

Preterism and the Ecumenical Creeds

Some of the most impassioned attacks that are launched against preterists today come from Protestants who judge preterism on the authority of the ecumenical creeds.

David A. Green

Introduction

Some of the most impassioned attacks that are launched against preterists today come from Protestants who judge preterism (1) on the authority of the ecumenical creeds. In the past, many who have disagreed with preterism have attempted to reason with us and have endeavored to disprove us through exegesis, but this has not been the case with our creedalist brothers. They have only rebuked us sharply without discussion and condemned us as antichrists and as wolves amidst the sheep of God's pasture.



The creedalists have behaved this way toward us partly because they believe that since our teaching is an alteration of a major doctrine in the ecumenical creeds, preterism must, ipso facto, be a denial of "the Faith once delivered to the saints." The creedalists have concluded from our significant creedal deviation that preterism can be nothing less than an attempt to subvert and overthrow the Christian religion itself.



Why do Protestant creedalists put such an emphasis on the ecumenical creeds in their rejection of preterism? We will attempt to accurately answer that question in this article as we examine the underlying beliefs of the creedalists. First, we will look at some of the principles wherein creedalists and preterists agree. Then we will mark our point of divergence and our conflicting conclusions. In the end, we will arrive at the step that must be taken before this conflict can ever be resolved.

It is my prayer that you the reader will give the ideas presented in this article serious consideration. I pray also that this article will help you not only to understand the creedalists better, but also the Christian Faith.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

Contrary to the way things often look to full preterists, the conservative Protestant creedalists today who are using the ecumenical creeds as their first (and often only) line of defense against preterism generally believe that:

The Bible is the ultimate and only infallible and absolute authority concerning faith and practice.

The typical Protestant creedalist does not believe that the ecumenical creeds were God-breathed, or that every "jot and tittle" of the creeds is infallible. The creedalists ascribe such qualities to Scripture alone. The creedalists know that even though the Lord in His providence determined that the vital truths of the Gospel were to be communicated in the Church's ecumenical creeds, the writers of the creeds were not inspired. They were fallible, and were subject --as all men are-- to lapses in their reasoning, and to failings in their comprehension and in their representation of the Scriptures.

Because of this, the creedalists do not automatically reject everyone as a Christian for every deviation from the ecumenical creeds. As the creedalist Andrew Sandlin says in his article *Biblical Authority and Christian Orthodoxy: Historic Christian "orthodoxy"* (the standard of basic Christian doctrine set by the ecumenical creeds) is a "much safer" presupposition than a Bible-only approach to Bible

study, and a deviation from orthodoxy is "usually" a perversion of biblical truth (Chalcedon Report, July 1997). In other words, a deviation from creedal orthodoxy is not always or necessarily a biblical error, because the creeds, though very reliable, are fallible.

Yet notwithstanding this concession from the creedalists, they will not allow preterists any liberty to challenge the creeds with preterism. Why is this? It is because preterists are not questioning merely one of the peripheral particulars or shades of meaning in the ecumenical creeds, but are meddling with a major creedal teaching. It is this fact that has caused the creedalists to conclude that preterists must be refuting a cardinal (i.e., principal, fundamental, indispensable, essential) doctrine of the Christian Faith.

Preterists believe that the creedalists have here jumped to the wrong conclusion. If preterists are actually refuting a Scripture doctrine, and if the creeds can contain inaccuracies (as the creedalists admit), and if Scripture is the only infallible authority (as the creedalists admit), then must not the creedalists use Scripture (and not primarily the creeds) if they are ever, decisively, to disprove preterism?

Indeed, we reason, how can the creedalists themselves know with certainty whether preterism is truth or error if they refuse to (or are unable to) prove or disprove it by means of the only infallible Scriptures? Their behavior toward preterism seems even more specious to us when we remember that the creedalists themselves have used Scripture to effectively and systematically refute another eschatological deviation from orthodoxy: hyper-dispensationalism. Why do the creedalists not respond to preterism with the same kind of studied, Scriptural response?

