

**THE GOD OF OUR REFORMED FAITH**

Acts 17:16-34, others

“Where are they?” he wondered. “What could be holding them up?”

He awaited the arrival of Silas and Timothy, his team. But he was, by natural wiring someone who hated delays. They always struck him as unnecessary, time wasted, unwelcomed pauses in the way life *should* go...and yet he belonged to a God who often had another schedule than his own.

So he filled the time by walking the city. Many a city he'd walked before, but never this one.

For the very first time, in Athens—

the eye of Greece, Mother of the Arts  
And Eloquence, native to famous wits  
The schools of antient Sages; his who bred  
Great Alexander to subdue the world  
Of Socrates  
Wisest of men; from whose mouth issued forth  
mellifluous streams that water'd all the schools  
Of Academics, old and new...<sup>i</sup>

He had to admit...it was a visually stunning city, unrivaled even by Rome for its exquisite buildings and innumerable monuments, temples, shrines, statues and altars. The sun reflected caught his eye, and he turned to view the Parthenon. Inside, the mammoth gold/ivory statue of Athena (goddess of war) whose gleaming spear-point was visible from 40 miles.

- Xenophon the Roman satirist referred to Athens as *one great altar, one great sacrifice*, adding *there were more gods in Athens than in the rest of the country, and it was easier in Athens to find a god there than a man.*<sup>ii</sup>

Elsewhere and everywhere shrines to **Apollo**,<sup>iii</sup> the national god of Greece and the city's patron, to **Jupiter** (god of Sky and Thunder), to **Venus** (love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity and victory), to **Mercury** (of commercial success/prosperity), to **Bacchus** (agriculture, wine, fertility), **Neptune** (brother to Jupiter and Pluto, of the sea and earthquakes), **Diana** (goddess of the hunt, the Moon, wildness of nature) and **Asclapius** (god of medicine and learning).

- All the gods of Olympus were extolled, the whole Greek pantheon: **Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Hera, Ares, Aphrodite, Hermes, Artemis, Hephaestus, Demeter** and **Dionysus**

And the investment...the sheer devotion of gift and artistry, the flawless perfection sculpted in images

of stone and brass, gold, silver, ivory, marble, such elegance by Greece's finest sculptors offered every reason for breath-taking admiration. For worship.

But Paul was no tourist. And, with each fresh turn around and down the matrix of roads and lanes, he felt no sense of wonder. Rather, a deep-seated, growing agitation. He would later, to Luke, describe the turmoil in his heart with the word "paroxyno" (παροξυνω<sup>τ</sup>) ... the very same descriptor used in the Old Testament to describe the reaction of the Holy One of Israel to the golden calf which the people crafted and polished to worship at the base of Mt. Sinai.

Waiting for his team, walking the city, Paul was in no mood to admire. He was sickened. he was "provoked by all the idolatry, provoked to anger, grief, and indignation, just as God is himself, and for the same reason, namely for the honour and glory of His name."<sup>v</sup> He could not help but find where the discussions about the gods and life were happening. Every day in the market square, every hour with anyone who would discuss, and listen.

"Men of Athens!" he declared. He stood that day center stage before the city's elite. "You worship so many gods. You do not know the One who is really there."

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Luke's account of Paul's days in Athens raises many questions. Here's the one that should command our attention – ***Why couldn't the Apostle Paul, in one of the world's greatest cities, just enjoy the majestic scenery?***

- Why couldn't he simply be a tourist?
- Why couldn't he just be satisfied with being wowed with the impressive engineering and skill of the architecture, revel in the beautiful craft of the statues, marvel at the artwork?
- Why not just chill out and happily commend the Greek citizenry for their history, for their culture and religious traditions and centuries of polytheistic worship?

I mean, it's all good, isn't it? No religion, no one-faith-system is better than any other, isn't it? I mean, as long as you're sincere. Why couldn't Paul just leave well-enough alone?

**Answer** – because Paul possessed a core-conviction. A core conviction about God.

Perhaps the more important question is - **Do you?** So, what are CORE CONVICTIONS?

Here's how I see it

**Core convictions** are truths imbedded by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a disciple of Jesus Christ, by which she/he understands what is uncompromisingly important, and lives accordingly.

