

Where We Stand in the EFCA: Denials and Affirmations

Evangelical Free Church of America (June 21, 2023)

We seek to address social movements and cultural trends that can create division among us. This statement has been approved by the Board of Directors and the Board of Ministerial Standing, the two boards elected by and accountable to the EFCA Conference, and was later affirmed by the District Superintendents.

Introduction

We believe that as an association of churches, we in the EFCA are bound together by the biblical gospel, and we seek to live in the unity which that gospel creates. We believe and practice, “In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.” In that light, we seek to address social movements and cultural trends that can create division among us. Just as Paul needed to explain and defend himself and his ministry (2 Cor 10-13), we, too, sense a need to explain the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. Because of questions asked, concerns raised and criticisms made about or against the EFCA, which both prompted *and* limited the issues addressed, the Board of Directors and the Board of Ministerial Standing have adopted this declaration. The following statements are not meant to demonize or denigrate but are attempts to clarify where we in the EFCA stand as we seek to make the biblical gospel, and not any social movement, central among us.

Denials and affirmations

- We are *not* adherents of the secular “Social Justice” movement as held in progressive circles, *but* we do believe that biblical justice has social implications, particularly in protecting those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.
- We are *not* “woke” in the sense of having embraced a progressive ideology that is grounded in critical theory rather than the Bible, *but* we do see the need to be awakened to the global and indeed cosmic impacts of sin, including racial injustice, and to be attuned to the biblical call for gospel-driven efforts toward reconciliation and restoration.
- We are *not* adherents of “Critical Race Theory” that reduces all racial inequities to a struggle between oppressor and oppressed and presents a worldview that is contrary to the Scriptures, *but* we do believe that the questions and challenges it raises stir us to recall critical biblical truths that we may have neglected and require our attention.
- We are *not* “Christian Nationalists” who believe the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation or who believe that Americans are “God’s chosen people,” *but* we do believe that a patriotic love of one’s nation is appropriate and that Christians should be good citizens who may freely advocate for God-honoring public policies.
- We do *not* believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God, *but* we do believe that God has appointed governing authorities to do good and that, for citizens in Christ’s kingdom, King Jesus’ rule and reign transcends all other citizenships and partisan ideologies and transforms how we live in the world.
- We do *not* believe that a person’s biological sex should be separated from their self-perception as a man or a woman nor that the body should be altered when it does not conform to that self-perception, *but* we do believe that some people experience a distressing struggle between these two and that we must treat those who struggle in this way with love and compassion as we seek to help them, with the truth and power of the gospel, toward the wholeness of a biologically-sexed identity grounded in God’s “very good” design in creation as male and female.
- We are *not* egalitarian in our understanding of the roles and functions of men and women in the church, *but* we do believe that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions, as reflected in our EFCA ordination policy.
- We do *not* believe in the annihilation of those who die apart from Christ, *but* in their eternal conscious punishment. Among the kinds of suffering we ought to seek to alleviate, this is the most grievous, and it is our urgent duty and God-given privilege to seek to alleviate it by proclaiming the gospel and calling all people to believe the gospel by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

A few summary statements reflecting our EFCA convictions

We believe that the good news of the Kingdom of God, announced and embodied by Jesus Christ, is the ultimate and final solution to the problems of this world. Love for God and love for our neighbor, to which the gospel calls us, requires that we seek the welfare and common good of our communities and nation.

We believe the church is the new community created by God, the “pillar and buttress of truth.” Our primary ministry and mission is to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples among all people, as salt and light in the world as we await the glorious return of Jesus who will complete the transformation he has begun.

We believe, as an association of churches united in our Statement of Faith, that biblical truth and the gospel are to be valued above any contemporary social ideology, while acknowledging that social movements may contain biblical truth to which we must attend.¹

In sum, the EFCA is neither “Progressive Evangelical” nor “Neo-Fundamentalist.” We remain tethered to the text of Scripture and grounded in the gospel (*evangel*) of Jesus Christ as we love God and love others (Matt 22:37-39). As we interact with one another and the world around us, we are committed to convictional kindness--conviction that is grounded in the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and kindness that manifests “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). We both proclaim the gospel (Rom 1:16) and seek to live in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27).

