

Statement of Faith FAQs

Revision Date: 10.05.2020

Preamble

Q: Why was a preamble added to the EFCC Statement of Faith?

A: There are several important concepts in this short introduction or “preamble”. We use the Bible to guide us. Jesus is the head. The Board of Elders is responsible to explain both what is meant and how it is practised. The Board also gives guidance on a practical level about how we live out these beliefs together. We add at the end a simple definition or purpose of a statement of faith.

Section 1: The Bible

Q: Why does the proposed Statement of Faith leave out the concepts of Inerrancy and Infallibility? Why was that change made? What does that mean for the way we see the Bible at EFCC?

A: In our current SOF, we used the theological concepts of inerrancy (“free from error”) and infallibility. Now, as you go through our proposed SOF, you’ll notice that we didn’t use the term “infallibility”. The only reason why we didn’t is because it is theological in nature, and one of the tasks of the proposed SOF committee was to refresh the language of the current SOF. As a committee, one of our goals was that the current SOF would be easier to read and understand by those that lack theological training in our congregation. For that reason, in our current SOF we used the phrases, “Scripture was without error in the original writings” to affirm the inerrancy of God’s Word, and “(Scripture) is completely truthful in all that it addresses”, to affirm its infallibility.

In our proposed SOF, we affirm that the writers of the Old and New Testaments wrote the words which God told them to write (2 Timothy 3:16). For this reason, we can trust that the original writings of Holy Scripture were completely free of any error. And since God’s Word is truthful (John 17:17), it’s considered the infallible (completely truthful) rule of Christian faith.

Section 2: The Trinity

Q: Why was the title of this statement changed from “Godhead” to “Trinity” if the word trinity does not exist in the Bible?

A: The term “Godhead” is not commonly used to describe the tri-unity or “Trinity” among Christians. We made it a priority to use terms that are more current.

Q: The word, “separate”, grants independence to each of the three persons of the Trinity and yet several times Jesus declares that “I can do nothing on My own initiative.”

A: As for the concept of being “separate”, the Scriptures show us that we have one God who exists in three persons. All members of the Trinity work together in perfect unity all the time. At the same time, they also play distinct roles in God’s plan. In creation, God the Father initiated the plan. God the Son was there with the Father as the agent of creation. While it was God the Holy Spirit who was active in carrying out the plan. When God the Son was baptised, God the Father spoke to God the Son from heaven as God the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. Yet, we have only one God and, as was mentioned in the question, the Son (Jesus) made it clear that if you have seen Him you have seen the Father. It is not easy to understand the tri-unity of God but it is clearly taught in the Bible.

Section 3: The Person and Work of God the Father

Q: Why did the committee feel the need to add this section?

A: Since we believe and state that there are three persons in the Trinity, it is logical and important that we address all three. Though all three are perfectly unified, they also play distinct roles in fulfilling God’s sovereign plan. While we recognize the unity of the Trinity means that the three persons work together in perfect harmony in all things, this section describes some of the particular emphases of God the Father’s role.

Section 4: The Person and Work of Jesus

Q: What does the proposed Statement of Faith state about the nature of the atonement? What does Jesus’ death on the cross accomplish and how does it make a way for humanity to receive new life in him?

A: The main difference between the current and the proposed statements are additions that were made; very little was removed from the current statement. Within conservative evangelicalism, there is a recognition among many that the atonement is multi-layered and multi-faceted. All agree that on the cross Jesus purchased salvation, but the nature of that accomplishment is nuanced within the Scriptures.

Throughout the history of the church, there have been many motifs of atonement, but there are two primary motifs within conservative evangelicalism today - Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) and Christus Victor (CV). Both views have biblical support and are included in our proposed statement.

