

## Creedal Christianity is....Resistant

Creedal Christianity is *resistant*. Like watches and tents, Creedal Christianity is water and wind resistant. Here's the problem. You think your faith, the believing going on inside of you, is both of these. Disabusing you of this fallacy is hard, painful, and dangerous.

First, let me show you how foolish we are when we think our believing is our salvation. It's being caught in a powerless closed loop. It's like being in quicksand and thinking you can reach around to grab yourself by the neck and pull yourself out. Or, it's thinking that you can power your surge protector by plugging it in to itself. You are no different than the church in the first reading. They saw 10 divine, powerful plagues of God with their own eyes. 7 of them they were delivered from while seeing the enemies of God suffer them. Yet, what do they say in a crisis? Why have you delivered us from the slavery? We we're better off then. Haven't you thought when facing some crisis brought on by the Devil, the World, or your Flesh, "I didn't have this before being brought to faith."

Your believing is going to land you right where it did the OT church. Or didn't you listen to the Second Reading? Our forefathers in believing were all Baptized in the Red Sea. They were all communed by God's Food and Drink. Now for the words that ought to haunt all of us, and for the life of you and the death of me, I don't know why they don't: "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert." Do you actually think you're believing is going to stand up to the revelry the pagans will offer you, to the sexual immorality available literally everywhere, to the temptation to test the Lord to show Himself by doing what you demand, to not grumble against Him when things don't go your way? Do you actually think your faith will stand firm when theirs didn't when you are the ones "upon whom the end of the ages has come"?

The Second Reading warns me, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" And this echoes Jesus' words from the Third Reading. "He who stands firm to the end will be saved." Yup that will be me. In the face of being handed over to be persecuted and put to death, in the face of being hated by all nations because of Jesus, I will stand firm. Though I see "many" turning away from the faith and brothers and sisters in Christ betraying and hating each other, I will stand firm. Though many false prophets will appear and deceive many and though wickedness will increase and the love of most grow cold, not me. I won't be among the many or the most: deceived or loveless. How could I possibly say this and you believe it when I've fallen harder, faster, and farther when much, much less than this has come upon me?

What do you say right now when asked what do you believe about... I was astounded years ago when I tested some leaders on this and not one of them felt comfortable enough to explain what they believed about a certain teaching. Realize that is all on me. I had been their pastor for years and I had failed to enable them to do what every 11 year old Baptist kid can. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." So what do you believe about creation, redemption, and sanctification? Why do you have hope in these areas? If you look to your heart to see what you can find about these, then you are trying to pull yourself out of quicksand by grabbing your own neck; you are plugging your surge protector in to itself to get power. Your heart says Jeremiah 17:9 "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked". Well, that's a good place to get answers! Beside so what your heart has good vibrations about creation, redemption, and sanctification? Haven't you ever talked to an atheist, agnostic, Buddhist, or Hindu? They usually feel just fine about all 3. No worries.

Okay, so you won't plug into your heart; you won't try to reach out from your heart to pull yourself up to proper believing about where you came from, where you're going, and how you're going to get there. You'll go by what you can get your head around. You can get your head around a creator God or at least an Intelligent Designer. But let's not go all unscientific and say He did it in 6 days and not billions of years. And thinking you can get your head around being forgiven for things you'd die if anyone else knew you said, did, or thought, is shallower theology than that of atheist Kris Kristofferson who wrote, "Why Me Lord?". Ouch, but "Love Hurts" as another song goes. Thinking you've gotten your head around redemption hurts, but thinking you've gotten it around sanctification is smarter than St. Paul. He didn't; he said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Rom. 7:15). Not you. You've got your head around sanctification. No wonder Bible Classes and Midweek Services are optional for you!

You don't need Creedal Christianity. You're faith-based individualized Christianity is serving you well. You feel good about it. You got your head around the Big Three of creation, redemption, and sanctification, and look what you've done to prove it. You recycle. You take care of the planet God gave you. You put a kneeling Santa in your Manger scene; you wear your pin proclaiming, "Jesus is the reason for the season", and when the clerk says, "Happy Holidays," you shoot them an icy stare and Clint Eastwood like you say, "Merry Christmas." And you meet the gold standard of Civil Religion for sanctification: you do the best you can.

