A Commentary on Certain Differences between the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message and the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

The history of Baptist theology (particularly the late 19th through the 20th Centuries) is a fascinating and rewarding study. The differences between these two versions of the Baptist Faith and Message are better understood in the context of three broad streams of thought among Baptists distinguished by how Baptists scholars either rejected or implemented the historical-critical method of biblical studies. These three streams are evangelicalism (characterized by a rejection of the historical-critical method and a commitment to biblical inerrancy), liberalism (characterized by its implementation of the historical-critical method within a world-view of naturalism leading to a rejection of biblical inerrancy and authority), and neo-orthodoxy (which, though utilizing the historical-critical method, sought to maintain a certain degree of orthodoxy). While not having been in any communication with any of the framers of either document, my suggestions as to what they were thinking in choosing their words are of course speculative. But I think it is safe to say that to an important extent the 1963 BFM took a somewhat broader stance in order to allow for a wider range of theological perspectives (especially regarding the nature of Scripture) than did the 2000 BFM. While Baptists were certainly predominantly theologically conservative in 1963, the drafting of the 2000 BFM no doubt reflects a marked move to the theological right with less of a desire to maintain this broad theological appeal. I think this move to the right by the convention accounts for some of the differences in wording. Other differences seem due to changes in American culture regarding issues such as abortion (which was not the issue in 1963 it came to be in 1972 after Roe vs. Wade), race relations, and feminism. In those instances where it is not clear to me what the significance is with a given difference, I have left the commentary section blank. I have also left the commentary section blank when the differences are due to the requirements of grammar where the 2000 BFM has re-worded a sentence. For ease of focusing the reader, I have shaded the differences between the two documents. Where the shade appears in a single cell, this constitutes the presence of words not found in the other document. Where the shade appears in parallel cells, this constitutes a difference of wording between the two documents. Each subsequent row indicates a change. For each issue, I have tried to give some suggested readings. These suggestions are not intended to give a full accounting of the issue, but rather are to give an Evangelical analysis of the issue. Words in bold are contained in the glossary. I welcome any comments, criticisms, or suggestions.

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<td>THE ISSUE: NEO-ORTHODOXY - The term 'neo-orthodoxy' (meaning, new orthodoxy) was the label attached to a body of theology that began to rise to prominence from the late 19th into the early 20th Centuries in an attempt to counter-act the detrimental effects of liberalism (or theological liberalism) in Christianity. Both neo-orthodoxy and liberalism stand in contrast (though in different ways) to evangelicalism. The increasing use of the historical-critical method of biblical studies among scholars led to a move away from theological conservatism. This move in some circles went as far as theological liberalism. Neo-orthodoxy came about to stave off this theological liberalism while granting the legitimacy of the historical-critical method. It sought to marry much of orthodoxy with such a method. Early manifestations of neo-orthodoxy (i.e., the use of the historical-critical method while trying to maintain a certain amount of orthodoxy) can be seen in Baptist thinkers such as Crawford H. Toy (1836-1919), John Clifford (1836-1923), and William Newton Clarke (1841-1912) who stood in stark contrast to the evangelical thinking of other Baptists such as John Broadus (1827-1894), James Petigru Boyce (1827-1888), Basil Manly, Jr. (1825-1892) and B. H. Carroll (1843-1914). The term 'neo-orthodoxy' did not come into use until the 20th Century. It reached its most mature</td>
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development in the thinking of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) The significance of neo-orthodoxy for the evangelical is its view of the nature of Scripture. The qualifying phrase 'the record of' was utilized by neo-orthodox theologians to attack the integrity and inerrancy of Scripture by trying to drive a wedge between what the neo-orthodox theologian maintained was the actual Word of God and the mere "record" of God's acting. In neo-orthodoxy theology, the actual Word of God consists of God's acting in the affairs of mankind and/or an individual's "encounter" with God so acting. In other words, for neo-orthodoxy, the Word of God is the religious experience or "encounter" that one has when that one reads the Bible. Neo-orthodoxy denies that the Bible is itself the Word of God, maintaining instead that the Bible is only the "record" of these acts of God in history. Sometimes this was described as the Bible "containing" the Word of God. This enabled neo-orthodoxy to allow for errors in the record, i.e., in the Bible, without seemingly impugning the integrity of God. While the 1963 BFM might have allowed for this understanding of Scripture, the 2000 BFM does not.

