

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 28, Evangelicalism, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 28, Evangelicalism, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture, "Evangelicalism an Evaluation," explores the defining characteristics and internal criticisms of the evangelical movement. He identifies key tenets such as a commitment to truth, a high view of scripture, the lordship of the Holy Spirit, personal conversion, evangelism, social consciousness, trans-denominationalism, and future commitments. Green then examines weaknesses acknowledged by evangelicals themselves, including a lack of appreciation for church tradition, failures in social commitment, intellectual shallowness, and cultural accommodation. Finally, in a subsequent lecture, Green offers both positive and negative appraisals of American Christianity as a whole, highlighting its denominational richness, social conscience, remarkable figures, and educational institutions, while also noting issues like church-state confusion, individualism, and theological decline.

**2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 28 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Church History → American Christianity).**



**Greenk_AmXy_Sessi
on28.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Green, Session 28, Evangelicalism, Part 2

Briefing Document: Dr. Roger Green on Evangelicalism and American Christianity in the Modern World

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

This briefing document summarizes the key tenets, weaknesses, positive appraisals, and negative criticisms of evangelicalism and American Christianity as presented by Dr. Roger Green in Session 28 of his "American Christianity" lecture series.

I. Tenets of Evangelicalism:

Dr. Green outlines several important tenets and doctrines that have historically supported evangelicalism, particularly in contrast to some aspects of fundamentalism.

1. **Commitment to the Integration of Faith and Reason:** Evangelicalism sought to overcome the anti-intellectualism of some fundamentalists by affirming that "**all truth is God's truth**. So whether that truth is philosophical truth, mathematical truth, or scientific truth, it's all from God." This emphasizes the use of both the mind and the heart in understanding God and the world.
2. **High View of Scripture and Reformation Hermeneutics:** Evangelicals are committed to a "**very high view of the Bible**," aiming to recapture the Reformation understanding of scripture. Dr. Green highlights the importance of discerning the "**intent of the scriptural 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?**" He introduces Alistair McGrath's two leading principles for an evangelical understanding of scripture:
 - Respect and honor views that attempt to be faithful to the Bible, even with a "**plurality of ideas coming from the same passage**."
 - If scripture doesn't make an issue clear, then "**it's debatable how important the issue actually is**." Dr. Green personally favors the term "**authoritative**" to describe scripture, aligning with the Wesleyan tradition, meaning it is "**the authority for Christian faith and practice**."

1. **Lordship of the Holy Spirit:** Evangelicalism has been crucial in bringing the Holy Spirit back into focus, emphasizing "**the lordship of the Holy Spirit over the life of the believer and over the life of the church.**"
2. **Emphasis on Personal Conversion:** Evangelicalism stresses the importance of "**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." Dr. Green cautions against universalizing the experience of conversion, noting that while historically evangelicals have focused on dramatic conversions with a specific "**spiritual birth date**," for others, it may be a more gradual process. The key is identifying with "**Christ as Lord and Savior.**"
3. **Priority on Evangelism:** Evangelism, with its varied means, is a significant priority for evangelicals, focused on bearing "**witness to the gospel.**"
4. **Strong Social Consciousness:** Historically, evangelicalism has been identified by a "**very strong social consciousness**," with concerns for the poor being paramount, as seen in the teachings of the prophets and Jesus. Dr. Green acknowledges a potential gap between this historical commitment and current practice.
5. **Recognition of Christian Truth Across Denominations:** Evangelicalism recognizes that "**Christian truth and Christian commitment is found in all denominations**" that hold to orthodox beliefs like the Trinity and the deity of Christ. McGrath's point about evangelicalism being a "**truly a trans-denominational movement**" is highlighted, noting the presence of evangelicals in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.
6. **Discerning Commitments for the Future:** Evangelicalism is actively considering its future direction. McGrath identifies three key areas:
 - **Evangelicalism and Public Policy:** Affirming that evangelicals, as stewards of God's world, should engage in public policy discussions and "**not be afraid to express biblical opinions about various matters.**"
 - **Collaboration with Other Christians:** Encouraging collaboration on issues of "**orthodoxy and ethics**," as exemplified by Dr. Green's experience on his denomination's international doctrine council engaging with the World Methodist Council and the Seventh-day Adventists. These collaborations revealed areas of agreement and disagreement, highlighting the potential for mutual learning (e.g., the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on the Sabbath).

