

## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT OF FAITH (Part 2)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
Integration

CANDIDATE'S NAME: **Nathan B. Edwards**

DATE: **March 1, 2016**

*Please attach your answers to these questions and return it to the chairman of the Candidates Care or Ministerial Committee before you are scheduled to meet with that committee for your oral ordination examinations.*

1. State in your own words your view of the Scriptures and the place the Scriptures will have in your ministry.

I love and tremble at God's Word. I confess with Peter "they are the words of eternal life" (John 6:68) and rejoice with the Psalmist that they are "sweeter than honey in my mouth" (Ps 119:103). My personal conversion came from reading the Word, and thus I don't merely assent to the authority and power of the Word doctrinally, I know it experientially. The Word is the voice of my Savior and my Lord and whether I understand all that He says or struggle with some area of His teaching, I know He is right and trust and submit my life to all that He has spoken. I do not judge the Word, the Word judges me. In the Word I experience the renewing of my mind as I discover my Lord's mind, heart, and will to be thoroughly good and wonderful. I experience communion with God through His Word and by it I know God personally and truthfully. I have devoted my life to the proper understanding of the Word and have made it my mission to teach and to preach the whole counsel of God with fidelity, clarity, and boldness. I believe resolutely that these are the words of life and that the Bible is useful for teaching, exhortation, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17). I believe that the central focus of the Scriptures is the redemption offered in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and thus to be read properly they need to be interpreted in light of Christ and His work. Additionally, I fully subscribe to the principle of sola Scriptura, and I live out this principle in ministry through a commitment to expositional preaching, to the regulative principle in worship, and to Word-governed evangelism and counsel. My ministry rests upon the conviction that the Word is sufficient to save and to sanctify God's people. I am impassioned to instill a love and reverence for the Word in my congregation. To put it simply, I proudly profess that God's Word rules my life and my ministry.

2. What distinctions of the Reformed faith appeal to you?

I am unapologetically Reformed in my theology. I was saved at a time when I was working to reject the faith and was making moral choices which denied God's authority in my life. Thus I had experienced the Reformed doctrines of grace before I was formally taught them. In my conversion I was awakened to and terrified of my deep sinfulness. I was drawn irresistibly to repentance by the call of the sovereign God. I met a Jesus who saved me by dying for me "while I was still a sinner." I experienced the assurance of the Spirit, who made me a new creation that calls God, "Abba, Father" and confesses "Jesus is Lord" in word and deed. In light of this I readily accept the Reformed doctrines of grace and cherish them. However, my confidence in them does not rest simply on my experience or on a few select authors. I believe they are taught clearly and unambiguously in the Scriptures. These doctrines appeal to me because they are biblical – they are true.

The other distinctives of the Reformed faith took a while longer to find their place in my theology, but I have enjoyed growing in my knowledge of covenant theology and heartily affirm

these truths as well. I affirm that God works through covenants, beginning in eternity past with the covenant of redemption between the persons of the Trinity. I believe the Scriptures teach a covenant of works made with a historical Adam in the Garden of Eden and that when Adam, as our federal head, disobeyed the stipulations he brought the entire human race into real guilt and a state of depravity. I believe in the glorious covenant of grace, which was first promised in the Garden and was carried forward through Noah, Abraham, and his descendants until its fulfillment in Christ. This one covenant of grace promises that all who trust in the person and work of Christ are fully redeemed and reconciled to God and inheritors of the new heavens and earth. Further, I affirm that there is one people of God, one way of salvation, and that the sign and seal of the covenant (circumcision in the Old Covenant and baptism in the New Covenant) is given to families, and, thus, is for both believing parents and their children as well as for all who repent and place their faith in the gospel of God. I believe that the Lord's Supper is more than a symbol; it is sacramental – a real meal in the presence of our covenant Lord and a means of grace. Finally, I believe that the Presbyterian system of government of a plurality of elders is the one that is in view throughout the Scriptures.

