



EFCA Statement of Faith: Article 10
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Response and Eternal Destiny

10. 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.

12. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord, of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.

I. Introduction

II. Logical Flow of Article 10 of the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) in Comparison with article 12 of the 1950 Statement of Faith

- A. This follows the biblical narrative, the unfolding plan of God's redemption.
- B. This follows theologically and logically in that the truths that have been stated must be responded to.
- C. Strong statement, "God commands," on the necessity of believing the gospel by repenting and believing the Lord Jesus Christ. There must be a response to the message of the gospel.
- D. Response to the gospel will have eternal consequences.
- E. Both believer and unbeliever will be judged, though on different bases with different results.
- F. Believers will be with the Lord in a new heaven and a new earth.
- G. This is all set in the context of God's glory, To the praise of His glorious grace. Thus, it begins with an emphasis on God's glory ("graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory") and ends similarly (to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen."). This is set in a doxological framework.

III. Article 10

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A. 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).

- God commands everyone everywhere
- To believe the gospel
- By turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ

B. 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).

- God will raise the dead bodily
- Judge the world

C. 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).

- Unbeliever

- Condemnation
 - Eternal conscious punishment
- D. 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).
- Believer
 - Eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord
 - New heavens and the new earth
- E. We believe this is all to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12). Amen.
- To the praise of His glorious grace
 - Amen

Summarizing connection to the gospel: *“God’s gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.”*

Specific Ways the Article on the doctrine of **Response and Eternal Destiny** has been strengthened, or new issues addressed.

- Commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel
- Believing includes repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ
- All – believers and unbelievers – will be judged
- Unbeliever to condemnation
- Believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord

- New heaven and the new earth
- To the praise of His glorious grace
- amen

IV. Importance of Reaffirming the Biblical/Doctrinal Truths of **Response and Eternal Destiny** Today (which also carries with it denials)

- All commanded to believe the gospel - repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ this is essential to emphasize the exclusivity and necessity of responding to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Bodily resurrection and judgment – this is not all there is, and we are embodied.
- Unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment – this is being denied by many today, and softening, e.g. annihilationalism.
- To God’s glorious grace – this is the reason for being!

V. Additional Resources

Questions for Further Study

1. Why is this article a fitting conclusion to the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*)? What makes a response appropriate? Please note that this is something “God commands.”
2. What is the response called for? To whom does this apply? Who is excluded or exempt from responding to the gospel?
3. The primary command to all is “to believe the gospel.” How is this more specifically spelled out? What is the relation between “believe,” “repentance,” and “receiving”?
4. What is the implication of a bodily resurrection of all the dead? How does this differ from those who say the body is a hindrance to be sloughed off?
5. Who is judged? What is the difference between God’s judgment of the believer and the unbeliever?
6. The unbeliever will be “assigned to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment.” What does this mean? How ought we to respond? What impetus does this give to our proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers? How does this position differ from annihilationism?
7. What is the assignment of the believer? What is the significance of “with the Lord”? The presence of the Lord is really what makes heaven heaven. Where

will this be? Why is it vital to state the reality of “the new heaven and the new earth”? How does this differ from those who worship creation?

8. How does this article and Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) end? Why is a doxological conclusion/crescendo appropriate? Please note that the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) begins and ends doxologically!

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

Hymns

To God Be the Glory

The Sands of Time are Sinking

Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy

For All the Saints

Choruses

I'll Fly Away

When We All Get to Heaven

EFCA Statement of Faith Commentary¹

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[12. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord, of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.]

Response and Eternal Destiny—

Evangelicalism has always emphasized the need for a personal response to the gospel message, and we believe this theme provides a fitting conclusion to our Statement. In any biblical soteriological scheme (Calvinist or Arminian), the objective work of God in Christ which we have expounded requires a subjective response.

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to God in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ—

Here we spell out more clearly the kind of response the gospel requires. The New Testament presents the gospel not simply as an invitation to be accepted, but also as a command to be obeyed (cf., e.g., 2 Thess. 1:8—"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus"). The proper response to this command, however, is one of faith, which alone is the instrument of our salvation.

In addition, this statement adds the significant language of repentance and of receiving Christ (Jn. 1:12). These are not "works" that are additions to faith but are aspects implied within saving faith itself. This affirms that to respond to the gospel means a recognition of who our Savior is—the **Lord** Jesus Christ.

