

CORE — CULTURE: We lovingly engage culture to reach people with Jesus.

June 30, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! If you are new, we are in a series called “Core.” This series is a chance for us to discuss the core values of CrossWinds Church, which unite us across all our campuses.

Last week, the plan was for me to be on the Spencer campus teaching about the core value of FAMILY, and Pastor Jordan to be here teaching about the core value of CULTURE. With the flooding in Spencer, we changed our plans. We felt it would be best for him to be in Spencer as that campus mourns the flood.

That leaves me pinch-hitting for Pastor Jordan this morning on our core value of CULTURE. Next week, we begin our series on Proverbs. I will kick off that series with a brief introduction to Proverbs and then a message about how to teach our children wisdom. Much of Proverbs is written from the perspective of a father teaching his son how to avoid foolish choices and make wise ones. Next week, that will be our message. It is very practical.

This morning, we are studying at the core value of CULTURE. Take out your outlines. The title on the outline is a full statement of our core value. Let me read it to you.

CULTURE: We lovingly engage culture to reach people with Jesus.

This morning, we will talk about three things. First, what does it mean for CrossWinds to engage our culture? Second, where does the EFCA denomination

stand on current cultural issues? Third, where to EFCA pastors stand on current cultural issues?

What does it mean for CrossWinds to engage culture?

Churches have always experienced tension on cultural issues. How much should a church be like the world, and how much should it be different from the world?

Most of you don't know this, but I worked for a Mennonite Church when I was in seminary. Just by looking at me, I am sure you could tell my Mennonite roots. The church prided itself in being separate from worldly culture. For example, they had plenty of money, but they wouldn't put air conditioning in the church. It was too worldly. In July, the windows were open, women carried fans, and people dripped sweat. Of course, at home, everyone had air conditioning, but not a church. When my parents retired, they moved to Pennsylvania and attended a nearby Mennonite Church.

Growing up baptist, we sang from the hymnal. The music came from the organ. I enjoyed the organ and loved the hymns, but it wasn't the kind of music my friends listened to. I remember when my youth group went to a Christian rock concert. It consisted of a middle-aged bearded man playing an acoustical guitar sitting on a stool. For our church, that was radical. That wasn't radical for the 1980s, but it was radical for our church. The church and the culture were in completely different worlds.

Through high school and college, I wondered about the cultural line. I loved Jesus but the church I attended and the world I lived in as a young adult and the world of the church were completely different. For example, in one of my

first pastoral jobs, even though I graduated from college as a computer science major, I was told pastors don't need computers. If you need a computer, just get a cheap one. The problem is I did everything through a keyboard and I was not a novice computer user. I was an experienced one.

When I was pondering about what to work on for my doctoral thesis, I was talking with Dr. Haddon Robinson, who was the director of my doctoral program, about possible topics. He suggested I write my thesis on the relationship between modern culture and the church, specifically studying the book of Romans. What we can learn about how the apostle Paul connected with the culture in Rome to better share the gospel with those who lived in Rome? What does that teach us about connecting with modern culture to share the gospel today?

Let me share what I learned. At the time of Christ, Rome was a sophisticated society. They didn't have cable TV, YouTube, or Rumble. Most people couldn't read. When people wanted to know the news of the day or be entertained, they went to places where people read the news or they presented their messages. They gave their sales pitch.

Remember that Rome was a sophisticated society. The way speakers organized and presented their information was very specific. You had to follow proper protocols. There was even a book written by an ancient orator named Quintilian that detailed how the public reading of lettersetailed how the public reading of letter or the communication of news was to be done in sophisticated Roman society.

In your Bible, if you have read the letter of Romans, you know it feels highly structured and organized. That is because it is. Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote his letter to the Romans. He wanted to reach the Romans with Jesus. What we find is that Quintillion's handbook of Roman oratory and Paul letter to the Romans fit together like a hand in a glove. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in perfect Roman oratory style.

