

THE CREED WE ALL NEED

SERMON BY REV. A. C. DIXON, OF BROOKLYN, N. Y.

The Bible is Open to All—Why Not Go Directly to the Original Source and Find a Creed for Ourselves—“As a Man Thinketh, so He Is.”

Text: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John III, 16.

While thousands of people were crowding Carnegie Hall and overflowing its spacious auditorium into the churches around, eager to hear the discussion of themes that interested the world, and the report of the triumphs of the Gospel in all lands, a bill poster was pasting a placard on the bulletin board near the entrance to the hall, announcing that a certain freethinker would speak Sunday afternoon on the “Crumbling Creeds of Christianity.”

How many people came to hear him I do not know, but it would doubtless not have been difficult to count the number of his audience. The fact is the creeds of Christianity, instead of crumbling, are becoming more definite and compact. A creed is a definite statement of belief. Every man of sense has a creed of some kind. If he rejects all creeds, he simply holds a creed of no creed. His belief is that a man should have no belief. And I find that the believers in no belief are the most credulous believers in the world. They refuse to accept Christianity because of some little gnats of difficulty, while they swallow camels of absurdities by the caravan. If one advocates that all creeds should be put in a pile and burned up, that we may find in the ashes the gold of a creed worth having, he simply asserts that all others should give up their creed for his creed.

There is an opinion afloat that the Christian Church is growing tired of creeds. It is a mistake. The Christian Church is really demanding more definiteness in creed, and these discussions among our Presbyterian brethren about the Westminster Confession of Faith indicate a growing sentiment in favor of a creed. If no one cared anything about a creed, there would be no demand for creed revision. It also shows a healthy growth in ethical stamina. Ministers are waking up to the fact that it is dishonest to subscribe to a creed they do not believe.

At regular intervals the professors of a certain theological seminary are required to sign their names to the creed which the founders of the seminary believed, and gave their money to perpetuate, and yet is a well-known fact that some of its professors openly avow that they do not believe parts of the creed which they have endorsed. The avowal of their unbelief, after they have signed the creed, does not relieve them of responsibility, but rather increases it, while it publishes to the world their double dealing. The enlightened Christian conscience of this age will not tolerate the successors of the pagan priests who ministered at the altar for pay, while they whispered to each other their contempt for what they were doing. The god Janus, who faces both ways for peace, is ceasing to be a popular deity. Reality, sincerity and frankness are demanded of Christ's teachers.

The importance of one's creed cannot be overestimated. “As a man thinketh, so he is.” Creed makes character. What a man believes will sooner or later mould a man's character. Character is also a test of creed. Learn a man's character and you have learned his creed. Men of bad characters sometimes hold a good creed, and men of good characters may hold a bad creed. But they do not believe what they hold. It is to them like an apple in the hand. But a creed one really believes is like the apple eaten, having become a part of blood, nerve, bone and muscle. Creeds are mental, moral and spiritual food. They become a part of the man, who, sooner or later, rises or falls to the level of his creed. Heresy in the pulpit is always a sign of heresy in the character. If it be moral heresy, there is a defect in moral character. If it be spiritual heresy, it is a sign of defect in spiritual character. If it be mental heresy, there is defect in mental character.

The demand for shorter creeds may be a sign of decadence in faith. The critics who would cut the Bible to pieces with their little penknives must have a short creed because they have such a little Bible. Those who reject the supernatural want a creed that eliminates God and exalts man. And when a man leaves God out he may express his belief in few words. He who doubts his faith, and believes in his doubts, wants only a creed of negations. The poor agnostic advertises his belief in his own ignorance in one short sentence—“I do not know.”

