

ARE CHURCHES OF CHRIST EVANGELICAL?

“Evangelical” is an adjective that came into use in the 20th century to describe a certain kind of church or denomination. An Evangelical person or church is Protestant, not Catholic. They are conservative, not liberal. Their identity is with the great Protestant reformers rather than with modern cults. Evangelicals emphasize salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the inspiration and authority of Scripture and the importance of preaching in contrast to ritual. They believe in the miracles recorded in Scripture, including the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ. The most visible Evangelicals are the Southern Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans, Reformed Churches and Assemblies of God.

Churches of Christ have much in common with Evangelicals. We are not associated with the Catholic church and do not follow the pope of that church. We are certainly not a cult and we agree with much that was preached by the great reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Knox. We emphasize salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ and the necessity of personal conversion to the faith. We hold a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. We too believe in all the miracles recorded in Scripture including those of Christ’s birth and resurrection. We also emphasize preaching and a non-ritualistic approach to worship. In this sense and to this degree we would be classed in the general category of Evangelical religious bodies.

On the other hand there are factors that separate us from those of the Evangelical world.

- * The church of Christ is not a “Protestant” body in the usual definition of that term. It is Christ’s church, the one he purchased with his blood, the one he established in Jerusalem on the Pentecost following his resurrection.

- * The church of Christ is not a denomination, not one of several divisions or parts of the body of Christ. If we are that we have no right to exist. Christ has not authorized the existence of denominations. He prayed that his people would be one (John 17:20-21). Paul condemned the spirit of denominationalism that had arisen in the church at Corinth (I Cor. 1:10-15; 3:1-5). Evangelicals do embrace the concept of denominationalism.

- * While we believe in salvation by faith in Christ, we do not believe in salvation by faith alone which is a fundamental teaching of all Evangelical denominations (James 2:18-26).

- * We accept the Bible as the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God, but we reject the many traditions and human speculations that flourish in the various Evangelical bodies.

- * We emphasize preaching of the gospel while many Evangelical churches include a rich mixture of human opinions with their preaching.

- * Evangelicals constitute a conservative, **ecumenical brotherhood** in contrast to the liberal Protestant ecumenicals. We cannot share in that Evangelical ecumenical brotherhood. Because of our many differences in faith and practice, we cannot and do not accept or endorse them as our brethren in Christ.

- * Most evangelical preachers do not extend a kindly hand to the average preacher of the church of Christ. They reject and resent our commitment to follow the Bible in all things and our refusal to compromise with our religious neighbors. As a general rule where you find Evangelicals warmly embracing preachers of the church of Christ it is those men who have lost their respect for the authority of God’s Word and taken a compromise position with their religious neighbors.

- * No Evangelical body would accept the Bible premise that baptism is by immersion only and that only those properly immersed are saved (Mark 16:16). Yet this is a non-negotiable article for us.

- * No Evangelical preacher would take the position that God has only one church in the world today, yet this is fundamental to members of the church of Christ (Eph. 4:4).

We admire and profit from the scholarship and writings of many Evangelical teachers. We share with them the great truths of the Christian faith. We appreciate the good they might do and the positive moral impact

they have on our society. Yet we can never be full partners with them in their associations and endeavors and at the same time remain faithful to Christ and his Word. We must by all means remain loyal to our Lord.
JHW