

THE CREED OF THE CHURCH
presented by
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We are continuing tonight our study of the New Testament church, having looked two weeks ago at the unity of the church and having looked last Lord's day evening at the undenominational nature of the church.

Tonight we are looking at the creed of the church and perhaps the subject for consideration might better be put in the form of a question, "Why does the church have no humanly written creed?" I think we need to notice very carefully just what this question is. I have been very careful not to make the question ask, "Why does the church have no creed?" For while some of my brethren have said that the church doesn't have a creed, I think that is an absolute impossibility. Particularly is it an impossibility when you consider just exactly what a creed is. If you will go to the dictionary for a definition you will find that creed will come from the Latin word "credo" which means "I believe." The definition reads as follows, "A brief, authoritative formula or religious belief. Any formula or confession of religious belief." Now I do believe something and to the extent that I believe something, I have a creed. To the extent that I have set the word of God as authoritative, I have an authoritative creed, or I have an authoritative source for my faith. The church, indeed, must have a creed. A creed is very valuable to an individual. Every person must have one. Since what you believe determines what you are and your creed determines what you believe, then your creed determines what you are.

Neither are we asking the question "Why do we have no written creed?" I have one that is written. I have one that is written because in II Peter 1:21 we read that "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And so it was spoken. In Revelation 14:13 I find the spirit saying unto John, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." Now it may be true that that direct statement related particularly to that one expression, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," but I think the principle involved is exactly the same as relates to the entire word of God. It was written because the Spirit moved men to write it. Thus, the church has a creed, and the church has a written creed.

The question is, "Why does the church have no humanly written creed?" You see, the emphasis is not upon the credo itself. The emphasis is not upon the writing of that creed. The emphasis, the point at issue, is the source of the writing. The basic question is, "Your creed, whence is it? From man or from God? Did man write it? Does it have no higher authority than man? Was it produced simply by the imagination of man? Or did it come from God having been produced by His inspiration?" May I refer you again to II Peter 1:21. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

And then I also want to turn to another passage, a rather lengthy passage. If you have your Bibles, you may want to follow. Turn to I Corinthians 2:1-13. In these verses the apostle Paul looks at the question, "Your faith- grounded in man or grounded in God?" "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and fear, and I much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." The American Standard more properly renders that last expression "comparing spiritual things with spiritual words." We have seen at least three times in these 13 verses an expression which either is or is equal to the thought that we have been putting forth not man's wisdom, but we have been putting forth the wisdom of God. This, then, is the question, "Is the written creed that man has from God? Or is it from man?"

I would suggest some seven reasons as to why the church of the N.T. does not have any humanly written creed. The first of these, and perhaps one under which we could really lump all of the others, is the fact that the church has no human religious creed because such is an affront to the God of glory. Does man suppose that he has the ability, does man suppose that he has the capacity to make clearer or to improve upon what God has said? We have the word of God, we have the Bible as it has come to us, and a creed, by its very presence, is saying that man cannot understand the Bible and needs some simplification, some explanation. Thus, we sit and write a human creed seeking to make clear to man that which God has given. In Ephesians 5:17 the apostle said, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Now it was apparently the idea of the apostle Paul that man should understand what the will of the Lord was. Likewise it was also his understanding, or at least his implication here, that a man who refused to understand it, or did not understand it, was "foolish," as he used the word. "Be not foolish, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Now those who are in protestant denominations have said for a long time that Roman Catholicism has no right to set itself

as an authoritative church by which the Bible is to be explained. But I ask this question, In this respect what is the difference between the Catholic priest (or the priest as an authoritative spokesman for the Catholic church) and the Protestant creedal statement or prayer book or confession of faith? One is oral and one is written, but they are both exactly the same thing. They both purport to be clear elucidations and explanations of the word of God, both explanations given upon the basic premise that without these things man cannot understand the Bible. Someone suggests that this cannot be the case because men, even with humanly written creeds, are constantly saying, "We want you to try our doctrine by the Bible." This is a very good statement. It is a worthy plea if it is done correctly. However, upon investigation we discover that many who are saying "Try our doctrines by the Bible," are trying it by the Bible based upon an interpretation or a method of interpretation which can be referred to as the "analogy of faith" method. In reality what they have done is to determine what the Bible teaches before they go to the words of God, and they go to the word of God not to determine its teaching, but they go to the word of God to find some basis for what they have already preconceived to be its teaching. Let me illustrate. Let us take a simple passage such as Acts 2:38. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now there are multitudes of good and honest people in this world who approach that verse with some preconceived notions, who approach that verse with the idea that baptism cannot be essential to the salvation of man. Having that preconceived notion, when they come to Acts 2:38 which states very explicitly, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, for the remission of sins," they know immediately, since they have eliminated any relationship between baptism and remission of sins, that that verse cannot mean what it says. It has got to mean something else. It has got to mean "repent, and be baptized because of the remission of sins," or something else. It cannot mean just exactly what it says. So when a man says, "Let us try our doctrine by the Bible, let us be certain that we are trying the doctrine by the Bible, and not trying the Bible by the doctrine. There is a great deal of difference between these two approaches.

