

EFCA

Statement *of* Faith

A study guide by the
Evangelical Free Church of America
and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School



Welcome

We are excited to provide this Statement of Faith (SOF) resource, and we are grateful you will be studying our SOF. This joint project of the EFCA and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) reflects our shared commitment to the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in our SOF, a confession we share.

Our prayer as you engage in this study is that you will come to know God and all things in relation to God. Remember, theology is best learned and lived in community.

Introduction

A Statement of Faith is more than a mere catalogue of theological propositions; it is an affirmation of convictions. In that sense, it is a confession, a creed (for the Latin word *credo* means “I believe”). As a corporate rather than mere individual expression (“We believe . . .”), it unites its adherents in a common faith. Moreover, a Statement of Faith is a declaration of identity. In addition to the affirmations made, the choices of what to include or exclude locate a group on an ecclesiastical grid and define what it considers most important. Our Statement of Faith reveals a great deal about who we are.

This is an *Evangelical* Statement of Faith. We have titled the theological exposition of our Statement of Faith *Evangelical Convictions*,¹ for this Evangelical Free Church Statement of Faith declares our theological identity—we are Evangelicals. As such, it was drafted to reflect our affirmation of the central truths related to the *evangel*, that is, the gospel, as that gospel message has come to us through the biblical and historic stream of Evangelical Christianity.

This is an *Evangelical Free Church* Statement of Faith. This Statement of Faith, though broadly Evangelical, also reflects our heritage within the smaller stream of the Evangelical Free Church as it developed in America. With roots in Scandinavia, our Free Church forbears broke away from the state church (hence, the “Free” in our name) and developed a strong conviction that the local church ought to be composed only of believers. At the same time, they had a strong commitment to Evangelical unity in the gospel. They united around the essentials of the gospel and did not want secondary issues of doctrine to divide. Hence, they spoke of being a church for “believers only but for all believers” and sought to “major on the majors and minor on the minors.” The famous statement attributed to the Lutheran pastor Rupertus Meldenius (1582-1651) expresses their attitude well: “In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.”

1. *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Free Church Publications, 2022).

Each generation has the responsibility not only to receive what has been passed on, but to own it for ourselves before delivering it to our children. As one writer has put it, “The doctrinal heritage of the past is thus both a gift and a task, an inheritance and a responsibility. What our forebears in the Christian faith passed down to us must be appropriated, in order that we may wrestle with it within our own situation, before passing it on to those whose day has yet to dawn.” As Paul instructs Timothy, “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Tim.1:13-14). May this Statement of Faith be an instrument of the Spirit to help us as the Evangelical Free Church of America to guard, and to bear witness to, the good deposit of the gospel.²

Statement of Faith and *Evangelical Convictions*

This Statement of Faith forms the basis for unity at the national and district levels, it serves as a doctrinal standard for all those who will be credentialed in the EFCA or serving with our international mission, ReachGlobal, and it is required for all new churches. It is also used as a basis for instruction in new member classes in local churches, in adult classes, and in small group studies. Additionally, this is the Statement of Faith at TEDS, our seminary, and faculty and administrators agree to and sign annually, without mental reservation, the Statement of Faith.

Evangelical Convictions, a theological exposition of our Statement of Faith, was written with this wide range of uses in mind. It seeks to speak clearly but, as much as possible, without technical theological terms so that it can be profitable for all believers who need to be grounded in the essentials of the faith.

Evangelical Convictions and the Statement of Faith Project

Grounded in *Evangelical Convictions*, this video series is another resource for expounding, studying, and discussing the Statement of Faith. Since the EFCA and TEDS affirm the same Statement of Faith, this joint project not only expounds the SOF, but it also reflects our shared commitment to biblical truth and the gospel of Jesus Christ and our commitment to serve the church, acknowledging we were created by the church for (to serve) the church.

Each video consists of approximately 20-25 minute interviews with TEDS professors on each of the Articles of the Statement of Faith. After a brief welcome and introduction, four questions guided the discussion:

1. What are some key truths stated in this Article that are important to highlight or emphasize?
2. How is the truth of this doctrine being questioned, challenged, or denied in the culture? What about in the church?
3. Why are these truths important to the life and ministry of the church and church leadership? How do these truths edify and build up the people of God, i.e., why are they necessary for our spiritual health?
4. What concluding thoughts or comments would you like to leave us with as we draw our helpful conversation to a close?

2. This Introduction consists of excerpts from *Evangelical Convictions*, xxv-xxvi, xxx-xxxii.

Intended Audience

Who should consider this study? There are several ways it could be used.

- as a study among pastors and elders.
- as a study among leaders in the church.
- in an adult Sunday School class.
- in a small group.
- in one's own personal study (though it is always fruitful to discuss these truths with others).

These are just a few of the ways it could be used, though one is certainly not limited to these suggestions.

Though this study is grounded in *Evangelical Convictions*, it provides a resource between the Statement of Faith and the robust theological exposition in the book. Several have asked for this kind of a resource, so this is an attempt to meet that need.

Meaning of Theology and the Posture of Theologians

Since theology is the study of God, every Christian is a theologian. Have you ever read the Scriptures and asked, “what does that verse mean?” Have you ever prayerfully pondered, “how does the truth of this biblical text specifically apply to me?” These are questions of theologians. Because all Christians are theologians in this sense, this study is designed to equip us to become better theologians.

When we consider being a theologian and the task of theology, it might be helpful to read and ruminate on how theology is understood. Here are a few definitions for you to consider.

- **Martin Bucer (1491-1551):** “True theology is not theoretical, but practical. The end of it is living, that is to live a godly life.”
- **William Ames (1576-1633):** “Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God. . . . Since the highest kind of life for a human being is that which approaches most closely the living and life-giving God, the nature of theological life is living to God.”
- **John Frame (1939-):** “Theology is application of God’s word to all areas of life.”
- **Kevin Vanhoozer (1957-):** “Christian theology is the intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual attempt to *articulate* the truth about God, the world, and ourselves, to *appropriate* this truth to ourselves, and to *apply* this truth to all areas of life, thereby responding to God’s word in speech, thought, and life to the glory of God.”
- **Stephen Wellum (1964-):** the *purpose* of theology is to help God’s people understand Scripture better so that we can rightly know God’s word, apply it to our lives, and fulfill our calling as the church to know God and to make him known . . . the *goal* of theology . . . is to enable the

church to know and worship our triune Creator-Covenant Lord rightly, to live obediently and faithfully under Christ's Lordship, and unashamedly to witness to and defend the life-changing truth of the gospel.

Grounded in the words of Jesus, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk. 10:27), and guided by these definitions, the goal of this study is to learn and know the truth and to live that truth in life, consisting of both *orthodoxy* (right belief) and *orthopraxy* (right behavior).

Remember this important truth as a context and posture for engaging this study: God's glory is the ultimate goal, theology is the ground, and doxology is the fruit. More specifically, theology is the ground of doxology (worship); doxology (worship) is the fruit of theology. As you study "sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:10-11), may you ultimately engage in worship, and through these God-ordained means, may he conform you into the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; Phil. 3:20-21).

J. I. Packer appropriately captures and summarizes the connection: "Theology is for doxology and devotion—that is, the praise of God and the practice of godliness. It should therefore be presented in a way that brings awareness of the divine presence. Theology is at its healthiest when it is consciously under the eye of God of whom it speaks, and when it is singing to his glory."³

Guidance

Here are a few words of guidance as you prepare to engage in this study.

1. At the beginning of the study, read through the whole Statement of Faith (pp. 9-10). Additionally, read the Summary of the Gospel in the EFCA Statement of Faith (pp. 86-88). And then plan to read and ponder each Article prior to the study.
2. In order to get the most from this study, it is important to read appropriate chapters in *Evangelical Convictions* prior to watching the video and discussing the Article.
3. The video is a supplemental resource to our Statement of Faith, which is considered a brief discussion about the longer theological exposition in *Evangelical Convictions*. Because the video captures a snippet of what is included in the Article, it serves as a companion to *Evangelical Convictions*, not a replacement of it.
4. Because it is a brief interview, and only a few key highlights are emphasized in each Article, it is important to remember that not everything in each Article will be addressed in the video. Additionally, although explicit texts of Scripture may not be referenced in all the interviews, everything said in each interview is grounded in and guided by biblical truth. As a challenge, identify the biblical text undergirding what they say. You are also encouraged to read the Statement of Faith with Scripture references and then the theological exposition of each Article in *Evangelical Convictions*.

3. *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream; Tyndale House, 1993), xii.

5. This Study Guide is only a guide. It is intended to be a resource to get the most out of the interviews and the study of our SOF, but a fruitful discussion is not necessarily limited to the Guide. Much discussion will be prompted by what is discussed in the videos without being tied to the notes in the Study Guide.
6. Confessions and Statements of Faith generally serve a fourfold function: baptismal, instructional (catechetical), doctrinal, and liturgical. This study focuses on the second and third, instructional and doctrinal.

Format

Although there is no set format, and there are several ways this material can be studied, we recommend two ways, depending on how the video will be used in the study.

1. If the study is scheduled for 60-minutes, we recommend participants watch the video on their own during the week outside of the group study. When watching/listening, take notes and include any reflections and questions, and then be prepared to share that during the study. A general summary of the interviews is included in the Guide. Before the first study, this entails reading *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 1: God," pp. 1-20, and watching the video interview on Article 1 with Kevin Vanhoozer. This is the format followed in the Study Guide.
2. If the video will be used during the study, we recommend a 90-minute study and then adjusting the time appropriately.

The content of the study is more critical than the specific format, so engage in the study in a manner that is most spiritually fruitful for all participants.

In addition to reading *Evangelical Convictions* and watching and responding to the video, through Notes, Reflections, and Questions, in preparation for the study, each lesson consists of Teaching Key Truths, Guided Discussion for digging deeper, and concluding with a time for sharing Insights, Applications, and Prayer. The Assignment for the Next Study is also included. Additional Resources are also included for each Article consisting of Scripture Reading, Scripture Memory verses, and a Bibliography for those interested in pursuing further study.

Although there is no required format for using this resource in a study, here is a general outline for a hour-long study, which is reflected in the study on each of the Articles. The breakdown of time for each section of the study is included as a guide in each lesson, but only as a guide.

Preparation for the Study

ABOUT 60 MINUTES

1. Read the chapter in *Evangelical Convictions* (about 30 minutes). Reading the chapter prior to the study each week will enable you to get the most from this study. This will be informative and instructive biblically and theologically, and it will also prepare you for digging deeper during the guided discussion. In the Study Guide under the section Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper, we have included several questions to guide one’s study of the Statement of Faith through the theological exposition in *Evangelical Convictions*. These questions could also be used in the study, not just in preparing for the study.
2. Watch the video (about 20-25 minutes). Through the interview in which we learn from our TEDS’ professors, this will give you a sense of some of the key truths in each Article, how these truths are being questioned, doubted, or denied today, and why these truths are important for Christians and the church to know. In order for you to engage and interact with what you are hearing and learning, we have included a section for Notes and Reflections, which includes notes from the interview to aid in that process. Also included are Questions to Ponder to help you process what you are hearing and learning. Please note when Scripture references are made, write them down and read them. It is the word of God that is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12), and we live by “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Study

60 MINUTES

1. **Introduction – 10 minutes:** During this time, welcome people, spend time in prayer, and together read the Article. It is good to confess/profess the Article corporately.
2. **Teaching Key Truths – 20 minutes:** The study in each Article includes four questions that are intended to guide the teaching, which serve as a general category to consider when teaching the material. What is specifically taught and the format in which it is taught is flexible, primarily based on the teacher and what is considered best for the study. This section will be filled out much more thoroughly by the teacher.
 - What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
 - What is being *explicitly* affirmed and what is being *implicitly* denied? For example, in *explicitly* affirming God is “Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” we *implicitly* deny God is a created being or that he is less than infinitely perfect or that he is non-Trinitarian.
 - What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

In the Study Guide, there is an outline of the Article, which follows the theological exposition in *Evangelical Convictions*, and an extended statement of the Article in the form of “we believe” statements, with supporting texts of Scripture. These are included as reminders of what is affirmed and confessed in the Article, which is grounded in the Scriptures, and they can be used to highlight

or emphasize a few key truths from the Article. Simply reading through this will be an excellent concise statement of biblical truth expounded in rich and robust theology. We have also included a series of Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper, which are specifically connected to the Article and serve as a guide when reading *Evangelical Convictions*, the theological exposition of the Statement of Faith. Due to limited time, you will have to be selective in what key truths on which to focus. This will be determined by the teacher/leader of the study.

