

Creeds Are The Bugle Call Of The Church.

Text: 1 Cor 14:7-9

Suggested Hymns:

136, 140, 197, 139, 142

1) Creeds are confessions of faith

2) The Church Must Clearly Define Its Teachings

3) Followers Must Follow Through

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 14:7-9, *⁷ Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? ⁸ For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? ⁹ So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the days of Jephthah, one of the judges of Israel, the nation was at war with the people of Ephraim. After the Ephraimites had been defeated, some of the enemy soldiers attempted to come over to Israel's army, pretending to be Israelites. However, the officers of the army became suspicious of these turncoats and demanded that they be brought before them.

To prove that they were Israelites they were asked to say "Shibboleth." Those who could not form the lips to pronounce the word correctly said "Sibboleth." Therewith they betrayed themselves, not being able to pronounce the word as the Israelites did.¹

In our text Paul likewise asserts that the sounds must be distinct and clear if the army is to know what to do and how to prepare for the battle. Garbled instructions leave the soldiers in doubt. The bugler must give the call with precision.

God is telling us through St. Paul that Christians likewise must clearly state what they believe. To do so they must themselves know where they stand. We cannot form a united front and act as a unit if today we say one thing and tomorrow something else. The first Christians, meeting on the streets and in the

marketplaces, greeted one another with “Maranatha,” which means “Jesus is coming again.” With this statement they identified themselves.

Jesus demands that we confess Him before men as our risen Lord, our God, and our Saviour from sin. Jesus says in Matthew 12:30 that ***“He who is not with Me is against Me.”*** And in Matthew 10:32, ³² ***“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”***

Therefore Paul stresses that we plainly and accurately state what we believe. This must be done that everyone may know where we stand and what we believe to be the truth in spiritual matters. No one can rally to colours that are washed out. The church and each Christian must make a clear-cut confession of faith so that all may know whether they can or cannot stand with us.

Today is Trinity Sunday and before we confessed our faith using the Athanasian Creed. Let us realise that Creeds are the Bugle call of the Church. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Creeds Are Confessions of Faith

This is done through creeds, which are a statement of what I believe personally. Whatever I believe becomes my creed, even if it is not true. That I believe a certain thing does not make it true. However, it does let others know where I stand. Therefore creeds are the bugle call of the church.

On Trinity Sunday the church especially emphasises what it believes. This Sunday therefore is designated as confessional Sunday in the church calendar. We emphasise that it is of great importance that the church clearly state its position on all doctrines and moral issues.

Only then can everybody know whether he is in full agreement with those who form this particular church and whether their teachings are in full agreement with Scripture, the revelations of God.

Paul says in our text, ***So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken?***

This means that we must know our own mind. We must state in plain, unmistakable terms, for what we stand, and do so for our own sake. For our own good we must think things through. This is necessary for the well-being of the church.

At Caesarea Jesus asked His disciples two questions. First he asked, “***Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?***”² The world of Jesus’ day had its varied opinions of this Prophet of Galilee. The leaders of Jerusalem had one opinion, King Herod another.

Some thought Jesus was Elijah, risen from the dead; others sought to identify Him with Jeremiah. Herod’s guilty conscience led him to think that Jesus was John the Baptist, come back to life. However, this difference in their thinking concerning Jesus did not necessarily make their opinions true.

Jesus therefore asked a second question, “***But who do you say that I am?***” For the group Simon Peter answers, “***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***” With this statement that group of disciples gave their answer to this most important question: *Who is this Jesus?*

They rejected the notion that Jesus was merely a great prophet. To them He was more than a great reformer. To them Jesus was the one and only Messiah, the Deliverer promised by God, the one who was to redeem the world from sin and eternal damnation.

To them He was “*very God of very God,*” the only person who could reconcile us to God. Therefore on Pentecost Peter told the people of Jerusalem that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved.

For our own sake we must think things through and come to the conviction that the revelations of God are true from beginning to end. Only then are we going to say with Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12, ¹² ***For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.***

2. The Church Must Clearly Define Its Teachings

However, the church must define its doctrines and teachings clearly and state its position on moral issues uncompromisingly that members can decide whether or not they agree with the church’s declarations. The church must say: Here is our platform. If you want to be one of us, you must believe and accept it as a norm of faith and life.

On that first Easter evening the Ten said to Thomas, Jesus is risen from the dead. This we believe. They demanded of Thomas that he accept this witness as true. It was plain, and it was clear. Such statements which cannot be misunderstood or be given a double meaning the church owes its members. Only on the basis of clear doctrinal declarations can they unite in the confession of faith.

You undoubtedly recall that Thomas did not accept the statement of the Ten. Not until the following Sunday did Thomas confess that Jesus was risen. However, if the Ten been less emphatic, maybe Thomas never would have come back to try to convince himself.

To this day, for the sake of its own members, the church has creeds through which the entire membership confesses its oneness of faith.

But the church makes creedal pronouncements also for the sake of the world. We are under obligation to preach the Gospel and to show our colours. The world must know where we place our loyalties.

