

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 28, Evangelicalism an Evaluation

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This is Dr. Roger Green in his teaching on American Christianity. This is session 28, Evangelicalism an Evaluation.

We may get back to some of those names. I'm on numbers four and five in your outline, and then we'll do the next lecture, which doesn't take long and is kind of American Christianity in the modern world. Where are we today with American Christianity? So, the next is tenets of evangelicalism.

What were the important tenets? What were the important doctrines? What did they stress? And you might find this here at Gordon today because Gordon identifies itself as an evangelical institution. So, some of them are tenets, and some of them are doctrines, which are kind of a mixed-together thing here that really supports evangelicalism. Okay, number one.

Evangelicalism tried its best to overcome the kind of anti-intellectual and anti-scientific spirits of some of fundamentalism, not all of fundamentalism, but it tried to overcome the anti-intellectualism that did discredit some of fundamentalism. And evangelicalism says that we are committed to the fact that all truth is God's truth. So whether that truth is philosophical truth, mathematical truth, or scientific truth, it's all from God.

He is the author of all truth. So, evangelicalism really committed itself to that kind of vision of what it is to use the mind as well as the heart in the study of God and the study of his world and so forth. Number two, evangelicalism was committed to a very high view of scripture, a high view of the Bible.

What they wanted to do was to get back into our vision, the Reformation understanding of the scripture, and how the Reformers, with their great intellect as well as their great hearts, understood the Bible. So, it used a kind of hermeneutical principles from the Reformation, from the Reformers. And so, this kind of renewed understanding of the Bible as the word of God to people was really important.

I would say that in general, and I'm obviously just speaking generally here, but I would say that in general, for evangelicals, what is important is the intent of the scriptural passage. What is the intention of the biblical passage? What did God the Holy Spirit mean, and what did the writer mean as the writer was moved by the Holy Spirit to write down a particular passage? What is the intention? What is the intention there? So always, that's an important question to me anyway. What's the intent of the passage? Now, Alistair McGrath, and you know his name well enough,

wrote a very kind of compelling book, and it's called *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*.

So let me encourage you on that text for your summer reading, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. And we've already mentioned how important Alistair McGrath is to evangelicalism, as kind of forging what evangelical thought is all about. Now, in his book, he deals quite a bit, of course, with the Bible and how important the Bible is.

What he does is he has two leading principles, and he feels that these two leading principles should guide an evangelical understanding of the scriptures, which is to say, a Reformation understanding of the scriptures. So here are McGrath's two leading principles. So now, the first principle is that views that attempt to be faithful to the Bible are to respect, be respected, and be honored.

So, views that attempt to be faithful to the Bible are to respect and be respected, and those views are to be honored by evangelicals, even, McGrath says, even when there is a plurality of ideas coming from the same passage. So even where there's a plurality of ideas coming from the same passage, you do have to respect and honor people. If you're an evangelical, you have to respect and honor people's positions on those passages. So that's one kind of principle that he gives, and he said it should guide evangelical thinking when it comes to the Bible.

The second principle that he gives is that if the scripture doesn't make an issue clear, then he says it's debatable how important the issue actually is. So, if the Bible doesn't give clarity on an issue, then you, as an evangelical, he says, he claims, you have to ask how important that issue is. How important is that matter? So, he takes a high view of the Bible. He says evangelicals need a couple of principles to help them with the maze through the biblical passages, but certainly the importance of scripture and a high view of scripture.

Personally, I'm just giving my own personal opinion here as an evangelical, but personally, especially coming from the Wesleyan tradition, I like the word authoritative, which means that the scripture is authoritative. It's the authority for Christian faith and practice. So, I like that word, which is a word that Wesley basically used for the Bible.

It is the authoritative book for us for our lives. Okay. So that's number two.

Number three, a tenet of evangelicalism, would be the lordship of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicalism has been important in bringing the Trinity back to our minds. A lot of people were talking about God, the Father, and God the Son, but what about the Holy Spirit? Well, evangelical movements have brought the Holy Spirit back into our

focus and the lordship of the Holy Spirit over the life of the believer and over the life of the church.

So that's number three. Number four is an emphasis on personal conversion. That's the way in which people identify with Jesus Christ and a renewal of the fact that Christ is the center of Christianity.

