

# **EFCC Statement of Faith with Commentary**

***The Evangelical Free Church of Canada is an association of autonomous (self-governing) 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.***

This Statement of Faith centers on the gospel, which provides the core of our identity as the EFCC. It is faith in this gospel that makes one a Christian and, therefore, eligible for membership in an Evangelical Free Church. This approach to our doctrinal statement is suggested by Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15:3,4 that he was passing on what he had received, and which was of "first importance"—the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection which was "according to the Scriptures." In this Statement of Faith, we are setting forth what is of first importance which is according to the Scriptures and which we have received from those who have gone before us.

In addition, in Rom. 1:1-4, the Apostle speaks of being set apart for "God's gospel," which he further defines as "the gospel regarding His Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." God's gospel—the gospel that has come not from man but from God—is the message of God's saving purpose through history which finds its culmination in Jesus Christ—who is the Son of God, who died and rose again to give us eternal life.

Jesus Christ is the center of the Bible—"in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). And Jesus himself is the gospel—Paul can say that he proclaims the gospel and that he proclaims Christ, and by that he means the same thing. So, it is appropriate to say that all of biblical theology is the story of God's gospel—God's plan and purpose to redeem a people for himself—a purpose realized in Jesus Christ.

Moreover, it was observed that when explaining the Evangelical Free Church in promotional literature, A. T. Olson used to speak of the "Evangelical" part of our name as an affirmation of our theology (we emphasize the gospel), and the "Free" part as an affirmation of our structure and organization (we are congregational). We determined that an emphasis on the evangel, the gospel, would be a proper framework for our "evangelical" statement of faith.

***The Evangelical Free Church of Canada is an association of autonomous (self-governing) churches—***

This introductory statement sets forth our polity as a public part of our identity without making it an "article of faith," that is, something vitally connected to the gospel itself. The term self-governing is a good way to balance the realities of local church governance with the fact that we are an association and fellowship of churches who are interdependent. This term, understood this way, also helps us avoid the error of thinking we are "independent".

***To God's glory—***

The focus on the gospel suggests that this is not an abstract presentation of theological truth but a confession of faith by the people of God—those who have come to know God through the

gospel of Jesus Christ. Only through this gospel can we know him as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We recognize, however, that one danger in using the gospel as an integrating theme is that it could give the impression that God exists supremely for our benefit. This we deny. This is God's gospel, which is, above all, a revelation of Himself—in all His holy love. And as a revelation of Himself as the triune God this gospel reveals God's glory. Throughout this Statement, we affirm that God's glory is the ultimate aim of all God's works in creation, revelation, and salvation.

***Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel. –***

This phrase echoes a very important EFCC theme: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, charity; and in all things, Jesus Christ." We recognize that it is challenging to draw definitive lines between what is "essential" and what is "non-essential" regarding the gospel, with the sense of what one must believe to be saved.

<https://efccm.ca/pdfs/HermeneuticsandtheEFCC.pdf>

For that reason, we have stated that these convictions are "vitally connected" to the gospel. The connection in each case may be a matter of degree. However, for the purposes of the EFCC this SOF does express what is "essential" to us in the sense that a denial of any of these convictions disqualifies a person from full membership in the EFCC.

***vitally connected—***

Here we seek to clarify that the theological affirmations that follow are not all in themselves "the gospel itself" but include some of the gospel's necessary premises. So, for example, our doctrine of human depravity is not itself "good news," but it is what makes the "good news" good.

***God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune 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.**

Many doctrinal statements start with a statement about Scripture. We have chosen to begin with a statement about God. 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.

***God's gospel—***

This term, though not commonly used, is entirely biblical (cf. Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:8,9; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Pet. 4:17). It has been chosen to emphasize that the gospel is from God (cf. esp. Gal. 1:11-17) and supremely for God, before it is for us.

***the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.—***

The gospel expresses the entirety of the nature of God, and not just His love. These perfections of God are described as "wondrous" to express the doxological nature of this statement and to preclude a static and impersonal description of God.

