

Why I Am an Evangelical
March 15, 2015

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is important to know who you are. It is important to know what you believe. Otherwise you can easily be led astray from the truth. We are warned of this all through the Bible. New Christians or young Christians are especially susceptible to this. I do not mean young in age, but immature in knowledge and experience.

As a follower of Jesus, you need to be confident in basic Christian teaching and terms. This morning's sermon is about one of those terms and the teaching it is based on.

Several weeks ago, I was in conversation with someone of our church who used the E word in a negative way. **The E word is evangelical.** The person's negative use of the word surprised me, and led to this morning's sermon. I asked what the term meant to the person who used it. The person was thinking of TV preachers. I admit that many TV preachers don't always come off very well. Some appear to be hateful towards sinners. Others just seem to be after money. Many appear arrogant and self-confident. They appear too polished, too canned.

Non-Christians often have that impression also. That is one reason the term evangelical is often used in a negative way in the media. There evangelicals are all lumped together as being "thoughtless, heartless, and hopelessly conservative", to quote one writer.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alister-chapman/why-i-am-still-an-evangel_b_2567694.html

I understand that perception. Some churches that identify themselves as evangelical have pushed a very conservative and public stance on social and political issues. And many have done so in a harsh way.

But while there are some evangelicals who appear that way, there are plenty of evangelicals who are not at all like that. In fact, many who are evangelical by belief do not even use the word to describe themselves.

I want to read a quote from an article from Religion News Service: "But most evangelicals do not identify as "evangelical." Evangelicals are much more likely to say that they are "born-again" or "Bible-believing" Christians. In a Baylor religion survey, 30 percent of Americans attended an evangelical church. In the same survey, only 14 percent of Americans said that "evangelical" was an identity that fit them very well, compared to 30 percent who said they were "born-again."

<http://tobingrant.religionnews.com/2014/05/14/three-common-religious-labels-normal-people-dont-understand-mainline-protestant-evangelicals/#sthash.gulh6UwE.dpuf>

As this Baylor study shows, many evangelicals do not know what the term means. And they may use it like the media does, in a negative way. That's what the person I was speaking to thought of the term.

Most of you are probably evangelicals, even if you have never thought of yourself as such. If you believe in the authority of the Bible, in individual conversion, and the need to share Jesus with unbelievers, then you are likely an evangelical.

Because of the negative use of the word in American culture today, you might think I would shy away from the term. Yet I do not. I still identify myself as an evangelical. But I do so with

explanation. I do so with a hope of informing you of what that term means to me. I do so in the hope that you will realize you may be an evangelical also, even if you never use the term to describe yourself. I admit I don't use it often, which led to the conversation with one of our members.

So here goes. The word evangelical comes from the Greek language of the New Testament. There are three similar words in the Greek New Testament. Two of them are derived from the first one.

The first word, the basic word, is *euangelion*. It means "a good message" or "good news". It is not a religious word. It could mean any good message.

This is a compound word. We have those in English too, like parkway, one word made of two words. But this word is not a compound word in English. So it is two words in English.

When used to mean the Christian salvation message it often has the direct article and is translated "the good news". This word appears 76 times in New Testament.

Matthew 24:14 (HCSB) This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations.

Some of you might be thinking that there is a "u" after the first "e", so how did that become a "v" sound? I don't know. It is the same kind of thing that happened with the "y" sound in Hebrew. The "y" sound became a "j" in English. The Hebrews pronounced Joshua as Yeshua. I have not studied the change in sounds much. But the "u" became a "v" for us. So it is pronounced *evangelion*.

The second word is *euangelizō*, pronounced e-van-gel-ee-d-zoh. It means literally, "to announce good news". English translations include announce good news, proclaim good news, and preach good news. It translates as three separate words in English. But it is one Greek word. It is from this word that we derive the terms evangelical and evangelism. Evangelism is the sharing of good news. We use it to mean a specific good news, the good news of salvation through Jesus.

This word appears 54 times in the New Testament. For example, look at Luke 4:18.

