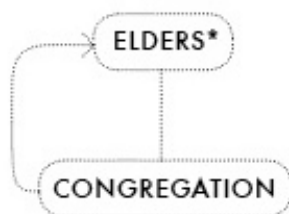


THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (2)

What is an evangelical church?

A. Introduction

1. Banstead Community Church is an independent church.



2. Banstead Community Church is also an evangelical church.

B. What is an evangelical church?

1. Yes, what is an evangelical church?

"In recent years the term evangelical has lost almost all its meaning." (Kevin DeYoung)

The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury writing in the late 19th century said *"I know what constituted an evangelical in former times... I have no clear notion what constitutes one now."*

Historian George Marsden has said that an evangelical is *"anyone who likes Billy Graham."*

2. Why does it matter?

There is a need for a local church to have boundaries.

To define who can be a member of that particular local church.

To define what churches they will be prepared to partner with and what matters they will partner on.

C. Defining Evangelicalism

1. The term 'Evangelical' comes from the Greek word for 'gospel' or 'good news'.

An evangelical is someone who believes the gospel.

An evangelical church is simply a local church that is committed to the gospel.

"Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." (2 Timothy 1:14)

"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." (Jude 3)

But is it really that straightforward?

2. The term 'Evangelical' is used to describe what people believe.

"He exhorteth them to proceed constantly in the evangelical truth." (William Tyndale)

"Tyndale [and] his evangelical brother Barns." (Sir Thomas More)

Luther refers to the 'evangelische Kirche' or 'evangelical church' to distinguish Protestants from Roman Catholics.

3. The term 'Evangelical' is used to describe a movement.

In 1920s and 1930s it began to refer to individual Christians and churches who were not liberals but neither were they fundamentalists.

In this case it defined who a local church was prepared to work with.

D. The development of evangelical belief and prioritiesⁱ

1. The Early Church

Jesus is fully God and full man.

God exists in three persons.

2. The Reformation

Sola Scriptura (Bible alone) – The Bible speaks authoritatively, and it speaks to all believers.

Sola Gratia (Grace alone) – We are saved by grace alone. Salvation is a free gift that we don't deserve or cannot earn.

Sola Fide (Faith alone) – We are justified by faith alone. The only way to be forgiven is to simply put your trust in Jesus. When it comes to salvation our good works count for nothing.

Sola Christus (Christ alone) – Jesus is the only way to God. He alone can rescue us.

Sola Deo Gloria (For the Glory of God alone) – God alone should be thanked and praised and given all the credit for saving us.

3. The Great Awakenings

An emphasis on proclaiming the gospel.

An emphasis on conversion or 'new birth'.

An emphasis on personal holiness.

4. The emergence of the liberals

The rise of liberalism cast doubt over:

The authority of Scripture.

The virgin birth.

The miracles of Jesus.

Jesus' bodily resurrection.

5. Modern controversies

The following doctrines have been attacked in recent years:

The sovereignty of God.

Penal substitutionary atonement.

Exclusivity of the gospel.

Justification by faith.

Hell.

6. Four qualities that mark out evangelicals.

"There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of evangelicalism." (David Bebbington)

George Marsden has put forward a fifth quality "Transdenominationalism".

E. So... what is an evangelical church?

1. An evangelical church is defined by certain beliefs and priorities.

It's a church that loves the Bible as the authoritative Word of God (biblicism).

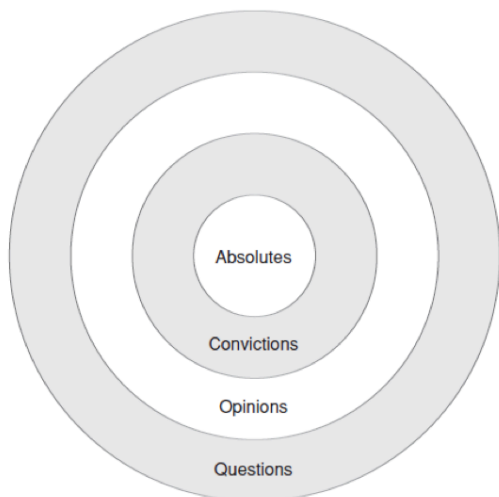
It's a church that is passionate about the gospel (crucicentrism).

It's a church that recognises the urgent need for everyone to trust in Jesus as Saviour and follow Him as Lord (conversionism).

It's a church that is committed to proclaiming the gospel and making disciples (activism or mission).

But these 4 marks are not enough because they fail to identify who is not an evangelical.

2. An evangelical church is defined by boundary markers.ⁱⁱ



There are certain things a local church must believe in order to be called an evangelical church (absolutes which are central and essential to the Christian faith).

There are certain convictions (not central or core beliefs) that members of a local church may have that may be different to members from another a local church. Yet they are both able to be called evangelical churches and partner with one another.

There are other beliefs where members of the same local church may disagree on but which are not worth dividing over.

F. What does all this mean practically for Banstead Community Church?

1. We are an evangelical church.

We love the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

We are passionate about the gospel.

We recognise the urgent need for everyone to trust in Jesus as Saviour and follow Him as Lord.

We are committed to proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.

We have a statement of faith that contains what we believe to be the absolute essentials of the Christian faith that all members are required to accept.

We have other convictions where we disagree with other evangelical churches but we still recognise those churches as being evangelical.

2. We will partner and work with other evangelical churches.

"True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel."

ⁱ The basis for this is Collin Hansen's 'The Story of Evangelicalism from the Beginning and Before' in Don't Call it a Comeback

ⁱⁱ The diagram is taken from Erik Thoennes' essay on 'Doctrine' in the ESV Study Bible