Christ is the heart of Christianity, the center of Christianity. It's as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: Christ is not the delicacy served after the bread. Christ is the bread itself or nothing at all.

So, bringing Christ back to the center of the story, that's where it all is here. So now, under this emphasis on personal conversion, I think what evangelicals need to be very careful about is that there's one way to experience that personal conversion. Evangelicals historically have been very, very concerned about people being dramatically converted and being able to give their actual spiritual birth date.

Well, that may happen in the lives of some people. For other people, the conversion experience may be more of a gradual understanding until they come to a place in their lives where they say Christ is the Lord of my life. But I think we need to be careful that we don't take this personal conversion experience and try to make one experience the experience of all people.

The important thing is that Christians identify with Christ as Lord and Savior. That's really the important thing. But we've got to make sure that we don't kind of universalize that.

Okay, so an emphasis upon personal conversion. The next one for evangelicalism would be a priority on evangelism. So, the priorities of evangelism vary, but the means of evangelism vary.

So, there are lots of ways to carry out evangelism and bear witness to the gospel and so forth. So, I've already borne witness to what I don't do when I'm flying on airplanes. But some of you might find flying on airplanes to be a wonderful opportunity.

And if it matches your personality and what you'd like to do, that's beautiful. That's a way of evangelism, no doubt about that. So, a priority on evangelism is important, whatever means we use.

Another one is what has identified evangelicalism as a very strong social consciousness. Historically, I want to turn to a name. In fact, you know, I think I'll, I think I'm going to leave that and just come back to that, but a very strong social consciousness.

As we saw in the video, my friend Bob was saying that care for the poor is uppermost in the minds of the prophets. Duck when you go, okay, that's uppermost in the minds of the prophets. That's uppermost in the minds of Jesus, caring for the poor.

And so that is an evangelical care and concern. Now, the question is, have we been faithful to that? Well, we'll see that when we look at some of the weaknesses of evangelicalism. So, I'm not sure we always have been, but we'll talk about that later.

But caring for the poor, no doubt, strong social conscience, no doubt. So, okay. Another tenet of evangelicalism that I think is really important is a recognition that Christian truth and Christian commitment is found in all denominations.

Christian truth and Christian commitment is found in all denominations. One of Alistair McGrath's points about evangelicalism and the future of Christianity is that evangelicalism is truly a trans-denominational movement. It's not a movement located just in one denomination or another denomination.

It's trans-denominational. And it is really trans-denominational today because there are Roman Catholics who identify themselves as evangelicals. There are Eastern Orthodox people who identify themselves as evangelicals.

And so, evangelicalism is in a position to say we cross all denominational lines and a recognition that there is truth found in all. Now, we're talking about Orthodox denominations. Now we're talking about people who take the Trinity seriously, take Jesus Christ seriously as the Lord, as the God himself and so forth.

In this course, we've seen a lot of marginal groups that are sometimes strange and wonderful. But we're talking about understanding within Orthodox communities and communities that take the word seriously. But evangelicalism certainly is trans-denominational and is varied as well, no doubt about that.

Number eight, a final thing in terms of tenets of evangelicalism is evangelicalism tries to discern its commitments for the future. What are its commitments? Where is it going in the future? In his book, Alistair McGrath tries to give some of that vision about where evangelicalism is going in the future. Now, he mentions three things which he has mentioned in public lectures, other articles, and so forth.

So here are three things to think about in terms of evangelicalism in the future. Number one, evangelicalism and public policy. Do evangelicals have a place in the public sphere in the public? And do they, therefore, have a place in public policy making? Well, yes, of course, they do because this world is God's world.

If they understand this world is God's world, and if evangelicals understand themselves as stewards of God's world, then evangelicals should not shy away from getting engaged in matters of public policy. What is the best thing for the common good? So, evangelicals shouldn't shy away from that. Evangelicals should be in the discussion.

Evangelicals should be at the forefront of the discussion. Do not be afraid to express biblical opinions about various matters. So, public policy is one of the things he talks about.