Or the demand for a shorter creed may be a sign of intensity of belief. There is such a thing as thought packed till it becomes solid. The fire mists of controversy contract as they solidify into the granite mountains of conviction. A creed may be an intellectual, moral and spiritual multum in parvo. Intense conviction does not scatter itself in verbiage. In weak characters it may act like steam escaping into the open air, making noise and fog. But in strong characters it rushes into the narrow cylinder, and, driving the piston of activity, brings things to pass. The bullet of the Mauser rifle goes through a tree and kills a man on the other side because the powder behind it was confined to a narrow space. Place the bullet and the same powder on a flat surface and apply the fire. There is a flash and smoke, but it

speed and power. The convictions of a strong character is the powder in the rifle, sending the bullet of truth whizzing on its mission to destroy error. The loose views of weak characters is the powder on the broad surface, making only flash and smoke, but carrying no power. It may be well to hold down the Westminster Confession, for it was made before the discovery and application of steam and electricity. In a day when people traveled slowly, and had plenty of leisure to read, the boiling down process, however, does not mean dilution, but concentration. Some of the verbiage will go, but God's eternal truth will remain. There will be no elimination of the doctrine of election, for it is taught in God's word, though some objectionable phrases used in relation to it may be left out. It will be shorter and more intense.

But in our search for a creed we need not go to any formulated statement made by ecclesiastical councils. Why not go directly to the original source, and find a creed for ourselves? The Bible is open to all, and Jesus Christ promised the Holy Spirit as a guide into all truth. If you believe the Bible, it is easy to find what it teaches on the great essentials. If you do not believe the Bible, you have no basis for a Biblical creed, and the honest course is to have nothing to say or do with the creed-making business.

You will find a good creed in the two ordinances of the Church. The Lord's Supper is a creed in symbol. It speaks of the blood that cleanses from all sin. Jesus said, “This cup is the New Testament in My blood.” In every church it proclaims that Jesus died on Calvary, and without shedding of blood “there is no remission.” We read in man's justification, sanctification and glorification through the blood of Christ. Baptism is also a creed. It proclaims the resurrection of Jesus, and our resurrection to newness of life. In the Lord's Supper and baptism we have a creed of the death and resurrection of Christ. He who believes in the Cross of Calvary and Christ cannot go far wrong on other things. But when a man goes wrong as to the atoning merit of Jesus Christ, and as to the resurrection of our Lord, he is apt to go wrong on everything else. He has learned his alphabet wrong, and how can he speak or read right, much less make or master a literature? The blood of Christ, like the scarlet thread in the cordage of the British Navy, runs through all the Bible and Christian experience. And if this scarlet thread be drawn out of the cordage of a creed it falls to pieces as a Biblical structure.

The resurrection of Jesus is the crown of glory on the brow of grace and truth. To remove it is to uncrown Christian doctrine and make it commonplace. The cross is the glory of love. The resurrection is the glory of power. The two ordinances of the church, therefore, give us a glorious creed of love and power. But if you ask me for a creed that we need I would state it in the words of Jesus in the text: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We have here: 1. A Great Personality. 2. A Great Fact. 3. A Great Result. 4. A Great Purpose. A GREAT GOD. The need of the day is a creed with a God in it great enough to worship. The Bible in its first verse reveals such a God. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Measure infinite space, and weigh millions of worlds that float in it. Study the laws of the universe and the planetary systems. Survey the oceans, mountains and valleys of earth. Imagine, if you can, the power that called all these things into being, and placed them in order, making them the willing subjects of His law. You have now only a glimpse of our God. We meet people who have a god on a level with themselves. They will not admit that he can do more than they can. They have really made a god in their own image, and the worship they render is self-worship. They regard God as working only in the usual way. They deny the supernatural. When they discover a new force, like electricity or the X-ray, they promote their god by admitting that he can work through these new forces, but they refuse to admit that their god can work in ways beyond their comprehension. There is a god caged and confined within the room of their little brains. He who made their brains they try to capture and imprison within the walls of His own handiwork. They would press the ocean into a thimble. They try to hold in their puny hands Him who holds in His hands all the worlds. They pity the heathen, who manufacture gods and sell them at so much apiece, forgetting that they are themselves in the god-manufacturing business. Some of the heathen have the advantage of them. I would rather be a pagan worshipping the sun than an American worshipping an American. For an American worshipping a god who can do only what Americans can do is really worshipping himself. The sun, as king of day, filling space with light and beauty, is a nobler object than a conceived American, inflating himself with the idea that there is no being in the universe greater than he.

