



DOCTRINE IN THE REAL WORLD

A Series of Articles written by EFCA West Pastors on How Our Statement of Faith Helps Us Navigate the Challenges of Everyday Life.

The Church by Tim Jacobs

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.

“The Mission Demands All Hands-on Deck!”

The first sentence of Article Seven of our EFCA Statement of Faith is worth reading very slowly, maybe even twice:

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

Think about that for a moment: the “true church” – in other words, God’s church - is made up of “all” who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. Can I ask, *do you actually believe that?* Because right now it seems, for some, the phrase “justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone” is not enough. There are those who would like to see a few other boxes checked in order to be of the “authentic” stock.

In A.T. Olson’s book, [*The Significance of Silence*](#), he illustrates how easy it is to divide over “secondary matters.” For example, if you answer a question about baptism, predestination, the gifts of the Spirit, or eschatology in the wrong way, there are many groups who will say, as Olson writes, “Sorry – though you belong to the body of Christ, we cannot accept you as a member of our church” (Olson, 17). In other words, you can belong to God’s church, *but you can’t belong to our church.*

That sentiment, however, is the exact opposite of what our movement is all about. The Evangelical Free Church sought to unite churches around what really matters, and that is a simple and yet sincere faith in Christ alone.

To be human, however, is to love controversy. Just spend five minutes on Twitter and you'll get that loud message and clear. Thus, we get wrapped up in everything from Bible translation to worship style to gifts of the Holy Spirit to even politics and vaccinations, and then like hawks we watch for anyone who seems to be out of step with what is our "brand" of Christianity.

So again, I ask, *are there people who by all accounts legitimately belong to "God's church," but if you're honest, wouldn't belong in your church?* Let's even expand it beyond the individual: Are there churches faithfully preaching the gospel and making disciples, that you have dismissed because their views on secondary matters differ from yours?

How, and why, does this happen? Well, for one thing, it is not new. For centuries churches have divided over just about everything, and in so doing have excluded from their membership fellow believers whom God otherwise accepts.

The main driver of division, however, is that we have forgotten our mission. We have forgotten that the church is to be sent into the world to proclaim the glory of God. Listen to how Dr. Craig Ott describes it in his book *The Church on Mission*, "Today [God] sends the church in the power of the Spirit as his people to further his mission of redemption and restoration. The church is indeed God's missionary people..." (Ott, 3). When we forget that, we begin criticizing our brothers and sisters for all they are not doing correctly. We take pride in our holiness, accuracy, and diligence, especially in comparison to our fellow churches who hold as passionately to the authority of Scripture as we do.

But it shouldn't be that way. In fact, the missionary impulse of the church is hard-wired into the two activities the church is practice on a regular basis: baptism and the Lord's supper. Again, in our statement it reads:

The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel.

Because "expressing the gospel" is the number one job of the church, these two activities should be happening regularly. A church baptizing new believers shows it has been instrumental doing its job of proclaiming the Gospel. Something real is happening when the blind begin to see and the dead come to life. In fact, it might be legitimately asked, *if a church is never conducting a baptism, at what point is it no longer functioning as a church?*

The Lord's Supper, as well, is absolutely essential, because in each element our core message is expressed. Peter tells us, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

This leads us to the final part of our statement:

Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

I love that word "nourish" because it carries with it the idea of health. There's nothing like the belief that you are *prevailing*, even in the midst of hardship. When church members experience not only their own baptism, but get to baptize others, it shows that the Spirit of God is prevailing, even when there is bad news all around. When we return to the core message of the Gospel, over and over again, especially in

the act of communion, it brings us back to what we're all about in the first place; it leads us to humility and gratitude, and ultimately, to worship.

Now we end where we began. Because the truth is, we are in a war. And in case you hadn't noticed, it doesn't seem like we're winning. We can fight about secondary matters later; *right now we need all hands on deck*. Every minute we spend criticizing another legitimate church is another minute our ships are taking on water and more of our neighbors are going to Hell. Every hour spent on a pithy blog post that takes aim at a brother or sister shows we are asleep at the helm while the enemy closes in. Have you been justified by faith alone in Christ alone? Good. You're on our team. Now grab a weapon and let's go.

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