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Evangelical Tolerance or All Things to all Men

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Fundamentalism Today

by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson

Evangelical Tolerance or All Things to All Men

Evangelicals are known for their tolerance and love. However, they are often hesitant to draw clear lines of separation from unbelief and doctrinal error. Left-wing Evangelicalism is extremely relativistic in its approach to truth and as such is reluctant to take a stand dogmatically for fear of offending those who may disagree. The issues Evangelicals struggle with are quite different from those facing most Fundamentalists.

Ten Questions for Evangelicals

1. Should I prohibit the men in my church from attending the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship? Yes No
2. Should I withdraw my support of our Campus Crusade Missionaries because of their new position on Charismatics? Yes No
3. Should I vote to dismiss Robert Gundry from membership in the Evangelical Theological Society because of his view on redaction criticism? Yes No
4. Should I allow a Fuller Theological Seminary student from my church to speak on the inerrancy issue? Yes No
5. Should I encourage our church members to attend the local movie theater to see Billy Graham's new film, *The Prodigal*? Yes No
6. Should I allow our youth pastor to conduct a nuclear freeze rally in our church auditorium? Yes No
7. Should I cooperate with a pro-life group that plans to march against the local hospital in protest of abortions performed there? Yes No
8. Should I ask the chairman of the deacon board to resign because he has been practicing Christian Science for nearly two years? Yes No
9. Should I allow our youth group to participate in an interfaith dialogue with a Catholic youth group? Yes No
10. Should I hire an assistant pastor who was recently divorced and remarried? Yes No

Fundamentalists rarely struggle with these questions. Their commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture compels them to take a strong stand on such issues. However, many of these

areas are of great concern to Evangelicals who do not want to appear intolerant or closed-minded. Their overt concern to appear academic, credible, and sensible often compels them not to draw clear lines of separation. This has become clearly evidenced in the areas of personal and ecclesiastical separation. Attempting to avoid the pitfalls of legalistic Christianity, Evangelicals have often surrendered their positions altogether.

Character or Compromise?

One of the major criticisms that Evangelicals have leveled against Fundamentalists is that we give simplistic answers to the complicated questions of society. Just as obviously, most Evangelicals give overly complicated answers to the simple questions that people are really asking. The pseudointellectualism of ivory-towered Evangelicalism often leaves the public wondering what it is really saying. The common Evangelical approach to most issues is to so neutralize and qualify answers as to offend no one. Most Evangelicals give such equivocated answers that they are not answers at all! Ask an Evangelical whether or not he believes there are flames in hell, and after a 30-minute philosophical recitation on the theological implications of eternal retribution in light of the implicit goodness of God, you will still not know what he really believes. Ask a Fundamentalist whether he believes there are flames in hell and he will simply say, "Yes, and hot ones too!"

The Great Evangelical "But"

The typical Evangelical approach to controversial issues is to negate one's statement with an appropriately placed "but." For example:

"I believe in hell, but . . ."

"Sure I am concerned about abortion, but . . ."

"I am personally opposed to movies, but . . ."

"I believe in social-political involvement, but . . ."

"I think we need to take a stand on inerrancy, but . . ."

"I am all for soulwinning, but . . ."

"I like Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*, but . . ."

"I am concerned about the theological drift of some of our Evangelical schools, but . . ."

"I don't agree with Robert Schuller's theology, but . . ."

Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy, has stated that the word *but* negates everything preceding it in a sentence and reduces it to meaningless verbiage! One of the techniques of Gestalt Therapy in counseling is to force the client to positively affirm or deny his statements without qualifying them with a great psychological "but." Perhaps the time has come to submit the entire Evangelical movement to religious Gestalt therapy in order to clarify the "game of dialogue" and "take responsibility" for what they really believe without the equivocation of the great Evangelical "but"!

Left-wing Evangelicalism is extremely relativistic and reluctant to take a stand dogmatically for fear of offending those who may disagree.

