

We Believe – A final word on unity.
Ephesians 2:11-22
(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Over the course of the summer, we walked through the ten theological statements that make up our Statement of Faith. This statement is the theological foundation for our essential beliefs as a local church and as part of the Evangelical Free Church of America. If you missed most or part of the series and want to know what we believe, you can go back and check those sermons out on our website. Our ten statements are not only rooted in the Bible, but they are also found in unity across denominations and over the course of church history. Simply, our essential theological convictions aren't new ideas that we've created. They are biblical and historical confessions of faith that allow us to have unity across denominational lines and within the long faithful history of Christianity. Yes, there are many secondary and tertiary points in theology. Many of them are far more than just matters of opinion or personality. They are real convictions that give shape to denominations and whole theological streams. Yet, they are secondary at best and need to be treated as such. When we can agree on the essentials, it allows us to hold even the most important secondary things with charity and respect that prompts unity among the saints. That is a beautiful and Christ-honoring thing.

There is a second and very important additional aspect of unity that is created by holding the essentials as primary, mission. Mission flows out of what is most important to the whole and not just to me. Over the course of the last month, we have focused on the reality and necessity of living out our faith in word and deed. We've heard stories of God at work in the lives of our global partners and here in our city. I want to celebrate a few things with you. As a local church, we invested in the lives of foster kids and parents from Story County through Royal Family Kids Camp. We have taken the opportunity to help our local neighbors with daily needs through Ames Housewarming. We have cared for our international friends through the Rest Assured Project by helping to supply beds. We helped to hand out over 900 pairs of shoes and 1,800 pairs of socks at the Hope in Christ Back 2 School event. We stepped out to facilitate tangible acts of love in the We Heart Ames project. The thing I especially love about the last two events is that they are purposefully done with several churches in town. Our mission and our theological essentials led us to not huddle up and be an exclusive club, but lock arm-in-arm with other brothers and sisters from other godly churches in our city and serve our neighbors for their good and to the glory of God! Unity is not some abstraction that is a pie-in-the-sky idea; it is real and being lived out in and through this church. **In simple terms, mission helps us stay unified.**

1. Theological Charity

a. What is theological charity?

- i. The knowledge to understand what is and isn't an essential, and the humility to listen and disagree with respect.

b. What is an essential? → 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.**

c. **"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."**¹

- 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."²

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."³
- 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).

e. What is heresy?

i. Definition of heresy:

1. **Heresy is – Any teaching rejected by the Christian community as contrary to Scripture and hence to orthodox doctrine.** Most of the teachings that have been declared heretical have to do with either the nature of God or the person of Jesus Christ.⁴

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

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

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

⁴ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 58.

- a. **Traditionally, a heretic is someone who has compromised an essential doctrine and lost sight of who God really is, usually by oversimplification. Literally, heresy means “choice” — that is, a choice to deviate from traditional teaching in favor of one’s own insights.⁵**
- 2. **Important** – Just because someone is wrong doesn’t mean that they are a heretic. Legalists teach an outsized focus on performance through good works, but that doesn’t mean that all legalists are heretics. Also, just because I disagree with someone on a secondary or minor point of theology, or hold a different interpretation of a debated passage, doesn’t make them a heretic.
- ii. **Examples of Heresy**
 - 1. **Denying the nature and person of Jesus.**
 - 2. **Denying the nature of the Trinity.**
 - 3. **Denying salvation through grace by faith in Jesus alone. i.e., Preaching a different gospel.**
 - a. These first three are the most historical examples. That is, most of heresies up until the 20th century dealt with these issues.
 - 4. **Denying the human condition and need for salvation.**
 - 5. **Denying the authority and inspiration of the Bible.**
 - a. The last two are more recent heretical topics that have uniquely emerged in the cultural and philosophical soil of the 20th and 21st centuries.

