

Being A Biblical Christian, **Getting Evangelical Christianity Radically Back to Good News** **and Apocalypticism** **Dr. Joe Martin, March, 2007**

INTRODUCTION:

This is a synopsis with further thoughts of a class that is taught at Atlanta Bible College, B470 Evangelical Theology. It uses Clark Pinnock's book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, and Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*.

I am fascinated by the term "Evangelical" by both its use and abuse. In a sense, I was determined to review Evangelical Theology with the notion that of all people, Biblical Christians ought to have good news as we fully understand the real Jesus and the real coming Kingdom.

"**Eu**" or "ev" in English, is a great prefix. It simply means "good." We use it often. The eulogy is spoken at the funeral. The deceased may be one of the vilest creatures that ever lived, but someone usually manages to come up with some "good word" concerning him or her. Note also, we see "**logos**" word or message. Another good word that is thrown about in our modern times is "euthanasia." ☺ You may have thought that biblically death was the enemy, but there are people out there who want you to have a "good death." However, Paul, I Corinthians 15, speaks of being sown perishable, in dishonor, in weakness, mortal. My favorite, besides our subject matter, evangelical, is "**eucharist**." The family of words, **charis** or grace, is beautiful. **Eucharisteo**, I give thanks, is the basis for the table of communion. I am thankful for the communion table and the "good grace" shown there.

The main word I want to look at is "**euangelion**" or good message, good news and gospel. We need to "steal back" the use of this term as we understand God, His Kingdom and His Christ. Radical means "to the roots." Evangelical Christianity ought to be reintroduced to the original good news that motivated early Christianity. A point made in class is that the "**euangelion**" is based upon the "**epangelia**" (super messages) or promises of God. (**epi**- on, upon; over, cp epidermis- the outer layer of skin... on top of the other) "God is not a man that he should lie." (Num. 23:19)¹ In fact, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) Concerning "**epangelia**" for men, the TDNT says, "In general promises are comparatively worthless, for they are so seldom kept. Thus... man who is always promising but never performs."² However, the **dabar YHWH**, word of God, is a definite promise. The Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant support the notion that God is going to do what God said he would do. The gospel has to do with the land, those who will inhabit the land, and the blessing that is to come to the whole earth. P.S.- THAT IS WHAT ABRAHAMIC FAITH IS!(THE GOSPEL WAS PREACHED TO ABRAHAM... GAL 3:8)

God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about 12 times (depending how one counts some of the dreams, theophanies, and angels). (Gen. 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14f; 15:1f; 17:1f³, 18:1f, 21:11f, 22:15f [all Abraham] 26:1f; 26:24f [to Isaac]; 28:13f; 35:9f [to Jacob]) About **50 times** phrases with "will..." (N.I.V.) are used in the promises. Who are we to

¹ New International Version used unless noted.

² Kittel, Gerhard, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Geoffrey Bromiley, trans., Eerdmans, 1964, V II, p. 577.

³ Read this sometime! About 20 "wills" from God in this one section.

think that God will not do the good things he promises to do. We have Good News, based on the super promises of God. A partial list of the “wills”...

- Will...great nation
- Will... bless you
- Will... make your name great
- Will... bless those who bless you
- Will... curse those ...who curse you
- Will ... bless all the people of the earth
- Will... give this land (Gen 12)
- Will... fruitful
- Will... kings come from you
- Will... establish... everlasting covenant
- Will... be their God
- Will... (Sarah) bear you a son (Gen 17 partial list.... Etc.)

The Davidic covenant is just as sure, II Sam. 7:16, etc. The *epangelia* of the **Ebed YHWH**, is just as prophetic, “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.” (Isa. 42:6) “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isa. 49:6) The “he” of Isa. 53 is “pierced, wounded, led like a lamb, cut off from the land of the living, assigned a grave, will see the light of life... .” YHWH says, “I will make the nations your inheritance” to his Son. (Psa. 2:8) “He will rule from sea to sea... the River to the ends of the earth.” (72:8) And of course Psalm 110:1, YHWH says to my Lord... . How dare we not understand the Gospel of God, GOOD NEWS! How dare we let nominal “Evangelical” Christianity have news (floating on a cloud playing a harp...etc.) other than God’s Good News? What God has done, does, and will do is GOOD. Genesis 1: Tov, tov, tov, tov, tov, tov, tov mayod (טוֹב מְאֹד)! Good, good, good, good, good, good, very good!