- **Learning Between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics:** Recognizing the ongoing dialogues and increasing understanding between these two groups, identifying areas of common ground and disagreement.

II. Weaknesses of Evangelicalism (Identified from Within):

Dr. Green emphasizes that these criticisms come from within the evangelical movement itself.

1. **Failure to Appreciate the Richness of Church Tradition:** Evangelicals often fail to appreciate the "aesthetic dimensions of church tradition, the great life and liturgy of the church of God for 2000 years." This can lead to a perception that the church began with modern evangelicalism, overlooking a rich historical legacy. This lack of appreciation has led some evangelicals to seek richer liturgical experiences in traditions like Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy.
2. **Failure to Remain Faithful to 19th-Century Social Commitments:** Referencing Donald Dayton's "Discovering an Evangelical Heritage," Dr. Green notes a decline in the strong social engagement (e.g., abolitionism, women in ministry, care for the poor) that characterized 19th-century evangelicalism, exemplified by figures like Finney who saw no separation between preaching the gospel and social action.
3. **Intellectual Shallowness:** Mark Noll's "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind" is cited, with its stark opening sentence: "**the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there isn't much of one.**" This highlights a perceived failure to engage in serious intellectual work and homework within evangelicalism.
4. **Accommodation to the Culture:** Drawing on David Wells' "The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams," Dr. Green criticizes the tendency of evangelicals to "**accommodate to the culture so that you can't tell evangelicals very distinctly from the broader culture.**" This lack of distinction undermines the ability of evangelicals to speak to or judge the broader culture.

III. Positive Appraisal of American Christianity in the Modern World:

Dr. Green offers several positive aspects of American Christianity:

1. **Rich Heritage of Denominations:** Despite potential overlaps, the variety of denominations arising from diverse theological, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds is seen as a "**gift**" and a positive aspect.

2. **General Toleration:** While acknowledging historical instances of interdenominational conflict, Dr. Green notes a general spirit of "**toleration of each other in American public life, in American denominational life, in American Christian life.**"
3. **Strong Social Conscience:** American Christianity has often led the world in its "**strong social conscience,**" exemplified by the Social Gospel movement of Rauschenbusch and the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., both rooted in the church.
4. **Production of Remarkable People:** American Christianity has produced many "**remarkable men and some remarkable women**" who have significantly impacted its history, including figures like Jonathan Edwards, Walter Rauschenbusch, Billy Graham, Mary Baker Eddy, and Evangeline Booth.
5. **Relationship of Colleges and Universities to Christianity:** The historical and ongoing connection between higher education and Christianity in America is seen as significant. From the founding of early universities with Christian missions to the emergence of Bible Institutes and modern evangelical Christian colleges (a uniquely American phenomenon), this relationship has been vital.
6. **Emphasis on Evangelism:** The significant and recurring emphasis on evangelism throughout American Christian history, from the Great Awakenings to the revivals led by Finney, Moody, and Graham, has had a global impact.
7. **Prophetic Role:** American Christianity has often taken a "**very prophetic role,**" exemplified by the abolition movement and the current push for women's ordination in American Roman Catholicism.
8. **Trying to Come to Grips with Social Issues:** American Christianity has generally attempted to address the critical issues of its time, with the establishment of public education by the Puritans through the Boston Latin School being cited as an early example rooted in Christian commitment.

IV. Negative Criticisms of American Christianity in the Modern World:

Dr. Green identifies several problematic aspects of American Christianity:

1. **Confusion Between Church and State:** Throughout history, there has been a frequent and complex "**confusion between church and state,**" leading to a kind of undefined "**civil religion**" in American life. While some traditions (e.g., Baptist)

have strongly advocated for separation, this confusion has been a persistent issue.

