

The Biblical and Logical Necessity of Uninspired Creeds

By Larry Birger, Jr.

"We're studying the Westminster Confession of Faith. Want to join us?"

"No; I don't give heed to the words of men."

"What do you mean?"

"I go by the Bible; I don't need to, nor can I, rely on the words of mere uninspired men."

"Me, too. That's why we're studying the Confession. You should join us; it'd be very edifying."

"Wait a minute. I just told you that I only go by the Bible, and yet you have just equated the study of this Westminster Confession with a study of the Scriptures!"

"OK; in that case, as I already told you, I only go by the Bible as well. Therefore, I'm not going to pay any attention to what you've just said."

"You had better, because what I said was biblical."

"How could it be? It was merely the words of you, an uninspired man. I only listen to the Bible, as you said of yourself. How can you lord it over my conscience by equating your uninspired words with the very word of God? Seems rather arrogant and presumptuous of you."

"Well, it's still biblical, and you do need to listen to me. I might not have quoted chapter and verse, but I was telling you what the Bible MEANS."

"So, what you're saying is that the meaning of the Bible, even if expressed in the uninspired words of uninspired men, is still binding; in fact, as binding as the very words of Scripture themselves?"

"Well, yes, that is what I'm saying. The meaning of Scripture carries the same authority of the Holy Spirit and therefore obligation to hear and obey as do the very words of the Scriptures."

"So how is what the Westminster Confession says different from what you've told me I'm required to do, or not to do? After all, they were only putting forth what they thought was the meaning of Scripture."

"Well, er. . . umm. . . ."

"I know of one difference: they were all preeminently qualified to expound the Word of God, having been recognized as having these gifts by the various churches that delegated them to sit at the Assembly. Any scholar who knows anything about Protestant history knows that these men were the 'cream of the crop', and that almost certainly there has never been since that time (and maybe even up to that time, except for the apostles themselves) one body containing so many godly and learned men. I don't think you possess the same qualifications."

"Hmmm, good point."

"Furthermore, the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 4 that Christ has given to the church teachers as a powerful and necessary means to building up the body of Christ into 'a perfect or complete man'. Obviously, these teachers do not have the gift of inspiration, and yet the Spirit didn't view this as a challenge to the sufficiency of Scripture, but rather as a necessary outgrowth of it, because He desires that we know the meaning of the Scriptures."

As Dabney says, *'He who would consistently banish creeds must silence all preaching and reduce the teaching of the church to the recital of the exact words of Holy Scripture without note or comment.'*

And, just because these men lived in past ages doesn't mean that they're still not a gift from God to us today; for the Bible everywhere speaks of the Church as one body which transcends all history (Gal. 3:23-24; 4:1-3; Ps. 66:6; Hos. 12:4; Deut. 5:2-3), and therefore, the astute teachers of past ages are ours as well, thanks to His gracious preservation of their writings. Actually, because these men were on the crest of reformation, and not in the trough of apostasy as we are today, we ought to pay more attention to them than to contemporary teachers, for we all, including our teachers, have been blinded to a great degree by our age's wretched and extreme departure from the Lord Jesus Christ."

"What time did you say you were meeting? I believe the meaning of Scripture commands me to attend!"

For further study: <http://snipurl.com/1w4yw>

From R.L. Dabney's "The Westminster Confession and Creeds", 1897:

We thus learn very simply what a creed means: it is a summary statement of what some religious teacher or teachers believe concerning the Christian system, stated in their own uninspired words. But they claim that these words fairly and briefly express the true sense of the inspired words...

Beyond question, God has ordained, as a means of grace and indoctrination, the oral explanations and enforcement of divine truths by all preachers. Thus

Ezra (Nehemiah viii. 8) causes the priests to "read in the book the law of God distinctly, and give the sense, and cause them to understand the reading." Paul commanded Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 2) to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." He, as an apostle of Christ, not only permits, but commands, each uninspired pastor and doctor to give to his charge his human and uninspired expositions of what he believes to be divine truth, that is to say, his creed. If such human creeds, when composed by a single teacher and delivered orally, "extempore", are proper means of instruction for the church, by the stronger reason must those be proper and scriptural which are the careful, mature and joint productions of learned and godly pastors, delivered with all the accuracy of written documents. He who would consistently banish creeds must silence all preaching and reduce the teaching of the church to the recital of the exact words of Holy Scripture without note or comment.

