

Biographical Sketch

Conversion of Candidate:

I was sent to church as a child (bus ministry), even though my parents didn't attend, to "make me a better person." When I was seven, I went forward at a Billy Graham Crusade. Several times in my childhood the sermon touched my heart and I would go forward again. As a teen I drifted away, and being popular and having fun became far more important. In my second year of college I was at a party and told someone that I was a Christian. The person I was talking to was astonished and asked, "How can you be a Christian and get drunk and party?" I said "Well, all you have to do is believe". This hypocritical response began to nag at me inwardly, and I realized that I truly believed there is a God, and a heaven and hell, and I did not want to be in hell for eternity. I decided that it was in my best interests to be a Christian, even though it would be boring and dull, but I would get an eternal reward that would make the suffering worth it. So, at age 18 I made a sincere commitment to follow Christ. At first, it was miserable. The things I wanted to do, I now had to resist. But God was faithful – one day a couple of months later I woke up and everything in me was different. I had new strength to resist temptation and a new love for others. There was no vision or charismatic experience, I just woke up one morning - changed. I believe I was filled with the Holy Spirit that day. Since then, I've had difficult questions and struggles with obedience, but never a time of walking away from following Christ.

Conversion of Spouse

My wife Alexandra grew up in a Byzantine Catholic home. Her mother was devoted to the church, but their family life was very dysfunctional. Alex says that growing up as a Catholic taught her two things: "1 - I'm a sinner, and 2 - Jesus is God." She drifted away as a teen, but by God's providence she was assigned a college roommate who was a Christian. The Holy Spirit

was at work, and one night she prayed with her roommate to receive Christ. Her faith is her own; all of this happened years before she met me.

Call to Ministry

I do not remember a particular “call” to ministry, but simply believe that living a sincere Christian life means that I am “in ministry.” I have expressed my willingness to God to be a missionary if it’s His will. In our small EvFree Church in Santa Ana, the pastor saw in me an aptitude for counseling others and began privately tutoring me to be a peer counselor. Later at Fullerton Free, these gifts were affirmed again.

Wife's attitude toward call to Ministry

Early on, Alex believed I was gifted in counseling others. She urged me to join the peer counseling at both churches. She has joined me and is fully engaged in teaching and coaching couples in our work at Fullerton Free and with our program CoupleTalk.

Preparation for Ministry

While I do not have a completed college degree, my life since age 18 has reflected an interest and commitment to serving Jesus by counseling and teaching others. I've owned a contracting business since I was 23, so for most of those years I was a volunteer. In 2008 we accepted full-time positions at a non-profit offering marriage education classes. We worked there for 3 years, after which we invested much of our retirement savings in developing a video-led, Christian couple communication program, CoupleTalk. Since then, we have taught in many churches, at conferences, and even in other countries. In 2015 we were asked to share one position (30 hrs/wk) as Shepherds of Marriage and Relationships at Fullerton Free, which continues today. In our 30+ years at Fullerton Free as volunteers and paid staff, and through CoupleTalk, we have taught relationship skills to thousands of couples on six continents.

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 purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

Acknowledging God as the creator is important because it indicates our responsibility to him. Because he made us, we are obligated to be accountable and obedient to him. All creation belongs to him (Ps 24:1; Ps 89:11), and as the creator of all things (Gen 1:1; Neh 9:6), he has all power and authority over us and all his created world (Ps 50:10-12). He created the entire cosmos out of nothing (Gen 1:1-2a; Heb 11:3). Whether it was created in six literal 24-hour periods or whether those “days” indicate ages or even epochs as I believe most likely, really makes no difference, and has no effect on the truth that he is still the creator. There is nothing in the universe that he has not created, or that came before him (Col 1:15-17). He has absolute power and authority to do with us as he chooses, and we are incredibly fortunate that he is a creator who loves and cares for us, his creation (Eph 2:4-6; John 3:16-17), is himself holy and pure (Ps 33:4-5; Lev 11:44), and who acts with mercy and compassion towards us (Is 54:10; 1 Pet 5:7).

What we know about the existence of God stems in part from a natural, intrinsic awareness in all of us that there is something greater than us that made the world and the cosmos (Rom 1:19-20), and also from the truths about this creator expressed in Scripture, which very clearly declares that the God it reveals is that creator. Each of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are this eternal creator God, the one God of the “Shema.” The Bible describes the persons of the Father (Num 15:41), the Son (John 1:1, 14; Heb 1:8; Isa 9:6), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-4) as each being God. Each person is described as eternal (Gen 1:1; John 1:1-3; Heb 9:14), as responsible for creation (Gen 1:1; John 1:1-3; Gen 1:2), and as being the essence of perfect love (John 3:16; Eph 3:17-19; Rom 15:30). Although the concept of the Trinity and the “Shema” statement that

God is one (Deut 6:4) are hard to reconcile in our human thinking, the fact that the Bible describes each of these three persons as having these various qualities of God, and further as being God, requires us to integrate these truths into our view of the Godhead, tempered always with an awareness that as humans we simply are not capable of fully grasping and understanding God's existence and character.