Parable of Pastor E. van Gelical

Consider the dilemma of Pastor E. van Gelical. Recently, a representative of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association called him about attending a meeting of local pastors to discuss the premiere showing of World Wide Pictures' new film, *The Prodigal*. While attempting to make up his mind about supporting a Christian film to be shown in the local movie theater, he receives a call from Rev. Fun D. Mentalist, who likewise has been invited to the meeting and wants to know if he is going. After talking it over, they decide to attend the meeting together without making any decision about supporting the movie since neither is fully comfortable with the whole idea.

When Rev. F. arrives he shocks Rev. E. with his giant-print Bible, Christian lapel pins, and a bumper sticker reading: "Beware of this car in case of rapture!" Reluctantly Rev. E. gets in and they set off to St. Mark's Church for the meeting. When they arrive, they are told that the entire group will be bused to the local movie theater for a special ministers' preview of the film. What should Rev. E. van Gelical do?

1. Ride the bus and hope that no one sees him enter the theater.
2. Go along for fear of offending the other pastors.
3. Ask to drive and conveniently get lost!
4. Walk out in protest.

He decides to go along on the bus to see the movie so that he can better decide the issue. When they arrive at the theater, Rev. Fun D. Mentalist further embarrasses him by passing a gospel tract to the theater attendant! As they are seated he finds himself between Rev. F. on the right and an ordained Presbyterian woman pastor on the left. Before the movie starts, she jokingly asks him if he saw the recent issue of the *Wittenburg Door* slamming Fundamentalists and further asks him what he thinks of these fanatical Fundamentalists. Feeling the presence of Rev. F. beside him, what should he do?

1. Ask, "What is your definition of a Fundamentalist?"
2. Defend Fundamentalists.

3. Whisper his response in her ear so as not to offend Rev. F.
4. Claim that he never saw that issue of the *Door*!

After viewing the entire movie, the woman pastor is deeply moved. She turns to Rev. E. and says: "I have not been so deeply touched by a movie since I saw *On Golden Pond*." She then asks him how *On Golden Pond* affected him. What should he do?

1. Tell her that he has never attended a movie theater.
2. Change the subject.
3. Act as though he agrees with her so as not to offend her.
4. Tell her he enjoyed the book more!

From the theater, the entire group is bused to a local restaurant for a complimentary meal. At the restaurant Rev. E. and Rev. F. are seated at separate tables. While Pastor E. van Gelical is looking at the menu, a Lutheran pastor orders a bottle of vintage wine for the entire table. The waiter opens the bottle and begins to fill the wine glasses. What should he do?

1. Tell them that he is allergic to wine!
2. Politely refuse the wine on the basis of his convictions.
3. Take just a few sips so as not to offend anyone.
4. Be all things to all men!

As the salad arrives, Rev. E. can hear Rev. F. praying out loud several tables away! The food is clearly set before them and everyone hesitates. What should he do?

1. Pray silently and begin eating.
2. Offer to ask the blessing for the entire group.
3. Start poking around in his salad, cautiously.
4. Excuse himself to go to the men's room and pray there in order not to offend anyone!

During the meal they discuss evangelism and he mentions to the group that he used to be a Youth for Christ staff evangelist. The Methodist pastor next to him excitedly tells him that they need a speaker to close their upcoming interdenominational Youth Celebration that will include a Christian rock concert, a modern dance dramatization, and a guest appearance by Joe Namath. What should he do?

1. Refuse the invitation.
2. Accept the invitation so as not to offend anyone.
3. Tell him that he will have to check his schedule.
4. Wish he had never gone to the Billy Graham film in the first place!

Compromise Begets Compromise

While the preceding parable is certainly hypothetical in nature, it nevertheless demonstrates that one compromise inevitably leads to another until it becomes impossible to avoid yet further compromise. The courage of one's convictions is essential if he is to stand up for what he believes without fear of offending those who may disagree with him. The ultimate reality of Christianity is the offense of the Cross! The message of the gospel automatically divides all men into two categories: saved or lost. We dare not neutralize the truth of God's Word in order to make it more palatable to a generation that has sold its soul to relativism, Humanism, and naturalism. The time has come for Evangelicalism to take its stand! If Evangelicals don't stand for something, they will eventually fall for everything and finally represent nothing!

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