A second thing he talks about is collaboration with other Christians on issues of orthodoxy and ethics. How can we collaborate with other believers on issues of orthodoxy or theology, good, clear theology, and how can we collaborate with other Christians on ethical matters? Is there a collaboration there? Can we reach out? Can evangelicals reach out to other Christians and talk about these kinds of things? And well, they should. Also, when groups come to them wanting to discuss certain issues, they should embrace that.

They should say, we're happy to have that discussion. So, it's a collaboration with other Christians. I was for many years privileged to be on my denomination's international doctrine council.

The International Doctrine Council represents many people from our denomination from various parts of the world. So, we're a pretty diverse group. During the years when I was on the international doctrine council, two groups came to us and said we wanted to talk to you about ethics.

We want to talk to you about theology. We want to talk to you about what we have in common and maybe what we don't have in common. So, we were given permission to participate in discussions with those groups.

Now, the first group was pretty well known to us. It's called the World Methodist Council. This is a council of worldwide Methodist denominations.

So, we would have a lot in common with them. And so even in the discussions, I mean, very little that we disagreed on theologically and so forth, but very interesting discussions as we learned a lot about these various Methodist denominations and as they learned about us. The second group that came to us, though, was a little more interesting to us because we didn't know much about them.

And that were the Seventh-day Adventists. Seventh-day Adventists came to us and said, we'd like to have some discussion with you about theology and ethics in our life and your life and so forth. And that was a very interesting experience because I came into that conversation knowing nothing about the Seventh-day Adventists.

And these sessions lasted long, and sometimes we'd invite them to maybe where, you know, one of our headquarters, and they'd invite us to their world headquarters and so forth. So, it was very, very interesting. But the Seventh-day Adventists and I remember agreeing on so many things in terms of Orthodox theology and in terms of basic evangelical theology, but there were some things we didn't quite agree on, and we were learning from them.

And, of course, the most interesting thing we probably learned from them was honoring the Sabbath day. When we were at their world headquarters, at about 12 o'clock on Friday, the place shut down basically because all of those people needed to get back home and prepare for the Sabbath. It's their Seventh-day Adventist.

So, they need to prepare for Friday night to Saturday night. That's the Sabbath. And as far as they're concerned, we've dropped one of the 10 commandments, we Christians, when we worship on Sunday instead of the Sabbath.

And so, they are very, very, very kind of almost Jewish about this and getting home, preparing the meal, going to the church on Friday night. That's a major service, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon. So, there is a lot to be learned, no doubt about that, but that kind of collaboration.

The third thing has to do with the second, but it's more focused in a sense. A third thing is that evangelicals are learning a lot about Roman Catholics, and Roman Catholics are learning a lot about evangelicals. Now, we have had dialogues right here on this campus between Roman Catholics and us as evangelicals. This was a few years ago, but there are discussions about evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism, what we have in common, where we agree, where we agree to disagree, and so forth.

So that kind of to discern commitments in the future. So that's important. So that's what I'm just calling tenets of evangelicalism.

Now, are there any questions about, I mean, I've chosen, yeah, Anna. So, are these things from? Some of them are, but not all. What is the one? I'd have to check on that, Anna.

I would, I'm guessing, yeah, I'm guessing, you know, I'm guessing late eighties, early nineties, something like that. But yes, we can Google that after this class is over. Google that, but I'm not sure.

Have any of you read that book by any chance? Have any of you read anything by Alistair McGrath or any course or anything? Alistair McGrath, Words of Hands? No. Okay. Bless your heart.

Okay. You need to put him on your reading list. You, you just have to do that.

Even if you just read this one book by Alistair McGrath, he's very readable. He's a scholar who thinks he has great thoughts, but he has a way of communicating these in a way that everybody can understand everything. So, so yeah.

Okay. I'm a little surprised that you haven't been reading Alistair McGrath or taking other courses here at Gordon. So, he has spoken here quite a few times.

I think he was here just last fall. I think I think he was. Other questions about these tenets? This is what evangelical, this is Gordon College we're talking about here.

So, you got that. Okay. Let's go now, excuse me, to the weaknesses of evangelicalism.

Now, here's the good thing about the weaknesses of evangelicalism. And that is the weaknesses are pointed out from within. This is evangelicals criticizing evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism doesn't need people from the outside to criticize evangelicalism, although people obviously do. But it doesn't really need that because we've got enough very determined evangelicals from within to criticize evangelicalism. So, we do the weaknesses.

