

Why I Don't Believe in "No Creed But Christ"

1 Timothy 4:16

I. What Does "Take Heed to Yourself and to the Doctrine Mean?"

- **NIV** – "Watch Your Life and Doctrine Closely
- **NAS** – "Pay Close Attention to Yourself and Your Teaching."
- **ESV** – "Keep a close Watch on Yourself and the Teaching.

Probably pretty self explanatory but . . .

take heed / watch = take of business . . . be sure to do what is required of you

yourself = your person . . . your position or responsibilities

the doctrine = teaching . . . faith . . . emphasis is on the content not the action . . . **The** Teaching / Faith / Doctrine you hold to . . . what is believed or taught.

A natural question arises . . . why say this?

-- Context of 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy is one of apostasy . .

Paul is writing to Timothy . . .

. . . to set things in order in the church

. . . to encourage Him to persevere . . . and

. . . to remind him to be faithful to his calling; be an example to the flock and preach the Word – pure doctrine / the faith.

There are two things you have control over when the World – the Church is out of control: Yourselves and The Doctrine or the Teaching of the Church. . . The Faith once and for all delivered to the saints . . . (Jude 3)

Because . . .

1 Timothy -- 1:3, 5-6, 19; 4:15, 16; 6:3, 14, 20-21

2 Timothy -- 1:13; 2:14-19; 3:1-7; 4:1-5

Titus -- 1:9 – 2:1, 7,

Why tell you what you already know? Why read to you passages that you have read and studied for yourselves . . . perhaps many times?

II. What Do We Mean by, “No Creed but Christ?”

It means just what it says . . . No Creed . . . Spelled Out Belief System, Statement of Faith, Doctrinal Statement or Confession but Christ. He is the main focus. I'm a follower of Christ!

Does Matthew 16:13-17 come to mind?

To be fair, some would understand Christ in orthodox terms. But isn't any explanation: What Christ, Which Christ, What “Christ” means, etc., a movement toward a “statement” or “clarification” of what you believe?

Therein lies the rub. . . it sounds so pious and “Christian” to say we are not aligning ourselves with this group, that group or the other because doctrine has divided far too long and what non-believers need to see is love and unity; not division and more churches and groups.

All true to a degree. However, far too often it is simply a smoke screen used by some to remain Christian without having to define what they mean by Christian. Thus, they can be tolerant, pluralistic and fit in with just about any group that will recognize some form of Christianity provided it doesn't claim to be the only way.

Why do people say this? Why are some people opposed to doctrinal statements of any kind – even the old creeds?

- Creeds are man made and should be ignored in favor of Scripture. . .they compromise Scripture's authority.
- The “Bible Only” is the religion of _____!
- Its not what you say but what you do . . . “Share Jesus and when in doubt use words.”
- They can produce a barren orthodoxy.
- They obstruct free interpretation of the Bible and interfere with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment.

- They are too dogmatic and produce division.
- They don't work today . They don't address our culture. You need to be culturally relevant! Post-modernism – truth is what YOU understand it to be and you must conform your style to this postmodern society in order to reach it . . i.e. culture dictates your message. You don't want to be seen as intolerant, separatistic or arrogant.

- **Second**, why are some in favor of broad statements or “watered down” statements or in favor of only using one or maybe two of the old creeds?
- The Old Creeds (Apostle's and Nicene) are sufficient to identify who is “Christian” or “orthodox” as opposed to “heterodox” or a “cult.”
- There is so much to be done . . . We should unite around what we agree on instead of focusing on what we disagree on.
- Such statements are more inclusive. Narrower statements tend to be exclusive, are too dogmatic and produce division.
- It is getting harder to recruit new workers . . .the more narrow you make your statement of faith, the more difficult it is to find people to join your organization.

- When you are in a hostile context on the mission field, doctrinal differences don't seem as important. Are you going to go it alone . . . have no fellowship "if" the other "Christians" don't believe exactly like you?
- Its not what you say but what you do! People are in need of justice, shelter, food, clothing, a sense of belonging, etc. Jesus came to bring justice, peace, healing, etc. Why get so hung up on words or the finer points of theology?
- They can produce a barren orthodoxy.

- Why Say No to this?

