

[1968. In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

EVANGELICALISM. The term “evangelicalism” is derived from the Greek word for Gospel or good news. The good news is salvation by grace and justification by faith, rather than acceptance by God on the basis of meritorious human endeavors. Thus, when the people of Germany were trying to escape the punishment of their sins by paying money to Tetzl for indulgences from the pope, the term evangelical was attached to the followers of Luther. Even today many Lutheran churches still use the term in their official titles. Since the Reformed churches also preached justification by faith, they, too; acquired the designation, so that evangelicalism and Protestantism became virtually synonymous.

Evangelicalism, however, is not defined by the doctrine of justification solely. The doctrine of the Trinity is also essential, so that a Unitarian or Socinian, even if he tried to preserve some form of justification by faith, cannot properly be called an evangelical. In addition to the Trinity, evangelicalism preaches the vicarious Atonement of Christ, a propitiatory sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God. Such a sacrifice is the presupposition of justification by faith alone. And there are other doctrines. But the most important of all, and one without which the Reformers could not have met the Romanists, is the supreme authority of the infallible Scriptures. The Romanists made their ultimate appeal to the church, the councils, and more recently to the infallible pope. Luther and Calvin made their ultimate appeal to the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.

There are, therefore, two principles which constitute evangelicalism. There is the *material principle*, the contents of the Gospel, in particular the doctrine of justification by faith alone. And there is the *formal principle*, the source of the contents, the authority of the Word of God, the infallible Scripture alone. *Sola fide! Sola Scripture* (Faith alone! Scripture alone!). No one who rejects either of these principles can properly call himself an evangelical. These two principles govern the historical meaning of the term, and it is theological dishonesty to alter the meaning.

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