

What Is Evangelical Christianity?

The Defining Criteria

Four Defining Beliefs

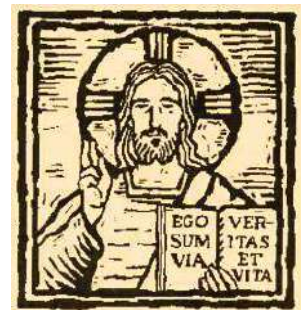
1. Biblicism.

- The Bible is our primary source of authority (*sola scriptura* or *prima scriptura*).
 - ▶ II Tim. 3:15 – All Scripture is God-breathed [divinely-inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”
- The Bible (not church history and traditions) is the ultimate authority for what we believe (doctrinally) and how we live (morally and ethically).
 - ▶ Church tradition may or may not be helpful as it is a convoluted mix in terms of fidelity to Scriptural principles but also gross corruption and hypocrisy, schisms, heresies, apostasy, and even persecutions carried out at various times by various churches in the name of Christ.
- Basic biblical orthodoxy:
 - ▶ Divine inspiration of Scripture.
 - ▶ The Bible is historically reliable, and doctrinally and morally authoritative.
 - ▶ The character and nature of God – eternal, infinite, personal, trinitarian, creator, sustainer, transcendent, immanent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, sovereign, immutable, inscrutable, loving, etc.
 - ▶ The character and nature of mankind – the *imago Dei* and original sin.
 - ▶ A real spirit world composed of angels and demons.
 - ▶ Satan is a real spirit-person, not a metaphor for evil.
 - ▶ The reality of the afterlife in Heaven or Hell.



2. Christocentrism.

- Doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.
 - ▶ Jesus: “You study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.... If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” [John 5:39, 46]
- The Incarnation, Virgin Birth, sinless life, atoning sacrificial death, and physical/ bodily resurrection of Christ.
- Spiritual salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Jesus Christ alone (*solus Christus*).
 - John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the God the Father except through me.”
- The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.



3. Conversionism.

- The Christian faith is primarily a spiritual relationship with God through personal spiritual conversion.
- The doctrine of the “New Birth”.
 - Key elements: Belief in the claims of Jesus Christ, repentance of sins, and commitment of one’s life to loving and following Christ.
- Salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Jesus Christ alone (*solus Christus*).
- John 3:3, 5-7 – “Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’”
- John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the God the Father except through me.”
- Act 16:31 – “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”
- I Tim. 2:3-6 – “God our Savior... wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

4. Evangelism.

- Evangelism is not optional – it is an essential component of discipleship – and every true Christian is called to be a witness for Christ.
- Matt. 10:32-33 – “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny him before my Father in heaven.”
- Col. 4:2ff – “Devote yourselves to prayer.... Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”
- I Peter 3:15 – “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”
- Matt. 28:19-20 – “Go and make disciples of all nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....”

— THE BARNAL GROUP —

Who Qualifies As an Evangelical?

<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/111-survey-explores-who-qualifies-as-an-evangelical#.Vie3Q-FPcs>

January 18, 2007 – The media and social commentators frequently refer to surveys that describe the opinions and behavior of “evangelicals.” However, those analyses are based on surveys that ask adults whether or not they consider themselves to be an evangelical. For two decades, The Barna Group has been measuring the social, political, religious and behavioral characteristics of evangelicals as well – but using a substantially different set of criteria. The Barna Group’s nine questions pertaining to the spiritual beliefs of people have reported on a very different – and much smaller – group of people. To distinguish them from the self-described evangelicals, Barna has named the segment based on its answers to nine theological factors the “9-point evangelicals.”

Size Counts

Asking people if they consider themselves to be evangelicals produces a comparatively large number: 38% of the [American] population accepts that label.

The Barna Group has traditionally used nine questions to categorize people as evangelicals [see page 3], whether they consider themselves accurately described by that label or not. Using the nine questions about their beliefs produces a much smaller figure: just 8% of the adult population in 2006 fit the criteria. In other words, the number of self-defined evangelicals outnumbers the 9-point evangelicals by a margin of nearly five-to-one. (The nine factors examined are listed in the Research Details section at the end of this report.)

When extrapolating these percentages across the entire adult population, the difference is staggering: 84 million adults based on self-report versus 18 million using the nine-point theological filter.

Also intriguing is the fact that 86% of the 9-point evangelicals also call themselves evangelicals. In stark contrast, just one out of every five self-proclaimed evangelicals (19%) meets the Barna Group’s nine-point definition.

Demographic Profiles Differ

Those who consider themselves to be evangelicals differ in their demographic background from those who meet the more stringent Barna Group definition.

The self-proclaimed evangelicals are less likely to have graduated from college (29%, versus 39% among the 9-point evangelicals); less likely to be married (63%, versus 77% among the 9-point segment); less likely to be white (66% vs. 76%); and have much lower average household incomes (\$40,250 for the self-reported evangelicals, compared to \$49,194 among the 9-point evangelicals). On the other hand, self-defined evangelicals are more likely to emerge from the Northeast or West (35% of the self-defined groups is from those two regions combined versus 27% among the 9-point evangelicals residing in those two areas) and are more likely to be 60 or older (38% versus 31%).

