

## SCEFC Membership Class

### Session I - EFCA Statement of Faith

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.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4**

- 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

#### **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.

#### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

- God has spoken - God is both transcendent and immanent, He is personal, over against a God who is absent or hidden
- Old and New Testaments - biblical canon, over against Nag Hammadi texts, Roman Catholic Bible, Orthodox, and popular writings like The Da Vinci Code
- Through the words of human authors - no mechanical dictation
- Verbally inspired - full inerrancy, over against limited inerrancy
- Complete revelation - over against mysticism, subjectivism
- Ultimate authority - every realm submits to Scripture
- Believed, obeyed, trusted - belief and behavior

### **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.

#### **Romans 5:12-14**

- God created Adam and Eve - historical particularity of creation of mankind
- Created in the image of God - human worth and dignity, bioethics
- In union with Adam, sinned and sinners by nature and choice - anthropology
- Satan - historical figure as opposed to a myth
- Alienated from God and under His wrath - sin incurs God's personal wrath, this is not simply a cause and effect, God is both loving and holy, not just loving.
- God's saving work in Jesus Christ - God's initiative, exclusivity of Jesus Christ to rescue, reconcile and renew

### **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.

#### **John 1:18**

- God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two Natures - hypostatic union - Jesus is the second person of the Godhead from eternity; this was not a truth determined after the fact at the Council of Nicaea (325)
- Jesus lived a sinless life - active obedience
- He was crucified - passive obedience
- Jesus arose bodily from the dead - over against a spiritual resurrection only
- Jesus resurrected body is the first fruits - this emphasizes the importance of the body, not only Jesus' body, but our body as well.

### **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.

#### **Hebrews 10:11-14**

- Jesus is our Representative and Substitute - His substitutionary death is being denied by some in broader evangelicalism today.
- Jesus shed His blood - this is important to emphasis today because it is biblical, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, and He did this voluntarily. For some, this is considered "cosmic child abuse."
- Perfect, All-sufficient sacrifice for our sins - nothing can be done or added to atone for sins, and this is being denied in many places. Any time anything is added to the work of Christ, it is being denied.
- Jesus' death is an atoning sacrifice - this means God's wrath is propitiated, and our sins can be forgiven.
- Jesus' victorious resurrection - this is the first stage of His exaltation. This, too, is denied by some as they will make a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.
- Salvation - salvation sin, ultimately God's wrath. There are many ideas about salvation today, but the only true salvation that gets at the heart of our problem is what has been stated here about the work of Christ.

### **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.

#### **Ezekiel 36:25-27**

- Glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ - when He ministers, Jesus is always exalted
- Convicts the world of its guilt - the world does not believe it is guilty before an Almighty God.
- Regenerates sinners - salvation is a work of God the Holy Spirit, not a work of man.
- Baptized into union with Christ - conversion and Spirit-baptism are simultaneous
- Adopted as heirs in the family of God - He addresses the problem of alienation, cosmic orphans. It emphasizes familial and legal aspects of our union with Christ.
- Illuminates - the Holy Spirit who inspires the Word of God also illuminates that Word in interpretation so we can understand it.
- Empowers believers for Christ-like living and service - belief and behavior are connected, and this has individual and corporate implications

### **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.

#### **Ephesians 1:22-23**

- Justification - this affirms the biblical teaching, over against the teaching of the Roman Catholic understanding, and the New Perspective on Paul (covenantal nomism, i.e. one enters into the covenant by grace, but one remains by works)
- Faith alone in Christ alone - solas of the Scripture, rediscovered during the Reformation, and essential to reaffirm today
- True church is manifest in local churches - this is contrary to the notion of lone ranger Christian, or the churchless Christian
- Not the means of salvation - over against those who claim they are - Roman Catholics, Lutheran, and other denominations or groups that claim salvific efficacy of the ordinances
- Celebrated in genuine faith - this is a celebration as the church body participates, and it is for those who have been justified, those who have true saving faith, i.e. genuine faith, and those alone come to celebrate, faith is not created by the participation in the ordinances

### **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.

#### **Titus 3:3-8**

- Justification and sanctification are components of salvation, and they cannot be separated, which is happening in many evangelical circles, pitting one against another
- Life together is emphasized such that the Christian life is to be lived in community, over against many in the broader evangelical community that attempt to be lone ranger Christians
- We are to care for others, remember the one another commands of Scripture, beginning with one's own life and family, but not ending there. There is a larger family, this new community to whom we are accountable and responsible, and then the broader world
- True faith has implications - it is mental, but it has other entailments

### **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.

#### **Matthew 24:42-44**

- Bodily - This is important to reaffirm over against those who would conclude that it is only spiritual.
- Certainty - The certainty of Christ's return is part of the gospel. If this is denied the gospel is denied.
- Future - This affirms Christ's faithfulness to His promises, over against those who would say that either He will not return, or those who conclude that all the prophetic promises of Christ's return happened in the fall of Jerusalem, 70 AD (full-preterism).
- Humility - At a time known only to God the Father is s recognition that He knows and we do not. This is over against those who would attempt to set dates.
- Demands constant expectancy - This is an exhortation to believers. Though they profess and confess the coming of Christ, it has very little bearing in the lives of believers. We are aliens and strangers, and we await our return home.
- Motivates the believer - This awaiting Christ's return is not "pie in the sky" and an avoidance of "living in the world," but a strong incentive to be "in the world but not of the world."

### **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.

#### **Acts 17:30-31**

- All commanded to believe the gospel - repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ this is essential to emphasis 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!