Let us test the idea upon which all humanly written creeds are based, that is, that we cannot understand the Bible, and see whether or not this is so. Let us, for the sake of argument, accept that these creeds are needed to set forth more clearly statements of Biblical truth. Let us test it. First of all, let me set before you two basic propositions. 1. That when God spoke to man, he spoke for the purpose and with the desire of being understood. Let me repeat that very slowly so you will get and won't miss it. That when God spoke to man, he spoke for the purpose and with the desire of being understood. Ephesians 5:17 substantiates that. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." This proposition must be so, for the contrary of that proposition would be an absurdity. The contrary of that proposition would be saying that when God spoke to man, He spoke with the purpose and for the design of not being understood, and I do not think anybody really believes that. So I think that we can accept the fact that when God spoke to man He spoke for the purpose and with the design

of being understood. The second proposition is : That every honest, unprejudiced soul may therefore understand what God has said in His Holy Scriptures, so far as knowledge of the truth is essential to his salvation. Now this proposition has got to be true if the first one is true because if God spoke for the purpose and with the design of being understood and yet man cannot understand it, it means that God has failed in His purpose. If God has failed in His purpose to speak where man can understand, God could also fail in His purpose to take us to heaven when we die. So we believe that God succeeded in His purpose; therefore, the second proposition is true. Let us repeat it: That every honest, unprejudiced soul may therefore understand what God has said in the Holy Scriptures so far as the knowledge of the truth is essential to his salvation. Now with these two thoughts in mind, let me put before you two syllogisms. Follow them carefully. We have two choices. Remember we are asking the question, "Your faith- from God or from man?" Major premise: Whoever acts in harmony with the divinely authorized creed will be saved. I do not think we will find anybody who will argue with that. Major premise again: Whoever acts in harmony with the divinely authorized creed will be saved. Minor premise: Every man's own interpretation of the scripture is his divinely authorized creed. Now what is our conclusion? Therefore, every man who acts in harmony with his own interpretation of the Bible will be saved. Now let us look at the contrary. Major premise: (same as the first one) Every man who acts in harmony with the divinely authorized creed will be saved. Minor premise: The inspired Bible is our only authoritative creed. Conclusion: Therefore, every man who acts in harmony with the precepts and requirements of the inspired Bible is saved. Now which do you believe? Two choices- that's all. From heaven, or from earth. From God or from man. Either God's inspired Bible is the only authoritative creed, it is the only rule and guide for faith and practice, or immediately the entire world is opened to every kind of "cockeyed" (I hesitate to use the word, but I think it is appropriate) religious belief that any man wants to concoct. If every man's own interpretation of the Bible is his divinely authorized creed, then there is no man upon God's earth who is doing anything wrong, and that includes a man who may be living an ungodly, immoral, lascivious life, if he believes that kind of life is authorized by the Bible. And in our modern day, there seem to be some "kooks" who do. Now, which will you believe? From heaven or from men? The N.T. church has no humanly authorized creed because such are an affront to the God of glory.

The church of the N.T. has no humanly authorized creed because there is no need for such. II Timothy 3:16, 17. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, (that means complete) thoroughly furnished unto all good works." I believe Paul said there that the scripture which is inspired of God is able to make the man of God complete and thoroughly furnish him unto every good work. Now if the man of God can be thoroughly furnished without a humanly written creed, why do we need it? II Peter 1:3, "According as

His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Now if he is able to grant unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, then what is the need for any additional writing that man might have?

The church cannot, must not have any written creeds for the N. T. condemns such. II John 9, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." I believe we'll see in just a moment as we conclude our lesson that these creeds, without exception must go beyond the Word of God.

