

# **LEFC Theological Distinctives**

**February 2016**

## **1. God**

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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. God the Father rules over all things and has limitless knowledge and power. He has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory. This means that He made man to have fellowship with Himself and intends that all creation should live to the praise of His glory.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

We believe God is sovereign. This means that God is the all-powerful King of kings. There is nothing that escapes His notice, nor anything that happens that is not under His direct control. Big things and small, good and evil, even the election and salvation of humankind are all controlled by God (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28; Rom. 11:36).

We believe that God unconditionally elects His children. Election refers to God's choosing whom to save. It is unconditional which means that there is no condition that man must meet before God chooses to save him. Also, because man is dead in trespasses and sin, there is no condition he can meet before God chooses to save him from his deadness.

However, election does not mean that our final salvation is unconditional. It is not. We must meet the condition of faith in Christ in order to inherit eternal life (Hebrews 11:6<sup>1</sup>; Eph. 2:8-9<sup>2</sup>). But it is not necessary to have faith in order to be chosen by God. It is just the opposite. God electing and choosing us is necessary so that we can come to faith. So because God chooses us before the foundation of the world, He also purchases our redemption at the cross through Christ<sup>3</sup> and brings us to faith (Acts 13:48<sup>4</sup>; Jn. 10:26<sup>5</sup>; Rom. 9:11-16<sup>6</sup>).

Therefore we believe that our perfect and sovereign God accomplishes the complete redemption of his people from start to finish. He elects them before the foundation of the world, and calls them, through Christ, to faith in Himself and justifies them. As Christians we love God and believe that He is our Great Treasure, and nothing can compare with Him<sup>7</sup>. One day God's people will be glorified by Him and nothing can nor will ever separate them from the love of God in Christ forever and ever (Rom. 8:28-33<sup>8</sup>).

## 2. The Bible

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

We affirm that the Bible is comprised exclusively of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. As such, this collection of historical narrative, letters, poems, laments, legal prescription, prophecy and other genres is the written Word of God<sup>1</sup>.

The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure. As applied by the Holy Spirit, it leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as originally written, we believe that the Bible is not only free from error in the original writings, but also in all that it teaches<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. The Human Condition

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

We believe that the history of the human race as presented in Scripture is primarily a history of humankind in a state of sin and rebellion against God and of God's plan of redemption to bring man back to Himself. This sin, which extends to all humankind is total and complete; meaning that people are completely and totally depraved from conception<sup>1</sup>. When we speak of people's depravity we are talking about an individual's natural condition apart from any grace exerted by God to restrain or transform them<sup>2</sup>.

We affirm that God Himself did not sin, and God is not to be blamed for sin. It was humankind who sinned, and it was angels who sinned, and in both cases they did so by willful, voluntary choice. To blame God for sin would be blasphemy against the character of God.

## 4. Jesus Christ

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

We believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God and is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. (Jn. 1:18; Heb. 2:14-18; Jn. 1:1) 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. (Heb. 4:14)

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

Jesus Christ, is the eternal Word made flesh. He is perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. Through Him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in Him all things hold together by the word of His power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation and in Him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. (Col. 1:15-19)

He is the only Savior for the sins of the world and has redeemed believers from our sin. He rose bodily from the grave on the third day, was victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of forty days appeared to over five hundred witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection. He then ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, He intercedes for His people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of his body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.

## 5. The Work of Christ

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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<sup>1</sup> death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

By shedding His blood on Calvary's cross and by dying in our place, Jesus revealed the divine love as He removed our guilt, redeemed us, and reconciled us to God. He also upheld divine justice by bearing the curse and wrath of God, which was due to our sin, so that we can be justified and the righteousness of God can be vindicated. In this way the death of Christ was necessary because God would not show a just regard for his glory if he swept sins under the rug with no recompense. (Rom. 3:25-26)

We believe that Christ ultimately died for the church. This means that the atoning death of Christ was not meant to purchase salvation for everyone, but only for those who believe in Him and follow Him. (Jn. 10:15-16) In this way the death of Christ only applies to a specific group of people. This is what we would call "Particular Redemption."<sup>2</sup>

## 6. The Holy Spirit

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**<sup>1</sup>

We believe that all that we, as believers understand of the Father and the Son, we understand through the illumining work of the Spirit (John 16). That whatever grasp we have of God's revelation is always enabled by the Spirit. We also believe that in whatever ways sinners are empowered to overcome the corrupting aspects of the world, the flesh, and the adversary, they do so by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit leads the faithful into all truth by pointing constantly toward the truth embodied in Jesus (Jn 16:13).

The Father and Son have given the church no greater gift than the outpouring of God's own Spirit, and Jesus (The Son) promised that the Spirit would follow His ministry on earth, and that blessings<sup>2</sup> would come with the ministry of the Spirit. Having once been given the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, the believing community will never be left without this Comforter.