Ironically, it was my going to a Baptist seminary that has most helped me grasp the reasons and the goodness of these distinctives. It has been this context that has most required me to defend these beliefs and articulate them to a questioning audience. Thus, being in a Baptist seminary did not lead me away from my tradition, but proved to be "iron sharpening iron." Moreover, it has taught me an invaluable lesson in how to hold to my distinctives in a charitable and loving manner. For just as much as I have learned to appreciate my own tradition, I have also learned to appreciate other views and to prioritize, as much as possible, the expansive amount of common ground that is shared among believers of different denominations and traditions. For this reason I find myself most drawn to the Reformed faith as practiced in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church since I also desire to live out the motto "in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity."

### 3. What/Who is the Holy Spirit and how important is his ministry?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is fully God, sharing in all the attributes of God, and is a full, equal, and essential participant in the life, decrees, and works of God. I believe that the Holy Spirit brings to completion the will of God. It is by the Holy Spirit that God's revelation has been communicated through inspiration of the Scriptures. It is by the Holy Spirit that the cross-work of Christ is applied to the elect through His regeneration and irresistible call. It is by the Holy Spirit that God's people are gathered into local congregations and specially gifted to be a body that grows in maturity and glorifies God. It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the Scriptures, giving God's people eyes of faith that are able to obey the will of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that seals the believer by indwelling him or her. He creates assurance by bringing His fruit out of the life of the believer, making the believer's adoption known through the cry "Abba, Father" and her repentance and faith certain in the confession "Jesus is Lord." The Holy Spirit sanctifies each believer growing them in Christlikeness. He teaches God's children how to pray and perfects our prayers in the ears of our heavenly Father. The Spirit works perseverance in the lives of the believers, and will be the one who raises them bodily with spiritual bodies to make them part of the perfect communion of the triune God as He dwells with His people for eternity. The Spirit witnesses to the truth of the Word, convicts the world of sin, and points people to Christ. In short, the Holy Spirit's ministry is integral and essential to our salvation, to the health of the church, and to the life of the believer.

4. What is your position on women in leadership roles in the church?

I concur with the position of the EPC that the ordination of women is a secondary doctrinal issue, as it does not immediately impinge upon gospel truths. In working together for the gospel I believe that a church must strive to be a body where each member seeks to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10). When this mentality prevails then the discussion of the roles of men or women in ministry is no longer about worldly measures of power or status, but about sacrificial love, mutual service, and Christ-honoring unity. Given this, I believe the Scriptures teach the equal importance and dignity of both men and women, while also affirming distinct roles which are designed to be complementary, interdependent, and harmonious. Part of this distinction is that God has given men the role of headship and women the role of helpmate. All of this being said, I also know many godly men and women who differ with me on this point, and I hold more strongly to what we hold in common – the gospel – than this particular difference in understanding. As such I am pleased to work with those who disagree and will partner with all men and women who have been ordained as a teaching or ruling elder as it serves the common good of advancing the gospel.

5. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian form of government?

The greatest strength of the Presbyterian form of government is its checks and balances between its plurality of elders and its multiple courts. I believe this government best upholds the Lordship of Christ over His church as the plurality of elders depend on the mutual leading of the Holy Spirit amongst them to rule and discipline the church of God. Further, I appreciate the way in which the Presbyterian form of government connects various local congregations together in the work of preserving orthodoxy, advancing the gospel, and ministering to one another.

I believe two potential weaknesses need to be guarded against. The first is having rule become increasingly invested in professional clergy to the exclusion of lay elders. In addressing this concern I appreciate the EPC's efforts to keep parity. The second weakness that can occur is the tendency to become denominationally closed-off and exclusive. I am encouraged by the EPC's approach to this pitfall as well in their striving to uphold unity in the essentials and liberty in the nonessentials.

6. Explain in your own words your philosophy of ministry.

My philosophy of ministry can be described by four tenets: (1) to be governed by the Word, (2) to be aimed at Christ, (3) to love the whole flock, and (4) to lead by example. To expand on each briefly:

**Governed by the Word:** The Word is the authority for all of my life and ministry. I will endeavor to make the Word the ultimate rule of faith and practice for my congregation by esteeming it through preaching, teaching, counseling, and decision-making.

