



Faith Bible Church

Vineland New Jersey

Sunday, June 1, 2008
AM Sermon
Pastor Paul Barreca

Why I am No Longer an Evangelical

Note carefully the indefinite article. This sermon will examine Evangelical the noun. I am not speaking about being evangelical. In that sense, the word evangelical is an adjective describing ones attitude toward sharing the gospel. I am not repudiating my Christian faith, but rather the identification associated with a particular group identified in our American culture as "Evangelical Christians."

I once identified myself as an Evangelical Christian. However, the meaning of words change over time and through usage. The word "Fundamentalist" was once a positive term used to identify Bible believing Christians who held to the fundamentals of the faith and rejected the liberalizing trends occurring in main line denominations. R.A Torrey wrote a powerful series of books published in 1917 called "The Fundamentals." His books encouraged many to stay true to the Word of God and led to opening of independent Bible churches and new Bible colleges and seminaries. However, by the 1970's, the term "Fundamentalist" became associated with a more rigid and legalistic brand of Christians. Vitriolic name calling, accusations of being "too liberal," debates over clothing and hair styles, led some Christians to shy away from being identified as a Fundamentalist. The new more appealing term was to be identified as an Evangelical.

Now, 30 years after my predecessors abandoned the "Fundamentalist" moniker, I am suggesting we abandon the Evangelical brand. The reasoning for this lies in the false message taught by the most visibly identified leaders of the current movement known as Evangelical Christians. Today, the term "Evangelical" is often associated with spiritual leaders who reject the truth of the Bible.

There is great confusion in America today concerning what it means to be a Christian. According to a 2007 survey conducted by the Barna Research Group, 42% of Americans claim to be born again. This is based upon their answers to two questions: 1) "have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?" and, 2) "when I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior." Individuals who answered "yes" to the first question and select this statement as their belief about their own salvation are then categorized as "born again."

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8>

I seriously doubt that 42% of the population possess a genuine relationship with Christ through faith. Simply examine the wickedness in our society and the relatively few number of people who live in any accordance with the Word of God (1 John 2:3-6).

Perhaps more accurate is Barna's question identifying whether or not a person could be considered an Evangelical Christian. The 2007 survey found 8% of population that could be identified as "Evangelical." These individuals met the "born again" criteria, plus seven additional questions: 1) their faith is very important in their life today; 2) believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; 3) believing that Satan exists; 4) believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; 5) believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; 6)



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asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; 7) God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=17>

It is not the people who identify themselves as Evangelicals that concerns me. It is the leaders who claim to represent Christ, yet teach another gospel. In Paul's letter to the church of Galatia we read, "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:9, NIV).

Today, many key leaders who identify themselves as "EVANGELICAL" are teaching a false Christian message.

These changes have been happening over the past 25 years, beginning with Bill Hybels "seeker" movement.

Many of the theological problems today were born out of good intentions.

During the past 25 years, leaders in the Evangelical movement emphasize methods over doctrine.

At its core, this is a **Theological** issue.

We are seeing a replay of the liberalizing trends that took place in the main line denominations almost 100 years ago. Then, church leaders sought **academic acceptance** in the face of their peers in colleges and universities and in print through books and scholarly journals. Church leaders could not stand up to the critics who undermined the authority of Scriptures and the miracles of the Bible. Little by little, leaders sought academic relevance and accommodated their theology to satisfy the objections and insults of the academic world. Over several decades, denominations that once were solidly biblical rejected the teachings of the virgin birth, miracles of Christ, and the inspiration of Scripture. Missions and evangelism were replaced with a social gospel, and a new generation of church goers were raised hearing sermons devoid of Biblical truth.

Today, the evangelical church is going through the same cycle as the denominations did 80 years ago. Once again, church leaders are embarrassed before their peers. This time it is not **academic acceptance** they seek, but rather **cultural acceptance**. Spiritual leaders today are hounded by post-moderns because the Christian message proclaims certainty in a world of moral relativism. Some leaders are embarrassed to teach doctrines that are culturally offensive to post-moderns. The doctrines of sin, hell and redemption through Christ are particularly offensive to post-modern thinkers. At first, these doctrines remained untaught by teachers embarrassed before their post-modern peers. Now they are openly rejected as leaders are more influenced by post-modern thinking than biblical exegesis. Coming full circle, we have returned to an emphasis on the social gospel. Church leaders rush to gain cultural relevance and to appear sensitive as they promote the hot issues of the day such as global warming, environmentalism, health care, etc.