- 3. Guided Discussion—Digging Deeper - 20 minutes:** This is an important part of the study as people think through the truth and its implication to life. As noted under Teaching Key Truths, the questions included in this section are intended to emphasize and highlight the doctrinal truths in each Article along with some questions to prompt and guide discussion (which may also be used as a guide when reading the chapters in *Evangelical Convictions* in preparation for each study). The study of Scripture and theology are never an end in itself. Information alone is not the goal. As Paul writes, “knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:1). In other words, knowledge is necessary, but when it is considered an end, it often leads to conceit or arrogance. Rather, knowledge of God through the Word is the God-ordained and Spirit-prompted means of transformation, of progressively being transformed (Rom. 12:2b; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:20-21) and conformed into the likeness of the Son (Rom. 8:29; for a contrast, cf. Rom. 12:2a; 1 Pet. 1:14). Theology is best learned and lived in community. As far as the specific breakdown of time, many may combine the Teaching Key Truths and Guided Discussion, since they do go together.
- 4. Insights, Applications, and Prayer - 10 minutes:** In closing, it will be fruitful to share briefly about the truths that were learned, insights that were gleaned, and applications that will be made. And then to entrust it all to the Lord in prayer, who alone will be able to bring it to fruition in one’s life. And then remember to pray for one another in between meetings. This will then become some of what is shared in the introduction in the next meeting.
- 5. Assignment for Next Study** along with **Additional Resources** are also included, which consist of Scripture Readings and Memory Verses. A Bibliography is also included for those who are interested in studying further aspects of the doctrine affirmed in an Article. There are several books included for each Article listed under the categories of Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced to guide you in your study.

Statement of Faith

Adopted by the Conference on June 19, 2019⁴

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:

1 God

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

2 The Bible

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

3 The Human Condition

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

4 Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

5 The Work of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

4. For the EFCA Statement of Faith, cf. <https://www.efca.org/sof>

6 The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

7 The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

8 Christian Living

We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

9 Christ's Return

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

10 Response and Eternal Destiny

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. *Amen.*



ARTICLE 01

God

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

ARTICLE 01: God

*God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.*⁵

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read the whole Statement of Faith.

Read the Summary of the Gospel in the EFCA Statement of Faith.

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 1: God," pp. 1-20.

Watch the video interview of Article 1 – Kevin Vanhoozer (17:50).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. Theology is a dangerous business because one does not want to be a blasphemer, saying things unworthy of God, or a heretic, saying false things about God. This means we need to know what God is like in order to confess him properly, and we need to know God so we do not say false things about him and subvert the gospel. Blasphemy gets an individual in trouble and heresy gets the church into trouble, because it strays from the gospel.
2. The doctrine of God is one of the deep mysteries of the Christian faith, but unless we understand God, we will not understand who Jesus is and what he came to do. The doctrine of the Trinity is a kind of summary of the whole gospel: the Father extends both hands, Son and Spirit, to embrace sinful creatures.
3. One of the oldest Trinitarian heresies is that Jesus is the greatest created being. This is one reason why in our thinking and speaking about God, we must be grounded in and guided by his revelation, the Bible, and biblically and Trinitarianly conscientious because it all reflects on Jesus.
4. We can say something about God since he has revealed himself to us—we have the Scriptures. Significant truths to affirm are the nature of God, the character of God, and the triune being of God.
5. There are several challenges to the doctrine of God today: a denial of his existence; God's love and what it means; an undermining or denial of God's holiness; that he is not made up of parts (a denial of simplicity) so that he is loving but not holy (affirming all his attributes is referred to as his perfections, or that he is "infinitely perfect"); separating the God of the Old Testament from the Father of the

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5. In the exposition of each Article in our Statement of Faith, we include a sub-heading which makes a connection to the gospel explicit giving a "gospel focus" to the entire Statement. These sub-headings were originally proposed as part of the Statement of Faith itself but were dropped and shortened in the revision process when premillennialism was reinserted in the 2008 Statement of Faith. Cf. *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., p. xxxvii, note 12.

New Testament (the heresy of Marcion); making God in our image (e.g., Ludwig Feuerbach who claimed the notion of God was merely a projection of man consisting of the highest, valued qualities of humanity), the essence of idolatry.

6. What we think about God is fundamental to everything in life (cf. A. W. Tozer). Our doctrine of God must conform to how he has revealed himself in Scripture. If we want to read the Bible rightly, we have to have a biblically faithful doctrine of God. If we want to relate to God rightly, and worship him in Spirit and truth, we have to say and to things that are worthy of God.
7. God did not need to create us. He was completely fulfilled in himself, eternally a life of love that existed between the Father, Son, and Spirit. But in his freedom and grace, he created us, with the purpose to form creatures that would share this family life with God, the life of Father, Son, and Spirit, to “redeem a people for himself and to make all things new for his own glory.” The gospel is good news, that what Jesus is by nature, the Son of God, we can become by adoption.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the “most holy faith”?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

The Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America is an exposition of the gospel—God’s gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what is the gospel? It is the *evangel*, the good news that God has acted graciously to save a people for himself through his Son Jesus Christ. The gospel is the simple message that Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that we might have eternal life.

The ten Articles of our Statement unpack this simple message of good news by setting forth our central theological convictions in a way that follows the logic of the gospel itself, seeking to unpack this gospel by organizing the essential doctrines of our faith—our critical Evangelical convictions—around this central theme.

The gospel, and our Statement, begins with God and his saving purpose, which flows out of the wondrous perfections of his nature. He is the Creator of all things and is holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This one God, all-knowing and all-powerful, has, in love and grace, purposed from eternity to redeem a people for himself and to restore his fallen creation for his own glory.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 1: God: *God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. The Gospel Is the Expression of God's Essential Nature
 - A. We Believe in One God
 - B. God Is the Creator of All Things
 1. God Alone Is the Creator
 2. God's Creation Is Ordered and Purposeful
 3. God's Creation Is Good
 - C. God Is Holy
 - D. God Is Infinitely Perfect
 - E. God Is Loving

- F. The One God Is Triune
- I. The Gospel Is the Outworking of God’s Eternal Purpose
 - A. God Has Purposed from Eternity to Redeem
 - B. God Acts with Limitless Knowledge and Sovereign Power
 - C. God Will Redeem a People for Himself
 - D. God Will Make All Things New
 - E. God Will Act for His Own Glory

We believe . . .

One God, Three Persons (Trinity)

1. We believe in one God (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29).
2. We believe God eternally exists in a loving unity of three equally divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Dan 4:34-35; Acts 17:24-25; Jn. 17:24; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Creator

3. We believe God, in all His fullness, is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6; Jn. 1:1; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3).

Infinitely Perfect

4. We believe God is holy, love, infinitely perfect, eternally existing, has limitless knowledge and sovereign power.

God’s Purpose

5. We believe God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11; 3:10, 11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).
6. We believe God will make all things new (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:19-21; Rev. 21, 22).
7. We believe God does everything for His own glory (Ps. 19:1-2; Isa. 43:7; Jer. 13:11; Col. 1:15-23; Rev. 4:11; 5:9-14).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. What does it mean that God is the Creator of all things? What does this affirm? What does it deny? What is the significance of God pronouncing his creation “very good”?

2. God is “holy.” What does it mean that God is holy? How is he unique in his holiness? What are some implications of God’s holiness in relation to creation and creatures, specifically human beings created in the image of God (*imago Dei*)?
3. God is also “infinitely perfect” in all his attributes and in all his ways. This means that he never has and never will lack anything. It also means he does not grow or change for he is unchangeable. This affirms the doctrine of *aseity*, that God is from himself and that he is self-existent, independent of the created order. It also affirms God’s *simplicity*, that is he is not made up of distinct parts, but rather God is his attributes. What does this mean for God? What about for us?
4. This “one God” is “eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The Trinity is the one doctrine that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. What biblical texts reveal and validate the doctrine of the Trinity? What is the significance of the Trinity in creation? What about redemption? We affirm the *eternal relations of origin* (the way the persons of the Trinity relate to one another in eternity), the *inseparable operations* (in every work of God, the three persons work inseparably), and *appropriations* (though the external works of the Trinity are undivided, one person of the Trinity may take a unique role in redemptive history). Why is it important to affirm this “trinitarian grammar”? How does this belief in the Trinity differ from Islam, one of the growing religions of the world today?
5. God has “limitless knowledge and sovereign power.” This means God is all-knowing (*omniscient*) and all powerful (*omnipotent*). How does this truth about God’s person and attributes differ from the position of open theism, which believes God has limited what he knows, and thus he is limited in his wise, sovereign, purposeful providence?
6. “God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself.” God created with a purpose and he redeems for a purpose. We are redeemed “for Himself.” What does this mean, and what are the implications for our lives? What is the importance of the reference to a corporate people, the church? How does this view of God’s purpose in redemption differ from many in evangelicalism who focus only on an individual?
7. God will “make all things new for His own glory.” God’s work in creation and redemption are for his own glory. What does God’s glory mean? Why is it right that he would only do things for his glory, whereas for us it would be wrong? This puts God and his work at the center of everything, and anything that would displace Him would be a chief act of treason, of idolatry. As you examine your life, is it about God and his glory, or is it about you?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 2: The Bible,” pp. 21-41.
- **Watch** the video interview of Article 2 – John Woodbridge (31:04).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Isaiah 40:9-31
- Ephesians 1:3-14

Memory Verses

- Numbers 23:19
- Revelation 4:11

Bibliography

Introductory

Scott Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction*

Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*

Intermediate

D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*

Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Advanced

Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism*

Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*

Audio/Video

2023 EFCA Theology Conference: The Doctrine of God

<https://helps.efca.org/bundles/2023-efca-theology-conference-resources>

2019 EFCA Theology Conference: The Doctrine of Creation

<https://helps.efca.org/bundles/2019-efca-theology-conference-resources>



ARTICLE 02

The Bible

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

ARTICLE 02: **The Bible**

God's gospel is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 2: The Bible," pp. 21-41.

Watch the video interview of Article 2 – John Woodbridge (31:04).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. The SOF assumes the Bible is God's Word, verbally inspired, and that it reveals God's will. Those are strong assertions. The Bible is the most important book in the world, said Martin Luther, because it is the only book that tells us about our salvation, and this is something we desperately need to know. Even John 3:16, "for God so loved the world," is only known because of special revelation. But additionally, God had mercy on us even to give us this special revelation, the Bible.
2. The Bible is God's book. He is the Author. Because of this, the Bible is authoritative and without error (inerrant). This truth claim is not only self-attested in the Scriptures, but it is the view of Jesus himself. There is an important relationship between Christ and the authority of Scripture. Confessing Jesus Christ is Lord also means we affirm Jesus' view of Scripture. Since as disciples we follow Christ, our view of Scripture ought to be Jesus' view. This was taught at TEDS by Kenneth Kantzer.
3. It is important to affirm the authority of the Bible and also the application of the Bible in life. In the 1960s, some evangelicals began bifurcating between the infallibility of Scripture, i.e., not prone to error, and inerrancy, i.e., without err. It was a wrong move. Evangelicals responded in the 1970s and 1980s through the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). In the course of 10 years, they published The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982), and The Chicago Statement on Biblical Application (1986).
4. The sufficiency of Scripture means that all we need to know about our salvation is in Scripture. Tradition is important, but it serves a role as guardrails along the doctrinal road (as articulated by Timothy George). But the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) is the Word of God.
5. There are several challenges to the Word of God today: naturalism; anti-authoritarianism, e.g., sexuality; respectability and relevance rather than faithfulness; pride; familiarity, etc.
6. The Scripture is powerful, it is living and active (Heb. 4:12), a biblical truth that has been significant in the history of the church. It was at the heart of Martin Luther and the Reformation. It was at the heart of Billy Graham's ministry, about which he writes in the inaugural volume of *Christianity Today* in October 1956, "Biblical Authority and Evangelism." It is no less true for us today.

7. Sometimes, according to Calvin, pastors even forget about the truth of Hebrews 4:12, that the word of God is living and active, it is the power of God. And at times, it is not a lack of knowledge of the Bible, it is what the Scriptures are, which requires a heart change, thus prompting to pray that God will even help us to read the Bible and to pray, because we are needy people.
8. Once again, Luther is helpful when considering a devotional life. He says it consists of meditating on Scripture, Psalm 1 was critical, praising/worshipping the Lord, and praying against temptation.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the “most holy faith”?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

How do we know this good news? We know it only because God himself has revealed it to us. Our second Article affirms that God’s gospel is authoritatively announced in the Scriptures. Through the words of its human authors, God has spoken in his Word, the Bible, without error. The Scriptures are the complete revelation of his will for salvation, and the ultimate authority that stands over every realm of human knowledge and endeavor. Therefore, the Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 2: The Bible: *God's gospel is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. God Has Spoken
- II. God has spoken in the Scriptures
 - A. The Bible Consists of Both Old and New Testaments
 - B. God Has Spoken Through the Words of Human Authors
 - C. The Bible Is the Verbally Inspired Word of God
 1. The Bible Is Without Error
 - a. Two Qualifications
 1. The Bible must be rightly understood
 2. The Bible is without error in the original writings
 2. The Bible Is Complete
 3. The Bible Is Authoritative
- III. Our Response to God's Word

We believe . . .

God Has Spoken and Still Speaks

1. We believe God has spoken in the Scriptures through the words of human authors (Matt. 1:22; 4:4; 19:4,5; Lk. 1:1-4; Heb. 1:1-2).

2. We believe the Scriptures, the Word of God, the Bible consist of both Old and New Testaments (Matt. 5:17-20; Lk. 24:44; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

Verbally inspired and Without Error

3. We believe the Bible, as the verbally inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21), is without error in the original writings (2 Sam. 7:28; Prov. 30:5; Num. 23:19; Ps. 119:89, 96; Matt. 5:18; Jn. 10:35; 17:17; Tit. 1:1,2).

Complete Revelation

4. We believe the Bible is the complete revelation of God's will for salvation (Isa. 40:6, 8; Lk. 16:29-31; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:24-25).

