

Romans 1:16-17
"I Am Not Ashamed!"
WRCoB 5.07.23

I begin with an illustration.

It is from an op/ed by David Brooks of the New York Times.

It was published February 4th, 2022.

Think of your 12 closest friends. These are people you vacation with, talk about your problems with, do life with in the most intimate and meaningful ways.

Now imagine if six of these people suddenly took a political or public position you find utterly vile. Now imagine learning that those six people think that your position is utterly vile.

You would suddenly realize that the people you thought you knew best and cared for most has actually been total strangers all along. You would feel disoriented, disturbed, unmoored. Your life would change.

Brooks says that this is what happened
Over the past six (now seven) years
To millions of American Christians

Especially among evangelicals.

Brooks writes that there were three issues
That profoundly divided the church.

The politics of the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections

Sex abuse scandals within the evangelical churches

And attitudes concerning race relations

Especially after the killing of George Floyd.

It has not only caused church division

But people are just plain leaving the church.

Russell Moore writes

We now see young evangelicals walking away from evangelicalism not because they do not believe what the church teaches, but because they believe the church itself does not believe what the church teaches.

This morning we take a look at this word “Evangelical”.

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Years ago, someone asked me

What kind of church was the Church of the Brethren.

A friend and fellow church member and I were together

And she answered first

“We’re a mainline Protestant congregation.”

I said I thought we were, “evangelical Anabaptists.”

Evangelical

Meaning we believe in the basic doctrines of the faith

And Anabaptist . . . meaning we believe in the

Peace-loving, adult-baptizing, feet-washing

Principles of the Church of the Brethren.

She didn't take kindly to the word evangelical
Thought it sounded too conservative.

The word, evangelical, comes from the Greek word

Euangelion: meaning "gospel" or "good news"

The gospel, of course, is the good news of Jesus Christ.

And this is not just in his atoning death on the cross
But all of what God did in Jesus.

The incarnation, his life and ministry
His death as an atonement for sin
The power of his resurrection
And his continued presence in the HS.

That all of who Jesus is
What he said, what he taught,
His healings and deeds
His death and resurrection
The sending of his Holy Spirit

All are acts of a Redeeming God.

To emphasize solely his death
Diminishes the other aspects of Jesus
That God would not want diminished!

The gospel of Jesus Christ
The good news of Jesus
The euangelion of Christ is all of who Jesus is
And what God has done through him.

In that sense, I am not ashamed to call myself
An evangelical Anabaptist Christian.

But society has robbed
The word evangelical of its original meaning.

It is now a political label for conservative white folk.

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Tim Dalrymple president of Christianity Today writes

As an evangelical, I've found the last five years to be shocking, disorienting, and deeply disheartening.

One of the most surprising elements is that I've realized that the people who I used to stand shoulder to shoulder with on almost every issue, I now realize that we are separated by a yawning chasm of mutual incomprehension.

Politics has replaced religion in the United States.

Politics has divided the church.

Where once Christians were on fire for the Lord
They are now on fire for their political candidate.

CNN and Fox has replaced Sunday morning worship.

5 hours with Tucker Carlson per week
Has replaced the 20 minute sermon.

We have traded religion for politics.

But let's be clear, this is mostly a US phenomenon.

The international church is thriving
Far outgrowing the stateside churches.

Ethnic congregations here are also thriving.

Just go to the intersection of Anoka and Fordson on Sunday

The St Mary's Coptic Church
Is filled with young families and children.

Rev Freda and I also witnessed this
In the multi-cultural conference, we attended.

The future of the US church
Will be more global
With immigrants bringing their faith with them.

And these global churches will bring with them
An evangelical Christianity.

Evangelical in the biblical sense of the word.

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In today's Scripture Lesson
The Apostle Paul writes to the Roman Christians.

These Christians are Jewish and Gentile in background.

As these Christians shared the "gospel"
With Roman non-believers
They were met with ridicule and derision.