***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 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. 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—***

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 "highest good," the ultimate purpose for all that God does.

***God's gospel is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures.***

**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.**

***God has spoken—***

This reference to the past "has spoken" refers to God's spoken Word now inscripturated, as noted by the reference to "the Scriptures." This is the Word of God. But it is important to note that it is in this inscripturated Word that God still speaks today in the present. In Scripture God spoke, and still speaks.

***through the words of human authors—***

The notion that the Bible is written in "human words" is central to our hermeneutical method, which seeks the original intent of the human authors as the primary means by which to discover God's truth.

***verbally inspired—***

That God has spoken in the Scriptures through the words of human authors is what we mean by the expression "verbally inspired" in the next sentence.

***the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged—***

This affirms that no area of human activity, including any area of knowledge or action, lies outside the authority of the divine Word of God. This statement does not demand that the Bible must be invoked to justify every aspect of human knowledge and action, for it does not address every subject directly. Rather, this statement affirms that the Bible speaks with divine authority in every area in which it speaks. But even in those areas in which the Bible does not speak directly, it is still "the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged." The expression "should be" rather than "is" or "must be" is not reflective of any limitation on the Word of God but rather recognizes our own limitations and frailty as we submit or do not submit all knowledge and endeavor to the Word. It addresses the broader application of the Word of God to all knowledge and life. This "should be" our posture as we submit to God through His Word in the world.

***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 expression "teaches" is not intended to limit the Bible's truthfulness in any way— everything it teaches, affirms, denies, or reveals is to be believed. This statement, as a whole, is adapted from a statement from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and is a helpful reminder that though the Bible does contain propositions that are to be believed, it contains more than that. The Bible reveals God Himself, not only as One who teaches, but also as One who commands and as One who promises. Faith in the God of the Bible must also issue in obedience and trust in response to His Word in every way that it addresses us.

***God's gospel alone addresses our deepest need.***

**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.**

***God created Adam and Eve—***

We have made a specific reference to the first human beings as Adam and Eve. This ties our doctrinal statement more closely to the biblical story itself (Gen. 3) and affirms the equal value of men and women as equally created in God's image. The mention of these two by name also supports the notion that the gospel is not a set of abstract philosophical propositions but a work of God in history. This creative act of God and the tragic events that follow set the stage for the unfolding story of God's saving work and points to the significance of Christ as the "last Adam" (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22,45).

***in His image—***

The creation of the first human beings was a unique and special act of God which separated them from any other creature in the natural world.

***sinned—***

This emphasizes the deliberate and rebellious nature of this act.

***when tempted by Satan—***

This indicates the reality of the spiritual realm. Significantly, Satan provides only the occasion of human sin, not its cause.

***In union with Adam—***

Though the Bible declares that both Adam and Eve sinned, Paul attributes the lasting impact of sin upon humans to Adam in particular (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21,22). This union is how Adam's sin affects us, and it provides a parallel with our union with Christ stated below.

***human beings are sinners by nature and by choice—***

This spells out what that lasting effect of our union with the sinful Adam is. The "and" in this clause means "as well as" or "in addition to." In other words, both are true: human beings are sinners by the nature they inherit, *and* they are sinners by the choices they make. This is not meant to declare that humans are sinners only when the sinful human nature is confirmed by some conscious human choice.

***all humanity is alienated from God and under His wrath—***

This is an assessment of the human condition, further defining what it means to be "lost".

***rescued, reconciled, and renewed—***

This includes both the negative and positive aspects of God's saving work in Christ, and, implicitly, its past, present, and future dimensions in the life of the believer as well: we have been rescued (1 Thess. 1:10) from the consequences of sin (including legal condemnation and moral captivity), we are reconciled into a new relationship of peace with God as our Father (cf. Rom. 5:1,2), and we will ultimately be renewed into the image of God (which is the image of Christ) when we are glorified with Christ at the resurrection (Rom. 8:29,30; Phil. 3:20,21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

***God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of 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.**

***made known supremely—***

Jesus Christ is the climax of special revelation. The word "supremely" also means absolutely, "definitively," carrying the meaning of finality as addressed by the author of Hebrews: "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (1:2).

