

*Still Evangelical? Ten Insiders
Reconsider Political, Social, and
Theological Meaning*

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In the Age of Trump, Can We Still Be Evangelical?

It may be a very evangelical act to decide if one is truly evangelical. The rife individualism of evangelicalism is obvious these days. The decision to be in or be out of the tribe will no doubt continue to shift in light of various factors – not least being the relationship between evangelicalism and political rhetoric.

The future of American Christianity will be affected by the current and future dynamics of evangelicalism, arguably one of its most vibrant and determined movements. Its multidenominational and nondenominational expressions mean it has plenty of room for flexibility and change – qualities that are among its most distinctive.

The highest reputed value in evangelicalism is the gospel itself – the only good news that can finally change the world. Thus the hope and corrective, to the right or left of evangelicalism, is that the evangel can and must continue to change evangelicalism itself. Whether “still evangelical” or not, being open and responsive to gospel transformation in word and deed is the most evangelical thing one can do.

Evangelical has value only if it names our commitment to seek and to demonstrate the heart and mind of God in Jesus Christ, who is the evangel. To be evangelical is to respond to God’s call into deeper faith and greater humility. It also leads us to repudiate and resist all forces of racism and misogyny, and all other attitudes and actions, overt and implied, that subvert the dignity of people, who are made in the image of God. The evangel holds our evangelicalism to account and not vice versa.

The only evangelicalism worthy of its name must be one that both faithfully points to and mirrors Jesus Christ. It is the good news for the world as it seeks justice that reflects the character of God’s kingdom. Any evangelicalism that seeks its own power is unfaithful to the evangel it claims to represent. Any evangelicalism that doesn’t allow the evangel to redefine, reorder, and renew power in light of Jesus Christ is lost and worth abandoning.

Referring to oneself as evangelical is not a congratulatory self-description (as though it is a trophy), nor a theo-political brand (as though it is a platform). It is rather a commitment and an aspiration to identify with God’s great love in Christ and, in true humility, to cry out for the daunting and urgent hope we believe can transform us and transform our world. It is a call to acknowledge and repent of our complicity in sin and injustice (both personal and systemic), and to work toward the reordering of all power after Jesus’ example. It’s a vision of living with coherence and integrity so that we truthfully proclaim and faithfully enact God’s good news of love, justice, and mercy in Jesus Christ.



If this is what the word *evangelical* means, then perhaps the pressing question is not, *Still evangelical?* but rather, *Yet evangelical?*

– Taken from the introduction by Mark Labberton

What Will Justice Require of Us Evangelicals?

Shame keeps us hiding in the dark. Shame keeps our heads buried in the sand while the world burns around us. Shame prevents us from facing the wrong things we have done – the evil we have complied with and benefited from. Shame tells us it will be better for us if we live the fantasy of perfection. But that’s just it. Fantasies always end. Reality always wins.

“Evangelical should mean Bible believing, gospel preaching, justice seeking, and Spirit filled. Instead it has become known more by its politics than by its commitment to the word of God. This book puts the current evangelical identity crisis within a much needed historical perspective and provides a way forward to help us recover the good news of Jesus that our world desperately needs to hear.”

– Aaron Graham, lead pastor,
The District Church,
Washington, DC

What if the cost of facing evil (through lament, contrition, loss of control, relinquishing the fantasy of supremacy) is far less than the gain?

What if, by facing the evil, evangelicals deemed “white” by the state unlock a process that reconnects them to their own fleshliness, to their own need for others, to the yearning of their souls for deeper connection – for forgiveness?

What if the process of repentance – restitution and repair – is the way of God, the narrow road to the health of our world?

And what if repentance is the way to the restoration of the image of God in a people group twisted by hubris?

And what if the call of God to white evangelicals is to stop trying to be God, to control everything and everyone, and to join the rest of humanity – beloved dust?

Then the question is this: Will the hope of resurrection be enough to move white evangelicals toward the brown wooden altar? Will the hope of becoming human again lead to bowed heads and hunched bodies, pink knees kissing brown dust? Will lament lead to surrender?

– Taken from chapter one, “Will Evangelicalism Surrender” by Lisa Sharon Harper

How Can Evangelicals Listen?

As evangelicals engage the world (for that is our full orientation – taking the good news of the gospel of Christ to those outside the church and into the public square), we must remember that no group is monolithic. Just as we don’t care for it when people view all Christians as a caricature, we should understand that “the world” isn’t monolithic either.



Not all atheists are angry with the church and want to steal away our children. Not all college professors and media professionals are “humanists,” out to attack Christianity at every turn. Not everyone outside our community hates Christians or dislikes our engagement in the culture. Not even most.

Of course, some individuals and groups are strongly opposed to what we stand for, and we should be mindful and ready to counter them in truth and love as we meet them. But not everyone is like that, just as not all Christians are exactly like you or me. In fact, think about this: the body of Christ is the most diverse collection of people on the planet, probably more so than any other group. This is God’s design. It makes his church both attractive and influential.