## 7. The Church

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

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.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

LEFC believes the marks of a true church involves not only the right administration of the ordinances (or sacraments),<sup>1</sup> but also distinctively embrace and practice the right preaching of the Word of God,<sup>2</sup> and the right use of church discipline.<sup>3</sup>

### **Membership:**

The membership of believers in the one true universal church manifests itself in covenant committed relationships with each other and the leadership within a local church setting.<sup>4</sup>

### Baptism:

We believe that baptism is an ordinance [or sacrament] of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.<sup>5</sup>

### The Lord's Supper (Communion):

The Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This observance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

We believe that solemn and proper observance of both The Lord's Supper and baptism are important for the spiritual health of individual believers as well as that of the body of Christ as a whole.

## **8. Christian Living**

### EFCA Statement of Faith:

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.

### LEFC Distinctive:

Not only do we believe that Christian Living is an overflow of what Jesus has accomplished for us, but we also believe that it is a necessary component of the life and lifestyle of every true believer. Therefore, we think it is important to be clear on what we see as the entailments of Christian Living. The items that follow are broad and yet they are not exhaustive of all that God's Word has to say on the subject. They also reiterate that all of our lives are both worship and testimony to our great God and merciful Savior.

First, we believe that our faith must endure to the end if we are to be saved. This truth highlights several aspects of the Christian Life. It shows that one is not saved simply for a moment, but really for all time, It also demonstrates that there is both an expectation of growth and perseverance in their faith (1 Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:11-12, Mk. 13:13; Rev. 2:7,10,11,17,25,26; 3:5,11-12).

We also believe that obedience, which is evidence of our inner renewal from God by His Spirit is necessary for our final salvation. To be clear, God does not demand sinless perfection from us as Philippians 3:12-13, 1 John 1:8-10, and Matthew 6:12 demonstrate. However, growth in godliness is an expectation and God's word doesn't mince words in laying out this reality. To state it in Biblical terms, we are to walk in newness of life (Heb. 12:14; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:10; 1 Jn 2:3-6, 3:4-10,14, 4:20; John 8:31; Lk. 10:28; Matt. 6:14,15; 18:35; Gen. 18:19, 22:16-17, 26:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:19).

However, it is a necessary reminder for each of us that God's children cannot be separated from his saving, redeeming love. This means that our eternal security is not tied to our performance but to Jesus' sacrificial death, and his provision of the Holy Spirit to us gives us the ability of meet the requirements of obedience<sup>1</sup> (Rom. 8:28-30; Jn. 10:26-30; Eph. 1:4-5).

Because God calls His people to walk in obedience to God and His Word, we also believe that the Church in every age must take positions on moral and social issues. What follows is a list of those issues on which we feel we must take a stand. Our full position on each issue can be found in a stand-alone document.

#### Marriage and Sexuality:

It is the biblical position that marriage involves the union of one man and one woman in permanent sacred fidelity.<sup>2</sup>

#### Abortion:

We believe that life begins at conception and that all life is created in the image of God and has value. Therefore, we believe that abortion is not acceptable at any stage of pregnancy, and that it is our responsibility, as Christians, to work towards the protection of human life whether born or unborn.

### **9. Christ's Return**

#### EFCA Statement of Faith:

We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial 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.

#### LEFC Distinctive:

The return of Jesus inaugurates the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth. When he returns he will do so in His physical body as the conquering king. At that moment every knee (even those who oppose him) will bow to his glory. This will be the moment when death itself will finally be defeated and we will receive our sinless, glorified bodies. Satan and all who have died apart from Christ will be banished to the punishment of eternal fire.

Because Jesus himself said that no one would know the day or hour of his return, our call is to diligently pray for his return, to be waiting expectantly and to be living each day as if today will be the day. Jesus also made it clear that as we wait we should be serving one another as would serve him, thus hastening the day of his return and the renewal of all of creation. And because the curse remains, we are also called to live now as exiles, looking forward to the kingdom that is to come.

Since there are several interpretive views on the timing of Jesus' return and our standing before God is based on his grace and mercy manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus, LEFC allows for all three views on the Millennial Kingdom to be acceptable.

## **10. Response and Eternal Destiny**

### **EFCA Statement of Faith:**

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **LEFC Distinctive:**

We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, and are taken consciously into the presence of Christ, which is more glorious and more satisfying than any experience on earth (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:13).

We believe in the blessed hope that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will gather His elect, raise the dead, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery (Mt. 25:34, 46; Jn. 14:2; Rev. 21:1-3).