Are the creedalists reacting to preterism in a manner inconsistent with their belief that the Bible is the only infallible authority concerning the Faith? It appears to preterists, and to others, that they surely are. But how is it that the creedalists believe that they are not acting in a manner incompatible with the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*? To begin to answer this question, we will look at an important belief wherein the creedalists and preterists have agreement.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

The creedalists believe that:

God has necessarily preserved throughout history the correct understanding of the biblical truths that are necessary for salvation. Or to put it another way, the Church must always possess the true Gospel.

The Bible tells us that when Jerusalem was destroyed in the apostolic generation, the Kingdom with its eternal Gospel was given to the Church forever, establishing the Church as God's perpetual life-giving ministry to the nations. As the Scriptures teach us:

"Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7). "Your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to you the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought" (Isa. 60:11).

"The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:25).

". . . the Tree of Life . . . yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. . . and His servants shall . . . reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 22:2,3,5).

Inasmuch as "God Himself" is forever "among men," (Rev. 21:3) so is the Church eternally among us (Eph. 5:28-33; Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9). This is the promise of the eternal covenant (Rev. 21:5-7). It follows from this that the Gospel is also with us forever, since without the Gospel there is no Church, and no God among us. Because of this, God can never and will never allow His Church to everywhere proclaim a false gospel, as the Church is "the pillar and ground of the Truth" (I Tim. 3:15). As the Lord says in another place, the Church continuously declares the glory of the Lord (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 10:18).

To say then that the universal Church has preached a false gospel throughout history is to refute God's covenant, and the power of His Gospel, and the authority of His Church. It is, in essence, to call God a liar.

Although there are likely no preterists who maintain that the universal Church has been "always and everywhere" preaching a damnable lie subsequent to the days of the apostles, the biblical principle of the eternity of God's covenant does have an effect on the debate over preterism and creedalism. For if preterism is a doctrine that is so radically other that it makes what the Church has always preached throughout history a damnable heresy, then preterism must be absolutely false.

If we regard preterism to be true we must not imagine that futurism then constitutes a doctrine that if a man believes he cannot be saved, because ever since some number of years after the apostolic generation, the universal Church has always (until relatively recently) preached some form of futurism. If preterism makes the historical gospel of the Church into a salvation-forfeiting lie, then preterism must inevitably be nothing more than an invention of modernity; a damnable, liberal heresy.

Since it is impossible that the universal Church has "always and everywhere" preached a false gospel, only two possibilities can exist:

Preterism is an erroneous and damnable doctrine (II Tim. 2:18),

or

Futurism is an erroneous but not a damnable doctrine.

As we know, the creedalists choose option number one. They fervently claim that belief in futurism is absolutely indispensable for salvation. Because of this, the creedalists are unable even to consider preterism as a valid option.

Preterists on the other hand believe that futurism is neither indispensable nor damnable. Nor do preterists believe that they are introducing a new way of salvation. They believe, as the reformers before them, that they are teaching a better understanding of the same salvation that the Church has and will continue to "always and everywhere" preach.

As we will discuss this point at which the creedalists and the preterists clash in more detail below, let us agree for now on these points: that God has preserved the Gospel throughout history, and that the historic Church has unintermittently dispensed that Gospel to the nations.

If we believe these two points, they will lead us to another belief in which we should find agreement with the creedalists, namely, a belief in the authority of the creeds.

THE GOSPEL IN THE CREEDS

The biblical truths that are necessary for salvation, and that God has preserved throughout history, were written in the ecumenical creeds.

The ancient ecumenical creeds have, throughout history, been deemed by all branches of the universal Church --western, eastern, even Roman-- to contain the fundamental rudiments of the true Gospel of salvation. If, as we stated above, the Church must remain perpetually in possession of the true Gospel of Christ, and if the ecumenical creeds contain a reflection of the message that all believers in the universal Church have historically believed and preached --and it is reasonable to believe that this is the case (2) -- then this must follow:

The creeds must contain the Gospel.