FIRST POINT, GOD:

There are three main thoughts in renewing “evangelical theology.” First, God is to be biblically understood as good. Second, Christ must be a biblical Christ. Third, the future ought to be a biblical future. Part of the class is to review the Good God! In many of our southern churches, the phrase is chanted, “God is Good! The response is “All the time” My main scriptural point is through Exodus 34:6,7, what I have come to refer to as the “Eight Attributes of God.” He’s the Compassionate, Gracious, Slow to Anger, Abounding in Love, Abounding in Truth (*emet*=faith/truth), Maintaining Love, Forgiving: Wickedness, Rebellion, and Sin; Yet Does Not Leave the Guilty Unpunished!⁴ Notice that the first seven are focused on GOOD things! Of course judgment could also be viewed from the context of justice and goodness. We have a GOOD GOD! Ezekiel 18:32 says “I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!” Also, “God is not willing that any should perish... .” (II Pet. 3:9) We have a Good God, who gives us Good News, based on His Good Promises, bringing us to His Good Messiah/Shepherd who will bring us into His Good Kingdom! (read that again!)

⁴ Some Jews refer to the “13 Midot of Rachamim” (mercy/grace) because of the 13 Hebrew words, but to me there are eight attributes. Cp. <http://vbm-torah.org/roshandyk/midot.htm>

Pinnock speaks of the “Wideness in God’s Mercy,” and the notion that there should be an optimism of salvation, a hermeneutic of hopefulness.⁵ He proposes two axioms, “the boundless mercy of God,” and the “finality of Jesus Christ... .”⁶ In a recent article I wrote, I asked the question, “What is Jesus’ favorite subject?” I proposed the answer to be God, and especially of God as Father who really cares for us. Of course, his primary proclamation and preaching, is the Kingdom of God. However, I noted the “of God” to be of particular interest. God is used 293 times in the gospels. Father is used 283 times there. The Kingdom is used 121 times. It’s the Kingdom of, Love of, Grace of, etc. ... GOD! “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (KJV James 1:17)

My favorite verse regarding the garden of Eden is Genesis 3:8, they “heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day... .” Just because they had sinned, God is not giving up on paradise. Hosea 5:15 says, “I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.” Our good God does not intend to stay away from the creation he designed to choose to love him. Through his phenomenal plan, logos, blueprint, gospel, He will walk with us again. Revelation 21, after the New Jerusalem comes down, verse three says, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” Randy Alcorn, in his book, *Heaven* says, “God has never given up on his original creation. Yet somehow we’ve managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear. Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect.”⁷ **GOD IS GOOD!**

SECOND POINT, CHRIST:

The second point that Christ must be a biblical Christ is also an issue in re-evangelizing evangelical Christianity. Alcorn says, “The people never looked for the Messiah to reign in Heaven.”⁸ In the pagan world of Plato and Aristotle, the gods were always coming down. In the biblical world of God’s plan and promises, the *protoevangelion*, Genesis 3:15, tells us that the deliverer will be born. He is the “seed of the woman,” the “seed of Abraham,” the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “David’s son... .” Please understand, Strobel’s book is an excellent book (*The Case for Christ*). In it he leads us as a former atheist, now an investigative journalist, in examining the evidence, biblical records, documentary evidence, corroborating evidence, scientific evidence , etc. to make a good case for scripture and Christ.

He questions several leading authorities who often give some great answers. His first interview is with Craig Blomberg⁹ who after reading Daniel 7:13-14 says, “So look at what Jesus is doing by applying the term ‘Son of Man’ to himself. This is someone who approaches God himself... and is given¹⁰ universal authority and dominion. That makes the ‘Son of Man’ a title of great exaltation, not of mere humanity.” ...And then the quantum leap takes place from Jesus’ unique association with God to God. ☹ In class, I called it the double talk of creedal orthodoxy. One example of talk, double talk was the

⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, Zondervan, 1992, pp. 17 ff.

⁶ Pinnock, p. 49.

⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale, 2004, p. 88.

⁸ Alcorn, p. 222.

⁹ Some of his books, *Jesus and the Gospels*, *How Wide the Divide*, etc.

¹⁰ Notice “given”, cp “all authority is given to me” (Jesus), given implies he didn’t have ...

letter of Pliny the Elder, to the Emperor Trajan in which he lets Trajan know these Christians met on a fixed day, and “chanted verses... in honor of Christ as if to a god.”¹¹ Now every good student of history knows that from Pharaoh (son of Re), to Alexander the Great, enjoying Pharaoh’s title also, to the Roman emperors being sometimes worshipped as “**dominus et deus**,” Lord and God, there is a problem in the culture of godship. Everyone is grasping at equality with God but Jesus! But the double talk is the very next page where the interviewee is quoted as saying, “And it talks about the worship of Jesus as God... .”