Sometimes, they are called “values,” but I think that word has often lost its impact. Core convictions is a better descriptor. They are truths that matter more than anything else, and they are imbedded in the core of your heart. Core convictions can embrace a whole range of truths

- truths about who you really are as a person, why you are here, and where you are headed
- truths about how to think, how to choose, how to feel
- truths about whether or not that sense of eternity within us<sup>vi</sup> comes from ourselves, or from the One who created us

As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, your core convictions, like mine, are rooted in the Scriptures. And, if you have chosen to grow in your walk with Christ along with others in a church like this one – an Evangelical Free Church – we belong to a fellowship that has identified 10 Biblically-rooted core convictions.<sup>vii</sup> 10 core convictions which we want to explore over the next 6-7 weeks.

Not surprisingly, **the first core conviction is about GOD** – intentionally so. In our Statement of Faith it reads like this:

### **God**

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. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory (cf. Article 1)

With your permission, let me simplify that excellent statement like this

**The one true God  
who created and sustains all things  
is worthy of every person’s worship  
(all our worship)  
because of Who God uniquely is.**

So who does God reveal himself to be both in creation and in the Scriptures?

First, the true God is uniquely, **altogether GOOD**

Second, the true God is uniquely, **relationally TRIUNE**

Third, the true God is uniquely, **incomparably GREAT**

Fourth, the true God is **graciously & relentlessly REDEMPTIVE**

Briefly together, let’s take each of these convictions in order.

First, the true God is uniquely, **altogether GOOD**

The EFCA Statement – “God is holy and infinitely perfect.” In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit consistently uses the word QADASH, which essentially means “God’s *apart-ness*,” or that which makes Him uniquely OTHER than anything or anyone else. God alone is uniquely good. God alone is uniquely perfect. God alone is uniquely pure.

The true God’s unique goodness and holiness is what Isaiah experience when, to his utter dismay, he was taken up into God’s throne room:

**Isaiah 6** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

It’s God’s holiness – that He is *other* and *pure* and perfectly right – His very being requires Him to call us to moral excellence. It’s God’s holy goodness that refuses to tolerate the destruction of sin in our lives. It’s God’s holy goodness that fuels His passion to call us to what is right and richly good, and away from what is wrong and inherently bad. The true God is altogether GOOD.

Second, the true God is uniquely, **relationally TRIUNE**

Triune? That’s not a word we use often. It means what the EFCA Statement voices – that God “eternally exists in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”

The Bible reveals this about God with crystal clarity, in scores of passages. We just saw one – Isaiah 6 – were you listening? “One angel called to another and said, **Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts** (ah, 3 times!)...and then God’s call (6:8) <sup>8</sup>And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for **us**?”

Put another way: The One true God is Three co-equal Persons who have been loving each other and working together from eternity past, in eternity present, and in eternity future. Practically

speaking, because we are made in God's image, we get our capacity and energy for loving relationships from these three Persons of the One true God. [And... in just a few moments, we will baptize Jesus' disciples in the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.)

The true God is uniquely altogether GOOD, uniquely relationally TRIUNE.

Third, the true God is uniquely, **incomparably GREAT**

EFCA Statement – “*God has limitless knowledge and sovereign power.*” May we read together:

**Isaiah 40:25** “To whom then will you compare Me,  
that I should be like him?” says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these stars?  
He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name;  
by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power,  
not one is missing.

**Hebrews 1:1-3** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God. He is the exact imprint of God's nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

The true God is uniquely altogether GOOD, uniquely relationally TRIUNE, incomparably GREAT.

Fourth, the true God is **graciously & relentlessly**  
**REDEMPTIVE**

EFCA Statement: “*He graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.*”

Greg Strand put it well in *Evangelical Convictions*:<sup>viii</sup>

**Even before the first sin spoiled the good world that he had made**, God knew what he was going to do. He had created human beings in his own image, so that the eternal Son of God would be able to take humanity into himself and to enter into our world and become incarnate as a human being like us. This was part of God's eternal purpose.

**From eternity God purposed more** than just the incarnation of Christ. He also willed his death, for the Bible speaks of Christ as “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The Lamb was slain to redeem a people who would be God's very own, a people redeemed to know him, to love him and to serve him forever (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 1 Chron. 17:21).

**There is a great mystery here**, but the central point of it all must be this: the gospel which has impacted our lives does not begin with us. We are not Christians, we do not share in the very life of God, because of our efforts to seek him out. It is not because of our cleverness or our goodness or our religiosity that we are adopted into God's family.

**No, the gospel that has come to us and saved us begins with God.** He loved us before we ever thought about loving him: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and

blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1:4). “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:9). So we believe that God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for himself (cf. also 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:11; 3:10; Rom. 8:29-30).