III. What is a Confession of Faith?

Creed from the Latin *credo* – I believe. It has the connotation of: 1) a brief authoritative formula of religious belief; 2) a set of fundamental beliefs or 3) a guiding principle. Where there is faith, there is also the profession of that faith.

A Creed, or Rule of Faith, or Symbol, is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well being of the Christian Church. A creed may cover the whole ground of Christian doctrine and practice, or contain only such points as are deemed fundamental and sufficient, or as have been disputed. (Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom)

- Creeds are statements of what Christians' believed at a particular moment in time. They are a fixed body of statements which were formulated and accepted by the Christian Church and transmitted in its history as important articles to which believers continue to pledge their allegiance.
- Generally, a creed is always the direct result of dogmatic controversy, and more or less directly or indirectly polemical against opposing error.
- **The authority of Creeds must be submitted to the light and revelation of Scripture. The value of the creed depends upon the measure of its agreement with Scripture.**
- **Creeds and Confessions, when submitted to Scriptural authority are the summaries of the doctrines of the Bible. They are standards and guards against false doctrine and practice.**

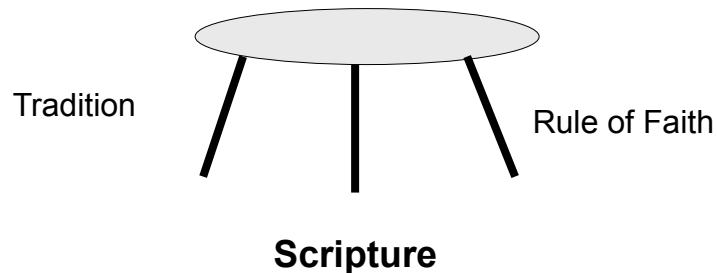
The Example of the Early Church

Two factors the early church were forced to deal with and which helped shape her understanding of tradition were persecution and heresy.

Obviously, if you were willing to die for your faith you wanted to be relatively sure what that faith was. Further, in order to defend the church from error, one needed to have an idea of what it was you were defending. Thus, there developed in the early church the concept of . .

Authority in the Church

A Three Legged Stool . . . one primary authority and two secondary authorities . . .



Secondary Authority #1: The Rule of Faith

- The **regula veritatis** (The rule of truth) or **regula fidei** or (The rule of faith)
- The rule of faith or truth refers to the content of the profession of faith that every catechumen was asked to recite from memory before his or her baptism (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3.4.2). It was the summary of faith taught by the apostles and taught to their disciples. (Ibid., 3.4.2)
- Earliest proponents: Irenaeus and Tertullian

The Apostles' Creed

- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
- He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
- He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
- He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit.
- The holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Secondary Authority #2: Apostolic Tradition

- This refers to the testimony of the apostles as it was handed down in the proclamation and teaching of the churches. In some cases it was maintained for decades via oral transmission and that “tradition” was not in conflict with what was already written down and would eventually be written.
- The historical context of this needs to be kept in mind. Gnosticism was on the rise. Gnosticism taught, among other things, “the privilege of the elite obtaining secret knowledge.” The church combated it by appealing to the Apostolic teaching passed down, open and public for all. . .not just an elite group. This “teaching” did not oppose or supplant Scripture. Rather, it agreed with it.

Primary Authority: Scripture The Word of God

- **Summation:** As the Word of God given by the Spirit of God, Scripture had for the Fathers the status of a primary authority in the life, teaching, and mission of the church.
- Deriving from God and enshrining the truth of God, it had indeed the authority of God Himself. This applied to the Old Testament in virtue of its prophetic testimony to the Christ who was still to come. It applied to the New Testament in virtue of its apostolic witness to the Christ who had already come in fulfillment of the promises. (Bromiley, p. 207)

Church Fathers

- Irenaeus – “It is the foundation and pillar of the Christian faith.”
- Tertullian emphasized the truthfulness of all Scripture, “We must live life by all Scripture. It is our authority.”
- Augustine referred to it as the highest pinnacle of divine authority.