If the creeds did not contain the Gospel (and therefore do contain a false gospel) while they accurately reflect the historic message of the universal Church, then it would follow that the historic Church was preaching a false gospel, and that it was therefore never the Church. Since no one can accept that idea without utterly forsaking the Christian religion and blaspheming God, one is drawn to agree that the creeds of the Church contain the Gospel.

What does this mean in the creedalist / preterist controversy? For one thing, it means that the creedalists are correct when they say that we may not refute the elemental traditions of the Gospel that are contained in the creeds. They are right that such things are "not up for debate." The rudiments of the Gospel are indeed divine presuppositions without which the historic Faith and the Church would completely disappear. We are not free to refute or nullify any of the cardinal elements of the Christian Faith. (3)

It is true that our freedom as preterists to challenge the ecumenical creeds is restricted. But this is not because the traditional, cardinal doctrines of the Faith were engraved on creedal paper by the Finger of God, but because the Scriptures and the Church together confirm the rudimentary doctrines of the Gospel (found in the creeds) as being the foundational truths of salvation.

Here is an example, outside of preterism, that validates this way of reasoning: The historic Church has proclaimed that Jesus is God incarnate, born of a virgin. If He is not God, then the Church has been teaching men to worship someone who is not God. To preach such a message is damnable (Ex. 22:20). Since it is impossible that the universal, historic Church of God could "always and everywhere" reside in a damning error, we must conclude that if the Church is truly the Church, then Jesus Christ must be God (as the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed teach). Hence, the doctrine of the Deity of Christ is not up for debate, as it is a tenet of the historic Church's God-given, Bible-based Gospel-Tradition, without which the universal Church would not exist and no one could be saved. (4)

So far, we should and we must stand in agreement with the creedalists that God has preserved in the Church throughout history a sufficient and adequate understanding of the biblical truths that are necessary for salvation, that the Gospel that the Church has historically preached is reflected in the ecumenical creeds, and that we are not free to remove or distort any of the biblical rudiments of the Faith that are found in the ecumenical creeds.

To the extent of the rudiments of the Gospel, we cannot challenge the teachings of the ecumenical creeds without challenging God Himself.

ARBITRARY CREEDALISM

Now having agreed upon these things we finally come to this question: Exactly what "eschatological" doctrines, if any, are included in the non-negotiable, "essential Gospel," that if a man does not believe he must be damned?

It is in this question that the credalist / preterist conflict resides. The credalists suppose that belief in the (yet) future-ness and, more especially, the physical-ness of the Second Coming and of its accompanying events, as taught in the creeds, are absolutely essential to salvation, and that therefore the parts of the creeds that contain those teachings cannot be challenged, even as the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection cannot be challenged. It is on this basis that the credalists make their claim that they and others must refuse to reason from the Scriptures with preterists, because we are antichrist.

We should realize that if the credalists are ever to be convinced that they should exegete with preterists and that they should cease from condemning us, the credalists will have to be convinced first that there is a theoretical possibility that futurism might not be an essential, non-negotiable tenet of orthodoxy wherein if a man disbelieves he must be damned. If the credalists can be convinced that there is even a bare possibility that belief in futurism could be a non-requisite to salvation, the offending presupposition would be gone and communication between credalists and preterists could begin, and the credalists could then begin to reason substantively with the Scriptures.

So much hinges on the answers to these questions: Could futurism not be part of essential orthodoxy that a man must believe or be damned? And more importantly, could futurism possibly be an historic, non-fatal Church-error?

If the answer to either of those questions is yes, then the credalists are in sin for having hastily shunned preterists without discussion and prematurely concluding that preterists are enemies. If either of those questions can be answered with a yes, the credalists must be exhorted to repent, to learn to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to be angry." (Jms. 1:19)

As we reason through those two questions, let us begin again at a doctrine on which credalists and preterists agree: The indispensability of the Second Coming. The doctrine of the Parousia (Second Coming) is a systematically essential rudiment of Christian orthodoxy. If the Parousia were never to happen, then Christ's ministry and His work on the cross, and the subsequent ministry of the Holy Spirit and of the apostles all came to naught, and we are still in our sins. Because of this, we may safely say that a rejection of the doctrine of the Second Coming is grievous and destructive, and that a knowledgeable and willful rejection of the doctrine is a grave, even damnable error.