Ultimate Authority

5. We believe the Bible is the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged (Ps. 12:6; 119:160; Matt. 24:35; Jn. 17:17; 1 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Response

6. We believe all that the Bible teaches (Matt. 22:29; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16).
7. We obey all that the Bible requires (Ps. 119:44-45, 162-168; Matt. 28:20; 2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12; 1 Jn. 2:5).
8. We trust all that the Bible promises (Rom. 1:2; 4:21; Heb. 10:23; 2 Pet. 1:4; 3:13).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. What are the similarities and differences between these terms: Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, Word of God, Bible?
2. God who has always been has spoken. He is a God who speaks. Why is it important to state that God has spoken "in the Scriptures" over against that God has spoken *through* the Scriptures? Why is it important to confine his spoken revelation to the Scriptures?
3. The Scriptures consist of the "Old and New Testaments." How many books are there in the Old Testament? What about the New Testament? Why is it important today to state explicitly the scope, or canon, of the Scriptures? How did the canon come to be? How is it being questioned or undermined?
4. "God has spoken . . . through human authors." This explains specifically what is meant by "verbally inspired." How would you explain the verbal inspiration of the Bible?
5. Because this is God's Word accurately recorded by human authors, it is "without error in the original

- writings.” The technical term is *inerrant*. What or who is at the heart of inerrancy? Why is it important to state that it was the original writings that were without error? Do we have them, and if not, what is the importance of this statement?
6. The Bible is “the complete revelation of His will for salvation.” What does it mean that it is complete? Why is it that many look elsewhere for something to add to the inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word? Why is it not considered sufficient? “Revelation” carries the meaning of “to make known.” God has ultimately revealed in the Bible, which is special revelation. God has also “spoken” or revealed in nature, which is known as general revelation. What is the difference between general and special revelation? How do we know, and where will we find the divine interpretation of God’s works and ways? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the Bible, and what is his role in our understanding it (*illumination*)? What are some challenges to the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of the Bible today?
 7. It is also “the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged.” Because it is God’s Word, He has the final say in everything. This is true with what the Scriptures state explicitly, but it is also true with what they state implicitly. No matter the discipline, it submits to the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. How is this true in your life? How is this true in your vocation? The fact that the word “should” is used acknowledges that not all use the Word to judge all they do and say. That is a statement of our sinfulness. What do you need to confess in relation to your posture to the Lord of the Word as revealed in the Word of the Lord?
 8. Most Confessions or Statements of Faith state what is to be believed: *credo*, I/We believe. In this SOF, there are a few Articles that also address an implication of the doctrine we affirm (Articles 2, 8, 10), with this being one of them. Here it is noted by the word, “therefore.” The appropriate response to God and His Word, as recorded in the Bible, is to believe “all that it teaches, to obey “all that it requires” and to trust “all that it promises.” Though the Bible is true with or without our response to it, what is wrong when it merely remains abstract words that do not affect our lives? Do you agree or disagree with the statement, “a person will not always live what they profess, but they will always live what they believe”? Why is it that biblical a-literacy is so rampant even among Christians? Why is it that the morality of many Christians is not noticeably different from non-Christians?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 3: The Human Condition,” pp. 43-63.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 3 – Eric Tully (24:06).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Psalm 1
- 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Memory Verses

- Isaiah 40:8
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Bibliography

Introductory

Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*

William D. Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible: Answers to Real Questions and Doubts People Have about the Bible*

Intermediate

David Brunn, *One Bible, Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?*

Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*

Advanced

Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*

D.A. Carson, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*

John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*

Audio/Video

2015 Theology Conference: The Doctrine of the Scriptures: Authority, Clarity and Sufficiency with Dr. Graham Cole

<https://helps.efca.org/resources/the-doctrine-of-the-scriptures-authority-clarity-and-sufficiency-with-dr-graham-cole>



ARTICLE 03

The Human Condition

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

ARTICLE 03: The Human Condition

God's gospel alone addresses our deepest need.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read the chapter in *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 3: The Human Condition," pp. 43-63.

Watch the video interview on Article 3 – Eric Tully (24:06).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. We are created by God, and we belong to God. We are accountable to him for everything we do. He created us, he loves us, and we are absolutely dependent on him.
2. Each human being is made in the image of God (*imago Dei*), and God created us "very good." We were not to die. We were not to suffer. We were to be in perfect relationship with God. This is the positive aspect of this doctrine. The negative is the corruption of sin (the Fall). That "in Adam," we are born in sin, we choose sin, and that extends to every individual, no matter the age, and it is pervasive, meaning everything has been damaged by sin.
3. The original default was that we were created to be in relationship with God and not to die. That changed "in Adam," so now the default due to sin (original sin), because of Adam's sin and because of our own sin, we reject God and are under his wrath. Just as sin and our sin nature, our depravity and corruption, are comprehensive, so is God's wrath against sin/sinners comprehensive. This gets to the heart of the gospel, which is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures.
4. By affirming our sin nature, we understand our problem is not that we are not becoming our best selves, that we are not achieving our highest potential, that we need rehabilitation or education. Our problem is rebellion against God due to our being in Adam, a result of a sinful, unbelieving heart. What we need is to experience the power of the gospel, a supernatural transformation of the heart, regeneration, so that a heart of stone is removed and replaced with a heart of flesh, the truth promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.
5. The Davidic King promised in the Old Testament made atonement for sins, meaning for those who receive him, the "second Adam," they are now "in Christ," meaning sins are forgiven, a new nature is received, a new life-orientation toward God exists, with a transfer of allegiance, and becoming a part of a new people. We are supernaturally and fundamentally transformed by Christ.
6. Some of the ways this doctrine is being challenged today is through functional atheism when we live as if God does not exist as that truth has no bearing on our thinking, living, and worldview; naturalistic evolution; it is implicitly denied in how we (mis)treat each other and the "least of these";

and self-actualization or expressive individualism. And in the church, this doctrine affects a broader philosophy of ministry and lays the ground for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

7. It is important we ensure that whatever we consume, it is being constantly evaluated. All we do, all we think, all we speak, must be filtered through the lens of Scripture and we must discern if and to what extent what we consume is either building up or tearing down true doctrine as revealed in the Bible.
8. An accurate diagnosis is required, we need to know our situation and status before God, and this leads to the wonderful truth and hope in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the “most holy faith”?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

This gospel revealed in the Bible is important to us because it alone addresses our deepest human need. Our central problem is not a lack of education, inadequate healthcare or a terrorist threat. It is our alienation from God. We have sinned, all of us, beginning with our first ancestors. We are fallen in our nature before we take our first breath. By our own volition we go our own way in defiance of God’s rightful rule, refusing to allow God to be God in our lives. This cosmic rebellion is evil, and God will not stand for it. As a result, we now stand under his wrath, and we can be rescued, reconciled and restored only through God’s gracious work in Jesus Christ.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 3: The Human Condition: *God's gospel alone addresses our deepest need.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. The Source of Human Dignity: Our Creation in God's Image
 - A. Human Beings as God's Image
 - B. The Significance of Adam and Eve
- II. The Source of Human Depravity: Our Fall into Sin
 - A. Tempted by Satan
 - B. The Nature of Sin
- III. The Continuing Effects of Sin: Our Union With Adam
 - A. Sinful by Nature and By Choice
 1. The Breadth of Sin
 2. The Depth of Sin
 - B. Alienated from God
 - C. Under God's Wrath
- IV. Our Only Hope: God's Saving Work in Jesus Christ—Rescued, Reconciled and Renewed

We believe . . .

Creation of Adam and Eve

1. We believe God created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Col. 3:10; Jms. 3:9).

Sin (Fall)

2. We believe Adam and Eve sinned when tempted by Satan (Gen. 3:1-6; Jn. 8:44; Rom. 5:12-14; 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).
3. We believe all human beings are in union with Adam (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; Jn. 3:6; Rom. 3:12; 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:22a; 1 Jn. 1:8), and are thus sinners by nature and by choice (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Isa. 6:5; Rom. 5:15; 8:5-8; Eph. 2:1-2; 4:17-19).
4. We believe every human being is alienated from God (Rom. 5:10), and under His wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:9-19; 3:23; Eph. 2:3).

God's Saving Work

5. We believe it is only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ (Act 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5) that we can be rescued (1 Thess. 1:10), reconciled (Rom. 5:1,2,10; Col. 1:20) and renewed (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. Why is it important to state that “God created Adam and Eve”? Why is it critical to affirm the biblical truth that God created “Adam and Eve,” male and female?
2. What does it mean that they are created “in God’s image,” the *imago Dei*? What does that mean for all humanity? What are the implications of the dignity of all humanity? We are all created dependent on God, thus with creaturely limitations, and interdependent on others, thus with a need for others (think of the corporate reality that God’s plan is from “eternity to redeem a people for Himself”).
3. Through whom did the temptation come? What is the occasion of sin?
4. What is the significance of the reference to “in union with Adam?” Who does that include?
5. Because of being in “union with Adam,” there are implications? What are they? How does it affect all of humanity. How does it affect us? How does it affect me?
6. What does it mean that we are “sinners by nature and by choice?” This is referred to as original sin with the implication being total inability. It is not that all apart from Christ are as bad as they can be, but rather that every aspect of one’s being has been affected (infected) by sin. Some have referred to being in Adam as being “unable not to sin.”

7. Often sin is mentioned alone, without mentioning anything else. It becomes something we do that adversely affects us. Why is it imperative to mention the vertical implications of our sin against God, viz. alienation and under his wrath? Why is that avoided or denied today? It has been said that the greatest problem is not our sin, but rather what our sins incur: the wrath of God. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
8. What is the “only” remedy that God has provided to our sin, both the guilt (addressed in justification) and corruption (addressed in sanctification)? Though Jesus’ death is the exclusive means, it is for all (inclusive). And the instrumental means by which “God’s saving work in Jesus Christ” is received is by faith. (The exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the ground of salvation is also emphasized in Articles 5, Jesus “atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the *only ground for salvation.*” and 7, “the true church comprises all who have been justified by God’s *grace [alone]* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone.*” [emphasis added])
9. What is the significance of the words “rescued, reconciled and renewed?” (The problem of sin is resolved in Christ: rescued from God’s wrath, reconciled to God from our alienation, and renewed into the image of the Son.) How does this prepare for the next article in the flow of redemptive history?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 4: Jesus Christ,” pp. 65-85.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 4 – Kevin Kompelien (22:26).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Genesis 3
- Romans 5:12-21

Memory Verses

- Genesis 1:26-27
- Romans 3:23

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Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*

Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*

Advanced

Michael Wilkinson, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: A Chalcedonian Anthropology*

Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed*



ARTICLE 04

Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel’s promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

ARTICLE 04: Jesus Christ

God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 4: Jesus Christ," pp. 65-85.

Watch the video interview on Article 4 – Kevin Kompelien (22:26).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. One of the important truths is that Jesus must be fully God and fully man in order to be our Savior. If he were not fully God and fully man, he would not be righteous to pay the penalty for our sin, or he would not share our humanity and to be able to pay the price for our sin. Both are essential.
2. A second important truth is the statement "Israel's promised Messiah." Jesus is the bridge between the Old and New Testament. The promise God gave in Genesis 3 and the prophecies through the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He made a promise, and he fulfilled the promise. Jesus is the one who ties the whole Bible together. This is evident in Matthew's Gospel, which connects to prophesy and then the fulfillment in Jesus. Apart from Jesus birth, his sinless life, his atoning death, his glorious resurrection on our behalf, we have no gospel.
3. A third truth addresses the current ministry of Jesus, that of being seated at the right hand of the Father, the place of ruling and reigning, and he also serves as our High Priest, the One who has fully paid the penalty and speaks to the Father on our behalf, and our Advocate, the One who stands in the gap for us. And this ministry of Jesus' heavenly intercession, inaugurated through his ascension and being seated, entails the ongoing earthly intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit.
4. A few of the ways this truth is being doubted or denied is by claiming Jesus was a good moral teacher (when Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58), the Jews picked up stones to kill him), by denying Jesus' exclusive claims of access to the Father (Jn. 14:6), by questioning the resurrection and empty tomb (as the idea of a crucified and risen Savior is a defearer belief to some and anathema to Muslims). In the church, Jesus is believed to be a kind, compassionate, and loving man, yet without requiring full obedience, without requiring a sacrifice of death to self in order to follow him and submitting to his Lordship. We forget the fact that Jesus had some stern words for self-righteous people.
5. These truths are critical because without a proper perspective on the person and work of Christ, you will not then understand the work of Christ, and without this there is no Christianity.
6. It is easy for Christians to refer to God generically. That is not inaccurate, but it can be stated more specifically, and therefore more accurately. Some will say, "God died on the cross." But that needs to

be stated more specifically. It is more accurate to say, "Jesus, God the Son, died on the cross for your sins." It reflects a malformed or mis-formed, or not fully formed, Trinitarian theology.

7. As we ponder Jesus Christ, we need to deepen our understanding of who Jesus is, considering him as we would a diamond, turning it and seeing a different beauty with each turn, and remembering that Jesus is not just the Savior, he is my Savior.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the "most holy faith"?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

In the Person of Jesus Christ the gospel is revealed in history. As Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man. He was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of God the Father, he is now our High Priest and Advocate.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 4: Jesus Christ: *God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?