Understanding the attributes and nature of God is especially important when faced with difficult circumstances or decisions that are not explicitly addressed in Scripture. Being able to apply known characteristics of God's nature and character allows us to sort through difficult situations and make healthy and godly decisions, with the help of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26; John 14:26), and in accordance with God's will (James 1:5; 1 John 5:14-15). Because God is patient and longsuffering (Rom 2:4; Ps 86:15), we know that He will not give up on us. Because God is compassionate (Ex 34:6; Ps 78:38), we know that he cares for us. In addition, knowing God's nature and character enables us to find hope and comfort during seasons of pain, grief, and loss, when our emotions are strong and we may have trouble finding peace or encouragement (John 14:16-17; 1 Pet 5:7).

The phrase "limitless knowledge and sovereign power" indicates that there is nothing that God does not know - whether past, present, or future (Isa 46:9-10; Heb 4:13) – and there is nothing that God cannot accomplish (Job 42:1-2; Matt 19:26). It means that he has all knowledge and all power. There is no exception. This contrasts with the idea that human free will means that God does not yet know what will happen tomorrow. This is wrong thinking. While God allows us human agency to daily choose obedience or disobedience (Isa 55:6-7; Mark 8:34), he already knows what I will choose, and has known since before the beginning of time what I will choose tomorrow, and every day of my life (Ps 139:16; Eph 1:4).

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.

The Bible, the 66 individual books that make up the Old and New Testament, are God's revelation of Himself to mankind. The Bible provides us with guidance, purpose, and an understanding of Him. It was "verbally inspired" by God to the various authors, meaning that His Spirit inspired and directed them to write exactly what He intended, but through their various personalities, word choices and writing styles. The Bible is the ultimate authority for Christians in all matters spiritual and temporal.

The Bible is inerrant, meaning that it is completely true and without error in the original writings by the biblical authors, writing under Divine inspiration. Due to archaeological discoveries of new and older manuscript evidence in recent years, the newest translations are even more accurate than translations made in the previous 1500+ years, and are coming ever closer to the original writings. To be clear, we do not make the claim of inerrancy for these highly accurate current translations, but only for the original autographs of the authors. The Bible is also infallible, which differs from inerrancy, as infallibility means that the Bible cannot fail to accomplish God's purpose for it (Isa 55:11; Heb 4:12) and has no possibility of error. Jesus held the view that the Scriptures are the highest authority and said they could not be broken (John 10:35). He taught that what was written in them was truth, not legend, and that every prophecy in the Scriptures would come to pass (Matt 5:17-19; Luke 24:44). Jesus also knew the power of the Scriptures, regularly citing them as the final authority for all disputes (Matt 5:19), and even using Scripture to fight against Satan when He was being tempted (Matt 4: 1-11).

The Bible was written over many centuries, by many different authors who were all inspired by God.

Old Testament: These 39 books were recognized by Jesus and by the Jews of Jesus' day as the Holy Scriptures – God's word. That agreement continues today between Jews and Protestants that these specific 39 OT books are Scripture. Jesus and the apostles had a very high view of these writings, calling them Holy Scripture and quoting them often in their teaching. There are other various writings said to be from before Christ called the Apocrypha that the Jews never accepted as Scripture, nor did we Protestants, but which are viewed as Scripture by Catholics and Orthodox.

New Testament: These 27 books were written by multiple authors who were Jesus' disciples or apostles (or their assistants), and were also written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). These books or letters were circulated among the early Christian churches, and because of their apostolic authority, were considered Scripture on the same level as the Old Testament. Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). These 27 NT books were officially recognized (canonized) as the God-inspired New Testament Scriptures in the fourth century AD.

The inerrancy and authority of Scripture means that the original writings were inspired by God, and what was originally written has the highest authority - above any other writings or human thought or philosophy. Scripture is to be relied upon, lived by, and trusted as the final word in our lives. My life and my ministry should be in accord with and inspired by the teachings in the Bible (2 Tim 3:16-17), and in fact I regularly use relevant scripture as the highest truth when teaching and counseling couples. I can give confident guidance to those in hurting relationships by basing my counsel on the scriptures. The implication of this is that I am to choose to follow what is taught in Scripture even if my individual thinking is different, my culture promotes something else, or

other beliefs and doctrines seem compelling. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are God's message to the world that He created, and this truth supersedes all other messages. The fact that the Scriptures reveal such good news about God's love and care for us, the ultimate end of evil, and our eternal paradise with God, provide the foundation for my worldview and give me great strength and hope in my life.

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.

Mankind is born in sin (Psa 51:5), and also chooses to sin (Rom 3:23; Psa 14:3). This statement is true for every human being that has ever lived, except for Jesus (Heb 4:15). Human beings are lost without God's intervention through Jesus' sacrifice. There is nothing on earth or in heaven that can cleanse us from our sinfulness and guilt except the work of Jesus (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-6). No amount of virtuous deeds or good behavior can ever be enough to reconcile us with a perfect and holy God (Eph 2:8-9; Isa 64:6).

