

Ordination Thesis of the EFCA Statement of Faith by Pastor Barry Vegter

Biographical Section

My conversion experience: I had the privilege of growing up in a family where my parents were Christ-followers. In the church where I grew up, my father was an Elder and my mother was a Sunday School teacher. Whenever the church doors were open for a gathering we attended and we were involved. More importantly, my parents lived out their faith in our home. We were a farming family, which means there was a lot of work, and to do that required everyone's help. My father was very intentional about living out his faith in the midst of his work. He taught my siblings and me in a way that reflected Deuteronomy 6; it was a way of life. We memorized the books of the Bible and Scripture as we milked cows. My father was a Gideon, and I saw him share his faith with the milk hauler, seed corn salesman, and other farmers.

There came a time in my life when I realized that I could not live off of my parent's faith. That time for me came when I was 18. The summer after my High School graduation, a friend of mine was tragically killed in an accident, and it shook me to my core. This friend was not a Christian, and I never shared my faith with him. What I believed about my life, that I said I was a Christian, was not the truth - I was not. I was a Pharisee and controlled by fear. As I entered college at UW-La Crosse, I had a lot of questions, and so I pursued getting answers to my questions. I met a couple of staff members from Campus Crusade for Christ who loved me and disciplined me. John Swanson was the staff member who had the most impact on my life during those years. (John planted an EFCA church in Janesville, Wisconsin). At age 19, on December 29, 1981 while attending a Campus Crusade for Christ Christmas Conference, the speaker was teaching on the "Rich Young Ruler" and I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. My life has never been the same! There is much more to my story but I will stop here.

My wife Lisa's conversion experience: My wife Lisa grew up in a very dysfunctional and chaotic home. Her mom was married three times. She never knew her biological father until she was 18. She was physically, mentally, emotionally, and sexually abused as a child. When she was nine years old, a friend took her to AWANA. After one of the AWANA meetings she asked the pastor if he would tell her how she could escape hell and be sure of heaven, but after that one year of AWANA, she was never really disciplined. She did pray to receive Christ as her Savior with the pastor. Because her home life was so abusive, at times she was suicidal, but God preserved her life through those dark times.

When she went to college at UW-La Crosse (a year after I graduated from UW-La Crosse) she got involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and was disciplined for the first time. She was a part time secretary for John Swanson, helping out with the ministry needs of Campus Crusade for Christ. She was also the primary baby sitter for John and Jane Swanson, and it was while she was in their home that she learned what a marriage and family could be. There is also more to her story, regarding overcoming the impact of all the abuse she suffered, which is still being written today. I believe that my wife is a walking miracle, and a testimony of the power of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.

My call to ministry and my wife Lisa's response to my calling: My call to ministry has both an internal and external aspect to it. After I became a Christian at age 19, my life took a turn in a radically different direction. I changed my major to education, and I became very intentional about disciple-making, spending two summers on mission projects with Campus Crusade for Christ. While competing on the track team at UW La Crosse, I saw 17 of the guys I was reaching out to become Christians. Some of those guys, whom I disciplined, are in full-time ministry today. After graduating from college, I took a position as a teacher and coach in a public school in Leland, Illinois. During those years, other people began to recognize that I was already pastoring people and families in that school district, even though I was not intentionally doing this. It just came naturally. One summer, I spent time in my home church preaching, leading a youth group, and learning theology, and by the end of that summer, the Elders confirmed to me that God could be calling me to pastoral ministry. The following year I enrolled as a student at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS. While in seminary, I got licensed in the PCA denomination in order to pastor a little country church that wanted me to be their student pastor. I was involved in an inner-city ministry while in Jackson, serving in various capacities. Before attending seminary, since my home church was in the RCA, I thought I might as well be in the RCA as well, even though I really knew very little about the RCA specifically, outside of my local church experience. During my years in seminary, I completed the necessary exams to be licensed in the RCA, moving toward ordination after I received my MDiv., confirming my call to ministry. After graduating from RTS, I was ordained in my home church in Clinton, WI, where my call to ministry was recognized, and I was called to serve as Associate pastor in an RCA Church in Friesland, WI. I spent seven years in the First Reformed Church in Friesland. In 2000, I was called to serve as Senior/Lead Pastor of Grace Evangelical Free Church (Formerly Grace Reformed Church) in Fond du Lac, WI, where I currently serve.

I met my wife Lisa while living in Leland, IL, during the time I was a public school teacher and coach, *not a pastor*. My wife has always trusted me concerning the changes we have gone through together as a married couple, even as I have changed callings over the years. She will tell you that being a pastor's wife was not something that she would have chosen, but being married to me and trusting God to lead me and our family is something she has done throughout our married life together.

Preparation for ministry: My preparation for ministry began before I became a Christian, through growing up in a Christian home and in my home church. It continued after I became a Christian while in college. During my college years, through the ministry of campus Crusade for Christ, I was equipped to evangelize and disciple others as a way of life. While teaching in a public school, I learned how to apply the Christian life to work, and living in a community that had many needs. While in Seminary, I learned many things to help me prepare for ministry, but the two most important were how to interpret Scripture and how to lead a church. I was then given the privilege of applying what I was learning as a student pastor to a church in Water Valley, MS. As an associate pastor in Friesland, I learned how to minister to families, while also being prepared for the Senior Pastor role, which God called me to in 2000, here at Grace Reformed Church in Fond du Lac, WI. I have learned that being a pastor is the primary way God has pruned me for even

more fruitful ministry. I was licensed for ministry in the PCA and RCA, ordained in the RCA, and now I am seeking to be ordained in the EFCA.

Doctrinal Section

Article 1: God—*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 pur-posed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.*

The doctrine of God, God revealing Himself to us, is the most important aspect of theology. Everything flows out of a correct understanding of who God is. He has revealed Himself in ways that we can know Him. Throughout God's Word, the warning of idolatry - making God to be something He is not, or creating our own god made in our image and likeness - is at the root of our problems. God made us to be worshippers - we *will* worship - but will we worship the true God, or will we substitute a false god? I affirm what God has revealed about Himself in His Word, in creation, and in Jesus Christ -- it has changed my life forever!

We believe in one God (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29) who is at the center of life. The "Shema" was an affirmation to the people of God that He is one, complete unity, and He alone is God. The Bible reveals a monotheistic view of God, and that He is the one and only true God, which is in direct contrast to the false gods people have created, which many times reflect a polytheistic worldview.

God reveals Himself as the *Creator of all things* (Gen.1 and 2; Ps.33:6; Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3). Why does it matter that God is the Creator? It provides the foundation for our relationship with Him. We trust Him and submit everything in our lives to Him because, as our Creator, everything we have comes from Him. This reality connects us again with why He alone is worthy of our worship, rather than worshipping the creation itself. What has been created by God does not exist without Him! As creation is described in Genesis 1 and 2, we affirm the greatness of God -- that He speaks and things are created out of nothing. Over the years, as the church has debated *how* God created, including the length of time and process, we must not miss that *God created it all*. I affirm the interpretation of most theologians throughout history regarding Genesis 1 and 2; that God used six 24 hour periods of time to create what we read in Genesis 1. In the same way that Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16), the very words that God used in His written Word to reveal Himself to us are rooted in the truth that *God spoke* (breathed) *words* in creation. In the same way that God chose the exact words to be used in his written Word to us, God created everything exactly the way He wanted, not by chance, but with a divine purpose. It is all held together *by Him* and would fall apart *without Him*. Our response to God as our Creator at this very moment should cause us to remember that we are living and breathing because of Him, and lead us to a place of humility. This means, our response should reflect the response we see in heaven. (Revelation 4 & 5). He is worthy to receive all glory and honor as we live our daily lives.

God reveals Himself through many attributes, which become the foundation of our worship of Him. God desires that we would know Him in so many ways, so that we would trust Him.

One of the most important attributes of God is that He is *Holy* (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; Isa. 57:15). All the other attributes of God are rooted in His holiness. He is separate, distinct, and transcendent; meaning He is over us, He is beyond us, and He is completely morally pure. It is His holiness that forms the basis of why Jesus came to make a way for unholy, morally impure, sinful people to be made acceptable to a Holy God. Without God's holiness, the love of God is diminished. It is not until we understand the holiness of God, that we can understand the depth of our sin and our need for a Savior who would love us completely. His love led Him to a cross where He became sin so that we could be made righteous, and know the God who created us to be in relationship with Him (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

Related to God's holiness is God's *infinite perfection* (Dt. 32:4; Job 1:7-10; Ps. 18:30; 50:2; 90:2; 145:3; Matt. 5:48) and *eternal existence* (Ps. 33:11; 102:25-27; 115:3; Dan. 4:34-35; Jn. 5:26; Acts 17:17:24-25). There are no limits to His awesome greatness. He is without defect, blemish, or imperfection. You cannot improve on perfection. God has no need of anything, and He does not change because He is immutable. God was not created, for He has always existed. This means that it is foolish to try to change God into our image or likeness, since perfection cannot be improved upon. God chose to make a way for us to know Him, to reveal who He is to us. This is astounding! That He is need of nothing, and yet He would love us by wanting us to be in relationship with Him is overwhelming.

God has revealed Himself as a relational being. He has personal relationships of love within Himself in *a loving unity* (Jn. 3:35; 17:24; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16). God is one and He is love. It is precisely because of God's love expressed within Himself that allows us to experience a love which is gracious, and self-giving. He has nothing to gain by extending His love to us. This is what makes His love for us so amazing. God has never been alone, loving Himself even before we were created. This loving unity is expressed by the word "Trinity". *Three equally divine Persons* (Matt. 3:16-17; Jn. 17:11; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2): *the Father* (Dt. 32:6; Mt. 6:6; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 8:6), *the Son* (Matt. 3:17; Jn. 1:14; 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:5), and *the Holy Spirit* (Jn. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom. 8:9, 26; Gal. 4:6). The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, and yet it describes what God has revealed about Himself. Throughout church history, theologians have used words to describe the Trinity as something that is a mystery. The three persons of the Trinity are one in nature and essence that have forever existed as one God in an eternal union of love. One of the words theologians have used to describe this eternal union of love is "*perichoresis*". Another word that theologians have used is "*homoousion*" to describe that the three persons of the "Trinity" are of the same being yet distinct in the relationship they have with one another. This makes the God of the Bible unique and distinct from all false gods of this world. The Old Testament describes the Trinity from the very beginning of His Word in Genesis 1:26-27 as God speaks of Himself in the plural form. The three persons of the Trinity are expressly mentioned in Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. Not surprising, the doctrine of the Trinity has been under attack for centuries. The evil one wants to distort who God is by deceiving people into believing lies about God, so that He is not worshipped. The two most prominent cults of today, the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses, have denied aspects of the Trinity and have deceived many. The Mormons believe in many gods and teach that God Himself was once a man, and that Jesus has not always existed

eternally. The Jehovah Witnesses deny that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are God. The Trinity is essential in understanding salvation and is also essential to our faith.

The Word of God reveals that God has *limitless knowledge* (Ps. 139:1-16; 147:5; Isa. 46:10; Jn. 21:17) and *sovereign power* (Jer. 32:17; Eph. 1:11; Rm. 8:28; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 1:8). Throughout church history, there have been debates concerning the extent and mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. We can all agree that God will bring to completion His purposes in all things. Because He is eternal, His limitless knowledge includes His foreknowledge of all things, including future choices that we make as humans. Because of His omnipotence, there is nothing outside His sovereign will. Because God has this kind of knowledge and power, we can come to Him with our flaws, failures, and struggles with confidence. He is greater than anything that comes into our lives as a result of our choices or the choices of others which may affect our lives.