2. **Emphasis on Individualism:** While freedom is positive, the strong American emphasis on individualism has sometimes led to the "**neglect of the body, the neglect of the church, and the neglect of the community of believers.**" This can result in a narrow view of Christianity as solely a personal relationship with Jesus, neglecting the communal aspect.
3. **Weaknesses of American Fundamentalism:** While fundamentalism has strengths, its public weaknesses have been significant and were a key factor in the rise of evangelicalism. Dr. Green notes that American fundamentalism is largely unique to American life, making it less understood in other global contexts.
4. **Myopic View of the Global Body of Christ:** Americans can be overly focused on their local or denominational contexts, leading to a "**pretty myopic view of the richness of the body of Christ around the world.**" The example of seeking funds to translate the already existing Russian Bible illustrates this narrow perspective.
5. **Low View of Sin and Evil and High View of Self-Accomplishment:** At times, American Christianity has exhibited a "**pretty low view of sin and of evil and a corresponding high view of our own accomplishments.**" This can be problematic, especially when the church models itself after the business world and fails to recognize internal failings, as illustrated by the unnamed wealthy California church that faced significant financial collapse.
6. **Decline in Doctrinal and Theological Training:** Within American Protestantism, there has been a "**real decline... in serious doctrinal and theological training and investigation and life.**" The emphasis on toleration has become so dominant that for some, "**pretty much anything goes,**" leading to a weakening of theological foundations. The changing landscape of the American Academy of Religion, with sessions moving far from traditional Christian theology, exemplifies this trend.

V. Additional Points Raised During Q&A:

- The term "evangelical" has been used since the Reformation to describe Christians who take the Bible and the Trinity seriously, experiencing periods of renewed emphasis throughout church history (e.g., Wesleyan revival, 19th-century revivals, post-fundamentalism movement).
- The difficulty faced by women in finding their way into the mainstream of church life is a valid negative criticism, although this is changing in some denominations.

- American Christianity's tendency to export its own cultural framework and values along with the gospel to other parts of the world, often without listening to reciprocal contributions, is a problematic aspect of "American exceptionalism."

This lecture provides a comprehensive internal evaluation of evangelicalism and a balanced perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of American Christianity in the modern world, encouraging listeners to critically engage with its history and present realities.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 28, Evangelicalism, Part 2

American Christianity: An Evaluation

Quiz

1. According to Dr. Green, how did evangelicalism differ from some aspects of fundamentalism regarding intellectual pursuits and science?
2. What are the two leading principles Alistair McGrath suggests should guide an evangelical understanding of scripture?
3. Beyond God the Father and God the Son, what aspect of the Trinity did evangelicalism bring back into focus, according to the lecture?
4. What caution does Dr. Green raise regarding the evangelical emphasis on personal conversion experiences?
5. How does Dr. Green illustrate the trans-denominational nature of evangelicalism in contemporary society?
6. What does Dr. Green identify as a key weakness of evangelicalism regarding its appreciation of church history?
7. According to Dr. Green, what significant social concerns were historically intertwined with evangelicalism in the 19th century?
8. What is the central argument of Mark Noll's book, "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind," as mentioned in the lecture?
9. What are two positive contributions of American Christianity in the modern world highlighted by Dr. Green?
10. What does Dr. Green identify as a problematic consequence of the American emphasis on individualism within Christianity?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Evangelicalism sought to overcome the anti-intellectual and anti-scientific tendencies present in some parts of fundamentalism. It affirmed that all truth, whether philosophical, mathematical, or scientific, originates from God.