## CONCLUSION

“Pastor David...you’ve back up the truck and dumped out a whole lotta doctrine here! My heart is struggle with *So what?* Is there a ‘*So What?*’ for my life?”

If these truths about the true God are a CORE CONVICTION – then my life and your life will likely be very different from many around us...and needs to be.

### #1 This God is worthy of ALL YOUR WORSHIP (with no rivals) John 4:24

Perhaps no one put it better than the William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1881-1944):

*Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. it is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, [the] nourishment of mind by His truth, [the] purifying of imagination by His beauty, [the] opening of the heart to his love, and [the] submission of will to His purpose. And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest expressions of which we are capable.<sup>ix</sup>*

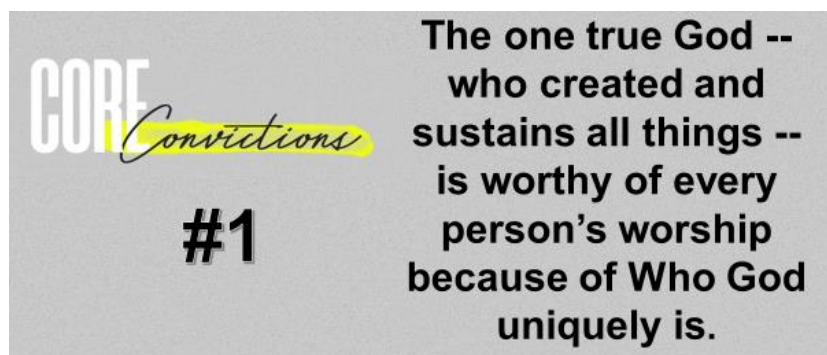
### #2 This God is worthy of your COMMITMENT to HOLINESS 1 Peter 1:14-16

1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

### #3 This God is worthy of being SHARED WITH OTHERS

Eugene Peterson translates Paul’s address to the Athenians like this (i.e., in *The Message*)

“It is plain to see that you Athenians take your religion seriously. When I arrived here the other day, I was fascinated with all the shrines I came across. And then I found one inscribed, TO THE GOD NOBODY KNOWS. I’m here to introduce you to this God so you can worship intelligently, know who you’re dealing with....“God overlooks it as long as you don’t know any better—but that time is past. The unknown is now known, and he’s calling for a radical life-change.



**CORE** Convictions

**#1**

**The one true God --  
who created and  
sustains all things --  
is worthy of every  
person's worship  
because of Who God  
uniquely is.**

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<sup>i</sup> from John Milton, *Paradise Regained* iv.240 ff.

<sup>ii</sup> John Stott's treatment of Paul's visit to Athens is immensely helpful. Cf. John Stott, *The Spirit The Church and The World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), "13. Paul in Athens 17:16-34, pp.276-291. See also F.F. Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), "Paul and the Athenians" pp. 235-247.

<sup>iii</sup> The national divinity of the Greeks, Apollo has been recognized as a god of archery, music and dance, truth and prophecy, healing and diseases, the Sun and light, poetry, and more. He is the son of [Zeus](#) and [Leto](#), and the twin brother of [Artemis](#), goddess of the hunt. Seen as the most beautiful god and the ideal of the [kouros](#) (a beardless, athletic youth), Apollo is considered to be the most Greek of all gods. Apollo is known in Greek-influenced [Etruscan mythology](#) as *Apulu*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo>

<sup>iv</sup> Stott, "originally had medical associations and used of a seizure or epileptic fit...especially to irritate, provoke, rouse to anger...the verb is in the imperfect tense which expresses not a sudden loss of temper but rather a continuous, settled reaction to what Paul [i.e., he] saw...this must have been the word which he himself used when later describing his feelings to Luke; evidently he was not ashamed of them." p.278.

<sup>v</sup> Stott, 278.

<sup>vi</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

<sup>vii</sup> [EFCA Statement of Faith as of June 2019](#) cf. [www.efca.org](http://www.efca.org)

## **God**

1. 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. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

### **The Bible**

2. 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.

### **The Human Condition**

3. 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.

### **Jesus Christ**

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. 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.

### **The Work of Christ**

5. 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 death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

### **The Holy Spirit**

6. 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 Church**

7. 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.

### **Christian Living**

8. 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.

### **Christ's Return**

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.

### **Response and Eternal Destiny**

10. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

<sup>viii</sup> EFCA. *Evangelical Convictions* (Kindle Locations 987-995). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ix</sup> in *Writings in St. John*