2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. Jesus' Identity: He Is God Incarnate
 - A. Jesus Christ Is Fully God
 1. Why Does It Matter?
 - B. Jesus Christ Is Fully Man
 1. One Person in Two Natures
 2. Why Does It Matter?
 - C. Conceived Through the Holy Spirit, Born of a Virgin
 - D. Jesus Is Israel's Promised Messiah
- II. Jesus' Life
 - A. Jesus Lived Without Sin
 - B. Jesus Was Crucified Under Pontius Pilate
 - C. Jesus Arose Bodily from the Dead
 - D. Jesus Ascended to the Father's Right Hand

We believe . . .

Person

1. We believe Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21; 16:18) is God incarnate (Jn. 1:14, 18; 1 Jn. 4:2), fully God (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:6; Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9) and fully man (Matt. 4:2; Lk. 2:40, 52; Jn. 11:35; Heb. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 1:1-3), one Person in Two natures (Jn. 3:13; 10:30; 17:5).
2. We believe Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah (Gen. 3:14-20; 12:1-3; 49:8-12; 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Matt. 1:1, 17; Lk. 4:16-22; 24:25-27; Jn. 1:41; 4:25-26; Acts 2:36; 13:23,32; Rom. 1:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:8,9).

Incarnation

3. We believe Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34-35) and born of the virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20; Lk. 1:34-35).

Sinless Life

4. We believe Jesus lived a sinless life (Rom. 5:19; Gal. 4:4-5; Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 4:15).

Crucifixion

5. We believe Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate (Dt. 21:23; Ps. 16:10; Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:16; Jn. 19:16; Acts 2:27, 37).

Resurrection

6. We believe Jesus arose bodily from the dead (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:39; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:20, 44-45; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5).

Ascension and Session

7. We believe Jesus ascended into heaven (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:6-11; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16) and sits at the right hand of God the Father (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22).

Present Ministry

8. We believe Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 8:1) and Advocate (Rom. 8: 34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. As we study the person of Jesus Christ, we must remember the doctrine of the Trinity since we believe Jesus is God, which we affirm in Article 1: “eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Why is it important to spell out more fully what it means to confess that “Jesus Christ is God incarnate,” with the statement “fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures”? This is known as the *hypostatic union*. We believe this truth is taught in the Scriptures. Why was it necessary to articulate this belief? In what ways was it being questioned or denied in the early church? What about today? What does this expression mean today to those in the church? What about to those outside the church?
2. What is the significance of the statement “Israel’s promised Messiah”? How is it that this reference to Jesus connects the two testaments, the Old and the New Testaments? How will this impact/influence our interpretation of the Bible? This expression is considered the hermeneutical (interpretative) lens in our SOF by which all the Scriptures are understood? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. What is unique about Jesus' conception? Though not an immaculate conception, as believed by the Roman Catholic Church, it is accurate to refer to this as a miraculous conception. Why? Why is the miraculous conception important, i.e. what does it mean for Jesus? What about for us?
4. How is it Jesus was able to live a sinless life? Were his temptations real, i.e., could he or could he not sin (this refers to the discussion about the *peccability* or *impeccability* of Christ)?
5. Jesus was obedient both actively in his sinless life as he perfectly obeyed the law and pleased his Father, and passively in his crucifixion, bearing the sin and wrath we deserve. Why is it important to include the reference to "Pontius Pilate," the one under whom Jesus was crucified? What is the importance of Jesus' obedience in both realms?
6. What does Jesus' resurrection mean? What is the importance for understanding who Jesus is, and what the implications are to those who are in union with Christ? Why is it important to emphasize Jesus' bodily resurrection?
7. Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, he also ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father. What does this mean relative to the earthly work of Jesus, and what insight does Jesus' final words on the cross, "It is finished," give to us? What is the significance of sitting at God the Father's right hand, and what does his posture of "sits" mean for him, as we consider his earthly ministry, and for us?
8. Jesus now carries on a ministry of "High Priest and Advocate." This means though his earthly ministry is complete, he carries on a heavenly ministry. Who does this ministry of high priest and advocate affect? What does this ministry of intercession mean? Why is it vital for Christians?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 5: The Work of Christ," pp. 87-107.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 5 – Steve Bryan (21:25).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Genesis 3:15
- Romans 1:1-6 (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Memory Verses

- Isaiah 7:14
- John 1:14

Bibliography

Introductory

Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*

Todd Miles, *Superheroes Can't Save You: Epic Examples of Historic Heresies*

Andreas J. Kostenberger & Justin Taylor with Alexander Stewart, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived*

Intermediate

Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*

Advanced

Athanasius of Alexandria *On the Incarnation*



ARTICLE 05

The Work of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

ARTICLE 05: The Work of Christ

God's gospel is accomplished through the work of Christ.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 5: The Work of Christ," pp. 87-107.

Watch the video interview on Article 5 – Steve Bryan (21:25).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. One of the first and important things to say about this truth is to that it is a distillation of what we mean when we use the term gospel. The gospel is about what Christ has done, not what we have done or do. If you were to point to any of the Articles as the heart of the gospel, this is it.
2. Jesus is the representative of his people, in that he dies for them. In the wider redemptive story, Jesus identified with Israel, which was grounded in God's covenant with Abraham and those descended from Abraham, and this was God's covenantal solution to human rebellion. It is through Israel's own rebellion that Christ becomes necessary. He is their representative, and therefore the representative of all humanity. This then enables us to understand how he becomes our substitute.
3. The gospel is a story. The four Gospels and the New Testament end with the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. There is a sense in which this has the sense of being outsized. But the Gospels are stories within a bigger story of God dealing with Israel, and even bigger still, all of creation. It is within this larger story that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection make sense. Consider Jesus' role as representative. In the Gospel of Matthew, the reader is informed he is to be called Jesus because he will save his people from sin. He dies for Israel, which is grounded in God's covenantal relationship with Abraham and those descended from him, so there is a covenantal solution to human rebellion. This is representation and substitution.
4. Often, we think of Jesus' crucifixion apart from the resurrection. The resurrection validates the truthfulness of Christ and the significance of his crucifixion. But importantly, Jesus' resurrection is connected to the doctrine of justification by faith. Paul writes that Jesus was raised for our justification.
5. A few ways this doctrine is being questioned, challenged, or denied is the notion of a blood sacrifice. The fact that we no longer have a sacrificial culture is a result of Christianity. And the irony is that in our post-Christian culture there is no revulsion to it. This leads to a second way, and that is the truth of Christ's shed blood on the cross as the means of taking our punishment (imputation) and the ground for our justification, is anything but just. The death of an innocent person (Jesus) for something others did (humanity "in union with Adam") is the very definition of injustice. Another way is that the Old Testament is considered irrelevant, and yet if you have no Old Testament you have

no categories to understand the shed blood of Christ, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Another is that we do not have a cultural category of sin any longer. People do not think they need to be saved. And that leads to a final, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, that his death and resurrection “constitute the only ground for salvation.”

6. This doctrine is critical for the people of God because the church is, above all, a gospel people. If we are unclear on the gospel, we lose our identity.
7. In the midst of cancel culture where there is only guilt and no forgiveness, the gospel provides the possibility of true forgiveness and reconciliation. For those who are disaffected with the church, the resurrection is our North Star.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the “most holy faith”?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

God’s gospel is not only revealed in Jesus Christ, it is also accomplished through his work. For when he died on the cross, Jesus acted as our representative and substitute as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. He was raised from the dead as a foretaste of his victory over all the forces of sin and death.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 5: The Work of Christ: *God's gospel is accomplished through the work of Christ.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. Of Central Importance: Jesus Christ Shed His Blood on the Cross
- II. Christ's Atoning Death: The Perfect, All-Sufficient Sacrifice for Our Sins
 - A. Biblical Language of the Atonement
 - B. Theological Views of the Atonement
 1. Jesus, Our Substitute: Penal Substitution
 - a. Objections to Penal Substitutionary Atonement
 2. Jesus, Our Representative: Union with Christ
- III. Christ's Victorious Resurrection: His Victory and Ours
 - A. Jesus' Vindication and Victory
 - B. Our Great Hope

We believe . . .

Of Central Importance: Jesus' Shed Blood

1. We believe Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross (Lev. 17:11; Mt. 26:28; Heb. 9:14, 22; 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 12:10-11).

Jesus' Death the Sacrifice for Sins: Perfect, All-Sufficient

2. We believe Jesus' voluntary death on the cross is the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:23-24, 26, 28; 10:1; 13:11, 12) for our sins (Isa. 53:5-7, 12; Jn. 1:29; Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:5).

Representative and Substitute

3. We believe Jesus is our representative (Gen. 2:15-17; Matt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:45, 47; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 4:15) and substitute (Lev. 16; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 2:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

Atoning Death and Victorious Resurrection, the Only Ground

4. We believe Jesus' atoning death (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10) and victorious resurrection (Col. 1:13; 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15) constitute the only ground for salvation (Rom. 4:25; 6:4, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:20; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 1:19-20; 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. What is the significance of Jesus being our “representative and substitute?” Why did we need a representative? Why did we need a substitute?
2. Why is the reference to Christ shedding “His blood on the cross” important? What are the roots of the necessity of a blood sacrifice under the old covenant?
3. Jesus' death is “the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins.” What is the importance of these specific expressions: “perfect,” “all-sufficient sacrifice,” “for our sins”? Can anything be added to what Christ has done to address our sin problem, viz., being under God's wrath? In other words, the badness of sin is not just that it affects one personally, or that it affects others horizontally, though both of those are accurate realities of the devastation of sin. The most serious offense of sin is against God and what that sin against God incurs: wrath. What are ways some attempt to address the problem of sin apart from Christ?
4. This cross-work of Christ is referred to as “His atoning death and victorious resurrection.” What does this mean to God the Father (consider propitiation and expiation)? What does this mean for us (consider the double imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and our sin to Christ)?
5. What is the significance of the truth that Jesus “atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the *only ground* for salvation”? (Please note the exclusive claims of Christ affirmed in Articles 3, “*only* through God's saving work in Jesus Christ,” and 7, “the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's *grace [alone]* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone*.” [emphasis added]) Is there any other ground of salvation? What are some alternative notions of salvation?
6. Why is it important to emphasize this truth of the work of Christ today? In what ways is this biblical truth being undermined?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 6: The Holy Spirit,” pp. 109-130.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 6 – Harold Netland (19:51).

Additional Resources

Scripture Reading

- Isaiah 53:1-12
- Romans 3:21-26

Memory Verses

- Isaiah 53:5-6
- 2 Corinthians 5:21

Bibliography

Introductory

Jeremy Treat, *The Atonement: An Introduction*

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*

Intermediate

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*

Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*

Advanced

Thomas McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters*

Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement*

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ARTICLE 06

The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

ARTICLE 06: The Holy Spirit

God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 6: The Holy Spirit," pp. 109-130.

Watch the video interview on Article 6 – Harold Netland (19:51).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. This Article touches on or relates to most of the other Articles. Though the Holy Spirit is not often given as much attention as the person of Jesus Christ, we must remember the Holy Spirit is fully God. We affirm one God, not three gods: God the Father, God the Son, God, the Holy Spirit, each fully and equally God.
2. The importance of this doctrine is first seen in the notion of being new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), or regeneration or spiritual rebirth (Tit. 3). Paul refers to those in Christ being new creations. This is not a matter of being a little bit better than we were before, a better version of a previous self. We are unable to respond the way that we ought to respond. The Holy Spirit enables us to respond, to understand the truth of the gospel, and then to respond to it appropriately. This is evidenced in Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus (Jn. 3).
3. Another important truth is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, of the indwelling of the Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth, and he guides believers (Jn. 14). Furthermore, the Spirit works with our inner being, our will, our desires, our disposition, our intentions in molding us progressively into the image of Christ. Foundationally, even though fully God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is a Christ-focused, Christ-exalting ministry (Jn. 14-16).
4. One of the ways the truth of the Holy Spirit is challenged or denied is that he is considered a vague, impersonal power or force. Biblically, he is revealed to be a person, an agent who can be grieved and resisted. Another way is in the relationship between the Christian gospel and other religions. Another way is an overemphasis on the Holy Spirit at the expense of the other persons of the Trinity. A danger in the Evangelical community is that we tend to be individualized, so we claim the Holy Spirit is with us but not with other believers (consider Ps. 139). There are also temptations to conclude we are saved by the Holy Spirit and then we are sanctified by human works. Or the other side of that is to let go and let God, to become passive and allow the Holy Spirit to do this in me apart from Holy Spirit's enablement.
5. In the New Testament it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us, guides us, strengthens us, prays with/for us (Rom. 8). We are to become Christlike as we obey what Christ has commanded. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to obey, but we are the ones who obey (Phil. 2:12-13).