However, as undeniably indispensable to the Christian religion and to the Church's salvation as the fact of the Parousia is, and as damnable as is a knowledgeable denial that the Bible teaches it, and as destructive an error as it is to teach wrong things about it, the Second Coming is nevertheless not a doctrine that one must necessarily know correctly in order to be saved. We know this is true because, if it were the case that we must have a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Second Coming in order to be saved, then all believers would be damned except those who hold to one exact eschatological view. Since this is unacceptable, we know that an error about "the time and the nature" of the Second Coming, as grievous as it may be, could theoretically exist in the Church, since every such error is not inescapably "another gospel" that if one believes he cannot be saved.

A credalist would likely agree with that last statement, but would maintain that preterism "crosses the line" between acceptable eschatological disagreement between brothers, and damnable heresy; and that which "crosses the line" about preterism is, as we said above, the degree of its deviation from orthodoxy. While the credalists admit that credal orthodoxy may be slightly flawed on a sub-

point or two, the idea that it could be flawed on a major point is absolutely unthinkable and anathema to the creedalists.

In their thinking, a small creedal error is possible, but a "major" creedal error is absolutely impossible. They believe that if a creed contained a serious error, then the whole Kingdom of Christ would sink into Gehenna. This is not an exaggeration. It is one of the foundational motivating factors of the creedalists in their dogmatic and fiery condemnation of preterists.

But we must ask the creedalists, is not this line between possible non-fatal flaws and impossible non-fatal flaws an arbitrary construction? If minor non-damnable errors can exist in the creeds, then why cannot serious non-damnable errors exist in the creeds? Could not God have allowed such errors to exist for hundreds of years? Where did God promise His Church, implicitly or explicitly, that He would never allow her to make serious, non-fatal, multi-generational errors?

What is the basis for the creedalists belief that serious non-fatal errors cannot universally exist in the Church for centuries? Their basis for this belief is, quite simply, presuppositional creedalism. The creedalists assume at the outset that every prominent aspect of creedal doctrine must be believed as an indispensable part of the true Gospel.

For the creedalists, it is truly as if God had decreed and promised under oath, in writing, that the universal Church's understanding of salvific doctrines absolutely cannot contain any noteworthy errors. Or to put it more specifically: For the creedalists, it is as if God Himself sent the Church three synopses of the Faith and promised the Church that these three papers are absolutely errorless at every major point and that every major point must be believed for salvation.

It is this mindset that causes the creedalists to reason that every major point of orthodoxy is scriptural because it is orthodoxy. As far as they are concerned, that is the end of the discussion.

Admittedly, it would be a good thing that the creedalists are fighting for an ancient Church tradition, if it were not for the fact that they are blindly presupposing that this particular tradition is a biblical tradition, and are thereby unauthoritatively declaring that belief in this tradition is a prerequisite for salvation.

"Circular reasoning" is not inherently wrong, but on this issue we preterists see strong evidence that our creedalist brothers are chasing their presuppositional tails in a creedolatrous (or ecclesialatrous) error, so that even if preterism is false, the creedalists are arguing against it in an irrational (sinful) manner. We pray to God that He will open their eyes to the misdirection of their faith.

In the meantime, let us answer these questions: Could futurism not be a part of essential orthodoxy that a man must believe or be damned? Could futurism possibly be an historic, non-fatal Church-error?

Yes, because:

1. The basis upon which the creedalists have categorically rejected preterism (and preterists) is arbitrary: The creedalists unauthoritatively assert that God would not allow His Church to make a serious, non-damnable creedal error. Then from that assertion, they unauthoritatively pronounce preterism a damnable heresy.