***is God incarnate—***

This language of incarnation reflects the Biblical teaching as given expression in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381): God became a man in Christ, the second person of the Godhead.

***fully God and fully man—***

This statement affirms the full deity and humanity of Christ in agreement with the Bible and affirmed by the early Christian creeds.

***one Person in two natures—***

This statement, rooted in Scripture, reflects the language of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) in which the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ was established. This formulation assured that in being fully man and fully God, or true man and true God, Jesus Christ was not a mixture of the two, forming a third kind of being, and that the subject of the Person of Christ was the divine Logos in which the two natures found their existence.

***Israel's promised Messiah—***

This puts the story of Jesus Christ in its proper Old Testament context. The God who is incarnate in Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promised Messiah. Implicit here is the notion that the Messiah of Israel is the Savior of the world (cf., e.g., Jn. 4:22; 1Jn. 2:2). The early Church quickly ruled out an understanding of the Christian gospel apart from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Although Christians recognize two testaments, they embrace one Bible, with Jesus being the key.

***conceived through the Holy Spirit—***

We have chosen to use "through" rather than "of" because it carries more meaning yet does not suggest that the Holy Spirit simply plays the role of the "father" in this conception. In this we have sought to reflect the language of Matt. 1:18 (which uses the preposition ek [reflected in the wording of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed]).

***born of the virgin Mary—***

The word "virgin" is not capitalized, emphasizing that this is a description of Mary and not a part of a proper name. This follows the practice, for example, of the Lutheran Book of Concord (Tappert edition, 1959) in its translations of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

***He lived a sinless life—***

This phrase points to the saving significance of the "active obedience" of Christ throughout His

life and not just at the point of His crucifixion.

***was crucified under Pontius Pilate—***

This phrase echoes the Apostles' Creed, anchoring our own statement in the historical statements of the Church. It also grounds the life of Jesus in real history. This expression emphasizes the “passive obedience” of Christ.

***sits at the right hand of God the Father—***

“Sits” reflects the biblical emphasis on the completed work of Christ—cf. Acts 2:33-36; 5:31; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:3; 8:1,2; 10:12; 12:2; Rev. 3:21. This simplification, “of God the Father,” makes explicit the reference to God in the expression “at the right hand of the Majesty on High” (which comes from Heb. 1:3). This is the second explicit reference to the God “the Father” (cf. the teaching of the Trinity in article #1.).

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. the language of the Chalcedonian confession: “such as he was announced formerly by the prophets.”

***God's gospel is accomplished through 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.**

***as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins—***

This gives substance to the doctrine of the atonement in our Statement of Faith and expounds what "shed His blood" means. Making Jesus the active subject emphasizes the voluntary nature of his sacrifice on our behalf (cf. Heb. 9:22). Rooted in the Old Testament law, this was the means through which the new covenant would be established (cf. Ex. 24:8; Lev. 16-17; Jer. 31:31-34; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

This affirms a substitutionary understanding of the atonement in a forensic sense (Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21), but can also include complementary views of the atonement which stress Jesus' victory over the forces of evil (Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Col. 2:15), His role as a ransom, redeeming us from the power of sin (Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14), and the moral power of His sacrificial love (1 Pet. 3:21-23). Jesus' death on the cross "as our representative and substitute" is the only means by which God's wrath against sinners (cf. article 3) is turned away, an effect otherwise known as propitiation (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

Further, we affirm that Christ's sacrifice is fully sufficient to save all those who trust in him. Nothing can be added to complete that work.