I suggested that we ought to try to “... not go beyond what is written.” (I Cor. 4:6) Here is a novel idea, whenever we are asked what we believe about Christ, JUST quote scripture! Like Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Mt. 16:16) How about just some of the **basic epangelia about Jesus!**:

Gen. 3:15- The seed of the woman to crush Satan
 Gen. 12:3- WHOLE world to be blessed through his descendants
 Gen. 49:10- Scepter/ruler’s staff from Judah
 Numbers 24:17- A Star, a scepter, a ruler
 Dt. 18:18,19- Prophet, ... My Words, He will tell, ...not listen, God calls ...
 II Sam. 7:16- House, Kingdom, Throne, forever
 Psa. 2-You are my Son, -I will make the nations your inheritance
 Psa. 72:8- Sea to sea,...River to the ends of the earth...all nations blessed...him
 Psa. 110- YHWH to my Lord... He will judge the nations... rulers... whole earth
 Isa. 9:6,7- Child...Son...Government...WC, MG, EF, PP,-Reign on David’s throne
 Isa. 49:5- EBED YHWH... bring my salvation to ends of the earth/Gentiles!
 Isa. 53:6- YHWH has laid on him the iniquity of us all
 Isa. 53:8-11- Cut off, grave, will see the light of life
 Dan. 7:13,14- He was given!!!!... authority, glory, power... dominion...kingdom !!!!!
 Micah 5:2-Bethlehem... one who will be ruler... origins of old! (Gen. 3:15 ☺)
 Luke 1:31-33- Child, Jesus, Son, Lord God will give... Throne... Kingdom Etc.

A great read on what the early church believed is James D.G. Dunn’s, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*.¹² According to Dunn, it would be better to speak of Orthodoxies in the first two centuries of Christianity. One sentence caught my attention, “In many places... it is more likely that what later churchmen called heterodox Christianity was the initial form of Christianity.”¹³ ☺ I like to think that we “Biblical Christians” though we are called heretical by some, may be closer to original Christianity than later creedal Christianity! Pinnock even “allows” for us whose “...difficulties with Christianity in fact lie not with biblical language so much as with the technical creedal formulations of later church tradition.”¹⁴ I have to smile! Compare that to Raymond Brown in *Jesus, God and Man*, while noting that only three times (to him) is Jesus “clearly” called “god,” (Jn. 1:1, Jn. 20:28, Heb. 1:8,9) he says in a footnote, “Needless to say, for those who believe in Nicaea and Chalcedon, these texts will be explained in a way ...”¹⁵ of the Catholic, church tradition, or orthodoxy. Wait! We explain the scripture with scripture, not creeds. ☺ Our Jesus needs to be a biblical Jesus. We may never “fully know” him at present (Mt. 11:27- “No one knows the Son except the father... .” knows= **epignosko**, fully knows.)

¹¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, Zondervan, 1998, p. 83, citing Pliny to Trajan letter.

¹² Second edition, Trinity (☺) Press, 1990.

¹³ Dunn, p. 3. Reflecting Bauer as well that there was no “pure form of Christianity.

¹⁴ Pinnock, P. 60.

¹⁵ Raymond Brown, *Jesus God and Man*, Macmillan, 1967, p.9.

POINT THREE: The Future, Apocalypticism.

Jesus is coming again in His Kingdom. It's been lost for almost two thousand years! It is called *apocalypticism*. We are not going to fix our problems, God will intervene in human history, through His Messiah, and begin the fix! Ehrman, in his book, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, suggests that if the beginning of Christianity was very apocalyptic, and the end is getting that way also, would we not conclude that the founder was truly apocalyptic. "Jesus thought that the history of the world would come to a screeching halt, that God would intervene in the affairs of this planet, overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment, and establish his utopian Kingdom here on earth."¹⁶ Ehrman, on Schweitzer's, *Quest of Historical Jesus*, says, "Throughout his account, Schweitzer sympathizes with scholars who sought to free Jesus from the dogma of the church (as if the historical Jesus himself would have recited the Nicene Creed)."¹⁷ 😊 That was Ehrman's parenthetical quote not mine!