6. Luke's recording of the Holy Spirit's work in the early church is instructive: "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). This is often the way the Spirit works among us, guiding and conforming us to the image of Christ through the community of believers. Remember, God the Holy Spirit will never lead you contrary to what God the Holy Spirit has inspired in the Scriptures.
7. One final thought about the Holy Spirit and witness. It is liberating and empowering to realize that God the Holy Spirit is already present and at work among people before we get there, while we are there, and after we leave.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the "most holy faith"?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

What Jesus did then, two thousand years ago, is now applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit glorifies Christ as he works within us to convict us of our guilt and to grant us new spiritual life as we are born again into a new union with Christ. We are joined to him in his death and resurrection. The indwelling Holy Spirit now empowers us to live in a new way, so that we might become like Christ.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 6: The Holy Spirit: *God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. Who Is the Holy Spirit?
- II. What Does the Holy Spirit Do?
 - A. The Holy Spirit Glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ
 1. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ in Evangelism
 - a. The Holy Spirit Convicts the World of Its Guilt
 2. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ in Conversion
 - a. The Holy Spirit Regenerates Sinners
 - b. In the Holy Spirit Sinners Are Baptized into Union With Christ
 - c. In the Holy Spirit Sinners Are Adopted as Heirs in the Family of God
 3. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ in Discipleship
 - a. The Holy Spirit Indwells Believers
 - b. The Holy Spirit Illuminates Believers
 - c. The Holy Spirit Guides Believers
 - d. The Holy Spirit Equips Believers
 - e. The Holy Spirit Empowers Believers for Christ-Like Living and Service

We believe . . .

Key Ministry

1. We believe the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 16:14).

Ministry Among Unbelievers

2. We believe the Holy Spirit convicts the world of its guilt (Jn. 16:8; 1 Cor. 2:14).

Ministry of Regeneration

3. We believe the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; Tit. 3:5; Jms. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3), and in Him they are baptized (Mk. 1:8; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13) into union with Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 5:19; 15:22b; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:22; 2:17; 3:28; Eph. 1:4; 2:12; 3:6; 4:32; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Thess. 4:16) and adopted as heirs (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; Tit. 3:7) in the family of God (Matt. 12:49-50; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:14-18).

Ministry Among Believers

4. We believe the Holy Spirit also indwells (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16), illuminates (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4-15; Eph. 1:17-19; Phil. 1:9-11), guides (Jn. 16:13; Acts 15:28; Rom. 8:4, 14; Gal. 5:16, 18), equips (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12: 4-10; Eph. 4: 7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11) and empowers (Acts 1:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:7) believers for Christ-like living and service (Acts 6:8; Rom. 8:4-6, 12-16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 3:3, 5; 5:22-23, 25; Eph. 2:22; 4:3; Phil. 2:1-2).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. As we study the person of the Holy Spirit, we must remember the doctrine of the Trinity since we believe the Holy Spirit is God, which we affirm in Article 1: “eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Why is it important to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is God within our affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity? How is the Holy Spirit understood to those in the church? What about to those outside the church?
2. What is the chief ministry of the Holy Spirit? Even though he is fully God, how and in what ways does the God the Holy Spirit glorify God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? When the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, how and why is all of this to the glory of God the Father?
3. The Holy Spirit’s work is seen in three key areas: conviction of unbelievers, regenerating sinners and indwelling believers. How does the Holy Spirit’s ministry of conviction occur in the lives of unbelievers? (It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit’s ministry of conviction also occurs in the lives of believers, though for different reasons and with different results, one prior to conversion and the other after conversion.)

4. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit “regenerates sinners”? Why is it important to equate Spirit-baptism with regeneration, and what is the significance? (Spirit-baptism is not a post-conversion experience evidenced by speaking in tongues.)
5. In the Holy Spirit believers are “baptized into union with Christ.” What does “union with Christ” mean? How does this relate to the fact that Jesus is “our representative and substitute” (Article 5) and that He lives a “sinless life” (Article 4)? What is the significance of the contrastive parallel between “union with Christ,” the second Adam, with “in union with Adam” (Article 3)? If being in union with Adam means we are “unable not to sin,” being in “union with Christ” means we are, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, “able not to sin,” similar to Adam prior to the fall (though this does not mean we are without sin or can live without sin in this life).
6. One of the results of our union with Christ is that we are “adopted as heirs in the family of God.” Adoption has two important meanings: heirship (legal) and familial (relationship). Why are both of these truths important?
7. In the life of the believer, the Holy Spirit is at the heart of Christian growth. Biblically the term is transformation while theologically the term is sanctification. The Holy Spirit “indwells . . . guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.” Why is it challenging for many to begin the Christian life by the Holy Spirit and then attempt to live the Christian life on one’s own apart from the Holy Spirit? So much of Christian growth today is considered in individual terms. Why is it important to combine “Christ-like living and service”? The Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures also “illuminates” them. What important truth does this state when considering reading, interpreting and understanding the Bible?
8. What are the ways the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is being questioned or undermined today? What truths are important to emphasize?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 7: The Church,” pp. 131-160.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 7 – Eric Rivera (21:37).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Ezekiel 36:22-28
- John 16:5-15

Memory Verses

- Ezekiel 36:26-27
- Titus 3:4-7

Bibliography

Introductory

Fred Sanders, *The Holy Spirit: An Introduction*

J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*

Intermediate

John Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

Advanced

Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*

Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*



ARTICLE 07

The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

ARTICLE 7: The Church

God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 7: The Church," pp. 131-160.

Watch the video interview on Article 7 – Eric Rivera (21:37).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. The word for church means assembly or called out ones. The church is the people of God—a community, not a building—who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Its purpose and mission is to glorify God by making disciples and propagating the gospel message.
2. The New Testament refers to the church using metaphors that enable us to understand the nature of the church: the body of Christ; the bride of Christ; and the family of God. Additionally, we are the flock and Jesus is the Shepherd. We are ambassadors, meaning this is not our home.
3. The ordinances hold a critical place in the life of the church because they remind us of what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf: baptism, a declaration of the gospel (Matt. 28), and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11), a reminder of what Jesus has done and an affirmation of believing in his promise to return one day. The ordinances are critical reminders of the gospel in the life of the believer in the church. In a sense, when the gospel is proclaimed, we hear the gospel through the ear. When the ordinances are celebrated, we see the gospel through the eye.
4. A few of the ways the doctrine of the church is being doubted, diminished, or denied is through the notion it is not necessary to go to church to be a Christian, or forsaking the gathering together (consider Hebrews 10). Some have been hurt in the church. Some do not want to yield to God's priorities for their lives. Some imbibe expressive individualism. We need to ask appropriate questions and then respond with truth, accompanied by grace and patience. When the church is healthy, it brings life, joy, and comfort.
5. We affirm the universal (true) church and local churches that God has designed in various contexts throughout the world, with different cultural expressions, languages, and all the beauty that comes with that. Too often when things get messy or difficult, we are tempted to move to another local church. In these contexts, we have the opportunity to live out the gospel that we preach, to extend grace to one another, to forgive, to reconcile. When we get our feelings hurt, we resolve them.
6. This truth is important because it reminds us of Jesus as the Lord of our lives and Head of the church, and as the people of God, we are the body of Christ, and Christ sends us off with a mission, the

Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. Understanding our identity, understanding that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have all we need to live out this Christ-imparted, Spirit-empowered mission. Jesus tells his disciples in the Upper Room that it is better that he departs so that Holy Spirit will come. He comes to believers, the church.

7. In conclusion, the church is not perfect, and no church ought to claim perfection or absolute purity. But that does not mean it does not work. The church is God's creation, consisting of his people that have his mission until Jesus returns. Linger over the truth of the church, love the church, not abstractly but the local church where you serve, and be a part of God's mission as you serve with and through the church.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the "most holy faith"?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

When we are joined to Christ by faith, we become a part of a new family, the family of God, and we become a part of a new body, the body of Christ. God's gospel is now embodied in a new community, the church, which is manifest in local churches. In the fellowship of the church and through its ordinances, our faith is nourished and strengthened.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 7: The Church: God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church.

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. The Nature of the Church
 - A. The True Church
 1. The True Church Comprises All Who Have Been Justified by God's Grace Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone
 2. The True Church Comprises Those United by the Spirit into the Body of Christ of Which He Is the Head
 - B. The Local Church
 1. A Visible Community Manifesting the True Church in the World
 2. Local Church Membership Should be Composed Only of Believers
- II. The Ordinances of the Church
 - A. The Nature of the Ordinances
 1. Their Source: The Ordinances Are Mandated by the Lord Jesus
 2. Their Purpose: The Ordinances Visibly and Tangibly Express the Gospel
 - a. The Ordinances Are Not the Means of Salvation
 - b. When Celebrated by the Church in Genuine Faith, the Ordinances Confirm and Nourish the Believer
 - B. A Description of the Ordinances
 1. Baptism
 - a. Baptism as a Believer's Profession
 - b. Baptism as the Church's Affirmation

- c. Baptism as God's Promise
 - d. Baptism and the Holy Spirit
 - e. What About Infant Baptism?
2. The Lord's Supper
- a. The Lord's Supper Is a Remembrance of Christ's Death
 - b. The Lord's Supper Is a Communion with Christ's Life
 - c. The Lord's Supper Is a Fellowship in Christ's Body
 - d. The Lord's Supper Is a Foretaste of Christ's Coming
- C. A Summary of the Ordinances

We believe . . .

True Church: Justification By Grace, Through Faith, In Christ

1. We believe the true church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:25; Heb. 12:28) comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 10:14).

Headship of Christ

2. We believe all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27), of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Local Church

3. We believe the true church is manifest in local churches (Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2), whose membership should be composed only of believers (Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:41, 47; 14:23; 20:7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 11:20; 12:13; 14:40; 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:9; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 10:25).

Ordinances

4. We believe the Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26), which visibly and tangibly express the gospel.
5. We believe that though baptism and the Lord's Supper are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer (Jn. 6:55-56; Acts 2:38; 8:39; 16:34; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:29-30; Col. 2:12).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. Who makes up the “true church”? What does it mean to be “justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone”? Why is it important to emphasize “alone”? (Please note the exclusive claims of Christ affirmed in Articles 3, “*only* through God’s saving work in Jesus Christ,” and Articles 5, Jesus “atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the *only ground* for salvation.” [emphasis added].) Do you think the Reformation captured the essence of the gospel through the *solas*: grace alone (*sola gratia*), faith alone (*sola fide*), Christ alone (*solus Christus*), Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), God’s glory alone (*solus Deo gloria*)?
2. What is the significance of affirming justification is forensic, a declaration made by God that sinful people, by faith, are not guilty, thus imputing Christ’s righteousness to them? The two aspects of this biblical truth and experiential reality are the forgiveness of sins, based on Christ’s atoning sacrifice (substitutionary death and propitiatory sacrifice), and the second being imputation, which results from Christ’s obedience. Do you think the Reformers (re)emphasized rightly the biblical truth when they stated that justification is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls? How does this view differ from the Roman Catholic view?
3. Regarding the true church, what is the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What is the ministry of Christ? As Lord of our lives and as Head of the church, why is it more accurate to refer to the structure/polity of the church as a Christocracy than a democracy? What does each term signify about authority in the church?
4. Why is it important for the “true church” to be “manifest in local churches”? Is there such a thing as a churchless Christian? One has said, “the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation [church] of men and women who believe it and live by it.” Do you agree or disagree and why?
5. Because we are a believers’ church movement, i.e., our polity is congregational, “membership should be composed only of believers.” Upon first reading, why do you think it should read “membership *must* be composed”? Upon further reflection, why is it appropriate to use “should”? Is the true church manifest in local churches? Must it? Does the “true church” find an exact parallel in the “local church”? Does the “local church” consist of both wheat and tares? What does that mean for how we consider the purity of the church and membership?
6. What are the two ordinances the Lord Jesus mandated? Please note baptism and the Lord’s Supper are mandated by the Lord Jesus! What does an ordinance mean? Is there a difference between referring to them as an ordinance or a sacrament? How do the ordinances “visibly and tangibly express the gospel”? As an important reminder, our Statement does not prescribe the “time” or “mode” of baptism (allowing for both credo- and paedobaptist practices) nor does it define the precise manner in which Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper (allowing for a variety of historic Evangelical views). Is there an order to the ordinances, in other words, is there an order by which they should be engaged?

7. Though the ordinances are clearly “not the means of salvation,” i.e., one is not saved merely by participating, could they be a means of spiritual growth or sanctification? If so, how? What is the important connection between “genuine faith” and the fact that the “ordinances confirm and nourish the believer”?

8. Often the ordinances have been relegated to the place of unimportance or indifference in the life of the local church. What do the terms “mandated” and “celebrated” have to say to this trend?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 8: Christian Living,” pp. 161-186.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 8 – David Gustafson (24:51).

Additional Resources

Preaching/Teaching Texts

- Acts 2:36-47
- Ephesians 3:4-12; 4:11-16

Memory Verses

- Matthew 16:18
- 1 Peter 2:9-10

Bibliography

Introductory

Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Health Church*

Timothy Keller, *Center Church*

Intermediate

Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*

Advanced

Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*

Audio/Video

2016 EFCA Theology Conference: The Doctrine of the Church: The Embodiment of the Gospel

<https://helps.efca.org/bundles/2016-efca-theology-conference-resources>



ARTICLE 08

Christian Living

We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

ARTICLE 8: Christian Living

God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 8: Christian Living," pp. 161-186.