RECOMMENDED READING ON BARTH AND NEO-ORTHODOXY

RECOMMENDED READING ON THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM, BIBLICAL CRITICISM, AND THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD
God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.

Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.

**THE ISSUE: INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE** - The past century has seen a tremendous assault on the integrity, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Scriptures. This assault has stemmed from a number of arenas, both within and without the church, including neo-orthodoxy, theological liberalism, and Higher or Biblical Criticism as well as Secular Humanism. As time has moved on, more and more qualifying adjectives were needed by evangelicals to maintain the historic, orthodox position on the nature of the Scriptures. The sentence “Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.” seeks to preempt the increasing attempts by biblical critics to give an appearance of orthodoxy while these biblical critics and others subtly maintain that the Scriptures are in error in certain matters such as history or science. Without a doubt, the definitive analysis and defense of inerrancy has come from the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) whose works are cited below.

**RECOMMENDED READING ON INERRANCY**


It reveals the principles by which

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<td>God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.</td>
<td><strong>THE ISSUE: HERMENEUTICS</strong> - <strong>Hermeneutics</strong> is the science of interpreting written text. The former sentence in the 1963 BFM has been exploited by some to subject the <strong>objective</strong>, authoritative meaning of the biblical text to one's own subjective or religious experience. Tacit within such attempts is the view that either there is no objective meaning to the biblical text or that such an objective meaning is out of one's reach. This view maintains that whatever meaning there is to any given biblical passage must be supplied by the reader. The reader &quot;creates&quot; his own meaning and tries to justify it by claiming that it stems from one's own personal experience with Jesus. The 2000 BFM tries to return the foundation and court of appeal of all theological discourse to the objective reading of the biblical text rather than to the personal subjective experience of each given individual.</td>
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<td><strong>II. God</strong> There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections.</td>
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<td><strong>THE ISSUE: THE NATURE OF GOD</strong> - This addition is in response to a growing aberrant theology known as &quot;open theism&quot; &quot;neo-theism,&quot; the &quot;open view of God&quot; or the &quot;openness movement.&quot; The idea of this theology is that the traditional view of God's omniscience is incompatible with human freedom. It denies that God has exhaustive knowledge of future contingent events, particularly the free choices of humans. While many of the advocates of open theism are otherwise orthodox evangelicals, this theology is a prelude to increasing unorthodox and heretical views of the nature of God such as process theism. <strong>RECOMMENDED READING CRITIQUING OPEN THEISM</strong> Geisler, Norman L. <em>Creating God in the Image of Man? The New &quot;Open&quot; View of God-Neothestism's Dangerous Drift</em>. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997.</td>
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<td>To him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.</td>
<td>To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.</td>
<td>Geisler, Norman L., H. Wayne House and Max Herrera. <em>The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism.</em> Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001.</td>
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| **1. God the Father**  
God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men. | **A. God the Father**  
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| **2. God the Son**  
Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God. | **B. God the Son**  
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<td>taking upon Himself the demands and necessities of human nature and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His revelation and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His</td>
<td>THE ISSUE: THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS - The notion of Christ's death being 'substitutionary' means that Jesus' death on the cross was a death He experienced in our place as our substitute. It says that on the cross Jesus Christ took upon Himself the punishment for our sins. As close as the 1980s at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the substitutionary atonement of Christ has been denied by at least one professor in the theology department. The 2000 BFM wisely saw the danger and made explicit this aspect of Christ's work on the cross.</td>
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**RECOMMENDED READING ON THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS**