Paul was a Jewish Pharisee. He was educated in Judaism and rabbinic communication. Paul didn't write to the Romans in the style of a Jewish Rabbi hoping that the Gentiles in Rome would accommodate themselves to his style in hopes that they might learn the gospel. Paul did the opposite. He studied Quintillian's handbook of how to properly communicate to the sophisticated people of Rome, then he wrote his letter to them in that style with that kind of level of organization and detail.

What is the application for us? If Paul studied the culture he was trying to reach with the gospel, then changed his style so he could more effectively communicate the good news of Jesus with them, then we must do the same. We need to study the culture around us and change ourselves to present the gospel message more clearly to the people around us we are trying to reach with Jesus.

This guides our ministry at CrossWinds. I have no problem with the organ, but the people we are trying to reach with Jesus in the community around us are not listen to music called, "The organ's greatest hits." The music they listen to has drum, guitars, and keyboard in it. If we are trying to reach them with Jesus,

we need to change ourselves to have a worship style that is more readily connects with lost people.

This is why we have pews, not chairs. I have no problem with pews but nobody in their world goes to an event where they sit in pews. Pews are not wrong. They are just church culture. We want to change ourselves to remove any barriers we can to more effectively reach the people around us.

This is why we updated the colors when we repainted the worship space and the gym. The old colors looked perfect for 1980. By simply updating the colors when we repainted the walls, we are better able to connect with younger people who need to meet Jesus.

This approach of actively engaging the culture around us so we can communicate the gospel in a way that is easier for people to understand, while at the same time keeping our finger in the text and unashamedly teaching the Word of God, has guided the way we work at CrossWinds. The question is not, “What is most comfortable to me?” The question is, “How can I change to more effectively communicate the gospel to those in the community who need to hear it most?”

This is why we use modern instruments. It is why we use video and streaming. It is not about what is most comfortable for us. It is about how can we change to better reach more people with Jesus.

Paul summarizes his philosophy in 1 Corinthians 9.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as

one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (ESV)

This is why we engage our culture the way we do.

Where does the EFCA stand on current cultural issues?

Whenever we talk about culture, there is a natural and healthy concern about the EFCA denomination. So many denominations are more concerned about staying hip with the culture than they are with being faithful to the Bible and preaching the gospel. Like you, I am sick to my stomach when I look at the decisions made by some mainline denominations. Let's talk about where the EFCA is on modern cultural issues.

In 2023, the denomination released a position paper on many issues called the Affirmations and Denials document. I have been looking for a good time to share this with you. Since we are talking about culture and how CrossWinds relates to modern culture, today seemed like a good day to share this. This part of the sermon is not much of a sermon, but it is good to know where our denomination stands on current cultural issues.

When these statements were presented at our annual conference, the response by those present was a standing ovation that our denomination is not drifting toward liberalism. There are eight statements. I am going to read through them one at a time and provide a little explanation after I read each one.

- 1. We are NOT adherents of the secular “Social Justice” movement as held in progressive circles, BUT we do believe that biblical justice has social implications, particularly in protecting those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.**

The social justice movement, which is held in progressive denominations, is committed to Critical Race Theory. That theory analyzes society, including all of its cultural ideas and values, solely in terms of a power imbalance between oppressors and the oppressed. Social justice focuses on this power imbalance and the need to emancipate the marginalized groups found in oppressive social systems and institutions.

The social justice movement has no hope of forgiveness and restoration with God. It has no goal apart from the continual revolution of those who are oppressed overthrowing their oppressors.

The meta-narrative of history in the Social Justice movement is the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor. The Bible says that the problems of the world are different. The problem in the world is not the tension between the oppressed and their oppressors. The problem in the world is sin. All humanity stands under God’s judgment, no matter their social or economic condition. God, in his mercy, sent his son to die for us to save us because he loves us. He paid the price for our sins on the cross. The problem in the world is sin. When sin is the problem, Jesus is the only answer.