Watch the video interview on Article 8 – David Gustafson (24:51).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. This Article helps us to understand the relationship of how we have been saved from something to something. Consider Ephesians 2:8-9, of which we are familiar, and then 2:10, of which we are not as familiar. It portrays a picture of God's grace working that brings us to himself, and then we see God's grace working in our lives that we might live and do the works that he has prepared for us. That's the application, living out what God has given to us.
2. Or consider 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul writes God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and then he has given to us a ministry of reconciliation. We go from needing reconciliation to being a minister of God's reconciliation, of being a messenger of reconciliation, an ambassador.
3. Or consider Matthew 22:37-38. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We both worship God vertically and we have a horizontal relationship and responsibility to others, to love and care for them. The latter is related to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1-2.
4. Or another text is Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission to make disciples, to be a witness for Christ and the gospel. In our discipling, we are to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to teach all that Jesus commanded, and we do so with the promise that Jesus will be with us to the end of the age.
5. Sometimes there has been an emphasis on gospel in word, or gospel in deed. They are both important. There is a proclamation of the gospel in word, which is verbal. It is a message about God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, who lived, died, was buried, rose and ascended. But our proclamation is embodied in how we go about as people. We proclaim the gospel in word and we demonstrate or manifest the gospel in deed. In other words, the gospel is verbal, but our evangelism is in word and deed. They are not one and the same, but there are entailments to the gospel. We need to teach a holistic gospel, which is verbal (primary and foundational) and demonstrated (entailments).
6. A few challenges are that some have made everything a gospel issue, and though there is some truth to that, it can lead to diminishing or diluting the gospel. Think also of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, which is not the gospel.

7. This article speaks of living the Christian life, living in God's grace, being witnesses to the gospel, making disciples, and doing justice. In the present day, the truth of the gospel is manifested or embodied. The local church is a manifestation of gospel meaning the church is a hermeneutic of the gospel (Lesslie Newbigin). We demonstrate before a watching world that the gospel transforms lives. This is not only individual, consider Paul's exhortation, "imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1), but it is also corporate (consider all the one another commands in the New Testament). There are several important statements in this Article that address living out our commitments, to justice (biblical justice), to other social concerns, those ministries that demonstrate our love for others, grounded in the Scriptures and guided by the gospel.
8. In closing, we are to love the Lord, first and foremost, and love others, living out the Great Commandment (Jn. 13:34-35) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) to make disciples. The history of the EFCA is full of examples of people who are saved by grace, living as God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, committed to the Bible and the gospel and its entailments. Consider for example, Ellen Modin, who loved God, loved others, and who was committed to living out her faith "with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the "most holy faith"?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

In the grace of the gospel, God justifies us, accepting us just as we are. But in his grace, he does not leave us just as we are. This gospel also changes us; it sanctifies us, compelling us to Christ-like living

and witness to the world. We are to grow in our love for God and for other people who are created in his image. We are to show the same compassion we have received toward others who are in need. We are to do battle with the forces of evil in this world, in fellowship with one another, in dependence on him, using all the resources he has given us. And in all that we do, in word and deed, we are to bear witness to this glorious gospel among all people.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 8: Christian Living: *God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. Grace and Godliness: God's Justifying Grace and His Sanctifying Power and Purpose
- II. The Great Commandment
 - A. We Are to Love God Supremely
 - B. We Are to Love Others Sacrificially
 1. Caring for One Another
 2. Acting with Compassion Toward the Poor
 3. Seeking Justice for the Oppressed
- III. The Spiritual Battle
 - A. Our Duty: To Combat the Spiritual Forces of Evil
 - B. Our Means
 1. God's Word
 2. The Spirit's Power
 3. Fervent Prayer in Christ's Name

- 4. We Do Not Fight Alone
 - C. Our Confidence: In Jesus Christ Our Victory Is Assured
- IV. The Great Commission: We Are to Make Disciples
 - A. What Is a Disciple?
 - 1. We are to Make Disciples Among All People
 - 2. We are to Make Disciples by Bearing Witness to the Gospel in Word and Deed

We believe . . .

Justification and Sanctification

1. We believe God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose (Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33, 35; Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 5:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 5:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Tit. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 6:11, 14; 1 Pet. 1:15; Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:1, 14; Rom. 6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Js. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

Great Commandment

2. We believe God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially (Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27).
3. We believe that, in loving God supremely and others sacrificially, we are to live out our faith with care for one another (Rom. 12:10; 14:13; 15:7, 14; Gal. 5:26; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 3:12; 5:11, 15; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:9), compassion toward the poor (Dt. 15:11; Psa. 82:3,4; Psa. 140:12; Prov. 14:21,31; 19:17; 22:9,16,22,23; 28:8; 29:7; 31:8,9; Jer. 22:16; Gal. 2:10; Js. 1:27) and justice for the oppressed (Ex. 23:6; Lev. 19:15; Psa. 82:3,4; 140:12; Prov. 29:7; 31:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 9:24; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9,10; Matt. 23:23; Luke 4:18).

Spiritual Battle

4. We believe that with God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name (Eph. 6:10-18), we (Heb. 3:13; 10:25), are to combat the spiritual forces of evil (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:11, 12; 2 Tim. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:3-4).

Great Commission

5. We believe that, in obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people (Matt. 28:19; Jn. 20:21; Rev. 7:9).
6. We believe that as we make disciples, we are always bearing witness to the gospel (Acts 1:8) in word and deed (Matt. 5:13-16).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. Statements of Faith are written in a specific historical context. Why is it important to include this article at this time in this Statement of Faith? Why was a similar statement likely included in the Norwegian-Danish Statement of Faith in 1912, but a similar statement was not included in the 1950 EFCA Statement of Faith.
2. How do “God’s justifying grace” and “His sanctifying power and purpose” relate? How are they different? In other words, how are justification and sanctification related and how are they different? What does the expression “must not be separated” mean? What are ways they are wrongly separated? What happens if they are too closely aligned?
3. “God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially.” Is this a command we either embrace abstractly as true, or does it have practical implications to and outworkings in our lives? Or is it both?
4. We are justified by “God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone” (Article 7). But this faith is never alone, but is an active, living faith. Saving faith is the root while living faith is the flower, a body of truth and a way of life: those who are declared righteous by faith (body of truth), they live by faith (trust, a way of life). This living faith takes expression as we “care for one another” in the body of Christ, consider all the “one another” commands, show “compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed.” This combines both orthodoxy (belief) and orthopraxy (behavior), which addresses an implication or entailment of what we believe. What does this mean today? How will this bear out in our lives and in the life of the church? What is the weakness in the liberal church? What has been the weakness in the evangelical church? Is it possible for the evangelical church to engage in ministries of compassion and justice today without being considered progressive? Is it acceptable for the evangelical church not to engage in ministries of compassion and justice today and be considered healthy?
5. The “spiritual forces of evil” are acknowledged as real, and as believers, we are to combat them. What are the ways Christians and the church are being influenced and impacted by the enemy today, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”? What are the idols we worship? What are the means with which we are to engage in this combat? Why is the plural “we” important to remember? Please note the spiritual disciplines used and the Trinitarian reference: God’s Word, the Spirit’s power, and fervent prayer in Christ’s name. In addition, what does the truth of Christ’s “atoning death and victorious resurrection” (Article 5) add?
6. In Christ’s Great Commission, he exhorts us “to make disciples among all people.” Why is this underlying truth important to remember in this article? What does it mean if we are obeying this command, especially the “all people” part? How are we coming short of recognizing the church being comprised of justified believers from every tribe and language and people and nation?

7. As we “make disciples” we are always to bear “witness to the gospel.” Why is it that this command never grows old? How does this relate to Jesus’ ministry and the ministry of the early church? What is the importance of Jesus’ promise to be “with you always, to the end of the age”? (Consider the emphasis on “all”: “*all* authority,” “*all* nations,” “*all* that I have commanded you,” and “I am with you *always*.”)
8. Some today downplay the need for gospel proclamation, but rather emphasize living out the gospel. Why does this come short? Why is it essential to bear “witness to the gospel in word and deed?” With the emphasis on “always,” why is “the gospel” the critical truth to remember?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., “Article 9: Christ’s Return,” pp. 187-207.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 9 – David Pao (18:59).

Additional Resources

Scripture Reading

- Matthew 22:34-40; 28:18-20
- Ephesians 6:10-18
- 1 Peter 1:3-11

Memory Verses

- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Revelation 12:10-11

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ARTICLE 09

Christ's Return

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

ARTICLE 9: Christ's Return

God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 9: Christ's Return," pp. 187-207.

Watch the video interview on Article 9 – David Pao (18:59).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. The fact that Jesus is returning is important. The Article has the right emphasis in that it begins with God, since it is important to be theocentric, God-centered, and Christocentric, Christ-centered, in talking about the return of Christ. It is about Christ. It is not about us having a good life. It is not about us being freed from suffering, though it is that. Rather, it is about God himself.
2. There are three biblical authors that give us perspective. The first is Luke in Acts 1:9. We address Jesus' return being "personal, bodily and glorious," and that is precisely how we talk about Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The second author is Paul. And the third is Jesus in Matthew 24-25. In this discourse, the word "glorious" appears 19 times. It is not simply about a good ending. It is about Jesus being the Lord of all. Jesus is seated on a glorious throne. He is the King, Lord, and Judge.
3. There are various ways this truth is being questioned, undermined, or doubted today. For example, we will place the emphasis in the wrong place. This is about God knowing the exact timing of the return, not us. Comparing biblical eschatology with ancient prophecy, they were about fortune telling, desiring to know precisely what will happen. Responding to this secular ideology, biblical authors emphasize God is in control. We are not. Thinking we are in control is idolatry. This ought to be approached with humility.
4. Something interesting is what is absent in the Article, which is right. There is no reference to the antichrist. The way to combat the antichrist is not to look at the antichrist but to look at Jesus himself, to know the Messiah, to know God working through his Son. So, equally important as what is included is what is excluded in the Article.
5. There are several truths to highlight that are important for the spiritual health and well-being of the church. The first is hope. For Paul and Peter (1 Pet. 1:13-14; 3:5), this is not just escapist and futuristic. Living in hope today means we live in light of the future, which is realistic, practical, and life changing. Living life now is determined by the sure and certain hope we have in the future. The second is mission. In Matthew 24-25 there are three parables. They all focus on master and slave in some way. In the first, the focus is on returning right away. In the second, the focus is on his delay. In the third on the talents, the focus is on the meaningful delay. And while waiting for the return, there is meaningful

mission. We are not simply waiting for Jesus to return. We are fulfilling our task here on earth waiting for his return, which is similar to what Jesus said in Acts 1:9.

6. In closing, there are two highlights. First, at the end of the day this statement is about the object of our worship. The way we think about the second coming reflects on the true object of our worship. The way we think of the second coming is a good test to see what the true object of my worship is. Second, Jesus' return will culminate this present age, which is not the end. At Christ's return he will usher in the ultimate. Knowing there is an ultimate reality to which we are looking forward, relieves us of the pressure that we need to do something to usher in the end. God is the one working among us, not us. Knowing we live in the penultimate reality (the time before the ultimate), and knowing there is an ultimate reality to come, that is encouraging.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the "most holy faith"?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

We believe that one day God will bring his saving purpose in the gospel to fulfillment, when Jesus Christ comes in glory with his holy angels to establish his kingdom fully and completely and to exercise his role as Judge of all. Jesus Christ is coming again, and that is our blessed hope—a hope that spurs us on to remain faithful to our Lord to the end.

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 9: Christ's Return: *God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. The Return of Jesus Christ
- II. The Nature of Christ's Return
 - A. A Personal Return
 - B. A Bodily Return
 - C. A Glorious Return
 1. Christ Will Come as King
 - a. Premillennialism
 - b. Postmillennialism
 - c. Amillennialism
 2. Christ Will Come as Judge
- III. The Time of Christ's Return
 - A. The Time of Christ's Return Is Known Only to God
 - B. Christ's Return Demands Constant Expectancy
- IV. The Effect of Christ's Return
 - A. Our Blessed Hope
 - B. A Motivation for the Believer

We believe . . .

Nature of Christ's Return: Personal, Bodily and Glorious

1. We believe in the personal, bodily (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7) and glorious (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26; 21:27; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:13; 5:1, 4) return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:31; Tit. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:11-21).

Time of Christ's Return: Humility

2. We believe the coming of Christ will occur at a time known only to God the Father (Matt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32).

Waiting for Christ's Return: Vigilance

3. We believe the coming of Christ requires constant expectancy (Matt. 24:42-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Js. 5:8-9; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3).

Effect of Christ's Return: Service and Mission

4. We believe the coming of Christ, as our blessed hope (Tit. 2:13), motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission (2 Thess. 1:6-8; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:28; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10-14).

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. Why is it important to emphasize “the personal, bodily, and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ”? By strongly affirming his “personal, bodily” return, what is being denied by some? By emphasizing Christ’s “glorious return,” what is the biblical meaning and significance?
2. Even though a certain tribulational view (pre-, mid-, pre-wrath-, post) or millennial view (Historic Premillennial, Dispensational, Progressive Dispensational, Amillennial) is not specifically included (or mandated), what are the meanings of the various views, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the views? Why is the precise timing of Christ’s return such a fascination for some? Is the specific timing of Christ’s return as important as the fact of His return? One has identified two wrong responses. One is marked by an intensive preoccupation with eschatology: *eschatomania*—it becomes the primary or preeminent focus of all of life. There is a second trend: *eschatophobia*—a fear of or aversion to eschatology, or at least an avoidance of discussing it. How would you describe your approach to the return of Christ and the doctrine of last things?
3. Why is it important to acknowledge our ignorance and the Father’s knowledge of Christ’s return, “at a time known only to God”? This requires humility. What are the temptations or tendencies to those who become preoccupied with the timing of Christ’s return?

