

# NO CREED, BUT CHRIST

## *What Is Wrong with Creeds?*

### I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Scripture Reading:

B. What Separates the Lord's Church from Man-made Churches.

1. There are many factors, but one major factor is the matter of "creeds."
2. Illus. Show various creed books.
3. Many denominational members do not even know they have a "creed."
4. In contrast, NT Christians follow the NT only; no man-made creeds. We speak where the Bible speaks, we are silent where the Bible is silent.

### II. LEARNING ABOUT CREEDS.

A. What is a creed?

1. Word study.
  - a) The word "creed," from the Latin *credo*, means "I believe;" from *credere*, to trust, believe (cf. *credo* is in the Latin Vulgate Bible).
  - b) A "creed" is a statement of belief and a confession of faith. It is not "I believe that...", but rather "I believe in..."
  - c) "1. A brief statement of religious belief; confession of faith. 2. A specific statement of this kind, accepted as authoritative by a church; especially the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Athanasian Creed. 3. A statement of belief, principles, or opinions on any subject." (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, p. 346)
  - d) "A concise formal and authorized statement of important basic points of Christian doctrine" (*The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 270)
  - e) Historically, creeds began as statements made by individuals, and moved to statements made by groups.
  - f) The key to understanding creeds is this: they are an authorized statement composed by a group and used as a standard.

2. Examples.

- a) Three classical creeds.
  - (1) Apostles' Creed – authorship debated; one of the first attempts to systematize belief; took on its present form in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century.
  - (2) Nicene Creed - drawn up by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, completed by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 381 and recognized as an official formula at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. A revised addition appeared in the Second Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553. A further revision is found in the Council of Toledo in A.D. 589. (Note: The Greek and Latin church divided, in part, over how this creed should be understood. In particular, the "filioque" clause.)
  - (3) Athanasian Creed – authorship and date are uncertain; emphasizes the doctrine of the trinity; pronouncements of damnation are made for those who do not keep this creed.

b) Creeds in other forms.

- (1) Confessions (Protestant Reformation) – usually longer than a creed and more detailed and systematic. It is designed more for reference than for recital.
  - (a) Augsburg Confession (1530) – a two-part creed composed by Melancthon with the approval of Martin Luther, and primarily written to defend the orthodoxy of Protestantism. It was later endorsed by John Calvin. It is the creed of the Lutheran Church.
  - (b) Waldensian Declaration of Faith (1532).
  - (c) First Helvetic Confession (1536).
  - (d) Geneva Confession (1537).
  - (e) Gallican Confession (1559).
  - (f) Thirty-nine Articles (1571).
  - (g) Canons of Dort (1619).
  - (h) Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).
- (2) “Symbols” is another term used for creeds.
- (3) “Rule of Faith” is another term used for creeds.

B. What is the basic function of a creed (c. 4<sup>th</sup> Century onward)?

1. Baptismal: what a candidate says prior to baptism.
2. Instructional: a syllabus for catechetical instruction in Christian doctrine.
3. Doctrinal: denounces heresies and serves as a test of orthodoxy.
4. Liturgical: used in a worship service with a response from the congregation (recited, or put to song).
5. Commendatory: used as a proof of identity and a test of fellowship.

C. What is wrong with classic, denominational creeds?

1. They are not authorized by the New Testament (Col.3:17).
  - a) The following examples are not examples of creeds as some suggest: Deutl.6:4-9; 26:5-9; Ac.8:37 (“Creed, Creeds” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p.283-284, G.W. Bromiley.).
  - b) Any statement in Scripture is Scripture; not a stated belief about Scripture.
  - c) It is admitted by scholars that no formal creedal statements are found in the Bible; and yet, they use the Bible to justify their creeds!
2. They are written by men, not by God; hence, they are fallible (open to error), imperfect and uninspired by God (Mt.15:1ff; Mk.7;1ff).
3. They impeach the wisdom and word of God (2 Tim.3:16-17). They are more or less than God's word. If they are the same as God's word, why do we need them? They are unnecessary.
4. They focus on the authority and standard of man's word, not on the authority and standard of God's word. They set aside God's word for man's word (Col.2:8,18-19,20-23). Creeds are recognized by scholars as an “authoritative statement,” as “standards” and “divisive” (“Creed, Creeds” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 1025-1026, A.H. Leitch).

