

# Essentials – Who is God?

## Genesis 1 & 2

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



**Article #1** - 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.

### 1. What is an essential?

- a. According to Webster's Dictionary - **absolutely necessary; extremely important: / fundamental or central to the nature of something or someone**
  - i. When we talk about essentials, we are talking about the very things that are core and required for the essence of something to be preserved.
  - ii. When we talk about essentials in theology and doctrine, we are talking about the things that are core to the character and nature of God and to right belief about the things of God.
    1. **That is, fundamental beliefs that hold to what is revealed about God in the Scriptures and thus do not confuse or conflate him with any other god.**
- b. We're not always great at agreeing on what truly is essential → How did we get 20,000 denominations?
  - i. If you do a quick Google search, you will find that there is reportedly 20,000+ denominations of Christianity. But, is that really accurate? → Yes and not so much. So, how did we get here? → A matter of making non-essentials... essential.
    1. **Polity?** – Yep
      - a. This is how a local church is structured and governed. I.e., Accountability
      - b. As an EFCA church we hold to Congregationalism, and if you want to be an EFCA church, you will be congregational.
        - i. What is that? → The membership has the highest voice in the body on the most important matters. It is not a pastor or a board but the members that serve in this ultimate accountability role.
    2. **Significant theological difference?** – Yep
      - a. Some denominations do have significant theological convictions.
    3. **Historical and social contexts?** – Yep
      - a. The EFCA came out of Swedish and Norwegian roots and movements that sought to be a free church apart from the oversight of the state.
      - b. Lutherans obviously come out the reforming movements attached to Luther.
    4. **Difference of opinion on minor issues?** – Definitely!
      - a. Unfortunately, the vast majority of denominations come from the splitting of churches over minor issues or disagreement on secondary and non-essential matters of doctrine.
  - c. **"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."**<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The famous statement attributed to the Lutheran pastor Rupertus Meldenius (1582-1651)

- i. One of the most well-known sayings of our Free Church movement is “We major on the majors and minor on the minors.” This phrase reflects how we have historically approached doctrinal matters in our Statement of Faith and in our life together in the EFCA. We have long lived with the notion of the “significance of silence,” that is, our Statement of Faith is silent on many issues that have divided Christians. This silence allows us to debate these issues, but we agree not to divide over them. A spirit of unity is an essential part of our ethos as a movement. Our position regarding the relative importance of certain doctrinal matters has sometimes been referred to as a distinction between “essentials and non-essentials.” We prefer to capture this notion with the term “doctrinal rank.”<sup>2</sup>
- d. **Why do essentials matter?**
  - i. Setting forth our central doctrinal convictions is difficult, but it is necessary. **Each generation has the responsibility not only to receive what has been passed on but to own it for ourselves before delivering it to our children.** As one writer has put it, “The doctrinal heritage of the past is thus both a gift and a task, an inheritance and a responsibility. What our forebears in the Christian faith passed down to us must be appropriated, in order that we may wrestle with it within our own situation, before passing it on to those whose day has yet to dawn.”<sup>3</sup>
  - ii. **Essentials matter because they help us stay unified.** → We will not be a healthy church that is faithful with the gospel, working for the common good of our neighbors, and committed to the mission God gave us as a local church if we are arguing over matters of conscience (secondary matters) and preference (tertiary matters).

## 2. Who is God? – What we believe.

- a. **“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.”**
  - i. Beginning with a statement on God is also significant in that it emphasizes that the gospel itself begins with God. In the gospel we are recipients of God’s grace, a grace that comes at his initiative, not ours. The gospel is God’s saving work from first to last; it flows from within himself as the expression of his essential character. His actions always conform perfectly with his own nature. In other words, God does what he does because he is who he is. Thus, God’s gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal triune God.<sup>4</sup>
- b. **Gen. 1 & 2 – The point of this text is theological, that is, it reveals the nature and character of God.**
  - i. v.1 - “God created...” - **The Hebrew verb for “created” is *bārā’*. In its basic form (used here) this verb appears in the Bible with only one subject: God.** Its usage suggests the kind of creating that only God, and no one else, can do. Old Testament and Semitic languages scholar Thomas E. McComiskey comments: “This distinctive use of the word is especially appropriate to the concept of creation by divine fiat.” He adds that this verb choice “denotes the concept of ‘initiating something new’” and that “since the primary emphasis

<sup>2</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 350). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 29-30). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 35). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition

of the word is on the newness of the created object, the word lends itself well to the concept of creation ex nihilo [out of nothing].”<sup>5</sup>

