



## Proposed Revision of the EFCA Statement of Faith

*Unanimously Adopted for Recommendation by the BOD on April 26, 2007 and Presented to the EFCA Secretary for Submission to the National Leadership Conference*

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

### *God*

1. 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.

### *The Bible*

2. 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.

### *The Human Condition*

3. 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.

### *Jesus Christ*

4. 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.

*The Work of Christ*

5. 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.

*The Holy Spirit*

6. 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.

*The Church*

7. 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.

*Christian Living*

8. 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.

*Christ's Return*

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial 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.

*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.

## Proposed Revision<sup>1</sup> of the EFCA Statement of Faith (noting changes from the Third Draft)<sup>2</sup>

*The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united<sup>3</sup> around these theological convictions:<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Since the Board of Directors (BOD) is presenting this as a motion to the 2007 Conference, this version becomes the "Proposed Revision of the EFCA Statement of Faith," not the Fourth Draft. The BOD motion, which was passed unanimously, was the following: "MSC to adopt the proposed revision of the EFCA Statement of Faith for submission to the 2007 National Leadership Conference as the recommendation of the Board of Directors for amendment of Article III of the Articles of Incorporation of the EFCA."

<sup>2</sup> In this "Proposed Revision," we have noted the word and phrase changes along with the rationale in the footnotes, just as we did with the Third Draft. Though the Commentary is not included, it is forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> The rest of the preamble completing the foundation of what unites us, which has been deleted, was the following: "*united in a common commitment to God's evangel – the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to give us eternal life. To God's glory, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel.*"

<sup>4</sup> The Spiritual Heritage Committee (SHC) set forth a vision to craft a Statement of Faith that would be centered on the gospel and which would incorporate only those theological convictions that are vitally connected to that gospel. It sought to embody that well known expression of Christian unity, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, charity; and in all things, Jesus Christ." As a consequence, the Statement was explicitly structured around the biblical gospel, and it removed two aspects of our current Statement that were not considered essential aspects of the gospel itself: our church polity and our particular premillennial eschatology.

However, after 18 months of presentations and discussion, the BOD does not believe that this vision has been able to capture the necessary consensus among us to make the passage of a SOF of this sort possible. As a result, for the sake of unity in our movement there have been a few major changes. This is explained in a letter from Jimmy Kallam, the BOD Chair, in the following manner: "The BOD decision to make these major changes from the Third Draft was based on the results of the research project. It revealed that a strong minority had concerns with the Third Draft, which are being addressed in the Proposed Revision. Though the majority of pastors surveyed did not raise those concerns, we are committed to the ongoing spiritual health and vitality of the EFCA. As a result, in the interest of unity within our movement – a strong biblical value we desire to maintain – we have made those key changes." The letter can be found at this address: <http://www.efca.org/about/doctrine>. Regarding these changes, you will notice that the "gospel format" has been abandoned – both the preamble which focused on the gospel and the headings which linked the articles to the gospel itself have been drastically reduced. Further, we have altered the proposed statement #9 by reinserting premillennialism and by eliminating some other aspects of that article that have been misunderstood or contentious. If this Revision is passed, premillennialism (including Dispensational, Progressive and

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*The Bible*<sup>6</sup>

2. 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.

*The Human Condition*<sup>7</sup>

3. 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<sup>8</sup> 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.

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4. 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

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Historic) will continue to be a required theological position among us. In addition, our local church autonomy is affirmed as our identity in the preamble (and the Articles of Incorporation), though it is not an explicit theological affirmation.

<sup>5</sup>The following heading was deleted: *"God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God."* Rather than tying all of our essential theological convictions directly to the unfolding of the gospel, the headings now provide a helpful guide to readers to locate particular aspects of the Statement. Whereas the other headings followed a biblical theology framework, these headings follow more of a systematic theology structure.

<sup>6</sup>The heading was deleted: *"God's gospel is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures."*

<sup>7</sup>The heading was deleted: *"God's gospel alone addresses our deepest need."*

<sup>8</sup>This word better captures the biblical teaching about our sin – we are held accountable both for our nature and for our choices. We are not just sinful, which focuses on a state, but we are sinners, which focuses on our status and our actions. This word is stronger and more descriptive of human beings in Adam.

<sup>9</sup>The heading was deleted: *"God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ."*

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.

*The Work of Christ<sup>10</sup>*

5. 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.

*The Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup>*

6. 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<sup>12</sup> and adopted as heirs<sup>13</sup> in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

*The Church<sup>14</sup>*

7. 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,<sup>15</sup> when

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<sup>10</sup>The heading was deleted: "God's gospel is accomplished through the work of Christ."

<sup>11</sup>The heading was deleted: "God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>12</sup>The previous expression, "baptizes them into union with Christ and adopts them into God's family," has been changed. This statement is put into the passive voice because this reflects the notion that the Spirit is the element into which we are baptized and not the agent of baptism in 1 Cor. 12:13.

<sup>13</sup>To the truth of adoption we have added that believers are also "heirs." This reflects both the familial or relational (God is our Father and we are sons and daughters) and the legal aspects (we are heirs) of our adoption as expressed in Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:23-29; 4:4-7 and Titus 3:4-7.

<sup>14</sup>The heading was deleted: "God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church."

<sup>15</sup>After reflecting on comments we received about the suggested change in the Third Draft, "but they are not a means of justification," we have reverted to the language of the current 1950 statement with one minor revision. The current statement declares that the ordinances are "not to be regarded as a means of salvation." We have changed this to "the means of salvation." The point is that this statement affirms that the ordinances, in themselves and apart from faith, do not regenerate or justify. In that sense, they have no saving power. This

celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish<sup>16</sup> the believer.

*Christian Living*<sup>17</sup>

8. We believe that God's justifying grace<sup>18</sup> must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose.<sup>19</sup> God commands us<sup>20</sup> to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another,<sup>21</sup> compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power,

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is what was most important to our forebears. However, the revised statement allows that when believers participate in the ordinances in/by faith God can use them as means by which the faith of believers is strengthened—like other means such as biblical preaching, reading the Bible and worshipping with God's people. In addition, we have repositioned this part of the statement to the beginning of the sentence so that we might end with a positive rather than a negative statement about the ordinances. In sum, with the 1950 statement we affirm the biblical importance of the ordinances, and we deny they are salvific, i.e. they automatically produce salvation. Additionally, we add that the ordinances provide spiritual strength to the believer when engaged in *in faith*, and we emphasize their positive, celebratory nature.

<sup>16</sup>We have given more life to the rather weak verb "strengthen." Also, these two verbs reflect the common understanding of the effects of baptism and the Lord's Supper: the one confirms the new believer in the inaugural act of faith and the other nourishes the believer in the on-going Christian life.

<sup>17</sup>The heading was deleted: "*God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.*"

<sup>18</sup> In the Third Draft the statement was completed with the following expression: "also has sanctifying power to conform us to the image of Christ." We have returned to the language of the Second Draft.

<sup>19</sup>This statement better captures the vital connection between justification and sanctification that Paul makes in his letters (cf. esp. Rom. 6). We have made one slight variation—we have replaced "its" with "His." This makes it clear that "grace" is not some infused substance, but it is God himself who has the power to sanctify us and that that is part of His saving purpose in our lives.

<sup>20</sup>We have changed the expression "Commanded by Christ" to "God commands us." This expands the demand to include the entire biblical witness and not just the direct commands of Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>This was added to reflect the special emphasis given in the New Testament to our responsibility toward fellow believers (cf., e.g., Jn. 13:35; Gal. 6:10). The expression "one another" ought to bring to mind the many "one anothers" of life together in the body of Christ (cf. Romans 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:7, 14; 16:16. These examples could be multiplied in the rest of the New Testament.) This also broadens the ways that we "live out our faith."

and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's <sup>22</sup>commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

*Christ's Return*<sup>23</sup>

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial<sup>24</sup> return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands<sup>25</sup> constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

*Response and Eternal Destiny*<sup>26</sup>

10. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by<sup>27</sup> 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.

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<sup>22</sup>The reference to "final" was not needed.

<sup>23</sup>The heading was deleted: "God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age."

<sup>24</sup>On this change, see note 4. We have eliminated the word "glorious" and all language about angels, the coming Kingdom, and Christ as Judge ("with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all.") because of the objections by some that these terms all referred to specific events in the eschatological timetable which they could not subsume under the term "Christ's coming." We simplified the statement as much as possible to avoid misunderstanding and contention and to achieve the widest acceptance.

<sup>25</sup> The word "requires" is changed to "demands" as this word better captures the moral element of this statement.

<sup>26</sup>The heading was deleted: "God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences."

<sup>27</sup>This addition of "by" clarifies this statement—turning to God and receiving Christ are aspects of "to believe the gospel."