(P.S.- Jesus cited the SHEMA! (Mk. 12:29)

What's happened? The "delay of the parousia" has caused many to give up the belief that Jesus will really, truly come back? Augustine gives us a "City of God" which is not the Kingdom? Well, that needs to be recaptured. If Matthew 24:14, is to happen, there needs to be a validation of Jesus' true message of the Kingdom. Several are making valiant efforts to do just that.¹⁸ Myles Munroe, a popular television speaker says that preaching of the Kingdom message is to the second coming as Noah's ark building was to the flood. The latter does not happen until the former is done! Dr. George Ladd says "three words are employed in the New Testament to describe the second advent."¹⁹ They are **parousia**, coming, presence, arrival (as-Mt. 24:27,37); **apokalypsis**, revelation, revealing (as-Lk. 17:30); and **epiphaneia**, manifestation (as Titus 2:13,14). These tell us of a **coming** as lightning flashing from the east to the west; a **revelation** as a flood to Noah, and as fire to Sodom; and as the **manifestation** of our true "blessed hope." If the roots are apocalyptic, the tree should be too. Ehrman says:

"For one thing, almost all scholars today would agree that when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, he is *not* referring to 'heaven'... but when Jesus talks about the Kingdom, he appears to refer principally to something here on earth—where God will at some point *begin* to rule as he already *does* rule up above... . Such references are scattered through the tradition, and rather than writing them off—for example on the grounds that we ourselves don't imagine that God will actually, literally, establish a kingdom here on earth—we should take them seriously. 😊 Jesus like other apocalypticists living before him and afterwards, evidently thought that God was going to extend his rule from the heavenly realm where he resides down here to earth. There would be a real, physical kingdom here, a paradisaical world... . In the future kingdom, God's people will be rewarded with a utopian existence. No wonder Jesus proclaimed the coming Kingdom as 'good news' to those who would listen."²⁰

¹⁶ Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, Oxford Press, 1999, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ehrman, p. 126.

¹⁸ Dr. George Ladd, my deceased teacher from Fuller, Anthony Buzzard, Dr. Myles Munroe, a charismatic, etc.

¹⁹ George Ladd, *The Last Things*, Eerdmans, 1978, p. 50 ff.

²⁰ Ehrman, p. 143-144.

CONCLUSION:

The bottom line then is for us to restore (aren't we in the *semper reformanda*²¹ business?), reboot "evangelical" Christianity with the goodness of God and the good news, gospel of the Bible, His Kingdom, and His Christ. The Greek family or cognate word group for *euangel...*, or *evangel...* is very interesting. It is **used over 100 times** in the New Testament. The good news or gospel is good news of the Kingdom, of God, of great joy, of peace, of God's grace, of His Son, of our Lord Jesus, of Christ, of the glory of Christ, and (best of all individually speaking) your salvation.²² "Health and wealth" is a golden calf gospel. "Going to heaven" is a feel good gospel. The gospel of the Bible, is down to earth, practical, straightforward. It is a paradise lost, to paradise restored Gospel. **IT IS GOOD!**

What of the Church now? Hauerwas and Willimon in their book, *Resident Aliens*, suggest that the church is as a "colony" of the Kingdom. The colony has "... significance only as God's means for saving the whole world. The colony is God's of a major offensive against the world, for the world."²³ In terms of Kingdom focus, God's Good News they say, "the removal of eschatology from ethics may account for the suffocating moralism in our church... . Without eschatology, we are left with only a baffling residue of strange commands... . How meager is our righteousness when set next to this vision of God's kingdom."²⁴

"The church is a language school for the kingdom.

We begin now to treat people the way we will treat them in the kingdom.

We begin now to love people the way we will love them in the kingdom.

We begin now to love ourselves the way we will be loved in the kingdom.

We begin now to do justice the way justice will be experienced in the kingdom."²⁵

We are living in a situation that for the most part has lost its "good news." Most news is bad news: wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, nuclear bombs, global warming, the latest murder, the latest tragedy, etc. What we need is the Good News of God. Look at the end in Rev. 5: 9, 10 "...with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." WOW! That's the Good News in a nutshell of two verses, the kingdom and Jesus bringing us to serve God!

**We have a
Who has
Based on
Of a
And**

**GOOD GOD
GOOD NEWS
GOOD PROMISES
GOOD KINGDOM
GOOD MESSIAH**

²¹ From the Reformation, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est secundu Verbum Dei* (the reformed Church must be always reforming according to the Word of God) Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vice-versa#vice-versa>

²² From Bible Works software study of "Gospel of..." or "good news of..."

²³ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Abingdon, 1989, p. 51.

²⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, pp. 90-91.

²⁵ Craig A. Loscalzo, *Evangelistic Preaching that Connects*, Intervarsity, 1995, referring to Tom Long, p. 51.