Greetings once again in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me invite you to join me as we begin class today. Let us pray. *Eternal God, we ask that you would be with us today, guiding us by Your Spirit, that everything that we think together and all that is said would be honoring to You. For we pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Many of us, I suspect, would readily and gladly identify ourselves as Evangelical Christians. Yet we need, from time to time, to be reminded of what it actually means to be an Evangelical. I want us to think about that important question as we conclude our course together.

There is much, of course, that we still don’t know about the Evangelical Movement. But there are several things which we can affirm with substantial confidence. In the first place, we can say that Evangelicalism is a very large movement. Some 40-50 million Americans identify themselves by the term “Evangelical.” And, of course, there are many additional missions around the world.


We can also say that Evangelicalism has received a great deal of attention in recent years, not only attention by the popular media—and, in fact, some of us perhaps wish that we would not have received quite as much attention as we have—but we have also received a great deal of attention by academics within academic institutions. One of the most interesting descriptions of some of that burgeoning interest in Evangelicalism among
academics is found in a little essay produced by Leonard I. Sweet in the book which he edited, titled *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, by Mercer University Press. Even though I have a little article in that same volume, the very best thing in the volume is Len Sweet’s description of some of the work which has been going on in Evangelical studies in recent times. It is remarkable, the wide range and diversity of things being studied now.

The study of Evangelicalism, in a sense, is a kind of growth industry, and we see that in the production of an enormous number of books, not only some of the old classics but now a great many more recent books as well. Let me suggest to you a few of these just to whet your appetite. Some of you may want to pull out of the library: Donald Dayton’s little book *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage*, by Harper and Row. It is a rather fascinating place to begin; or Donald Bloesch’s [book] *The Evangelical Renaissance* by Eerdmans; or Ken Kantzer’s [work] *Evangelical Roots* by Thomas Nelson; or more recently, a book like George Marsden’s *Reforming Fundamentalism*, by Eerdmans; or Bruce Shelley’s fascinating [title] *The Gospel and the American Dream* by Multnomah Press; or perhaps, J. D. Allan’s [work] *The Evangelicals: An Illustrated History* by Paternoster and Baker Press. These and a good many other books are available for our study and for our growing understanding of the Evangelical Movement.

So we can say that Evangelicalism is a large movement. It is substantial in terms of its size and certainly worthy of our study because of that. We can also say that it is a richly varied movement. We can say that it has received a great deal of attention not only by the popular press but also in academic circles. But perhaps most important of all, I would want to suggest that Evangelicalism is currently in trouble. And the reason it’s in trouble is that it is confronted today with a wide range of different problems. Let me mention a few of these just in a suggestive manner.

There is a growing sense of *fragmentation* within the movement. Some of the diversity that we heard referred to in the list of Robert Webber’s 28 or Gabe Fackre’s five or any number of other listings of categories of Evangelicals should point us at least in the direction that the movement is a divided movement with many different kinds of emphases and different direction. And I want to come back to that in just a bit.

We also are faced, today, as Evangelicals, with enormous lure of *materialism*, the kind of cultural captivity which has surrounded the Evangelical Movement. Bruce Shelley picks this up very
powerfully in his little book *The Gospel and the American Dream*, which I mentioned a moment ago.

We also have the growing problem of *relativism*. Those of you who are familiar with Alan Bloom’s interesting and rather controversial book *The Closing of the American Mind*, by Simon and Shuster, will recall that that book opens with the suggestion that one thing that all university professors can take essentially for granted as they look out upon the new crop of students each year is that those students bring with them a basic commitment to relativism—that there are no absolutes. Now that obviously is going to deeply impact the life of the church, eventually, as people work their way through the universities and on into our seminaries and into leadership within the life of the church.

Another problem that we have today is what Robert N. Bellah in his *Habits of the Heart*, a book which was published by Harper and Row in 1986—one of the most important books of this last decade—has suggested is that American religion is, in general, a privatized kind of faith. That is, people have turned in on themselves. They have become interested only in what relates directly to them and to their own growth and development and interest.

These and many other problems, I think, we can point to as dilemmas for a movement which is very large, powerful, and growing, but increasingly now fragmented, privatized, captive to the culture, materialistic at the base. These are elements that call, I think, for a basic and deep-seated commitment to renewal or revival within the life of the church.