Sorry about this. This cold is not shaking, and my voice is okay. I'm just going to use my water to help me out.

Thank you. I hate to do that, but thanks for letting me do that. Okay.

So here are some. Number one is the failure to appreciate the richness of church tradition. Now by that, I mean the aesthetic dimensions of church tradition, the great life and liturgy of the church of God for 2000 years.

Often, evangelicals do not appreciate that rich tradition. And evangelicals sometimes give you the impression that the church began just today with evangelicalism, and they kind of forget that no, it's got a 2000-year history, which is a very rich and rewarding history, a very deep-rooted, wonderful, beautiful history. And as I say, often I find this in the life of the church and in the liturgy of the church.

Now, there have been many evangelicals that I know personally and that you would know, but there've been many evangelicals who have moved into Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. The reason they have is they felt that in growing up in the evangelical community, they didn't have a very rich liturgical, rich Christian history

life, and they were missing that. And they have found that in Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, or Eastern Orthodoxy.

So there are lots that made that pilgrimage, and there is no doubt about that. So that's one thing. The second thing was a failure to remain faithful to the social commitments of the evangelical tradition of the 19th century.

Now, remember what we said about Finney: Finney saw no, absolutely no gap between preaching the gospel and winning people to the Lord on the one hand and being an abolitionist on the other hand. He saw no, and there wasn't any contradiction here at all. This is all part of the same gospel.

So, in the 19th century, with many evangelicals, there were social issues of abolition in this country, women in ministry, and taking care of the poor. So what happened is that an evangelical by the name of Donald Dayton came along, and he wrote a book called *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. What he is doing is looking at Evangelicalism in the 19th century and comparing it to Evangelicalism in the mid-20th century.

So that becomes really, really important. I'm just turning to one thing here. I just need to check one thing in our syllabus here.

I'll be right with you when I do this. Okay, I can do this after class. So, Evangelicalism in the 19th century, he is saying that we haven't kept that evangelical heritage.

He is very astute; he's a historian by training. So that's a second criticism from within. He's an evangelical from within. We've not maintained that.

Now the question is, are we getting back to that? Well, I don't know. Number three, in Evangelicalism, at times, there has been an intellectual shallowness. Now, there was a blockbuster book a few years ago by Mark Noll.

Now, there's a name you're familiar with. We mentioned Mark Noll. Mark Noll wrote a book called *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

And the first sentence, now this is an evangelical talking to evangelicals, but the first sentence says the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there isn't much of one. Yikes. Okay, so that was a little hard to take, but he was right.

We haven't done our intellectual homework. And we need to get down to business about that. And he was a good model and a good example of that, no doubt about that.

And still is a good model and example. Trained as a historian, now teaching as we mentioned, now teaching at Notre Dame. But he saw that as a real weakness of Evangelicalism and really stimulated evangelicals to start to think pretty critically, pretty seriously.

So *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* is a blockbuster book. And number four is often an accommodation to the culture. And David Wells, who teaches up at Gordon-Conwell, I think he's retired now but teaches at Gordon-Conwell.

David Wells wrote a book called *The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. And in that book, he really chastises evangelicals for accommodating to the culture so that you can't tell evangelicals very distinctly from the broader culture. There's no distinction here.

And he comes down pretty hard on evangelicals for whom there is no distinction. We have just sunk into the broader culture, and we have absorbed the broader culture. We're part of the broader culture, and we don't speak to the broader culture or judge the broader culture. So, the weaknesses of Evangelicalism are pretty strong, but all from within.

That's what I like about it. We don't need people outside, although there are plenty of critics outside, but we've got people from within saying evangelicals have some serious weaknesses that they have to contend with, and they should know about this, and they should do something about it. Okay, let me stop there on the weaknesses of Evangelicalism.

Anything here on the weaknesses? Here's what we have to kind of come to grips with. No doubt about that. Yeah.

Right. That would definitely go back to Alistair McGrath's point that evangelicals should be, and in a sense are, becoming part of public policy. Well's point is that as he's looked at evangelicals, we've often accommodated, however, to the culture, that you can't tell us any different from the culture.