One of the greatest thoughts that we can have about God is that He *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 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). This is amazing. As we reflect on the story of Abraham, we see a man with many flaws, and yet God makes a covenant with Him, declaring that God will redeem a people to represent Him to the nations. This redemption of a people is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as both Jew and Gentile-in-Christ now becomes a people redeemed to represent Him to all peoples. At the end of history, people from every tribe, nation, and tongue will be worshipping Him around the throne. We are called, as His redeemed people, to go into the entire world and make disciples of all nations as we wait for His return. He is coming back to create the new heaven and the new earth.

As we see the effects of sin all around us, which have corrupted all of creation, we are looking forward to the day when God makes *all things new* (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:19-21; Rev. 21. 22) *for His own glory* (Ps. 19:1-2; Isa. 43:7; Jer. 13:11; Col. 1:15-23; Rev. 4:11; 5:9-14). The gospel includes this wondrous coming act of God in which He will not only redeem a people for Himself, but redeem or restore the fallen creation. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has not only taken care of the penalty of sin and the power of sin, but will eradicate the presence of sin forever. The greatest consequences of sin are death, separation, and pain, but God will redeem in such a way that there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, as He makes all things new. Everything God has created has been made for His glory, to reflect His glory. When the presence of sin is eradicated forever, everything will then be free to give glory to the One who deserves all the glory, honor, and praise!

Article 2: The Bible—*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.*

One of the first things we learn about God is that He speaks. He reveals Himself in words. This truth is affirmed many times in the Bible. It is foundational to our faith. We do not have to speculate on who God is, because He has revealed Himself; He wants us to know Him. Our relationship with God is about getting to know Him, and as God reveals Himself we receive it and believe it by faith. As we get to know Him more, we fall in love with Him more and more. As a result, we can't stop talking about Him, and desire to join Him in His mission to make Himself known.

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures (Matt. 1:22; 4:4; 19:4; Heb. 1:1-2) *in both the Old and New Testaments* (2 Pet. 3:15-16). There are sixty-six books recognized as having divine authority by Jesus and the early church. "Canonicity" is the process used to determine what books had divine authority and were to be included in the Bible and which did not. Essentially, the process of canonization was an historical one, in which the Holy Spirit guided the Church to recognize which books had divine inspiration. The word "canon" comes from a Greek word that means 'rule, measure or standard'. The word "canon" then helps us understand what books were known as canonical and establishing a rule of faith and practice. The church has recognized that it did not create the canon, but received it from God who created it. The Old Testament came to the church from Jesus and the Apostles. The New Testament came from the same source. The basis of recognition was and is: (1) Apostolic authorship (2) Christ-honoring doctrinal content, in line with teaching of other apostles (3) Continuous acknowledgment and spiritually fruitful use of the books within the church from the apostolic age on. It is recognized that the canon of Scripture has been closed since the third century. The books commonly known as the apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore have no authority in the church of Jesus Christ. There are some canonical issues involved with some passages like Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. Because these verses are not contained in early manuscripts, along with some different literary style differences that did not seem to fit with the rest of the book, some doubt was raised about its authenticity. In recent liberal scholarship, some have used their presuppositions, higher criticism, and form criticism methods to cast doubt on the divine nature of the Bible. Others have said that certain books of some historical value should be included in the canon of Scripture. The recent "Da Vinci Code" craze is an example of how people are still trying to attack the Bible, so that they can live under the illusion of being free from any obligation to God. The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy in 1978 and 1982 summarized a unified belief in the authority of Scripture. There is much more to this issue than I can include in this brief paper.

As God spoke in the Scriptures, He did it *through the words of human authors* (Luke 1:1-4) *as the verbally inspired Word of God* (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit acted on the writers of the Bible in an organic way, in harmony with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary and style. The Holy Spirit so worked within the minds of the human authors, prompting their memories, repressing the influence of sin, guiding their thoughts, and causing them to write in such a way that even the choice of their words was controlled by His influence. This is called *organic inspiration*. It is produced by the creative breath of God so that *the Bible is without error in the original writings* (Num. 23:19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Prov. 30:5; Ps. 119:96, 60; Matt. 5:18; Jn. 10:35; 17:17; Tit. 1:1, 2). God worked through the personalities of the Biblical writers in such a way that, without suspending their personal styles of

expression or freedom, what they produced was literally God-breathed. This revelation of God is propositional, plenary, and verbal. In other words, the Bible contains words that reflect a variety of literary forms to communicate truth; every part of the Bible is inspired, and every word chosen to communicate about God. When interpreting the Bible, it is important then to seek the intent of the author as the primary way by which we discover the meaning God intends for us in the Biblical text. Reading the text in its original context, as we focus on the intent of the author, is called the *grammatical-historical method of interpretation*. It is also important to remember that there is a redemptive aspect to interpretation, in which the text points us to Jesus (John 5:39-40; Luke 24:27). The central message of the Bible, if rightly interpreted, is ultimately about Jesus as God, our Savior, the object of our faith, forgiver of our sins, and giver of eternal life.

The Bible then, is *the complete revelation of His will for salvation* (Lk. 16:29-31; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Tim. 3:15) *and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged* (Ps. 119:44, 45, 165; Jn. 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:23). The complete revelation of God is seen in general and special revelation. General revelation includes: creation, common grace, and conscience. For anyone to have a saving knowledge of God, it is required that, in addition to general revelation, they must also receive and believe special revelation. There are two aspects of special revelation that we need: God revealing Himself in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and through the divinely inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. The words, “Sufficiency of Scripture” and “Sola Scriptura” have been used to describe the completeness and ultimate authority of Scripture. All truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly and implicitly in Scripture. The Bible is very clear concerning salvation. The life, death, burial, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ as the One who brings complete redemption, so that we can add nothing to His redemptive work, is clearly taught in Scripture. The words “inerrant” and “infallible” have been used to describe the full trustworthiness of the Bible. The Bible is without error in its form and content. The full inerrancy of the Bible must be maintained if we are to have confidence in the Bible as our only rule of faith and practice. God’s sovereign power to preserve His Word, so that we are not deceived, serves as a basis for restoring rationality to our radically irrational world in which anything goes. It is true that we cannot claim absolute certainty that we have the original inerrant text of the Bible. As we compare manuscripts, there are variants in the texts, but less than 1% of these variants affect the meaning of a text. Therefore, we can say with great certainty that *no central truth in God’s Word depends on a passage that is in any way dubious*. The modern translations of the Bible, if translated according to the best manuscripts we have, are reliable for us to understand God’s revelation about salvation and our spiritual life.

The Bible, therefore, *is to be believed in all that it teaches* (Matt. 22:29; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16), *obeyed in all that it requires* (Matt. 28:20; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:5), *and trusted in all that it promises* (Rom. 1:2; 4:21; Heb. 10:23; 2 Pet. 1:4; 3:13). The Bible does not touch on every aspect of human life but it is authoritative over every realm of human life. Because we humans are fallible, our interpretation of the Bible must not be seen as inerrant. The analogy of faith is the simplest principle of “hermeneutics”. It is a term that means that *Scripture is to be its own interpreter*. When we interpret, we allow the clear teachings of Scripture to interpret the less clear portions of

Scripture. However, we are encouraged to examine our interpretations in light of church history, being careful not to give more authority to church tradition or other church writings above the authority of Scripture itself, in all that it teaches. Our response to the Word of God begins with an attitude of humility. We are warned that knowledge by itself can lead to pride. Humility begins as we submit ourselves to the Author of the Bible, God Himself, responding to Him with a belief that reflects obedience. We dare not approach the Bible as we approach other writings, picking and choosing what we will believe and deciding what we will not believe. An encounter with the God of the Bible leads us to belief which requires faith and action. We can trust God. He is faithful to keep all of His promises to us. Everything that God reveals about Himself is rooted in His holy love. This revelation confirms that, without His holiness, the entire universe would collapse. This revelation confirms that His love reflects His heart to protect us, provide for us, and redeem us. We are to respond like the early followers of Jesus in Acts 2, after Peter preached the Word of God to them; they were cut to the heart, wanting to know how to be saved, and responding in faith and repentance, becoming followers of Jesus.

Article 3: The Human Condition—*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.*

What does it mean to be human? It is important that we allow the Creator to define the answer to this question. The truth that humans are different than the rest of the creation is clearly seen. We become what we believe about ourselves, and what determines one’s being is the image we adopt. Someone or something will determine how we see ourselves, and this view will affect everything in our lives. The doctrine of man must be rooted in the doctrine of God. We must always start with God, and then look at man through God’s eyes.

The Bible reveals that God *created the first humans, Adam and Eve, in His image* (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Col. 3:10; James 3:9). Our worth, dignity, and significance are defined by the truth that we have been made in the image of God. We were created by the Trinity to live in relationship with God and others. Unlike the animals who were made according to their “own kind”, we are created distinct from the rest of living things. We are moral beings, possess the ability to think rationally, ability to communicate, ability to love, ability to create, and to worship. Theologians over the years described the attributes of God as incommunicable, those attributes that only belong to God, and the communicable attributes that we have as God’s image bearers. The reason we are struggling so much today with issues related to gender identity confusion, cheapening the value of life, and stewardship of this world is that we have drifted away from our understanding that we were made in the *image of God* – made to reflect who God is in the world.

As we look around us, we know that something is not right in the world. When God created everything “very good”, there was peace (*shalom*) in this world. The Bible teaches that God created everything in this world in a perfect state, but then something changed it. In Genesis 3 we see that Adam and Eve *sinned as they were tempted by satan* (Gen. 3:1-6; Jn. 8:44; Rom. 5:12-14; 16:20;

2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14) and the result was the fall. Genesis 3 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible because it explains the source of sin and death, as well as the solution. Satan, a created being himself - a fallen angel who fell away from God because of pride - now seeks to destroy God's featured part of creation -- mankind. Satan does not want mankind to worship and trust their Creator. Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy, and so he tempted Eve to mistrust God's Word by changing its meaning. Eve chose to entertain the lies and was deceived by his crafty arguments. Satan accused God of being a liar and not good, tempting the pride of Adam and Eve by declaring they could be God. Idolatry is at the root of sin. In truth, they were already like God by the fact that God made them in His image and likeness. Eve's sin was one of commission, because she chose pride over humility and partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thus sinning against God. Tragically, Adam stood by silently while this was all going on, failing to lead his family toward God. His sin was that of omission, where he failed to do what God had created him to do -- lovingly lead his family. So Adam joined his wife's sin and ate as well, producing guilt, shame, distrust, fear, and separation between themselves and God, and between each other. God came looking for the man, holding him responsible for the sinful condition of his family as its head. Rather than repenting of his sin, Adam argued with God by blaming Eve for his sin, and blaming God for making Eve. Eve also failed to repent of her sin, and blamed Satan for deceiving her.

As a result of the fall and *our union with Adam as human beings, we are sinners by nature and choice* (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Isa. 6:5; Rom. 5:15; 8:5-8; Eph. 2:1-2; 4:17-19). The truth is that we are all linked to Adam: we share his image. This includes the way in which Adam's sin corrupted God's creation and all of his offspring, including you and me, and we are sinners as well, from the time of our conception. By nature, we are totally depraved. This does not mean that we are a bad as we can be, but that sin has corrupted every part of our nature. In Romans 5 we read the following truths related to our union to Adam as human beings: that through one man (Adam) we discover that sin and death came to all men because we have all sinned; we discover that through trespass and the disobedience of the one man (Adam) we all became sinners. Therefore, the corruption of Adam's nature, which resulted from his sin, is imparted to all his offspring. This is what we call *original sin*. The Bible teaches that human sin is universal, except for Jesus Christ. We are all guilty and need of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.