2. McGrath's two leading principles are that views attempting to be faithful to the Bible should be respected and honored, even with differing interpretations, and that the importance of an issue is debatable if scripture lacks clarity on it.
3. Evangelicalism brought the lordship of the Holy Spirit back into focus for believers and the church, emphasizing the Trinity as a whole.
4. Dr. Green cautions against universalizing the experience of personal conversion, noting that it can be dramatic for some but a more gradual understanding for others. The key is identifying Christ as Lord and Savior.
5. Dr. Green notes that today, even Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox individuals identify as evangelicals, demonstrating its presence across traditional denominational lines.
6. A key weakness is the failure of many evangelicals to appreciate the rich aesthetic dimensions, life, and liturgy of the church tradition spanning 2000 years, sometimes giving the impression that the church began with evangelicalism itself.
7. In the 19th century, evangelicalism was strongly connected to social issues such as abolition, women in ministry, and care for the poor, with figures like Finney seeing no separation between preaching the gospel and these social commitments.
8. The central argument of Noll's book is that there was a significant lack of intellectual engagement within evangelicalism, summarized by the statement that "the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there isn't much of one."
9. Two positive contributions mentioned are the rich heritage of denominations in America and the strong social conscience demonstrated through movements like the Social Gospel and the Civil Rights movement led by figures like Rauschenbusch and Martin Luther King, Jr.
10. The emphasis on individualism in American Christianity has sometimes led to a neglect of the importance of the church as the body of believers and the community within which faith should be lived out, making it seem like a purely private matter.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the tension between evangelicalism's commitment to a high view of scripture and Alistair McGrath's principles for interpreting it. How might these principles both strengthen and challenge traditional evangelical approaches to biblical authority?
2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of evangelicalism as presented by Dr. Green. In what ways do the internal criticisms offered by evangelicals themselves provide a more nuanced understanding of the movement than external critiques might?
3. Evaluate the positive and negative aspects of American Christianity in the modern world, according to Dr. Green. Which of these factors do you believe has had the most significant impact on the development of Christianity globally?
4. Explore the historical relationship between evangelicalism and social action in America, considering both its 19th-century heritage and the criticisms regarding its faithfulness to those commitments in later periods. How has the understanding of "evangelism" broadened or narrowed over time in relation to social justice?
5. Consider the future of evangelicalism as suggested by Alistair McGrath's three areas of focus: public policy, collaboration with other Christians, and engagement with Roman Catholicism. What opportunities and challenges might these areas present for the movement in the coming years?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Evangelicalism:** A Protestant movement characterized by a belief in the necessity of personal conversion, the authority of the Bible, the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation, and the importance of evangelism.
- **Fundamentalism:** A conservative movement in early 20th-century Protestantism that opposed modern theological trends and emphasized biblical inerrancy and traditional doctrines.
- **Tenet:** A principle, belief, or doctrine generally held to be true, especially by a particular group or movement.
- **Hermeneutics:** The branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible.
- **Lordship of the Holy Spirit:** The belief that the Holy Spirit actively guides, empowers, and has authority over the lives of individual believers and the church.
- **Personal Conversion:** A personal experience or process by which an individual comes to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- **Evangelism:** The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.
- **Social Consciousness:** An awareness of social problems and injustices, and a desire to address them.
- **Trans-denominational:** Extending across or transcending different religious denominations.
- **Orthodoxy:** Generally accepted or traditional beliefs, especially in religion.
- **Public Policy:** Principles and actions formulated by governmental bodies to address societal issues.
- **Liturgy:** A form of public worship; the order of service in religious ceremonies.
- **Aesthetic Dimensions:** Relating to beauty or the appreciation of beauty, in the context of church tradition, this refers to the artistic and sensory aspects of worship.
- **Social Gospel Movement:** A Protestant intellectual movement that applied Christian ethics to social problems, particularly issues of social justice, poverty, and inequality.

- **Intellectual Shallowness:** A lack of depth or rigor in thinking and engagement with intellectual matters.
- **Accommodation to the Culture:** The process by which a religious group adapts its beliefs and practices to align with the prevailing cultural norms, sometimes at the expense of its distinctive identity.
- **Civil Religion:** A non-sectarian quasi-religious faith that exists within a society, often incorporating national symbols and rituals with religious overtones.
- **Individualism:** A social theory favoring freedom of action for individuals over collective control. In a religious context, it can emphasize personal faith over the communal aspects of religion.
- **Myopic View:** A narrow or limited perspective; lacking foresight or broad understanding.
- **American Exceptionalism:** The idea that the United States is inherently different from other nations in its origins, values, political system, or historical development, often implying a sense of superiority or a unique global role.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 28, Evangelicalism, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: American Evangelicalism and Christianity in the Modern World

1. How did evangelicalism differentiate itself from fundamentalism, and what are some of its key tenets?

Evangelicalism emerged partly as an effort to move beyond what some perceived as the anti-intellectual and anti-scientific tendencies within fundamentalism. Key tenets include a commitment to the idea that all truth, whether philosophical, mathematical, or scientific, originates from God. Evangelicals also emphasize a high view of Scripture, seeking to understand the intent of biblical passages through a hermeneutical approach rooted in the Reformation. Other important tenets include the lordship of the Holy Spirit, an emphasis on personal conversion (though with a recognition of diverse experiences of conversion), a priority on evangelism through various means, a historically strong social consciousness (focused on issues like poverty), a recognition of Christian truth across denominations (making it a trans-denominational movement), and an ongoing effort to discern future commitments, particularly in areas like public policy and collaboration with other Christians.