4. What does Christ's certain coming "demand" of believers? What does the term "constant expectancy" mean? What would it mean in one's life and in the life of the church?
5. What is "our blessed hope"? How is it that Christ's coming is "our blessed hope"?
6. Not only does Christ's coming "demand" a "constant expectancy," it also "motivates" believers? How? In what ways?
7. What happens if we become complacent about Christ's return? What happens if we become overly consumed with the details and intricacies of Christ's return? How do we retain the constant expectancy, while at the same time giving ourselves faithfully to "godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission"? What does this mean specifically for you? What about the church?

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Assignment for Next Study

- **Read** *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 10: Response and Eternal Destiny," pp. 209-234.
- **Watch** the video interview on Article 10 – Craig Ott (20:27).

Additional Resources

Scripture Readings

- Mt. 24:30-44
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- 2 Pet. 3:3-13

Memory Verses

- Titus 2:11-13
- 1 John 3:2-3

Bibliography

Introductory

Andreas Kostenberger, Alexander Stewart, Apollo Makara, *Jesus and the Future: Understanding What He Taught about the End Times*

John Piper, *Come, Lord Jesus: Meditations on the Second Coming of Christ*

Intermediate

George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things: An Eschatology for Laymen*

Advanced

Stanley N. Gundry and Alan Hultberg, *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*

Stanley N. Gundry and Darrell L. Bock, eds. *Three Views On The Millennium and Beyond*

Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*

Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*



ARTICLE 10

Response and Eternal Destiny

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

ARTICLE 10: Response and Eternal Destiny

God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Read *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd ed., "Article 10: Response and Eternal Destiny," pp. 209-234.

Watch the video interview on Article 10 – Craig Ott (20:27).

Video: Notes and Reflections

1. Regarding the importance of Article Ten, it serves as a culmination to the truths in the Statement of Faith, and it underscores the eternal weight of our commission. Eternity matters and our life on this side of eternity matters as we live it in light of eternity. This is also foundational to the character of God in that there will be a judgment. We will all stand before God one day, and there are only two outcomes: eternal blessedness and fellowship with God in all his fullness for all eternity; the other is eternal conscious punishment. There is no in-between. This is why it begins with the eternal life and death matter of believing and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We're commanded to respond, and it compels us to respond.
2. There are several ways this weighty truth is being questioned, undermined, or denied today: it is countercultural in that claiming believing and receiving Jesus Christ is absolute and exclusive is widely rejected; questions are raised about whether there even is such a thing such as eternal judgement, and even if there is, since God judges on a curve, all will be accepted in the end anyway; the very concept of hell. This biblical truth is different from what we are hearing most everywhere else, so this is a challenge in the church.
3. As far as addressing this in the church, the objections must be acknowledged. The other important matter to remember is the beauty of the gospel. We are not using a hammer to convince people to believe something that is unbelievable. We let the beauty of the gospel and the Holy Spirit do the work. In today's culture, even though we may be more reticent to discuss these things, people are often willing to talk about spiritual things.
4. Additionally, there are misconceptions about heaven. For example, there is a notion that if you believe in heaven, then nothing in this life matters anymore. This must be clarified because eternal life begins now. Those who believe in life after death are the people who sacrifice the most now to demonstrate love and compassion on this side of eternity because it matters (consider C. S. Lewis). Another misconception relates to the other end, and that is hell. The Bible uses metaphorical language (e.g., fire, darkness) to communicate real truth (separation from God), to communicate the truth from something known to describe/explain something unknown or not experienced, but true and real (speaking in metaphorical language to communicate a literal truth).

5. As we consider the doxological ending, it is important remember we were made as image bearers of God to reflect who he is and to represent him in the world, which reflects back to him his glory. We did not fill the earth with his glory, but with violence (Gen. 6). But in Christ, we have been restored and are being renewed into the image of Christ. That will come to fulfillment in his new creation, and all of this is to the praise of his glory, because God is eternal, he is ultimate. The beauty and glory of God are infinite, so it will take an infinity to plumb the depth of who God is, with every insight more glorious than the other.
6. As a final summarizing comment, we are given the mandate as a church to tell this great story to everyone, and we are not done. Taking our direction from Jesus, he sees the crowd and has compassion, he then asks the disciples to pray and then sends them out (Matt. 9-10). In light of the eternal state, in light of the grandeur and glory of the gospel, keep going. Let the heart of Jesus for people without him fill you and move you outward. And let the heart of Jesus who died for you, redeemed you, and has invited you to an eternity with him, let his heart fill you with joy that it overshadows whatever troubles we may have here.

Questions to Ponder

1. What key truths did you learn or of what truths were you reminded? What would you emphasize? Why?
2. Although it is important to know and affirm the truth, which is foundational, it is also important to know ways the truth is being questioned, challenged, or denied. What impacted you about the issues addressed? In what ways do you think these truths are being questioned or challenged? How do you respond to these questions in your own life and in the lives of others?
3. What did you learn about the importance of these truths in life and ministry? What is the practical outworking in your own life and ministry? How will you build yourself and others up on the “most holy faith”?
4. What were your key takeaways? What questions do you have? What would you like to study further?

Study

Introduction

10 MINUTES

The gospel message comes to us as a declaration of fact—God has acted to save us through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. But that declaration also issues in a command—we must repent and believe that good news. The New Testament presents the gospel not simply as a helpful suggestion to implement or even an invitation to accept, but as a command to obey (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8; Rom. 10:16-21; also Acts 5:32; 6:7; 17:30; Rom. 6:17; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:17). The objective work of God in Christ requires a

subjective response. The proper response to this command is faith, the sole means of receiving God's saving grace (cf. John 6:29).

When God's saving purposes have been fulfilled and his people are redeemed, reconciled and restored in the transformed creation, they will gather in joyful celebration and adoration as a great multitude that no one can count. Coming from every nation, tribe, people and language, they will stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb and exclaim: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10). Because salvation is all a gift of God's grace, no one will have cause to boast and God alone will be exalted. The unfolding of God's saving purpose in the gospel of Jesus Christ will be "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6).

All theology, because it is truth about God, is to be doxological, a prayerful profession, a joyful declaration, an act of worship. In the end, all that we can do is offer our hearty and heart-felt affirmation of God's glorious gospel revealed in Jesus Christ—So be it! We began our Statement by declaring that in all that God does, he acts "for His own glory" (Article 1). We now close with the word which ends the Bible itself: Amen (Rev. 22:21).

Teaching Key Truths

20 MINUTES

Article 10: Response and Eternal Destiny: *God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.*

1. What are the key biblical and theological terms/words, phrases, and doctrines?
2. What is being *explicitly* affirmed? What is *implicitly* being denied?
3. How are these truths critical to the Christian faith and why are they crucial for the spiritual health and maturity of believers and the church?
4. What are the implications or entailments of what we affirm (and deny), what is one truth you have learned or of which you have been reminded, and what is one personal application for which we can pray in the upcoming week?

Outline

- I. God's Gospel Requires a Response
 - A. God Commands Us to Respond
 - B. The Gospel Addresses Everyone Everywhere
 - C. We Are to Believe the Gospel
 1. We Are to Turn to God in Repentance
 2. We Are to Receive the Lord Jesus Christ

- II. Our Eternal Destiny
 - A. God Will Raise the Dead Bodily
 - B. God Will Judge the World
 - 1. The Destiny of the Unbeliever: Condemnation and Eternal Conscious Punishment
 - 2. The Destiny of the Believer
 - a. Eternal Blessedness and Joy with the Lord
 - b. In the New Heaven and the New Earth
- III. God's Final Purpose: To the Praise of His Glorious Grace
- IV. Our Final Response: Amen

We believe . . .

Gospel Response

1. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere (Acts 20:20) to believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 6:29; 8:24; 11:26; 14:1; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22; 10:14; Gal. 3:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 Jn. 3:23) by turning to Him in repentance (Isa. 55:6-7; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19; 14:15; 20:21; 26:17,18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-10) and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:12).

Eternal Destiny: Unbeliever and Believer, Hell and Heaven

2. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:13) and judge the world (Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 26:31-32; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:12).
3. We believe God will assign the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment (Matt. 25:46; Lk. 16:26; Jn. 5:25-29; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11; 21:6,8; 22:14,15).
4. We believe God will assign the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord (Matt. 25:34, 46; Jn. 5:25-29; 14:2; Rev. 21:1-3), in the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rom. 8:19-21; Heb. 12:26,27; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:3).

God's Final Purpose: Doxology

5. We believe this is all to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12). Amen.

Guided Discussion: Questions Related to the Article—Digging Deeper

20 MINUTES

1. Often Confessions or Statements of Faith consist of doctrines to be affirmed. In our SOF, there are also a few Articles in which entailments or responses to those doctrines are included (Articles 2, 8, 10). This is one of them. Although somewhat unique, why is emphasizing the gospel, as that which is of “first importance,” important, and then, secondly, why is including entailments of the gospel significant for the people of God?
2. Why are the truths in this Article a fitting conclusion to the whole Statement of Faith? What makes a response to all the truths affirmed in the SOF appropriate?
3. Please note that this is something “God commands” and no one is exempt from this command. Consider these questions: What is to be the response (“believe the gospel”)? To whom does this command apply (“everyone everywhere”)? Who is excluded or exempt from responding to the gospel (no one)? This affirms the exclusive claims of Christ and the exclusive means of salvation. How do many respond to these claims today?
4. The primary command to all is “to believe the gospel.” How is this more specifically spelled out: “by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ”? What is the meaning of each of these terms—“believe,” “turning,” “repentance,” and “receiving”—what is the relation between them, and how are they uniquely expressed in the new birth when a person by faith receives the Lord Jesus Christ? Is repentance “once and done” at conversion? In considering repentance, what is the difference between repentance at conversion and repentance in the Christian life? Why is repentance considered not only an initial response to the gospel but also an ongoing mark of the gospel in one’s life?
5. What are the implications of a bodily resurrection? What about the significance of a bodily resurrection of “all” the dead? How does this differ from those who claim the body (the material) is a hindrance that needs to be discarded or sloughed off, because what matters is the spiritual?
6. In God’s judgment of all, what is the difference between his judgment of the believer and his judgement of the unbeliever?
7. Based on unbelievers’ response to Jesus Christ in this life, since physical death marks the end of our ability to respond to God in faith (“it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment”) and there is no post mortem salvation, God’s judgement means they will be “assigned to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment.” What does this mean? How ought we to respond? Does the reality that God is rebelliously defied grieve us? What impetus does God being robbed of his glory and the “eternal conscious punishment” experienced by the unbeliever give to our proclamation of the gospel? How does this position differ from annihilationism? What about universalism?

8. Based on believers' response to Jesus Christ in this life, God's judgement results in "eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord." What does this mean? What is the eternal contrast between the two? What is the significance of being "with the Lord"? The presence of the Lord is really what makes heaven heaven. Where will this be? Is heaven final? Why is it vital to state the reality of "the new heaven and the new earth"? (Heaven is penultimate with the new heaven and the new earth being ultimate.) Though we await a new heaven and new earth, how does this view differ from those who worship creation? What about those who have no care or concern for God's creation?

9. How does this article and Statement of Faith end ("to the praise of his glorious grace. Amen.")? Why is a doxological conclusion/crescendo appropriate? Please note that the Statement of Faith begins and ends doxologically!

Insights, Applications, and Prayer

10 MINUTES

Additional Resources

Preaching/Teaching Texts

- Matthew 7:13-27
- Matthew. 25:31-46
- Acts 20:17-24
- Revelation 20:11-15

Memory Verses

- John 1:12-13
- Revelation 21:3-4

Bibliography

Introductory

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

Michael E. Wittmer, *Heaven is a Place on Earth*

Intermediate

Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, ed. *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*

Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*

D. A. Carson, "On Banishing the Lake of Fire," in *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*

Advanced

Preston Sprinkle, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd edn

William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*

Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vol.

John Calvin, *Psychopannychia: The Sleep of the Soul*

Statement of Faith

WITH SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

A Spiritual Heritage Committee working document⁶

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:

01: God

We believe in one God (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29), Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6; Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3), holy (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; 57:15), infinitely perfect (Dt. 32:4; Job 1:7-10; Ps. 18:30; 50:2; 90:2; 145:3; Matt. 5:48), and eternally existing (Ps. 33:11; 102:25-27; 115:3; Dan. 4:34-35; Jn. 5:26; Acts 17:24-25) in a loving unity (Jn. 3:35; 17:24; 1 Jn. 4:8,16) of three equally divine Persons (Jn. 17:11; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2): the Father (Dt. 32:6; Mt. 6:6; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 8:6), the Son (Matt.3:17; Jn. 1:14; 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:5), and the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom. 8:9, 26; Gal. 4:6). Having limitless knowledge (Ps. 139:1-16; 147:5; Isa. 46:10; Jn. 21:17) and sovereign power (Jer. 32:17; Eph. 1:11; Rm. 8:28; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 1:8), God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11; 3:10,11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8) and to make all things new (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:19-21; Rev. 21,22) for His own glory (Ps. 19:1-2; Isa. 43:7; Jer. 13:11; Col. 1:15-23; Rev. 4:11; 5:9-14).