As a result of this truth, that we are sinners by nature and by choice, we are *alienated from God* (Rom. 5:10) *and under His wrath* (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:9-19; 3:23; Eph. 2:3). Sin produces death. Death is reflected in the word "separation". We are separated from God due to our rebellion and rejection of God. Separation, or alienation, is the consequence of sin. It is relational by nature. We have chosen to cut ourselves off from God's blessings and the life that is found in Him. The Bible uses the words "enemies of God". Again, we must go back to the one attribute of God that is foundational to everything: God is holy, holy, holy! God must condemn sin and He cannot have sin in His presence for He alone is righteous. Romans 1 reminds us that we have suppressed the truth of God, and rejected what He has clearly made known to us. Instead, we have not thanked God, glorified God, honored God, but have foolishly exchanged what is true about God with a lie, creating our own idols to worship. Because God is a jealous God, who does not want us to worship

anything or anyone other than Himself, the Bible states that the wrath of God comes upon us, since by His holiness He must judge sin. There are many consequences to sin, but the truth is that any false idol we worship will destroy us, and will cause us to face eternal condemnation, if we do not have Christ's righteousness imputed to us through His life, His finished work of the cross, and His resurrection.

In response to our hopeless condition, God offers a solution. *Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ* (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5) *can we be rescued* (1 Thess. 1:10), *reconciled* (Rom. 5:1, 2, 10; Col. 1:20), *and renewed* (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2). Romans 5:19 reminds us that just as through the disobedience of Adam we were made sinners, so also through the obedience of Jesus we were made righteous. What we have earned by our sin is *death*, but what we receive through the gift of God in Jesus Christ is *eternal life*. 1 Peter 3:18 tells us that Jesus Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous (Jesus) for the unrighteous (sinners like you and me) that He might bring us to God. Ultimately we have been saved by God and from God. We have been rescued from God's judgment which we deserve. This rescuing includes the penalty of sin which, without the righteousness of Christ being applied to our lives, would lead ultimately to eternal punishment. In 2 Corinthians 5 we read that, through Jesus Christ we have been reconciled to God, as God, through Jesus' finished work on the cross, is no longer counting our sins against us. Jesus, the One who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf, so that we would become the righteousness of God. Apart from Jesus Christ, we are dead in our trespasses and sins, without hope, and need of being renewed into life. He died and was resurrected so that those who are dead and in need of life will now live for Him who died and was raised for our sakes. Therefore, if we are in Christ, we are a new creation, renewed, no longer living for ourselves as dead men walking, but now are alive in Jesus Christ spiritually forevermore! Some final thoughts as it relates to God's salvation through Jesus Christ alone: If there was any other way of salvation, other than through Jesus Christ's choosing to come into this world, humbling Himself and taking on our humanity as fully God and fully man, suffering as He did -- if there was another way for God to save us -- short of sacrificing his only Son -- He would have done that. There was not. ***Jesus is the only way, the only truth, and the only life!!!*** Our attempt to save ourselves from the consequences of sin is folly. There is no other name under heaven through which we can be saved. There are plenty of false saviors out in the world - who are really not saviors at all - that come from misunderstanding the depth of our sin. God has warned us of living life apart from Him, just like He warned our first parents, Adam and Eve. Because God is holy, He must deal with our sin in a just way. Because God is loving, He has chosen to do so in a way that we could be forgiven and restored to right relationship with Him. The proper response to God and to our sin, in light of His holiness and love, is faith and repentance. Repentance is a gift that allows us to put our faith in the only One who gives us hope in the midst of our hopeless condition. Praise be to God for Jesus Christ!!!

Article 4: Jesus Christ—*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.*

It has been said that “Christianity is Christ” and that Christian theology is therefore an explanation of *who Christ is* and what it means to have faith in Him. Faith always has an object – someone or something to believe in – and therefore it is essential to know who Christ is and accepting what He has said about Himself, in order to have true and saving faith. The question Jesus asked of Peter, “Who do people say I am?” is still just as relevant today as it has ever been. Who we believe Jesus to be, and responding to Him, is the most important aspect of faith. A person’s eternal future is directly connected with one’s relationship with Him. So who is Jesus?

Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21; 16:18) *is God incarnate* (Jn. 1:14, 18; 1 Jn. 4:2), *fully God* (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:6; Jn. 1:1; 20:28) *and fully man* (Matt. 4:2; Lk. 2:40, 52; Jn. 11:35; Heb. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 1:1-3). The person of Jesus Christ entered into this world. The one who is eternal came to live in a broken world. In Jesus, God and man became one person. Jesus Christ was - and forever will be - fully God and fully man in *one* person. Jesus is the “God-man,” possessing all the essential qualities of both the divine and human natures. This unity is a supreme mystery. The unity of these two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ exists without confusion, conversion, separation, or mixture, with each nature retaining the essential qualities of its own. "Incarnation" means 'becoming flesh.' The opening chapter of John helps us understand Jesus' incarnation. In many respects, the incarnation is more of a miracle than the resurrection is, because in it, somehow, a holy God and sinful humanity are joined, yet *without the presence of sin*. Only if Jesus is God, is there hope, because He has all power and authority to redeem through forgiveness, resulting in salvation. *Only as God* did Jesus Christ have the ability to overcome our sin problem that separated us from Him, but *only as man* was he qualified to do so, as the only one who was perfect in His obedience to the law.

So let us look a little deeper into the truth that Jesus is *one Person with two natures* (Jn. 3:13; 10:30; 17:5). Theologians have used the word “*Kenosis*” meaning 'emptying' (Phil. 2:6-7) to help explain the “Hypostatic Union” of Jesus Christ, the term for the 'union of both natures' in Jesus Christ. In AD 451, the council of Chalcedon met to clear up the heresies which wrongly defined the humanity and divinity of Jesus. *Kenosis* describes the truth that Jesus, who was fully equal with God in every way and who was the very form of God, did not see that as something to keep in His grasp, but emptied Himself of that equal status and role to take on the status and role of humanity. He, who was and is God, took on the likeness of humanity. God (Jesus) became the “image of God” (man) for the sake of our salvation. Theologians describe this ‘emptying’ with the descriptive phrase *he laid aside the interdependent exercise of His divine attributes.* What this mean is that He did not continually exhibit the incommunicable attributes He possessed, such as His immortality, omniscience, or omnipresence, except at the leading of the Holy Spirit. Philippians 2:5-11 is an amazing section of Scripture which describes the incarnation. The Creator entering His creation to reveal God to us personally, identifying with our weaknesses, and dying for us as a humble servant. He lived as we must live—by the enabling power of God the Holy Spirit. I want to be clear; Jesus remained fully man and fully God during His incarnation, and maintained all of His divine attributes while depending on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Before I go on any further to add more to who Jesus is, it is important to know that through the early church, church history, and continuing today, the person of Jesus Christ is being attacked

through various heresies. I do not have time to expound on all of these heresies, although they center on the incarnation, seeking to destroy the “Hypostatic Union” of Jesus Christ. The list of those who have denied the full divinity of Jesus is long: the Ebionites, Socinians, Servetusites, Nestorians, Modalists, Monarchianists, Sabellianists, Unitarians, Social Gospel proponents, Liberal “Christians”, Arians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and more recently through the “Da Vinci Code.” The list of those who have denied the full humanity of Jesus is also long: Marcionites, Docetists, Gnostics, Modal Monarchianists, Apollinarian Pulicians, Monophysitists, New Agers, Eutychians, and even some protestant church denominations who so overemphasize Jesus’ deity that Jesus’ humanity is so overwhelmed by His divinity that he was largely not tempted to sin. We need to be aware of why this all matters ...Our salvation depends on it! If Jesus is not fully God *and* fully man - one Person in two natures - we are still in our sin!

Jesus is also Israel’s promised Messiah (Gen. 3:14-20; 12:1-3; 49:8-12; 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Matt. 1:1, 17; Lk. 4:16-22; 24:25-27; Jn. 1:41; 4:25-26; Acts 2:36; 13:23, 32; Rom. 1:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:8-9)—*was conceived through the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34-35) *and born of the virgin Mary* (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20; Lk. 1:34-35). The entire Bible is about Jesus. Throughout the Old Testament there were prophecies and promises which all pointed to Jesus as the coming Messiah. Jesus Himself said that everything written about Him as reflected in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms *must be fulfilled*. In fact, Jesus said that salvation is from the Jews; and from Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, salvation goes out to the whole world. Jesus’ miraculous conception is one of those prophecies which was fulfilled. Jesus Christ, being both fully divine and fully human, is revealed from the very beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit’s overshadowing Mary to bring conception is an act of creation—Jesus becomes the new Adam (Second Adam), untainted by sin, and thus able to be our Savior. The Creator became a creature in His creation, even as One who takes on the flesh of humanity, in order to provide a way for sin to be dealt with through His life and death - as the One who is a perfect sacrifice. The fact that He also, as a Holy Judge, is willing to be judged for our sin in order that we can be reconciled to God, should cause us to worship Him!

Jesus lived a sinless life (Rom. 5:19; Gal. 4:4-5; Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 4:15), *was crucified under Pontius Pilate* (Dt. 21:23; Ps. 16:10; Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:16; Jn. 19:16; Acts 2:27, 37), *and arose bodily from the dead* (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:39; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:20, 44-45; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). Jesus came to seek and save the lost; but how? The Bible is very clear that Jesus never committed a sin, even though He was tempted in every way. This enabled Him to die for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. In contrast to the first Adam who failed to obey, Jesus, the second Adam, obeyed completely and lived the life that humanity was incapable of living, due to our sinful nature. His obedience was both active and passive. His obedience was complete. His obedience was active, in that Jesus, as our mediator, observed the law perfectly on our behalf, as the necessary condition for obtaining eternal life. The active obedience of Jesus was necessary to make His passive obedience acceptable with God. His passive obedience is seen in that He subjected Himself voluntarily to sufferings and death, especially through the truth that He, who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf so that we could be righteous—WOW!!! He lived a sinless life to make salvation possible. The truth is that,

in order for Jesus to truly be our Savior, he had to be tempted as fully man. Jesus, however, never sinned. But Jesus, as fully God, cannot sin. Therefore we conclude that Jesus was and still is fully God. Jesus could not sin, yet as one who was fully man, He could be tempted to sin. We know that the crucifixion of Jesus was a historical event, carried out under the authority of Pontius Pilate, who served as the governor of the Roman rule in Judea. Crucifixion was prophesied as the way the Messiah would die, long before crucifixion was even devised as a way to execute people. It was a horrible way to die, but part of the way Jesus, as the Messiah, would fulfill His role as the suffering servant. Sin is horrible. It causes much pain, and no one has ever experienced the kind of pain that Jesus suffered on the cross for our sins. Yet His death was not the final word, for Jesus arose bodily from the dead, defeating the ultimate consequence of sin—death. The gospel is good news because of the resurrection—a life now immune from death. If Christ had not risen bodily from the grave, there would be no good news for any of us, because we would still be in our sin. The resurrected Jesus was forever united to humanity in this new bodily form. The resurrected Jesus changed everything, including the disciples, and provided true hope for all of us living under the curse of sin. Hallelujah!