2. According to the source, what are Alistair McGrath's key principles for an evangelical understanding of Scripture?

Alistair McGrath proposes two leading principles to guide evangelical interpretation of Scripture. First, views that genuinely attempt to be faithful to the Bible should be respected and honored, even when multiple interpretations of the same passage exist. Second, if Scripture does not offer clear guidance on a particular issue, then the importance of that issue should be considered debatable. These principles underscore both the high regard for the Bible within evangelicalism and a degree of openness to diverse interpretations on less clear matters.

3. What are some of the internal criticisms or weaknesses of evangelicalism identified in the source?

Evangelicals themselves have offered several criticisms of their movement. One is a failure to fully appreciate the richness of church tradition, including its aesthetic dimensions and historical depth, sometimes giving the impression that church history began with evangelicalism. Another criticism is a failure to remain as faithful to the strong social commitments of the 19th-century evangelical tradition (such as abolitionism and care for the poor). Intellectual shallowness has also been noted, with a lack of serious engagement with intellectual work. Furthermore, there's concern about an accommodation to the broader culture, making it difficult to distinguish evangelical perspectives.

4. What does the source identify as positive aspects of American Christianity?

The source highlights several positive aspects of American Christianity. These include a rich heritage of denominations, generally a spirit of toleration among different Christian groups, a strong social conscience (exemplified by figures like Rauschenbusch and Martin Luther King Jr.), the production of remarkable individuals (both men and women), the significant relationship between colleges and universities and Christian faith (including the unique phenomenon of American evangelical Christian colleges), a consistent emphasis on evangelism, a history of taking a prophetic role on social issues (like abolition), and ongoing efforts to grapple with contemporary social concerns (such as the early commitment to public education).

5. What are some of the negative criticisms leveled against American Christianity in the modern world, according to the source?

The source presents several negative criticisms of American Christianity. These include a recurring confusion between church and state, often leading to a somewhat undefined "civil religion." The emphasis on individualism is seen as potentially neglecting the importance of the church as a community. American fundamentalism, while having strengths, has also exhibited public weaknesses. There can be a myopic view of the global body of Christ and its historical richness. At times, there has been a low view of sin and evil coupled with a high view of self-accomplishment, and within Protestantism, there's been a noted decline in serious doctrinal and theological training, with toleration sometimes overshadowing theological substance.

6. How has the understanding and use of the term "evangelical" evolved, according to the speaker?

The term "evangelical" has a history stretching back to the Reformation, initially used to describe Christians who took the Bible and the Trinity seriously and centered their faith on Christ. It reappeared during the Wesleyan revival in the 18th century with a similar meaning, again in the 19th-century revivals, and Rauschenbusch was also labeled evangelical. In the 1940s, the term was consciously adopted to differentiate a movement from fundamentalism, again emphasizing a serious engagement with the Bible and a Christ-centered faith. Thus, the term has been a recurring descriptor throughout church history for those emphasizing these core tenets.

7. What examples of collaboration and dialogue between different Christian traditions are mentioned in the source as a future commitment for evangelicalism?

The source highlights a commitment to future collaboration with other Christians on issues of orthodoxy and ethics. Specific examples of such dialogue include the speaker's involvement on his denomination's international doctrine council, which engaged in discussions with the World Methodist Council and the Seventh-day Adventists. Furthermore, the source mentions dialogues that have occurred on the speaker's campus between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement in their respective faiths.

8. How has American culture, both positively and negatively, influenced American Christianity as discussed in the source?

Positively, American culture's emphasis on freedom has fostered a rich diversity of denominations and a spirit of toleration within American Christianity. The freedom of thought has allowed individuals and groups to pursue different theological and social paths. The strong social conscience often seen in America has also deeply influenced Christian action on issues like poverty and civil rights. Negatively, the American emphasis on individualism has sometimes led to a neglect of the communal aspect of the church. Additionally, there's a tendency for American Christians to be myopic about the global church and to export their own cultural frameworks along with their religious beliefs. The potential for confusion between church and state, a uniquely American dynamic, has also been a point of concern.