We've caved into the culture, he feels. So yeah, I think you can make a distinction there between what evangelicals should be doing to work on public policy on the one hand and where we have accommodated the culture so we can no longer judge the culture. Those are fine lines, probably at times. Something else about the criticisms of Evangelicalism, all done by evangelicals.

Okay, let's go on to lecture number 18. We're entitling it on page 17 of the syllabus. We're *American Christianity in the Modern World*.

What I'd like to do in this kind of closing lecture is I want to give both a positive appraisal and negative criticism of American Christianity. So that's what we're trying to do here. So, while you're just writing that down, I'm just turning to one thing here.

We mentioned it on Friday and also next Wednesday, so be sure to bring all your textbooks. So, we did mention that, didn't we? We included the Rauschenbusch one in the article. So, we've said that.

Okay, American Christianity in the Modern World. What are the positives? What are the negatives? Then, next Monday, when we kind of talk together about where you are from and what you have learned in this course, you might want to pick up on some of these. So, excuse me.

Okay, I've got names here, and I think we've dealt with all of them. So, I don't think I need any names here. Okay, and I think we probably dealt with these texts too.

There's Donald Dayton's text. We've talked about that. There's a scan, and here's the God-knows-how text.

Okay, positive appraisal. Okay, number one on my hit parade in terms of American Christianity would be a rich heritage of denominations. I do not see denominationalism as a problem.

I see denominationalism as a gift. And I know we've got a lot of them, and maybe we've got too many of them at times, but there is a rich heritage of denominations. They come from all kinds of theological backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds, but I think the richness of denominational life is a good thing in American life.

So, I think that I put that down as a positive. So, number two, in America, there's been a, I think in general, I mean, it's a general thing. There's been, in general, a toleration of each other in American public life, in American denominational life, in American Christian life.

No doubt about that. Now I know that sometimes there have been anti-Catholic feelings by Protestants. That's been true.

No doubt about that. We don't want to gloss over that, but at other times, there have been anti-Protestant feelings by Catholics as well. It's worked both ways.

I think we're kind of beyond that now, but I like that kind of spirit of toleration in general. Also, number three is we have a strong social conscience. We have, in a sense, led the world with a strong social conscience.

And I'll do two examples of that. And the first one you're very familiar with is because you've read the book three times now, and you just want to make sure to get every nugget in that book on Rauschenbusch. But a perfect example of that is Rauschenbusch, isn't it? And the whole social gospel movement, strong social conscience.

And a second example would Martin Luther King, Jr., of course, because like Rauschenbusch, he grew up in the church. Martin Luther King, Jr. 's message was a message he developed in the church. And so that strong social conscience, both with Rauschenbusch and with Martin Luther King, Jr., came from the church.

That's where it was embedded there. Number four is a fourth thing that I think is positive, and we have produced some very remarkable people in American Christianity. There's no doubt about that.

We've produced some remarkable men and some remarkable women. Among the men, of course, they're more mainstream, aren't they? Because what we've said about women is in American Christianity, they've often had to work on the margins of things, and they've had to have an influence on the margins of the greater kind of denominational life. Some of them have had their influence on orthodoxy, and some of them have not.

But in terms of a couple of the men, well, you could name them. I mean, like Jonathan Edwards or Walter Rauschenbusch or Billy Graham or people like that. In terms of the women that we deal with, tomorrow we're going to see Mary Baker Eddy, for example.

Now, this is a woman to be contended with, no doubt about that. This is a woman who's very important, I think, from my own tradition of Evangeline Booth, who ministered here in America for 30 years. So, there are some pretty remarkable people in American Christian history, no doubt, American Christian history.

Number five would be, to me, the relationship of colleges and universities to Christianity. That story is a fascinating story. Why was Harvard founded? Why was Princeton founded? Why was Yale founded? Why was Dartmouth founded? And that's an incredible story.

And when that first wave of universities kind of went a different way, then you've got another whole wave of colleges and universities in the 19th century, redoing what Harvard, Princeton, Yale did. For example, how important is Oberlin to the Christian history story in America? It's very important as an abolitionist institution and Charles Grandison Finney. So that's kind of a second wave.