After forty days, *Jesus ascended into heaven* (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:6-11; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16) *and sits now at the right hand of God the Father* (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22) *as our High Priest* (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 8:1) *and Advocate* (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1). This last section of the statement of faith concerning Jesus Christ gives us confidence as we continue to live in this world; confidence as we battle the world, the flesh, and the devil. As Jesus arose in a glorified body and ascended into heaven, it gives us confidence that we too will one day receive a glorified body, and receive the blessing of Jesus' sitting at the right hand of the Father. Jesus' position here provides the benefits of His Kingly rule with all power and authority over everything in our lives. His ascension and succession also provided the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, so that we can live the Christian life. His ascension and succession point to His role as our High Priest, who has offered one sacrifice for all time, reminding us that all of our sins - past, present and future - have been forgiven. Finally, His ascension and succession provide continual intercession for us as we follow Him in this world.

Therefore, we can live our daily lives with confidence as we place our faith in Jesus Christ. Because of who He is, only He can do what He does. Praise be to God for His great salvation on our behalf and for His glory!!!

Article 5: The Work of Christ—*We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.*

The most succinct summary of the gospel in Scripture is in 1 Corinthians 15. *“That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”* "Who Jesus is" moves quickly and inevitably to "What Jesus does". It is impossible to talk meaningfully about the person of Jesus Christ without talking about what He did and accomplished for us. When you begin to understand the work of Christ, it

leads to humility in our lives. Jesus, the God-Man, came to save His people from their sins. But why did Jesus choose to do this? In the answer to that question lies the essence of what salvation is all about. We are helpless to experience salvation apart from the work of Christ. So let us summarize Christ's work in the following statements from Article 5.

For salvation to be accomplished for us, *Jesus Christ was our representative* (Gen. 2:15-17; Matt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:45, 47; Phil. 3:9) *and our substitute* (Mk. 10:45; Heb. 2:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). To understand why Jesus has to be our representative and our substitute, we must understand God's holy love and our need. God is both holy and love. His holiness requires justice, and His love longs for relationship. This love leads to the action (salvation) which satisfies the requirements of justice, so that a relationship with a holy God can be achieved. The Bible makes it very clear that, because of our depravity, we are incapable of being holy. Our inability to provide what is necessary for salvation means that salvation must come from outside of us. The Bible describes the three roles necessary for salvation which Jesus Christ, as our representative, provides for us: Prophet, Priest, and King. A prophet is one who speaks for another. Jesus speaks for God; He represents God and thus is the one who speaks authoritatively. He declares that He is the way, the truth, and the life. In other words, there is no other way for salvation to be accomplished except through Him. Jesus as our priest becomes the mediator in two ways. First, by offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins, which the Old Testament priests could not; He is able to do this because He obeyed the law perfectly and shed His blood on behalf of others—Amazing! (I will get more into depth about this a little bit later as Jesus becomes not only the priest but the sacrifice itself.) As priest, He is also the One who intercedes for us. Finally, He is our King. Jesus, as Israel's true Messiah King, identifies Himself with His people and dies for them as their King, thus saving His people from their sins. It is clear from Scripture that in these three roles, salvation is accomplished for God's people, as Jesus becomes our substitute. We are born in solidarity with the first Adam as our representative head, having a sin nature resulting in spiritual death for us. In the same way Jesus, as the second Adam, is our representative and accomplishes what the first Adam could not, so that He, through His obedience and as our substitute, brings righteousness and life to us. Jesus lived the perfect life we cannot live, and dies to bring about the perfect sacrifice that we cannot give.

Not only is Jesus Christ our representative and substitute, but as such *shed His blood on the cross* (Lev. 17:11; Mt. 26:28; Heb. 9:14, 22; 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 12:10-11; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:23-24, 26, 28; 10:1; 13:11,12; Isa. 53:5-7, 12; Jn. 1:29; Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:5). I already alluded to some of these descriptions about our salvation, but let me add some more depth to what the Bible says about the basis for our salvation, and the reason Jesus' shed blood on the cross was necessary. Blood is mentioned some 362 times in the Old Testament and at least 92 times in the New Testament. Throughout Scripture, blood is inextricably connected with sin for two primary reasons. First, shed blood reminds us that sin results in death. Second, God is grieved by sin, which causes death. Leviticus 17:11 reminds us that *life is in the blood*. Blood is sacred, and is necessary for every sacrifice - the substitution of *life for life*. The theme of blood, like every theme of Scripture, finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus was described by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. This prophetic declaration was fulfilled

when Jesus was slaughtered on the cross where His blood flowed freely. The crucifixion of Jesus is the central point of the gospel story. The significance of Jesus' death, as compared to others who died on a cross, is that Jesus' death on the cross was sacrificial, perfect, and all-sufficient. His death was unique because Jesus was unique. He never sinned! He was perfect. His sacrificial death had to be complete and was indeed necessary if there was to be any hope of salvation for those for whom He died. This sacrificial death lacked nothing, as it fulfilled all the requirements of God's holiness and justice, providing the means of our salvation in every way and in every respect for all eternity. Our sins separated us from God. Although God did not have to save any people at all, in His love He chose to save some. God's justice made it necessary for Jesus to live the life He lived and die the death he died.

Let us finish this section on Christ's work by talking about *His atoning death* (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10) and *victorious resurrection* (Col. 1:13; 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15) *constituting the only ground for salvation* (Rom. 4:25; 6:4, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:20; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 1:19-20; 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:3). Jesus' work for us on the cross is called "atonement". In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement was the most important day of the year for the people of God with respect to their relationship with Him. It was a foreshadowing of the atonement God would bring through Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Of the many prophetic elements on this special day, which Jesus would fulfill in a complete way, the concepts of propitiation and expiation are especially important. A healthy goat, without defect, was chosen to represent sinless perfection, and was slaughtered by the high priest, taking on the guilt of the people, as a payment for sin so that God's just and holy wrath was satisfied – this is what propitiation is about. In the same way, Jesus became the true sinless perfect sin offering, sacrificed in our place. The wrath of God was placed upon Jesus so that you and I would not have to suffer the consequences of our sin. The word "propitiation" reflects more than six hundred related words and events in the Bible in which Jesus diverts the active wrath of our rightfully angry God away from us, so that we are loved and not hated. Propitiation then deals with the penalty for sin, whereas "expiation" deals with the cleansing from sin. Sin makes us unholy. Whether the uncleanness of sin is because we have sinned or someone sinned against us, we are in need of being cleansed—being made holy. The predictable result of being defiled because of sin is shame, including being found out and known. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, covered themselves in shame and hid from God and one another after they sinned. Jesus forgave our sins at the cross and cleansed us from all sins – both committed by us and what is committed against us. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has taken our sin away forever, as was foreshadowed by the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. This goat was sent away to run free in the wilderness, symbolically taking the people's sins with it. This is what expiation is all about. Our sin is expiated, or taken away, so that we are made clean through Jesus, who is our scapegoat. Another aspect of Jesus' atoning death is the word "redemption". To use a very Biblical concept, sinners are slaves. We are locked in a prison of sin and cannot get free. Redemption is synonymous with being liberated, freed, or rescued from bondage and slavery to a person or thing. Some have taught erroneously that Jesus died to *pay off* Satan, which is ridiculous, because Jesus *owes* Satan nothing. The theme of *God the Redeemer* is seen throughout Scripture. When Jesus was crucified and His blood was shed, it was so that we could be redeemed from the curse of the law, our sinful

flesh, and the power of sin. When Christ has set you free, you are free indeed. All of this reconciles us to God. Reconciliation is about relationship; specifically a broken relationship being restored. Jesus' atoning death provided a complete way for reconciliation to happen between a holy God and unholy people. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 it says that for our sake God made Jesus to be sin who was sinless so that in Jesus we, who are unholy, became the righteousness of God. But how? The word "imputation" is an important word as we understand the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:21, so that we can appreciate even more the salvation God has given us through Christ's atoning death for us. Becoming *the righteousness of God* is only possible through Jesus' perfect righteousness, reckoned to our account, so that we are counted as having kept the law flawlessly. This provides the basis for the maturing and conforming of our character, thoughts, and deeds to God's loving and perfect standard, until we perfectly meet that standard when we enter into the presence of God in heaven where there is no more sin. This is why we need the Holy Spirit to empower us to live the life described in the New Testament, that we may grow into that which God says we are in Christ. This leads us into the importance of the resurrection as 1 Corinthians 15:17 declares, that if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. Jesus' resurrection demonstrated His victory over sin and death and because we, by faith are in union with Him, His victory becomes our victory. In conclusion of this section, we see that His atoning death and victorious resurrection are the only ground for salvation. We have no hope in our sinful condition apart from the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, which is rooted in His atoning death and victorious resurrection. As 1 Corinthians 15 states in verse 2, it is by this gospel that we are saved. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves because He is holy and we are not; but Jesus chose to join our humanity to Himself so that as Judge He could take our place, who have already been judged. God did not need to do this, but out of His great love, He redeemed a people for Himself through the finished work of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. There is no other way in which man can be saved. We must put our faith in Jesus, and repent of placing our faith in any other false savior. He is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise!

Article 6: The Holy Spirit—*We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.*

The Bible reveals that God is One but in that oneness God has eternally existed as three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Because God is three distinct persons, the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Each of the persons of the Trinity is fully God. Because both the Father and the Son are God, it makes sense that all three are mentioned with equal importance throughout the Bible (ex: Matthew 28:19). That being said, in this present time in church history, there seems to be a neglect of the Holy Spirit within many evangelical churches. While I have observed this personally in my own church experience, many other current theologians agree with my assessment as well. There have been many sermons and books written on God the Father and God the Son, but not many on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is personal, and the church would not be able to accomplish anything apart from the Spirit's filling and

empowerment. The New Testament exhorts us to not to sin against the Holy Spirit, not to resist the Holy Spirit, and not to grieve the Holy Spirit. He is set forth as a person whom we may either please or offend, who can love and be loved, and with whom we can have personal fellowship. Simply put the Holy Spirit is God.

Let us look more closely at who *God the Holy Spirit* is and what is His work. I want to summarize the answer to this question by writing about some things that have been revealed about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person (Jn. 14:17; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). The Holy Spirit is eternal and holy (Jn. 14:16; Rom. 1:4; 5:5; Heb. 9:14). The Holy Spirit prays for us (Rom. 8:27). The Holy Spirit has emotions (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit is omnipotent (Zech 4:6), Omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), and Omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10). Beginning in the book of Genesis, we see God the Holy Spirit active in creation, and then trace His actions through the whole of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit anointed prophets, judges, and kings with power to do what God had called them to do. Yet in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit filled only certain people. When Jesus begins His earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit anoints Him. When Jesus rises from the dead, he prepares His followers to make disciples as they go into the world and do what He did. He tells His followers that before they do this, He must leave so that the Spirit can fill and empower them to live the Christian life. Jesus tells them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and fill them. In Acts 2 we read about Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit comes and fills not just some, as He did in the Old Testament, *but all*. In order for the church to live out its purpose to glorify God and make disciples, it must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we turn our attention to some specifics about the work of the Holy Spirit, we discover that *in all that He does, He glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ* (Jn. 16:14). The Holy Spirit brings glory to Jesus Christ by applying what Jesus accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection to our lives as believers. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son through convicting sinners of their sin and their need for a savior, by bringing the new birth in which we are united in Christ and adopted as God's children, and then empowering us to live the Christian life on a moment-by-moment basis. As the Holy Spirit works, He convicts the world of its guilt (Jn. 16:8; 1 Cor. 2:14). The need for conviction of our guilt before a Holy God is essential if we are to be converted. The Holy Spirit exposes our false hope in our own ability to accomplish any righteousness apart from Christ, and exposes our self-directed life that reveals our bondage. We are all under the judgment of God; but unless we see this, we will not repent and place our faith in Jesus Christ.