Rather than assuming what “those people” are like, we should get to know them. It’s much easier than we might imagine. Each person we meet is an individual created by God, unique as any snowflake. We should embrace people in their uniqueness and be not only willing but *eager* to talk to them and ask them about their beliefs, their stories, and what makes them who they are. I believe we should have two questions on the tip of our tongue as we engage with those around us:

1. Help me understand what you believe.
2. What brought you to those conclusions?

This requires being good listeners. People who met Pope John Paul II throughout his life remarked about what an intense listener he was. Nothing else existed when he engaged with someone. The person in front of him was always the most important thing going on at the moment. He wanted to experience that person and discover who she was as a unique God-imager. As evangelicals, we would do well to adopt this same perspective.

– Taken from chapter eight, “The Importance of Listening in Today’s Evangelicalism” by Jim Daly

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A New Alter Call

Jesus must be the foundation for all our political convictions. He is the lens through which we understand the world and the Bible. There’s an old hymn that goes like this: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. . . . On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” Over the centuries, Christians, at their best, have refused to place their hope in anything short of Jesus. After all, the word *vote* shares the same root as *devotion* and has everything to do with where we rest our hope and where our loyalty lies. Our devotion to Jesus and the “least of these” creates the framework for how we think about every issue, whether it is immigration, capital punishment, abortion, or healthcare.



We hear a lot about God blessing America, but the Bible doesn't say, "God so loved America." It says, "God so loved the world." And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus named those that God especially blesses: the poor, the meek, the merciful, those who mourn, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. God seems to bless the very antithesis of many of the things America has come to stand for: prosperity, pride, and power. The prophets of old would undoubtedly call it idolatry. We have made idols out of wealth, fame, power, and whiteness, and the phenomena of Trump is a natural outgrowth of that idolatry.

The things Jesus said couldn't be more relevant to the world we live in.

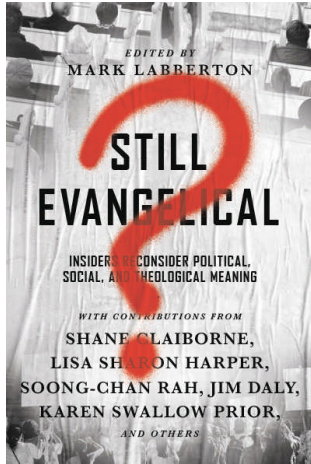
And the things Jesus said stand in stark contrast to many of the things America has come to adore.

I believe it was the legendary Wendell Berry, farmer and theologian, who once quipped about how our money says "In God We Trust" but our economy looks like the seven deadly sins. When those sins, which include greed, lust, and vanity, have become credentials for our country's highest office, we are all in trouble, especially if the prophetic conscience of the Church surrenders her voice to these cultural idols.

Donald Trump is only a man. But the movement behind him unveils an idolatry that has intoxicated many of our fellow Christians.

Let's live like Jesus really meant the stuff he said. Let's imagine a Christianity that looks like Jesus again, a faith worth believing in, an evangelicalism that's known for love again. And then let's build the church.

– Adapted from chapter seven, "Evangelicalism Must Be Born Again" by Shane Claiborne



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Leaders Weigh in on “Still Evangelical?”

Evangelicalism in America has cracked, split on the shoals of the 2016 presidential election and its aftermath, leaving many wondering if they want to be in or out of the evangelical tribe. The contentiousness brought to the fore surrounds what it means to affirm and demonstrate evangelical Christian faith amid the messy and polarized realities gripping our country and world. Who or what is defining the evangelical social and political vision? Is it the gospel or is it culture? For a movement that has been about the primacy of Christian faith, this is a crisis.

Gathered by Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, this collection of essays provides an introduction to the volume. What follows is a diverse and provocative set of perspectives and reflections from evangelical insiders who wrestle with their responses to the question of what it means to be evangelical in light of their convictions.

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Shane Claiborne is an author, activist, speaker, and self-proclaimed “recovering sinner.” He writes and speaks about peacemaking, social justice, and Jesus, and is the author of numerous books, including *The Irresistible Revolution*, *Jesus for President*, and *Executing Grace*. He is the leader of The Simple Way in Philadelphia and cofounder of Red Letter Christians.

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Lisa Sharon Harper is a prolific speaker, writer, trainer, activist, and founder and principal of Freedom Road. She is the author of several books, including *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*.

Mark Labberton is president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Prior to that Labberton served for a number of years as senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, California. He has also served as chair of John Stott Ministries. Today he continues to contribute to the mission of the global church as a senior fellow of the International Justice Mission. He is the author of *Called*, *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor* and *The Dangerous Act of Worship*.

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Karen Swallow Prior is an award-winning professor of English at Liberty University. She is the author of *Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me* and *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More – Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist*. She is a research fellow with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Mark Young is the president of Denver Seminary. Before coming to the seminary, he served as a missionary educator, a professor of world missions and intercultural studies, and a pastor. He remains actively engaged in global theological education.