While we do not agree with Critical Race Theory and the Social Justice movement because the Bible sees the problem as sin and the answer is Jesus, not the problem is oppression and the answer is revolution.

Yet, we do believe that biblical justice has social implications. For example.

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37–39 (ESV)

Later, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus defines our neighbor as anyone who is in need if we are in a position to meet that need. It doesn't matter what the person is like economically, racially, or educationally. If they are in need, and we can meet that need, we are to do that.

God's will is that we don't ignore the poor, but as God's people, we are to be known for our compassion of the poor.

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’ Deuteronomy 15:11 (ESV)

We are care for those who are vulnerable and helpless.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27 (ESV)

In the Old Testament, God judged his people and sent them into exile in Babylon in part because the rich used their wealth to oppress the poor instead of care for them.

Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well... But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.” Jeremiah 22:15b–17 (ESV)

Look what Proverbs says about the rich taking advantage of the poor.

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. Proverbs 14:31 (ESV)

If we take advantage of the poor we are insulting God who made them. If we are generous to the poor, we honor God. How does this apply to us? When you go to a restaurant, are you a good tipper? The waiter or waitress are poor people by most standards. They rely on tips for most of their income. Are you stingy or generous? Are you insulting God or honoring him?

In the Old Testament, it was oppression of the poor, lead God to become disgusted with Israel's worship.

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen... cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Isaiah 1:15–17 (ESV)

Our highest priority is the teaching of the Bible and sharing the good news of the gospel. That alone can address the real problem of sin, and the only solution to sin, which is Jesus. But as men and women whose hearts are touched by God's love for us in the poverty of our sin, how can we not extend compassion toward others who are poor and vulnerable, just as God extended compassion to us through Jesus?

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

In practical ways, this is why we turned our Spencer campus into a homeless shelter this past week, where we housed 50 to 130 a night. There are people with needs. It is a privilege to meet those needs as much as we can.

2. We are NOT “woke” in the sense of having embraced a progressive ideology that is grounded in Critical Theory rather than the Bible, BUT we do see the need to be awakened to the global and indeed cosmic impacts of sin, including racial injustice, and to be attuned to the biblical call for gospel-driven efforts toward reconciliation and restoration.

In recent years, the word “woke” has entered our cultural vocabulary.

Today, it has almost become a definition-less word because it is used in so many ways. It was originally used in minority communities to refer to the need for awareness of ongoing injustice in our society. Woke originally meant waking up to those societal injustices and seeing them. Today, woke has become a catch-all term covering critical race theory and human sexuality as a mere social construct that can be changed at our will. Woke is a term hijacked by the political left and right and used for their own purposes.

As we think about this, it should not surprise us that our society and government fall short of perfect justice. It should not surprise us that the way America operates has a measure of injustice and oppression built into the fabric of our society. That will be the case in every society, not just American society. Sin is not simply a choice we make, but it infects our character, emotions, thinking, our government, and our laws. Sin even blinds us to seeing the injustices impacting others and their lives. Sin impacts everything.

As Christians, we want to be woke, that is to become awake, to the global and cosmic impacts of sin in our world and society. We want to be awakened to laws and social structures that might be promoting racism and social injustices. But we do not want to be work in the sense that critical race theory talks about it.

We do believe the answer is not the overthrow of society or the looting of stores, but reconciliation to God and forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, Jesus brought people together across dividing lines in society. He eliminated the racial and social divides and made a new family through the church.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. Ephesians 2:14 (ESV)

We looked at this verse a few weeks ago. The dividing wall of hostility was a low wall around the temple. There was a sign on it that forbade Gentiles from passing beyond the wall and getting closer to the temple. If they did, they would lose their life. Jesus breaks down the hostility between Jews and Gentiles and creates one new people in Jesus. In the church, the Jesus who unites people is bigger than the racial, economic, and social divisions between people. In the church, with people's whose hearts are changed by Jesus, we find systemic injustices being addressed, not in rioting and social upheaval.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 (ESV)

The gospel message is a message of reconciliation. It is the message that Jesus brings us to God and to one another.

