

Defining Some of our Terms

Grace Church Brockley is an *independent, protestant, reformed, evangelical* church committed to the Bible as the Word of God.

Independent

Independent or non-denominational churches are those not formally aligned with an established denomination (e.g. Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.), or that remain otherwise officially autonomous. This, however, does not preclude an identifiable standard among such congregations. They may establish a functional denomination by means of mutual recognition of, or accountability to, other congregations and leaders but without formalizing external direction or oversight in such matters. Such churches would have commonly held doctrinal beliefs, policies and models of ministry.

Some non-denominational churches explicitly reject the idea of a formalized denominational structure as a matter of principle, holding that each congregation is better off being independent or autonomous. They might therefore refuse to recognize any ecclesiastical authority above the local congregation and deny the visible unity of the Church (*though not the unity of the invisible Church*), despite the fact that the original denominations were formed by substantially the same ideology. Members of non-denominational churches often see themselves simply as "*Christians*". Non-denominationalism however, should not be confused with inter-denominationalism, or ecumenism.

Grace Church Brockley is not currently independent as a matter of principle, but for the moment finds itself in a position not unlike that which is described in the first paragraph above. In the future this may or may not change into something more formal depending on circumstances. If we do officially affiliate or align ourselves with any organisation or body, it is most likely at this stage to be the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC).

Protestant

Protestantism is one of the major groupings within Christianity. The term Protestant is used to refer to any Christian group which developed from the Reformation. The term was not initially applied to the Reformers, but later was used to describe all groups protesting against Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Since that time, the term Protestant has been used in many different senses, often as a general term merely to signify Christians who belong to neither of the Churches of Catholic tradition (e.g. Roman, Orthodox).

Protestant has also been defined as "*any of several church denominations denying the universal authority of the Pope and affirming the Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth*" and, more broadly, to mean Christianity outside "*of a Catholic or Eastern church*". It is a movement that began in Germany in the early 16th century as a reaction against medieval Roman Catholic doctrines and practices, especially in regard to salvation, justification, and ecclesiology. Certain German princes protested against the decision of the Diet of Speyer in 1529, which sadly had denounced the Reformation.

Reformed

As discussed above, the "Reformation" was a movement which began in the sixteenth century where its proponents reacted against various ungodly medieval Roman Catholic doctrines and practices. Reformation Theology (RT) was an attempt to hold purely to the teachings of the Bible such that the doctrines proclaimed by the church would be nothing more than the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles and the totality of the Scriptures. To the reformers of the 16th century RT was THEREFORE about recovering the gospel which had been either lost or obscured by the false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) during the Middle Ages; or since the time of Augustine in the 4th century and Jesus Christ and the apostles in the 1st century.

A person holding to the key truths of the Reformation historically confessed a belief in the truth of the five solas: Sola gratia, Sola fide, Solus Christus, Sola Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria. In other words, they confessed that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Christ alone as revealed in the Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. RT then stresses the sovereignty of God, that is, His reign over all things, meticulously determining (see *Eph. 1:11*) all that comes to pass such that He is never taken by surprise. It emphasizes a Christ-centred proclamation of the gospel, and that salvation is wholly of God, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as revealed in the Scripture alone, and to the Glory of God alone. RT views the Bible as the historical and progressive unfolding of God's plan to rescue a people for Himself on the stage of human history through a covenantal relationship.

It seems reasonable to say that if it were not for human sin we would not need to make a distinction between biblical Christianity and the reformed faith, however the Bible warns us that false teachers and false teaching will perennially arise within the church and therefore it remains as important for 21st century Christians to guard the doctrine of the church as it was for the 16th century reformers, indeed as it was for the likes of Timothy in the 1st century. As RT is that which affirms the doctrines taught by Jesus and the apostles, Scripture is therefore considered the ultimate authority in matters of life, faith and conduct and so all reformed doctrine is founded on the Bible.

Evangelical

The term evangelical has its etymological roots in the Greek word for "*gospel*" or "*good news*": ευαγγελιον (evangelion), from eu- "*good*" and angelion "*message*". In that sense, to be an evangelical means to be a believer of the gospel that is the message of Jesus Christ. An evangelical is recognized by a passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ, by a deep commitment to biblical truth, by a sense of urgency to see those who are lost hear the gospel, and by a commitment to personal holiness and the local church. Arguably this is what we should hope to recognize as authentically evangelical.

By the time of the Protestant Reformation, Protestant theologians began to embrace the term '*evangelical*' as referring to "*gospel truth*". The heirs of the Reformation were simply described as evangelical as a way of stressing a positive identity other than just being known as non-Catholic. In the United States and in Europe, the term was often used as a synonym for Protestant.

Evangelicalism is a Protestant Christian movement that began in the 17th century and became an organized movement with the emergence of the Methodists in England around 1730, and the Pietists among Lutherans in Germany and Scandinavia. The movement became even more significant in the United States during the series of Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. As a result it drew far more members than in Europe and continues to draw followers globally in the 21st century, especially in the developing world.

Traditionally, evangelicalism de-emphasizes ritual and emphasizes the piety of the individual, requiring him or her to meet certain active commitments, including: The need for personal conversion, or being "*born again*", a high regard for biblical authority, an emphasis on teachings that proclaim the saving death and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ and actively expressing and sharing the gospel. The following quote is helpful in defining what an evangelical is:

"After 1520 an evangelical was a person who was committed to the sufficiency of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, the total lost-ness of humans, the sole mediation of Christ, the gracious efficacy and finality of God's redemptive work in Christ through election, propitiation, calling and keeping. The linchpin for all of this was the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Thus, the believer, declared righteous by virtue of God's satisfaction with Christ's holiness imputed (credited) to us through faith alone, is simul iustus et peccator--"simultaneously justified and sinful." - Michael Horton