We believe that the end of all things in this age will be the beginning of a never-ending, ever-increasing happiness in the hearts of the redeemed, as God displays more and more of His infinite and inexhaustible greatness and glory for the enjoyment of His people (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rom. 8:19-21; Heb. 12:26; 27; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:3).

## Appendices:

### God

1. Hebrews 11:6 says: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” So faith is a necessary component in our salvation because apart from it we cannot please God or draw near to Him. In this way, without faith we are still dead in our sin and are not yet reconciled to God. So we must believe and have faith in God in order to be saved by God.
  2. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” This is not only a reminder of the necessity of faith for salvation, but it also lets us know that our faith is a gift of God and not a result of anything we do. We must have faith for salvation, but that faith is given to us by God.
  3. All election is in relation to Christ. There would be no election of sinners unto salvation if Christ were not appointed to die for their sins. As Ephesians 1:5 says: “...he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,...”
  4. Acts 13:48 reports how the Gentiles responded to the preaching of the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Notice it does not say that as many believed were chosen to be ordained to eternal life. The prior election of God was the reason some believed while others did not.
  5. Jesus says to the Jews in John 10:26, “You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.” He does not say, “You are not my sheep because you do not believe.” Being a sheep is something God decides for us before we believe. This means that we believe because we are God’s chosen sheep, not vice versa. (See Jn. 8:47; 18:37)
  6. In Romans 9:11-16 Paul stresses the unconditionally of election. For example, in verses 11-12 he describes the principle God used in the choice of Jacob over Esau: “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” This means that we are unconditionally elected by God before we are born or have done any good or evil.
- God’s unconditional election is stressed again in Romans 9:15-16 which says: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So it depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy.” We are hopelessly bound in the darkness of sin. If we are going to be saved, God will have to unconditionally take the initiative to make us willing to submit to him.

7. God is infinite and is the answer to our longing for completeness. He is eternal and is the answer to our longing for permanence. He is unchangeable and is the answer to our longing for stability and security. Nothing can compare with God.

8. Romans 8:28-33: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose, For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”

Often this text is used to argue against unconditional election on the basis of verse 29 which says, “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined...” Some people say that God’s foreknowledge means that God knows in advance who will use their free will to come to faith, so that he can predestine them to sonship. This would mean that people are chosen on the basis of their faith which they produce themselves and God sees beforehand.

But this does not fit with the context of the passage. Notice that Romans 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Focus for a moment on the fact that all whom God calls he also justifies. This calling in verse 30 is not given to all people. The reason we know it’s not is that all those who are called are also justified — but all men are not justified since justification comes by faith (Rom. 5:1), and not all receive faith.

So this calling in verse 30 is not the general call to repentance that preachers give or that God gives through the glory of nature. Everybody receives that call. The call of verse 30 is given only to those whom God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son (v. 29). It is this specific call which leads necessarily to justification, and since justification comes by faith it is also a call which leads to faith. This is God’s specific and irresistible call to those whom He has predestined.

Now notice the implication this has for the meaning of foreknowledge in verse 29. It can’t mean that God knows in advance who will use their free will to come to faith, so that he can predestine them to sonship. It can’t mean that because we have seen from verse 30 that people do not come to faith on their own. They are called irresistibly by God to faith and are justified.

So foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 is not the mere awareness of something that will happen in the future apart from God’s predetermination. Rather it is the kind of knowledge referred to in Old Testament texts like Genesis 18:19: “I have chosen [literally: known] Abraham so that he may charge his children...to keep the way of the Lord”, and Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations”, and Amos 3:2: “You only [Israel] have I known from all the families of the earth”.

## **The Bible**

1. Each book of the Bible is to be interpreted according to both its immediate and overarching biblical context and purpose in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through His word in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine.

2. The Bible is totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed. No tradition, regardless of its piety and helpfulness, should supplant Scripture. Likewise, neither extra-biblical revelation nor worldly wisdom can be used to redefine what God teaches in His word. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God that is found in the Holy Scriptures.

## **The Human Condition**

1. Humankind's depravity is total in at least four senses.

### **Our rebellion against God is total:**

Apart from the grace of God there is no delight in the holiness of God, and there is no glad submission to the sovereign authority of God.

Of course totally depraved people can be very religious and very philanthropic. They can pray and give alms and fast, as Jesus said (Mt. 6:1-18). But their very religion is rebellion against the rights of their Creator, if it does not come from a childlike heart of trust in the free grace of God. Religion is one of the chief ways that people conceal their unwillingness to forsake self-reliance and bank all their hopes on the unmerited mercy of God (Lk. 18:9-14; Col. 2:20-23).

The totality of our rebellion is seen in Romans 3:9-10 & 18 which says, "I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no not one; no one seeks for God....There is no fear of God before their eyes."