3. We are NOT adherents of “Critical Race Theory” that reduces all racial inequities to a struggle between oppressor and oppressed and presents a worldview that is contrary to the Scriptures, BUT we do believe that the questions and challenges it raises stir us to recall critical biblical truths that we may have neglected and require our attention.

Critical Race Theory follows Karl Marx in claiming all societies must be analyzed in terms of the power imbalance between oppressors and the oppressed. Marxism saw this power imbalance purely in economic terms, but those who adhere to modern Critical Race Theory broaden this to include all cultural ideas and values. They believe those in power control not just financial leverage but they determine what is considered normal, true, valuable, and good. In doing so, they oppress those who do not measure up to their standards.

Critical Race Theory believes American society is dominated by White Culture because those who are white are in a position of power and privilege over people of color. Critical Race Theory believes all who are white, simply by virtue of being white, are racist. They believe that American society is inherently racist because it was created by those who are primarily white. Critical Race Theory calls for a total destruction of our society and a reconstruction of our culture that transfers the balance of power to those who are not white as the only way the problem of racism can be alleviated in our society. This is very radical. As we saw earlier, it is not based on the Bible, which sees sin as the problem for all people and Jesus as the only answer for all people. The Bible says the issue that matters is not if you are black or white, or if your culture is developed by white people or developed by black people. What matters is, “Are you saved by Jesus or are you lost and heading to hell without Him?”

While saying that, there is a bit of truth to Critical Race Theory. We should acknowledge that. Those in positions of power can and do oppress those who are socially weaker. We see this not just happening in America, but the same thing happened in biblical times. God was not pleased when it happened.

“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos 5:21–24 (ESV)

While those in power can and will naturally set things up in their favor, calling for the destruction of society and a transfer of power from those who are white to those who are black is too simplistic of a solution.

Critical Race Theory fails to recognize that all people are free moral agents. Everyone is a result of their choices. Everyone, no matter their skin color, lives with the result of their choices, regardless of skin color. Those who make good and wise choices in life generally do well. Those who make foolish or irresponsible choices generally suffer for them. If you see someone doing well because they made good choices and you are suffering because you made foolish choices, the answer is not to overthrow those who are successful. The answer is to stop being jealous and take responsibility for your actions. That is regardless of skin color.

Critical Race Theory also denies the transforming power of the gospel within which there is neither white nor black, Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free. The Jesus who unites us is greater than the differences that divide us.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

Critical Race Theory is a misguided attempt to address the symptoms of racial and social inequality in this world. It does not address the underlying sociological and spiritual causes. My friends, the answer is not Marxism. It is Jesus.

4. We are NOT “Christian Nationalists” who believe the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation or who believe that Americans are “God’s chosen people,” BUT we do believe that a patriotic love of one’s nation is appropriate and that Christians should be good citizens who may freely advocate for God-honoring public policies.

Christian nationalism is the belief that the United States is a Christian nation not only in sociological description but as a mandate from God. It is the belief that Americans are God’s chosen people and that we have replaced Israel and God’s chosen people.

Christian nationalism tries to bring the kingdom of God to earth through political means while neglecting the truth that Jesus is the king of kings. No political party or political platform can fully conform to or reflect the fullness of God and his kingdom. Every time the church aligns itself with a political party or platform it does injustice to Jesus and the gospel loses ground.

Christian nationalism is idolatrous. It lifts up one nation over another and denies God’s passion for the gospel to reach all people. Christian nationalism only dilutes the church’s witness for Christ and his kingdom in this world.

When Jesus went into Jerusalem, his disciples were looking for Jesus to make a political kingdom and overthrow the Romans. Jesus didn't do that. He said his kingdom was not of this world. Nothing has changed.