2. “In Christ Jesus”

- a. **What is the “therefore” there for? – Paul’s writing style.**
 - i. Remember, Paul writes in the Hellenistic style of rhetoric that was common in his day. That means that he routinely builds his arguments in a linear fashion that often flow: Point A + Point B = Conclusion C. In this way it is very algebraic in nature. So, if you understand basic algebra, Paul becomes much easier to read and understand. That doesn’t mean that he is always easy, as he also slips back and forth from a Greek style of argumentation to Hebrew poetry and theological concepts.
 - ii. **Greek & Hebrew** → Paul is writing the believers in Ephesus and they are predominately Gentile. However, Paul opened up his letter with a Hebrew style poem in 1:3-14. This either means one of three things. First, that they were familiar with this style of writing and it wasn’t limited to Jewish audiences. Second, there were enough Jewish believers in this large metropolitan city that they could unpack and explain it. Or, third, that the information presented was clear enough that even the Gentile audience could understand what Paul was expressing without needing to understand the rich tradition it flowed out of. The reality to these three possibilities is that it is most likely that all three are true of the Ephesian context.
 - 1. **It is also why we today as a modern audience can understand what Paul expresses in 1:3-14 without understanding the rich tradition of this style of poetry.**
 - 2. Through Paul’s command of Greek and Hebrew culture, language, and theology we can come to see why he was so influential and used by God in this era of the

⁵ Holcomb, Justin S.. Know the Heretics (KNOW Series Book 2) (p. 11). Kindle Edition.

life of the church. He was truly able to communicate to all people the hope of Jesus!

- iii. As we continue to grow in our understanding of how Paul writes, or as scholars like to say, the Pauline rhetorical style, we have come to see that we don't have to be a scholar to understand Paul. Instead, we just need to know what to look for.
 - 1. If Paul flows in a linear logical fashion, then we should be on the lookout for any transition words or phrases such as "therefore" and "for this reason." These will be key transition points in Paul's logic that will help us track what he is saying.
 - 2. We have already heard a "for this reason" back in 1:15. It was Paul's transition point after he laid a theological foundation of God's character and nature in vv.3-14. The "for this reason" then flowed into his praise and thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers because of God's character that was at work within them. It also gives the foundation for his prayer for them.
 - 3. **We come to another key transition in 2:11, this "therefore" transitions to the big conclusion of the nature of our salvation.**
- b. **Saved from and Saved for.**
 - i. What you have been saved from. → We have been saved from sin and rebellion.
 - 1. 2:1 – You "were" dead in your trespasses. → Again, Paul is continually driving home the reality of what was and what now is. Transformation has occurred and is occurring.
 - 2. In this section we hear that we were saved from division and hostility.
 - ii. **What you are saved for. → Righteousness and to bear Christlike fruit.**
 - 1. Everything so far has been building to what Paul is about to say in vv. 13-22. We are something entirely new and we belong to a new people in Christ.
 - 2. When I live as if I've been saved from something, I start to live with less of a sin avoidance mentality and more of a God glorifying mentality.
 - 3. **One of the key questions in growing into maturity is asking, "How do I honor God in this situation?"**

3. "Being built together."

- a. To make the point even clearer, Paul explicitly tells them that they are now a new people. There is no mistaking at this point in the letter. Their identity is to be seen solely in light of what Christ has done for them.
 - i. **V.11 - The purpose of Christ's work for human salvation is not limited to the giving of new life to individual men and women, previously dead in sin, as the last section has described.** Chapter 1 has given hints that it goes beyond this, and the present section now shows that it involves the bringing of those individuals, whatever their race or background, into unity in the people of God. In this respect it involves the greatest transformation of situation for the Gentiles, and this section, like verses 1–10, begins by showing what was the condition of Gentiles in the past. **As John Stott puts it we have 'the portrait of an alienated humanity', then, 'the portrait of the peace-making Christ' and lastly 'the portrait of God's new society'.⁶**
- b. This isn't a theoretical newness either. It is to affect the very fabric of their community.

⁶ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 86.

