

Rationale for the change

The EFCA attempts to “major on the majors,” “minor on the minors.”

There is a principle of the EFCA called, “Significance of silence”

“We will discuss and debate but we will not divide over secondary issues”

That would be “those doctrines which through the centuries have divided Christians of equal dedication, biblical knowledge, spiritual maturity, and love for Christ.”

Examples:

- Baptism
- Lord’s Supper
- Age of earth
- Calvinism vs. Armenianism
- Eternal security
- Cessationist vs. continuationist
- Women in ministry
- Eternal destiny of infants
- Destiny of unevangelized
- The nature of the resurrection body
- The time of the rapture

The change to the statement of faith removes the word “premillennial” from the statement concerning Christ’s return.

It adds the word, “glorious,” which is an *excellent* addition, considering the many verses regarding the Lord’s return that describe it as “glorious.”

Let me go on record that I hold a premillennial view. I do not argue for a different view.

That is not what this is all about. This is about unity versus division.

There are many varieties even within premillennialism. There are many different theories. The early church tended towards a type of premillennialism which is different from Dispensational Premillennialism. Among dispensationalists, there are multiple differences. Justin Martyr, who lived between about 100 – 165 AD, wrote about his premillennial view. In his *Dialogue with*

Trypho, Justin affirmed his expectation that the faithful departed would rise from the dead and reign with Christ for a thousand years in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Justin admitted openly that not all Christians shared his expectation of how things will unfold, though. He said:

“I and many others are of this opinion, and believe that such will take place ... but, on the other hand, many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”

He had the humility and charity to grant leeway to others who disagreed.

Arnold T. Olsen, the second president of the EFCA, by the way, on the premillennial view in the Statement of Faith, said, in 1961, in his book, “This We Believe,”

“The view reflects the time in which it was started and the attitudes of evangelical leaders during the years of its existence. While new voices are now calling for a new evangelicalism and a re-appraisal of the teaching pertaining to eschatology, the Evangelical Free Church statement will continue to stand until it no longer reflects the view of the majority.”

He acknowledged that this one item within the Statement of Faith was subject to change. It should depend on the majority view of the churches. We can’t imagine that he would say this about the other points in the statement of faith. *They would never be subject to change based on the majority view.*

I’ve talked to several people in our congregation about this change, and it seems to me that there are some things we need to make clear about what the change does NOT mean:

What change does NOT mean

1. Does not mean we no longer believe in the inerrancy of the Bible

2. Does not mean that eschatology is unimportant
3. Does not mean we can't teach premillennialism
4. It does not mean that we now have to teach amillennialism or postmillennialism.
5. It does not mean that a church is forced to call a pastor who has a different millennial view
6. Does not mean we have to give equal weight to other millennial views
7. Does not take away from autonomy of local church (in fact, it increases it)
8. It does not mean that the EFCA is becoming "liberal"
 - a. Some of the loudest voices against liberalism have been amillennial
9. This does not weaken the autonomy of the local church...in fact it is increasing it!
10. This was not secretly slipped in by the National Office and passed behind the backs of the churches. In fact, 79% of the delegates voted for it. That's nearly 4 out of 5. This would be the majority Olsen was talking about.
11. It does not mean we are on a "Slippery slope." This is not a argument. It is a logical fallacy. To a search on the term "slipper slope fallacy." This will not lead to us performing gay marriages, or appointing women as elders, or advocating abortion, or whatever else you might be worried about. There is no logical connection. If we adhere to the primary issues in the SOF, none of those things will occur.

The issue before us is simply a matter of choosing between unity and division. We need to ask ourselves, "which issues would justify breaking full fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, who believe in the First Level points of our Statement of Faith.

We need to approach this with humility. If we come at this with an attitude of pride and superiority, God is not in it.

When humility is seen as weakness or lack of courage, we have the danger of thinking way too highly of ourselves and sideline those who disagree on debatable issues.

We cannot marginalize, demonize, demean, or ridicule those who disagree on secondary issues such as this, thinking that they just don't know the Bible, or they don't care, or maybe they don't believe the Bible.

We need to get away from this "us versus them" mentality.

If they adhere to the FIRST LEVEL items of the SOF, then they ARE US, regardless of their millennial view. If Jesus has saved them as he saved us, they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul says,

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. (1 Tim 1:5-7).

Let's not be the type of person Paul is talking about.

I'd like to address something that was said last week, that "We are trying to broaden the spectrum to include more people. But in all actuality, we should be getting narrower and narrower." Jesus said,

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt 7:13-14).

Here's the thing: It is not for us to make the gate narrower than it already is. We don't need to put a lock on the gate. We don't need to add extra gates. That isn't our job.

In Acts, there was a group of Christians who insisted on being "narrower," saying that a believer must be circumcised first in order to be part of the Church. I'm sure they were able to go through the Old Testament Scriptures and build a pretty good case for this. But the Church was

able to come together to discuss and debate the issue. What they came up was a *broader* view, not a narrower view: “Let’s not make it difficult for gentiles”

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:10–11).

This wasn’t a lack of courage. It wasn’t a dilution of the Gospel. This was an act of *love and inclusiveness*. We need to embrace those who have believed in Jesus and were saved by grace through faith.

All believers, circumcised and uncircumcised were able to have *full* fellowship in Christ, who broke down that barrier.

Grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone.

Not Grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone (plus circumcision).

Nor Grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone (plus premillennialism).

Nor Grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone (plus anything!)

With the issue before us, we need to absolutely avoid placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples to keep them out.

We should not be in the business of constructing barriers for fellowship between believers. There will be issues of discussion and debate.

Jesus had words to say about the Scribes and Pharisees:

⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. (Matthew 23:3–4)

What did Paul emphasize?

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:2).

Millennialism is a *secondary* issue. It is *not* a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. It *is* important. It *is* relevant. But we cannot refuse *full* fellowship with a brother or sister who sees it differently. We cannot conflate millennialism with the Gospel any more that we can conflate circumcision with the Gospel.

This is an issue of unity versus division. Jesus chided the religious leaders for keeping people out by creating unnecessary burdens. We should not impose a burden of doctrinal

conformity on our brothers and sisters in Christ, refusing full fellowship with those who disagree on secondary issues.

We need humility. We need to realize that we don't see everything with crystal clarity. "We see dimly." Yes, we need to search the Scriptures. We need to do our best to look at the whole counsel of God. We do our best to harmonize the many, many passages in the Old and New Testaments. But we elevate ourselves way too much when we feel we have all of the answers. We need to search. We need to discuss. We need to lay down our pride.

What is the reason there are hundreds denominations in the United States? It is because Christians are unable to lay down their pride, discuss, and agree to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

If we choose to divide over every secondary or tertiary issue, the logical outcome is that none of us will have ANY fellowship with any other believer. Each of us will be our own one-person denomination.

There are problems and issues with each theory of millennialism. The Church has never been in full agreement. There is no water-tight system of understanding. We need to approach it with humility.

Jesus in returning. We need to be ready. Readiness is not going to be accomplished by infighting between and exclusion of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus said, "be dressed for action and keep your lamps burning."