- ii. This means that the Genesis account is not primarily a scientific text, that is focusing on the mechanic of the creative process, but it is instead, a theological text focusing on the character and nature of God.
  - 1. Since science deals with causal relationships within the created order, **the existence of creation itself must be a philosophical or theological question.** Thus, the fact that God is the Creator of all things is beyond the realm of scientific discovery. **At the same time, however, the Christian doctrine of creation provides the foundation for all the known laws of nature, for God’s creation is orderly and its clear patterns can be investigated and understood.**<sup>6</sup>
- iii. Among the implications of the doctrine we may note that on the Godward side it excludes the idea that our Maker is the ‘wholly Other’. Manward, it requires us to take all human beings infinitely seriously (cf. Gen. 9:6; Jas 3:9). And our Lord implies, further, that God’s stamp on us constitutes a declaration of ownership (Matt. 22:20, 21).<sup>7</sup>
- iv. The reality of Genesis shows us that because God is able to create out of nothing, that means he is also:
  - 1. **Holy** – completely set apart. I.e., There is no one like him.
  - 2. **Sovereign** – completely powerful and possesses ultimate authority. I.e, There is nothing and no one greater than him.
  - 3. **Eternal** – If the Lord is the one who creates out of nothing, it is the Lord is eternal, that is he is above and beyond the scope of all things including time. Time is a product of his creating power.
    - a. Man, who is created in God’s image is also eternal. All people are eternal beings. In the fall (original sin), we did not cease to be eternal, but instead demanded eternal separation from God.

### 3. How does this impact my identity?

#### a. Created in God’s image. – Gen. 1:26

- i. **26. Let us make man.** In both the opening chapters of Genesis man is portrayed as *in* nature and *over* it, continuous with it and discontinuous. He shares the sixth day with other creatures, is made of dust as they are (2:7, 19), feeds as they feed (1:29, 30) and reproduces with a blessing similar to theirs (1:22, 28a); so he can well be studied partly through the study of them: they are half his context. **But the stress falls on his distinctness. Let us make stands in tacit contrast with ‘Let the earth bring forth’ (24); the note of self-communing and the impressive plural proclaim it a momentous step; and this done, the whole creation is complete.** *Vis-à-vis* the animals man is set apart by his office (1:26b, 28b; 2:19; cf. Ps. 8:4–8; Jas 3:7) and still more by his nature (2:20); but his crowning glory is his relation to God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ross, Hugh. Navigating Genesis: A Scientist's Journey through Genesis 1–11 . RTB Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 37). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 55–56.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 54–55.

- ii. The terms, *in our image, after our likeness*, are characteristically bold. If *image* seems too pictorial a word, there is the rest of Scripture to control it; but at a single stroke it imprints on the mind the central truth about us. The words *image* and *likeness* reinforce one another: there is no ‘and’ between the phrases, and Scripture does not use them as technically distinct expressions, as some theologians have done, whereby **the ‘image’ is man’s indelible constitution as a rational and morally responsible being, and the ‘likeness’ is that spiritual accord with the will of God which was lost at the fall**. The distinction exists, but it does not coincide with these terms. After the fall, man is still said to be in God’s image (Gen. 9:6) and likeness (Jas 3:9); nonetheless he requires to be ‘renewed ... after the image of him that created him’ (Col. 3:10; cf. Eph. 4:24).<sup>9</sup>
- iii. The *dominion* over all creatures is ‘not the content but the consequence’ of the divine image (Delitzsch). James 3:7, 8 points out that we still largely exercise it—with a fatal exception. Hebrews 2:6–10 and 1 Corinthians 15:27, 28 (quoting Ps. 8:6) speak of its full reclamation by Jesus, and 1 Corinthians 6:3 promises the exalting of redeemed man above angels (cf. Rev. 4:4). In sad contrast, our human record of exploiting what is at our mercy proves the unfitness of fallen beings to govern, as ourselves ungoverned: cf. the ominous tone of 9:2.<sup>10</sup>

**b. Conformed to the image of Christ – Rom. 8:28-30**

- i. **“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** – Rom 8:29
- ii. In other words, through faith and baptism the sinner becomes a Christian, who bears the shape or form of God’s own Son. Christians are not just adopted children (8:15), but are being continually transformed or metamorphosed into an *eikōn*, “image, likeness,” of the Son of God.<sup>11</sup>
- iii. The new creation, the community of men and women conformed to the image of Christ, who is himself the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), is seen to have been from the beginning the object of God’s foreknowledge and foreordaining mercy. The fulfilment of this purpose is involved, for New Testament writers, in the creative words of Genesis 1:26, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’<sup>12</sup>

## 4. How does this impact my life?

- a. **Did God make my day? i.e., We are to know him.** → God exists in loving union to himself and extends loving union to us.
  - i. This means that we were created to **know and enjoy** God. Graciously, in the face of our rebellion, God made a way for us to be restored so that reality could be experienced again.
    - 1. Our doctrine of creation also means that we are not materialists or philosophical naturalists. We cannot believe that “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will

<sup>9</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 55.

