the modern world, and one of the greatest moral and spiritual leaders of the century"](#), (Saturday Evening Post , Jan./Feb. 1980).(2) Graham is a product of his era in that he along with many others, teaches people to jump into Jesus and everything will be alright. Whilst the Bible teaches that we need to repent and forsake our old life, and embrace the truths of the gospel, which means living a holy life that backs up your words.

It was Charles Parham who first formulated the definition of Pentecostalism by linking tongues with the Holy Spirit Baptism. "Glossolalia" (glosso-tongue/ lalia-speak) became the proof or evidence of a post conversion experience. Parham actually had three main teachings which included the above. Two of these teachings were rejected: these were that Spirit filled believers are "sealed" as the bride of Christ, and that the "glossolalia" would be the tool for a world endtime revival. However, the teaching of "the evidence of tongues" for a subsequent Baptism with the Spirit remained as the distinctive teaching that defined and separated the Pentecostal Movement from historical Christianity.

Parham was documented as having mental, emotional, psychological and sociological disorders. In 1907 he was arrested for homosexual acts with a 22 year old man in San Antonio, Texas. From then unto his death in 1929 he was considered by the movement as a "fallen prophet".

However, he continued his religious endeavors up to the end, including raising funds for a trip to the Holy Land to search for the Ark of the Covenant. This trip never materialized as Parham claimed to have been "mugged" in New York and had all his money "stolen". Many writers and leaders have

sought to reject Parham as the founder. But it was Parham who founded the first Pentecostal magazine called "Apostolic Faith", he issued the first

Pentecostal minister credentials, and it was he who first formulated the new Pentecostal doctrine of a subsequent Baptism With the Spirit. Parham was a Bible College teacher at Topeka, Kansas, USA and mentor of a black man called William Seymour who founded the Azusa St. church some years later to which various Pentecostal affiliations trace their roots.

Evangelicals And The Jewish People

The following press release is on the Internet from The World Evangelical Movement
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/article.htm?id=1732>

It is refreshing to see American evangelicals are at last lining up alongside the Jewish believers, but this is not so in the UK. Many churches and many denominations are very much into replacement theology, this is also true of the Bible Colleges. Now I can understand their position in some ways, as many so called Messianic Jews are totally locked into rabbinical teachings which as I see it is not Biblical, not in the New Testament anyway.

The biggest battle we all have is to learn to love each other, because Jesus did not come to bring Jewishness, He came to bring the way to eternal life. If He had wanted denominations He may have kept the twelve tribes. However, He grafted the Gentiles into Israel (not the other way around) so Jewish believers and Gentiles could be one in Christ.

In Manchester alone we have had some 609 anti-semitic incidents on the Jewish Community in 2009, which is the worst it has ever been. I suspect this is mainly because of what is happening in Israel. But it is at times like these we need each other for support if there is one thing Jewish people don't need it's more friction from the churches.

Israeli journalist Gershon Gorenberg, who has studied Evangelical views of Israel for years, advocates some caution toward this support: "[Accepting the embrace of conservative evangelicals poses problems of principle for Jews and Israel, in return for an illusory short-term payoff. Jews would do better to follow the Hebrew maxim 'Respect him and suspect him,' maintaining a polite distance and publicly delineating their differences from the Christian right, even while at times supporting the same policy steps.](#)"

Gorenberg also disputes the findings of the Tarrance poll:

[The Christian right's view of Israel derives largely from a double-edged theological position: Following a classic anti-Jewish stance, it regards the Jewish people as spiritually blind for rejecting Jesus. Yet it says that divine promises to Jews - to bless those who bless them, to return them to their land - remain intact. Indeed, it regards Israel's existence as proof that biblical prophecies are coming true - heralding an apocalypse in which Jews will either die or accept Jesus.](#)

He dismisses the arguments of Jews who say Israel's current needs warrant setting aside concerns about the end-times beliefs.

Although Gorenberg's view is shared by many American Jews, Israeli politicians have adopted the pragmatic approach being taken by so many communal leaders in the United States. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has called Evangelicals some of Israel's best friends, and is only the latest in a series of premiers and other top politicians to embrace the community.

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1. 'Fields White unto Harvest' by James Goff
2. T A Ministries Australia