Now you’ve heard me call for this in past lectures, but I want to reaffirm the importance that I place upon the prayer and work of the Christian Community for the renewal of the church in our day. And I think, in particular, our Evangelical Movement today, as powerful and as strong as it is, it has great need for renewal. And that is an element that we’ve seen occur over and over in the history of the church and which needs to happen again today.

You remember in our discussion of American religious life that “the City on the Hill,” that initial Puritan dream, ultimately reached a point of collapse. And it was renewed and revived through what we call “The First Great Awakening of the 18th century.” That work under such people as Theodore Frelinghuysen and Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and Samuel Davies and Devereux Jarratt and others. This was followed by a “Second Great Awakening” in the early part of the 19th century under people like Beecher and Nettleton and Charles G. Finney. “A
“Third Awakening” brought new life in the late 19th century in the great prayer revival of 1857 and then under the work of Moody and Sunday. And a “Fourth Awakening,” as William McLaughlin of Brown University has suggested, emerging in 1940 out of which the new revived Evangelicalism emerged.

You can recall our discussion earlier of the life cycle that all movements, all churches, just like individuals, go through a process of life cycle: from birth, through growth, to consolidation, decline, and ultimately death. And the only thing that can interrupt that process within the life of the church is God’s gracious renewing of the church, which can bring new vitality and life. Elements are always present in that kind of renewal—elements of prayer, of Bible study, [and] of lay involvement. Remember those themes that we picked up from our study of renewal throughout the history of the church.

A revival is possible. It has come again and again by God’s grace. That renewal of spiritual vitality, always sent by God through His Spirit, and always producing in the life of the believer and in the believing community a deeper love for God and a deeper love for one’s neighbor. Remember those marks of genuine revival which Jonathan Edwards gave us at the time of “The Great Awakening,” does this revival raise the esteem of Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of all people? Does it cause an abandonment of sin and a thirst for righteousness? Does it increase regard for the Holy Scriptures? Does it produce sound doctrine, correct belief? And does it evoke genuine love for God and the neighbor? These marks of genuine revival are as useful and important for us today as they were for the church in the past in every era in which the life cycle brought them to the point of decline and the need for renewal and revitalization.

What I am suggesting to you today, then, is that our own Evangelical movement, as large and influential as it is, I think is in great need of revival. And I call upon us to get ourselves involved through prayer and Bible study and activity, calling upon God to refresh us once again with genuine wholesome revival in our midst.

Now American Evangelicalism itself is rooted in that kind of renewal and revival. Remember it started in “The American Evangelical Awakening” in the first revivals of the 18th century. It reached its maturity, its classic shape, in “The Second Great Awakening” of the 19th century. It was transformed in many ways through all of the changes that took place in the late 19th and early 20th century through “The Third Great Awakening.” And it
reemerged. It was reenergized in the form of new Evangelicalism in “The Fourth Great Awakening.” A number of different traditions came together to form what we call “American Evangelicalism.” The Protestant Reformation, of which we’ve talked on a number of our lectures in this course, giving to us those great principles of Reformation thought: (1) the authority and centrality of the Scriptures, (2) justification by grace through faith, [and] (3) the priesthood of all believers. Those great principles that we talked about came out of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. These have helped to nourish the American Evangelical Tradition.

“Continental Pietism,” that renewal movement within Lutheranism in Europe itself, has been a major ingredient to nourish American Evangelical thought with its missionary fervor, its deep social concern, its stress upon experiential faith.

The two most immediate historical antecedents to American Evangelicalism, however, were Puritan Calvinism with its stress upon conversion. Remember, the Calvinists of a Puritan stream were committed fundamentally and centrally to new birth. They talked about it endlessly. It shows up in their journals over and over again. They were also committed to church reform. In fact, they were a reforming society at the very core. That is why they call themselves “The City Upon the Hill.” They had a vision of a Christian Society and what it might be like. They were ardently “post-millennialists” at that time. They believed in the establishment of the kingdom right here on the earth. Puritan Calvinism then nourished American Evangelicalism. And, in fact, it is within the soil of Puritan Calvinism in the Great Awakening period that American Evangelicalism was, in fact, born.

But along with Puritan Calvinism, Wesleyan Arminianism became the second great primary antecedent to American Evangelical thought with its stress upon disciplined living, social reform, evangelism, and missions and experiential faith.