<sup>10</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer S.J., *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 525.

<sup>12</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 176–177.

be.”<sup>45</sup> Before the world came into being, God forever was, and he now sustains all that exists by his powerful word (Heb. 1:3). In an act of freedom, God spoke, and it came to be. The implications of this are clear. To use the biblical image, he is the potter and we are the clay. The Lord God sits above the universe on his throne as the eternal King, and we are accountable to him. **We were made by God and for God, and insofar as we ignore this, we are defying God, the source of all life.** We owe him; failure to see and delight in this is idolatry. The first responsibility of sentient moral creatures is to acknowledge our creatureliness.<sup>13</sup>

ii. **A disciple is... i.e., a follower of Jesus is..**

1. **Character: Biblically saturated and prayerfully minded**

2. **Competency: Biblically literate and prays without ceasing**

a. **Demonstrated by:**

- i. I regularly consult with God before entering my day/week/month/year.
- ii. I confer with God and allow Him to interrupt my plans.
- iii. I regularly seek guidance from God through the Scriptures.
- iv. I am regularly attended a Bible study.
- v. I am usually in a listening posture with God.
- vi. I humbly obey the voice of God and seek His answer through prayer.

b. What is my intentional next step in growing closer to God?

b. **We are called to make him known. → The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)**

- i. The God who revealed himself as Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Old Testament is the very same God who is now revealed in Jesus Christ and manifested by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. He is the God of the whole world, and for that reason his people have a responsibility to make him known to all people. **Our monotheism calls for mission, for though other religions may have some elements of truth, a person who does not know this God, the God of the Bible, does not know God at all.** As we read in the prophecy of Isaiah, the Lord says, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me” (Isa. 46:9).<sup>14</sup>

ii. **How worn is my welcome mat?**

1. **A disciple is...**

a. **Character: Compassion for the lost**

b. **Competency: Gospel-fluent**

2. **Demonstrated by:**

- a. People in the community know that I am a strong Christian.
- b. I take regular initiative to meet or serve unchurched people.
- c. I regularly have spiritual conversation with individuals who don't share my spiritual beliefs.
- d. I can confidently explain the Gospel to someone.
- e. I look for ways to share the Gospel.

<sup>13</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 39). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>14</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 36). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

Additional notes:

### On doctrinal Rank:

With the Bible and the gospel foundational to our doctrine and life (1 Tim. 4:16), we have identified four categories of dogmatic rank, simply identified as: 1. Of First Importance 2. Of Second Importance 3. Of Third Importance 4. Disputable Matters This four-level framework has been chosen because it allows enough nuance and distinction between levels without becoming overly complex. The two poles of this four-level framework are drawn directly from the two Scripture passages previously mentioned, in which Paul says, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance ...” (1 Cor. 15:3), and “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters” (Rom 14:1). In determining doctrinal rank, the Scripture alone is our absolute authority and norm, and as such it serves a magisterial role. But there is also a place for creeds and confessions, which set forth the truths of Scripture in a systematic fashion. They always stand under the authority of Scripture, and therefore can only serve a ministerial role, assisting us in our understanding of Scripture. This applies also to historical theology, which helps us understand how the “faith once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) has been articulated, defended and applied by the church through time. **Again, historical theology is not an absolute authority, which is the Bible alone. We have developed six key factors articulated through six diagnostic questions to weigh the relative importance of a particular doctrinal formulation:**

1. Relevance to our understanding of the nature and character of God: To what extent does this doctrine or practice reveal the person and nature of God?
2. Connection to the gospel and the overarching narrative of the Bible: How directly is this doctrine or practice connected to the gospel and to the storyline of the whole Bible?
3. Exegetical clarity: To what extent does Scripture unambiguously affirm this doctrine or practice?
4. Biblical prominence: How prominent is this doctrine or practice in Scripture?
5. Historical consensus: How widespread is the consensus on this doctrine or practice in the Church of both the past and present?
6. Application to the church and the believer: How relevant is this doctrine or practice to us today?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 351-352). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.