***victorious resurrection—***

"victorious" is included to emphasize the triumph of Christ over the powers of evil—a power that is now available to believers. This *Christus Victor* theme is significant in the biblical presentation of the work of Christ (cf. e.g., Col. 2:15). It is an important truth that is anchored in the substitutionary and representational death and resurrection of Christ, which is the heart of the atonement.

***God's gospel is applied by the power of 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.**

***God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit. —***

This heading highlights the Holy Spirit as the source of the power inherent in the gospel.

***We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ.—***

This opening sentence is meant to be the summary statement, making the work of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ the central work of the Spirit (Jn. 16:14). The three remaining sentences explain how the Spirit glorifies Christ in His convicting, regenerating, and sanctifying work.

***convicts the world of its guilt—***



This explains the convicting work of the Spirit.

***He regenerates sinners—***

We desire a statement that is consistent with both Arminian and Calvinist soteriology, but which requires neither. This phrase regarding the Spirit's work in regeneration is not to be understood to endorse either a Calvinist or an Arminian view. Again, at this point we are only discussing the Spirit's work. In statement #7, "faith alone in Christ alone" is addressed (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). In statement #10 we refer to the attendant human response (cf. Jn. 1:12-13). Both regeneration (the Spirit's work) and faith (our response) are essential for salvation. We seek to emphasize both without giving logical priority to either.

***in Him they are baptized into union with Christ—***

The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in conversion is the same work that unites us to Christ. This act is often referred to as "the baptism of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> This can be a controversial concept, and here we affirm that this Spirit-baptism refers to that work of God in conversion by which we are joined to Christ and so partake of all His benefits. We believe this theological truth of union with Christ, so central to New Testament teaching, needed to be affirmed. The inclusion of the term "baptized" here in the context of conversion is important in that it denies the Classic Pentecostal teaching which insists upon a post-conversion baptism in the Spirit which is accompanied and evidenced by speaking in tongues.

***adopted as heirs in the family of God—***

This statement brings the notion of adoption into our statement of faith. It is placed here to emphasize that it is a consequence of our being in union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. In union with Jesus Christ the Son of God, we become sons—sons and daughters of God (cf. esp. Gal. 3:26,27; also Gal. 4:6,7; Rm. 8:15; Jn. 1:12).

***illuminates—***

Here we reflect the conviction that the teaching of the Holy Spirit is chiefly through the illumination of our minds to understand the Scriptures. The Spirit who inspires the authors of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) is also the Spirit who illumines the readers (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:6-16).

***equips—***

This equipping includes the bestowal of spiritual gifts to every believer for the edification of the body of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup>We concede that the translation of a key text, 1 Cor. 12:13, is uncertain—is it "by" one Spirit (agent) or "in" one Spirit (location or substance) that we are baptized? But regardless of the exegesis of that one verse, this, in fact, is what the Spirit does in theological terms—he unites us to Christ in a "Spirit-baptism" that occurs at our conversion.

***Christ-like living and service—***

the term "Christ-like" is specifically used here because we feel it is perceived as a broader and more inclusive term for the life to which we are called and empowered, including ministry in the church and the world as well as personal piety.

***God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called 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.**

***new community—***

This description is not intended to make any judgment about the relationship between the Church and Israel. The word "new" simply points to the new work of God in the "new covenant" marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

***We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone.—***

This statement of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone is emphasizes teaching, which is prominent in the New Testament, and was rediscovered during the Reformation to become a central teaching of the Reformers. For these reasons it is included in our statement. It is placed at this point for it defines those who belong in the true church—those who are "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.—***

We do not speak of regeneration at this point because it was mentioned in the previous article of our statement.

***whose membership should be composed only of believers—***

This emphasizes humbly that we do not have infallible knowledge of who is a member of the true church. We can only make a judgment based on a credible profession of faith, hence the term "believers." The word "should" also reflects this. We cannot demand what is impossible to accomplish in this regard. However, that the local church is to be a fellowship of believers is strongly affirmed here.