When God created Adam and Eve, he created them in His image - the image of God (Gen 1:27). Although the Scriptures do not specifically define what is meant by the "image of God," it can be said that the following characteristics of humans are not shared in the same way with any other living things on earth: our ability to reason and have rational thought, our moral capacity to make judgments about right and wrong, our ability to exercise our will, the need for relational connection, the capacity to love and be loved, to be artistic and appreciate and recognize beauty, to be spiritual and worship and pray to God, and to represent God in the role of serving and protecting His created world, as the ones assigned dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28).

Sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, who were not mythological characters but were truly the first two humans (1 Chron 1:1; Luke 3:38), were tempted by Satan and rebelled by eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which had been expressly forbidden by God. As a result of this sin, death entered the world (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12), and Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness, became fearful and hid from God, and then blamed others for their own sinful choices. God sent them away from the paradise that was the Garden of Eden, and their world, and even the world itself, was changed. What had been a perfect creation was damaged by the effects of sin (Rom 8:18-23), and as a result, all humans carry with them, as descendants of Adam and Eve, the guilt of sin and the propensity to sin further (Rom 5:12). The Scriptures state that all people (except Adam and Eve) are conceived in sin, even before we are born or have made any conscious choices (Psa 51:5; Psa 58:2-3). The Scriptures also tell us that all humans have sinned (with the exception of Jesus), and are deserving of the punishment and wrath of a pure and holy God. Being in "union with Adam" means that all his descendants (all humans that have ever lived or ever will live) are conceived with and born in sin, and live this life on earth with a sinful nature. Even after salvation, all humans still carry a sinful flesh, which throughout our lives is at war within us against our regenerated spiritual nature (Rom 7:22-24; Gal 5:17).

The phrase "sinners by nature" means that all humans are born into sin and are deserving of its consequences, even before they have made any conscious moral decisions. The associated phrase "sinners by choice" means that all humans can and do make sinful moral choices throughout their lives (Eph 2:1-3; Eccl 7:20). Humanity is deserving of the penalty of sin in both cases. The only remedy for the sin we are born into "by nature," and the sins we commit "by choice," is the sacrificial atonement accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead

(John 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5). This substitutionary atonement rescues us from the penalty we deserve, reconciles our relationship with our Creator, and makes our spirit alive by God's presence within us, and the fruits of His Spirit in our lives.

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.

Jesus was with God before all that was created came into being (John 1:1-2). All things were created through Him (John 1:3). He knew himself as God, and emptied Himself (Phil 2:5-7), and took on human form and lived and walked among us on earth (Phil 2:8; John 1:14). In His “emptying” He did not cease to be God, but He voluntarily “laid aside His privileges” in humility and love for humanity, to be born to a virgin woman and become a human being that lived and experienced human life, all while being fully God and fully man.

Jesus can claim that he is true God and true man – two natures in one person. This fact that Jesus is fully God and fully man is a mystery. Jesus saw Nathaniel sitting under the fig tree (demonstrating God’s omniscience) but was often hungry, sad, tired and He did not know the day and hour of His future return. But according to the Scriptures He was not less God when he lived on earth (Col 2:9; Isa 9:6; Matt 1:23), though he chose to set aside His privileges (Phil 2:7-8; Matt 24:36). And he was not less a man when he lived here on earth, as he was tempted in all ways as we are, although without sin (Heb 4:15). His life was the perfect example of living a human life (Heb 7:26; 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Jesus is not a mythical figure, but was an actual man living in historical reality in the land of Israel around 2,000 years ago. He willingly left heaven and came to earth for the express purpose

of being the sacrifice for the sins of humanity (John 10:17). He knew that He would suffer and die as the sinless sacrifice that would redeem the world (Matt 20:17-19; Matt 26:28). His sinless life and willing sacrifice allow His righteousness to be credited to each of us who believe in and trust in Him. His presence on earth as Israel's promised Messiah was prophesied by the Hebrew prophets (Isa 53; Micah 5:2, and many others), and His fulfillment of these prophecies is essential to validate His claim as Messiah.

He came to earth as a man by being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) and born to a young virgin woman named Mary (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:26-35). He taught throughout Palestine as an itinerant preacher, and eventually was tried and falsely convicted by a Roman court under Pontius Pilate, through the urging of the Jewish religious leaders of the day. He was put to death on a Roman cross around the date 30-36 AD, and three days later he rose bodily from the dead (Luke 24:39-43) and was seen by his disciples and over 500 others (1 Cor 15:4-8). This bodily resurrection was to a glorified body that had supernatural capabilities (e.g., he entered a closed room without opening a door or window - John 20:19-20), but was also recognizable as Jesus (Matt 28:9-10) and still had the nail holes in His hands and feet (John 20:27).

After 40 days He was taken from the earth and ascended into heaven where he presently advocates for us at the right hand of God's throne (Rom 8:34). He intercedes with the Father as our High Priest on our behalf, and advocates for our needs and our prayer requests. There will be a day in the future when Jesus will return to Earth in the same way that he left, in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11), and in a final battle he will permanently vanquish evil and establish an eternal kingdom with Him as King (Rev 11:15). Our adversary Satan and his followers will be cast into eternal punishment (Rev 20:10; Rev 20:14-15), and those of us who have put our faith in Jesus will be welcomed into eternal paradise, forever in His presence (Rev 21:3-4).