It is a myth that a person in their natural state is genuinely seeking God. People do seek God. But they do not seek Him for who He is. They seek Him in a pinch as one who might preserve them from death or enhance their worldly enjoyments. Apart from conversion, no one comes to the light of God.

Some do come to the light. But listen to what John 3:20-21 says about them, "Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God."

Yes there are those who come to the light — namely those whose deeds are the work of God. “Wrought in God” means worked by God. Apart from this gracious work of God all people hate the light of God and will not come to Him lest their evil be exposed — this is total rebellion. *“No one seeks for God... There is no fear of God before their eyes!”*

**In their total rebellion everything humankind does is sin:**

In Romans 14:23 Paul says, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” Therefore, if all people are in total rebellion, everything they do is the product of rebellion and cannot be an honor to God, but can only be part of their sinful rebellion. If a king teaches his subjects how to fight well and then those subjects rebel against their king and use the very skill he taught them to resist him, those skills become evil. Therefore, people do many things which they can only do because they are created in the image of God and which in the service of God could be praised. But in the service of people’s self-justifying rebellion, these very things are sinful.

In Romans 7:18 Paul says, “I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” This is a radical confession of the truth that in our rebellion nothing we think or feel is good. It is all part of our rebellion. The fact that Paul qualifies his depravity with the words, *“that is, in my flesh,”* shows that he is willing to affirm the good of anything that the Spirit of God produces in him (Rom. 15:18). “Flesh” refers to people in their natural state apart from the work of God’s Spirit. So what Paul is saying in (Rom. 7:18) is that apart from the work of God’s Spirit all we think and feel and do is not good.

**Note:** We recognize that the word “good” has a broad range of meanings. We will have to use it in a restricted sense to refer to many actions of fallen people which in relation are in fact not good.

For example we will have to say that it is good that most unbelievers do not kill and that some unbelievers perform acts of benevolence. What we mean when we call such actions good is that they more or less conform to the external moral pattern of life that God has commanded in Scripture. However, such outward conformity to the revealed will of God is not righteousness in relation to God. It is not done out of reliance on Him or for His glory. He is not trusted for the resources, though He gives them all. Nor is His honor exalted, even though that’s His will in all things (1 Cor. 10:31). Therefore even these “good” acts are part of our rebellion and are not “good” in the sense that really counts in the end — in relation to God.

**Humankind’s inability to submit to God and do good is total:**

Picking up on the term “flesh” above [people apart from the grace of God] we find Paul declaring the “flesh” to be totally enslaved to rebellion. Romans 8:7-8 says, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” The “mind of the flesh” is the mind of people apart from the indwelling Spirit of God; but for those who are in Christ. So natural person has a mindset that does not and **cannot** submit to God. People cannot reform themselves.

Ephesians 2:1 says that we Christians were all once “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” The point of deadness is that we were incapable of any life with God. Our hearts were like a stone toward God (Eph. 4:18; Eze. 36:26). Our hearts were blind and incapable of seeing the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6). We were totally unable to reform ourselves.

**Our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment:**

Ephesians 2:3 goes on to say that in our deadness we were “*children of wrath.*” That is, we were under God’s wrath because of the corruption of our hearts that made us as good as dead before God.

The reality of hell is God’s clear indictment of the infiniteness of our guilt. If our corruption were not deserving of an eternal punishment God would be unjust to threaten us with a punishment so severe as eternal torment. But the Scriptures teach that God is just in condemning unbelievers to eternal hell (2 Thess. 1:6-9; Mt. 5:29f; 10:28; 13:49f; 18:8f; 25:46; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10). Therefore, to the extent that hell is a total sentence of condemnation, to that extent must we think of ourselves as totally blameworthy apart from the saving grace of God.

In summary, total depravity means that our rebellion against God is total, everything we do in this rebellion is sin, our inability to submit to God or reform ourselves is total, and we are therefore totally deserving of eternal punishment.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of admitting our condition to be this bad. If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But if we humble ourselves under this terrible truth of our total depravity, we will be in a position to see and appreciate the glory and wonder of the work of God discussed in all points.

2. There is no doubt that each person could perform more evil acts toward other people than they do. But if they are restrained from performing more evil acts by motives that are not owing to their glad submission to God, then even their “virtue” is evil in the sight of God. (Rom. 2)

**Work of Christ:**

1. The atonement is the work of God in Christ on the cross whereby he canceled the debt of our sin, appeased his holy wrath against us, and won for us all the benefits of salvation.

2. The term “Particular Redemption” addresses the question, “For whom did Christ die?” But behind the question of the extent of the atonement lies the equally important question about the nature of the atonement. What did Christ actually achieve on the cross for those for whom he died?