**Aimed at Christ:** My ministry is passionately driven at making Christ known and exalted in every place. In whatever piece of ministry, no matter how mundane, my concern will be to make sure Christ and His kingdom remain the focus and the primary motivation. My objective will be to continually bring people to rest in Christ and to depend upon His faithfulness, which never fails.

**Love the whole flock:** I want my flock to know through my care and affection for them that they are Christ's Beloved. I will work to know the individuals of my congregation personally so

that I can minister to them the gospel of God to their individual struggles, hurts, doubts, and needs. I intend to devote considerable time to visitation and personal discipleship.

Leading by example: I desire to be one who can say with Paul "imitate me as I imitate Christ." Though, I am far from perfect and far from arriving, I nonetheless intend to always be striving in such a manner that my congregation can see the rule of Christ and the beauty of faithfulness in my life. I hope to provide an example that will encourage and motivate the flock in my care to pursue Christ as their treasure and greatest joy. Additionally, I believe my fittedness to ministry depends upon being "above reproach." This means that my own personal walk cannot be neglected. Personal spiritual disciplines and a system of accountability are priorities for me in guarding the integrity of my ministry. I strive for my life to adorn the gospel and pray that nothing in my life would ever be the cause for stumbling in another's faith.

I confess that I tremble at the great responsibility of pastoral ministry, nonetheless, I entrust my ministry to the one who is sufficient to accomplish all things in me. Thus these tenets recognize that all of my ministry and any fruit that it bears is all of grace.

7. Describe your approach personally and as a pastor in a local church to evangelism.

I believe that the best way for evangelism to be a passion in the church is for it to be a passion in the pastor. A pastor needs to exhort his congregation in applying the Word of God to "go and make disciples," but he also needs to adorn this preaching with a life that demonstrates personal evangelism. Thus my approach to church evangelism is first to lead by example.

My personal approach to evangelism is captured in Paul's words in Acts 26:29 who says, "whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am." I believe that the call to share the gospel is an always present imperative. Some witnessing opportunities develop slowly, but others are brief. Faithfulness involves seizing both. I approach evangelism expectantly, believing that God is sovereign in evangelism and that any effective hearing comes about not through my superior methods or persuasiveness but by a supernatural opening of the ears by the Spirit.

On church evangelism, I believe every church has two groups of people who need to be evangelized: those inside the church and those outside of it. The first group is often forgotten when talking about evangelism, but I believe this group is the first group we are called to reach. I believe that in every church is a significant portion of people who have not truly been converted. Thus, I believe all ministry, teaching, and preaching should be gospel-centered. I also believe that evangelism to the church involves personal visitation to members' homes. As a pastor it will be a priority to me to get to know every member in my church and to hear their testimonies and to teach them the basics of the gospel.

Regarding evangelizing those outside the church, I believe effective evangelism requires knowledge of the local community and persistence through multiple means. With this in mind, I find Darrell Robinson's five-prong approach to evangelism to be a good structure for developing an evangelism plan for a local congregation. Robinson's five prongs of evangelism are based on the practices demonstrated in the book of Acts. They are: (1) proclamation, (2) caring ministry, (3) event attraction, (4) geographic saturation, and (5) personal witnessing. I have found that developing evangelistic outreaches in these areas that are tailored to the unique character of the surrounding community is an effective way to reach every person in the church's sphere of influence with the gospel.

Finally, I believe that the Great Commission calls the church to "make disciples of all nations," which means a local congregation cannot simply focus upon its own neighborhood, but

must also be partnered with international missions. I hope to feature and encourage the prayerful and financial support of many missionaries, including those sent out from our own congregation in short and long term mission trips, and by involvement with the missions work of my Presbytery and denomination.