5. They teach things, at times, contrary to plain Scripture (1 Tim.1:3-4; 4:1-3).
6. They must be revised from year to year (cf. the Nicean Creed written in A.D. 325 was revised, in part, in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries).
7. They keep the religious world divided (Jn.17:20). A Baptist creed produces a Baptist, nothing else; a Methodist creed produces a Methodist, nothing else; and so on.
8. They will not be used as the standard of judgment in the last day (Jn.12:48; Rev.20:11-15).

### **III. OUR STANDARD OF AUTHORITY - GOD'S WORD (NT SCRIPTURES).**

#### **A. The NT Scriptures are the Standard.**

1. Mt.17:5; 28:19-20.
2. Jn.12:48; 14:6,26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15; 17:20.
3. Ac.2:42; 3:22-26; 6:7; 13:8.
4. Rom.6:17; 16:25-26.
5. 1 Cor.11:23; 14:37; 15:1-2.
6. Gal.1:6-9,23; 3:23.
7. Eph.1:10; 2:19-20; 3:1-11; 4:5.
8. Phil.2:16.
9. Col.2:2-3,7-10,18-19
10. 2 Thess.2:15.
11. 1 Tim.4:6; 5:8; 6:3-4,10,21.
12. 2 Tim.1:13; 2:2; 3:14-17; 4:3-4.
13. Tit.1:9,13.
14. Heb.1:1-2; 2:3-4.
15. 2 Pet.1:3-4.
16. 2 Jn.9-11.
17. 3 Jn.3-4
18. Jude 3.
19. Rev.20:11-14.

#### **B. We Have "No Creed, But Christ."**

1. Whatever may be said in favor of expedients (written materials) to teach God's word, let it be clear that the NT, and the NT alone, is our standard of authority.
2. All denominational creeds are wrong!

### **IV. CURRENT ISSUE OVER CREEDS.**

#### **A. Why We Are Having an Issue Over "Creeds" Today?**

1. Reason #1 - Some brethren misunderstand that certain types of Bible teaching are authorized and expedient.
2. Reason #2 - Some brethren don't want error exposed.

- a) They know brethren generally reject “creeds” (those of the denominations), and so, if they call a document or practice a “creed,” then brethren will reject it. Apparently, if you cry “creed” long enough and loud enough, some will believe it.
- b) This is similar to how some use word “tradition” or “judge.” Some “tradition” (e.g. Catholic tradition) is wrong, but not all (2 Thess.2:15). Some “judging” is wrong (e.g. prejudicial judging), but not all (Mt.7:1-5; Jn.7:24). Yes, some writings are denominational creeds and are wrong, but not all writings are creeds.