Luke 4:18 (NIV) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

The third word is *euangelistēs*. It is translated as "an announcer of good news". From it we get our word evangelist. It appears three times in the New Testament.

Acts 21:8 (NIV) Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.

(Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5)

These three words give us our English words evangelism, evangelist, and evangelical. I am an evangelical. I am an evangelical because I believe what the Bible says. As I go through this you may agree with what the following verses teach and decide that you too are an evangelical.

I am an evangelical...

... because all people are sinners.

Romans 3:23 (NIV) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

This is a basic fact about every person who has ever lived on this planet, except for Jesus. We'll come back to Jesus in a moment. The rest of us are all sinners. The rest of us are guilty of sin. We are guilty of living in rebellion to the glory of God. In this use, we might define the glory of God as His importance. God is central to this planet because He created it. He made the planet. He made us. He did so for His own reasons. He has a purpose for our lives. Yet we live, most of the time, for our own purposes. Nearly every decision we make every day, is made out of our purposes and not God's purposes. We make decisions everyday about us without giving God a say. This is our chief sin, and our most serious sin. This is worse than any sin we commit against each other.

I am an evangelical because all people are sinners. More than that, I am an evangelical...

... because judgment on sin is coming.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

There is a day sometime in the future when every one of us will stand before Holy God and give an accounting of our unholy lives. Everything will come out in the open. Every word, thought and deed will come out. Everything that others saw, but misinterpreted, will come out. Everything we did that we thought no one saw, will come out. Nothing about us, good or bad, will be left undisclosed. It will all be plain and written there between us and God. No excuse will work. No fault on others will be laid. We will answer for ourselves.

And each of us will be found wanting. None of us, even the best of us, will be found to be all that good. We will be found guilty of much sin, over a lifetime. We will all stand guilty before God our maker. That's the bad news.

But I am also an evangelical... **because forgiveness is possible.** This is good news.

Acts 13:38 (NIV) "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

While all of us are sinners and will be found before God to be guilty of sin, that may not be the end of your story. There is, today, right now, forgiveness of sin available. Jesus accomplished righteousness. That is, Jesus lived a perfect life with God, and for God. Then Jesus voluntarily gave up His life, according to God's purpose, to take the penalty for our sin upon Himself. This forms the basis for forgiveness. The plan is an exchange. Jesus takes our sin upon Himself. We lose our sin and gain His righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT) For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

I believe this to be true. By faith in Jesus, God put my sin on Him and His righteousness on me. In His righteousness I am forgiven of my sins. I am also an evangelical...

... **because there is only one path to forgiveness.**

Acts 4:12 (NLT) There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”

Jesus is the only acceptable sacrifice for sins. No one else has lived good enough to die in my place. It would take a perfect person. Jesus was the only perfect person. Only by faith in Jesus is forgiveness possible.

Put your faith in Jesus alone, not Jesus and your goodness, not Jesus and going to church on Sunday, not Jesus and prayer, not Jesus and good deeds, not Jesus and loving people, but only and completely in Jesus alone.

I believe in this one way of forgiveness. That is why I am an evangelical. And the last reason I am an evangelical is...

... **because people need to hear (read) the Good News in order to believe and put their faith in Jesus.**

Romans 10:13-14 (NLT) For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?

God's plan is for the church, the followers of Jesus Christ, to work with God, in getting out the message of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. For that reason missions, as I said last week, is important to us. Evangelicals are about missions. If God has laid the mission of missions, the importance of missions, on your heart you too are an evangelical.

God is working behind the events of human history to get out the good news of Jesus to everyone on the planet. He is using followers of Jesus to do so. I am a living part of that effort. So are many others, even if they don't identify themselves as evangelicals.

As we share THE good news of Jesus, God convicts people of their need for Him. Perhaps as I have shared these verses with you this morning, God has convicted you of your sin, of your need for a Savior. Perhaps God has spoken to your heart and mind this morning and told you that Jesus is true and your only answer for the forgiveness you need.

If so, I urge you to put your faith in Him today. Believing in Jesus is a choice. Just as you believe other things, you look at the evidence and make a choice to believe. Today, take God at His word and believe on the Savior He sent you.