While we do not believe America is the new chosen nation of God and that any one political party represents Christ and his kingdom, we do believe we should have a patriotic love for our nation and gratefulness for those who served to give the freedoms we enjoy, which is much better than most of the nations in the history of the world. We believe we should be good citizens and advocate for positive public policies in alignment with God's will that benefit the common good of all people in the nation. While submitting to the government, we have the responsibility to honor the government and submit to those in authority.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Romans 13:1–2 (ESV)

While it is appropriate to exercise our rights as citizens of an earthly kingdom and to love for our own nation, God's kingdom is not one of earthly borders or nations. It is multi-national and multi-ethnic.

5. We do NOT believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God, BUT we do believe that God has appointed governing authorities to do good and that, for citizens in Christ's kingdom, King Jesus' rule and reign transcends all other citizenships and partisan ideologies and transforms how we live in the world.

While political means cannot establish the kingdom of God, we have a responsibility as citizens to be the best citizen of our country that we can be.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Romans 13:1 (ESV)

God establishes our government leaders, even if they are not the government leaders we would prefer.

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 1 Peter 2:17 (ESV)

We are to honor the emperor.

We are to pray for our government leaders. Are you spending more time praying for our president right now, or making fun of him?

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior. 1 Timothy 2:1–3 (ESV)

While recognizing human authorities, we must not forget that our ultimate allegiance is not to the government but to Jesus. Our highest allegiance is to Jesus, not to the state. If a time comes when those are in conflict and we must disobey the state because of our allegiance to Jesus, we do that willingly and we accept the price we must pay for having a higher allegiance to Jesus.

6. We do NOT believe that a person's biological sex should be separated from their self-perception as a man or a woman nor that the body should be altered when it does not conform to that self-perception, BUT we do believe that some people experience a distressing struggle between these two and that we must treat those who struggle in this way with love and compassion as we seek to help them, with the truth and power of the gospel, toward the wholeness of a biologically-sexed identity grounded in God's "very good" design in creation as male and female.

The Bible teaches that human beings are embodied beings created with a unity of soul and body. When every body is resurrected and reunited with their souls at the last judgment, God will not suddenly realize he put the wrong gender of the wrong soul in the wrong body. Every soul will be reunited with the

selfsame body they had for life. God didn't make the mistake of putting the gender of the wrong soul in the wrong body.

Genesis and Jesus both affirm God only created two genders, not 37. They are male and female. Adopting a gender different than the one God biologically assigned at conception is rebelling against the way God created us.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them.** Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

Each of us has a biologically sexed identity grounded in God's good design for us. He gave us the gender he wanted us to have to accomplish the work he gave us to do. The Bible prohibits denying your sexual identity, cross-dressing, and any attempts to appear as the opposite sex.

"**A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.**" Deuteronomy 22:5 (ESV)

If you are a biological male, you are a male, even if you think you are a woman. A biological male must always conduct and dress as a male.

The problem is that we live in a fallen world with sin influencing everything. It should not surprise us that as a result of sin, there are some who are confused about their gender identity or who believe themselves to have a soul different from their biological identity. This situation happens from sin in the world or sin that was done to someone or by someone.

Freedom from gender dysphoria is not found in cross-dressing, surgical intervention, or pharmacological hormone intervention but in Jesus.

When we came to Jesus, didn't he give each of us new desires? Didn't he help us to see the things in our life that were sinful when previously we were

blind to those sins? Didn't his Holy Spirit give us conviction of sin and then freedom from sin as we relied on him? Look what the Bible says Jesus does in us.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Jesus transforms us. He makes us into new creations. In submitting to the study of the Bible, prayer, and life together as the church, God sustains his people and renews them, especially as they struggle with sinful desires.

While we believe we must submit our biologically sexed identity and that surgery, hormones, and cross-dressing are not honoring to God, we must extend love and compassion to those whose sexual self-understanding is shaped by a distressing conflict between their biological sex and their perceived sexual identity. We need to recognize that conflict is deeply rooted and deeply distressing since it involves one's self-perception. Yet, God can transform people through the power of the gospel message.