death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, | death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, | THE ISSUE: THE TRINITY/THE DEITY OF CHRIST - There can be no confusion as to the necessity of maintaining the full deity of Jesus Christ. To say that Jesus Christ is divine is to say that He is God in the flesh. The 1963 BFM wording could be exploited by those who would want to say that Jesus was a human being who somehow "took on" divinity. This heresy is common in certain New Age circles. While the writers of the 1963 BFM in no way desired to compromise the doctrine of the deity of Christ, the writers of the 2000 BFM wisely saw the need to eliminate the possibility of misunderstanding and opted for less ambiguous wording. The historic, orthodox doctrine of the deity of Christ says that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man at the same time. He is one person who possesses two natures. In theology, the relationship of these two |

| fully God, fully man, |
natures is known as the **hypostatic union**. The doctrine of the deity of Christ is subsumed under the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is universally attested to by all branches of the Christian faith—Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox and is denied by all cults. It is considered one of the essential, cardinal doctrines of historic Christianity. In short the doctrine says that there is only one eternal God who exists in three co-equal persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is one in nature and three in persons. The doctrine does not say that there are three God, but rather that the three persons are the one God.

**RECOMMENDED READING ON THE TRINITY/THE DEITY OF CHRIST**


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The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. |
| **C. God the Holy Spirit**
The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. | **THE ISSUE: THE TRINITY/THE DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** - One of the most important doctrines of historic Christianity is the **Trinity**. While the debate about the nature of Christ can sometimes take center stage, one must always be vigilant to defend both the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. Most modern cults (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses) deny the personality and/or divinity of the Holy Spirit. (See the discussion above on the Trinity.) **RECOMMENDED READING ON THE TRINITY/THE DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** |
<p>| Hodge, A. A. &quot;The Holy Trinity.&quot; In <em>Outlines in Theology for Students and Laymen.</em> Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972. | <strong>He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures.</strong> Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and | <strong>He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures.</strong> Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and |</p>
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<td>THE ISSUE: GENDER ISSUES - With the rise of feminism, it has become increasingly necessary for the evangelical church to address issue of gender. Two extremes should be avoided. First, the distinctions between the genders should not be blurred so as to ignore the relative function of the genders in the church and in the family. Second, the distinctions between the genders should not be exaggerated so as to imply that one gender is inferior to the other. RECOMMENDED READING ON GENDER ISSUES Kassian, Mary A. <em>The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church</em>. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992. Piper, John and Wayne Grudem, eds. <em>Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism</em>. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.</td>
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<td>Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation.</td>
<td>Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation.</td>
<td>THE ISSUE: GENDER ISSUES - (see above)</td>
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<td>In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence; whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore every</td>
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1963 Baptist Faith and Message | 2000 Baptist Faith and Message | Commentary
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possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. | possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. | THE ISSUE: RACE - With the history of racism in this country, it is necessary that evangelicals are unambiguous regarding the equality of the races.

IV. Salvation
Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration,

THE ISSUE: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH - Justification by faith is the clarion call of the reformation. Oddly, the 1963 BFM left this essential ingredient out in its presenting of the elements of salvation. The doctrine is sometimes referred to as justification by faith or justification by faith alone. It says that a person is made right with God by faith alone. On the basis of this faith, God imputes to the sinner the righteousness of God. This imputed righteousness (sometimes referred to as declared righteousness or forensic justification) is possible because the just punishment for the sins of the sinner is borne by his substitute Jesus Christ in His death on the cross.

RECOMMENDED READING ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

sanctification, and glorification.

sanctification, and glorification.

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

THE ISSUE: EXCLUSIVISM - With the rise of liberalism, it is important that evangelicals are unambiguous that salvation is only through Jesus Christ. Exclusivism says that Jesus is the only way to God and that there is no salvation in any other religion.

RECOMMENDED READING ON EXCLUSIVISM
Craig, William Lane. "Christ, the Only Way." In Hard
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1. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

2. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

3. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

V. God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is

THE ISSUE: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH - (see above)
VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local body of baptized believers, who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes.

In such a congregation, members are equally responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. The notion of one being accountable to Christ as Lord is a re-emphasis of the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in terms of which no church council or creed is able to bind the conscience of any believer.

Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, THE ISSUE: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH - (see discussion of gender issues above)
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<td>the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.</td>
<td>The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages,</td>
<td>a re-emphasis on the equality of all people</td>
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<td>believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.</td>
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<td><strong>VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper</strong> Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.</td>
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Aberrant theology - Something is aberrant when it deviates from what is the norm or what is acceptable. In this context, I use the term 'aberrant' to refer to doctrines of theology that fall outside evangelicalism but which have nevertheless manifested within the context of the ostensive evangelical community. Historically, the term 'heretical' has been used to describe those false doctrines that have arisen by the denial of the cardinal or fundamental doctrines of Christianity as defined by the historic creeds agreed upon (for the most part) by all three major branches of the Christian faith, viz., Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. Examples of such cardinal or fundamental or creedal doctrines would be the Trinity, the Virgin Birth of Christ, and the Deity of Christ. The term 'aberrant' can be used to refer to those false doctrines that stand in contrast to other specific doctrines of Christianity that I believe are vitally important though beyond those doctrines codified by the historic creeds. Thus, for example, the doctrine within the Word of Faith movement which says that Christians can activate the "force of faith" and call upon the miracle, creative power that God used to create the universe is aberrant since it imposes an occult view of reality upon the Christian faith. But this aberrant doctrine is not exactly definable as a denial of a cardinal doctrine as defined by any historic creed. Sometimes the presence of aberrant theology may occur in the thinking of those who are otherwise orthodox. Thus, while the distinction between orthodox and heretical may amount to the distinction between genuine Christianity and non-Christianity, aberrant theology may be held by someone who is genuinely a Christian.

Anti-supernatural, anti-supernaturalism - see "Naturalism"

Barth, Karl - (1886-1968) very influential Swiss theologian who pioneered what came to be known as neo-orthodoxy

Biblical criticism, (Higher Criticism), biblical criticism - a method utilizing the Historical-Critical Method with its assumptions of naturalism of studying the origins and backgrounds of the books of the Bible; Because of the anti-supernatural assumptions of its method, biblical criticism invariably came to radical conclusions about the authors of various books of the Bible. For example, because the latter half of the book of Isaiah mentions a figure (Cyrus) who did not live until about 200 years after Isaiah, the biblical critics concluded that this section of the book of Isaiah must have been written later. But this conclusion follows only if it is not possible that Isaiah could have known the future. Since the biblical critics assumed that it was impossible for a person to know the future (because of their anti-supernatural or naturalistic assumptions) then it was not possible in their estimation for Isaiah to have written the second part of the book.

Biblical criticism - see "Biblical criticism"

Charismatic - sometimes referred to as neo-pentecostalism, a movement within Christianity during the 1960s to today that emphasizes the manifestation of certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues. The charismatic movement is generally distinguished from traditional Pentecostalism by the former's rejection of tongues as a necessary sign of being born again. (cf. Pentecostal)

Contingent - opposite of 'necessary;' Something is contingent when it could be one way or another or could have been different that it is. For example, that I am wearing blue jeans is a contingent fact since it is not necessary that I wear blue jeans and I could have decided not to wear blue jeans. In this context, it is generally thought that the actions of humans are contingent in as much as they are freely chosen and different actions could have been chosen instead. This is admittedly a controversial and complex topic in as much as opinions differ whether there are different notions of contingent (something being contingent in one sense and necessary in another) and whether or how the notion of contingency is compatible with God's foreknowledge. An orthodox view of God says that God has all knowledge, even of future contingent events. (See, "open theism")

Evangelical, evangelicals - see "Evangelicalism"

Evangelicalism - a particular stream within Protestant Christianity that is mainly characterized by a commitment to biblical inerrancy. What is now known as 'evangelical' was in the earlier part of the 20th Century known as 'fundamentalism.' Unfortunately, the term 'fundamentalism' (due to certain events during the last part of the 19th and first part of the 20th Centuries) has taken on the connotation of anti-intellectual or anti-academic religion. In contradistinction, evangelicalism has produced some of the greatest scholars of theology and philosophy who encourage strong intellectual and academic pursuits, believing that good learning only further substantiates the truth of the Christian faith.