In support of PSA, we stated, “through His death on the cross, paid our penalty for sin which is death. Thus, He satisfied God’s righteous judgment and revealed His merciful love by offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice providing forgiveness to all who trust Him.” PSA focuses on the fact that on the cross Jesus paid the penalty for sin (death) by dying in our place. This motif is alluded to in numerous places in scripture, one of which is 1 Peter 2:24 which reads,

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The cross is the punishment (penal), the fact that he bore our sins points to the reality that Jesus became our substitute (substitution), and the result is that we get to live to righteousness (atonement). PSA is prominently in our current statement and it remains in our proposed statement.

The second motif of atonement that is now included in our proposed statement is Christus Victor. CV states that on the cross Jesus defeated the cosmic powers of evil, sin, and death that war against the human soul. Because of Jesus' victory, we are now freed to walk in victory as well. Colossians 2:15 makes this clear when Paul writes about the cross stating,

¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Through the cross, the powers of darkness have been defeated and new life has been purchased for those who by faith receive Jesus. Jesus is the victor.

Our section on the Person and Work of Jesus now includes both the glorious reality that by the cross we are freed from sin and that the cosmic enemies of our soul have been defeated. Praise God!

Section 5: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

Q: What does the proposed Statement of Faith leave out in regards to the gifts of the Spirit? Why was that change made? What does that mean for the way that gifts will be practiced at EFCC?

A: In our current SOF, we have two sections dealing with the Holy Spirit. The current Section 4 answers the question "Who is the Holy Spirit?" and then begins to answer "What does the Spirit do?" However, the current Section 9 continues answering the question "What does the Spirit do?" by talking about the gifts of the Spirit. One of the main reasons that the team decided to combine these into one statement was to have a more robust statement about the "Work" of the Holy Spirit. You will notice that the statements about the "Person" (or the "Who" question) have not changed significantly in substance (more in clarity of terminology).

However, the fact that the single statement is much shorter than the two previous statements begs the question, what was taken out? You will notice that the proposed statement does not go into detail about how to understand the specific gifts of tongues and healing. This is not necessarily because the previous statement is wrong, but because it was both too narrow in scope and too narrow in theological interpretation. In scope, our current statement only addresses two of the gifts and then only some of the Biblical admonitions about those gifts. There are many other gifts that would be helpful to address, but to do so would turn this document into something very different. Instead, the team decided to go with the strong statement: "These gifts are to be biblically exercised for the glory of Jesus Christ and the building up of His church." We believe that this is the strongest statement that we can succinctly make about all of the gifts. This statement places the authority of the Bible over the practice of any gift.

Does this mean that we will change the way that we practice the gifts of the Spirit at Emmanuel Faith? No. At Emmanuel Faith, we have always done the best we can to follow the teachings of scripture. This is our ongoing commitment. At the same time, we do not want to limit what the Spirit can do in our midst. Instead, we will be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, constantly “examining the Scriptures” to make sure that what is said and done at Emmanuel Faith is in line with God’s will.

Section 6: The Human Condition

Q: Why was the title changed from using the word “man” to “human”?

A: We used the term “human” in place of “man” because it is more common modern vernacular to refer to all humanity rather than only males.

Section 7: The Gift of Salvation

Q: Why was the title changed from The “means” of salvation to the “gift” of salvation?

A: The Board of Elders tried to capture the intent of the Bible that salvation isn’t simply a transaction that happens, but rather a gift that is received. The main, though not only, text we saw this in was Ephesians 2:8-9 which reads,

“⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The phrase “means of salvation” was not one that we found explicitly in Scripture. Certainly the idea is present, but we decided to go with “the gift” because it is one of the most prominent ways salvation is described in the Bible.

Section 8: The Life of the Disciple

Q: Why was the title changed for section 8? We are known to be a missions minded church. Would the committee consider adding a phrase that places greater emphasis on “proclaiming the gospel to all nations”?

A: Yes, we are considering a way to elevate our mission as a church and the proclamation of the gospel in the proposed SoF. It is not included in our current SoF but we agree that it should be in the proposed. Thank you for the feedback!

Section 9: The Church

Q: Why was the word “ordinances” taken out?