The Romans knew this word "gospel" or "euangelion"

They knew the word because it was used in context
Celebrating the birth day of Caesar Augusta.

It read

Caesar Augusta, the beginning of good tidings (euangelion)

To Roman non-believers, Augustus was a “savior”
Who brought the “gospel” to the world.

And so, to counter the ridicule they were receiving
Comparing the “gospel of Caesar Augusta”
To the “gospel of Jesus Christ”

Apostle Paul writes the Book of Romans
And makes his signature statement

**Romans 1:16 CEB I’m not ashamed of the gospel: it is
God’s own power for salvation to all who have faith in
God, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

This term evangelical represents the whole gospel message.

It goes something like this.

We have corrupted ourselves and this world by sin.

Things fall apart, the center does not hold.

But God comes to our rescue.

God initiates a relationship with us

Through the life, death, resurrection
And continued presence of Jesus Christ.

God initiates it . . . not us.

Through Christ
God restores, redeems, and renews our relationship.

In this way, this term righteousness
Which we find in today's passage
Means being in a right relationship.

We did not create this right relationship.

It is uniquely the work of Christ.

Salvation, then, is the transformational awareness
Of God's actions found in the gospel
Bringing us into a right relationship with God.

It is a gift.

That is the difference between the OT and the NT.

Whereas in the Old Testament the people of Israel
Were given a right relationship or righteousness
By obeying God's Law.

In God's New Testament
We are blessed with a right relationship
Through God's gracious acts in Jesus.

Whereas before we had to earn our righteousness
To be children of God

Now, by faith in Jesus, we become God's adopted children.

Whereas before

We were never able to achieve it on our own
Because we could never get it right.

Now, despite our weaknesses and disobedience
God welcomes us into his kingdom.

We have done nothing to deserve it.

This is the gospel message, the good news, euangelion.

This is what the word evangelical stands for.

And so, in this way

I am not ashamed to be called an evangelical.

Take away the political baggage

And strip it down to its essence

And you shouldn't be ashamed to be an evangelical either.

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Evangelicals need to divorce themselves

From partisan politics.

Not that evangelicals shouldn't be interested in politics.

But let Christianity define who we are

Rather than our favored political party.

Evangelicals need to redefine evangelicalism
From a political label to its original meaning
Those who believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelicals need to broaden their understanding
Of what being a Christian means.

David Brooks, in his op/ed article
Questioned the new president
Of the National Association of Evangelicals
Walter Kim.

Kim grew up in a Korean American Church.

Brooks asked Kim his priorities.

His first priority is “grappling with the issue of racial justice and reconciliation”.

His next priority is “public discipleship”.

*“We have lots to learn from the Black church,” Kim adds.
“They understand their church couldn’t just address personal transformation but also their place in society.”*

We can’t let politics divide the church

We can’t let theological differences divide the church

The old Church of the Brethren is slowly dying a slow death.

Many traditional Brethren congregations
Are basically empty on Sunday mornings.

However, the international Brethren
And the US ethnic Brethren congregations are thriving
Stateside, they include the Haitian and Hispanic Churches.

Internationally, the Caribbean, South America
Spain and Africa are seeing tremendous growth.

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We have much to reflect on as we consider
How we might best, not only survive
But thrive in these difficult and divisive times.

This past Tuesday, the US Attorney General
Declared that loneliness is a health risk
As hazardous as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

From NPR

Research shows that Americans, who have become less engaged with worship houses, community organizations and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness.

I believe we live in a world that rejects the very thing
They need for emotional and spiritual health

David Brooks concludes

The age of the autonomous individual, the age of the narcissistic self, the age of consumerism and moral drift has left us with bitterness and division, a surging mental health crisis and people just being nasty to one another.

Millions are looking for something else, some system of belief that is communal, that gives life transcendent meaning.

Christianity is a potential answer for that search, and therein lies its hope, and the greatest possibility of renewing its call.

Euangelion, the gospel, is made for just such a time as this.