

Leadership and Gospel Faithfulness

There is a growing softness around the edges of biblical morality, on issues such as hell and judgment, sexual ethics. Theological liberalism always emerges when evangelicalism becomes embarrassed by its core convictions. What do you do with Christian colleagues who you have worked with closely in the past but have now shifted their ground on some basic and important principles? How can leaders remain faithful to the Gospel and Scriptures amid ethical challenges?

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I. Evangelicals who drift from the gospel and gospel doctrine

A. Recent examples of evangelicals who have drifted from the gospel

1. Peter Enns
2. Roy Clements
3. Steve Chalke
4. Bart Ehrman

B. Doctrines that former evangelicals have often abandoned

1. Inerrancy of the Bible
2. Eternal punishment in Hell
3. Propitiatory atonement
4. The wrath of God
5. Sexual ethics – exclusively for heterosexual marriage
6. Exclusivity of Christ in salvation

C. The devastating impact of drift from the gospel in evangelical history

1. Unitarianism – 17 & 18 Century
2. Classics Liberalism – 19 & 20 Century
3. “Oneness Pentecostalism”

D. Drift and the redefinition of “evangelical”

1. historic/classic/orthodox/conservative evangelicalism
2. open/liberal/progressive evangelicalism
3. “Gospel” as an alternative definition (cf. The Gospel Coalition)
4. “reformed” as a narrower subset of “evangelical”

II. What is drift from the gospel?

A. The difference between heresy and difference on secondary matters

1. Those things of “first importance”
2. Tolerance of legitimate disagreement

B. Heresy and false teaching

1. Denial of the divinity of Christ
2. Denial of the humanity of Christ
3. Denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15)
4. Denial of the future personal return of Christ to judge (2 Peter 2:1-3 & 3:1-10)
5. Denial of justification by faith alone (Gal. 1:6-9)
6. Denial of apostolic authority
7. Legitimation and approval of sin – especially sexual sin (Rom. 1:32)
8. Imposition of ascetic legalism (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

III. Why do evangelicals drift from the gospel?

- A. We live in the last days – what did you expect! (2 Tim. 3:1-4:8)
- B. Parable of the Sower – persecution and pleasure of life (Matt. 13:1-23)
- C. Academic and social pressure
- D. Immature and naïve evangelicalism
- E. Reaction against crass fundamentalism
- F. Desire not to judge family and friends
- G. Influence of key leaders who have drifted
- H. Desire to justify sexual sin

IV. How do we protect against drift from the gospel?

- A. Personal responsibility – Guard your lives and doctrine carefully
- B. Mutual accountability – Friendships, fraternals, associations
- C. Ecclesiological accountability – Confessional standards
- D. Where will you turn to when you have doubts and questions?

V. What should we do when former evangelicals drift from the gospel?

- A. The distinction between church leaders and church members
 - 1. A higher accountability for teachers/leaders
 - 2. Moral and doctrinal criteria for leadership (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-13)

- B. The vital importance of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-8; 1 Timothy 1v18-20)
- C. The need to protect the church from false teachers (1 Cor. 5:6-8)
- D. The need to bring those who have drifted to repentance and salvation (1 Cor. 5:5 & 2 Cor. 2:5-11)
- E. The need to forgive those who repent of their unfaithfulness (Jude 22; 2 Cor. 2:5-11)
 - 1. Restoration to fellowship but not necessarily to church office
- F. Discipline in local churches, denominations and pan-denominational evangelicalism
- G. The crucial role of seminaries, publishers, broadcasters and para-church organisations

Suggested Readings:

Carl Trueman, *The Confessional Imperative* (Crossway)
 Carson and Keller, *The Gospel as Centre* (Crossway)
 J Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Eerdmans)
 John Piper, *Brother We Are Not Professionals*
 Paul David Trip, *Dangerous Calling* (IVP)
 Paul Mallard, *Staying Fresh* (IVP)
 Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline* (Crossway)
 Jonathan Leeman, *Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love* (Crossway)