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.

When Jesus died on the cross, he did so as our representative in several ways. He represented mankind, having experienced life as a human (Heb 4:15). He represented us as our high priest, continually mediating between us and God the same way the high priest did for the people (Heb 4:14-15). And He represented us as our king, the promised Messiah, who had come to save his people as was foretold (Isa 53:1-12). Jesus also acted as our substitute, meaning that he stood in our place receiving judgement for our guilt, taking our punishment in his own body (1 Pet 2:24), thereby satisfying God's justice (Psa 37:28).

The method by which Jesus' death and resurrection accomplished our salvation relates to the purity and holiness of God, and God's holy and righteous response to reject and punish evil (Psa 5:4-6). Because of God's holiness and justice (Rev 15:4), evil must be punished. But God, because of His great love for us, provided the only possible solution for our sin - a perfect blood sacrifice. Atonement cannot be accomplished on our own because of our sinful nature and our sinful actions. The sacrifice had to be pure and holy. So, God sent Jesus, who came willingly to be that perfect, sinless sacrifice for us. His death was the propitiation, or appeasement, of God's holy wrath against sin and evil (Rom 3:24-25). His death on the cross accomplished the expiation, or removal of the consequences of our sin from all who place their faith in Him and His sacrifice. It was not simply an example of sacrificing for others, it was THE permanent, eternal sacrifice that is sufficient to cover our sins. So, the method of receiving salvation, of being saved from the wrath that we deserve (Rom 3:23), is to acknowledge our personal sin, turn away from it, and receive

Jesus' gift of Himself and His atoning payment for our own sin. We are not saved by our efforts, or by our sincerity of belief, but only by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus for our sin.

Jesus's sacrifice for our atonement does not need repeating like the Jewish ceremonial sacrifices (Heb 10:11-14). Jesus' sacrifice has been done once for all (Heb 9:26b) and is perfect and complete in itself. It does not require any additional behaviors or cooperation from those of us who receive atonement through Him. It is the only possible way that humanity can avoid the inevitable judgement for sin and evil. There is no other way. Jesus claimed this exclusivity when he said, "No one can come to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). The only way of escaping God's just wrath is to be covered by the atonement of Jesus.

There are many belief systems where followers offer sacrifices of various kinds in an effort to win favor with a deity, usually by giving enough or by giving the "right" gift, but only in Christianity did the God whose holiness required punishment for sin, also offer Himself as the sacrifice to cover the sin of His people (Heb 9:12). All humanity was lost and without hope in our sin, but God in his kindness and love, has ransomed us himself (Mark 10:45). Amazingly, Jesus was and is all of these: a man (Phil 2:5-8), the creator (John 1:1-3), the Messianic King (Rev 1:5), God in the Flesh (Isa 9:6, Matt 1:23), and the perfect sacrifice in payment for the sin of the world (Heb 10:14). God was able to meet the requirements of his holiness and justice, while at the same time meeting the requirements of his love and compassion, by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Jesus' sacrifice provided the opportunity for all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4-6), which is Universal Atonement – that Jesus died for everyone in the world (1 John 2:1-2). God certainly already knows who will or will not eventually receive Him, and God has also predestined some to

salvation (Eph 1:4-5), but the offer of redemption for which Jesus gave his life is made for every person in the world (Titus 2:11).

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 Holy Spirit is God, the third person in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is described in Scripture as the Creator (Gen 1:2), as raising Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11), is spoken of as God (Acts 5:1-4), and is identified with the title of Lord/Jehovah (Acts 28:25-26, cf. Isa 6:8-9). The Holy Spirit is described as having attributes of deity such as omniscience (1 Cor 2:10-11), omnipotence (Zech 4:6), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), and eternal existence (Heb 9:14).

The Holy Spirit is not simply a force or an influence, but is a Divine person who leads and guides believers (Rom 8:14), intercedes for us (Rom 8:26), teaches us (1 Cor 2:12-13), has a will of His own (1 Cor 12:11), grieves (Isa 63:10, Eph 4:30), can be suppressed (1 Thess 5:19), can be resisted (Acts 7:51), gives instructions (Acts 8:29), and convicts us of sin (John 16:7-8).

The Holy Spirit is referred to many times in the Old Testament, including prophecies about His role in indwelling the believer (Ezek 36:25-27), and His being "poured out on all flesh" (Joel 2:28-29). Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit as the "counselor" or "helper" (John 15:26) who would come after Jesus left earth and ascended to heaven. Jesus said He would not "leave you as orphans", and He did this by sending the Holy Spirit to indwell believers (John 16:7).

