



EFCC exalting Christ in growing
healthy churches

EFCC Positions Paper

The Basis of Faith of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches succinctly outlines our theological commitments; namely, that we are a group of churches committed to the Gospel of our Triune God as taught in the infallible and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Our theological roots lie in the Savoy Declaration of 1658 which is summarised by our Basis of Faith. The centre of gravity and the direction of travel for the EFCC is Reformed.

As the cultures around us in the world and in the church change, our theological priorities remain unchanged because they are grounded in the word of God. There are, however, certain issues raised at different times and in different ways by these cultures on which the Bible speaks clearly. These issues spring from primary points of biblical doctrine and it is therefore valuable to state clearly the position of the EFCC on our commitment and ethos regarding human sexuality, the equality of men and women and their differing responsibilities (complementarianism), and relationships between churches (ecumenism).

The pastoral implications are vast and complex, and we are keenly aware that there can be much pain and sadness for individuals dealing with these issues. We have deliberately omitted some of the detailed outworkings, however, in the understanding that they are best worked out in the particular and nuanced context of the local church.

Human Sexuality and the Goodness of Marriage

Marriage is the life-long covenantal union of one man with one woman.¹

The Scriptures teach that marriage is a creation ordinance and a good gift from the Living God which reflects the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church.²

Marriage is the only context in which human sexuality is to be expressed. Through this joyful and self-sacrificial union, in God's goodness, children may be born and raised in a loving and secure family.³

Scripture is clear that any sexual expression outside marriage, such as adultery, promiscuity or homosexuality, whether physical or mental, is sinful and damaging to the individual and

¹ Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:14

² Ephesians 5:31-32; Revelation 21:2

³ Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

society, because it is contrary to God's good design.⁴ On the other hand, when marriage is honoured, it is for the good of society, and churches can care more effectively for those who are widowed, divorced or single.

We are God's image, and we are created as male and female.⁵ As such our immutable biological sex determines a significant part of who we are, how we live including what is acceptable sexual behaviour.

Contemporary sexual and transgender ideology defines sex as biological, and gender as cultural and fluid. The definitions lead to the separation of sex from gender, which is then used to encourage individuals to define their own identities. Self-identification is understood in this ideology as an inalienable right, but it ignores reality and objective truth and is therefore highly damaging.

Such self-identification often takes the form of a man claiming to be a woman or a woman claiming to be a man. This can lead to compromising the safety of women and children, particularly in relation to safe spaces. Maintaining sex-specific spaces, especially for women and children is a vital aspect of safeguarding.

The Equality of Men and Women and their Differing Responsibilities

The Lord, in His goodness, created us male and female with equal dignity and worth and with different strengths and responsibilities.⁶ The differences complement in all of life and particularly in the church and in marriage, which is a picture of Christ's union with the Church.

In marriage and the family, the husband is to love his wife, protecting her and providing for her as Christ sacrificially loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. The husband is to be worthy of the respect of his wife and to lead her as the head of the household.⁷ The wife is to respect her husband and joyfully and intelligently submit to his leadership in a way that models the submission of the Church to Christ.⁸

In the church, both men and women serve the Lord and should be encouraged to fulfil their potential in the various ministries of the church.⁹ Scripture is clear that the responsibilities of eldership and the ministry of the word to the gathered church are only for men who meet the scriptural qualifications.¹⁰

The biblical distinctions between the responsibilities of men and women are not merely cultural but they are seen in Scripture, in creation, the fall and redemption.¹¹

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Romans 1:27

⁵ Genesis 1:27

⁶ Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18

⁷ Ephesians 5:28-33

⁸ Ephesians 5:22-24

⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Ephesians 4:12-16

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:11-3:7; Titus 1:5-9

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 11:7-12; 1 Timothy 2:12-15

The fall introduced distortions in the relationships between men and women, and there is much suffering, conflict and abuse as a result.¹² When the biblical teaching on the relationships between men and women is followed, it leads to the flourishing of both men and women, and of churches and society.

Relationships between churches

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the universal Church which is manifested in local churches.¹³

The true church is distinguished by her common confession.¹⁴ In relation to unity among churches this is particularly focused on the full and final authority and inerrancy of Scripture as the word of the Triune God, the penal substitutionary death and resurrection of God the Son incarnate and the justification of sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

As the EFCC we enjoy unity together and with the wider church based on our common confession. We affirm this common confession in a Congregational context in our basis of faith which stands in line with the historic confessions and creeds of the church. This is the biblical ecumenism that responds to Christ's high priestly prayer for the unity of God's people in truth.¹⁵

As a fellowship of churches, we thrive as we work and worship together in prayer, discipleship, evangelism and church revitalisation and planting. We also have close relationships with other individual churches and networks based on our common confession.

We should not partner in these activities with churches and networks that do not share this common confession. Such partnership would be unbiblical ecumenism that promotes unity at the expense of truth. Biblical unity in gospel work is commanded and blessed by the Lord, it is something we should actively seek and promote.

¹² Genesis 3:1-7

¹³ 1 Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:18

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:2

¹⁵ John 17:17-26

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