If you say that he died for every human being in the same way, then you have to define the nature of the atonement very differently than you would if you believed that Christ only died for those who actually believe. In the first case you would believe that the death of Christ did not actually save anybody; it only made all men savable. It did not actually remove God's punitive wrath from anyone, but instead created a place where people could come and find mercy only **if** they accomplish their own new birth, and bring themselves to faith without the irresistible grace of God.

In other words, to believe that Christ died for all men in the same way, means that the benefits of the cross cannot include the mercy by which we are brought to faith, because then all men would be brought to faith, but they aren't. But if the mercy by which we are brought to faith (irresistible grace) is not part of what Christ purchased on the cross, then we are left to save ourselves from the bondage of sin, the hardness of heart, the blindness of corruption, and the wrath of God.

Yet we do not limit the power and effectiveness of the atonement. We simply say that in the cross God had in view the actual redemption of his children. And we affirm that when Christ died for these, he did not just create the opportunity for them to save themselves, but really purchased for them all that was necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith.

However, we do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense (1 Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe"). For all of God's mercy toward unbelievers — from the rising sun (Mt. 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (Jn. 3:16) — is made possible because of the cross. What we deny then is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way.

So in one sense Christ is the savior of all men as the cross allows God to show mercy to all people. (Rom. 3:25) But he is especially and specifically the Savior of those who believe. And the intention of the death of Christ for the children of God was that it purchase far more than the rising sun and the opportunity to be saved. The death of Christ actually saves from **all** evil those for whom Christ died "especially." This means that the death of Christ was designed specifically for the salvation of God's people, not for every individual.

There are many Scriptures to support that the death of Christ was designed specifically for the salvation of God's people. For example:

John 10:15, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

John 10:26, "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep."

John 17:6, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."

**Note:** Being a sheep enables you to become a believer, not vice versa. So the sheep for whom Christ dies are the ones chosen by the Father to give to the Son.

John 11:51-52, “[Caiaphas] He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

So there are children of God scattered throughout the world. These are the sheep the ones the Father will draw to the Son. Jesus died then to gather these people into one.

Revelation 5:9, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...”

**Note:** John does not say that the death of Christ ransomed all men but that it ransomed men from all the tribes of the world. This is the way we understand texts like 1 John 2:2 which says, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

This does not mean that Christ died with the intention to appease the wrath of God for every person in the world, but that the “sheep,” “the children of God” scattered throughout the whole world, “from every tongue and tribe and people and nation” are intended by the propitiation of Christ. In fact the grammatical parallel between John 11:51-52 and 1 John 2:2 is so close it is difficult to escape the conviction that the same thing is intended by John in both verses.

Also, If “the whole world” in John 2:2 referred to every individual in the world, we would be forced to say that John is teaching that all people will be saved, which he does not believe (see Rev. 14:9-11). The reason we would be forced to say this is that the term **propitiation** refers to a real removal of wrath from sinners. When God’s wrath against a sinner is propitiated, it is removed from that sinner. And the result is that all God’s power now flows in the service of his mercy, with the result that nothing can stop him from saving that sinner.

This means that propitiated sins cannot be punished, otherwise propitiation loses its meaning. Therefore if Christ is the propitiation for all the sins of every individual in the world, they cannot be punished, and must be saved. But John does not believe in such universalism (Jn 5:29). Therefore it is very unlikely that 1 John 2:2 teaches that Jesus is the propitiation of every person in the world.

Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Matthew 26:28 Jesus says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Hebrews 9:28, “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (See also 13:20; Isa. 53:11-12.)

**Note:** These verses use the term “many” which does not mean everyone.

Ephesians 5:25-27, :Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

**Note:** Here Paul not only says that the intended beneficiary of the death of Christ is the Church, but also that the intended effect of the death of Christ is the sanctification and glorification of the church. This is the truth we want very much to preserve: that the cross was not intended to give all men the opportunity to save themselves, but was intended to actually save the church.

Another important text is Romans 8:32 which says, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?”

**Note:** The crucial thing to see here is how Paul bases the certainty of our inheritance on the death of Christ. He says, “God will most certainly give you all things because he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you.” What becomes of this precious promise if Christ is given for those who do not in fact receive all things but instead are lost? The promise vanishes.

In summary, we would say that particular redemption means that though the atonement of Christ in some sense has benefits for all people, it is intended specifically for God’s people, His sheep, the church. So this means that Christ did not die for all the sins of all men, but that He died for all the sins of some men, His people. This means that He died for the unbelief of the elect (See section 1 about God) so that God’s wrath is appeased toward them and his grace is free to draw them irresistibly out of darkness into his marvelous light that they would be saved and would be called His people.

