

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



January 27, 2013

Creedal Religion

The creeds of Christendom originated in noble attempts to clarify and preserve Biblical truth. In reality, they have perpetuated division and subverted God’s word as the basis of unity.

“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2).

The English word “creed” comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning “I believe.” Throughout the history of Christianity, creeds have served as convenient expressions of doctrinal truth, designed to clarify what God’s people should believe on key issues.

In early centuries, creeds were written by church councils to define orthodoxy and heresy on a variety of disputed doctrines. The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Creed of Chalcedon all provided carefully worded statements beginning with “We (or I) believe . . .” In later centuries, especially during the Protestant Reformation, every new splinter group was identified by the creation of (1) a new name, and (2) a new creed or statement of faith that distinguished the new body from all the others.

Every creed is an effort to refine, summarize, or otherwise restate Biblical

truth. But that very process carries the risk of doing the very thing Moses warned God’s people not to do—leaving out critical details, or adding extraneous information that did not originate with God. Even if much of the information in the creed is Biblically accurate, it conditions its followers to place their confidence in a product of human ingenuity, rather than in God’s word.

A creed is a filter through which Biblical truth must pass before it can be accepted by believers. It is a platform for unity only insofar as people are willing to submit to the human authority that created it. In practical terms, therefore, creeds are not a means of preserving unity, but of perpetuating division.

Proponents of creeds argue that *any* expression of fidelity to *any* element of biblical truth constitutes a creed; therefore, there is nothing wrong with documenting a set of doctrinal positions in a formal statement. But there is a huge difference between sharing a personal conviction on a given topic, and compiling a formal list of “important” doctrinal positions that must be accepted as the

basis of fellowship. The former looks to God’s word as the standard; the latter exalts a human document as the rule.

Ironically, even those who preach the hardest against creeds can fall victim to the lure of creedal religion. Several years ago a cabal of preachers and elders circulated a list of 28 questions on a variety of hot-button issues, insisting that preachers respond with the “right” answers as a condition for receiving financial support. The uproar that ensued forced the list back into the shadows, but the incident serves as a reminder that even among those who claim to be “Christians only” the temptation to impose a quick shortcut to truth and unity is strong.

So if we do not have a creed to define our faith, what do we believe? Very simple: the word of God. Applying God’s word in a local church is a laborious process, requiring all the patience and humility we can muster. But that’s the way God wants it, and any effort to circumvent that process by substituting a creed denigrates the power of God’s word as the basis of unity.

– David King