Grammatico-Historical Method - a method of analysis of the biblical text used by more conservative scholars as opposed to the Historical-Critical Method. The abiding assumption is that the text of the Bible should be understood in its historical context according to the normal rules of grammar and allowing for the possibility of the supernatural. Thus, when the text speaks of an event such as Jesus walking on the water, this method avoids trying to "explain away" the event as myth or legend simply because it is miraculous. (cf. Historical Critical Method)

Heresy, heretical - A doctrine is heresy when it denies a cardinal or fundamental tenet of a given religion. In Christianity, heresy is characterized as a departure from the cardinal or fundamental doctrines as defined by the historic creeds agreed upon (for the most part) by each of the major divisions of the Christian faith—Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox.

Hermeneutics - the principle of textual interpretation; In this context, hermeneutics is that branch of knowledge dealing with the guiding principles of how one is to interpret the biblical text. Hermeneutics deals with such issues as...
historical or cultural context, word usage, literary styles (poetry, personal letters, historical narrative, etc.), literary methods (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, parallelism, synecdoche, metonymy, etc.) and more.

Higher Criticism - see "Biblical criticism"

Historical-Critical Method - a method of analysis of the biblical text that is generally characterized by an assumption of naturalism that has given rise to what is often referred to as Biblical Criticism. (cf. Grammatico-Historical Method)

Hypostatic union - A term used to describe the relationship between the divine nature and human nature of Jesus Christ. The doctrine says that the person of Jesus Christ possesses at once both a human nature and a divine nature. They are united in the one person yet so as not to be blended. Statements about Jesus can be ambiguous until they are clarified as referring to Jesus with respect to His human nature or Jesus with respect to His divine nature. Thus, to say that Jesus got tired and that Jesus is God does not entail that God got tired. The person of Jesus in His human nature is finite and subject to the limitation of that nature. But the person of Jesus in His divine nature is infinite.

ICBI - see "International Council on Biblical Inerrancy"

Inerrancy - a characteristic of the Bible which says that the Bible is free from all errors in the original manuscripts. The doctrine is essential in as much as the admission of error in the Bible would impugn the veracity of God Himself. If the Bible is God's Word and God cannot err, then it follows that the Bible cannot err. If the Bible errs, then either it is not God's word or God can err. (cf. infallibility)

Infallibility - a characteristic of the Bible which says that the Bible is incapable of leading someone astray with it. It is properly understood and followed. Often, however, the term is used as a synonym for 'inerrancy.'


Justification, justification by faith, justification by faith alone - the doctrine sometimes referred to as justification by faith; the central doctrine of the Protestant Reformation that says that a person is made right with God by faith alone. On the basis of this faith, God imputes to the sinner the righteousness of God. This imputed righteousness (sometimes referred to as declared righteousness) is possible because the just punishment for the sins of the sinner is borne by his substitute Jesus Christ in His death on the cross

Liberalism (or theological liberalism) - Liberalism (in the context of theological studies) is generally characterized by a naturalistic approach to religion in terms of which the supernatural is either downplayed or denied. The assumption of naturalism leads to a denial of the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and the reality of miracles. The German theologian Rudolph Bultman is largely responsible for the increase in the 20th Century of liberalism in Christian studies. Bultman believed that the Bible was written within a context of a primitive, if not superstitious, culture (containing what he called myths) and thus must be de-mythologized for the modern reader. To de-mythologize means to strip the Bible of all of its supernatural or miraculous elements, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In some contexts, the term 'liberal' is used generically (if somewhat inaccurately) for any theological thinking that falls outside of evangelicalism.

Naturalism, naturalistic (or anti-supernatural, anti-supernaturalism) - a guiding assumption that plagues many modern thinkers who maintain miracles are not possible or at least never occur. Generally, naturalism or anti-supernaturalism is based on atheism, the denial of the existence of God.