Do you hear that? It's a slow sarcastic clap. Your believing is not water or wind resistant. *Your* faith is not; *the* faith is. Mat. 24 says the problem is that many will turn away from "*the* faith." 2 Cor. 13:5 doesn't command you to test yourself to see if you have faith, believing going on, but to test yourself to see if you are "in *the* faith." This is the faith Jude 1:3 says is to be contended for. This faith is summed up in the 18 centuries old Apostles Creed. So when asked what do you believe about where all things came from, you can answer, "I believe in God the Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth." When asked who is Jesus? You can answer, "He's the only Son of God the Father, conceived by the

Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, and my Lord who suffered, died, and rose for me.” When asked why do you believe you’re going to heaven, you can answer, “I believe the Holy Spirit through the Holy Christian Church has brought me into the communion of saints by forgiving my sins and will raise my dead body and give me life everlasting.” And for a more detailed confession use your Catechism. Not for nothing it’s called the Layman’s Bible.

And that bothers you. You think I’m pointing you to a manmade Bible in place of God’s. No, I’m trying to stop you from plugging yourself into yourself and thinking you can pull yourself up by yourself. The Creed, let alone the Catechism, is not the Rock. The Bible is the rule of faith not the confession of faith. The creed is a confession of the faith. It’s not the rule of the faith (Krauth, *Con. Ref.*, 128). Jesus, person and work, who He is and what He did is the objective, unmoving Rock. In the Man Jesus we first meet the God we cannot see. In the Virgin’s Womb, on her lap, is the One who for us men and our salvation came down into our flesh and blood to take our place. He took on all the obligations of God’s holy law. Kept those to a T, and then was driven to the cross to be tortured, damned, and die *as if* He had done what you *did do*. And in God’s eyes He had.

The Holy Spirit delivers the Redemption of the Second Article and the Creation of the First Article to us. Here’s how Luther sums it up: "'Christ forgives the sins....The Father desires it, the Son has accomplished it; as for the Holy Spirit, He is the one who delivers it.' Where the signs of grace [the Means of Grace] that have been established by the Son are to be found, the entire Trinity is present there as well, for our salvation" (Peters, *Creed*, 225).

You know how I have you say Luther’s Small Catechism in Midweek Services? That’s how it was done in Luther’s time. The Catechism was written on big placards and held before the congregation and they would say it. Now I know what you’re thinking. We should be reading the Bible. Creedal Christianity never supplants Bible reading. There is “abundant proof for the prevalence of Bible reading in the Christian home” even right after the Apostles and Nicene creeds were settled on in circa 325 A.D. (Reu, *Catechetics*, 55). Remember the Ethiopian who was reading the Bible? Acts 8:32 tells us, “The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open his mouth.’” Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. He answers, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” That’s what Creeds, Catechisms, and pastors that faithfully grow out of the Bible do. But, and this is a big difference, Creeds and Catechisms outlive pastors.

Solzhenitsyn, Soviet dissenter, said that the Communists could make the historical uprisings against Communism in Russia disappear from people’s minds even though they only occurred 10 or 15 years before. It’s much easier he said to make disappear the events of Christianity that happened 2,000-4,000 years ago (*Gulag*, 3, 228). Faithful Creeds and Catechism are not the record of those events; that’s the Bible, but they faithfully confess the events. Creedal Christianity, built on the Word, is the House Jesus’ speaks of in Mat. 7 that is built on the Rock not sand. The wind and water rush against it but it stands solid, even in death. Everyone is building a house. It’s either built on self or Jesus’ Words. Creedal Christianity expressing the Faith is a water and wind resistant house. My believing is neither. And Jesus doesn’t leave me at the mercy of my subjective believing but at His mercy revealed in the Bible and confessed in faithful Creeds. The weather outside is frightful this year. Let it rain, let it blow, let it snow. Built on the Rock the confessing Church does stand. Amen

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