### **The Holy Spirit**

1. From the very beginning of creation we see that the Holy Spirit’s work is to complete and sustain what God the Father has planned and what God the Son has begun. For it says in Genesis 1:2, “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” Also, at Pentecost, with the beginning of the new creation in Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who comes to grant power to the church (Acts 10:38; 2:4, 17–18). The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity through whom God particularly manifests His presence in the new covenant age, and He is the “first fruits” (Rom. 8:23) and “guarantee” (or “down payment,” 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5) of the full manifestation of God’s presence that we will know in the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev. 21:3–4).

## 2. Clarifications on how the Holy Spirit brings God's blessing:

### **The Holy Spirit Empowers Belief:**

The doctrine of irresistible grace does not mean that every influence of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. It means that the Holy Spirit can overcome all resistance and make His influence irresistible.

In Acts 7:51 Stephen says to the Jewish leaders, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did." And Paul speaks of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). God gives many entreaties and promptings which are resisted. In fact the whole history of Israel in the Old Testament is one protracted story of resistance, as the parable of the wicked tenants shows (Mt. 21:33-43; cf. Rom. 10:21).

However, the doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is sovereign and can overcome all resistance when he wills. As Daniel 4:35 says, "He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand!" This means that when God undertakes to fulfill his sovereign purpose, no one can successfully resist him.

This is what Paul taught in Romans 9:14-18, which caused his opponent to say, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" To which Paul answers: "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?" (Rom. 9:20f).

As it relates to salvation, irresistible grace refers to the sovereign work of God to overcome the rebellion of our heart and bring us to faith in Christ so that we can be saved. So if our doctrine of total depravity is true, there can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace.

Someone may say, "Yes, the Holy Spirit must draw us to God, but we can use our freedom to resist or accept that drawing." Our answer is: except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always use our freedom to resist God. That is what it means to be "unable to submit to God." However, if a person becomes humble enough to submit to God it is because God has given that person a new, humble nature.

As Jesus says in John 6:44 says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." This drawing is the sovereign work of grace without which no one can be saved from their rebellion against God. Again some say, "He draws all men, not just some." But this simply evades the clear implication of the context that the Father's "drawing" is why some believe and not others.

2 Timothy 2:24-25 says, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth."

Here, as in John 6:65 repentance is called a gift of God. Notice, he is not saying merely that salvation is a gift of God. He is saying that the prerequisites of salvation are also a gift. When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God “irresistible grace”.

**Note:** It should be obvious from this that irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to believe against our will. That would even be a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, irresistible grace is compatible with preaching and witnessing that tries to persuade people to do what is reasonable and what will accord with their best interests (1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Acts 16:14; John 1:12-13).

### **The Holy Spirit Empowers Gifts:**

We believe in the biblical use of all the spiritual gifts as God apportions to each believer for the edification and the building up of the body. (1 Cor. 12:7-30; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Peter 4:11, Eph. 4:7).

Although we believe that all the gifts of the Spirit are available to believers today, not all gifts are to be prominent at all times. The purpose of the gifts are to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns (1 Cor. 1:7; Eph. 4:11-13), and they will be replaced with something better and more perfect (1 Cor. 13:8-12).

The gifts include (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Rom. 12:6-8):

- a. Prophecy [see below]
- b. Serving – Also referred to as “ministering,” the Greek word diakonian, from which we get the English “deacon,” means service of any kind, the broad application of practical help to those in need.
- c. Teaching – This gift involves the analysis and proclamation of the Word of God, explaining the meaning, context and application to the hearer’s life. The gifted teacher is one who has the unique ability to clearly instruct and communicate knowledge, specifically the doctrines of the faith.
- d. Encouraging – Also called “exhortation,” this gift is evident in those who consistently call upon others to heed and follow God’s truth, which may involve correction or building others up by strengthening weak faith or comforting in trials.
- e. Giving – Gifted givers are those who joyfully share what they have with others, whether it is financial, material, or the giving of personal time and attention. The giver is concerned for the needs of others and seeks opportunities to share goods, money and time with them as needs arise.

f. Leadership – The gifted leader is one who rules, presides over or has the management of other people in the church. The word literally means “guide” and carries with it the idea of one who steers a ship. One with the gift of leadership rules with wisdom and grace and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit in his life as he leads by example.

g. Mercy – Closely linked with the gift of encouragement, the gift of mercy is obvious in those who are compassionate toward others who are in distress, showing sympathy and sensitivity coupled with a desire and the resources to lessen their suffering in a kind and cheerful manner.

h. Word of wisdom – The fact that this gift is described as the “word” of wisdom indicates that it is one of the speaking gifts. This gift describes someone who can understand and speak forth biblical truth in such a way as to skillfully apply it to life situations with all discernment.

i. Word of knowledge – It would seem preferable to understand this in a “non-miraculous” way, simply as the ability to speak with knowledge in various situations. What many people today call “word of knowledge” in charismatic circles, it would seem better simply to refer to as “prophecy.”

j. Faith – All believers possess faith in some measure because it is one of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on all who come to Christ in faith (Gal. 5:22-23). The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, His promises, and the power of prayer to effect miracles.

k. Healing – We believe that God can heal people in miraculous ways. The gift of healing serves as a “sign” that authenticates the gospel, to show God’s mercy by bringing comfort and health, to equip people for service by removing the physical barriers that keep people from ministry, and as an opportunity for God to be glorified as people see the physical evidence of His goodness, love, power, wisdom, and presence.

