

Elders Recommendation to Keep the Current Statement of Faith #9, Longer Version

We of the EFCP have an issue on our Statement of Faith to vote on coming up in April?, 2021. The focus is SOF #9 regarding the return of Jesus Christ.

In 2019 the EFCA national conference voted to change the Statement of Faith (SOF) article # 9 from:

Christ's Return in the older SOF

9. 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.

To --

Christ's Return in the EFCA 2019 SOF

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and **glorious** 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.

EFCP has been called on to vote on this change for our fellowship.

Churches have the option to stay with the "old SOF #9" and still remain in the EFCA or to change their SOF to agree with the national EFCA.

The changing of our SOF is a big deal. To change our statement of faith requires a vote in which a super quorum is present. This consists of half of the elders (1/2), one half (1/2) of the church board members and those members of the congregation who attend. An overall 2/3 vote for the new wording for the SOF #9 is necessary to replace our current SOF #9 with the new one.

PART II

The Elders recommend staying with the old SOF (year 2008) for the following reasons:

Given the following list of factors, It has the strongest over all claim for being true.

- 1. The preponderance of the historical evidence is in favor of Premillennialism being most clearly supported in the early post apostolic period.**
Historically, the premillennial position can be traced back to the earliest comments of the post apostolic church fathers. (examples: The Didache c. AD 100, Papias AD 80-163) Justin Martyr AD 100-, Irenaeus (died c. AD 200), Tertullian (AD 150-225)
- 2. The shift away from the premillennialism position in church history occurred on the basis of a world view in which an earthly component of the millennium was considered inferior to a completely heavenly ethereal world view.**
The final glory was thought to be a spiritual contemplation of God and not that presented in Revelation in which the heavenly Jerusalem comes down to earth.

This hermeneutic shift was influenced by unbiblical factor(s) namely Neo Platonism present in North Africa, held by Origen (C. AD 184-253) who held some heretical views.

But this hermeneutic wasn't popularized until Bishop Augustine of Hippo in the years he wrote his work The City of God. (c. AD 413-426) See Book XX, chapter 7.

This Neo-Platonism emphasized the spiritual to the point that a material creation and its fruitfulness were down-played. The goodness of the pre-fall creation was not properly considered. Whereas, when God created the heavens and the earth in their vast area they were good, even more, VERY GOOD. (Gen. 1:31)

The dating of the writing of Revelation favors the time of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96 or later!) which favors the Premillennial position.

This Domitian dating is explicitly supported by Irenaeus (c. AD 200). The concept of "Preterism", predominant in Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism to a lesser degree, would mean the Great Tribulation, was already over; by AD 70. This does not fit the emphasis of Scripture, not the view of Irenaeus.

The Great Tribulation best fits the premillennial position, and Amillennialism but not postmillennialism.. Over and over again the saints are taught to expect tribulation, not how to deal with prosperity nor a time when evil would be so minimized.

For example see See Rev. 7:9,13-14. Rev. 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ; ... **Rev. 7:13** Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" **Rev. 7:14** I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of **the great tribulation**; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In Postmillennialism, the great tribulation is over, having ended about AD 70 with the fall of the Jewish Temple, and Jerusalem. Those who died in it were able to be numbered. Post millennialism looks forward to a time that continually gets better and better until it reaches a long period of millennial blessing level (maybe thousands of years). A study of Revelation, and the books of the NT repeatedly deals with tribulation being an integral part of the Christian life until the time around the return of Christ. History shows major departures from mankind improving (WWI & WWII) History shows a time when far more Jewish people were killed ... 6 million during the Third Reich under Hitler than the War with the Jews ending AD 70. Amillennialism favors a flow of history in which there is kind of an equal balance on increasing grace matched by an increasing evil with the result that there is no discernable millennium on earth. That is not the message of Revelation!

Premillennialism best deals with the binding of Satan described in Rev. 20. The binding is at a different level than that which occurs in the casting out of demons during the Gospel or Apostolic period; or even the victory that occurred over the demonic powers that

occurred in the crucifixion of Christ. The binding of Satan in Revelation occurs during the millennium so he could not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were over. But it is evident that the nations have been and are still being deceived and that the deception has been controlling in groups like those in the Islamic world for centuries (till very recently).

Premillennialism preserves the best prophetic hermeneutic, in which the prophecies of the past are seen as clearly fulfilled in Christ and the Gospel time period. --even from the perspective of the prophets who gave them. This is a matter of first importance. It is a proof of the Gospel. (1 Cor. 15:1-6)

****Premillennialism is the most consistent with the interpretation of Revelation 19-20 in the twice used term “they came to life” as referring to two bodily resurrections as opposed to the first referring to rebirth and the second referring to a bodily resurrection.**

Rev. 20:4-5 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.

