

A CHURCH OF WORD AND SPIRIT

The Word of God and the Spirit of God in the Life and Ministry of Wayzata Free Church

An Executive Summary

Background

Wayzata Free has been moving through a time of deep reflection regarding the relative importance of a Scriptural based vs. Spiritual based worship experience.

The Word of God and the Spirit of God in the life of Jesus are inseparable (Luke 4:1-4; 13-14; 17-18; 24:45-49). When one becomes unhinged from the other, Jesus is not present. When Jesus is present, the Word of God and the Spirit of God work harmoniously together bringing freedom, love and life.

It is the Father's good pleasure that those who tend to be people of the Word would be stretched by people who tend to be people of the Spirit, and that those who tend to be people of the Spirit would be grounded by people of the Word. We need each other. Each possesses strengths that are essential to a balanced, life-changing faith. Rather than divide, our differences are actually intended to explode the Presence of God throughout the world (as it did through Jesus and the early church).

The two streams of the Word and the Spirit which throughout history have often divided are in our day moving together. The Evangelical Free Church of America is positioned both historically and doctrinally to live as Jesus did and model this life of the Word and Spirit. This will require humility, maturity and love.

Our Denominational Foundations

The history of the question of relative impact of Spirit and Scriptural based worship within the Evangelical Free Church movement in the US and worldwide has been conducted in depth.

Foundations provide support. They ensure stability. The Evangelical Free Church of America anchors Wayzata Free Church both theologically and historically with the ability to hold both emphases in balance.

Understanding the EFCA and Its Historical Context

The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) was birthed out of the Pietistic revivals that swept through Denmark, Norway and Sweden during the 1800s. At a time when the state church was spiritually dead, groups of believers began meeting together in homes to study God's Word for themselves and witnessed the power of God's Spirit in their midst.

Tim Addington, Senior Vice President of the EFCA, writes, *The Word and the Spirit are both central to the Christian life. They form our roots as a movement coming out of dead orthodoxy and they form our lives today: We live in the presence of a living God who speaks truth through His Word and guides us through His Spirit. We are a movement that is Word-based and Spirit-empowered.*¹

You might say the Word and Spirit are a part of our denominational DNA. A good grasp of our historical roots positions us well to blend these oft divided tendencies.

Understanding the EFCA and Its Statement of Faith

The EFCA is an association of autonomous churches united around 10 faith statements. This Statement of Faith is grounded in the Bible and is the bedrock of our united belief. These are the essential doctrines of the EFCA as well as Wayzata Free Church. Within those 10 statements there is a statement on the Word of God and a statement on the Spirit of God.

Article 2: The Bible

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.

Article 6: The Holy Spirit

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.

The EFCA attempts to focus on the essentials of the doctrine while allowing freedom of understanding on non-essential matters. For example, neither modes of Scriptural study nor experiential manifestations of the Spirit are listed in these doctrines. Many more specific concerns could be mentioned but the EFCA has purposely focused on the essentials and avoided such comment in the Statement of Faith. The drafters of the 1950 Statement of Faith (and the updated 2008 Statement of Faith) chose to be silent on certain disputed doctrinal matters. The silence was not to limit discussion on issues but simply to emphasize that we will not divide over them.

Understanding the EFCA and Its Theological Convictions

From the early days of the EFCA there have been a few theological convictions that have held together this association of local churches as well as the people within their congregations. The Apostle Paul's words in his letter to the church in Ephesians are an imperative. *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who overall and through all and in all (4:2-6).* Unity is not optional. There are

two particular foundational theological convictions: *The Significance of Silence and Unity in Essentials*.

As stated above, the framers of the Statement of Faith chose to major on the essentials and remain silent on the non-essentials. There is a freedom for individuals to read God's Word and be guided by the Holy Spirit in their faith and practice.

EFCA Theologian Greg Strand comments, *Many conclude that the "significance of silence" means we cannot discuss a theological issue...Often people conclude that it means either we cannot talk about these disputed matters at all, or we have come to some amalgamated, via media position because we don't hold our positions strongly. Neither is what is intended. We don't downplay or ignore differences. We acknowledge them and yet we have determined to live and minister together based on the essentials of the gospel and engage in robust dialogue in the areas of differences (what would be considered non-essentials).*²

Silence on non-essentials preserves our unity. Yet this unity in essentials does not disallow a healthy, respectful dialogue where we differ.

Arnold T. Olson was the first President of the combined Free Churches, the Swedish Evangelical Free Church and the Norwegian/Danish Evangelical Free Church. He and other EFCA leaders envisioned a "big tent" association of local congregations. The EFCA "big tent" comprised local churches representing differing theological views while remaining unified and committed to the essential doctrines as expressed in the EFCA Statement of Faith.

We will seek to reflect this "big tent" expression of unity at Wayzata Free Church. We will seek to understand one another even though we may not always agree with one another. We will do this respectfully with humility and maturity whether it revolves around the non-essentials of salvation or the non-essentials of being a church of both the Word and the Spirit.