- i. Not only can it be said that Christ brings peace. *He is our peace*. As men and women are brought to be in him, and continue to live in him, they find peace with God, and so also a meeting-place and concord with one another, whatever may have been their divisions of race, colour, class or creed before. He came for this purpose (Luke 2:14), to be the Prince of peace, and indeed in such terms the prophets had foretold his coming (Isa. 9:6–7; 53:5; Mic. 5:5; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 9:10). By his coming and supremely by his cross, he *has made us both one*. The Greek says literally that ‘he has made both things into one thing’ (later, in v. 15, the personal is used). The organization of Judaism and that of the Gentile world no longer stand apart as before. Divisions and distinctions no longer exist as far as the standing of any before God is concerned. God has made a way for the divided to become one (cf. John 10:16; 17:11; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13).⁷
 - ii. **Barth notes, “In Christ, our existence here-and-now is so radically related to God’s beyond, and our entire known existence is brought so fully into the light of his eternal future, that the distinctions and antitheses that define our current existence are revealed to be conditional and provisional.”**⁸
 1. What Barth is getting at in this quote is that everything else that we see that divides us or defines us is based upon conditions that we did not control or are totally provision based upon our circumstances. But what we have been made into in Christ is something that does not change with our physical location nor into eternity. It is in every way permeant and binding.
- c. **Our “new man” status is permeant and binding: Let’s ask –**
- i. **Is there anything in my life that is more important to my identity and security than what Jesus has done for me?**
 1. What are the things that we look towards to define us?
 - a. Politics, family, careers, degrees, hobbies, parts of our personalities or even personality tests, finances, relationships, entertainment, etc.
 2. How do these things not only define us, but provide us with a level of security?
 - a. I.e., “I’m ok as long as I have...”
 - i. This doesn’t mean that it wouldn’t hurt to lose something on that list. We’re not robots without feelings or convictions. But it does mean that we can lose these things and not become lost or hopeless.
 - b. It also means that we do not look to these things to provide what they never could provide in the first place.
 - ii. **In what ways are we promoting hostility instead of peace and unity?**
 1. We do this when we allow anything outside of Christ and essential to the faith drive a wedge between us and cause unresolved conflict.
 2. This is not a call towards some odd or otherworldly “peace” that comes off as eerie or delusional. It is instead a call to sobriety and maturity. A willingness to recognize that we are different people, with different lived experiences, and different perspectives, so we are going to have differences of opinions and convictions.
 - a. **I.e., Unity does not equal uniformity.**

⁷ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 89.

⁸ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, ed. R. David Nelson, trans. Ross M. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 140.

3. This means we are not to play the same games nor adopt the same posture as the world around us. Instead we are give an example of a better way of patience, respect, and gentleness through conflict.
4. We are also not to allow anything that is secondary become primary and with that, be taken captive by vain ideas and tossed back and forth.
- d. When we talk about being exiles, we must understand why we are exiles.
 - i. **We are not exiles because we have somehow grown discontent with the way things are or how the world around us is going.** Too often in Christian circles we appeal to the “good old days” as if we are to return to those days. Yes, there very well might be parts of what was that were noble, lovely, and true. It is ok for our hearts to long for those things. But we must also have the maturity to know that there were plenty of parts of what was that weren’t noble, lovely, or true. And our call is not to return to what was in our recent past, but a call to what was in Eden before the fall.
 - ii. **We are exiles because we have been made into something new in Christ.** This means that we are not looking to what was, but what is and what will be. It means that our old ways of thinking, acting, and relating to one another are now different because of Christ. We were captivated by this world before, but now we are captivated by Christ.
- e. Paul and Peter agree on this idea of being exiles and what has transformed us into an exilic people.
 - i. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
 1. In Philippians 2:1–3 and 4:2 Paul had to speak against divisions due to personal rivalries, and in 1 Corinthians 1 and 3 against the danger of breaking up into sects for the sake of loyalty to honored leaders rather than to Christ. Here he has had in mind the Jewish-Gentile animosities that in earlier days threatened to make two churches instead of one, and now to Gentile Christians he says—what many Jewish Christians before had been loath to accept—you *also are built together into this holy temple, this dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*⁹
- f. **1 Pet. 2:9-11** ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
- g. Peter is really helpful for us to understand the nature of exile:
 - i. Peter closed the opening section by reminding the group of Christians that he is writing to about their identity change.
 - ii. **⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (2:9-10)**
 - iii. Peter is writing to a group of people with pastoral authority to teach, encourage, and even correct them.

⁹ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 96.