***The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances—***

This phrase grounds these ordinances in the authority of our Lord Jesus, which link this statement of the ordinances directly to Paul's reference to the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23ff. (cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:14-20). Because Jesus is Lord of the church, what he ordained for us, we must practice. The number "two" emphasizes that we believe that He mandated just these two ordinances and no more.

***visibly and tangibly express the gospel—***

This ties the ordinances to our central theme: God's gospel. Their relationship with the gospel is part of what defines them as ordinances. They are "visible words" of God. Yet the ordinances are not only seen, but they are also experienced physically—we "eat and drink" and we are "washed," hence, the inclusion of the term "tangibly". When the Word is preached, the gospel is heard through the ear; when the ordinances are celebrated in faith, the gospel is "proclaimed and seen" through the eye.

***though they are not the means of salvation.—***

Participation in the ordinances gives a person no merit before God. As we have affirmed earlier in this statement, we are justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone.

***in genuine faith—***

To ensure that the ordinances are not perceived to be efficacious in and of themselves, we have included the necessity of genuine faith if they are to have spiritual value. In this way we believe that we have safeguarded the biblical teaching of justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone.

***these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer —***

Rather than merely speaking negatively ("are not the means of salvation"), we have chosen also to speak positively. We affirm that the ordinances are not a means of salvation, but we wanted to also affirm their important place in the life of the church and of the Christian. Christ commanded them, so they must be taken seriously. Being commands, they are also beneficial. As we come in faith, God works through baptism and the Lord's Supper to confirm the gospel of which they speak in our hearts – edifying the believer and the church. They are, in that sense, a means of grace. Specifically, we affirm that they nourish believers who celebrate them in genuine faith. This phrase is fully compatible with a "memorial" view of the Lord's Supper, and it also allows for a "spiritual presence" view.

***God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.***

**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.**

***God's gospel compels us—***

This expression is meant to reflect Paul's words in 2 Cor. 5:14: "Christ's love compels us." Without a sense of the need to live out one's faith, one has a limited understanding of the gospel.

***We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose—***

This statement is not intended to demand either an Arminian or Calvinist understanding of sanctification. Rather, it simply affirms that the gospel includes a new power through the Spirit to

live in a new way.

***God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially,—***

This is simply a restatement of the Great Commandment and its companion (Mk. 12:29-31). Just as Jesus "went around doing good" (Acts 10:38), so should we (Jn. 20:21), loving not just our friends (Gal. 6:9-10), but our enemies as well (Matt. 5:43-48). On sacrificial love, cf. Lk. 10:25-37; Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 3:16.

***and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed—***

These are strong biblical themes (cf., e.g., Deut. 15:11; Ps. 82:3,4; Prov. 14:31; 29:7; Isa. 1:17; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 25:31-46; Lk. 16:19-31; Js. 1:22) that have too often received little emphasis in Evangelical circles. This does not supplant or replace the gospel, but rather is one important aspect of outworking of the true biblical gospel as we live out our faith in the world. This statement implies no particular political agenda. How we are to fulfill this biblical mandate must be worked out in fellowship with one another.

***With God's Word, the Spirit's power and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. —***

The reality of the Christian's battle against forces of evil, both within and without, is acknowledged here. This statement captures the struggle of the Christian life, as well as the powerful resources at our disposal. In its context, following the statement on the church (and in the use of the first-person plural), it should be assumed that our engagement in the world has a corporate as well as an individual dimension. Our fellowship with one another in the body of Christ is one of our essential resources in the spiritual battle in which we are engaged.

Nothing is specifically said in this statement about "institutional evil," but this statement allows for an understanding of the "spiritual forces of evil" at work in social, cultural, and institutional ways. Moreover, though nothing is said about God's common grace operative in this fallen world (cf. Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17), that truth is also recognized in this statement.