Some Valid Concerns

There is scriptural basis for both components in worship. Some Wayzata Free members are gifted with an emphasis of one over the other but all need to value and respect the critical importance of both.

There are some valid concerns to pay attention to as we walk together in unity as a Church of the Word and Spirit.

Experience over Scripture

One of the greatest concerns, and a valid concern, is that people allow their experience to be their authority rather than the Bible. One author warns against this tendency. *Remember, we are not seeking experiences, we are seeking a pure heart. We are not running after visions; we want holiness...Do not conjure up an "experience" with Jesus; seek to have a clean heart, allowing Christ to examine and purge you daily. And as He washes you with His Word and chastens you with His holiness, He will draw you into His Presence. He will open your eyes to "things without and things within."*³

Our heads and our hearts are to be touched. We long to be holy, which places us under the authority of God's Word and yet we long for an experience with the Living God which draws us into an experience with God's Spirit.

Second Class Christians

Wayne Grudem writes, *Harm comes to the church from teaching a two-class Christianity.*⁴

Throughout the history of the church Christians have attempted to divide the believers into two categories. Various names have been attached to this tendency.

There are many degrees of empowerment and there are Christians at all points along the scale in their walk with God. It is important to respect the experience of one another as we grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus. The key is that none of us are better than the other. We all kneel together at the cross.

Self-Glorification versus Christ-Glorification

A concern expressed by many revolves around the emotional and expressive response of those who tend toward the Spirit. Everyone needs to be alert to the temptation of bringing glory to themselves. We are all called to examine our hearts and see if there is any wicked way in them.

Excesses and Manifestations of the Spirit

Most every revival and move of God has had its excesses. Is God in all of them? Probably not. Is God in some of it? Only God knows. Is it for you? Maybe not. Is it for me to judge another? No. Yes, we are called to be wise and discerning. Yet we are also called to be careful in judging the heart of another.

The brilliant theologian Jonathan Edwards who lived in the midst of one of the greatest awakenings this world has seen reserved his judgment and called people to not focus on the manifestations but on the enduring fruit. This is what we are about at Wayzata Free Church. We are individually and collectively constantly paying attention to taking our next step to know, follow and become like Jesus. Manifestations are here today and gone tomorrow. Fruit lasts. This is our focus.

Orthodoxy Without the Spirit Is Dead

People are looking for life change. Transformation. Authentic and genuine spirituality lived in truth and with divine power. They would agree wholeheartedly with the Apostle Paul: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power* (I Cor. 4:20).

We should be seeking for a church that combines the Word of God with the Spirit of God powerfully. We want what God desires: His Word mixed with His Spirit.

Restrictive Legalism

Paul wrote the Declaration of Independence for the believer in Galatians and yet added, reminding us that we serve a holy God: *Do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Gal. 5:1, 13-14).

We are free to follow Jesus. We are also bound by love. On one hand, we are free, and yet on the other hand, we are restricted by only one thing: LOVE. We are not ruled by rules but by the one and greatest rule of God's Word and the God's Spirit – the rule of loving the Lord our God and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

The balance of being a church of the Word and Spirit will strengthen our relational growth. It will call for the deep character resources that lead to unity. Paul encourages this kind of relational life. *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:2-3). Jesus calls us into the flexibility and love of a relationship through His Spirit.

Closed Mindedness

We do know that when God moves He manifests Himself in a variety of ways strengthening the faith of His people (Acts 19:11-12). Whether or not we have personally experienced these manifestations make them no less real. We need to be wise and discerning – and yet keep our minds open to the mysterious ways of our Lord.

Concluding Thoughts

The Scriptures, the history, doctrinal statement and the uniqueness of the Evangelical Free Church of America command and encourage us to be free to emphasize both scriptural and spirit based components of worship and to respect how others are both temperamentally wired and gifted in this regard.

What we are promoting at Wayzata Free Church is a vital faith where the Word of God grounds our experience as the ultimate authority and the Spirit of God enlivens and empowers our faith in God to live holy lives as lights to a darkened world. We will allow followers of Jesus to freely express their faith and follow the Holy Spirit's leading in their lives. We encourage robust dialogue on points where we differ, respectful interaction around God's Word, and vigorous unity to insure healthy relationships within our church family.

May we, Wayzata Free Church, fulfill Jesus' High Priestly prayer for unity in Him. *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me* (John 17).

End Notes:

¹Tim Addington, EFCA Today, Hearing God, (Summer 2014), p.2.

²Greg Strand, EFCA Theology Conference 2015, Introductory Session: *Soteriological Essentials and the 'Significance of Silence': Arminianism, Calvinism, Lutheranism and the EFCA*, pp. 8-9

³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 775.

⁴Francis Frangipane, *Holiness, Truth and the Presence of God*, (Washington DC, MD:Arrow Publications, 1993), p. 123