

# “How do modern Evangelicals differ from other Christians?”

Some people have no idea what the word “Evangelical” means. They think it means someone who is a mindless fundamentalist bigot, politically to the right of Attila the Hun! Well, there are some, especially across the Atlantic, but most Evangelicals are anything but that.

Elsewhere on the website <http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/understandingevangelicaltradition.html> I have defined an Evangelical congregation as one which emphasises:

## 1. The authority of Scripture

- But allows freedom for questions and sensitive but honest facing up to difficulties of interpretation

## 2. The exposition of Scripture

## 3. The necessity of personal conversion

## 4. Evangelism

- Emphasising the necessity of a conscious personal relationship with Christ and having assurance of eternal salvation,
- Encouraging people to respond personally and, where appropriate to say a prayer of commitment, alone or with the Christian doing the evangelism (perhaps with that person leading them in a prayer).
- Taking every opportunity to proclaim the ABC of the gospel at occasional offices, festivals such as Christmas or Easter, even in sermons which are not primarily evangelistic.

## 5. A simple but dignified ritual in services

## 6. Corporate intercession

## 7. Every-member ministry

However the Evangelical Alliance recent surveyed over 17,000 people to find out what 21<sup>st</sup> century Evangelicals believe (<http://www.eauk.org/snapshot/read.cfm>). Over 1000 of those who responded did not consider themselves to be evangelical Christians and the difference of views is interesting:

	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
Strongly agree that Jesus is the only way to God	91%	75%
strongly agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God.	93%	43%
Strongly agreed that the Bible has supreme authority in guiding their beliefs, views and behaviour	83%	43%
read (or listen to) the Bible daily	52%	26%
Pray alone daily	76%	57%
strongly agree that their faith is the most important thing in their life	88%	54%
strongly agree that faith is a key factor in their decision making	83%	51%
strongly agree that it's a Christian's duty to be actively involved in evangelism	71%	27%
talk about their faith, at least once a month, with someone who wouldn't call themselves a Christian	58%	38%

There are other figures for Evangelicals but without comparable figures for non-evangelicals:

read (or listen to) the Bible at least a few times a week	82%	
attend a church service at least once a week.	96%	
attend a small group meeting at least once a fortnight	77%	
pray at least a few times a week	96%	

agree that it's a Christian's duty to care for the environment	94%	
agree that Christians should be united in truth	94%	
agree that Christians should be united in mission	92%	
agree that Christians should have a voice in the media	93%	
agree that Christians should engage with government	94%	

The report concludes that:

1. Faith takes a more prominent place in the lives of evangelical Christians.
2. The Bible has a more significant role in the lives of evangelicals.
3. Evangelicals pray more frequently and are more likely to believe that Jesus is the only way to God.
4. Evangelicals place more emphasis on evangelism.
5. Evangelicals tend to have stronger views on what's right and wrong.

However Evangelicals are not monochrome. A majority believe the Bible in its original manuscript was without error, that assisted suicide is wrong, that women can be in leadership, that evolution and Christianity are compatible and that homosexual actions are always wrong. A smaller majority believe in Hell as eternal conscious suffering and that abortion can never be justified.

Younger evangelicals are more likely to talk about their faith with 'non-Christians' but are less likely:

- to regard the Bible as the supreme authority in guiding their beliefs, views and behaviour
- to regard faith as a key factor in decision-making
- to pray or read the Bible daily
- to agree that women should be as eligible for all church roles as men are
- to agree that abortion can be justified.
- to give money

Their desire to talk about their faith is encouraging and their views on women's ministry and abortion are surprising but the other views listed here are worrying. The report suggests it is because young evangelicals have been brought up on Christian summer festivals and the like, rather than personal devotions.

Most of my ministry has been in an Evangelical context. But I have been in non-Evangelical parishes for almost 8 years – long enough to make a well thought-out comparison between the two contexts.

On the one hand I have valued some of the aspects of a Central, as opposed to Evangelical tradition. I really enjoy a Sung Eucharist with a certain amount of ceremonial – the singing, the use of the sign of the cross, the colour and the candles, etc. It is certainly not the way the early church did things but it is meaningful for me. On the other hand, I am not happy with a more fundamentalist Evangelicalism which can suffer from a fair amount of fear, e.g. the fear that if some secondary detail of Scripture were proved incorrect it would undermine the whole authority of the Bible.

However, my experience in non-Evangelical contexts has strengthened my allegiance to the real principles of Evangelicalism which I outlined at the beginning of this article. I am more committed to them than ever.

It makes me upset when I come across situations where clergy have not regularly expounded Scripture. This has led to people being lamentably ignorant of the content of the Bible and missing out on the spiritual maturity which Bible study produces.

It is also clear to me that all too many clergy do not really know how to do evangelism. They don't have a clear presentation of the Gospel to convey. They don't know how to lead someone to Christ. Consequently, all too many church attenders are stuck in religion, as opposed to having a conscious personal relationship with Christ and the assurance of eternal salvation.

As for corporate prayer (other than intercessions in a service) most churches – and sadly many Evangelical churches – do not have a gathering simply to intercede. It is interesting that the Evangelical Alliance survey did not refer to such corporate prayer and yet it is absolutely fundamental to the ministry and mission of the church.

I firmly believe that the way to see a church grow spiritually and numerically, by the grace of God, is by stressing:

1. *Exposition of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God both in services and in informal caring fellowship.*

2. *Evangelism: taking every opportunity to proclaim the ABC of the gospel and to encourage people into a conscious personal relationship with Christ and the assurance of eternal salvation.*
3. *Regular planned group intercession for the church and parish, with at least some people praying aloud, but welcoming those who pray silently.*
4. *Ensuring that church services are simple enough for newcomers to understand as well as helping the regulars.*

I am immensely grateful for my Evangelical background which trained me in such things.