***In obedience to Christ's final commission, we are to make disciples among all people, —***

Here we affirm the missionary mandate as a priority and an integral part of the gospel. God's gospel is for the world, and we have been given a commission to take it to everyone (Mt. 28:19). This statement makes explicit the proper concern of all Christians to seek to reach "all people" (the use of "among" here requires that "all people" be understood to refer not only to all individuals but also to all groups of people, cf. Rev. 5:9; 14:6). This missionary mandate includes the process of discipleship as well as evangelism.

***always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.—***

Our witness to the gospel is to be verbal and non-verbal, for who we are and what we do is anchored in and reflects the message we bring.

***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, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**

***personal, bodily—***

Though the notion of a "bodily" return of Christ is implicit in the word "personal," we believe it is important to make it explicit by including the word. This emphasis on the "physicality" of the coming of Christ, along with the new heaven and new earth He will usher in is significant, for it ensures that the consummation of God's saving purposes are not simply "spiritual" and involve the renewal of our physical existence.

***with His holy angels—***

This provides a reference in the Statement of Faith to the existence of angels (cf. Matt. 24:30,31, 25:31; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7). It also reflects a biblical emphasis that Christ's coming will be glorious, and the entourage of angels reinforces that glory. This statement in no way precludes a pre-tribulational rapture of the church when Christ comes "for his saints," nor a further coming of Christ "with his saints." It only affirms that the glory of his final coming will include an angelic host.

***when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment—***

This statement is intended to be compatible with all millennial positions but should not require any one of them. It does not require that the kingdom is already present; only that when Christ returns, He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment. Nor does it deny that the kingdom may already be present in part; only that it will come in its fullness when Christ returns. This future consummation of the kingdom is supported by Paul's words in 1 Cor. 15:23-38. A thorough-going preterist view that denies a future return of Christ in glory is not compatible with historic biblical Evangelical theology or with this Statement of Faith.

***This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God—***

This is a clear biblical teaching: cf. Mark 13:32—"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." 13:33—"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come." 13:35—"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn." All eschatological views must be compatible with this affirmation.

***demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission—***

This phrase clearly expresses the biblical emphasis on the proper attitude toward the coming of Christ (cf. esp. Matt. 24:36-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3). It clearly emphasizes the "vital bearing" that the coming of Christ ought to have in the personal life and service of the believer. "Blessed hope" is simply a biblical phrase taken from Tit. 2:13. In that passage this hope specifically refers to the "glorious appearing" of Christ (cf. also 2 Thess. 1:6-8). This statement affirms simply that we long for the coming of Christ, whether that coming be in two stages or in one. This statement refers to the "return of Christ" as one big event and is not intended to exclude the view that the blessed hope may refer more specifically to the initial stage of a "two-stage" return of Christ (i.e., to the pretribulational rapture in Dispensationalism).

***God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.***

**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.**

***God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.—***

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, turning to Him 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 uses the 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").

***We believe that God —***

This is the only article in which we affirm twice that "We believe that God . . ." 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. This is spelled out above. In the second, we affirm the truth that all will face eternal consequences based on the response to the gospel.

***God will raise the dead bodily—***

God raising the dead bodily refers to "the bodily resurrection of the dead" (cf. 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

***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. In that judgment (in whatever form it may take), however, two different destinies will ensue (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Jn. 5:19-30; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor.

5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:4-6).

***assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment;—***

This is a most sobering statement. The word "eternal" is specifically used to build on the way the NIV translates *aionion* in the crucial verse on this doctrine, Matt. 25:46. We have used the word "condemnation" here because we are stating the result of that judgment. Admittedly, this doctrine has been questioned in recent years within Evangelical circles, but we 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. The word "conscious" has not been traditionally included in statements of this doctrine but was included here specifically to refute annihilationism. Not only does Matthew 25:41,46 (cf. Lk. 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:9) support this understanding, but it is significant that even the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in Rev. 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 and Rev. 14:11.

***in the new heaven and the new earth—***

This refers 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.

***to the praise of His glorious grace.—***

This echoes Paul's words in Ephesians 1:6 and points to the God-ward emphasis in our Statement. The unfolding of this gospel 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.