All of these elements then—Protestant reformed thought, Continental Pietism, Puritan Calvinism, [and] Wesleyan Arminianism—came together to form that classic core of American Evangelical life and thought which we find emerging in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. All of these tied together by certain common commitments: (1) a shared authority: the Bible, (2) a shared experience: conversion or new birth, (3) a shared task: worldwide mission and evangelism, and (4) a shared vision: The establishment of God’s kingdom here on earth.
These then took classic form in the 19th century, and became the dominant religious pattern of America’s 19th century. These were transformed in certain ways as they went through the vast changes that we’ve talked about that followed the Civil War and that brought us into the beginnings of our own century.

And you can recall that that great Fundamentalist Wing, which is the inheritor of this Evangelical mantle, is in the early part of this century, in doing battle with Modernism—with that Liberal tradition which had emerged also in the 19th century, though it had its roots much earlier—ultimately polarized in such a way that both of them collapsed. And we entered the 1930s in a time of spiritual as well as economic depression. And it is out of that experience that the renewal movements of our century, the Orthodoxy (about which we have spoken as a renewal within the old Liberal camp) and new or neo Evangelicalism (which was the renewal within the Fundamentalist camp) began to emerge. And they emerged once again in the revivals of the 1940s and 50s. They consolidated themselves in this gigantic network of institutions, which we call New Evangelical Institutions: (1) The National Association of Evangelicals, formed in 1941; (2) Christianity Today, formed in 1956 as the voice of the movement; and (3) The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, to help to promote and encourage the Evangelistic efforts of the primary voice of the new Evangelical movement—Billy Graham himself.

This gigantic network of institutions, which dominated Evangelical life from the 1940s through the early 1960s, was led by a relatively small circle of individuals—people like Billy Graham and Harold John Ockenga and Carl F. H. Henry, Charles Fuller, Harold Lindsell, J. Howard Pugh, and one might name a few others as well. It was a rapidly growing and remarkably cohesive movement. One that had deep impact upon American religious life, brought tens of thousands of people into the kingdom of Christ, introduced them to the faith of the Gospel which we find in the Scriptures, and began to establish them in various useful work throughout the world. It was also a great stimulus to missionary activity as well.

There were a lot of continuities as we have already discovered with the old Fundamentalism: (1) the commitment to the same basic theological affirmations of the divinity of Christ, and (2) the authority of the Bible and the like. We have talked about those already. But there were some discontinuities with old Fundamentalism. And, in fact, a reestablishment, a reengagement with the kinds of commitments that had been part of classic Evangelicalism through most of its history. A reengagement
with the life of the mind, as Evangelicals began to reinvade the universities. A reengagement with mainline church life, and Harold John Ockenga was one of the most dominant voices in calling Evangelicals to return to those mainline churches and to pray and work for renewal within those churches. And, of course, a reengagement with social justice issues, the kinds of concerns which had been so much a part of Evangelical life in earlier years but which had been lost in part due to the battles of the 1920s.

What we have emerging then is this great Evangelical renewal of the 20th century began to come unglued and began to fragment as it faced the challenges of the 1960s. And we talked a little bit in our last lecture about the impact of that remarkable decade. *Time Magazine* summarized this in an interesting way in an issue, April 9, 1973, following the 60s and reflecting back upon them. Let me read a section of an article which they titled “Searching Again For the Sacred.:

No book captured the popular theological mood of the 60s better than Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City*. “Men must be called away from their fascination with other worlds, astrological, metaphysical or religious, and summon to confront the concrete issues of this one,” wrote Cox, a professor of religion at Harvard Divinity School. His call for social involvement was a capstone to decades of religious “this worldliness.” Religion was not a thing of pious Sundays but of vigorous shirtsleeve weekdays. Struggles for racial justice, economic equality, and so on came to dominate the 60s. But the liberal optimistic vision of the secular city and of the human race was at odds with a growing undercurrent of disillusion about man’s ability to transform either himself or his world. Slowly, as out of a fog, life began to be a matter of basic questions again. Young people especially were virtually impelled to go on their own quest for religious roots. Few are finding what they seek in liberal churches, since the mid 1960s mainstream Protestantism particularly has slipped in numbers (of course, this is well documented by the Roof and McKinney mainline church study and others). Many Americans are finding a measure of transcendence in the growing ranks of the doctrinally conservative Protestant churches, some of them Evangelical, some of them frankly Fundamentalist.
That interesting reflection on the shift from the 1960s to the 70s indicates a kind of growing new interest in the supernatural which marked that era. Along with that, however, was a growing fragmentation within the very renewal movement, which had come to be called “New Evangelicalism,” and which had been so cohesive and so powerful during those decades of the 1940s and 50s particularly.