IV. Why Should We Have a Confession of Faith / Doctrinal Statement?

- The Bible is full of “faith” statements or confessions. I.e. Deut. 6:4, 1 Kings 18:39; Matt. 16:15-16; John 6:68-69; Acts 2:41-42; 16:31; Romans 10:9, 1 Cor. 8:6, 15:1-7; Phil 1:27, 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 John 4:2; Jude 3
- The Church has always had them. “Creeds and confessions convey in the most authoritative, accurate, and perspicuous way the truth as that truth has been grasped in the mind of the Church. It is true that it is by truth sanctification is achieved. Truth must penetrate, must leave a distinct and durable impression upon the heart.” (Robert Rayburn)
- They help keep us balanced. Even the best intentioned believer is subject to imbalance or loss of spiritual equilibrium . . . The “witnesses” of the past can help keep us balanced and on the right track.

- Faith is never confessed in a vacuum, but in relation to important events and challenges within a Christian's life or the life of the Church. Confessions make it possible for you to be as specific as necessary to make meaningful distinctions between two or more competing ideas about God, Jesus, Salvation, Authority, etc.

Consider the context of the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. When the Apostles' Creed was drawn up, the chief enemy was Gnosticism and the cult of the Emperor. When the Nicene Creed was written, the chief enemy was Arianism. These helped established what the Church believed to be the "orthodox" as opposed to "heterodox" view of the Deity of Christ and His humanity, death, resurrection, etc.

Does it make one *iota* of difference?

⋈

Nicea	ὁμοουσιος <i>homoousios</i>
Arius	ὁμοιουσιος <i>homoiousios</i>

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty [*pantokratora*], creator of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten [*pro panton ton aionon*] of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, **of the same essence** [*homoousion*] with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

- A confession is a useful means for the public affirmation and defense of truth. It serves as a public standard of fellowship and discipline and as a concise standard by which to evaluate ministers of the Word and ministries.
- Creeds and confessions are voices from the Church's past. Perhaps that is why they have fallen on hard times . . . David Wells has said, "It is the conceit of modernity that the past is nothing more than a dead weight, that constant innovation is the only key to a better life and richer truth." Yet, this is a deadly mistake for the Church to make. It was and I believe still is God's way to address the future from the past. This "pattern" is woven into the fabric of the history of salvation. . . . Truth . . . the truth we subscribe to lies behind us in one name, one person, one book and one event. E.g. Psalm 77 and 78.
- "Christians should be people of their own time only in the sense that they should live the Christian faith in keeping with the circumstances of their own day. They should be in all other respects people of the ages who possess as their inheritance the entire accumulated wisdom and virtue and conviction which their spiritual ancestry has passed down to them." (Rayburn)

- “You are not such wisecracks as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without the assistance from the works of divine and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition . . . It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.” (Charles Spurgeon to a group of students)

Conclusion . . .

- Practically everything you are and do is derived from biblical or humanistic doctrines, beliefs, theologies or worldviews. You and I do doctrine / theology everyday! Everyday, your belief system and mine shows up in what we say and do. Truth cannot simply be what you and I alone understand it to be. We live in a world that interprets daily life “literally” everyday. We live in a world of stop signs, contracts, labels, environmental research, relationships, free trade goods, news stories, newspapers and magazines, events, etc., etc. We live and interpret by a standard each and every day of our life. The questions are: What is my standard -- my grid if you will -- and How do I interpret it and thus live my life?

- To those who say you can't be certain . . . "certitude is often idolatrous" . . . and to those who say lets be kinder, gentler, have a bit wider orthodoxy . . . i.e. let's not be so narrow . . . I say . . .
- Ambiguity produces nothing but inconsistency and eventually frustration . . .or at best futile attempts to lessen both by covering them over with more and more words and more and more self-effort. How can you be certain of your uncertainty OR how can you be certain of your future when you have jettisoned the historical past (the Bible – Historic understanding of its truths by the Church for 2,000 yrs) it has been built upon? How can you call something "Christian" when it has no clearly definable or defensible Biblical standard in the present to point to or when it has untied the anchor of its biblical historic past?
- "Without clarity there is no conviction. Without conviction there is no affection for the truth and without affection for the truth there is no communion." (John MacArthur)

- Doctrine is the grid for your life . . .
 - Helps you determine what is T / F
 - Informs us on how we are to live
 - It gives hope in trial or death
 - It keeps you steadfast. Which will you stand in the gap for: a maybe or a know so?
 - What keeps you true to Christ?
 - What keeps you true to your vows?
 - What keeps you on the trenches amidst persecution and hardship?

In short, what is it that you believe and what do you stand for? If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything