



EFCA Statement of Faith: Preamble and Article 1
Greg Strand, Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing

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.

2. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I. Introduction

II. The Preamble

- A. We attempted to keep essentials in the SOF.
- B. Identification of who the EFCA is as an association.
- C. Move our autonomy (not congregationalism) from article 10 to the preamble.
- D. Our congregational polity will still be our organizing structure, which is guaranteed by our Articles of Incorporation.

III. Headings

- A. Identify the article
- B. Capture the flow of salvation history.

IV. Change of Order in Articles 1 and 2

- A. This is how the Bible begins.
- B. God is not dependent on the Bible for His existence.

- C. God existed before He spoke the world into being, and the Bible which is the written record of His “speech.”
 - D. This follows a biblical theology rather than a systematic theology format.
 - E. Since this follows a gospel structure in its framework, the gospel begins with God.
- V. “We believe . . .”
- A. This is the heart of a SOF.
 - B. It is not just rational, but is also intended to be truth to which we assent and truly believe.

VI. Article 1

God

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- A. We believe in one God (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29).
- B. We believe God eternally exists in a loving unity of three equally divine persons.
 - 1. God exists eternally (Ps. 33:11; 102:25-27; 115:3; Dan. 4:34-35; Jn. 5:26; Acts 17:24-25).
 - 2. God exists in a loving unity (Jn. 3:3-5; 17:24; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16).
 - 3. God exists in three equally divine Persons (Jn. 17:11; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).
 - a. Father (Dt. 32:6; Matt. 6:6; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 8:6).
 - b. Son (Matt. 3:17; Jn. 1:14; 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:5).
 - c. Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom. 8:9, 26; Gal. 4:6).
- C. 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).

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

1. Holy (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; 57:15)

2. Love (Jn. 3:35; 17:24; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16)

3. Eternally existing (Ps. 33:11; 102:25-27; 115:3; Dan. 4:34-35; Jn. 5:26; Acts 17:24-25)

4. Infinitely perfect (Dt. 32:4; Job 1:7-10; Ps. 18:30; 50:2; 90:2; 145:3; Matt. 5:48)

5. Limitless knowledge (Ps. 139:1-16; 147:5; Isa. 46:10; Jn. 21:17)

6. Sovereign power (Jer. 32:17; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 1:8)

E. 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).

F. We believe God will make all things new (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:19-21; Rev. 21, 22).

G. 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).

Summarizing connection to the gospel: *“God’s gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.”*

VII. Specific Ways the Article on the doctrine of **God** has been strengthened, or new issues addressed

- Holy, this attribute is important to emphasize in conjunction with His love
- eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine persons, which means that God is complete in Himself, He is not absolutely contingent on anyone or anything other than Himself.

- limitless knowledge and sovereign power, which addresses God’s exhaustive foreknowledge over against open theism
- graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a person for Himself
- will make all things new
- God-centered

VIII. Importance of Reaffirming the Biblical/Doctrinal Truths of **God** Today (which also carries with it denials)

- Creator – this is over against naturalism
- Holy and loving – both of these attributes are to held in union not in opposition
- Trinity – this is central to the Christian faith, and is critical to know as one engages Islam
- Limitless knowledge and sovereign power – open theism
- Redeem a people for Himself – purpose of our existence
- Make all things new – physicality, which is over against material-immaterial dualism
- For His own glory – God-centeredness over against man-centeredness

IX. Additional Resources

Preaching/Teaching Texts:

Isaiah 40:9-31

Ephesians 1:3-14

Memory Verses:

Numbers 23:19

Revelation 4:11

Questions for Further Study

1. What does it mean that God is the Creator of all things? What does this affirm? What does it deny?
2. God is “holy.” What does it meant that God is holy? How is He unique in His holiness? What are some implications towards His creation and creatures of His holiness?
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 that He does not grow or change for He is unchangeable. 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. Can you think of some biblical texts that validate the doctrine of the Trinity? What is the significance of the Trinity in creation? What about redemption? How does this belief in the Trinity differ from one 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?
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? How does this view of God’s purpose in redemption differ from many in evangelicalism?
7. God will “make all things new for His own glory.” God’s work in creation and redemption is for His own renown. 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 so 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. As you examine your life, is it about God in all His fullness, or is it about you?

Hymns:

A Mighty Fortress is our God, Martin Luther
Holy, Holy, Holy, Reginald Heber

Choruses:

God of Wonders, Steve Hindalong and Marc Byrd
Indescribable, Chris Tomlin

EFCA Statement of Faith

Commentary¹

Length: One of the perceived strengths of the 1950 statement of faith is its brevity, consisting of only 454 words. We have sought to maintain this brevity as much as possible, though this revised statement consists of 713 words. The headings, however, provide a "headline" for each statement that allows one to skim through them quickly and grasp the whole more easily.

The number of statements has changed from twelve to ten because we have combined four of the statements from 1950 into one new statement (all dealing with the church) and added one new statement addressing an area not covered in the 1950 statement (dealing with sanctification, Christian living, and mission).

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

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches--

This introductory statement sets forth our polity as a public part of our identity without making it an "article of faith." This reflects our understanding of our name: the term "Evangelical" refers to our faith (it emphasizes the gospel, which focuses on God and what He has done through His Son Jesus Christ, which means we are a God-centered people) and the term "Free" refers to our polity. The articles of this SOF refer to our "faith."

We considered several options here but agreed that the term "autonomous" best reflects what is contained both in the 1950 EFCA SOF ("10. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church, and that every local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs.") and in the EFCA Articles of Incorporation (Art. II.A: "The Evangelical Free Church of America shall be an association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government . . ."). The term "autonomous" balances the term "association" to express well the nature of our fellowship of churches—autonomous yet interdependent, avoiding some of the negative associations of "independent."

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.

¹This commentary will only highlight proposed changes from the current Statement of Faith and not expound the theological truth common to both statements. If this becomes the EFCA SOF, a full commentary will be provided as a supplement to aid in the study of this important Statement.

After each revised statement we will print the corresponding statement(s) of the 1950 statement of faith—

[2. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.]

A significant shift takes place in the opening statement. We have chosen to begin with a statement about God and then a statement about Scripture, reversing the existing order. Both orders are represented in historic doctrinal statements, but this order seemed more appropriate in this statement because of its narrative framework. The Biblical gospel is a story revealed in history—the true story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, with its center found in Jesus Christ. And that Biblical story begins with God (Gen. 1:1) and then tells us that He speaks. The gospel originates in the being and character of God, and God's revelation of Himself within His creation is itself a part of that story. In effect, we have placed statements of systematic theology in a framework of biblical theology, providing a narrative for that theology.

Implicit also in this order is the recognition that we have no epistemological foundation apart from the living God who has revealed Himself. In other words, our faith in the Bible as a revelation of God is itself grounded in our faith in the reality of the living God.

In addition, our confidence in the Bible as a trustworthy revelation, without error, is ultimately grounded in our understanding of God as One who is truth and thus speaks truly. We believe in order that we may understand.

a loving unity—

This points to the essential nature of the holy God as love, affirming that because God is Trinity, love existed within God Himself even before the creation of the world. In other words, within the persons of the Trinity, God loved Himself before He loved us. Our experience of eternal life is, in some sense, an experience of that intra-Trinitarian love (cf. Jn. 17:20-24). The statement as a whole affirms that God does what he does [the second sentence] because He is who He is [the first sentence]. His eternal purpose to redeem and restore flows out of His essential nature as holy love—He is holy and he is love in Himself eternally as the triune God.

a . . . unity of three equally divine Persons—

This emphasizes the Biblical truth declared at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) concerning the Trinity—each Person of the Trinity is equally God. These three are one in nature and essence.

Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power—

This statement, though it contains eternal truth, is particularly addressed to the contemporary issue of "Open Theology." We affirm that God can and does know the future free choices of human beings and that nothing is outside His sovereign will.² The 1950 statement has no such affirmation. Though someone holding to "Open Theism" may be able to sign this statement, our intention in including this affirmation is to exclude that understanding as one that is both unbiblical and outside the stream of historic evangelical theology.

purposed from eternity—

²The EFCA Board of Ministerial Standing has adopted a policy under which it will not approve credentials for those who deny God's exhaustive foreknowledge, which includes the future free acts of human beings.

This gospel of which we speak is an unfolding of the purpose of God Himself, and it flows from His essential nature. On this, cf. esp. Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.

to make all things new—

Here, reflecting the words of Jesus in Rev. 21:5, we affirm that God's saving purpose goes beyond personal salvation and includes a restoration (and more than a restoration) of creation itself in a new heaven and a new earth. This is implicit in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and is explicit in Rom. 8, Rev. 21,22.

for His own glory—

This is the *summum bonum*, the "highest good," the ultimate purpose for all that God does.

Appendix 2

Frequently Asked Questions

One of your guiding principles was brevity. It is also one of the strengths of our SOF. Is length a concern?

Yes, we do think brevity is important. A SOF cannot be a minimalist statement, in that it then does not address key essential gospel matters that are being undermined today. But neither can it be a maximalist statement, in that it then becomes a systematic theology textbook. The key is to make it brief while at the same time addressing the key biblical and theological truths that clearly anchor us in the Word. The reason this is such an important balance to strike is because in the EFCA this is our only doctrinal statement that carries Conference authority. If a theological matter is not addressed in the SOF and it has not been approved by the Conference, there is no formal authority to make decisions on some matters. Care must be taken to ensure gospel essentials are addressed, because otherwise the SOF will become too long, and possibly too narrow.

What were the grammatical principles used for punctuation and capitalization?

We had a number of people look through the SOF with a gift for grammar and syntax. One is a professional editor. We recognize that there are a couple of ways of using commas. We followed the general rules of using commas in a series of things with a final “and” preceding the final item, viz., in a list concluding with an “and” there is no comma preceding the “and.”

But where we believed the addition of a comma would increase clarity and understanding, we included it. We desired that the document would be both grammatically accurate and understandable/readable. What you have pointed out reflects these principles.

We also capitalized pronouns that referred to deity.

Would removing congregationalism from our SOF affect our church polity?

The 1950 SOF does not refer to us as being explicitly congregational. This issue is addressed in articles 8-10 of the 1950 SOF. Article 8 addresses salvation, 9 the church, and 10 polity. In number 10 what it does say is this: “. . . every local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs.” In the current Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*) we have stated it like this: “The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:” The difference is that the former is article 10 of the SOF, while the latter is in the preamble of the SOF. But both are part of the SOF. Our congregational polity is embedded in our Articles of Incorporation (Article II.A), which are as authoritative as our SOF, as the SOF is part of our AOI. Here is how that article is written: “The Evangelical Free Church of America shall be an association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government.” This is what will ensure we remain specifically and explicitly congregational. As an association of churches, we do have to have a manner of organizing those churches, and we believe congregationalism is a biblically faithful way to do that. The reason it is in the preamble and not a specific article in the SOF is because specific church polity does not rise to the level of a gospel essential.

Why have we changed the order of articles one and two, between the Bible and God?

This has been done for three reasons. First, we have followed a salvation-historical framework. We have followed a biblical theology framework in the statement, so it follows God’s story of His unfolding plan of redemption from beginning to end. This is the purpose of the headings. (Each article then states

the truth in systematic theology categories.) It gives preeminence to God in all His Trinitarian fullness. God existed before the Bible. This God, however, is a talking God. This means that we have received His Word. Much like when we study Christ, we begin with His person and then address His work. Here we begin with the person of God, and then we address one of the things He has done, revealed Himself through words which is recorded in the Word. Second, we begin with a statement about God because ultimately our convictions about the nature of the Bible are based on our faith in God. This addresses epistemology, i.e. the basis of how and what we know. The real foundation for our knowledge of God is not a rational judgment about an inerrant Bible, which is it, but a faith in the goodness of the God who speaks. We believe God, we believe He has spoken, and we believe He has spoken truly. Third, since the gospel was the organizing structure of the Revision, it, the gospel, has its source in God, so it would be fitting to begin the Statement with God, from whom the gospel originates. It is God's gospel. With the replacement of the "gospel headings" with simple topical ones, this change obscured the primary rationale for switching these two articles. As we originally framed it, our emphasis was not on epistemology, first and foremost, but on God's grace in the gospel. The Bible was the result of God's gracious purpose to save a people for himself. It was a necessary part of that saving work, communicating it to a fallen humanity. Though the headings have been removed, this is still a Statement of Faith centered on the gospel, which begins with God.

Why was the gospel made the focus of the SOF in the earlier drafts?

The main message Jesus preached was the gospel (Mk. 1:14-15 - *evangel* is the Greek term that is translated gospel). We are also known as the *Evangelical* Free Church of America. It has long been explained that the Evangelical part of our name emphasizes our theology, our commitment to the gospel. (The Free emphasizes our polity.) By centering our SOF around the gospel, it bridges the gap between the main message of Jesus, specifically, and the New Testament, generally, and who we are as the Evangelical Free Church. We are gospel people from beginning to end. Though the gospel framework is no longer in the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), we are still gospel people.

In the first three revisions the structure of the SOF was the gospel. What did you mean by the "gospel"?

In its simplest form, the gospel is the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again, all according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Though this is the gospel, it is also so much more. This is evident in the book of Romans, Paul's writing that most significantly and intentionally focuses on theology and missiology. Not only does he begin the book with an emphasis on "God's gospel" (1:1-4), but the gospel also serves as the structure and theme of the whole book (1:16-17). This means that God's gospel is focused on the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. But, in addition to this, it means that God's gospel is the message of His saving purpose which culminates in the coming of His Son Jesus Christ and which will be brought to completion when His Son comes again in glory. This SOF is meant to expand our understanding of this central biblical term, the gospel, God's gospel.

Are the headings designed to be a part of the Statement, or are they intended to be a bullet point summary?