Then, you start to get a third wave with the Bible Institutes. When colleges and universities weren't keeping faith with what they began to do, you've got the Bible Institute, so you've got Gordon College and Barrington College as kind of a third wave of Christian higher education. So, the relationship between colleges and universities is really important to Christianity.

So now let me talk about the Christian colleges today, this third wave. Let me talk about Gordon College or Barrington College. There is nothing like this in the rest of the world.

This is unique to American evangelical Christian colleges. You have somewhat, you have a little bit of this in Canada, but not much. You don't have many colleges and universities like this in Canada.

In Europe, they are usually the European expression of the American tradition. So this is an American phenomenon, that there would be all these Christian colleges and universities, decidedly Christian, and many of them decidedly evangelical. So this is a new thing in the landscape.

Another positive thing, I think, is the emphasis on evangelism. Just think of the emphasis we have had on evangelism in the American First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, the Finneyite Revival, the Moody Revival, and the Billy Graham Revival. Just think of the emphasis on evangelism that American Christianity has produced, which has affected the rest of the world, of course.

So, I would say evangelism. The next thing is the American church has often taken a very prophetic role in the church. So American Christianity has often taken a very prophetic role.

Look at what American Christians did for the abolition of slavery. Very, very important. In Roman Catholicism, it is American women who are leading the way to ordination.

Now, I am not going to see Roman Catholic women being ordained in my lifetime. You may see it in your lifetime, but maybe not. Things take a few years to work, maybe a couple thousand years.

So, things take a little bit of time to work. But it is American Roman Catholic women who are leading the way. They want ordination for women in the Roman Catholic church.

That comes out of the American tradition. Then, finally, in a positive appraisal, American Christianity and American Christians have truly tried to come to grips with

the social issues of the day. I am going to mention one that we have not mentioned in the course.

But trying to come to grips with the critical issues of the day. I am going to mention the Boston Latin School. Boston Latin School was founded over 350 years ago.

I forget the exact date of the foundation of the Boston Latin School, but that was public education begun by the Puritans. The Puritans felt a need for public education for the children. So, public education began out of a church tradition and out of a Christian commitment to education.

Now, I know that you are never going to hear the story that education in America began with Christians for that reason and so forth, but that is part of the story that is important to remember. So, that is a positive appraisal in terms of American Christianity. Now, before I get to the negative criticisms, I hate to end on the negative criticisms, but maybe it will spur us to think about some things.

But are there other positive things that you can think about that American Christianity has produced? Now that you know enough about the history, the denominations, the people, can you think of other things that American Christianity has produced that you think are really good things, really helpful things? What have we done in American Christianity that is helpful and good and positive and lasting? Can you think of things that we haven't talked about yet? Right. Except what the state teaches or what the church, with a capital C, teaches. And that is a good point because so much of what we have seen, starting with people like Roger Williams, using his kind of freedom of thought to say, I am not going to be bound by this.

And so, he had that kind of freedom to do that. That is within the American culture. The thought, for example, of the denominations.

Also, the denomination is not only the orthodox community but the community within it. You hold the orthodox, and you hold the secular. Right.

Right, right. And that is part of the American cultural life, isn't it? That we have the freedom of thought. Yeah.

Is there something else that you can think of? American Christianity, what have we given the world that is helpful? Yeah, Alexander? Focus on missions. Right. Yes.

Right. The focus on missions. American Christians have supported missions in tremendous ways, all of our history, basically, and still do today.

Focus on missions is a good point. Yeah. Something else? American Christianity, what have we given the world and the rest of the Christian world that is so important, do

you think? Anything else? These are good thoughts about what we have produced here.

Okay. All right. Let us look at some negative criticisms.

I do not want to end with this, but we are looking at ourselves anyway. So, some negative things that I think are problematic for American Christianity. One is that throughout our history, we have had confusion between church and state.

That is often a very complicated confusion between church and state. What is the job of the church? What is the job of the state? In meshing church and state together, we produce a kind of civil religion in American life. And I think that civil religion in American life can be very undefined in a sense.

But there have been times when there has been a confusion of church and state. Sometimes, some denominations have been very good about making sure we do not confuse those two, like the Baptist church. One of the great traditions of the Baptist, Roger Williams, in American life is not to confuse the two, church and state.

