

WBNP #6

Good Evening. A Puritan's Mind brings you The Wild Boar News Podcast from Sunny South Florida. Welcome, I'm Dr. Matthew McMahon.

This just in -

During the Reformation, the term "Evangelical" was used to describe the reformers who believed in "gospelling" or heralding the good news of justification by faith alone. In contrast to the Apostate Roman Catholic Church of the day, Protestants were known as these "Evangelicals." Those in league with Wittenberg and the Swiss cantons toward Reformation were frequently referred to in this manner. Reformed doctrine, then, historically, was associated with the term. However, today, this is not the case.

Evangelicalism as a contemporary term really came about after the turn of the last century. The common Christian ideology of Evangelicalism did not formally begin until about 1939 (Why was it not used for some 300 years?). At that time J. Elwin Wright of the New England Fellowship toured through the US seeking denominations to band together to press a national revival. (This would obviously obscure denominational lines and overthrow, in many ways, the proper authority of the church.) He invited representatives to meet at a National Conference for United Action among evangelicals at St. Louis in 1942. Four pastors were the primary speakers at this conference: Harold J. Okenga, pastor of Boston's Park Street Church, William W. Ayer, pastor of New York's Calvary Baptist Church, Robert G. Lee, pastor of Memphis' Bellevue Baptist Church and Stephen W. Paine, president of Houghton College. The four preached on various ecumenical topics and encouraged unity and a national movement toward spiritual renewal. The conference drafted a constitution, a statement of faith, and agreed to meet again at a constitutional convention in the next year. The constitution drawn up for these evangelicals comprised the following: 1) there would be a voluntary, democratically administered organization (i.e. a complete overthrow of church government). 2) The group would not oppose the role, right and privileges of its members (this is so vague, one wonders exactly what they mean). 3) Church

membership would be limited to those in agreement with them and with the doctrinal beliefs they held (this would be an impossibility if every denomination held to their actual beliefs - ecumenicity would be impossible and self-defeating). 4) They were to be evangelical in spirit and purpose (what does "evangelical" actually mean?). This newly constructed body of "churches" would concern itself with evangelism, their relation to government, national use of radio for the propagation of the Gospel, public relation activities, preservation of the separation of church and state, Christian education, and the freedom for home and foreign missions. This statement was approved in 1943, and the N.A.E. (National Association of Evangelicals) was born.

In general the term "Evangelical" has developed into a more inclusivistic attitude toward liberalism, and are ecumenical in their efforts towards ecclesiastical unity. As a result of a broad churchism their theological views are akin to pleasing the masses. Evangelicals believe that there should not be any isolation from other denominations. Thus, Methodists should work with Presbyterians, and Presbyterians should work with Baptists, and Baptists should work with Pentecostals, and so on, for the cause of the Gospel. How could this happen if different theological lines delineate "what is the Gospel" and how one should "preach the Gospel?" In any case, Evangelicals are also tending to lean toward modernists and mainline ideas - mainline denominations that are akin to popularity. Such popular associations and organizations are The Billy Graham Crusade, Trans World International, Youth for Christ International, Wheaton College, and Gordon College. Even the EPC - the Evangelical Presbyterian Church - founded with a flexibility around issues or women ordination in both elder and deacon offices, and flexibility around doctrinal matters such as the baptism in the Spirit and Spiritual gifts. (Not to mention that the EPC gutted the Westminster Confession of Faith and reinstated a watered down version of Christian fundamentals.)

The Evangelical sector is made up of pastors, theologians and teachers who are best described as "theologically flexible." This is a compliment for many of them. This ecumenical and theological flexibility is a key factor (and problem) among contemporary Evangelicals. They are often non-compulsory and convicting in their preaching, and

desire to keep the peace in their biblical preaching. The problem that is faced is their flagrant inability to draw solid non-negotiable doctrinal lines in the sand. They propagate, primarily, a cooperative spirit with everyone (which is not necessarily a bad thing except when it has a focus of ecumenicalism.)

Many pastors pride themselves in being ecumenical, or evangelical. They see "Evangelicalism" as a good thing. It is obvious they are unaware of its history, and its popularity. Maybe they are being ignorantly overly optimistic. Maybe their alliances are hoping to make a greater change across the world in their attempts to be more "biblically evangelical." But as far as labels go, that designation is about as ambiguous as an ethereal label can be, no matter how long someone takes to define it. The longer it takes to define, the vaguer its actual connotations are known.

In today's Evangelicalism, countless people have succumbed to the deceptive antics of the ecumenicity of the sinner's prayer. The Sinner's Prayer is a demonstration of how a fallen man may recognize the Need he has of Christ. The "Sinner's Prayer" is a term that describes the words spoken by a person when he or she has recognized their sin and their need for a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Though this idea in general is a complete overthrow of the doctrine of man's depravity, the sinner's prayer, in Evangelical circles, goes something like this:

*"Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."*

At that time a card is given to them, they sign it, and they are told that they are now part of the Kingdom, and that no one can tell them differently.

However, such a prayer remains biblically inconsistent. Christ never sat down with a man and told him to (quote) "Repeat after me.." Rather, Christ and His Disciples told men to repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Jonathan Edwards has been heralded by most of Christendom to be the greatest preacher that America ever produced. If Edwards is such a great preacher and evangelical, certainly we should find the sinner's prayer, or something like it, in his writings, if Evangelicalism today is correct. Dr. John Gerstner in reading all of Edward's works and sermons, compiled what Edward's would consider, not a sinner's prayer, but a seeker's prayer.

*Dear God, whom I hate with all my being precisely because you hate and threaten me with hell, I hate this punishment perhaps even more than I hate you. Or, maybe I should say that I love my comfort even more than I hate you. For that reason I am asking a favor of you. I want you to make me love you, whom I hate even when I ask this and even more because I have to ask this. I am being frank with you because I know it is no use to be otherwise. You know even better than I how much I hate you and that I love only myself. It is no use for me to pretend to be sincere. I most certainly do not love you and do not want to love you. I hate the thought of loving you but that is what I'm asking because I love myself. If you can answer this 'prayer' I guess the gift of gratitude will come with it and then I will be able to do what I would not think of doing now—thank you for making me love you whom I hate. Amen.*

As you will notice, this prayer would be considered as anti-evangelistic in contemporary circles - the modern evangelical church today repudiates such thoughts and would be abhorred to see it in print in any form. They would never counsel someone to pray a prayer as this. But in light of the historical teaching of the church, of Reformed preaching through the centuries up and through Jonathan Edwards, this is surely what the church did believe, did counsel and did preach from their pulpits. The doctrine of seeking is essentially gone from 21st century Christendom, but it needs to be revived.

Where are you on the evangelistic theological scale? After hearing this prayer, ask yourself "Does this shock you?" If it does, then certainly, you have been infected by the virus of contemporary Evangelicalism. If not, then you are a spirit of a different sort, one that is biblically consistent, but one that would be better termed an evangelical in another generation as it once was in the time of the Reformation.

This is Dr. Matthew McMahon signing off.