All people must know that we pledged to confess and serve this Jesus, who is Saviour and God. By word and act we must let the community know that we belong to Jesus. When John the Baptist said to some of his immediate followers, ***“Behold the Lamb of God,”*** and accepted Jesus as Messiah, Philip immediately sought out his friend Nathanael and enthusiastically said, ***“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”***³

Contemptuously Nathanael replies, ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** Philip insists that he should come and see. Once convinced, Nathanael publicly declares, ***“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*** Had Philip been less certain and positive in his declaration, Nathanael might not have made the effort to come and see.

Sunday after Sunday we are called upon to confess our faith. This we do through the creeds of the church, usually the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. Therefore Paul insists that we be clear and emphatic that others may be persuaded to come and see, even as the bugler of the army by his clarion call unmistakably tells the men of the army what to do.

Honestly demands an honest confession. Paul contends that it is of utmost importance that the church honestly, without mincing words, state to the world where it stands. There must be no double meaning, no ambiguous wording. Words that are “easy to be understood” should be used.

And this must be done in love. ***“Speaking the truth in love, [so that you] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ.”***⁴

If we have honest convictions, we cannot be silent even when facing opposition. Brought before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, or Council, John and Peter insisted that Jesus rose from the dead. The leaders were willing to release the two if they would promise to remain silent. However, John and Peter answered, ***“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”***⁵ Nothing could shake them in their conviction, and threats could not silence them. They refused to sell out to obtain their release and freedom.

Our confession of faith must therefore be more than a ritual said by rote. What we confess we must believe. Upon this we must build our hope of salvation. Only if we sincerely believe and honestly declare that Jesus died for us as God’s Son become flesh, can we be sure that our sins are forgiven, that heaven is ours, and that we shall see the Saviour face to face in glory.

That is why Paul tells the Roman Christians that confessing of faith is vital. We read in Romans 10:9-10, ***if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***¹⁰ ***For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***

If we confess our faith, others who hear our testimony will be brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit and share with us our joy, peace, and hope in believing.

Note that Scripture breathes certainty. Our text says ***For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?***⁹ ***So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.***

Scripture breathes certainty. In plain, simple language that even a child can understand it tells us in John 3:16,¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave***

His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. It also says in 1 Corinthians 15:3, ³ *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.* And in 1 John 1:7, *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

As Scripture, so must we — also as a church — speak plainly that all people may understand what we are saying.

When Lazarus died, Martha quickly went to meet Jesus, saying, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”*⁶ To this Jesus replied, *“Your brother will rise again.”* At once Martha makes this plain statement, *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* This is no wishful thinking. Here is conviction firmly expressed. The brother will rise again; this will take place on the resurrection day, which shall come at the end of time. All this is plainly stated.

Paul too is clear and forthright, *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*⁸ These are plain and emphatic words, in which Paul makes known his conviction that he is saved by Christ to glory.

This example we must follow. We must speak to others of the hope that is in us without doubt or wavering. Scripture demands this of us as individuals and as a church group.

3. Followers Must Follow Through

When the church gives these plain directives, members must follow through without hesitating. Hearing the bugle call for action, the members must rally to the cause with enthusiasm. They must act with zeal. They must defend the Lord’s cause with conviction, for they know the doctrines and the directives for Christian living.

Only as the church gives distinct direction can the membership bear witness for Christ, promote His cause, and do the Saviour’s will.

Only as the church makes clear that we are obligated to stand up for Jesus shall we be ready to follow through, even make sacrifices, and suffer martyrdom.

The woman of Samaria acted upon conviction. She hurried back to the city to tell her townsmen, ***“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”***⁹ Later they said to the woman, ***“Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”***¹⁰

Only as the church stresses unhesitatingly that there is no salvation except in Christ Jesus will members follow through and face opposition with courage, suffer persecution without fear, and die rather than give up Christ as our Saviour from sin and judgment.

Uncertainty and doubt and indifference lead to collapse. A lukewarm membership dies of dry rot. Nothing is as bad and injurious to the church as a membership which does not care. Without convictions the church is dead. Of the Sardis congregation Jesus says in Revelation 3:1, ***“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”***

You and I believe certain things. But are these things true, the truth? We can be wrong in our belief. You may go to your medicine chest and reach for a bottle containing “something you think heals.” But your belief that the contents are healing will not give the poison in the bottle healing powers. Rather the poison will kill.

The only truth in spiritual things is the truth revealed by God in the Bible. Only if we take our stand beneath the Cross shall we be healed from sin. Only if we clearly affirm this faith will others come to be saved. With us they will come to the conviction that Jesus is the Way to life eternal and that no man comes to the Father but by Him.

Let us be sure that the things we believe are in full agreement with God’s revelations as found in Scripture. Then with confidence and joy let us confess our faith before foe and friend to the glory of our eternal God and follow Jesus loyally until our journey’s end. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

-
- ¹ Judg. 12:4-6
 - ² Matthew 16:13
 - ³ John 1:45
 - ⁴ Ephesians 4:15
 - ⁵ Acts 4:20
 - ⁶ John 11:16
 - ⁷ 2 Tim. 1:12
 - ⁸ 2 Timothy 4:7-8
 - ⁹ John 4:28
 - ¹⁰ John 4:42