A: The word “ordinances” was exchanged for the word “practices” for the purpose of using more current and common language. No change in meaning is to be implied. In addition, we learned

from our church family that there is a preference for the word “communion” over “the Lord’s Supper”.

Q: Why did the committee feel the need to take out the phrase, “This body was formed on the day of Pentecost”?

A: The Board removed the phrase “formed at the day of Pentecost” because that phrase or concept is not stated in the Bible. It’s something that we can certainly deduce but we don’t have chapter and verse for the exact day when the church began. Though Jesus’ followers were acting like the church on the Day of Pentecost, the Bible does not explicitly refer to the church by name until Acts 5. It is for this same reason that we removed the phrase, “will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own”. Though we understand that the God’s people will experience new forms in the future, there is no specific chapter and verse that speaks to the day the church ceases.

Section 10: The Second Coming of Christ

Q: Why is the word “rapture” not mentioned in the proposed statement? Is the church shifting from Classic Dispensationalism to Progressive Dispensationalism? If the proposed statement is “making room” for those with a mid-trib or post-trib perspective, what will be taught from the pulpit?

A: That’s a great question. The word “rapture” is not mentioned in our current statement either but the event is clearly communicated through the phrase, “the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy is the personal return of Christ to remove from the earth His Church.” That statement was left out of the proposed statement. Why?

The Board of Elders decided to focus more on the “glorious return” of Jesus than we did on trying to identify the timing of those events. There was a time when a pre-trib return of Christ was the predominant view within conservative evangelicalism but that time is no longer. There are a wide variety of views that make up current evangelical thought. This is not in spite of what the Bible teaches on the subject but rather because of what the Bible teaches. The timing doesn’t seem to be laid out quite as clearly as was once assumed. Our proposed statement attempts to create space for pre, mid, and post tribulation views within the membership at EFCC. Those who hold strongly to our dispensational heritage can still affirm the proposed statement as being true, even as it does not explicitly mention the rapture.

It is worth noting that while our statement is intentionally nondescript as to the timing of the events of Christ’s return, it is not ambiguous as to our conviction about the millennium. We take a strong stance stating that we believe Jesus will return to earth and will set up his earthly reign.

Regarding the question of what will be taught from the pulpit, I (Ryan) have a few comments. First, that depends on what passage of scripture we’re teaching from. Second, with much debated topics like the rapture, I will always attempt to accurately represent the main evangelical views and explain why people hold those views. My personal approach is to teach

biblically rather than systematically - meaning that there will remain some mystery regarding some topics. Systematic preaching tries to answer all the questions, eliminating the mystery and paradox within the Scriptures. A biblical approach still attempts to reconcile seeming contradictions, but it also attempts to honor mystery where it exists. J.I Packer referred to this as an “antinomy” which is defined as “a contradiction between two beliefs or conclusions that are in themselves reasonable.” Finally, we live in a digital age, and I assume that I (or whomever is preaching) is not the only voice people are listening to. I want to honor people’s intellect and ability to research and learn on their own by not taking a dogmatic view of doctrines widely debated in modern evangelicalism. On some debated issues (such as rapture) I will share my view, but I’ll create space for people to disagree with me.

Section 11: The Eternal State

Q: What does the proposed Statement of Faith say about the eternal condition of non-believers when it comes to either conscious punishment or annihilation?

A: The Final Proposed Statement of Faith contains the phrase that unbelievers will be “eternally punished and shut out from the presence of the Lord”. As one of the verses listed in the Section 11, 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is an important one for understanding this phrase in regard the eternal state of the unbeliever, specifically when it comes to the meanings of punishment (δική, “dikē”) and destruction (ὀλέθριος, “olethrios”). The ESV, the NIV and the NASB versions of the Bible translate these words as, “punishment of eternal destruction”, “punished with everlasting destruction”, and “penalty of eternal destruction”, respectively.