Neo-orthodoxy, neo-orthodox - a body of theology or a theological method characterized by understanding the Word of God to be the "encounter" that one might have on the occasion of reading the Bible. Neo-orthodoxy rejects the notion that the Bible itself is the Word of God, opting rather to say that the Bible "contains" the Word of God. It matured in the 20th Century in the thinking of Karl Barth as a reaction to theological liberalism. Whereas theological liberalism (with its naturalistic assumptions) sought to evacuate religion (particularly Christianity) of all miraculous elements, neo-orthodoxy sought at one and the same time to give credence to higher or biblical criticism (together with the denial of biblical inerrancy) which utilizes the historical-critical method and still retain some notion of God communicating with mankind. It did this by separating the "Word of God" from the Bible itself and thus sought to allow the critical conclusions of higher criticism while retaining a qualified doctrine of revelation. In this way, it saw itself as the "new orthodoxy," hence the term 'neo-orthodoxy.'
Neo-theism - see "Open theism"

Objective - Something is objective when it is the same for every person regardless of perspective. For example, a fact of reality such as whether it is raining outside is an objective fact. In this context, evangelicalism maintains that there is an objective meaning of the text of the Bible that must be discovered by the proper methods of biblical hermeneutics. cf. "subjective"

Omniscience - all-knowing; the doctrine of theology that says that God knows all things

Open theism - a relatively new theological view within evangelicalism that maintains that God does not know certain things about the future, particularly the free actions of human beings; also known as the "open view of God" (because the future is said to be radically "open" even to God) and the "openness movement" Probably the most important writer defending open theism is Gregory Boyd.

Open view of God - see "Open theism"

Openness movement - see "Open theism"

Orthodox, orthodoxy - right or sound doctrine. While any theological school of thought might consider itself orthodox in as much as it sees itself as right, the term is more often utilized by those within evangelicalism to contrast its historical fidelity and commitment to the cardinal doctrines that have come to define Christianity with those bodies of thought which would deny all or some of the same. (Sometimes the term 'Orthodox' is used as shorthand for 'Eastern Orthodox' which is one of the three major branches of Christianity. Context usually makes it clear which definition is being used.)

Pentecostal - a movement within Christianity during the 20th Century that emphasized the necessity of a "second blessing" or a "second work of grace" whereby one is confirmed in the faith by the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Most Pentecostal groups (e.g., Church of God; Assembly of God) should be distinguished from the cultic United Pentecostal Church which denies the doctrine of the Trinity. (cf. Charismatic)

Reformation - sometimes referred to as the Protestant Reformation; the movement precipitated in 1517 by the Catholic monk Martin Luther (1483-1546) who sought originally to reform the Church of its immorality, particularly with respect to the selling of indulgences. Luther expressed his outrage with certain problems within the church in his publication of Ninety-five Theses. Tradition maintains that he nailed the publication to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther defended the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Secular Humanism - the world view that denies the existence of God and seeks to ground all human morality and social mores in either biology or in convention, often by an appeal to some form of utilitarianism; The famous works Humanist Manifesto I (1933) and Humanist Manifesto II (1973) were largely responsible for defining Secular Humanism in America.

Subjective - Something is subjective when its truth or reality may vary from person to person. For example, the claim "Broccoli tastes good." is neither true nor false in itself. Rather it is true for some people and false for others. In this context, evangelicalism denies that the truths of the Bible are dependent on the subjective experience of the readers. cf. "objective"

Substitutionary, substitutionary atonement - The doctrine in theology that says that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was in the place of sinners as their substitute; also known as 'vicarious'

Theological liberalism - see "Liberalism"

Trinity - One of the essential or cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. The doctrine says that there is only one God and that this one God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The persons are distinct from each other but each is fully God. Philosophically, the doctrine says that God is one in essence and three in person or one is substance and three in subsistence. The doctrine preserves the truths that Jesus Christ is fully divine and that the Holy Spirit is a person who also is fully divine. It denies that Jesus Christ is somehow less than God. It also denies that the Holy Spirit is merely some force or influence of God, as is claimed by some cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

Word of God - The expression 'the word of God' is used in two ways in theology. First, Jesus Christ is called the Word (λόγος, logos) in John 1. In this sense, He is the express image of the Father, the fullness of deity in bodily form. Second, the expression is used to refer to the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.