

## **WISER LAKE CHAPEL HISTORIC CREEDS**

### **Q: WHAT STATEMENTS DOES THE CHAPEL BELIEVE BEST CONFESS THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE?**

A: There have been many good creedal statements over the centuries. Each one addressed a certain time and situation, and thus each had particular strengths and weaknesses. The most universal statements are the ecumenical creeds of the early church, such as:

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed.

But the more comprehensive and, we believe, most accurate statements are the confessions and catechisms, which were written as a result of the Protestant Reformation, such as:

- The Belgic Confession
- The Heidelberg Catechism
- The Canons of Dort
- The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms

All these historical statements of doctrine are extremely useful as we continually labor to understand all the Bible teaches. Indeed, these careful statements of faith are neglected only at great peril to the church. The Chapel delights in these very articulate re-statements of Biblical truth, and our final authority is the Bible.

### **Q: DOESN'T WISER LAKE CHAPEL HAVE A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT, SOMETHING THAT MAKES CLEAR EXACTLY WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES?**

A: First of all, we believe that the Bible already speaks clearly: "That with ordinary intelligence any person can obtain from the Word of God itself the main point of the things he needs to know".<sup>1</sup> Secondly, there are many wonderful summary statements of the Christian Faith in the historic creeds of the church. The Chapel delights in those very articulate re-statements of Biblical truth.

### **Q: SO, WHY NOT JUST SAY THAT THOSE CREEDS ARE OUR STANDARD OF DOCTRINE--THAT THEY FULLY AGREE WITH GOD'S WORD AND, THEREFORE, DEFINE WHAT WE BELIEVE?**

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<sup>1</sup> Van Til, Cornelius, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 140. Quoted by G.I. Williamson in *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, p. 19.

A: There are several reasons. First, no creed can actually be the standard, for no creed is completely accurate. All synods and councils of the church err and must constantly be judged by the Scriptures themselves. Second, no creed is comprehensive enough to sufficiently expound the truth of God's Word. There are as many as sixty Reformed creeds, but that is no accident; the reformers understood that anything could become an idol -- even a creed.<sup>2</sup> It is dangerous to think we have captured God's Word in some summary fashion that alleviates our responsibility to continually search the whole Scripture. Third, no creed can actually be our standard for no creed is final. No creed transcends all history and all cultures like the Bible does. Synods and councils confront the questions of their day. But that is possible only because in the Scriptures, God has spoken to every age and every situation. Therefore, the church will never outgrow the need to understand and apply God's Word anew. And as it does, many more creeds may be written.

**Q: IF THE CREEDS HAVE ALL THESE LIMITATIONS, WHY NOT JUST IGNORE THEM?**

A: Much of the Church does just ignore all the creeds. But, "in an odd way this itself is a denial of the clarity of Scripture, for it proceeds upon the assumption that in all history no one before us has been able to see the truth contained in God's Word. It is precisely because we believe that the Bible is plain that we value the creeds".<sup>3</sup> So, instead of ignoring the creeds, we want to stand with - indeed, stand on the shoulders of - all those who throughout the ages who have searched the Scriptures and boldly confessed its undeniable truth.

**Q: SO, WHAT IS THE PROPER USE OF THESE HISTORIC CREEDS?**

A: In all our learning, our living and our teaching we need the wise and godly counsel of the whole Body of Christ, His church. Such help is immediately available to us in the fellowship of the Chapel and in the resources of the broader, contemporary church. But, in the historic creedal statements we find the well thought-out, articulate counsel of the saints who have gone before us. Here is wisdom that has endured passing fads and stood the test of time - qualities not yet proven in the counsel of our peers. We must listen to this wisdom, in obedience to the command to submit to one another in Christ. For by defining so carefully how the Bible has been understood in the past, the creeds help us identify when our new formulation of some doctrine is departing from historical interpretations. That cautions us to be doubly sure that we have really derived our views from the Scriptures. We certainly may come to disagree with older definitions, but we ought never to do so lightly.

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<sup>2</sup> Leith, John H., ed. *Creeds of the Churches*. (John Knox Press, 1973) p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Williamson, G.I. *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. (Pres. & Reformed, 1964) p. 19.

**Q: ARE THERE USES OF THE CREEDS WHICH WOULD BE IMPROPER AND, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE AVOIDED?**

A: In general, we need to make a clear distinction between the Bible itself, the very Word of God, and the creeds, which are the words of men about the Bible. At no time should the words of men, even long-standing, honored traditions, replace the Word of God. Specifically, the creeds are not proper texts for preaching. Though no good preacher can afford to be ignorant of the church's historic interpretation of his text, it is still only the Text itself, which is the Word of God, surrounded by the promises of God, when it is preached.

Secondly, the creeds ought not be used to silence inquiry into the meaning of God's Word. They are certainly a great help in understanding the interpretive work that has gone before us; but the fact that a doctrine has been inscribed in a creed, should never squelch the diligent re-examination of God's Word.

Finally, the creeds of the church do not define sin, and therefore cannot be the basis of censure. Demonstrating that someone's belief or practice is out of accord with the historic creeds does not prove that it is sin, and therefore, a chargeable offense. Only the violation of God's Word is a proper ground of church discipline; for only God's Word defines sin and binds our consciences before God.