Spiritual gifts are distributed to believers by the Holy Spirit, and each of us are given gifts as He wills (1 Cor 12:4-11). The apostles who walked with Jesus demonstrated many different gifts - some for service, some for ministry roles, and some that were miraculous, and they wrote

about these gifts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There is debate about whether the miraculous gifts are still in operation, or if they were intended only for the first century apostles until the end of the apostolic era and the New Testament scripture was completed. Without question the Holy Spirit has all power to do any miraculous thing He chooses, now in the present day, and forever. The miraculous gifts may exist in some particular believers today, although it has not been my personal experience, gifting, or practice.

The “fruit” of the Spirit differs from the “gifts” of the Spirit, in that the “fruit” are qualities that can and should appear in every Christian as we are conformed into Jesus’ image by the Holy Spirit. Believers can develop each and every one of these nine qualities (Gal 5:22-23). In contrast, the “gifts” are not all available to each of us, as they are distributed by the will and choice of the Holy Spirit, to whomever He wills (1 Cor 12:4-11).

The Holy Spirit brings glory to Jesus in many ways. When we experience an awareness of our sin and of our need for salvation through Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit that is doing the convicting (John 16:7-8). The moment that a person places their faith in Jesus, they are born again by a regenerative act carried out by the Holy Spirit in their heart (John 3:3-6). The adoption into God’s family, and the inheritance we receive, is a direct result of that new birth carried out by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14-17), and our relationship with the Holy Spirit living in us is the down payment of that inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

There is a difference between the baptism, indwelling, and filling of the Holy Spirit. The *baptism* of the Holy Spirit occurs once at the moment of regeneration (1 Cor 12:13), when the Holy Spirit gives us new birth spiritually. The *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit describes the way He lives within us after we have been saved (Rom 8:9-11), guiding, prompting, convicting, and teaching us. The *filling* of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18) is needed when we drift spiritually from time

to time and need the Holy Spirit to be reinstated in control of our hearts and renew us to a growing relationship with God. This “filling” or “refilling” happens many times in the Christian life.

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.

The church is defined in Scripture as both a local Christian assembly (Rom 16:3-5a), as well as the entire number of genuine believers everywhere, whether living or dead, who make up the “universal church” or “true church” (Matt 16:18). Scripture refers to this universal church as “Christ's body” (Rom 12:4-5) which, like a human body, is made up of many different parts or members. Scripture also refers to Jesus as “Lord and Head of the church” (Eph 5:23), comparing His headship of the church with how a human head rules over the members of a body.

Members of this “universal church” are those who have been justified. Justification means that our sin has been declared “paid for” and we will be judged as though we had not sinned. It is Christ's righteousness being credited to our account. Justification comes only by God's grace, through faith in Christ and his atoning sacrifice on the cross (Rom 5:18). We do not receive justification by our charitable deeds or accomplishments, but only when we place our faith in Jesus' work and sacrifice (Eph 2:8-9), which is why our EFCA statement includes the declaration “through faith alone, in Christ alone”.

Jesus mandated two “ordinances”: water baptism (Matt 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19). The practice of either of these two ordinances does not bring salvation, but does bring a strong benefit for believers in each. The benefit in water baptism is that the believer is

reminded that he has been baptized into Jesus' death and will be raised with Him one day (Rom 6:3-5). Water baptism is a picture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs when we are saved. By declaring his faith in Jesus in a one-time public baptism, the believer confirms and strengthens his commitment to live for Christ. And the benefit of the Lord's Supper to the believer is the reminder of the enormous love Jesus has for him. He recalls that Jesus would suffer and die for him, although Jesus was innocent, and despite the believer's sinfulness, and ugly, self-centered heart (Matt 26:27-28). Each time the believer takes the Lord's Supper, which should be done regularly throughout our lives, he experiences a spiritual refocusing and is brought back to the basic foundation of Jesus' love for and incredible gift to him. He is left renewed again in his commitment and gratefulness to Jesus. The Lord's Supper is celebrated together with other believers as a family, and points us toward a coming future banquet in paradise (Rev 19:9). These ordinances are important not only because they "confirm and nourish" us, or because they were instituted by Jesus and He told us to do them (Matt 28:19; Matt 26:27-28), but also because of the spiritual impact and public testimony they bring.

The EFCA describes itself as an association of churches that are "autonomous but interdependent congregations." Being "autonomous" means that each local EFCA church is not under the control of an ecclesiastical hierarchy – there are no bishops or cardinals in the EFCA. Each local congregation commits to fidelity to the EFCA Statement of Faith, but beyond this is free to manage its own affairs without permissions from the EFCA national office. The local congregation also has freedom to decide for themselves on "second level" questions not outlined in the Statement of Faith, such as whether to immerse or sprinkle in baptism, or whether to baptize infants. Although I understand baptism to be the full immersion of people who have made a personal choice to follow Christ (not infants), there is freedom within the EFCA for each

autonomous congregation to decide these questions on their own. I appreciate and support this freedom in the “second level” questions. This “congregational” structure models the example of the 1st century church (Matt 18:17-19; Acts 6:1-6) and allows the local church freedom to decide how and where they do ministry. Each local EFCA church is governed first by Jesus as the founder and the Head of the church (Col 1:18), which is demonstrated by fidelity to His Word above all else. This governance is followed by the congregation, who elect leaders to serve as elders who have authority over all operations. These elders then govern the lead pastor and staff. The local congregation makes its own decisions about hiring, church discipline, spending, etc., without the involvement of the national leaders. The “interdependence” element means that these many local congregations are connected to one another not only by the bonds of Christian brotherhood, but also by a shared commitment to larger ministry such as world missions, care for orphans, and church planting, often managed by the EFCA national leadership.