The notion of repentance occurs frequently in the teaching of Jesus in the gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:17; 11:20,21; 12:41; Lk. 13:3,5,7; 16:30; 24:47) and in Acts in the preaching of Peter (Acts 2:38; cf. also 2Pet. 3:9—"The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.") and Paul (cf. esp., Acts 17:30—"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent"; Acts 20:21—"I have

¹This commentary will only highlight changes from the 1950 Statement of Faith and not expound the theological truth common to both statements.

declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus"; Acts 26:20—"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds").

God will raise the dead bodily—

This change in wording from the 1950 statement is for stylistic reasons (making God the active subject) and is not intended to suggest any theological change. God raising the dead bodily refers to "the bodily resurrection of the dead."

and judge the world—

Putting this statement at this point in the article affirms that everyone will come under the judgment of God, not just unbelievers (as the 1950 statement suggests). In that judgment (in whatever form it may take for the two classes of people), however, two different destinies will ensue.

assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment—

This is a most sobering statement that we have carried over almost unchanged from the 1950 statement apart from the minor updating of archaic language here and in the next phrase from "everlasting" to "eternal" (This is the way the NIV translates *aionion* in the crucial verse on this doctrine, Mt. 25:46). No alteration in meaning is intended by this change. We have changed "judgment" to "condemnation" because here we are stating the result of that judgment.

Admittedly, this doctrine has been questioned in recent years within Evangelical circles, but we were determined to retain it as a significant part of the biblical witness to what is at stake in the gospel and of what has been affirmed through the history of the church.² Not only does Matthew 25:46 support this understanding, but it is significant that even the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21,22 contains a contrast between those who drink from the "spring of the water of life" (21:6) and those consigned to the "fiery lake of burning sulfur" (21:8) and a contrast between those who go "into the city" (22:14) and those "outside" (22:15). We consider the "second death" (21:8) a condition, a state of existence, rather than an event, and this is supported by the description of this "lake of burning sulfur" in Rev. 20:11 (a place of torment "day and night forever and ever") and in Rev. 14:11 ("the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever").

in the new heaven and the new earth—

This was added, referring back to what was stated in the last line of article #1—the renewal of God's fallen creation when he "makes all things new"—and to what was stated in article #3—the final renewal of those redeemed, known as glorification. In this specific context, this emphasizes the "physical" nature of the redemptive purpose of God. It is this earth that will be

²We recognize that the word "conscious" has not been traditionally included in statements of this doctrine but was included in the 1950 EFCA statement specifically to combat annihilationism, and we chose to retain it for that reason.

somehow transformed by God's grace and power to His glory. In this new creation all of God's redemptive purposes will be finally fulfilled.

to the praise of His glorious grace.—

This addition, echoing Paul's words in Eph. 1:6, points to the God-ward emphasis in our Statement. The unfolding of God's saving purpose is not supremely for our good but for God's glory, reminding us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of the glory of God.

Amen.—

This reminds us that all theology, because it is truth about God, is to be doxological, a confession, a joyful affirmation, an act of worship.

Appendix 2

Frequently Asked Questions – Article 10

I thought a SOF would just include beliefs. Why have you included both beliefs and behavior?

Credo, the Latin expression for “I believe” is at the heart of Creeds. Many Creeds contain only beliefs. Being part of this Evangelical tradition, we also realize that belief (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) go together. For this reason we have included both what we ought to believe and how we ought to behave. This is one of the unique marks of this SOF. Moreover, this Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) concludes with a strong exhortation to believe these truths, and our response to these gospel truths has eternal consequences.

Why is the active call to believe mentioned seldom, and why does it occur at the end?

It is important to note that this is not just about how many times a word is used, or stating the reality about who we are, viz. believers, in only one way. We have attempted to be intentional about being biblically anchored and sensitive to our evangelical history. Moreover, the place where it does occur is in article #10, which speaks about eternal destiny. This is the key expression of response based on all that is stated in the SOF. You will notice that this is the only article in which we affirm twice that “We believe . . .” In the first, we affirm and emphasize the necessity of a personal response to the gospel. All are exhorted, commanded to believe the good news, to repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. In the second, we affirm the truth that all will face eternal consequences based on the response to the gospel. This is stated clearly and strongly. There is no aversion to calling people to believe, to repent, to receive, to speak the words of John 1:12 or Acts 16:31 (cf. article #10). But what we do say, and the SOF reflects this, is that there are more ways to explain salvation and who we are in Christ than John 1:12 or Acts 16:31.

What is meant by repentance?

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Here we spell out more clearly the kind of response the gospel requires. The New Testament presents the gospel not simply as an invitation to be accepted, but also as a command to be obeyed (cf., e.g., 2 Thess. 1:8—“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”). The proper response to this command, however, is one of faith, which alone is the instrument of our salvation.

In addition, this statement adds the significant language of repentance and of receiving Christ (Jn. 1:12). These are not “works” that are additions to faith but are aspects implied within saving faith itself. This affirms that to respond to the gospel must mean a recognition of who our Savior is—the Lord Jesus Christ.

The notion of repentance occurs frequently in the teaching of Jesus in the gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:17; 11:20,21; 12:41; Lk. 13:3,5,7; 16:30; 24:47) and in Acts in the preaching of Peter (Acts

2:38; cf. also 2Pet. 3:9—"The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.") and Paul (cf. esp., Acts 17:30—"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent"; Acts 20:21—"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus"; Acts 26:20—"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds").

The addition of "by" clarifies this statement – turning to God and receiving Christ are aspects of "to believe the gospel."

Has the need to respond to the gospel been downplayed or undermined?

The need for humans to respond to the gospel is essential. The necessity of human agency has not been diminished at all. Statements on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are not the articles in which we ought to include human agency, but that does not mean it is being denied. Moreover, there is a tight logical connection between each article of the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), and the SOF builds to a response to these truths that have confessed in the previous articles (1-9). When we consider all of the truths stated in the articles, we reach a climax in article 10, and there are not many ways this call for a response could be any clearer or stronger: "We believe God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ"? It is not how many times a word or expression is or is not included but rather where and how it is stated. Once again, I do not believe it could have been said more strongly in the final article of the SOF, as that is the only appropriate response to all that proceeded.

Why is there a reference to the new heaven and the new earth?

This was added, referring back to what was stated in the last line of article #1—the renewal of God's fallen creation when he "makes all things new"—and to what was stated in article #3—the final renewal of those redeemed, known as glorification. In this specific context, this emphasizes the "physical" nature of the redemptive purpose of God. It is this earth that will be somehow transformed by God's grace and power to His glory. In this new creation all of God's redemptive purposes will be finally fulfilled.

Is this Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) intended to include all that must be believed in order to be saved?

This Statement of Faith includes all that must be true in order for one to be saved, but not necessarily all that must be believed in order to be saved. If one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of sin and receiving the Lord Jesus, he/she is saved, even if that person does not understand all the intricacies of the return of Christ. But the return of Christ, even though not understood, must be true in order for us to be saved.

What is the meaning of "eternal" in relation to the duration of hell?

Here are two thoughts to your concern. First, the expression with which you take issue, "eternal conscious punishment" (taken from the NIV) is taken directly from our 1950 EFCA SOF

(there the expression is "everlasting conscious punishment" taken from the KJV). If you look at article 12 you will find it there. This means that if you could not sign the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), you could not sign off on the 1950 SOF either. It appears though the this word is translated differently, "eternal" (NIV) or "everlasting" (KJV), the translations were intending to mean the same thing.

Second, if you look at Matthew 25:46 you will read the following, which, by the way, is explicitly from where this statement comes: "And these [goats] will go away into *eternal* punishment, but the righteous [sheep] into *eternal* life" (Italics mine). Here you have the same word used in the same sentence referring to two real, equal but opposite and eternal states. If it is true as you state that there is a limitation to the punishment experienced by the goats, it seems that it would also have to be true that there is a limitation to the blessedness and joy of the righteous in eternal life. But, on the other hand, the eternal state of the one, the blessedness and joy of the righteous in heaven, is paralleled with the eternal state of the other, the eternal punishment of the unrighteous in hell.

A Statement of Faith consists of true statements but not exhaustive statements.

Here is the principle: everything in the SOF is true biblically, clearly and explicitly. But everything that is true biblically is not contained in the SOF. This is one reason, among many, why a SOF is reformable/revisable. The only document in which that is not true is the Bible.