1. **Peter writes to give these Christians hope, consolation, and encouragement by explaining their new identity in Christ and how even suffering is an integral part of that identity.**¹⁰
- iv. Who is he writing to? → Christians who are suffering for their allegiance to Christ.
 1. **Slander and malicious talk undermined their relationships with associates and family, threatened their honor in the community, and possibly jeopardized their livelihood.**
 2. The issues of how to maintain a vital Christian faith in such circumstances and how to respond to unjust treatment pressed upon them.¹¹
- h. As Peter begins the second section of his letter, he will move to the application phases of the idea he just unpacked in 1:1-2:10.
 - i. Though it is an oversimplification, it may be said that 2:11–5:11 gives specific application to the general teaching of 1:1–2:10.¹²
 - ii. By using the word **beloved** Peter reminds his readers that though he exhorts them as an apostle he also cares for them as beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord's family. Although 'beloved' is a rather archaic word today, 'dear friends' (NIV) seems too weak. The Phillips paraphrase is probably best: 'I beg you, as those whom I love'.
 - iii. *I beseech you* is archaic language again, but 'I urge you' (NIV, NASB) is not forceful enough. **The word (*parakaleō*) has the sense 'I strongly urge you, I strongly appeal to you'.**¹³
 1. The reality here is that Peter is not giving them wiggle room on this application. → This is an imperative... a command... a requirement.
 - a. We all have examples of the difference between "recommendations, strong recommendations, and requirements."
 - b. Growing up, it was recommended that I have a neat haircut.
 - c. Growing up, it was strongly recommended for me to be on time.
 - d. Growing up it was required that I would have a job as a teen.
 2. **Why? → Because they have a new identity and need to live like it.**
 - a. It is the same for the examples of my growing up years, the required thing was required because it was part of our family identity.
 - iv. **Because they are 'aliens and exiles' they should *abstain from the passions of the flesh*.** These 'passions' or strong desires (see note on this word, *epithymia*, at 1:14) which are characteristic of the sinful nature are not appropriate to a Christian's heavenly homeland. Examples of such desires are found in **Galatians 5:19–21 and 1 John 2:16 (the discussion of 'the flesh' as the sinful nature in Gal. 5:13–25 is a good commentary on this phrase), but in fact any desires for things contrary to God's will are prohibited here.**¹⁴
 - i. **V.11** - They are still living in this world, but they are no longer part of it. → So their new values are to be expressed through their conduct.

¹⁰ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 63.

¹¹ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 63.

¹² Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 122.

¹³ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 121–122.

¹⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 122.

- i. I.e., Belief must correspond in behavior. → If I think I am... I should act like it.
- ii. Again, this was not out of a moral performance or legalism standpoint. Jesus had saved them and continues to save them and keeps their salvation secure. → Salvation was and will always be a gift of grace by God. (cf. Eph 2:8-9)
- iii. **We must avoid the trap of legalism as much as they needed to.** → This is also what Paul writes to address in the Galatian church.
 - 1. ²¹**I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. ¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Gal. 2:21-3:3)
- j. **V. 12 - Living out our new identity is not merely about avoiding sin, but it is also about living in a honorable way among all people (especially those who don't believe).**
 - i. No new sentence begins here in the Greek text, for this verse is the positive counterpart to verse 11: not only are the readers to abstain from sinful desires (v. 11), they are also to continue to '*Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles*'. **Conduct here refers to a day-by-day pattern of life (see note on this word at 1:15).** Peter calls unbelievers *Gentiles*, not because he thinks that his readers were all Jewish Christians, but because he once again assumes that Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles within the body of Christ) are the 'true Israel'. Therefore all who are not Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles) are truly 'Gentiles' (cf. 4:3).¹⁵
 - ii. In the first century, Christians were called cannibals for eating the Lord's Supper; they were called atheists for not worshipping the pagan gods; they were considered disruptors of society and rebels against the emperor.¹⁶
 - 1. **Our battle is not against the unbelieving people of the world; they are our mission field. It is against our own natural, sinful desires—and no amount of insulation from the world "out there" will leave behind our desires "in here."**¹⁷
 - iii. One of the primary questions of living in an honorable way for the mature and maturing Christian is, **"How can I honor God in these circumstances or in this relationship?"**
 - 1. Christian maturity is not merely about avoiding sin... yes, that is important!
 - 2. We grow into Christian maturity as we begin to live more and more with the goal to glorify and honor God in all our circumstances.
 - a. We honor God in our relationships.
 - b. We honor God in our grief and distress.
 - c. We honor God in our joy and celebration.
 - d. We honor God in our business, career, and scholastic pursuits.
 - e. Etc.
 - 3. Why do we do this? → So that others will believe and experience abundant life in Jesus! (cf. v.12 / Jn. 10:10)

¹⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 123.

¹⁶ Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2016), 96.

¹⁷ Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2016), 95.