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 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.

While God's “justifying grace” and His “sanctifying power and purpose” should not be separated, the difference between the two must be distinguished. This difference relates to orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right behavior). If we have right belief but do not have right behavior, our faith is the same as that of the demons, who “believe and tremble” (James 2:19). This faith does not save (James 2:14-17; James 2:26). On the other hand, if we only have

right behavior without a genuine faith, this does not save us either, as none are able to become worthy of salvation simply by our works alone (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). If we have a saving faith in Jesus Christ, there will be behavioral evidence of this faith in our lives (Matt 7:16-20). The good behaviors do not save us, but they demonstrate that our faith is genuine. Therefore, it is a natural response for the true believer to follow Jesus' call to godly behavior, such as caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27) and for the poor and oppressed (Prov 14:31), and doing so is an evidence of genuine faith.

This relates to the relationship between justification and sanctification. Justification is God's act of pardoning our sin and declaring us righteous in His sight (Rom 3:23-26). Good behavior does not obtain justification. We can only obtain justification through faith in Jesus' sacrifice for sin on our behalf (Eph 2:8-9). When we are justified, we are relieved of the punishment we deserve for our sin, and are saved from God's wrath. Sanctification is the ongoing process, after justification has occurred, by which the Holy Spirit moves a believer toward holiness, gradually conforming us to the image of Christ (Heb 10:14). We are continually being sanctified as the Holy Spirit works within us to conquer sinful desires and produce godly behavior (Rom 6:22). This process of being renewed and transformed is ongoing throughout the entire earthly life of the believer.

"Living out our faith" means that God has called us to purity and holiness, and that these qualities are becoming increasingly evident in our behavior toward others. This includes godly behavior toward all people, but particularly toward those who are vulnerable and defenseless such as the poor (Deut 15:11), aliens/foreigners (Deut 10:18), the powerless (Psalm 82:3-4), and widows and orphans (James 1:27). It is our responsibility to stand up for those who are taken

advantage of or abused (Isa 1:17), to provide for those with great material needs (1 John 3:17-18), and to attend to those in prison (Matt 25:36; Heb 13:3).

Another aspect of “living out our faith” involves spiritual warfare, which is an unseen battle that occurs in the spiritual realm as well as in human hearts, minds, and lives (Eph 6:12). Satan, and those spiritual beings who are allied with him, use their power and influence to discourage God's people and God's work. The believers’ proper response to spiritual warfare is to put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:11), and more specifically 1 – to bathe our minds in God's word and live by it faithfully (2 Tim 3:15-17), 2 – to be filled with the Holy Spirit and avoid squelching His influence in our hearts and minds (Eph 5:18; 1 Thess 5:19), and 3 - to pray regularly and fervently for God to intervene on our behalf in this spiritual battle (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6).

This process of living in the Spirit and growing in godliness enables us to fulfill Jesus’ great commission of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching them His commandments (Matt 28:19-20). As we live lives of increasing faith and holiness, others will be drawn by God’s Spirit to the sweet salvation found only in Jesus.

Article 9 - Christ’s Return - We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious 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.

Jesus has promised to go and prepare a place for us, and then to return to take us to be with Him (John 14:2-3). His return will happen in a way that will be seen by everyone, and will be visible in the sky in the same way that He was visible when He ascended (Rev 1:7; Acts 1:9-11; Luke 21:27). Jesus said that no one knows the day or time of His return (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32), but that we should be ready, alert, and busy doing His work because He might return at

any time. Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins with the oil (Matt 25:1-13) and His message was to be alert, aware, and ready at all times for the Master to return. This impacts my life by reminding me that I have been called to obedience by my Master, and that I want to be seen as faithful anytime my Master decides to return. The term “constant expectancy” in our statement of faith is a call to keep the return of Christ in our everyday thinking, as though He may return at any moment. This will have a powerful impact on the way we live, and the things we value.

There are several perspectives about when Jesus will return, each described by when it occurs in relation to the millennium, which is the 1000-year period of Christ’s rule referred to in Rev 20:1-10. These perspectives are broadly defined as pre-millennial, post-millennial, and a-millennial. Pre-millennialists believe that Jesus will return before His 1000-year millennial reign. Post-millennialists believe He will return after the 1000-year millennial reign. A-millennialists believe that there is no literal 1000-year millennial reign, but that the “1000 years” is a figurative term for a general advancement of Christianity in the world over an extended period of time. Based on the passage from Rev 19:11 to 20:15, I tend to lean towards a pre-millennial, post-tribulation view, but held loosely, with a ready acknowledgement that there is much room for interpretation. What I do not hold loosely, and do strongly believe, is that Jesus will return and that the end of all things will be a world made perfect for eternity under His loving rule.