To accomplish salvation the Holy Spirit *regenerates sinners* (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; Tit 3:5; Jms. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3), *and in Him they are baptized* (Mk. 1:8; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13) *into union with Christ* (Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 5:19; 15:22b; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:22; 2:17; 3:28; Eph. 1:4; 2:12; 3:6; 4:32; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Thess. 4:16) *and adopted as heirs* (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; Tit. 3:7) *in the family of God* (Matt. 12:49-50; 2 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:14-18). All I can say after that list is, "Praise be to God!" There is so much here, so let us begin with understanding our need for regeneration. Regeneration is necessary because the Bible describes our condition as *hopeless and helpless to do anything to save ourselves...we are dead in our trespasses and sins*. If

you are dead, you cannot make yourself spiritually alive. Therefore, we need to be made alive by being born again, so that we can experience salvation or conversion. The way in which salvation happens has been argued theologically over the years, but I believe that the Holy Spirit Himself must first give us life, since we can never believe in our spiritually dead condition. The Holy Spirit brings spiritual life to us by applying the work of salvation in Christ as we are united to Christ eternally. Our union with Christ is mentioned some 170 times in the New Testament and gives us eternal security. In the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into our union with Christ. Let me clarify a few concepts related to this baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit involves uniting us in a spiritual way with Christ - taking what happened in Christ's life, death, and resurrection and applying all of His saving work to our lives. *It is a onetime experience.* The Bible also describes the work of the Holy Spirit as an "indwelling" because of our union with Christ. This does not mean that we somehow become God, but through the Spirit, Christ lives in us and we are in Him. Another way the Bible describes the work of the Holy Spirit is being *filled* with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is *not a onetime experience.* It is a repeated experience in the life of the Christian as we submit or yield to the Spirit's control. It is probably best described as *an empowerment to live the Christian life.* As a Christian, when we sin, we move from being under the Spirit's control to being controlled by the flesh, and as a result we grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, resulting in a break of fellowship, even though we remain in our relationship with God because of our union with Christ. The Bible describes our relationship with God in many ways. One of those ways is *walking by the Spirit.* The imagery is that living our daily lives as an ongoing, moment-by-moment fellowship with God through the Spirit's power. The result of this fellowship is *the fruit of the Spirit*, which is in contrast to choosing to live life in our own power and not submitting our lives to the Spirit's control, producing the fruit of the flesh – our sinful nature. Reflecting this close relationship with God, and walking by the Spirit, is the concept that we are adopted as heirs in the family of God. God chooses to adopt us as His children so that we know Him as Father. We are not sons and daughters of God because He is our creator, but by God's enabling grace as we come into a relationship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and place our faith in Him. When we do this, we enter into a new status as adopted children with all the rights and privileges that come with this new status. The Bible describes this as being an heir of all the promises of God...heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. This enables us to know the love of God the Father personally. We know Him as "Abba Father" or Daddy, as the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. This is amazing!

Finally, as we understand the work of the Holy Spirit we see that *He indwells* (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 3:16), *illuminates* (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4-15; Eph. 1:17-19; Phil. 1:9-11), *guides* (Jn. 16:13; Acts 15:28; Rom. 8:4, 14; Gal. 5:16, 18), *equips* (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-10; Eph. 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), *and empowers* (Acts 1:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:7) *believers for Christ-like living and service* (Acts 6:8; Rom. 8:4-6, 12-16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 3:3, 5; 5:22-23, 25; Eph. 2:22; 4:3; Phil. 2:1-2). I touched on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit already, but let me reiterate that this is necessary to live the Christian life, and happens at the time of new birth because of our union with Christ. The evidence of this indwelling is seen in the fruit of the Spirit being lived out, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit being used to build up the Body of

Christ, and making disciples of all nations. Some believe that some of the gifts of the Spirit have ceased and were only needed during the apostolic time, but that has not been my experience with the church around the world, nor through the testimony of many missionaries as they testify of the Spirit's work in all of the Spirit's fullness in their context and culture. While there have been abuses of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that does not mean that the Holy Spirit does not continue to work through all of the gifts that were evidenced in the first century. The Holy Spirit illumines believers, enabling us to understand and apply God's truth to our lives, because the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures now gives us understanding. The Holy Spirit guides, equips, and empowers believers to live the Christian life as well. As our Counselor, the Holy Spirit leads us into holiness, reflecting *Christ-likeness*, as we live our lives to the glory of God. It is also important to understand that the Spirit equips us to serve God and others, especially within the community of believers. The purpose of these gifts, as I stated earlier, is to build up the body of Christ, and therefore we need to be equipped to effectively use these gifts. The work of the Holy Spirit was promised in the Old Covenant and experienced in a limited way at that time, but the promise has been fulfilled in the New Covenant, and now the Holy Spirit empowers us to do what we are helpless to do in our own ability...conforming us to the image of Christ as we live the Christian life. Praise be to God for the gift and work of the Holy Spirit!

Article 7: The Church—*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.*

Jesus said that He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not be able to overcome it. The story of the Christian church, from its beginning as a handful of Jesus' followers, to what it is today, having a few billion followers, is amazing, and can only be explained by the power of God. Scripture tells us what the church is. The book of Acts is the historical account of the early church which was birthed out of Pentecost; and the true (universal) church of today, comprised of all of God's people in all times and places, is an amazing thing to reflect upon. By virtue of being a Christian, one becomes a member of the true (universal) church; local churches are smaller gatherings of the universal church where Christians assemble as God's people. The word for "church" in the Greek New Testament (*ekklesia*) means "gathering," "meeting," or "assembly." The Scripture reveals that the true church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:25; Heb. 12:28) *comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone* (Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 10:14). When we speak of the "True" church, it reflects the importance of distinguishing those who use the name "Christian" and are saved by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone, from those who use the name as a "religious term" and may not be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. The true church includes all those who are united to Christ by grace through faith, resulting in a righteous standing before God,

reconciled to Him and reconciled to one another. But let us be clear; only God knows who are His. An important word to understand concerning those who are part of the true church is the word, "justification." The gospel is the good news that God rescued sinners from condemnation through the work of Christ. It is a judicial term meaning 'we are declared righteous'. So how can this be? In Romans 3:21-25 we understand how this can be. The source of our justification is God's grace. It is unmerited. In other words, there is not one thing we can do to make ourselves righteous, because what we have earned is death - separation from God for eternity. But instead we are *justified by grace*. Grace is accomplished on our behalf through God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ. God, in the person of Jesus Himself is the sacrifice of atonement; Jesus acts as our righteous substitute, becoming sin on our behalf, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. Justification comes to us through faith in Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf. Faith connects us to God's salvation, not as a reward which we have earned, but simply becomes ours through faith, as we are now united with Christ, having received His righteousness. *His righteousness is credited to us*. WOW! I am still in amazement of God's love for us. Let me just say before I move onto the next part of this article, that one aspect of our justification by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone is that this truth has to be understood, not just on a personal level, but also in terms of our relationship with others who have been justified. We live in a time and culture in which there is so much emphasis on "the individual" that at times it can limit how we apply this in our relationship to others within the church. There is a communal reality to how we live because we have been justified by the grace of God.

The true church is *united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ* (1 Cor. 12:12-27), *of which He is the Head* (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19). Our union with Christ is indeed very personal, but it is also communal. The best word we can use to describe this is "family". Out of our union with Christ, God becomes our Father, thus creating a family of spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of His body, fellow members of that body along with every other believer who is also in union with Christ. Again, it is important to remember that the Holy Spirit makes this happen. This unity in Christ, leading to unity with one another in the body of Christ, recognizes that Christ is the Head. Jesus Christ as the Head, leads us and guides us so that we can experience both the unity and diversity that exists in our relationship with one another. Each believer is to serve the other in a community of love, and this is only possible if we are united under the authority of Christ as our Head. All authority has been given to Him as we make disciples of all people groups in the world. He is the only One that can bring this kind of unity to a world that is so divided because some people have chosen not to live under Jesus' authority.

His authority as the Head over all is to be experienced personally, but also *within local churches* (Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1, 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2), *whose membership should be composed only of believers* (Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:41, 47; 14:23; 20:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 9; 11:20; 12:13; 14:40; 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 10:25.) As I said earlier in this article, the true church includes the universal church, which is comprised of all of God's people in all times and places, but generally in the New Testament, "the church" denotes a local gathering of believers in one place. These locally-gathered believers have committed themselves in a covenant of love with each other as they serve Christ together for the sake of the gospel. If

this is true, then membership in a local church should be comprised only of believers. If the local church is part of the true church, then only those who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone can be members of that local church. In other words, only Christians can be members. Membership is a recognition of the corporate body of Christ that a person's confession of faith in Christ for salvation is authentic; we also recognize that some may appear to be saved but in reality are not...ultimately only God knows. Membership is important because it reflects a relational commitment to one another. People make a covenant with one another which reflects the marks of membership found in the New Testament, especially as it relates to all of the "one another's." Unfortunately, many churches seem to think membership means simply putting your name on a membership list, giving an offering, and attending a service once a week or whenever it fits into the schedule. The Bible describes membership in relational terms - members of one body and as members of the household of God - so that God's people live as a gospel community and help one another grow in Christ, and seek to reach others with the gospel as they commit to fulfilling the Great Commission, making disciples of all nations. Jesus as Head and Chief Shepherd of His church has also given leadership of His church to under-shepherds who submit themselves to Jesus' loving Lordship in all things. This leading encapsulates how we govern and steward His church under His loving authority. There are different governing structures seen in Scripture that have been used throughout church history. The governing structure of congregationalism believes that Jesus Christ is the Head of every local church, so congregationalism is not a democracy but always submits to Jesus as Head. One of the truths that is the basis for congregationalism is the *priesthood of all believers* (1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6, 5:9). This does not mean that there are not designated leaders within the church like Pastors, Elders, and Deacons, as well as other leadership positions. Leaders are necessary for the local church to function in an orderly and unified way, guiding towards Christ's purposes for that local congregation. In recognizing that each local church is autonomous, it is recognized that we must live *interdependently*, seeking to work with other local churches to fulfill God's purposes together, because we are still one body in Christ. Therefore, denominations and associations do have value in promoting common interests, especially as they relate to fulfilling the Great Commission, so that what Jesus prayed in John 17 can and will be fulfilled as we are one body in Christ. There is much more that could be said about this, but let us move to the final portion of this article.

Since Jesus is the Head of the Body of Christ, the One with all authority, we recognize that the *Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism* (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12) *and the Lord's Supper* (Matt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26), *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* (Jn. 6:55-56; Acts 2:38; 8:39; 16:34; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:29-30; Col. 2:12). We acknowledge that the gospel is at the center of the church. Proclaiming the gospel is a mark of the true church. This proclamation of the gospel includes the preaching of the Word of God, as well as the proper administration of the ordinances (sacraments) of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Jesus mandated the practice of these two ordinances as an expression of the covenant of grace. This does not mean that the ordinances *contain* grace but they *represent* God's grace in Christ that He accomplished for the believer. They

visibly express the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ as we use water, bread, and the fruit of the vine to represent aspects of the gospel of grace. We get to be reminded and experience physically as water is applied to our bodies, or in the tasting of the bread and cup, pointing us to the gospel of grace. We need to be aware of our tendencies to make the *signs or physical elements* our focus, leading us to erroneously believe, as some in the history of the church have, that simply partaking of the sign is the means of experiencing salvation. We are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, and the signs used in the ordinances point us to this reality. We never want to minimize the ordinances as a way to confirm and nourish the believer when they are taken by faith. Even though the ordinances are not the *means* of salvation, there is a spiritual benefit when we connect the ordinances to the gospel, and respond in repentance, thanksgiving, and praise, which leads us to worship God with our lives. Let me focus for a bit on the two ordinances and their meaning as they communicate God's grace to us.