The N. T. has no humanly written creeds, because no humanly written creed is perfect. I do not believe that anyone can bring me a humanly written creed in which I cannot find a contradiction of Holy Scripture, and I am aware of what a contradiction is--that a contradiction does not occur until you have two statements for which there is no logical means of reconciliation. Then you have a contradiction. I still say, accepting that definition, that no man bring me any humanly written creed in which I cannot find a contradiction of the Word of God. In fact, I have in my office several creeds of different denominations which I have examined and I would give you just as an example the following statement from one of them: "Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." James 2:24, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Now, let's put the two statements together. "Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." I do not believe there is any logical way whereby those two statements, one man is justified by faith only and the other man is not justified by faith only, can be reconciled and made not to be contradictory. I believe the imperfection of all humanly written creeds is shown by their need for revision every few years. Every few years, the truth as it is conceived by these groups seems to change and we must call the synod or the conference or the ecumenical council together and come up with some kind of "restatement" of the faith. But I suggest to you that truth does not change--God's truth does not change. God's truth, as God, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The most charitable statement that we could make for these conferences which meet to change creeds is that it is an admission that wrong has been taught and now we are changing it to accord with the Holy Scripture. But the great tragedy is that we can examine the restatements of the creeds and find in them just as great errors, and find most of the modern statements greater errors than have been in any of the old ones. Many of the new creedal statements are cutting men adrift from any kind of faith in the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of the Savior, salvation by the atoning blood of Jesus and any other basic Bible doctrine. The Bible has never needed any revision. It doesn't need any revision tonight. It contains the message of the Ancient of Days and yet it is just as much up to date today as when it came from the Spirit. In Psalm 19:7 the Psalmist said, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." That statement is just as true now as when penned by the Psalmist in the long ago.

We do not need any humanly written creeds because they are divisive. How often have we said that men are not divided today over what the Bible says but over what men say about the Bible. I believe that is true tonight. Indeed, it is probably for this reason that most of the humanly written creeds have been written. Men felt that they had to set forth their teaching. It was apparently different enough from the word of God that you couldn't get it just from reading scripture. I think of a woman who came by our home. I was too young at the time to really know what was going on but I've heard my father mention it in later years. We were living in Itasca, Texas, at the time and it was during the war. She was taking up some money to send certain books to our men overseas. Naturally, everybody was interested in sending things to our men who were fighting overseas. She showed my father the book she wanted to send. It was a religious creed of a particular faith. My father told that lady that he appreciated her zeal and asked her why she did not just send a N. T. She said, "But we want to send these." And he said, "But wouldn't it be better to send a N. T.?" And when she had been asked the question about three times, she finally said, "Yes, but then they wouldn't know about us." This is the reason for most of the creeds--you can't find the groups that write them in the Bible and they must have some way to make themselves known. Men have to have some kind of writing to guide others to their particular faith. It is an admission that it is not Biblical, and is the basis for our religious division.

We do not need humanly written creeds because they are not enduring. In Luke 21:33 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." In II Peter 3:10 Peter said, "The earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." I suggest to you tonight that all humanly written creeds are works of the world and that means they shall burn. But God's word shall not! Oh, I know the Bibles will burn because the paper, the ink, and the leather are all creations of man. But the message won't, because the message, you see, is in the mind of God. The message is eternal.

We need no humanly written creeds because these humanly written creeds are not going to be the basis of judgment. When you stand before Jesus in the great day, the last day, there will not be around the great white throne a single prayer book, discipline, confession of faith, or missal. There shall be only His word. You are not going to be judged according to things you have read in one creed or any combinations of creeds written by men. You are to be judged by the word of God. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last days." (John 12:48). And when you stand before Jesus in judgment, and He presents His word to you, and asks you why you could not obey it, it is not going to do much good for you to say, "Well, now Lord, over here on page 32 of my creed it said something else. You see Ephesians 5:17 doesn't say 'understanding a creed', it says 'understand what the will of the Lord is.'"

We do not need humanly written creeds, they are objectionable

on every ground. Let me suggest this thought to you. If a humanly written creed contains less than Bible, we do not need it, and we ought not to want it because it contains too little. On the other hand, if a humanly written creed contains more than the Bible we do not need it, we ought not to want it, because it contains too much. Then here in the middle, if a humanly written creed contains the same thing as the Bible, we don't need it, ought not to want it, because we already have the Bible. Objectionable on every ground. You ought not to base your hope for eternal salvation upon something that has no higher authority than the ruling body of your denomination. You ought not to base your hope for eternal salvation on anything less than what you find written in God's Holy and God's eternal word.

I ask you tonight, have you obeyed the gospel? Have you obeyed the teachings of the N. T.? Have you believed? Would you repent? Would you confess the name of Jesus and then in obedience to His word, as we have read it to you even tonight-- Acts 2:38--be baptized for the remission of your sins? If you have done this and you have come forth from that watery grave writing your own creed with your life, cutting out a part of God's word here, adding a little explanation of it over there in order to justify yourself in going on and doing what you want to do, though not written, you still have a creed that will cause you to be lost eternally. You need to come and base your faith upon that creed which is Jesus Christ and His revealed will.. Would you come? Would you do it while we stand and while we sing?