02: The Bible

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures (Matt. 1:22; 4:4; 19:4,5; Heb. 1:1-2), both Old and New Testaments (2 Pet. 3:15,16), through the words of human authors (Lk. 1:1-4). As the verbally inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20,21), the Bible is without error in the original writings (Num. 23:19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Prov. 30:5; Ps. 119:96, 160; Matt. 5:18; Jn. 10:35; 17:17; Tit. 1:1,2), the complete revelation of His will for salvation (Lk. 16:29-31; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Tim. 3:15), and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged (Jn. 17:17; 1 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Ps. 119:44,45,165). Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches (Matt. 22:29; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16), obeyed in all that it requires (Matt. 28:20; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:5), and trusted in all that it promises (Rom. 1:2; 4:21; Heb. 10:23; 2 Pet. 1:4; 3:13).

03: The Human Condition

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Col. 3:10; Jms. 3:9), but they sinned when tempted by Satan (Gen. 3:1-6; Jn. 8:44; Rom. 5:12-14; 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). In union with Adam (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; Jn. 3:6; Rom. 3:12; 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:22a; 1 Jn. 1:8), human beings are sinners by nature and by choice (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Isa. 6:5; Rom. 5:15; 8:5-8; Eph. 2:1-2; 4:17-19), alienated from God (Rom. 5:10), and under His wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:9-19; 3:23; Eph. 2:3). Only through God's saving work in Jesus

6. For the EFCA Statement of Faith with Scripture References, see <https://helps.efca.org/resources/statement-of-faith-with-citations>

Christ (Act 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5) can we be rescued (1 Thess. 1:10), reconciled (Rom. 5:1,2,10; Col. 1:20) and renewed (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

0 4 : Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21; 16:18) is God incarnate (Jn. 1:14, 18; 1 Jn. 4:2), fully God (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:6; Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9) and fully man (Matt. 4:2; Lk. 2:40, 52; Jn. 11:35; Heb. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 1:1-3), one Person in two natures (Jn. 3:13; 10:30; 17:5). Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah (Gen. 3:14-20; 12:1-3; 49:8-12; 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Matt. 1:1, 17; Lk. 4:16-22; 24:25-27; Jn. 1:41; 4:25-26; Acts 2:36; 13:23,32; Rom. 1:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:8,9)—was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34,35) and born of the virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20; Lk. 1:34,35). He lived a sinless life (Rom. 5:19; Gal. 4:4,5; Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:7,8; Heb. 4:15), was crucified under Pontius Pilate (Dt. 21:23; Ps. 16:10; Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:16; Jn. 19:16; Acts 2:27, 37), arose bodily from the dead (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:39; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:20, 44-45; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5), ascended into heaven (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:6-11; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16) and sits at the right hand of God the Father (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22) as our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 8:1) and Advocate (Rom. 8: 34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1).

0 5 : The Work of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative (Gen. 2:15-17; Matt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12- 13; Lk. 4:1-13; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:45, 47; Phil. 3:9) and substitute (Mk. 10:45; Heb. 2:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), shed His blood on the cross (Lev. 17:11; Mt. 26:28; Heb. 9:14, 22; 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 12:10-11) as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:23-24, 26, 28; 10:1; 13:11, 12) for our sins (Isa. 53:5-7, 12; Jn. 1:29; Rom. 3:21- 26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:5). His atoning death (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10) and victorious resurrection (Col. 1:13; 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15) constitute the only ground for salvation (Rom. 4:25; 6:4, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:20; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 1:19-20; 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:3).

0 6 : The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 16:14). He convicts the world of its guilt (Jn. 16:8; 1 Cor. 2:14). He regenerates sinners (Ezek. 36:25- 27; Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; Tit. 3:5; Jms. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3), and in Him they are baptized (Mk. 1:8; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13) into union with Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:19; 15:22b; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:22; 2:17; 3:28; Eph. 1:4; 2:12; 3:6; 4:32; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Thess. 4:16) and adopted as heirs (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; Tit. 3:7) in the family of God (Matt. 12:49-50; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:14-18). He also indwells (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16), illuminates (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4-15; Eph. 1:17-19; Phil. 1:9-11), guides (Jn. 16:13; Acts 15:28; Rom. 8:4, 14; Gal. 5:16, 18), equips (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12: 4-10; Eph. 4: 7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11) and empowers (Acts 1:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:7) believers for Christ-like living and service (Acts 6:8; Rom. 8:4-6, 12-16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 3:3, 5; 5:22-23, 25; Eph. 2:22; 4:3; Phil. 2:1-2).

0 7 : The Church

We believe that the true church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:25; Heb. 12:28) comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31;

Rom. 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 10:14). They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27), of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The true church is manifest in local churches (Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2), whose membership should be composed only of believers (Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:41, 47; 14:23; 20:7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 11:20; 12:13; 14:40; 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:9; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 10:25). The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26), which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer (Jn. 6:55-56; Acts 2:38; 8:39; 16:34; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:29-30; Col. 2:12).

08: Christian Living

We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose (Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33, 35; Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 5:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Tit. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 6:11, 14; 1 Pet. 1:15; Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:1, 14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Js. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially (Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27) and to live out our faith with care for one another (Rom. 12:10; 14:13; 15:7, 14; Gal. 5:26; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 3:12; 5:11, 15; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:9), compassion toward the poor (Dt. 15:11; Psa. 82:3,4; Psa. 140:12; Prov. 14:21,31; 19:17; 22:9,16,22,23; 28:8; 29:7; 31:8,9; Jer. 22:16; Gal. 2:10; Js. 1:27) and justice for the oppressed (Ex. 23:6; Lev. 19:15; Psa. 82:3,4; 140:12; Prov. 29:7; 31:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 9:24; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9,10; Matt. 23:23; Luke 4:18). With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name (Eph. 6:10-18), we (Heb. 3:13; 10:25), are to combat the spiritual forces of evil (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:11, 12; 2 Tim. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:3-4). In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people (Matt. 28:19; Jn. 20:21; Rev. 7:9), always bearing witness to the gospel (Acts 1:8) in word and deed (Matt. 5:13-16).

09: Christ's Return

We believe in the personal, bodily (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7) and glorious (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26; 21:27; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:13; 5:1, 4) return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:31; Tit. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:11-21). The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God (Matt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32), requires constant expectancy (Matt. 24:42-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Js. 5:8,9; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3) and, as our blessed hope (Tit. 2:13), motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission (2 Thess. 1:6-8; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:28; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10-14).

10: Response and Eternal Destiny

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere (Acts 20:20) to believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 6:29; 8:24; 11:26; 14:1; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22; 10:14; Gal. 3:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 Jn. 3:23) by turning to Him in repentance (Isa. 55:6-7; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19; 14:15; 20:21; 26:17,18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-10) and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:12). We believe that God will raise the dead bodily (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:13) and judge the world (Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 26:31-32; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:12), assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment (Matt. 25:46; Lk. 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11; 21:6,8; 22:14,15), and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord (Matt. 25:34, 46; Jn. 14:2; Rev. 21:1-3), in the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rom. 8:19-21; Heb. 12:26,27; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:3), to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12). Amen.

Summary of the Gospel

in the EFCA Statement of Faith

The goal in formulating this Statement was to set forth “sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,” which he has now entrusted to us (1 Tim. 1:10-11). We believe that our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel.

The Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America is an exposition of the gospel—God’s gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what is the gospel? It is the *evangel*, the good news that God has acted graciously to save a people for himself through his Son Jesus Christ. The gospel is the simple message that Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that we might have eternal life.

This message of good news can be stated as concisely as this: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Or as doctrinally robust as a matter of first importance: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

These truths certainly are the heart of the message, but when we proclaim this message, we say much more than this. In a sense, the ten Articles of our Statement unpack this simple message of good news by setting forth our central theological convictions in a way that follows the logic of the gospel itself, seeking to unpack this gospel by organizing the essential doctrines of our faith—our critical Evangelical convictions—around this central theme.

The gospel, and our Statement, begins with God and his saving purpose, which flows out of the wondrous perfections of his nature. He is the Creator of all things and is holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This one God, all-knowing and all-powerful, has, in love and grace, purposed from eternity to redeem a people for himself and to restore his fallen creation for his own glory.

But how do we know this good news? We know it only because God himself has revealed it to us. Our second Article affirms that God’s gospel is authoritatively announced in the Scriptures. Through the words of its human authors, God has spoken in his Word, the Bible, without error. The Scriptures are the complete revelation of his will for salvation, and the ultimate authority that stands over every realm of human knowledge and endeavor. Therefore, the Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

This gospel revealed in the Bible is important to us because it alone addresses our deepest human need. Our central problem is not a lack of education, inadequate healthcare or a terrorist threat. It is our alienation from God. We have sinned, all of us, beginning with our first ancestors. We are fallen in our nature before we take our first breath. By our own volition we go our own way in defiance of God’s rightful rule, refusing to allow God to be God in our lives. This cosmic rebellion is evil, and God will not stand for it. As a result we now stand under his wrath, and we can be rescued, reconciled and restored only through God’s gracious work in Jesus Christ.

Summary of the Gospel *in the* EFCA Statement of Faith

In the Person of Jesus Christ the gospel is revealed in history. As Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man. He was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of God the Father, he is now our High Priest and Advocate.

God's gospel is not only revealed in Jesus Christ, it is also accomplished through his work. For when he died on the cross, Jesus acted as our representative and substitute as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. He was raised from the dead as a foretaste of his victory over all the forces of sin and death.

What Jesus did then, two thousand years ago, is now applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit glorifies Christ as he works within us to convict us of our guilt and to grant us new spiritual life as we are born again into a new union with Christ. We are joined to him in his death and resurrection. The indwelling Holy Spirit now empowers us to live in a new way, so that we might become like Christ.

When we are joined to Christ by faith, we become a part of a new family, the family of God, and we become a part of a new body, the body of Christ. God's gospel is now embodied in a new community, the church, which is manifest in local churches. In the fellowship of the church and through its ordinances, our faith is nourished and strengthened.

In the grace of the gospel, God justifies us, accepting us just as we are. But in his grace, he does not leave us just as we are. This gospel also changes us; it sanctifies us, compelling us to Christ-like living and witness to the world. We are to grow in our love for God and for other people who are created in his image. We are to show the same compassion we have received toward others who are in need. We are to do battle with the forces of evil in this world, in fellowship with one another, in dependence on him, using all the resources he has given us. And in all that we do, in word and deed, we are to bear witness to this glorious gospel among all people.

We believe that one day God will bring his saving purpose in the gospel to fulfillment, when Jesus Christ comes in glory with his holy angels to establish his kingdom fully and completely and to exercise his role as Judge of all. Jesus Christ is coming again, and that is our blessed hope—a hope that spurs us on to remain faithful to our Lord to the end.

This is the gospel—God's saving purpose in Jesus Christ. We might well ask, does the saving work of Christ apply to everyone whether they want it to or not? Is everybody automatically forgiven and reconciled to God simply because Jesus died and rose again? Will everyone be saved in the end?

But what does it mean to be saved? Doesn't it mean that we are rescued from the self-centeredness of our sin and brought into a relationship with God in which he is worshiped and adored and given all glory and honor? Do all people really want this kind of salvation? They may want to be free from pain or sickness or death, but do they really want to enter into a realm in which God rules supreme? Would God force such people into his kingdom against their will?

The gospel is a declaration of what God has done to rescue us, but it does not benefit us whether we want it to or not. No, God's gospel requires a response. The gospel certainly proclaims something God has accomplished outside of us, without our help, but God's saving work is not effective apart from our

Summary of the Gospel *in the* EFCA Statement of Faith

personal involvement. In any biblical understanding of the gospel, the objective work of God in Christ requires a subjective response, a response of faith. We are called, indeed we are commanded, to believe the gospel. By faith in Christ, and by faith alone, this gospel becomes ours. By faith we become recipients of God's saving work.

The gospel message comes to us as a declaration of fact—God has acted to save us through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. But that declaration also issues in a command—we must repent and believe that good news. The New Testament presents the gospel not simply as a helpful suggestion to implement or even an invitation to accept, but as a command to obey (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8; Rom. 10:16-21; also Acts 5:32; 6:7; 17:30; Rom. 6:17; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:17). The proper response to this command, however, is faith, the sole means of receiving God's saving grace (cf. John 6:29).

When God's saving purposes have been fulfilled and his people are redeemed, reconciled and restored in the transformed creation, they will gather in joyful celebration and adoration as a great multitude that no one can count. Coming from every nation, tribe, people and language, they will stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb and exclaim: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10). Because salvation is all a gift of God's grace, no one will have cause to boast and God alone will be exalted. The unfolding of God's saving purpose in the gospel of Jesus Christ will be "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6).

All theology, because it is truth about God, is to be doxological, a prayerful profession, a joyful declaration, an act of worship. In the end, all that we can do is offer our hearty and heart-felt affirmation of God's glorious gospel revealed in Jesus Christ—So be it! We began our Statement by declaring that in all that God does, he acts "for His own glory" (Article 1). We now close with the word which ends the Bible itself: Amen (Rev. 22:21).⁷

7. *Evangelical Convictions*, xxvi, 209-212, 233-234.