A few years ago, I taught on transgender. At the time, I shared the Walt Heyer story. He dealt with gender confusion. He was married. He left his wife and children and transitioned from a man to a woman. He eventually ended up at a church where a couple befriended him. Patiently they spent time with him and studied the Bible with him. He eventually became a Christian. He de-transitioned (as much as he possibly could). Today, he is the author of multiple books on the subject of transgender, and he runs what is probably the largest website on the Internet, speaking against sex change. It is called www.sexchangeregret.com I recommend it to you to hear his story.

7. We are NOT egalitarian in our understanding of the roles and functions of men and women in the church, BUT we do believe that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions, as reflected in our EFCA ordination policy.

There are two big words in this statement. They are egalitarian and complementation. Egalitarianism is the belief that men and women are equal in every way and every role. Complementarianism is the belief that men and women are equal in every way but in marriage and the church. In those spaces, there are unique roles that men and women play. Egalitarianism is the default worldview. It is the belief in our culture that everything a man can do, a woman can do better. Let's look at what the Bible says about unique roles.

The Bible says men and women are equally valuable as persons created in God's image and as recipients of God's grace.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

In the context of marriage, the Bible teaches that the husband has the role of being head of his household. His role is to sacrificially love and lead his wife. He is to seek her welfare, even to the point of laying down his life for her. The Bible says the husband and wife relationship was given to us to parallel the relationship between Jesus and his church. Just as Jesus loves his bride (the church) and laid his life down for his church to save her and bless her, husbands are not just the head of their wives, but that involves laying down one's life for their wife, just as Christ laid down his life for us.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

A wife is to submit to her husband's leadership. A husband is not to be harsh and domineering in his leadership but loving and sacrificial, just as Jesus loved us and sacrificed himself for us.

What does the Bible say about a wife's role in marriage?

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Ephesians 5:22–23 (ESV)

Just as Eve was created to be a helpmate to Adam, wives are to be helpmates to their husbands. They are not to lead over him but to support and encourage him. These roles are not arbitrary or reversible.

Today, when we hear submission, we bristle at the word because we always think of submission in negative terms. That shouldn't be the case.

Submission is a good thing. For example, we are called to submit to our church leaders.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

Jesus submitted to his Father's will to die for us on the cross to save us.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8 (ESV)

Just as there are specific roles for a husband and wife in marriage, and they are not arbitrary or reversible but complementary, there are specific roles for men and women to play in the church, which is called the household of God. The local church operates as God's family, God's household.

In the Bible, the office of pastor and elder reflects that of husband and father in the family unit. As shepherds of God's flock, pastors and elders have the

primary responsibility for spiritual oversight of the church family, which includes proper teaching of the Word and protection from false teaching. Pastors and elders are to sacrifice themselves for the people, just as Jesus sacrificed himself for us.

While both men and women have contributions to make in the church, the Bible limits women from the positions of pastor and elder and from holding teaching authority over a man in the church.

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 1 Timothy 2:11–14 (ESV)

Some people will tell you this prohibition against a woman teaching and leading men in the church only pertains to an unknown issue in the city of Ephesus. That is not true. Notice the reason Paul gives for this prohibition. He roots it in the creation order and the fall. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. Eve was created as Adam's helpmate, not to lead over him. Adam was not deceived but Eve was.

There is much more to this discussion and far more than one verse on the subject. I have taught on this three times in the past, and I can share links to those teachings if you would like to learn more.¹

For this reason, the EFCA will not ordain women to the pastorate. It is not overstating the case that denominations who will ordain women as pastors have taken the first step toward liberalism. They have begun crossing out the Bible verses with which they disagree. Once that begins, it doesn't stop. I was thrilled

¹ <https://www.christ2rculture.com/offsite/sermons/files/category-0023trending.php> and <https://www.christ2rculture.com/offsite/sermons/files/1timothy21115theroleofwomeninthechurch.php>

the EFCA denomination made a clear statement on this issue in the Affirmation and Denials document.