In our local church context we practice both infant baptism (covenant perspective) and believer's baptism (credo perspective). We know that our local church is unique in this. Our perspective on baptism should not prevent our unity in the gospel, since there are godly theologians on both sides of this issue who have sought to interpret God's Word with integrity. We have come to this practice because we recognize, after studying Scripture, that there is Scriptural evidence for both practices. We therefore encourage our people to study Scripture, and whatever they chose concerning baptism, to make sure it is based on faith. We need to emphasize that the practice of baptism, especially that of infant baptism, does not *contain grace* but it affirms the *covenant of grace*. We need to focus on the promise of the gospel for the baptism of children of believing parents, and hold that these children will one day need to personally profess Christ as their Savior (Acts 2:39, 16:15, 33; Colossians 2:11-12). In believer's baptism, the believer publically proclaims their faith to God and promise to follow Christ all the days of their life. It represents our union with Christ (Romans 6). We are called to make disciples by baptizing (Matthew 28: 19) and so we are to follow Christ's mandate to baptize. The mode of baptism does not seem to be as important (immersion, pouring, or sprinkling) as what that baptism means, concerning union with God through Christ, and all that pertains to it.

When Jesus gathered His disciples to celebrate the Passover in the upper room, He redirected them to Himself as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. This change is what we celebrate as New Covenant believers in the Lord's Supper, or Communion. The meaning of the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's death and is meant to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes back again. In this act of remembrance and proclamation, we experience our union with Christ in His death, as well as His resurrection, both personally and corporately. Throughout church history, the precise nature of our communion with Christ as we celebrate the Lord's Supper has differed. The Roman Catholics practice *transubstantiation*, which is a belief that the bread and fruit of the vine possess a real physical reality of the presence of Christ. The Lutherans practice *consubstantiation*, which is the belief that although the bread and cup remain the same, a real presence of Christ is present...itis in--with--under the physical elements. The Memorialist view is a belief that the bread and the cup are *merely symbolic* and is to be seen as *an act of remembrance with no real spiritual presence*. The final view is the *spiritual presence* view of the Lord's Supper.

I saved this for last because this is the view we hold to as a church. It is a belief that, although there is not physical presence of Christ in the elements, there is a real spiritual presence of Christ experienced as we partake of the elements in communion with Him, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, within the current culture in which we are called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of His Church, there is an erroneous perspective that you can be a faithful Christian without being a member of a local church. It is a very individualistic view, rooted in selfishness and consumerism. In Ephesians 5:25 we are reminded that Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her...we are the Bride of Christ. He loves and serves His Bride, despite all her faults and flaws as His Bride. Those who disengage from the church, because of her faults and flaws, may need rethink this perspective. As we strive to follow Jesus, we are to love as He loves, and serve the church as He does, because this is what Jesus does and how He loves!

Article 8: Christian Living—*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 of 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.*

Jesus said that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, so repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:14). Paul said that everyone should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance (Acts 26:20). So the Christian life is rooted in the gospel and requires repentance and faith as a lifestyle. We are continually repenting and replacing unbelief with faith, as we mature into who we are in Christ, following Him as a disciple who can make disciples. This involves change and is a lifelong process; becoming more and more like Christ (Romans 8:28-30). This is the Christian life.

There are some important truths at the heart of the Christian life. First, *that God’s justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose* (Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33, 35; Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 5:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 5:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Tit. 3:5; 1 cor. 6:11, 14; 1 Pet. 1:15; Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:1, 14; Rom. 6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Js. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). God is a *redeeming* God. Our redemption for His glory begins with our conversion, when God justifies us and adopts us as His children. *Justification* is God’s work on our behalf; God declares us righteous before Him—it is a legal term in which God gives us a legal standing before Him. This legal standing before a Holy God is only possible because of His grace. We cannot do anything to earn it. His justifying grace makes it possible for us to be adopted as members of His family—WOW! God’s redemption includes His work, not just at conversion, but also His desire for us to progress and mature in our Christian life through sanctification. *Sanctification* is the process by which we become *more like Christ*. This process involves dealing with habitual sin as we grow in holiness through repentance and faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cooperate with God in this process of sanctification which began when we

were justified before God, and now continues until we die and are glorified. Sanctification includes the truth that we were created for good works. The good works we do cannot justify us, but rather reflect our love for God, and reveal that we are truly saved. The assurance of our salvation is rooted in both our justification and our sanctification. When the Scriptures talk about faith, it is in two directions. Faith has an object, and at the point of conversion there is an acknowledgement of faith that focuses on the truth of who God is, our sin, and our need for a Savior, which is reflected in the phrase that we are *justified by faith*. We also recognize that we live the Christian life by faith as a *lifestyle*. This faith is reflected when we trust God with everything in our lives as the only way to live the Christian life, including the commandments of God, which we follow by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our sanctification reflects the truth we believe that the commands of God are for our good. They are not burdensome but reflect God's will for our lives. His commands are meant to protect us and provide for us. So *God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially* (Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27) *and to live out our faith with care for one another* (Rom. 12:10; 14:13; 15:7, 14; Gal. 5:26; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 3:12; 5:11, 15; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:9), *compassion toward the poor* (Dt. 15:11; Psa. 82:3-4; Psa. 140:12; Prov. 14:21, 31; 19:17; 22:9, 16, 22-23; 28:8; 29:7; 31:8-9; Jer. 22:16; Gal. 2:10; Js. 1:27), *and justice for the oppressed* (Ex. 23:6; Lev. 19:15; Psa. 82:3-4; 140:12; Prov. 29:7; 31:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 9:24; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10; Matt. 23:23; Luke 4:18). We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This act of worship is in response to His love for us. As Image-bearers, we were made to worship Him, and that image which was marred because of sin is now being restored in Christ. God's love for us and our love for Him compels us to love others sacrificially. We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us, and this demonstration of love will be a witness to the world of *who Jesus is*. Because there are so many expressions given in the Scripture of what it means to love one another, we do not need to *figure out* what it means – it is plain to see. God's heart for people who are hurting, like the poor and oppressed, is to be our heart as well. It is more than just feeling sorry for them, regardless of whether they are inside or outside the church; it is reflecting compassion to the extent that we must get involved, so that needs are met. Identifying with those hurting and in need, and meeting their needs, will cost us something, and may include the possibility of suffering ourselves. Yet this is the kind of love God calls us to; a love that reflects our Lord Jesus Christ, who was willing to give everything so that we could be saved by a Savior who meets our deepest needs.

The kind of sacrificial love we are called to reflect includes the realization that we are in a spiritual battle to live this way. *But with God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name* (Eph. 6:10-18), *we* (Heb. 3:13; 10:25), *are to combat the spiritual forces of evil* (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:11; 2 Tim. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:3-4). There is spiritual opposition to the gospel being advanced in us and through us. We are told that our battle is not with flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces. The Bible is very clear that we are in a battle with the world, our flesh, and the devil, and that God provides us with the weapons to overcome these enemies. God's Word is truth that can help us battle the devil's schemes of using lies and deception to enslave us. The Spirit's power is also necessary in order to overcome our enemies. We see a connection between God's Word and

the Spirit, working together to defeat the work of the devil, to help us overcome temptation in our flesh, and to overcome the world as it seeks to conform us into its image. As we encounter the spiritual forces of evil, we understand how important prayer is in this battle. Prayer reflects dependency and faith, because we are acknowledging that God acts when we pray. Our prayers are in the *name of Jesus*, the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth, including over all the spiritual forces of darkness. A John Piper quote about prayer has been very insightful in regards to prayer in my life is, "We do not know what prayer is for until we understand that life is war!" Because Jesus is Lord, we know that even though there are times when we lose some battles along the way and get discouraged, Jesus has won the war. We *will* have trouble in this world but Jesus has overcome it—Hallelujah, AMEN!

Finally, the Christian Life is about living out the Great Commission with an "Everyday commandment" heart. So *in obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people* (Matt. 28:19; Jn. 20:21; Rev. 7:9), *always bearing witness to the gospel* (Acts 1:8) *in word and deed* (Matt. 5:13-16). Jesus invites us and commands us to make disciples who can make disciples. In the local church in Fond du Lac where I pastor, we discovered that we have to agree on a definition of "disciple" that moves us past the simple idea of just being a "learner". As we prayerfully studied the passage in Matthew 28:16-20 in the context of the gospels, we defined a disciple as: one who worships Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, who dependently obeys Jesus in all of life, and leads others to do the same. We describe discipleship as *the process of leading people to increasingly submit all of life to the loving Lordship and empowering presence of Jesus Christ*. We are called to make disciples as we go throughout our "everyday", by sharing the gospel in word and deed, leading others to Christ through grace-filled repentance and faith, and baptizing them as a declaration that something about their life has changed and they are now identified with Him. We teach them to obey all that Jesus commanded and we live confidently in the promise that Christ's presence is with us always. In the book of Revelation, we see that God will save people from every tribe, language, people group, and nation, and that God has made them a Kingdom and priests to serve our God. We are to join God in this mission. The Kingdom of God is about God's rule and reign in *every aspect* of life. This will not be fully realized until Jesus comes back again and establishes the new heaven and new earth. Therefore, until that happens, we must seek to demonstrate, through word and deed, the blessing of God's rule - His loving Lordship in all aspects of life - so that people can taste and see that the Lord is good, and that the *shalom* of God is possible.

The Christian life involves transforming all that we are, our entire being, into the likeness of Christ. It is a process. There is no distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple. They are one in the same. Maturing into who God says we are in Christ is a lifelong journey of grace-filled repentance and faith. As a disciple, you cannot impart to others what you do not possess, therefore, as we become multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ, we desire to reflect and multiply the true character and conduct of Jesus. What a privilege God gives us to join Him in His work of making disciples of all nations through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Article 9: Christ's Return—We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious (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.

When it comes to the doctrine of eschatology, there have been many heated arguments about aspects of Christ's return. Even though there have been disagreements about specific interpretations surrounding Christ's return, especially as it relates to the millennium, there is much we can all agree on. I'd like to bring to light some things that most Christians agree on, as well as those where Christians differ, relating to aspects of Christ's return.

We believe in the personal, bodily (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7) and premillennial (Rev. 20:1-10) return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:31; Tit. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:11-21). The Lord Himself will come - not just some 'spiritual presence' of Jesus. Not only that, but He will come again in bodily form, designed for the new heaven and the new earth, which we will also receive when we meet Him face to face. Before Christ returns, many signs will proceed the time of Christ's return - things like: the gospel being preached to all nations, tribulation, appearance of many false prophets and false Christs, signs in the heavens, many Jews coming to Christ, and the involvement of the antichrist. Regardless of the differences in interpretation of these events, Scripture is clear that the exact timing of the personal and bodily return of the Lord Jesus is a mystery. There will be events that will happen when Jesus returns including: judgment of unbelievers, rewards for believers, receiving a new glorified body, worship that is unending, and the presence and consequences of sin will be no more. One area of differing interpretation among sincere Christians concerns the *millennium*. The word "millennium" means 'one thousand years'. The source of debate over which interpretive view of the millennium is accurate comes primarily from Revelation 20. Let me share a brief summary of millennial views, giving extra attention to the EFCA's "premillennial" view, and including my current positions on these interpretations.