There are two general views held by biblical, Evangelical theologians regarding the condition of non-believers after the final judgement at the end of the Millennium. Both views hold 1) there is a bodily resurrection of all people, 2) unbelievers will be punished by being thrown into the Lake of Fire, 3) the punishment is permanent, 4) the punishment involves death, 5) death is everlasting separation from God, 6) believers enjoy eternal life, 7) eternal life includes the privilege of reigning with God and 8) there is a new heaven and new earth coming. While there are moral and extra-biblical arguments that can be made for both positions, this summary focuses on a few of the specific scriptures that are understood to support each perspective.

One view would understand “eternally punished” to describe an eternal state of conscious punishment. Proponents of this view, such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem, refer to verses like 1) Matthew 25:46, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”, 2) Revelation 14:11, “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name”, and 3) Revelation 20:10f, “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” as evidence. Those who hold this view understand the punishment of “destruction” to describe a painful existence in a “ruined” or “wasted and worthless” state, outside of the presence of God.

The other view would understand “eternally punished” to describe an eternal state in which a person, after a time of painful punishment following his or her physical death and continuing

through the Millennium, ceases to exist. Proponents of the view, such as John Stott, refer to verses like 1) Psalm 37:20, “But the wicked will perish; and the enemies of the Lord will be like the glory of the pastures, they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.” and 2) Revelation 20:14, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” See also Isaiah 25:8 where “the Lord God will swallow up death for all time” and Rev 20:14 where itself is “thrown into the Lake of Fire”. The term “perish” as found in John 3:16 is seen as a support for this position.

The Proposed SoF creates space for believers who hold either position based on their biblical convictions. The Board wants it to be clear that those who hold to current SoF position that believers will suffer eternal conscious punishment can continue to hold that belief and that those who hold to the position that unbelievers will cease to exist after a period of conscious punishment can fully participate in the life of the church family.

General Questions

Q: What is the need for rewriting the Statement of Faith?

A: It is most important to remember that we are a traditional evangelical, Bible-believing church that adheres to the historical interpretations of biblical Christianity. At the same time, given changes in cultural context and linguistic differences, we have sensed the need to evaluate our current Statement of Faith to make sure we are both accurate and relevant in how we express our doctrinal beliefs. The purpose of a Statement of Faith is to have a clear, mutual understanding of what the Bible teaches around which we unify. As Dr. Richard Strauss stated in a mission statement during his tenure as our Senior Pastor, it is our aim to “apply the truths of Scripture to the needs of this generation”. See <https://media.efcc.dev/live/docs/Why-Change-Statement-of-Faith.pdf> for more information.

Q: What translation of the Bible was used in preparing the Statements?

A: Multiple translations were used as references as well as quoted directly. The three primary translations utilized were the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Version and the New International Version. At the same time, study of the original languages of Hebrew and Greek took high priority in determining the meaning of words and phrases as they were expressed to the people to whom they were written.

We focused on which English translation of the Greek/Hebrew best captured the whole teaching of the Bible rather than a particular theological system. I am not comfortable adding anything to the SoF that we did not agree on in the Elder Meeting without followup approval. If we want to add a comment like this to an accompanying email or explanatory note that is separate from the Amended Version, we might want to include a bit about why we would choose a particular version. G

Q: What does “room at the table” mean?

A: The charge and intent of the Board of Elders was to first and foremost be biblical in all that would be proposed. At the same time, there is currently a broader understanding among conservative evangelicals today of dispensationalism and biblical theology than when the last major revision was proposed in the late 1970s. We are sensitive to maintaining the unity of the church while we also recognize that elements of our current SoF focus more on non-essentials of theological distinctives rather than on the core beliefs of evangelical doctrine.

Q: If I am not able to be on campus for the vote on October 25, will there be another way for me to watch the Annual Meeting as well as vote?

A: Yes! As with the Town Hall meetings, we will live stream the Annual Meeting so that you can watch it online in the comfort of your own home. Please see the Statement of Faith webpage for a link. In regards to voting, members will be receiving a ballot in the mail that can be mailed back or dropped off at the church the Thursday prior to the Annual Meeting on October 25.