

What are Creeds and Do We Need Them?

I. *Sola Scriptura*

- A. As Protestants, we are those who hold to the precious doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. We believe that the Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice and that in them we have everything we need for life and godliness. So, why would we need creeds? Isn't saying we believe the Bible enough?
- B. The insufficiency of only saying that we believe the Bible becomes apparent when we consider others who make that claim. Mormons and even some Muslims claim to believe the Bible, but they add other books to it and believe very different things than we do. During the Reformation, there was a group named the Socinians who believed the Bible, but denied the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, that Christ's death was atoning, and many other doctrines. Saying only that we believe the Bible does not demonstrate why these other beliefs are in error. In order to do that, we must explain what we believe the Bible says.

II. *Creeds*

- A. A creed is a statement about what one believes. Everyone has a creed they believe, whether it is spoken or not. Some people will argue against holding to creeds by saying something like, "No creed but Christ!" But that itself is a creed. *Sola Scriptura* is a creed. Every sermon that a pastor preaches or every Bible study lesson that someone teaches is a creed that describes what the person speaking believes the Bible teaches. Hymns also are creeds we commonly confess.
- B. Creeds must always serve to express the truth that the Scriptures teach. No creed of the church is inspired, and every creed is written by sinful men and can contain error. A creed must never add, take away from, or refashion the teaching of Scripture.
- C. So, the question is not, "should we have creeds?" We can't help but have them. The question is "do our creeds accurately reflect the truth and are we transparent enough to hold those beliefs accountable to what the Scriptures teach?"

III. *Why Write Creeds?*

- A. **To summarize the truth of Scripture:** The Bible is a very large collection of books that we could never fully plumb the depths of. Its many different parts inform each other in various ways that require the illumination of the Holy Spirit and careful study of the Bible to understand. Creeds are helpful and necessary to summarize the teaching of Scripture so that we can be grounded in the truth and have a proper lens through which to read the Scriptures.
- B. **To differentiate truth from error:** It is not that the Bible is unclear, but that we are sinful and finite human beings who through sin or ignorance can twist the words of Scripture. We must never question the Scriptures because of a creed, but creeds of the church should make us question our private interpretations.
- C. **To unite us with other Christians:** Knowing that we worship the same God gives us joy and fellowship with one another. A public creed is a means for that unity. Public creeds can be evaluated and improved upon by the whole church, so the church as a whole can come rally together around the truth. A private creed cannot be a means of unity since it submits itself only to the private interpretation of the person who believes it and no one else knows exactly what the content of the creed is. For such unity, we need commonly to confess the truth that we believe in mutual submission to God and each other. It also unites us with Christians throughout history. We must confess the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints, not the sentiments of our age.

Purposes of This Study

I. *To Instruct Us in Key Issues in Theology*

- A. We are people shaped by our age. We are sensitive to the issues that we see crop up around us and are blind to many others that do not have a bearing on our own context. Therefore, issues that we give much attention will not have much of a history of thought and vice versa. Studying the historic creeds of the church helps us to see beyond our own context to the issues that have been considered essential throughout the history of the church.
- B. The evangelical church has sought to become more grounded in the Scriptures. This is a good thing. However, it has often sought to do this by deemphasizing theology. As a result, we are often ignorant of aspects of the truth of Scripture that faithful generations before have worked out. This can lead to errors in our conception of God and His truth because we have studied the Bible in isolation, with only our own internal creed to guide us, and not listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture in the church. Creeds help to instruct us in the right paths.

II. *To Show How Key Doctrines are Developed from Scripture*

- A. Although we are acknowledging the need and helpfulness of creeds for the Christian life, we must never be satisfied with merely resting upon them. We must be convinced that their conclusions are true to the teaching of Scripture. Therefore, it's important for us to examine the Scriptural basis for creedal statements so that we can be convinced that we are not merely holding to pious tradition, but to God's truth.
- B. For many doctrines (e.g. the Trinity) there is not a specific verse or passage to which we can point that explains all of that doctrine. A creed can help collate the disparate Scriptural statements together so that we can learn to defend the doctrine from the Scriptures. Knowing the Scriptural bases for creedal declarations also helps us to interpret Scripture with Scripture and to learn how to read the Bible so as to synthesize its different parts.
- C. Knowing these creeds should increase our confidence that our belief is grounded in the Scriptures and has been held by God's people in all ages.

III. *To Increase Our Faith and Love for God*

- A. Theology is often viewed as an impractical and dry discipline. However, this idea of theology is a modern misconception. The Christian life consists in knowing God (John 17:3) and we come to know God as He is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Through knowing God, we grow more and more in reflecting His image in us. Historically, theology was seen as critical to this purpose of us learning how we should live as Christians. Therefore, creedal statements were intended to instruct the church in such a way that she would come to know her Lord better.
- B. Our intention is to study these creeds in such a way that we learn how the truths expressed in them is to bear fruit in our lives. Knowing the Lord to greater degrees should more firmly ground us in our faith. This knowledge and faith should produce love and adoration to God in our hearts and should result in greater godliness in our lives.