The church I grew up in held the "amillennial" view of Christ's return. This position interprets Revelation 20 as a description of the *current church age*, in which there is no future millennium yet to come. Those who hold to the amillennial view interpret the thousand years as *figurative*, meaning that it represents a very long time where God is at work to complete His purposes before Christ returns. Essentially, those who hold this view believe that all of the end-time events will happen at once, immediately after Christ's return. At Christ's return, there will be one resurrection of believers and unbelievers, the final judgment will take place, and the new heaven and new earth will forever be the new reality as we enter into the eternal state. There is, of course, much more to this view, but let us proceed to the *postmillennial* view.

There was a time in my journey of understanding end times theology when I strongly considered this postmillennial view as my position. I was attending a church that held to this position, and I was reading a lot about the Kingdom of God. Those with this view of the millennium believe that there will be such progress of the gospel, that gradually a millennial age of peace and righteousness

will be the norm. Being a very optimistic person, this view appealed to me. This time of peace under Christ's reign, although not a literal thousand years, will eventually lead to Christ's return to earth. At His return, believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will happen, the new heaven and new earth will be established, and the eternal state will occur. Again, this is a brief overview of this interpretation, and much more could be explained, but let us go forward to a few other interpretive views of Revelation before proceeding to the premillennial view.

The "preterist" view of how we interpret the book of Revelation holds that the events described happened during the time John was alive, and also includes a few future aspects yet to come. The "historicist" view interprets the events in the book of Revelation as happening from the time of the Apostles to the end of the age; while others interpret the book of Revelation as symbols reflecting spiritual truths during the age of the church. Lastly, the "futurist" view interprets the book of Revelation as events still to come, at the writing of this book. The reason I bring these interpretations up before we focus on the premillennial view, is that I believe that throughout church history, all of these interpretations have had some influence on the premillennial position.

The *premillennial* view has a few different variances to it, depending on one's view of the tribulation. However, I will keep to the main tenets of this view. From this interpretation, the present church age will continue, but towards the end of this age, a period of great tribulation and suffering will come to earth; some believe that there will be a rapture of the church before this time of great tribulation. Many believe that during the tribulation, a great harvest of Jewish people will come to trust Christ as their Messiah. After the tribulation, which will usher the end of the church age, Christ will return to establish a millennial Kingdom. When Jesus returns, believers who have died will be raised from the dead and they will reign with Christ on earth for a thousand years. (Some premillennialists hold to the understanding that the thousand years could be symbolic.) Believers will receive their new resurrected bodies to live on the earth and reign with Christ. Some of the unbelievers who live on the earth during this time will have an opportunity to come to Christ and be saved. During this time, satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit, so he cannot deceive others during the millennium. At the end of the thousand years, satan will be freed to influence unbelievers and he will gather them for a battle against Christ, but they will fail. Christ will then raise the unbelievers who have died, and they will stand before Him for the final judgment. After this judgment, all those in Christ will enter into the eternal state in the new heaven and new earth.

Finally, some premillennial perspectives regarding the nation of Israel. "Historic" premillennialists believe that the promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ and in the church. Pre-tribulation premillennialists (mostly from a dispensational interpretation of the Bible) emphasize the continuation of the significance of the nation of Israel as distinct from the church. As we look at Romans 11:25-27, there are four primary views concerning how to interpret Israel being saved. "All Israel will be saved" is interpreted in a spiritual sense that would include both Jews and Gentiles who are of the true church. "All Israel will be saved" could be interpreted as God saving those Jews who are predestined for salvation. "All Israel will be saved" could be referring to the time in the millennial kingdom when there will be a great harvest of Jews who believe that Jesus

is the Messiah. Finally, “All Israel will be saved” is interpreted as all the elect of Jewish descent experiencing salvation.

Finally, let me share my current view about Christ's return. Concerning Article 9, I have found it interesting that the EFCA seeks to unify around the major doctrines of Scripture, while allowing some flexibility in interpretations within these doctrines. However, over the years, the theologians within the EFCA have chosen to include a definitive position on the millennium; specifically the premillennial position. That being said, it appears to me that the premillennial view of eschatology, which the EFCA has chosen as distinctive, has some flexibility within it. My current position is closest to the premillennial position, although as I stated earlier, this has not always been my viewpoint. Through my study of Revelation 20:1-10 in a much more definitive way, I was not satisfied with how the amillennial and postmillennial views interpreted this chapter. When you read Revelation 20 in the context of Revelation 19-22, it seems that there is a sequence of events which includes the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom after He comes again (Revelation 19:11-21). Whether or not it is a literal thousand years or a long period of time does not seem to be as important as the events surrounding this establishment of the millennial kingdom. After the second coming of Jesus, satan is bound (Revelation 20:1-3) ushering in a time of *shalom*. At the beginning of the millennium, Christians receive their resurrected bodies (Revelation 20:4-6). The final defeat of satan begins with his release from his prison, as he seeks to deceive more people and gather the deceived for a battle against the Lord. He ultimately meets his final defeat and is forever punished, along with the resurrection of unbelievers, for the final judgment (Revelation 20:7-10).

In summary, my position acknowledges the premillennial view of Revelation 20 as stated in the previous passage. Christ will return in glory. Believers and unbelievers will be resurrected from the dead. A final judgment will take place. The righteous in Christ will be rewarded with eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. Satan, and all those who do not have Christ's righteousness imputed to them, will be condemned to eternal judgment.

The last part of this article says that *the coming of Christ, will come at a time known only to God* (Matt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32), *demands constant expectancy* (Matt. 24:42-51; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Js. 5:8-9; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 3:3) *and, as our blessed hope* (Tit. 2:13), *motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission* (2 Thess. 1:6-8; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:28; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10-14). This last section is fairly straight forward, beginning with our need for humility, as well as a real urgency in how we live *every day*, since no one knows the exact time of Christ's return. His return fills us with hope and gives meaning to each day. We experience a longing when we think about Christ's return, which is reflected in wanting others to know Christ, so as believers they too can have the same hope we have. Christ's imminent return helps us live our lives with an eternal perspective, recognizing that judgment is coming. Therefore, we are to reflect the heart of Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost, so they may know Him and worship Him. As Revelation 22:20 reminds us, Jesus is coming soon. Our hearts say, “Come Lord Jesus.”

Article 10: Response And Eternal Destiny—*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.*

Over the last decade there has been much talk about the gospel in the evangelical circles. The “Gospel Coalition” has come out of this movement. Answering the question, “What is the gospel?” is important, because our answer to that question has eternal consequences, and impacts how we will live in this life.

*We believe that God commands everyone everywhere (Acts 17:30; 20:20) to believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 6:29; 8:24; 11:26; 14:1; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22; 10:14; Gal. 3:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 Jn. 3:23) by turning to Him in repentance (Isa. 55:6-7; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19; 14:15; 17:30; 20:21; 26:17-18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-10) and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:12). The gospel is the good news that God has come to rescue sinners through the life, death, resurrection, and return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When it comes to the gospel, the issue is unbelief. In fact, I believe that every one of us, at least in some areas of our lives, live in unbelief. Do not misunderstand me - the Bible is very clear that there are some who are regenerate children of God and others are not yet. There are those who have been given new life by grace through faith in Jesus. They have become new creations and are called to live a grace-filled repentant life. Others however, who are still dead in their sins, are not yet truly alive in Jesus Christ. But we, as new creations in Christ Jesus, can fall into unbelief. We still have places in our lives where we don't believe God; areas where we do not believe that what God accomplished through Jesus Christ is enough to deal with our past, what we are presently facing, or even moments in our future. The gospel is *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*. We never outgrow our need to believe in the gospel. This belief must be connected with the truth of who God is, who we are, and our need for Christ as we live our daily lives. Belief must include a personal response of trust or reliance on God, which includes repentance. Repentance is a *change of mind* that leads to trusting God, resulting in actions that reveal this change. We are saved by grace through faith, but repentance is a prerequisite of faith. We turn away from what we previously trusted in and turn toward God and trust Him. There is a personal reality to repentance and faith which is described as *having a personal relationship with Christ*. Jesus Christ is the *Savior who saves us from our sin* and is our *Loving Lord who leads us*—this is extremely personal. Eternal life, as Jesus described in John 17:3, is not so much about a place, as it is about knowing God relationally. The Bible is very clear that there is no salvation apart from Christ, so responding to the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ through repentance and faith is *essential*. We must respond personally to Jesus – which includes sharing the good news of the gospel with all those that come across our path.*

We also believe that God will raise the dead bodily (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:13) and judge the world (Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 26:31-32; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 12:2), assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal

conscious punishment (Matt. 25:46; Lk. 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:11; 21: 6, 8; 22:14-15), *and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord* (Matt. 25:34, 46; Jn. 14:2; Rev. 21:1-3), *in the new heaven and the new earth* (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rom. 8:19-21; Heb. 12:26-27; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:3), *to the praise of His glorious grace* (Eph. 1:6, 12). Amen. Because God is a redeeming God, the Bible describes our future destiny after we die as the resurrection of the body. He will recreate our body, not only our eternal soul. The resurrected body, in terms of the unbeliever, is somewhat a mystery. We only know that *for the believer*, the resurrected body will be like that of Jesus. We are warned that for us as believers, it is appointed once to die, and then comes the judgment. God is Holy, and with His holiness comes the necessity for judgment. His judgment gives us hope that His justice will prevail and that our lives have meaning. According to the Bible, Christians will face the *judgment seat of Christ*...we will give an account of how we lived our lives, resulting in degrees of reward, but we need not fear being eternally condemned, because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1) However, the *Great White Throne Judgment*, mentioned in Revelation 20, is a judgment that all those who are not in Christ should fear. Unbelievers will stand before a Holy and righteous God and receive punishment for what they had done. The destiny of the unbeliever is condemnation to a state of eternal punishment...hell. Hell is described as a place of burning fire, as a place of darkness away from God's presence, and a place of destruction in which there is eternal conscious punishment. Hell is unending for the unbeliever. It is a constant awareness of their choice and its consequences, and their punishment results in being alienated from God. As believers, we experience eternal, unending joy with a blessedness that is indescribable. Believers who die before Christ returns have assurance of being with Christ in heaven, but the fully redemptive purposes of God will not be complete until their bodies are resurrected. Heaven is described as a place where the presence of God is manifest - a place of unceasing joy, a place of overwhelming love, a place where the consequences of sin and death are no more, and a place where God's glory and beauty is continually on display. After Christ's millennial reign and the final victory over satan is complete, the divide between heaven and earth will be no more, and the *shalom* of God will be our reality. The culmination of this is the great multitude of the redeemed - from every nation, tribe, people, and language - gathered to worship the only One worthy to receive all glory to the praise of His glorious grace. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Pastoral and Personal Section

Current Doctrinal Issues

1. My Beliefs about Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, Gender, and Sexuality

I believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God and as such, one's biological sex is not to be rejected (Genesis 1:26-27).

I believe that marriage has only one meaning: the uniting of one biological man and one biological woman in a single, exclusive, life-long union which is generative in nature, as delineated in

Scripture (Genesis 2:18-25). I believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Corinthians 6:18, 7:2-5. Hebrews 13:4).