However, it should be said that we still believe in the value of modern medicine and we believe that God works through those means to heal people. We also believe that, at times, it is part of God’s divine plan not to heal someone for the purpose of increased sanctification through illness and suffering.

l. Miraculous powers [miracles] – Since Paul does not specifically define what the “works of miracles” are, we believe that it is best to say that the “gift of miracles” refers to any kind of activity where God’s mighty power is evident (see Acts 5:19-20; 13:9-12; 16:18; 28:3-6).

m. Distinguishing (discerning) of spirits – the unique ability to determine the true message of God from that of the deceiver, Satan, whose methods include purveying deceptive and erroneous doctrine (Mt. 24:4-5), the gift of discerning spirits is given to the Church to protect it from such as these.

n. Speaking in tongues/Interpretation of tongues [see below]

o. Helps – Closely related to the gift of mercy is the gift of helps. Those with the gift of helps are those who can aid or render assistance to others in the church with compassion and grace. This has a broad range of possibilities for application.

### **Clarification on the Sign gifts:**

Below is a clarification of what we believe about the two sign gifts that are most commonly practiced in our local and regional context.

#### **Clarification regarding Prophecy:**

NT prophecy differs from OT prophecy. In the New Testament and specifically in the writings of Paul it denotes proclamation, encouragement and comforting, (1 Cor. 14:3, 31). The one who prophesies utters the divine call of judgment and repentance which is burdensome and tormenting to many (Rev. 11:3, 10) but which convicts others of sin and leads them to the worship of God (1 Cor. 14:24).

Therefore, the proclamation of God's Word becomes LEFC's primary form of prophecy. Prophecy is to be "weighed and tested" (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-21), and if anyone thinks they have a prophetic word it should be brought to the Elders and should be subject to the authoritative teaching of Scripture.

#### **Clarification regarding Tongues:**

Definition: The word "tongue," is used not only to mean the physical tongue in a person's mouth, but also to mean "language." In the New Testament passages where speaking in tongues are discussed, the meaning "languages" is certainly in view.

The purpose of gifts are to edify the body of Christ and among the spiritual gifts of speech only those that are intelligible result in the immediate edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:4). And since the Canon of Scripture is closed, and the context of (1 Cor. 14:23), LEFC's stance is that tongues are not necessary in a worship service. Also, tongues require interpretation/translation in any public setting (1 Cor. 14:27-28), thus are not to be weighed as prophecy is. They will have a decisive meaning. Scripture also conveys that tongues are a viable private prayer language that is meant to edify the tongues-speaker himself (1 Cor. 14:4).

### **The Holy Spirit purifies:**

One of his primary activities is to cleanse us from sin and to "sanctify us" or make us more holy in actual conduct of life. Even in the lives of unbelievers there is some restraining influence of the Holy Spirit as he convicts the world of sin (Jn. 16:8–11; Acts 7:51). But when people become Christians the Holy Spirit does an initial cleansing work in them, making a decisive break with the patterns of sin that were in their lives before.

## **The Holy Spirit reveals:**

Revelation to Prophets and Apostles – The whole of the Old Testament Scriptures came about because “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt. 1:21 NIV). Several other passages mention this work of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament prophets (see Matt. 22:43; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; 1 Pt. 1:11). The New Testament apostles and others who wrote words of New Testament Scripture were also guided “into all the truth” by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), who also spoke to the apostles what he heard from the Father and the Son, and declared to them “the things that are to come” (Jn. 16:3; cf. Eph. 3:5). Therefore we believe that it is the Holy Spirit who teaches and illuminates our minds to know God’s Word (Jn. 14:26).

He Guides and Directs God’s People – The depth of the work of the Spirit within personal freedom [direction] is conditional upon the degree of yieldedness of the believer. The disciples at Pentecost were fully yielded, as was Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 2:4; 4:8), and the worshipping community after they had prayed (Acts 4:31). The martyr Stephen was fully yielded to the Spirit as he faced death (Acts 7:55), as were the apostles Paul (Acts 9:17) and Barnabas (Acts 11:25; cf.).

## **The Church**

1. There are two ceremonies the Lord Jesus Christ himself ordered the church to observe. They are baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

### **Baptism:**

Matthew 28:19 shows Jesus commanding the disciples to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Also, in Acts 2:38-41, we see that baptism was a normative practice of the church from its inception.