They each have their realms and so forth. But sometimes, there can be confusion between church and state, and it can be very, very complicated. Another thing that I would say is a weakness of American Christianity, and that is the emphasis on individualism.

Now, naturally, that emphasis on individualism comes as a result of our freedom, as we just mentioned, the freedom to choose, the freedom to say yes, the freedom to say no. However, the emphasis on individualism has also, at times in American Christianity, been on the neglect of the body, the neglect of the church, and the neglect of the community of believers. And we've got to keep those two things in balance.

God works with the individual for sure, but Christianity is a very personal religion, but never private. It always works itself out in the church, in the body of believers in the community. So American emphasis on individualism can be problematic at times, making it seem like Christianity is just about Jesus and me.

And that's not what Christianity is all about. So, a third thing that is problematic is kind of a mixed bag, in a sense. American fundamentalism has strong points and weak points. It's unfortunate that the weak points of American fundamentalism were so public.

And so American fundamentalism has its strengths and weaknesses, but the weaknesses sometimes won out. That's why evangelicalism was formed. Let me just say something about American fundamentalism, though.

This really is unique. Basically, it is unique to American life. If you grew up in an American fundamentalist tradition, when you travel to other parts of the world, you don't know very much about this tradition, even within the same denomination.

Even if it's in the same denomination and you go to another part of the world, and you maybe grew up in a fundamentalist church denomination, and you start to go to the rest of the world and say, here's what we're doing. They might not always be in sync with what you're talking about because they don't realize what the culture and social background is to American fundamentalism. So, they don't have that knowledge.

Therefore, without that knowledge, they don't realize why it produced what it produced. So another kind of negative thing, and we've already, I guess, talked about this in the weaknesses, but sometimes there can be a pretty myopic view of the richness of the body of Christ around the world. Americans can be so focused on their own little church or their own little denomination that they don't recognize the richness of the church in history or the richness of the church around the world either.

So, they don't recognize a world church, not one world church, but they don't recognize Christianity as it ministers to the world and is around the world in various traditions. A good example of this is when the Soviet Union kind of opened up for people to go and visit, and many of you may know of missionary groups that went into the Soviet Union. I know of some myself who went into Russia and Ukraine and so forth.

But when that opened up, when missions opened up to go into the Soviet Union, there were actually some groups on television asking for money to translate the Bible into Russian. Now, there's one little problem with that. The Bible has been in the Russian language for a thousand years.

So, nobody needs to translate the Bible into Russian. But that's a pretty myopic view. If your view is so closed, you don't think that there are Bibles in the Russian language and have been for a thousand years and that we need to get these translations into the hands of the people because they've never been able to read the Bible in their own language.

That's pretty myopic. That's pretty closed. That's pretty focused on just Americans and what we know about Christianity and so forth.

So that is myopic view. Another problem is at times in American Christianity has been a pretty low view of sin and of evil. A pretty low view of sin and evil and a corresponding high view of our own accomplishments.

And I think we need to be careful when the church patterns itself after the business world. The church is not in the business of business. The church uses business to accomplish what it has to do.

But it's not in the business of business. But when it comes into the business, when it has this high view of what they're able to accomplish and a low view of sin and evil, or a low view of our own reasons why we're doing what we're doing, excuse me, that can be problematic. So, there was a famous church in California, which will go unnamed, which was a very, very wealthy church that kind of patterned itself after a business, a very low view of sin and evil, a very high view of personal accomplishment.

And that church went finally, it took a nosedive, it went \$50 million in debt. Partly, the reason it went into such debt was because it didn't recognize the sin in its own ranks. It didn't recognize that that church was built on a lot of personal needs for attention, visibility, building a big structure, and so forth.

So sometimes in American Christianity, there's been this kind of low view of sin and evil, a correspondingly high view of the possibility of our own accomplishments. And finally, certainly, within American Protestantism, there has been a real decline in American Protestantism in serious doctrinal and theological training and investigation and life, I would say. And toleration has become so important in American Protestantism.

Toleration has become so important, kind of the important thing, that pretty much for some American Protestants, anything goes. And I've got an illustration of that. I'll give you just a minute.