I recognize that there are diverse of viewpoints on divorce and remarriage as we read the Scriptures. I believe Scripture teaches that divorce is permitted under the limited circumstances of: unrepentant adultery and decisive abandonment. In these cases, I believe that the marriage truly ends, and the reconciliation-desiring, aggrieved spouse is free to remarry in the Lord. (Matthew 19:1-12, 1 Corinthians 7)

I believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is contrary to Biblical teaching (Matthew 15:18-20, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

I believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who seek His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, as we repent of any expression of sexuality outside of God's design. The gospel of grace in Jesus Christ is the power of God to change anyone (Acts 3:19-21, Romans 1:16-17, 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

I believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31, Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture. I believe Jesus would be welcoming to those who struggle to overcome sin, including sexual sin, but *not affirming of sin*. Therefore, I want to follow His example. All of us are in need of the grace of God.

I believe that, in order to preserve the function and integrity of any local church where I serve as pastor, I must provide a Biblical role model to the members of that local church and to the community of which that church is a part. Therefore, it is imperative that persons employed by, are in leadership in, or who represent the local church I pastor, must agree and abide by these beliefs on Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Gender, and Sexuality (Matthew 5:16, Philippians 2:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

2. My Beliefs about the Sanctity of human life issues

I believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image (Genesis 1 & 2). Human life is to be valued and protected in all of its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every stage or condition, from conception to natural death (Psalm 139). Therefore I will defend, protect, and value, all human life.

3. Role Distinctions for Men and Women in the Home and the Church

I am a complementarian; therefore, based on my understanding of Biblical teaching, I believe that men and woman were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in manhood and womanhood. Men and women were made to *complement each other* and not compete with each other, or be interchangeable in how they live out God's creative design. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order,

however, because of the fall, sin entered the world and began to distort God's created design. I believe that male headship and servant leadership in the family and church is God's design, but that God gives to men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men. Therefore, I do not believe women should be ordained to the office of Pastor and Elder, based on my understanding of the Biblical text (Gen. 3; 1 Cor. 11:3-16; 14:33b-36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7). For more of my beliefs regarding this area of theology, I subscribe to "The Danvers Statement" on Biblical manhood and womanhood which I believe reflects accurately the role distinctions of men and women in the home and the church.

4. Theology of Worship

My whole paper could be written on just this area of worship. So let me share a few things related to my beliefs about worship by answering some basic questions.

What is worship? True worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him (John 4:23). I believe that worship is not merely an aspect of who God created us to be, but is at the core of our being as God's image-bearers. As a result, *all of life* is ceaseless worship (Romans 12:1-2). This means that, although worship can include corporate church gatherings, singing songs, etc., it is not *limited* to these expressions, because *worship never stops*. We are not 'created to worship', but I believe we are 'created worshipping.' Everyone, everywhere, all the time, is always worshipping. Worship is the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do, and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen god. Hebrews 13:15-17 reveals that worship includes: praise, proclamation, service, participation, sacrifice, and submission.

What is idolatry? Idolatry is the opposite of worship. Every human being...at every moment of their lives and into eternity is either worshipping the One true God or is involved with idolatry. Idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Bible. The underlying foundation of idolatry is the lie that says: I am god; you can become god; you are part of a god; you are worthy of worship as a god; I can become the source of life and meaning for myself and others; and I can transform myself and the world I live in apart from the One true God. Romans 1:18-32 contrasts the lie of idolatry and its manifestations with the truth of worship. The lie that there is no distinction between the Creator and the creation, or *monism*, is at the root of much of the idolatry and pagan religions of the world.

What is required in corporate worship? The very nature of the Trinity is relationship. Because we are made in the image of God, I believe that the Holy Spirit, which indwells the believer, gives the individual worshipper a deep desire to worship God with other worshippers. In fact, we see this throughout the book of Revelation. (On a side note, I believe that the book of Revelation is primarily about worship.) I believe that corporate worship is essential to our personal growth, brings joy, is a witness to the world, provides the completeness of the Body of Christ in its various expressions, and provides the opportunity to experience His manifest presence. I believe God must be worshipped as *He* wishes, not as we wish. When it comes to worship, which is all of life, both

personally and corporately, the God of the Bible cares about both what we do and why we do it. If we are not engaged in personal worship throughout the week, it will affect our worship corporately. I have sought to follow seven principles for corporate worship which I have learned during my days in seminary:

1. Corporate worship is to be God-centered (Matthew 4:8-10). Since we are prone to worship ourselves as idols, corporate worship must focus on what gives God pleasure; asking the question, "What did God receive from me as a worshipper?"
2. Corporate worship is to use language that is understood by God's people (1 Corinthians 14:1-12). We must understand what we are singing and hearing as the word is being preached.
3. Corporate worship is to be centered on the gospel so that any non-Christians present can respond to the gospel (1 Corinthians 14:20-25; 15:1-6).
4. Corporate worship is to be unselfish (1 Corinthians 14:26). The gathering of the church to worship is just that, a corporate response to God, so we need to be aware of anything we as individual worshippers may do to distract others from worshipping God.
5. Corporate worship is to be orderly (1 Corinthians 14:40). While the Bible does not prescribe or describe any order of worship for a corporate worship service, it is important that the service is prayerfully thought through, moving God's people from being spectators to participants in a unified way.
6. Corporate worship is to be missional (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). I believe that the corporate gathering needs to fit the culture in which it is called to minister. Tradition can help people worship, as long as it doesn't become *traditionalism*, which is a form of idolatry. Today, it appears that music can quickly become a point of disunity, as people place their cultural preferences above everything else, which again is a form of idolatry.
7. Corporate worship is to include certain elements prescribed by Scripture like: preaching, celebrating the sacraments of baptism and communion, prayer, reading scripture, giving, and music which helps people sing to God (2 Timothy 4:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 1 Timothy 2:1, 4:13; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Colossians 3:16).

In conclusion, concerning my theology of worship, I want to quote John Calvin who said, "The human heart is an idol factory." Thankfully, the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ can transform us from *idolaters* into *worshippers*. Worship is both personal and corporate. When we fail to worship the Creator, we will worship that which is created, and this will be reflected in our personal lives *and* corporate experiences. Repentance is the act of turning from sin and returning to God by trusting in Jesus Christ, who alone is the perfect worshipper. This truth helps idolaters be transformed into worshippers. The Apostle John closes 1 John with these words, "Keep yourselves from idols." May we keep ourselves from idols in our personal lives and in our corporate worship experiences so that God is glorified in all that we do!

Issues Related To Lifestyle

My view of Scripture and hermeneutics, as it relates to living my personal life in a way that is more consistent with what I say I believe.

I believe Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) is very important because it is at the root of how we live daily life as Christians. Therefore, I depend on the Holy Spirit to teach me as I pray in dependence to interpret the Bible. I believe the historical-grammatical-redemptive approach to studying the Bible will lead me to understanding. In other words, I allow Scripture to interpret Scripture; I interpret Scripture in its original context; I interpret Scripture in light of grammar (meaning of words, grammatical structures, literary genre, verb tenses, etc.) and I interpret Scripture through the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ. I reject cultural interpretations of Scripture, by which we are tempted to change what Scripture says to make it more culturally acceptable - or even more comfortable for me. Lastly, I reject placing my experience above Scripture, but seek to allow Scripture to interpret my experiences. God's Word is meant to be applied to all of my life and this is how I seek to do that:

1. Spiritual Disciplines...

How do we grow in grace - maturing into who God says we are in Christ – and become more like Christ? I believe the spiritual disciplines must not be separated from the Holy Spirit's work. They must not become merely a religious activity leading to pride or legalism. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. This need for self-control, or *self-discipline*, is important as we grow in our relationship with God. The following spiritual disciplines are becoming more and more a part of my lifestyle and are life-giving to me: Solitude, fasting, Bible study, worship, service, prayer, fellowship, repentance with confession, and submission. I am currently reading through the Bible again and reading one Psalm a day. I am in an accountability group for fellowship. I am journaling regularly in the form of prayers and reflection on how I integrate Scripture into my personal life. I fast regularly. I am involved in personal and corporate worship. I am learning to enjoy solitude (I just had an eight week sabbatical.) I am regularly confessing and repenting, especially as it relates to areas of unbelief in my life, where I am not living out of my identity in Christ.

2. Stewardship, Personal Finance, and Debt...

I believe that I do not own anything. Even though I believe this, I find I am still am tempted (and give in to that temptation) when it comes to God's ownership of everything in my life. God is the owner and I am the steward. I struggle with being a workaholic, and therefore *time* is something I am learning to steward better, especially as it relates to the pace of life. Lisa and I just decided to sell our home in order to free up money from the housing allowance budget, making it available for the church to use for kingdom purposes. We live within a budget and have no debt to speak of.

3. Sexual Purity...

Pornography has a real stronghold in the church today. I have observed, up close and personally, the effect it has on people, including those in my own family. At times in my life I have seen pornography, but it has never been a controlling factor in my life. What I have learned about this particular temptation is that mere external motivations and internet protections are not enough. There must be a willingness and movement to deal with idolatries and lies that are associated this temptation, in order to become a sexually pure man of God. I do not currently view pornography, nor am I really tempted by it. My phone and computer are completely open for my wife and accountability team to view at any time they should want to see what I have been viewing. I am living a sexually pure life, and living out my sexual desires within my marriage.

4. Marriage and Family Priorities...

I have come to realize that I am the only one who can be a husband to my wife. Along with that reality is the truth that I am the only one who can be a father to my seven children. God has chosen me to live out these roles in my relationships with my family. If these realities are true, then I want to make sure that I am spending time cultivating these relationships. This means the *quality of time* needed to develop these relationships will happen in the context of *quantity of time*. My marriage and family life cannot become an idol to me, but at the same time, God has called me to love my wife and love my children as Jesus loves me and loves them. I have struggled with being a workaholic, believing a lie that somehow I could not say “no” to various ministry opportunities. I have neglected my marriage and children at times, but I have repented and continue to repent. I have grown much in this area, but it is still a temptation to me.

5. Social drinking...

I will make this brief. I am not a social drinker. I rarely drink alcohol. The Scriptures do not forbid drinking alcohol, but we must not allow it to become an idol or ever drink to the point of being under its influence, instead of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

6. Accountability in Life and Ministry...

I have always been in accountability groups since I became a Christian at age 19. I value them. No matter where I have lived or what church I have been involved in, I have sought out fellowship and accountability with other men. I am also accountable to my wife and children, and I regularly humble myself and ask them to speak into my life concerning what they see happening there. If my behavior is affecting them negatively, I ask them for forgiveness and repent. You have my permission to contact them about anything I have written here. I want to be a man of integrity. Finally, I am accountable to the Elders of the church I pastor. The Christian life is personal but it is not private. I have sought to reflect what God has said in Hebrews 3:12-13 and 10:24-25 as God reminds us that we need others in the Body of Christ to grow as a Christ follower.

Attitude Towards the Evangelical Free Church of America (Answer with Yes or No and clarify any answer if needed.)

1. Am I willing to minister alongside those whose views differ with my views on nonessential matters (The significance of Silence perspective)? **YES**
2. Am I in harmony with the mission of the EFCA? **YES**
3. Am I willing to live in accordance with the articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Policies of the EFCA? **YES**
4. Am I willing to follow and adhere to the congregational processes at the local church, district, and national level of the EFCA? **YES**
5. Is it my intention and desire to work in cooperation with the EFCA and the district in which I serve? **YES**
6. If I ever find myself in the future not agreeing with the EFCA's Statement of faith and or policies of the EFCA, am I willing to surrender my credentials? **YES**
7. Is there any issue in my life currently which, if known because it has not been dealt with or repented of, would bring disrepute on the Lord or His Church? **NO**