Addendum: *Sic et non* (yes and no)

As Christians, we affirm the truth of the Scriptures and the truthfulness of biblical doctrine with an unqualified “Yes” (1 Cor 15:1-8; 2 Cor 1:20). When the truth of the Scriptures and biblical doctrine are being denied, we respond with an unqualified “No” (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Pet 2:1). When we encounter those with views different from our own, how do we respond? Too often there is either an attempt at *via media*, a “middle of the road” belief as if differing beliefs can be melded together or that they do not matter, or an “all or nothing” approach, either naively and uncritically accepting everything, or critically and condemningly rejecting everything. There is a better way.

Sic et non, yes and no.

Sic, yes. This means, first of all, that in our approach to contemporary claims we need to learn to say “yes.” We need to avoid an attitude of hyper-criticism, which assumes that if any idea is new (or, if we have never heard it said that way before) it must be false. Although we have the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Scriptures, no church body or theological tradition has all the truth.

Non, no. Just as clearly as we must affirm the truths others hold, we must also reject their errors. Too many of us are extremely naive in our acceptance of the truth claims of others. Too often we allow ourselves to be misled by others’ false notions because we are convinced that their motives are pure, unaware of the damaging (and damning!) spiritual effects of every false doctrine or teaching. How do we do a better job of engaging the increasingly diverse religious opinions we are hearing today? By teaching our minds and our lips to say “yes and no.” “Yes” to what is good and right. “No” to what is bad and wrong. This will require that we use our critical faculties and listen to people as they speak and write. It will also require us to search the Scriptures more carefully and fully to be in a better position to make valid assessments of others’ truth claims.

¹These social/secular ideologies often contain elements of biblical truth but cut them off from other complementary truths, distorting and falsifying them in the process. The issues raised by these movements are “antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview,” and they will be subversively fulfilled and transformed only by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Additional Note (regarding egalitarian roles & complementarian convictions): “The EFCA embraces a complementarian theology that emphasizes the equality of men & women, their gifts & ministries in the church, & the God-ordained leadership roles that are entrusted to men.” – Marcus Johnson, LakeRegionBibleChurch.org

Where We Stand in the EFCA: Denials and Affirmations

Evangelical Free Church of America (June 21, 2023)

We seek to address social movements and cultural trends that can create division among us. This statement has been approved by the Board of Directors and the Board of Ministerial Standing, the two boards elected by and accountable to the EFCA Conference, and was later affirmed by the District Superintendents.

Introduction

We believe that as an association of churches, we in the EFCA are bound together by the biblical gospel, and we seek to live in the unity which that gospel creates. We believe and practice, “In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.” In that light, we seek to address social movements and cultural trends that can create division among us. Just as Paul needed to explain and defend himself and his ministry (2 Cor 10-13), we, too, sense a need to explain the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. Because of questions asked, concerns raised and criticisms made about or against the EFCA, which both prompted *and* limited the issues addressed, the Board of Directors and the Board of Ministerial Standing have adopted this declaration. The following statements are not meant to demonize or denigrate but are attempts to clarify where we in the EFCA stand as we seek to make the biblical gospel, and not any social movement, central among us.

Denials and affirmations

- We are *not* adherents of the secular “Social Justice” movement as held in progressive circles, *but* we do believe that biblical justice has social implications, particularly in protecting those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.
- We are *not* “woke” in the sense of having embraced a progressive ideology that is grounded in critical theory rather than the Bible, *but* we do see the need to be awakened to the global and indeed cosmic impacts of sin, including racial injustice, and to be attuned to the biblical call for gospel-driven efforts toward reconciliation and restoration.
- We are *not* adherents of “Critical Race Theory” that reduces all racial inequities to a struggle between oppressor and oppressed and presents a worldview that is contrary to the Scriptures, *but* we do believe that the questions and challenges it raises stir us to recall critical biblical truths that we may have neglected and require our attention.
- We are *not* “Christian Nationalists” who believe the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation or who believe that Americans are “God’s chosen people,” *but* we do believe that a patriotic love of one’s nation is appropriate and that Christians should be good citizens who may freely advocate for God-honoring public policies.
- We do *not* believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God, *but* we do believe that God has appointed governing authorities to do good and that, for citizens in Christ’s kingdom, King Jesus’ rule and reign transcends all other citizenships and partisan ideologies and transforms how we live in the world.
- We do *not* believe that a person’s biological sex should be separated from their self-perception as a man or a woman nor that the body should be altered when it does not conform to that self-perception, *but* we do believe that some people experience a distressing struggle between these two and that we must treat those who struggle in this way with love and compassion as we seek to help them, with the truth and power of the gospel, toward the wholeness of a biologically-sexed identity grounded in God’s “very good” design in creation as male and female.
- We are *not* egalitarian in our understanding of the roles and functions of men and women in the church, *but* we do believe that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions, as reflected in our EFCA ordination policy.
- We do *not* believe in the annihilation of those who die apart from Christ, *but* in their eternal conscious punishment. Among the kinds of suffering we ought to seek to alleviate, this is the most grievous, and it is our urgent duty and God-given privilege to seek to alleviate it by proclaiming the gospel and calling all people to believe the gospel by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