One of the beauties of our denomination is the “significance of silence” in our statement of faith. This emphasis on not dividing over second-level doctrinal differences fits perfectly here, as many intelligent, well-studied, Bible-believing Christians differ on the question of when the return of Christ will happen. The idea that I can be in close fellowship with brothers and sisters with whom I differ about this, is beautiful to me. I agree with the recent removal of the term

“premillennial” from our statement of faith, and affirm the concept expressed by Augustine: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

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.

The gospel, or “good news” is that although humanity has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal (Rom 3:23), God loves us and has provided a way for us to escape the just penalty of our sin by believing in His Son Jesus, and His substitutionary sacrifice (1 Peter 2:24). This “believing in Him” is more than simply agreeing that He exists or that He died for sin, for even the demons believe this (James 2:19) and they are destined for eternal punishment (Matt 25:41). This “believing” includes genuinely confessing our sin, accepting God’s gift of forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrifice, receiving Him into our hearts and trusting in Christ’s completed work on our behalf. When this happens, we are “born again” and our spirit is made alive (Eph 2:4-5). After this “new birth,” we live our lives trusting in and clinging to Jesus day by day. We are not saved by our honorable deeds (Eph 2:8-9), although good deeds will certainly be evident in us as we grow in our faith (James 2:17). Nor are we saved by baptism or any other ritual or religious practice, although baptism is an important step of obedience in our walk with Jesus. Receiving and trusting in Jesus is the only way for a person to obtain salvation (John 14:6). There is no other way; all other paths are false (Acts 4:12).

Each person who does not receive Jesus will receive the eternal judgement that God has prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). God does not desire that any person would perish, but wants all to come to salvation (2 Peter 3:9). But Jesus also said, “Whoever is not for

me, is against me” (Matt 12:30). Therefore, not choosing to receive Christ means that person is against Christ (John 3:18) and is condemned to the same fate as the devil (Rev 20:15). This fate is described in Scripture as a place of eternal, conscious suffering in hell (Mark 9:47-48; Rev 20:10). Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) who each had died, and Jesus describes the rich man in Hades as aware, talking, having all his senses, his memory, and experiencing agony and thirst. Jesus clearly described a conscious person.

In our present day, when a believing person dies, they go next into the presence of God (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8), until the final judgement. Ultimately, that believing person will receive an eternal resurrection body that is like Jesus’ body after He was raised from the dead (1 John 3:2). When an unbeliever dies, they go next to a place of torment and conscious suffering (Luke 16:22-24) while awaiting their final judgement. The concept of “annihilation,” where unbelievers are completely destroyed and cease to exist, is ruled out biblically based on Jesus’ parable of the rich man in torment, and the passages in John’s revelation (Rev 14:11; Rev 20:10) that describe torment “day and night forever and ever” in the lake of fire.

The new heaven and new earth (Isa 65:17) will be the eternal home of those who receive Jesus. The present earth and heavens will be destroyed by God in judgement (2 Peter 3:10), and He will replace it with this newly created heaven and earth. It will be a place with no death, mourning, weeping or pain. The New Jerusalem will be its capital, and God will live there with us in this new creation for eternity (Rev 21:1-4).

Current Doctrinal Issues

1. Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage – God created marriage for our benefit, and He intends it to be between one man and one woman, for a lifetime. A healthy marriage is founded on the principle of mutual submission as taught in Eph 5:21-25. God allows remarriage in cases of divorce after infidelity (Matt 5:32), after abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:15), and after the death of a spouse (1 Tim 5:14). Although Jesus gave an allowance to divorce because of infidelity, even in those cases we work to help couples reconcile, and have seen God do beautiful healing many times.
2. Abortion, Infanticide, Euthanasia – Life begins at conception (Ps 139:13; Jer 1:5) and therefore abortion and infanticide are the taking of an innocent human life, and are morally wrong. Euthanasia is a more complicated issue, especially with medical advances in prolonging life, and I would respond with kindness to any person or family considering it. “Active” euthanasia (a deliberate act that will cause a person’s life to end) is wrong, as the decision to end a life should be made by God alone. “Passive” euthanasia, such as removing or withholding life-prolonging treatment to a terminally ill person (i.e., “pulling the plug”), can be moral and kind. These are difficult areas, and our motives in our action or inaction are key.
3. Role Distinctions for Men and Women in the Home and the Church – Scripturally there are clear distinctions in roles between men and women in marriage (Eph 5:22-25) and in the church (Elders – Tit 1:6). While these distinctions have sometimes been exaggerated and abused over the centuries, it does not change what is specifically written in Scripture.

If a man is “giving himself up” for his wife, he can accept his role as head of the wife and exercise it with kindness, respect, and a giving spirit. Since there are no marriages in heaven, then what matters in this life is not who is “boss,” but our individual obedience to Jesus. In the church, the Scriptures clearly teach that a woman is not to be in authority over a man (1 Tim 2:12), and that the role of elder or overseer is for men only (1 Tim 3:2), but in all other ways women and men are equally able to serve.