8. As you reflect on your life, explain your sense of call to ministry.

I believe that I have been called to pastoral ministry. I have had several confirming evidences that this is my call, these include: an abiding and fervent desire, spiritual gifting and equipping, and numerous external confirmations. I will elaborate on each of these briefly:

My abiding and fervent desire to be a pastor: My sense of call to be a pastor seems to go back as far as the moment of my conversion nearly fifteen years ago. For several years I tried to fulfill this call by serving the Lord in a lay capacity. However, the Lord's call on me continued to consume more and more of my life to the point that I could not continue in a lay capacity. I finally relented to God's call upon me to pursue full time ministry and began my studies. During this period of intense study and the exposure of other opportunities to serve, my focus upon pastoring has only become more certain. I am anxious and excited, like a groom waiting for his wedding day, to complete my credentialing and ordination so that I can serve a congregation for the glory of God.

Spiritual gifting and equipping: The more I reflect upon my life the more I resonate with the words of Paul that God "had set me apart before I was born" (Gal 1:15). I see God's work in my life preparing me to be a herald of His gospel even before my conversion as He gave me a bold and principled spirit, natural leadership abilities, and a gift at public speaking, persuasion, and argumentation which He honed through my high school debate years. I praise God for further refining my critical thinking and problem solving skills and developing my management abilities through my engineering years. I even believe my lostness and my years of sinfulness were used to teach me the grievousness of sin, the beauty of the gospel, and to give me a heart aflame for the welfare of souls both inside and outside of the church. I believe all of this training and experience was superintended by God to serve His church. Further, as it came time to develop specific ministry training, God brought about what I needed and provided for me and my family through the process so that I was able to pursue a M.Div. and a Ph.D. Further, He gave me invaluable church crisis management training by placing me on session during a particularly tumultuous time in the life of my home church.

I believe that I have been given the spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching, evangelism, leadership, and a prophetic spirit -- all of these affirm a calling in pastoral ministry. Furthermore, as I examine the qualifications for a pastor in 1 Timothy and Titus I believe that God has preserved me and prepared me for this office.

Numerous encouragements and external confirmations: I believe that I have had many external confirmations of my call to pastoral ministry in my opportunities to counsel, to preach, and to teach. In all these areas I have seen my work receiving validation and bearing fruit.

In light of all of this I feel very confident that my call is to pastor a local congregation and I hope to find a church that I will be able to love in the Lord and pursue the exciting work of gospel ministry together.

9. Elaborate on your convictions about personal accountability in your life and in the lives of Christians to whom you might minister.

My philosophy of ministry has my own personal walk as one of its key tenets, thus I place great importance upon my spiritual life and accountability. I believe that the Christian wars against the powers of darkness and I take Christ's words that the "flesh is weak" with utmost seriousness. I seek to never assume that I am exempt from spiritual attack, temptation, or moral failure; my hope of perseverance rests in the power of God and in availing myself of the full armor of God. This means that I make a priority out of personal spiritual disciplines, especially Scripture reading and prayer. I seek to live transparently and make myself accountable through mentoring and accountability relationships. Additionally, I find that one of the greatest defenses against sin and temptation is to continue to keep my heart aflame in the gospel and to grow in my joy in the justification that I have in Christ, thus I seek to go through life with a worshipping heart.

I also take the responsibility of protecting the members of my flock from moral failure as a key part of the role of shepherding. I believe good preaching provides protection and accountability to the whole congregation by bringing them into awareness of their fragility and the strength they have in the gospel. I seek to call members weekly to repentance and renewed trust in the gospel as all sufficient for their fight. I also seek to involve myself in the lives of the members of my congregation. I want to be accessible to them and I want to know them personally so that I can continually encourage them to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. I also intend to be as available as possible to counsel members and families who are in a state of crisis. I hope to find a good network of Christian counselors that I can refer members to as needed. Finally, I seek to be an interceding pastor for my congregation. I intend to regularly lift up my congregation, and individual members by name, to the throne of grace, that they may be strengthened and kept blameless by the power of God.