## B. Concerns That Some Brethren Have.

1. “Creedal tendencies” (around 1994) or “clumsy efforts to creedalize” (written recently).
  - a) Answer: We must distinguish between a classical, denominational creed that is an authoritative standard, and our expedient practices of teaching the Word of God. Do not throw out expediencies because they may look like a creed (both are written on paper, etc.). “Don’t throw out the baby with the bath water,” so to speak.
  - b) Answer: When a brother writes about “creeds” today, is he writing a “creed” about “creeds”? If not, why not? Why is his writing not a “creed,” but what he is writing about is a “creed”?
2. A document that contains less than the entire NT.
  - a) Answer: Any teaching on God’s word that focuses on something less than the whole of truth may have a purpose in mind. Allow brethren to focus on certain issues and discuss them. Do not require them to teach all of God’s word (from Genesis to Revelation) every time they speak or write.
  - b) Answer: Those among us who are concerned that we are writing “creeds” have themselves taught and focussed on doctrines that are only part of God’s word. (I don’t know of anyone who teaches by starting at Genesis and going to Revelation, discussing every verse, every time he teaches.)
  - c) Answer: We are told that all the Bible (the NT) should be used as a standard for orthodoxy. We agree! But, we are not told how that can be done in an expedient way. Do brethren who cry “creeds” today, teach every verse in the Bible, every time they say or write something? If not, then why would what they say or write not be a “creed” by their own definition?
3. A document, other than the NT, is used as a standard of orthodoxy.
  - a) Answer: A classical, denominational creed is authoritative and is used as a standard (see Webster’s definition again.) However, the NT is our final authority, not anything we do (spoken or written words) to teach it. There is no inherent authority in what we say or write as we teach God’s word. What we teach (spoken or written) alone is not authoritative and it should be rejected if it does not conform to NT teaching.
  - b) Answer: Our expedient method of teaching is not a binding, authoritative standard; the NT is.
  - c) Answer: If I ask a question (“Do you believe baptism is for remission of sins?”), the question itself is not authoritative. The answer to my question simply tells me what a person believes about the baptism. The NT is authoritative, not my question.
  - d) Answer: We already have a creed, the NT. We do not make a creed when we teach the NT (speaking or writing). If you throw away all the words that have ever been spoken or written about the Bible (tracts, bulletins, papers, commentaries, etc.), we would still have a creed, the NT. The same cannot be said of classical, denominational creeds.

- e) Answer: What we say or write about God's word should never supplant God's word.
  - f) Answer: You don't have to believe what a man says or writes; you have to believe the NT.
4. One or more individuals, or one local church is trying to control the brotherhood by what they write.
- a) Answer: One or more individuals may teach God's word (verbally or in writing) anytime, anywhere. However, no individual has authoritative control over the brotherhood in what he says or writes.
  - b) Answer: Asking questions is an expedient way to get information. It is an expedient way to clarify what someone believes and clarify an issue at hand; nothing more.

### C. Questions.

1. Is it wrong to believe something? No. Is it wrong to say what you believe? No. See 2 Cor.4:13; 2 Tim.1:12.
2. Is it wrong to write down on paper what you believe? No. See Ac.15:23-29.
3. Is it wrong to teach what the Bible says in spoken or written form? No. See 1 Tim.3:2; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim.2:2,24; Heb.5:12 (this is our generic authority to teach).
4. Is it wrong to use authorized expediencies to teach the word of God? No. The generic authority to teach God's word allows for expediencies to teach (tracts, Bible class workbooks, tapes, filmstrips, charts, bulletins articles, periodical papers, commentaries, Roy Cogdill's **New Testament Church**, etc.).
  - a) Why are we hearing about "creeds" among us today, when these forms of teaching were never charged with be "creedal"?
  - b) Note: Years ago there were some brethren who would not use Bible class literature because they thought it to be uninspired literature and the "creeds" of men.
  - c) If any of the above listed expediencies become an authoritative standard for God's people, then they become a denominational type "creed" and must be rejected.
5. Is it wrong for elders to watch over the local church using oral or written questions; oral or written teaching? No. See Ac.20:28-31; 1 Pet.5:1-3 (this is generic authority to watch over the flock).

### D. What Do I Defend?

1. I do not defend any one document that has been written by a brother. This is not a defense of a particular document, per se.
2. I defend the right to use authorized expediencies to teach God's word.

## V. CONCLUSION.

- A. Those Who Follow Denominational Creeds Need to Do What the Ephesians Did in Acts 19 - Burn The Books - And Come Follow the NT.
- B. Those Who Cry "Creeds" Among Us, Need to Understand the Real Issue. The Issue Is: We Have Generic Authority to Teach God's Word Using Authorized Expediencies (Spoken or Written Teaching).

Outline by: *Chris Reeves*