

Evangelicals: What is its Future?

1. What defines the word “evangelical?”

That is a lot more difficult than it used to be. The word has become quite elastic. The safest and most sound way to define the word is to allow Scripture to set the parameters. 1 Cor. 15: 3-6 is a good place to start. Here the evangel or good news is defined in terms of the person and work of Jesus Christ accomplished by His death on the cross and His resurrection. From this core definition, Scripture incorporates both an objective and subjective aspect. Who Jesus is and what Jesus did is the objective reality. Our appropriation of His person and work is the subjective component. Both elements must be present for a completely biblical understanding of the gospel.

2. Are there boundaries for evangelical doctrine? If so, who defines what they are? How are they enforced?

I do believe there are boundaries for evangelical doctrine. Jude speaks of our contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. However, given our ecclesiology, these boundaries can only be defined by consensus, our perhaps better stated, by confession. Hence, there can be no unanimous consensus on every detail of doctrine, though there ought to be broad and basic agreement among all those who affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the normativeness of Scripture for establishing doctrine.

3. Where is the evangelical movement headed in the future?

The future of evangelicalism is uncertain. In fact, the foundations appear somewhat shaky given recent trends within the greater evangelical community.

4. What are some dangers on the horizon for evangelical theology?

I believe the most immediate danger is the doctrine of God. I have in mind particularly the new kid on the block known as Open Theism. Persons in this camp are attempting to redefine God in a way that, heretofore, was never conceived within orthodox/evangelical Christianity. That God would be understood as not knowing all things past, present and future, actual and potential, was inconceivable for the great theologians of the Christian tradition. A redefining of God of necessity will require a redefining of other major doctrines as well. It is my own conviction that those who affirm an open view of God have in actuality ceased to be evangelicals, no matter how loudly they may protest. I am absolutely convinced that to walk down this road is to travel a course that will result in a dead end theologically and evangelistically. Ultimately, the gospel itself will be redefined. As is often the case, our greatest threat is not from without but from within.