8. We do not believe in the annihilation of those who die apart from Christ, but in their eternal conscious punishment. Among the kinds of suffering we ought to seek to alleviate, this is the most grievous, and it is our urgent duty and God-given privilege to seek to alleviate it by proclaiming the gospel and calling all people to believe the gospel by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, many denominations that are drifting from the Bible are also beginning to deny the doctrine of hell. I think of Rob Bell, who wrote a book called Love Wins. He finishes his book by finally stating that he believes God saves everyone without their asking for it. I gave a four-week series on hell. Those studies are available as books, videos, or manuscripts if you would like to learn more.²

Throughout history, the church has affirmed the destinies of believers, and unbelievers, though very different, stand in parallel. Both will continue to experience the consequences of their earthly choices for all eternity. Jesus affirmed this when he talked about separating human beings on the day of judgment, like a shepherd separates sheep and goats.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... and these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’” Matthew 25:41, 46 (ESV)

Notice the word eternal is used three times. In Greek, it is the same word every time. It means forever. If the eternal punishment of those in hell is not forever, then the eternal life of those in heaven is also not forever because the word used to describe their state is the same word. The temperature in the fires

² <https://www.christ2rculture.com/offsite/sermons/files/category-hell.php>

of hell does not go down after 5,000 years. It is described as an eternal fire that was originally made for the devil and his angels.

Look how Paul describes hell.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction,..., 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

Eternal destruction is the same way Jesus described it. Jude describes the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven as an example of the eternal fire that is to come.

...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Jude 7 (ESV)

Here is another verse that describes the lake of fire.

...he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Revelation 14:10–11 (ESV)

Sometimes we think Satan is in charge of hell. We picture him in a red jumpsuit with a pitchfork. Actually, Jesus is in charge of hell. All the suffering that takes place there is fully just. Remember that Jesus is our savior if we accept him now, but if we reject him, he will be our judge later.

How long does the lake of fire last? Forever and ever. There is no rest day or night.

Eternity in hell or eternity in heaven is based on one decision in this world. Who is Jesus? Is he your savior? Do you worship and follow him or do you reject him?

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. John 3:36 (ESV)

Where do EFCA pastors stand on these issues?

While the denomination made clear affirmation and denial statements, another important question remains: Are the views presented in the affirmation and denial statements only those of the denomination's leaders, or are they also those of the pastors? Every two years, the denomination asks all lead pastors to complete an extensive doctrinal survey to determine what pastors believe and teach. Here are some of the results.

- **Point 5:** We do not believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God. 98% of EFCA lead pastors agree.
- **Point 6:** We do not believe that a person's biological sex should be separated from their self-perception as a man or woman, nor that the body should be altered when it does not conform to that self-perception. 98% of EFCA lead pastors agree.
- **Point 7:** We believe that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions, as reflected in our EFCA ordination policy 90.4% of EFCA lead pastors agree.
- **Point 8:** We believe in eternal conscious punishment. Among the kinds of suffering, we ought to seek to alleviate, this is the most grievous, and it is our urgent duty and God-given privilege to seek to alleviate it by proclaiming the gospel and calling all people to believe the gospel by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. 96% of EFCA lead pastors agree.

I could go on, but I will stop here. The good news is that not just our denominational leaders have held the biblical line; but an extremely high percentage of Lead pastors in the denomination do, too.

Conclusion

At CrossWinds, we engage culture for missional reasons. As a church, we are not trying to keep ourselves as comfortable as we can, but we are about shortening the cultural gap between ourselves the the lost world around us so we can more effectively share the gospel.

We believe what the Bible says. Hell is real. Eternity is long. The only way that anyone's destiny can be changed is through Jesus. That is why we do anything we can to more effectively tell people about him.



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