The headings are part of the SOF, though they serve a different function than the articles. The headings serve as a redemptive-historical guide to the SOF. It follows the storyline of the Bible. This is biblical theology. This is why the SOF begins with God, not Scripture. It does not devalue God's Word but rather acknowledges that God (#1) speaks, and His Word is contained in the Scripture (#2). Each of the articles then addresses the key biblical and theological truths. It focuses on the complete teaching of the Scriptures on each of the issues. This is systematic theology. This is one of the unique strengths of the structure of the SOF.

Since our identity is who we are, should not certain “identity markers” be included in our Statement of Faith?

We believe our identity is important. But we do not believe that identity markers ought to be included in a SOF, a statement that ought to include our unity in the essentials of the gospel (which, interestingly enough, is a key identity marker). Identity markers are not on par with the essentials of the gospel. It is appropriate to set out our identity, but we believe that ought to be done in a list of distinctives or identity markers, not the SOF. With the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), one of our identities is stated in the preamble, viz. that we are autonomous churches. One of our other identities or distinctives did make it into article 9, premillennialism.

Why was the whole gospel structure framework removed with the addition of premillennialism?

From the beginning, the Spiritual Heritage Committee (SHC) set forth a vision to craft a Statement of Faith explaining the "Evangelical" part of our name—a statement of the biblical gospel within the historic Evangelical tradition, incorporating 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." It was an attempt to ensure that we truly majored on the majors and minored on the minors. This, we believed, was who the Free Church was – a movement centered on the gospel as we engaged in “the significance of silence” on the non-essentials. As a consequence, the Statement was explicitly structured around the biblical gospel, and it removed two aspects of the 1950 Statement that were not considered essential aspects of the gospel itself: our church polity, congregationalism, and our particular premillennial eschatology. This framework was evident in the all of the Drafts.

After the Board of Directors received the results of their research project, which revealed there was a strong minority – not a majority – that wanted premillennialism in the Statement of Faith (SOF), they asked the SHC to revise the Fourth Draft to include premillennialism. (By the way, all the articles of that Draft, with the exception of article 9, were what was presented to the BOD.) After this was done, the BOD unanimously approved this as a Proposed Revision to be presented at the 2008 Conference.

As you have observed, the addition of premillennialism in the SOF resulted in three major changes.

The first major change was the addition of the premillennial return of Christ in article 9, which was the basis of all of the changes. Here is the article in its two versions, the first the Third Draft, the following in the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*):

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

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all. This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, requires constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

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.

As you compare these two versions, you will notice that 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.

The second major change was that the reference to the gospel in the preamble is removed and it is shortened. Here, again, is the Third Draft, followed by the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*):

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches 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.

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

Emphasizing the critical truths of the return of Christ, along with the essential gospel truths in the other articles, we could say with integrity that "Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel." This meant that each of the articles was vitally connected to this gospel. It was a gospel essential SOF. With the addition of premillennialism, we did not believe we could say the same thing with biblical integrity. This is why we shortened it to read that we are "an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions." Saying that is accurate to the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), but it is quite different than the previous statement acknowledging that all of the theological convictions stated in the SOF are vitally connected to the gospel such that if you do not embrace the statements your commitment to the gospel as understood biblically and informed by historic Evangelical tradition could be questioned. This led to the third key change.

A changed preamble also meant that the gospel headings, which flowed from the preamble, are removed and shortened to include theological titles for each article. This was the third major change. It was no longer fitting or appropriate to include the gospel headings.

As much as we desired to retain a gospel framework, we simply could not do it with a clear conscience. This was the SHC's attempt to resolve the tension between saying we major on majors and minor on minors and we include the autonomy of the local church and premillennialism in our SOF. We had defended the Draft Revisions as a SOF that focused on and emphasized gospel essentials. We had believed that our identity was rooted in Jesus Christ and the essentials of the gospel, not in our distinctives.

In summary, due to all of these connections to the gospel, we believed it would have been misleading to retain the gospel focus and framework. We believe it not only would have perpetuated the tension but added to it. We initially struggled with this as well, but the more we have pondered this and what this decision to add premillennialism entails, the stronger our convictions that what we did with the structure was right.

In what ways would this revision strengthen our Statement of Faith?

It strengthens our position on the Bible, the doctrine of God, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, justification, sanctification, belief and behavior, the spirit world, among many other areas. In particular we have strengthened our statement on the substitutionary atonement of Christ, which was in 1950 weakly stated because there were some who embraced an exemplarist view of the atonement. This view focuses on Jesus as a teacher, which is true, but without Jesus being our Savior, the truth of the substitutionary view, we are still lost in our sins. We needed more than a teacher but a Savior. We are also able to address some issues that have arisen since 1950, e.g. postmodernism and open theism.