4. Homosexual Belief and Conduct (and other sexual perversions of God’s design for human sexuality) – God invented sexuality as a beautiful gift to men and women. He told us what is acceptable and what is not. Homosexuality (Rom 1:26-27), incest (Deut 27:22) and bestiality (Lev 18:23) are clearly defined in Scripture as sinful. Our response to the specific question of those who believe in and practice homosexuality, is to share lovingly and respectfully with them the scriptural teachings. Those who struggle with same-sex attraction but who choose to follow Christ, and are celibate, should be fully accepted as brothers and sisters in the church (1 Cor 6:9-11). Transgenderism is not God’s plan or ideal for humans, and often is chosen as a result of searching for belonging and identity. Those involved in this belief or practice, while we lovingly disagree, are God’s creation and must be treated with love and respect. I would refer anyone struggling in this area to a qualified Christian therapist.

Issues Related to Lifestyle

1. Spiritual Disciplines – Regular prayer and study of the Scriptures should be part of the life of every sincere Christian. The practice of bringing our worship, questions and requests to God builds faithfulness and causes us to become more dependent on Him in our hearts and minds. Study of the Bible helps to conform our thinking to His truth, builds wisdom, and empowers us to provide hope and answers to others. In my life, the more I am connected to God in prayer and the Scriptures, the more content I am, and the more I am used in other people's lives.

2. Stewardship, Personal Finances, and Debt – There is much wisdom in the Bible about proper handling of money. We are called to be responsible, honest, and generous people, and this includes our finances. I have been in debt and experienced the weight and pressure debt brings. Being now out of debt has enabled a freedom and generosity that was not there when I had debt pressures. It is our duty to support our local church, although a 10% fixed tithe is no longer a requirement under the new covenant. We are to be responsible for taking care of ourselves here on earth, but that our treasure should be in heaven – instead of earthly wealth and excess accumulation, my treasure should be stored in heaven in the form of obedience, good works, and generosity.

3. Moral Purity (including Pornography) – Because we all still carry a sinful nature (wretched men and women that we are – Rom 7:24), each of us has an internal, lifetime battle with sin and selfishness. In our work helping marriages, we have seen tremendous damage done by pornography and an impure thought life. Our highly sexualized culture

opposes God's truth and makes it extra hard for a Christian to be morally pure today. Our call from God is obedience to His standards, even when we don't want to, and to weaken our sinful nature by starving it – by not gratifying the sinful desires when they come. Every time we resist temptation and choose obedience, it strengthens our spirit and starves/weakens our sinful nature. That sinful nature will never be totally gone in this life, but we can make it weak and far less damaging.

4. Marriage and Family Priorities – The Scriptures are clear about our call to healthy marriages (Eph 5:21-25) and families (Prov 17:6). An important part of our support system comes from them. They can call us out when we're wrong, and encourage us when we're down. They provide relational security and are part of our identity and foundation. As part of the qualifications for leadership in the church, we are told that the health of our marriage and our family is an important factor (1 Tim 3:2-4). I have seen many Christian leaders who are so wrapped up in "ministry" at church, that they neglect the ministry of their spouse and family. This is out of balance, and often results in damage to the church work in addition to the obvious damage to the spouse and family. We are an example to our community when we have loving, healthy marriages and families.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA:

1. The Evangelical Free Church of America purposely allows latitude in significant areas of doctrine (e.g., the age of the universe, Arminianism and Calvinism, the use of the gifts of the Spirit particularly the miraculous gifts, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the tribulation, etc.). This has been referred to as the "significance of silence," viz. we will debate these issues, but we will not divide over them. Are you willing to minister alongside those whose views differ from yours on nonessential matters?

YES! 100%! I think this is one of the best things about the Free Church. We can differ on second level topics and still worship and serve together.

2. Are you in harmony with the mission of the EFCA "to glorify God by multiplying healthy churches among all people," as well as our distinctives? Please see the following link: <https://www.efca.org/resources/document/efca-distinctives>

YES

3. Are you willing to live in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws and policies of the EFCA? (This does not mean that you may not support a change to any of them through the proscribed process, cf. the next question.) Please see the following link: https://www.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2019/07/2019_efca_bylaws_-_as_amended_june_19_2019_0.pdf

YES

4. Are you willing to follow and adhere to the congregational processes at the local church, district, and national conference level in seeking changes in the programs or policies of the EFCA?

YES

5. Is it your intention and desire to work in cooperation with the EFCA and the district in which you serve?

YES

6. If at any time you change your doctrinal beliefs and/or find yourself in disagreement with the statement of faith and/or policies of the EFCA, would you be willing to surrender your credentials to the EFCA?

YES

7. Is there any area or issue in your life which, if known, would bring disrepute on the Lord or the Church (drunkenness, gambling, plagiarism, pornography, racism, or “things like these” (Gal 5:19-21))?

NO, there is not.

Add any additional personal comments:

Fun side note – my ethnic heritage is 50% Swedish and 25% Danish (although it played no part in bringing me to the Free Church).