There are huge gaps between the two groups in terms of political inclinations. For instance, those who are self-described evangelicals are much less likely to say they are mostly conservative on social and political matters (45%, compared to 65% among the 9-point evangelicals). They are also considerably more likely to be registered to vote as a Democrat (35%, compared to just 26% among the 9-point evangelicals) and less likely to be registered as a Republican (42%, compared to 51% among the 9-point evangelicals). Seen in a different light, there is only a seven percentage point difference in the number of Democrats and Republicans among the self-defined evangelicals, but a 25-point difference among those who are deemed evangelical by virtue of their beliefs.

Radical Differences in Beliefs

The most striking differences relate to the beliefs of each group. Compared to the 9-point evangelicals, those who say they are evangelicals are:

- 60% less likely to believe that Satan is real;
- 53% less likely to believe that salvation is based on grace, not works;
- 46% less likely to say they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs with others;
- 42% less likely to list their faith in God as the top priority in their life;
- 38% less likely to believe that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth;
- 27% less likely to contend that the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings;
- 23% less likely to say that their life has been greatly transformed by their faith.

In fact, the Barna research also noted that one out of every four adults (27%) who say they are evangelicals is not even born again, based upon their beliefs. (The Barna Group defines someone as born again if they say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicate that they believe when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents are not asked to describe themselves as “born again.”

Divergent Religious Behavior

The study also detailed the very different religious behavior profiles of the two segments. On the traditional measures of religious behavior, the 9-point evangelicals were much more active in pursuing their faith. For instance, the 9-point evangelicals were 40% more likely to read their Bible during the week, and 31% more likely to attend church during a typical week.

Amazingly, the self-proclaimed evangelicals were four times more likely than the 9-point segment to be unchurched.

A Call for Clarity

George Barna, who has pioneered a number of the measurement standards used for examining people’s spiritual lives, called for the media to be more careful and thoughtful in their reporting of faith matters.

“The Bible does not refer to any person as an ‘evangelical,’” the researcher noted. “This is a construct created within the religious community many years ago to differentiate a group that possesses a distinctive theological perspective. Over time, people have become sloppy in the measurement process, as evidenced by the fact that one out of every four self-identified evangelicals has not even accepted Christ as their savior. Responsible analysts, researchers and journalists should be encouraged to re-examine the term and the measures they are using. Political commentators, reporters, educators and researchers continually make important claims about the spiritual life, lifestyle patterns, voting preferences and issue stands of evangelicals even though it is clear that the criteria they use for identifying evangelicals are misleading, at best.”

Barna suggested that those who describe themselves as evangelicals more closely resemble a segment that his company has labeled the **“born again Christian”** population – a group that displays an above-average interest and involvement in religious activity, but whose religious fervor and commitment is nowhere near that of true evangelicals. He stated that past research among the 9-point evangelicals showed that their voting patterns are radically different from those of born again and self-defined evangelicals; that they are much more conservative on a vast array of social and political issues, ranging from abortion and homosexual unions to the importance of family; that their use of media and their lifestyles are significantly different from those of the born again public; and that evangelicals donate significantly more money to non-profit organizations.

When asked about the origin of the nine-point evangelical criteria that his firm has used in surveys for nearly two decades, he cited the work of the **National Association of Evangelicals**. “Years ago, NAE labored long and hard to identify what an evangelical believes. Because the distinguishing attribute of an evangelical is what he or she believes, we drew criteria from the belief statement of the nation’s leading association evangelicals. We probably overestimate the number of evangelicals, since we do not take into account all of the beliefs that NAE says a true evangelicals holds. But our measurement approach incorporates the key elements from their statement of faith.”

He ended his remarks with a caution. “Keep in mind that only God knows a person’s heart. No scientific instrument is able to perfectly evaluate what a person believes, or how deeply they believe it. Research is just an approximation of what is happening in society. But America certainly deserves – and has access to – better measures than those that are often used in public discussions about the religious faith of people, and the implications of that alleged faith, especially in matters of politics and public policy.”

Research Details

The data in this report are drawn from four nationwide telephone surveys conducted by The Barna Group with random samples of adults, age 18 and older, conducted in January, April, August and October of 2006. In total, 4014 adults were interviewed. From those surveys, there were 763 adults who described themselves as “evangelical Christian” and 333 who met the 9-question Barna Group definition of an evangelical Christian. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the self-defined sample of evangelicals is ± 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the 9-point evangelicals is ± 5.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

“Born again Christians” are defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today, and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents are not asked to describe themselves as “born again.”

“Evangelicals” meet the born again criteria (described above) *plus* seven other conditions. Those include...

- **Saying their faith is very important in their life today;**
- **Believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians;**
- **Believing that Satan exists;**
- **Believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works;**
- **Believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth;**

- **Asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and**
- **Describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.**

NOTE: Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or one’s church (or denominational) affiliation. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “evangelical” but were assigned that label based on their responses to the criteria mentioned in this article.

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