So we return to Gabe Fackre’s five groupings of Evangelicals as a way of pointing in the direction of that kind of fragmentation which not only has divided into these five major camps. But now redivided into “sub-group after sub-group, often angry with one another,” as Robert Wuthnow, the sociologist from Princeton has suggested to us in his recent writings.

The New Evangelicals, those who had reengaged with the life of the intellectual community with mainline churches with social concern, had only pressed that old Evangelical agenda so far. And others began to want to press that even further. The Peace-and-Justice Evangelicals, led by folk like Ron Sider with periodicals such as The Other Side and Sojourners Magazine, wanted to expand the range of social issues, of justice issues, confronted by Evangelicals. The questions of peace and power, the role of women in society and the church, the place of structural evil in ethical categories; these were the new frontiers, the recaptured frontiers in many ways, for these Peace-and-Justice Evangelicals, so-called.

There was resurgence also of the Old Fundamentalists reaching back to the original Puritan models, often times to call for Christian political action to help build a more biblical society. And we have the emergence of “The Moral Majority” and the concerns to use the political process now to bring America into conformity with biblical principles once again.

And there were the Charismatics, about whom we have talked in an earlier lecture—this massive, enormously influential wing of worldwide Christianity, the largest growing wing of Evangelicalism itself with millions of adherents around the world. Rooted, of course, in the great Azusa Street revival of 1906, but then pervading not only the classic Pentecostal bodies, but beginning to invade all of the mainline churches and the peripheral churches as well with the kind of emphases which marked Charismatic renewal.

And there were the Old Evangelicals, those who wanted to reactivate the glory days of 18th and 19th century classic Evangelicalism. These are some of the folk about whom Donald Dayton talks in
his book *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. It is quite fascinating when one begins to think how even our seminaries now are beginning to line up in one camp or other. Where does one go if they are part of “the New Evangelical Movement,” that wing of modern day Evangelicalism? Well they might choose schools like Gordon Conwell Seminary or Trinity Evangelical Divinity School or Denver Seminary or Bethel or one of those. Where do “Peace-and-Justice” folk tend to go? They might tend to go among other places to Eastern Seminary. Where do the Fundamentalists go? They might go out to John MacArthur’s Masters Seminary or to Talbot or to Dallas. Where do the Old Evangelicals tend to go? Well it might be to Princeton or maybe even to Asbury. Where do Charismatic Christians go? Well among many others, maybe out to a place like Fuller Theological Seminary.

Many of the seminaries, in fact, in our day are beginning to position themselves in one or other of these camps. These are difficult days for enrollment in many schools, and because of that many target their market. They target their focus, and often those targets are geared toward those very divisions which now mark Evangelicalism.

What I would like to suggest is to move beyond that kind of division, subdivision, and resubdivision which we have found in our day and to return to a different kind of agenda, overcoming our fragmentation, our materialism, our relativism, these things with which we as a movement are struggling today and to recapture our central sense of mission. Placing God at the very heart of what we are about, that our basic focus needs to be upon the glorification of God. As the old Westminster folk taught us, our task is also “to enjoy God forever,” but our focus being centrally on God Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And our task, that which unifies us and ties us together is The Great Commission in Matthew 28. And our guide, our authoritative source, is the Scriptures which provide the kind of balance which I think we need within our movement today, stressing: (1) the uniqueness and universality of Christ, (2) we need for cultural sensitivity in our communications across boundaries, (3) social responsibility, (4) commitment to justice, (5) a recognition of the power of the Holy Spirit, (6) an understanding of spiritual conflict within our world today, (7) a stress upon appropriate education—to train lay and clergy for their work in the world. All of these and so many other parts of that biblical balance need to be recaptured. But they need to be recaptured around not schools of thoughts or of divisions which have now pulled us apart, but around our
commitment to our God and toward the mission which He has called us to do.

Do you remember those powerful words in Matthew 28? Let me remind you of those because I think that they form the very core of what God is calling us as his people to do today:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”

That commission which was given to the original disciples is a commission which is given again to us today. As we come to pray, to study our Bibles, to work again for renewal, for revitalization of spiritual faith within the movement that we love which has nourished us and which has helped to shape us, we need to rediscover that it is more important for us to focus our attention upon biblical faith and upon the call to the ministry of worldwide evangelization which God has given us. And that, in effect, that can draw us once again together across the boundaries which now increasingly divide us.