A few summary statements reflecting our EFCA convictions

We believe that the good news of the Kingdom of God, announced and embodied by Jesus Christ, is the ultimate and final solution to the problems of this world. Love for God and love for our neighbor, to which the gospel calls us, requires that we seek the welfare and common good of our communities and nation.

We believe the church is the new community created by God, the “pillar and buttress of truth.” Our primary ministry and mission is to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples among all people, as salt and light in the world as we await the glorious return of Jesus who will complete the transformation he has begun.

We believe, as an association of churches united in our Statement of Faith, that biblical truth and the gospel are to be valued above any contemporary social ideology, while acknowledging that social movements may contain biblical truth to which we must attend.¹

In sum, the EFCA is neither “Progressive Evangelical” nor “Neo-Fundamentalist.” We remain tethered to the text of Scripture and grounded in the gospel (*evangel*) of Jesus Christ as we love God and love others (Matt 22:37-39). As we interact with one another and the world around us, we are committed to convictional kindness--conviction that is grounded in the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and kindness that manifests “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). We both proclaim the gospel (Rom 1:16) and seek to live in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27).

Addendum: *Sic et non* (yes and no)

As Christians, we affirm the truth of the Scriptures and the truthfulness of biblical doctrine with an unqualified “Yes” (1 Cor 15:1-8; 2 Cor 1:20). When the truth of the Scriptures and biblical doctrine are being denied, we respond with an unqualified “No” (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Pet 2:1). When we encounter those with views different from our own, how do we respond? Too often there is either an attempt at *via media*, a “middle of the road” belief as if differing beliefs can be melded together or that they do not matter, or an “all or nothing” approach, either naively and uncritically accepting everything, or critically and condemningly rejecting everything. There is a better way.

Sic et non, yes and no.

Sic, yes. This means, first of all, that in our approach to contemporary claims we need to learn to say “yes.” We need to avoid an attitude of hyper-criticism, which assumes that if any idea is new (or, if we have never heard it said that way before) it must be false. Although we have the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Scriptures, no church body or theological tradition has all the truth.

Non, no. Just as clearly as we must affirm the truths others hold, we must also reject their errors. Too many of us are extremely naive in our acceptance of the truth claims of others. Too often we allow ourselves to be misled by others’ false notions because we are convinced that their motives are pure, unaware of the damaging (and damning!) spiritual effects of every false doctrine or teaching. How do we do a better job of engaging the increasingly diverse religious opinions we are hearing today? By teaching our minds and our lips to say “yes and no.” “Yes” to what is good and right. “No” to what is bad and wrong. This will require that we use our critical faculties and listen to people as they speak and write. It will also require us to search the Scriptures more carefully and fully to be in a better position to make valid assessments of others’ truth claims.

¹These social/secular ideologies often contain elements of biblical truth but cut them off from other complementary truths, distorting and falsifying them in the process. The issues raised by these movements are “antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview,” and they will be subversively fulfilled and transformed only by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Additional Note (regarding egalitarian roles & complementarian convictions): “The EFCA embraces a complementarian theology that emphasizes the equality of men & women, their gifts & ministries in the church, & the God-ordained leadership roles that are entrusted to men.” – Marcus Johnson, LakeRegionBibleChurch.org