



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.

Christian Living by Scott Savage

We Are People Who (Imperfectly) Live What We Learn

I'm honestly surprised that I'm still serving in pastoral ministry today.

In my mid-20s, I went through a nasty rumble with what I call the ABCs - anger, bitterness, and cynicism. I served in a church where my youth and idealism collided with unhealthy leadership patterns and competing forces trying to determine the future of the church.

Over a number of years, my anger and bitterness produced cynicism as I watched older believers held up as models of maturity, while my up-close-and-personal experience revealed those men and women were relationally and/or emotionally immature. Spiritual maturity was defined by knowledge and age, rather than spiritual fruit or Christlike love.

I'm grateful that on the other side of a season of burnout and several years of working with a Christian therapist, there has been tremendous healing in my heart and growth in my relationship with Christ. Nevertheless, those painful experiences have formed me. They also give me incredible appreciation for what the EFCA holds to be essentials of the faith.

In continuing this series reflecting on our statement of faith, this is the content of the eighth article in the EFCA Statement of Faith, which falls under the heading of 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 for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed."

This statement reminds me of the words of John Calvin. In his Institutes, Calvin wrote, “It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.”

Whenever I have the privilege of meeting with someone before their baptism, we read Ephesians 2:1-10 together. We talk about how we are saved by grace and not by works. But then we talk about the intentional flow of Paul’s words here. Ephesians 2:1-9 talk about the work of grace to save us. Then, Ephesians 2:10 talks about how that grace empowers us to do good works that God planned for us long ago.

To use an Olympic analogy, our conversion and baptism are not the finish line; they're the starting line.

That race looks like:

- Loving God and others in sacrificial ways.
- Living out our faith with care for one another.
- Exhibiting compassion for the poor
- Pursuing justice for the oppressed
- Combating evil
- Making disciples
- Bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed

Each of the descriptions given of “Christian Living” affirm a pattern. Christian living is active, not passive. God’s grace not only transforms our brains, but our bodies.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, CS Lewis writes the following about humans. “Whatever their bodies do affects their souls.” Christian living is not limited to our thinking, but it also encompasses our doing.

For the past 5 years, I’ve had the privilege of serving as the Lead Pastor of [Cornerstone Church](#) in Prescott, Arizona. This fall, we’re walking our church through our church values - 8 statements that summarize what matters most to us as a community. One of those values is “Fighting for Simplicity.” This value reflects our approach to ministry. In our further explanation of this value, we state “We are a simple church with a passion for transformation. We focus on a map of next steps, rather than a menu of programs. In each step, we refuse to settle for merely learning new information. With a bias for application, we seek to live what we learn together.”

My favorite line of that description is “we live what we learn.” When I think back to what my wife calls my “angry phase” ministering in my early and mid-20s, I fell into a giant hole struggled to get out. That hole was the gap between what was being taught and what was being practiced.

This is why James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote the well-known words of James 1:22. “*But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*”

I'm not the only one who stumbles when we deceive ourselves like this. The watching world around us doubts that we believe what we say we believe because they fail to find the content of our belief statements within what they observe in our daily lives.

Author Ralph Waldo Emerson famously wrote, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." At Cornerstone, we end every sermon with "next steps" - two to four practical ideas to live out what we've just learned from studying God's word together. When it comes to our commitment to Christian Living, I'd like to offer you four next steps.

First, read through this article of the [EFCA Statement of Faith](#) with a group of people from your church family.

Second, with these members, staffers, or elders, identify the gaps between what we say we believe about this subject and how we're living out these words.

Third, determine the sources of the gap(s). Potential sources could include busyness, distractions, confusion about order of priorities, a lack of intentionality, or blind spots.

Fourth, commit to one or two immediate actions you could take to begin to narrow the gap between beliefs and living, between what you're learning and how you're living it.

In committing to this Statement of Faith, we are creating a way for us to hold each other accountable. None of us will ever completely eliminate the gap between what we say and what we do on this side of heaven. However, in humility, we can save those watching us from stumbling over our brokenness as they explore or seek to follow Jesus.

Scott Savage is a pastor and a writer with the coolest last name ever. He leads Cornerstone Church in Prescott, Arizona. Scott is married to Dani, an attorney, and they are the parents of three "little savages." He helps hurting people forgive others through his [Free to Forgive course](#) and you can read more of his writing at scottsavagelive.com