A few days ago I addressed an audience of freethinkers, by special invitation, on the subject of “Christ and Him Crucified.” In his comments on the address one of the speakers asserted that a personal god was a myth, and that principle or law is all the god there is in the universe. When I twitted them with the fact that they were a fine lot of pharisees, with a very high estimate of themselves, and low estimate of God, they assented to the charge. But when they were told that people became like the object of their

worship, and if they worshiped an everlasting “It” they would soon become a lot of its, they were not so well pleased and murmured dissent. When I told them that they were worshipping a god below themselves they replied: “No, no; our god is above us.” When I replied, “Then you are below it,” some of them grew angry and left the room. The reply to the freethinkers will apply to the so-called Christians who would limit their God within the boundaries of human experience. Their god is really an “It,” having no existence except in their imaginations. The real God of almighty power, and Ruler of His universe, goes on working, regardless of them, in answer to the prayer of His true worshippers.

A GREAT FACT. God loves. The God of creation is not all that I need. Power, though it be almighty, does not satisfy the yearning of my soul. Such power is my danger, if it be against me. Power linked with justice assures my punishment, if I sin. Power may cause me fear, but it cannot warm my heart. Power compels, and I naturally resent compulsion. Power restrains, and restraint may only irritate me, but when I hear that the God of infinite power is also a God of infinite love I am willing to be compelled and restrained as He may wish. His love constrains me without a thought of His power. My faith in Him is a creed of love.

A GREAT RESULT. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. In all nature we see the result of His wisdom and goodness, but Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of His love. Let no one be deceived into the illusion that God loves us because Christ died for us. It was love that brought Christ to Calvary. God so loved the world with all its sin that He gave Jesus Christ for its salvation. The text expresses a great fact in the past, which includes all the present and future, for God is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. God so loved, and if He so loved as to give His Son, will He not with Him freely give us all things? All gifts are included in the great gift. And if God so loved that He gave His Son, is this not proof that He loves at all times and under all circumstances? When we are in great trouble we are tempted to doubt God's love, for we say, if He loves us, why does He not with Him freely give us all things? All gifts are included in the great gift. And if God so loved that He gave His Son, is this not proof that He loves at all times and under all circumstances? When we are in great trouble we are tempted to doubt God's love, for we say, if He loves us, why does He permit these things to come upon us? His answer is, I so loved you as to give My Son to die for you, and that fate should be such proof of My love that you should not demand any other evidence. If I should see fit to withhold all other proof of My love you should still believe in Me after I have given the overwhelming demonstration of My love in Jesus Christ on the cross.

A GREAT PURPOSE. “That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here death and life are in contrast. We are sometimes told that it is not the purpose of Christianity to save men from hell, but to better their condition in this life. It does better their condition, but it also saves them from hell. The purpose of God in the gift of Christ was that men “should not perish.” This does not refer to natural death, and with the New Testament open before me I cannot believe it refers to annihilation. It is an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Banishment from God is death, and sin brings it about. God desires that His children should be with Him, and like Him, and He gave His Son in order that, by making propitiation for sin, its guilt might be put away, and life might prevail against death.

Has the purpose of God become our purpose? Do we live and pray and work that men may not perish, but have everlasting life? Are you making money simply that you may enjoy what money can bring? If so, you are living on a low plane. May God help you to glorify your business by giving you the motive of God that men “may not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Whosoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God,” and the glory of His love is that men should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Women as Sapphiras. Feminine ideas of truth are sometimes a little peculiar. Who has not heard a sweet angel-faced woman at the door of a crowded concert room or even a church say to the sympathetic usher: “Please get me a seat near the front, I am a little deaf!” You happen to know the sweet thing, and are well aware that she hears somewhat better than the generality of her sex. And the funny part of it is that if you did bring the incident to her notice she would not understand why you should treat the matter seriously. She would probably say, with a roguish look: “Well, you know, I don't hear very well.” Or, begging the question altogether—a favorite course—“Why shouldn't I have the good seats as well as somebody else. Feminine possibilities in the way of juggling with conscience is a mystery to the average man.

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