One of the meetings that Dr. Hildebrandt and I go to almost every year, perhaps, is called the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. These two groups meet together every year. There are usually about 10,000 of us meeting together.

Now, the American Academy of Religion began, I can speak for that more than I can for the SBL, but the American Academy of Religion began as a very serious theological, scholarly discussion of theology and so forth and everything that attended to biblical theology. It wasn't exclusively Protestant, but it was heavily Protestant. But there were Catholics who came and Eastern Orthodox who came.

Now when you go to the American Academy of Religion meetings today, you can hardly recognize Orthodox theology in some of the sessions. And in fact, there are sessions that are so far away from Christianity and from Christian theology that

they're unrecognizable. I'm glad to say you can still find serious sessions and discussions on Karl Barth or Dietrich Bonhoeffer or evangelical theology.

So you can still find things there. And that's why I go; I want to find the people who are taking this stuff seriously. But there are so many other sessions that are so far away from scriptural authority or from the authority of the church, and I'm not sure why they still remain in the American Academy of Religion.

But there has been certainly a decline, certainly since the 60s, of the landscape of American religion within Protestantism, especially theologically, no doubt about that. Okay, so those are some of the things we should come to grips with in American Christianity and in this course. And just for a couple of minutes, are there any other negative things that you feel about? Yeah, Porter.

I just have a question about evangelicalism because you talked about how it sort of came from evangelicalism, but then you label some people as anti-evangelical. Right. Yeah, that's a good question.

The term evangelical really started at the time of the Reformation. So, the term evangelical has been used since the Reformation to talk about Christians who take the Bible seriously and take the Trinity seriously and believe Christ is the center of the story, those kinds of things. And what happened in church history then? The term keeps popping up so that, for example, the Wesleyan revival in the 18th century was labeled as an evangelical revival.

By that, we meant that the Wesleyans meant we're going back to a Reformed understanding, the importance of the Bible and the importance of grace and Christ, and so forth. Then, it comes back into the 19th century with the revivals, and they're labeled as evangelical. And then Rauschenbusch is labeled as evangelical by Evans.

Then, evangelicalism was used very seriously in the 40s to distinguish it from fundamentalism. So, it's picked up again to be used as a descriptive term of taking the Bible seriously, Christ is essential, all those things. So, the term has been used since the Reformation in various stages of church history.

So, the people who broke away from fundamentalism, the way they said, this is the term we want because it's very descriptive of what we're all about. Yeah. Something else.

Yeah. Oh, that could be, that's right. That would be a negative criticism that women have found it very difficult to find their way into the mainstream of church life.

Now, that happens more often with the Wesleyan groups because they believe in the equality of men and women. They believe that at Pentecost, there was this great

kind of liberation when the Holy Spirit came upon the sons and daughters, and so forth. It's happening with some churches like the Anglican church, where there are now women coming into ministry in the Anglican church.

But that's right. Women, in general, in American Christianity have had to work out on the borders because the main line, the mainstream, wasn't open to women in ministry. That is changing now.

And so, we'll see where that's going, but that is changing now. But that's right. That would be a negative criticism that, right from the beginning, women weren't recognized for what they could contribute to the Christian church.

Right. We tend to export it. That's true.

And what we're also exporting is American culture too, and American values too, or dis-values, however you want to say it. But we tend to export that to the rest of the world and not listen to what they have to contribute to the conversation. That's true.

No doubt about that. Yeah. Right.

Right. That's right. That's right.

Right. Yeah. That's very true.

American exceptionalism has been and continues to be problematic. And as we said, certainly within missions, we're not only taking the gospel, but we're taking the whole cultural framework to that gospel as well, which is an American framework. And yeah, that's true.

We have to be careful of that. So, some negative things. Okay.

So where are we? We're on Friday. Where are all the books? Well, some of you I'll see tomorrow. Most of you I'll see tomorrow.

By the way, if you're dropping out or adding, there's a little right there, last chance. Some of you will see all the books tomorrow, Friday; on Monday, we'll sit around and confess, and then on Wednesday, we'll see all the books, and then the following Monday is the exam.

This is Dr. Roger Green in his teaching on American Christianity. This is session 28, Evangelicalism an Evaluation.