When we are NOT REACHING people with the gospel, we cannot bear the thought of our own failure, so we begin to WATER DOWN what the Bible teaches about HELL, SALVATION, and the NEED for FAITH in CHRIST ALONE.



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What is happening to the church today?

First of all, **we've stopped talking about the LOST**

25 years ago, the "unsaved" became the "unchurched." This was the paradigm that propelled Willow Creek Church led by Pastor Bill Hybels.

Many do not see people as lost.

During a recent interview with Robert Schuler, Billy Graham stated that anyone can get to God regardless of their religion. This is shocking from someone who preached the gospel clearly for many years. (Christian J. Pinto, "Megiddo," Adullam Films).

In 1 John 5:1-5, we read "everyone born of God overcomes the world. . . . Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." In contrast to what many evangelical teachers say under the pressure to be more graceful in a society ruled by tolerance and non-judgment, the Bible declares plainly that only through Jesus can one claim to be the child of God. Further, Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." In John's gospel we read, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18, NIV). "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36, NIV).

Well intentioned leaders like Billy Graham are contributing to a growing ecumenical movement that will come into full bloom during the tribulation period under the leadership of the false prophet. The fact that this movement is obvious to us today is one strong indication that the stage is set for the rapture of the church and the brief but devastating reign of the anti-Christ and the false prophet (Matt 24:4-5, 11; 2 Thess 2:3-12; Rev 13:11-18).

There exists today an attitude of tolerance that regardless of your beliefs, behavior or thoughts about God, sincerity and human kindness will gain God's favor and the right to earthly and eternal blessings. As God's people we reject this false belief because it holds people in ignorance and condemns them to eternal separation from God.

The next major departure among Evangelical leaders is that **we've stopped talking about hell.**

Emergent church leader Brian McLaren summarizes what many like him believe: "The language of hell, in my view, like the language of biblical prophecy in general, is not intended to provide literal or detailed fortune-telling or prognostication about the hereafter, nor is it intended to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but rather it is intended to motivate us in the here and now to realize our ultimate accountability to a God of mercy and justice and in that light **to rethink everything** and to seek first the kingdom and justice of God." (Brian McLaren, "The Last Word," 188).

Contrary to McLaren's viewpoint, the Word of God has been given to us so that we might have the "mind of Christ." (Romans 8:9). God fully intends for us to understand spiritual truth. McLaren encourages us



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to "rethink everything." This suggestion is not new. The Colossian church was told that their faith in Christ was insufficient to satisfy their spiritual need. Paul countered this idea when he wrote. "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3, NIV). We don't have to rethink everything. We simply have to gain the Lord's instruction through His Word. "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 John 2:27, NIV).

There exists today a cultural offense toward anyone who teaches an authoritative message. We must recognize this false and evil philosophy and proclaim the message of the Gospel as "men sent from God." "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Corinthians 2:17, NIV).

A third theological compromise for Evangelicals is that they **we've stopped believing in the Bible**. Tony Jones of the Emergent Church Movement made a shocking and disturbing public comment when he said, "The Bible is an f-----ing scary book." (Ken Silva, www.aprising.org/archives/2007/03/tony_jones_of_t.html). This speaker is not a fringe personality. He has repeatedly spoken at Wheaton College.

Even more popular than Tony Jones is Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill church. Many churches follow Bell's model of ministry. He is regarded by many as the most influential Emergent pastor. He wrote, "The Bible itself is a book that constantly must be wrestled with and re-interpreted. Scripture alone will not answer all of our questions" (Rob Bell in an interview in which he spoke about his book, "Velvet Elvis, Repainting the Christian Faith," (http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story_17301_2.html)).