The second “came to life” is overwhelmingly held by the 3 eschatological positions as a “resurrection of the dead”. By strong implication, this means that the first occurrence also refers to a resurrection, not to rebirth. (The **rest of the dead did not come to life until** the thousand years were over) The first group that are specifically called out who rose from the dead, were already physically dead. They had been beheaded! So the appeal to John chapter 5 is mistakenly applied.

Premillennialism best explains the beast and his false prophet as being future, not past. The Nero of Postmillennialism fails to meet the description in Revelation. Other suggested personages or institutions are too vague to be confidently identified.

Candidates for the “Beast” in the past history are not satisfactory. They would undermine the prophetic nature of Revelation; as critics would call it; prophecy after the fact. Preterism’s best identification of the “Beast” is Nero. This falters on the fact that Nero died in AD 69 before the fall of the Jewish Temple and Jerusalem. He doesn’t live long enough to complete the seven year period referred to in Revelation and Daniel. The Apostle Paul’s death is estimated at AD 67-68. So the relevance of most of Revelation would be over by AD 70. (only 2 years!) From then on the Great tribulation would be in the past. Premillennialism places the Great Tribulation in the future.

** The existence of two wars in Rev. 19-20, one before the Millennium and one after the Millennium, fits Premillennialism the best. It defeats the over application of the recapitulation seen in earlier chapters of Rev, to counter the objection of the coming of Christ BEFORE the Millennium. If these are two separate wars... Premillennialism is the true choice.

Recapitulation of the same war falters on the fact that the Beast and the Prophet had been consigned to the Lake of Fire after the first war described in chapter 19 (and ch. 16 as Armageddon). Whereas Satan was not consigned to the Lake of Fire till after the short war after the Millennium Rev. 20:7-9. For that battle, Satan is released to deceive the nations into opposing God's Christ afterwards.

Premillennialism has a good candidate for the Restrainer being the Holy Spirit in His influence in the lives of the Saints, who are the Salt of the Earth, and, under Christ the Light of the World. But civil government could also be a viable candidate.

Premillennialism advocates for a personal AntiChrist rather than a vague principle. That seems to fit the depiction in Revelation.

Premillennialism does not make the mistake of "Replacement Theology", replacing Israel with the Church.

Israel still has a special place in God's plan. Amillennialists and Postmillennialists hold that the church replaces Israel in the fulfillment of all OT prophecies not fulfilled in the OT period. But, it is clear from Revelation and Daniel that Israel has a special place in the Apocalyptic Times, as described in Revelation and the Apostolic period (see, Romans 9-11). It fulfills the promises made to OT Saints, where a special emphasis on Daniel is clear in Revelation. And in Paul, ethnic Israel is clearly distinguished. The continuance of Israel as a nation even now seems to be supported by evangelical Christians who believe in a Premillennial eschatology.

Arguments for the hermeneutic of the church fulfilling Israel's prophecies in Amillennialism and Postmillennialism misses the mark. See restoring David's house in Acts 15 (Amos 9) or the gift of tongues in Acts 2 (Joel) They relate to Israel.

Premillennialism best fits a time predicted in OT prophecies of a time of exceedingly great blessings, and the clarity of God's rule, yet before the final resurrection and judgment, when physical death still exists. This does not fit with Amillennialism nor as well with Postmillennialism. The millennium of premillennialism is a time in which death is still a real factor: One who dies at age 100 will seem accursed. The content of Isaiah 65 best fits premillennialism which recognizes the eternal kingdom after the Millennium. The existence of death during this period cannot be explained away as a symbol of eternal life.

Other Impacts of changing the SOF:

It changes the hermeneutic that Christian leaders use to communicate the truth of Scripture to God's people. The Gospel being a fulfillment of OT Scriptures is a matter of "first importance". 1 Cor. 15:1-6

The latest (2019) SOF #9 weakens the understanding of the prophets who prophesied, asserting that they did not really understand what they were saying. But a careful look at the messianic prophecies showed they did understand or came to an understand during their lives. (1 Peter 1:10)

Changing SOF #9 will change the theological complexion of the denomination as a whole and can do the same in churches individually—the silence of the EFCA on matters that unnecessarily have divided the church. This has been especially seen in the Reformed -Non Reformed positions, and the charismatic-cessationist positions. This unity may soon be lost.

The impact on the EFCA NMD can already be seen in: Loss of individual churches from the district who see the importance of Premillennialism. And the loss of a very excellent District Superintendent who had been very faithful to the EFCA and has been used of God to help restore failing churches. He has been an avid supporter of the EFCA till this point and been in the denomination for decades.

So the Elders favor keeping our SOF #9 as it is. Any questions?—we invite you to view the series of teachings on Eschatology (12 sessions) or connect with Pastor Emeritus Doug Busby.