My son Robert is part of a youth group in our church, and that youth group has had some difficult days in past years. They’ve been somewhat “disunified.” They have fished around for things that they can do to entertain themselves—until this past year, that is, when under some very adept and godly leadership, their attention was focused not upon themselves, but upon what God was calling them to do “together” as believers, as part of Christ’s church here in the world. They started studying the problem of homelessness. They read about it. They talked with people in our area that were part of that difficult phenomenon in our urban centers here in America today. They learned everything they could about it. They talked with people in our area that were part of that difficult phenomenon in our urban centers here in America today. They learned everything they could about it. They began to study the Bible as it relates to our obligations to other peoples. And then, they began raising money so that they could go to work over the spring break in Washington D. C. in one of the homeless centers serving food for people in the mornings, again at noon, talking to folk, doing work that would be constructive for the needs of that community. They earned a remarkable amount of money through car washes and through
the sale of everything from lobster rolls to pies and cookies. And it transformed the group literally from folk who were disjointed, not quite sure whether they wanted to be part of it, to a cohesive core of young people who were committed to ministry and who became excited about the possibilities of living out their faith in a way that made a difference in the world today.

My hunch is that the Evangelical Movement, so badly fragmented today, needs once again to be captured by that vision of a mission that moves beyond their differences to the common call to evangelization, to world ministry that God has given to us again and again across the centuries.

Now some will say today, of course, that that is not what people in the churches are really interested in. Some years ago a very interesting study was produced by the National Council of Churches. It was published under the title *Punctured Preconceptions*. It was a study of North American Protestants from 15 different denominations. Interviews of an hour and a quarter (average time apiece) were held with 3,454 of these people. They were given an opportunity to state their views about what they believe, how they feel about the church, what the church should be doing, what is expected from the denominations, how they do or do not respond to church programs, why they give, and what the future holds and the like. And the result of this was the “puncturing” of many beloved preconceptions. One of them: that we are living today in a post-Christian Era and that people today no longer accept traditional Christian faith. The fact is that the study showed overwhelmingly, among US lay population, that when they asked questions like this: I believe in God as a heavenly Father who watches over me and to whom I am accountable—97.8 percent said, “Yes.” I believe that God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ; 99 percent, “Yes!” I believe in eternal life; 97.3 percent, “Yes.” I believe that Christ is a living reality; 97.8 percent, “Yes.” The fact is, according to this very thorough study, that today's church members overwhelmingly and enthusiastically affirm traditional concepts of faith and insist that these be taught and preached in their churches.

Also, they tested the assumption that the declining church membership in America is a result of the churches traditionalism. If we could jazz the churches up a little bit, they would do far better. So they asked them, “Why don’t you go to church?” And the reasons were surprising. They were more interested in non-church organizations that challenge them to things that are worthwhile more than do the churches. They don’t like the pastor.
They've lost faith in the church. The programs aren't appealing. There are too many financial requests. These are the things that seem to have kept people away from the church, not its traditional practices.

Declining church membership, according to the study, is largely due to its failure to adequately meet the lay person's need for growth and service. They aren't being challenged. They aren't being given anything worthwhile to do that compels them to be there.

Finally, let me mention that they tested the assumption that modern church-goers are no longer interested in evangelism. Remember, these are broad-based studies across 15 denominations. They discovered that the number one priority in the church (listen to this carefully) given by this study is: “To win others to Christ.” And they said it [in] no uncertain terms. *Punctured Preconceptions* puts it this way on page 188:

> Beyond getting the record straight on these functional matters, however, the strong steady note that sounded throughout this study was the overwhelming, unshaken dedication to classic Christian beliefs, a plea for fuller teaching of them, and an insistence that they be plainly proclaimed in the cause of evangelizing the nations and winning others to faith in Christ. “The church must return to the preaching of the Gospel,” declared an Ohio salesman, “it is the only way we can be effective.”

What the people in the churches are saying to us is exactly what God calls us to and that is: We need to quit talking only about ourselves, internalizing, privatizing, and we need to get to work at the commission that Christ has given to His church. [It is] the same commission today as has been true in every generation. There is where revitalization can take place as we pray and work for renewal, as we set our hand to the plow to do the task that God has called us to do.