The interviewer continues, "Bell also shakes up traditional evangelical beliefs. While calling Christ's way 'the best possible way to live,' Bell writes that Jesus did not claim one religion is better than another when he said he was "the way, the truth and the life." Rather, he writes, "his way is the way to the depth of reality." As a follower of Jesus, Bell says he is free to claim the truth "wherever he finds it." "One of the lies is that truth only resides in this particular community or that particular thought system," Bell says. "I affirm the truth the truth anywhere in any religious system, in any world view. If it's true, it belongs to God." (Charles Honey, www.beliefnet.com/story/173_17301_1.html)

This dim view of the plain meaning of Scripture is based in post-modern philosophy that holds that truth is something uncertain, always changing and open to interpretation. The most upsetting thing one can do to a post-modern is to claim that something is true. However, the meaning of the Bible is clear. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-15 we are told that the rulers of this world do not understand the things of God. "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, **that we may understand what God has freely given us.** . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment" (1 Corinthians 2:12-15, NIV). "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";" (1 Corinthians 3:19, NIV). Teachers like Bell might have started with a solid Biblical background and a desire to reach people with the gospel. But somewhere in their quest to relate to the post-modern mind they became so thoroughly post-modern



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that their message is no longer the message of the gospel. Without realizing it, they become more post-modern than biblical, to the point of no longer clearly presenting the claims of salvation.

There exists an assault against believing and proclaiming the difficult truths of the Bible. We must affirm our belief in the Scriptures in their literal and plain sense.

Another departure seen in Evangelicalism today is that **we have moved from sharing the Gospel to improving people's lives.** Joel Osteen leads the largest church in America. His books and television program have great impact on millions. His weekly invitation sounds like the gospel, but it is incomplete because he does not speak of sin, repentance, hell or the absolute necessity of the cross. In a recent message, Osteen preached that "Jesus died to give you freedom, freedom from bad habits and addictions, freedom from worry, freedom from discouragement and depression, freedom from poverty and lack, freedom from low self esteem. He didn't create you to be average, to barely get by. We've got to get the right vision, to walk in divine health, to have good relationships, to have plenty to pay your bills."

This is not the gospel. Recently, a missionary in Italy was thrilled to see his first Italian convert after four years of ministry in one small town. After this young man trusted Christ, he was thrown out by his father for "wasting his life." If he had been listening to Osteen's gospel, he would have been disillusioned with the results of his conversion. His experience is exactly what Jesus warned of when He said, "For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matthew 10:35, NIV). The voluminous testimony of Scripture repudiates every aspect of Osteen's message. "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (1 Timothy 6:8). "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13, NIV). "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10, NIV).

At a recent youth ministry conference at Willow Creek, Brian McLaren said, "we're in a period of profound shift in our world today, and what has been familiar to us and our churches is in some ways shaking and crumbling and being reconfigured. Youth ministry in the postmodern world must stop pointing out to teens the faults of non-Christian religions, because postmodern people do not view critiques positively. The kids walk out thinking, 'man, I don't want to be a Christian because Christians are always attacking everybody else.' So you end up giving the opposite message you intended to give because they're living in a world where to be critical seems like it's dangerous because they're worried that people are going to kill each other and blow each other up. We've got to realize the storm is occurring and the landscape is changing."

(David Roach, SBC.net posted on April 18, 2008).

We must recognize that just as there is truth, there is also error. Truth will become the casualty of well intentioned theological pacifism. I encourage you to recognize the philosophy promoted by this kind of false teaching and reject it! Embrace certainty! Embrace the Word of God! Embrace truth! Embrace Salvation! Embrace Grace!

MacLaren writes about a "scene change." He is right, but the coming scene change is the Rapture of the church, and many who follow the false teaching of today's so called Evangelical leaders will be greatly



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disillusioned when they find themselves participants in God's judgment and blinded by the deception of the anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

The illustrations above are just some of the false teachings of many who are recognized as leaders of the Evangelical movement. Perhaps you know why I no longer will call myself an Evangelical. If you must have a category to place me in, you can call me a born again, blood bought, spirit washed, water baptized, Bible believing, soul winning, doctrine preaching, disciple making, sanctified, separated, waitin' for the rapture and praying' for grandchildren child of God through faith in suffering, death and resurrection of the sinless, perfect son of God who died for me!

Consider the warning of this passage as you discern the teaching of our day: "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you" (1 Timothy 6:20-21, NIV).

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