### **The Lord’s Supper (Communion):**

In Luke 22:19 Jesus, during the Passover, broke bread and drank wine saying, “Do this in remembrance of me.” In 1 Corinthians 11:23, the apostle Paul instructs the church in Corinth regarding the right observance of the Lord’s Supper and says, “I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.”

As we partake of the Lord’s Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ’s body.

In the proper administering of these ordinances, their celebrations should point not to any power in the outward signs of water, bread, or wine (cup). But rather paint a picture of the power of God in his saving and sealing work of those whom he has chosen and who participate in these ceremonies by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The right preaching of the Word of God includes practicing the proper interpretation and application principles as mentioned above in **Section 2: The Bible**. It also includes a true presentation of the gospel (Christ crucified) for it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16) and Christ is also the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

3. The right use of church discipline is to protect the body of Christ from doctrines and deceptions of false teachers (Gal. 1:8; 5:7-12), disobedient and unrepentant believers (1 Cor. 5:3-5; 9-11) and disputes that cause division. (See all of 1 Cor.) It is also meant to bring people back into a right relationship with God and with the rest of the local church body. In this way it is motivated by a love for sinfully wayward Christians. It begins with a gracious word of rebuke and may culminate in the act of removal from local church membership. In both instances and all actions in between, the hope of such confrontational love will result in the repentance of sinful attitudes and lifestyles (Mt. 18:15). *As supported through Scriptural texts, the general guidelines for the disciplinary process here at LEFC are found in the LEFC By-Laws Article 1 Membership Section E, F.*

4. The new covenant establishes a people of God much larger than any one local church or denomination. When God says in Jeremiah 31:33, "I will be their God and they will be my people," he means that the new covenant will establish one great people of God. The church is the glorious gathering of the redeemed, the sanctified flock of the great Shepherd, the united household of God, the beautiful body and bride of Christ. It manifests the "manifold wisdom of God" for the display of His glory (Eph. 3:10).

In 1 Corinthians 12:14-20 Paul draws on the imagery of a body as a metaphor for the local church. Far from commending self-sufficiency and independence, the apostle upholds a radically countercultural vision of desperate interdependence marked by love, service, humility, sacrifice and sympathy. And, as participants in the body are called "members," so this participation in the local church body is called membership.

Church membership is a formal relationship between a Church and a Christian characterized by the church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.

5. While there are specific disagreements in both the mode of baptism and the proper recipients of baptism, LEFC understands that the EFCA allows for either immersion or covenantal infant baptism. The belief of immersion is not a requirement for membership at LEFC, but a distinctive for our theology and our Elders as it relates to ministry [i.e., our elders would not perform a covenantal baptism at LEFC].

## **Christian Living**

1. One question that often arises surrounding eternal security and the perseverance of the saints is: "What about those who profess Christ, yet fall away? Are they still saved, even as they live in rebellion to God and the gospel?" The Bible is clear that if someone professes faith in Jesus only to later reject this faith and who Jesus is, that person's faith was not genuine and they were never really saved. The bottom line is that if someone is living like an unbeliever, they are an unbeliever, no matter what words they may have uttered years or decades before. The good news is that God is never done working in someone's life and that every moment up to their final breath is an opportunity to repent and turn to Christ in true, saving faith (1 Jn. 2:19; Lk. 8:9-14; 2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:13).

The confidence we can have regarding living the Christian Life is that God, through his Spirit is working to cause his children to persevere. Left to ourselves, we would rightly be in angst over whether we are persevering or if it were even possible to do so. But for the praise and glory of God he is working in us and through us in such a way as to build us up and sustain us even as we work toward those same goals (Phil. 1:6, 2:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 1 Cor. 1:8-9).

This means that we should strive to live in such a way as to make our calling and election sure. If our lives are directionally correct, even as we stumble in our sin and frequently fail to measure up to the high calling of Christ, our own assurance of salvation can be strengthened. Doing what our Father wants, even if imperfectly, is so much better than not doing anything at all (2 Pt. 1:10, Eph. 4:1-7).

2. The Church's Statement on Marriage and Sexuality is based upon God's will for human life as conveyed to us through the Scriptures. It shall not be subject to change through popular vote; referendum; prevailing opinion of Members or the general public. It shall also not be influenced or interpreted by any government authority, agency, or official action; or legal developments on the local, state, or federal level.

## **Response and Eternal Destiny**

1. God's will for all people to be saved and his will to choose some people for salvation unconditionally before creation is not a sign of divine or exegetical confusion. Unconditional election therefore does not contradict biblical expressions of God's compassion for all people and does not rule out sincere offers of salvation to all who are lost among the peoples of the world.