...experience has taught that, since the death of the inspired (writers of the Bible), the Scriptures alone are no longer a sufficient test of fidelity to divine truth.... Here we are face-to-face with a large group of stubborn facts, which it is simply childish to attempt to disregard. Let us suppose a court of scriptural presbyters, invested with the duty and responsibility of selecting and ordaining successors. Let us suppose this court professing to employ no other test or standard of fidelity to God's truth than the Scripture itself. Let us suppose a cluster of candidates before them of whom each and all declare that they believe the Holy Scriptures, and hold all their very words as their sincere creed. The court points to these express words of Christ in John's Gospel: "I and my Father are one." The court declares for itself that it can honestly see in these words this meaning only-- The consubstantial unity and equal divinity of the two persons. But one of the candidates is a Sabellian, and

he exclaims, "No, it means that Father and Son are neither of them consubstantial with deity, but two parallel emanations from a central (unknowable) unit." Another is an Arian; he declares, "No; the Son is but a creature, the earliest and most exalted of creatures, and divine Son of God, only by act of adoption." The third is a Socinian, and he cries, "No; Christ is only a human being, favored by God, more than any other prophet, with a species of adoption, because of his sanctity and loyalty."

Now, we need not claim that a court of presbyters is the only party which construes the inspired words aright, or that it alone is honest. The court and the Sabellian, the Arian and the Socinian, each declares the same sincere belief in the Holy Scripture. Allow them all to be equally honest, yet this obstinate fact remains, *that they all contradict each other*. Must they yet be all ordained as authorized witnesses to one vital truth, and that by this court, which honestly believes each of the others in fatal error? Where, then, could be the church's testimony for truth?

Again, the court of presbyters points to the term "metanoia" [repentance], and asks each candidate what it means. They all declare the Holy Scripture, including this term, is their honest creed. But one is a Pelagian, and he says "metanoia" means simply an outward reform of manners and morals, wrought by the human will. Another is a papist, and he translates "metanoia" "doing penance." Another is an evangelical believer, who asserts that "metanoia" is conversion, a fundamental revolution of the soul as to God, sin, and duty. Yet all say their creed is the Bible! . . .

[W]hy multiply instances? There is not a cardinal doctrine, nor sacrament of the gospel, concerning which parties claiming to be Christians do not

advance explanations discordant with, and destructive of, each other. What is it, then, except a puerile fraud, for men to cry, "The Scripture is the only creed needed"? If a church is to have any honest testimony, something else is needed as a test of harmony in beliefs, a candid explanation in other terms, which, though human, have not been misconstrued.

This view has, in fact, a force so resistless that it is unavoidably obeyed by all the parties which profess to discard it. There is not, and there never has been, a body possessing any organic consistency, as a church or denomination of Christians, which has not had a virtual creed, if unwritten, additional to the mere words of Scripture. And every one of them practically applies its creed for the preservation of its testimony by the exclusion of dissentients.

The only real difference between these professedly creedless bodies and the Presbyterian Church is, that their unwritten creeds are less manly, less honest and distinct, and, therefore, more fruitful of discord among themselves, than our candid, published and permanent declaration. And here is one of the legitimate uses of our creed: when we invite men to share with us our responsibility as witnesses to God's truth, they have a right to ask us what the tenor of that witnessing is to be. It is but dishonest child's play to say, "Holy Scripture is the creed to which we witness," when the inquirer knows that every party of heretics and enemies of God's truth is ready to give the same answer.

Reformation Presbyterian Church
Boerne, Texas
www.ReformationPres.com
reformation.sermonaudio.com
830-895-5045