2. If preterism is true, this does not mean that futurism is a damnable error. It would be arbitrary to say that all forms of futurism are damnable if preterism is true. Because non-damnable errors can

exist in the creeds, as the creedalists admit, such an error could exist in the eschatological statements of the creeds.

3. The substantial exegetical case that has been made for preterism has not yet been decisively (biblically) disproven. In light of points one and two, this means that as far as anyone can know, preterism could be true and futurism could be a non-fatal error.

WHY DO THE CREEDALISTS RAGE?

Preterism is exegetically derived. It is the child of Scripture exegesis. This fact in itself does not by any means prove that preterism is biblical, but since preterism grows from out of Scripture exegesis (and not from out of hatred for creeds or tradition), there is only one possible way that the preterism / futurism controversy can ever be resolved, and that is through judicious Scripture-exegesis and reasoning. If preterism is false, then there absolutely must be sound reasoning from the Scriptures in the creedalist camp before this controversy can be ended. As the Westminster Confession of Faith wisely says:

"The supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." (Chapter I, Section X)

The creedalists' strong reliance on orthodoxy in this controversy is putting them in a precarious situation, as the case for creedal futurism is being found wanting in light of the exegetical weight of preterism. This is being proven true in the fact that, while relying almost solely on creedal orthodoxy, the creedalists are giving no reasoned or solidly biblical, systematic explanation why preterists must be damned. The fact that preterists contradict a "major" aspect of creedal orthodoxy (the timing and nature of the Second Coming) is all the "logic" that the creedalists use in order to condemn. Indeed, one can almost hear the creedalists declaring, "The preterists have spoken blasphemy. 'What further need have we of [Scriptural] witnesses?'" (Matt. 26:65)

This brings us to another important reason, aside from their inordinate veneration of creedal orthodoxy, that the creedalists angrily abstain from exegeting Scripture against preterism; and that is that the creedalists are exegetically defenseless (hence, their inevitable lapse into irrationality in their fight against preterism). This is why that even though they have always been diligent in the past in exegeting Scriptures to refute all other heresies in the Church, they are unwilling to do the same thing in the light of preterism. Their behavior is strikingly changed with us, and as we know, they have as of yet produced not one exegetically substantive refutation of preterism.

Though they deny it, the creedalists are demonstrating that they believe the following:

If a major creedal doctrine (which the creedalists deem to be a prerequisite belief for salvation) is not scripturally provable, or if a challenge to a major creedal doctrine is not scripturally disprovable, then we must at that point put our faith in God for salvation through the teaching of the creeds alone.

Instead of attempting to "prove all things" pertaining to salvation by means of the Scriptures, the creedalists are assuming certain things pertaining to salvation by means of the fallible creeds in the absence of decisive proofs from the Scriptures. Needless to say, this is a dangerous thing to do.

While deferring to the authority of the Church in the absence of a firm Scriptural teaching is not inherently illegitimate, the question here is, are the fallible decrees of the Church alone, without

strong Scriptural support, authoritative enough to be used to anathematize brothers? The preterists' answer to this question is an unequivocal No. The creedalists reject the validity of the question itself, presupposing that belief in creedal futurism must be as essential to salvation as is belief in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Since the creedalists insist on rejecting preterism because of tradition alone, while they do not have a strong exegetical or systematic basis for their rejection, we preterists cannot help but perceive them as modern-day "Pharisees":

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . . Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition . . . Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered . . . (Mk. 7:8,9,13).

It is not unreasonable to conclude that this is why we have seen so much anger and verbal abuse from the Protestant creedalists today: Their behavior is characteristic of those who find that they have very little biblical defense for the traditional belief to which they passionately cling. (5) Thus it is that we have seen the creedalists behaving with like passion as those men who heard Stephen's teaching that day before the council:

They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord (Acts 7:57).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Preterists and Creedalists believe that:

1. God has preserved His Gospel throughout history. 2. The cardinal doctrines of the Gospel are God-given, indisputable truths. 3. Those historical tenets of the Faith were recorded in the ecumenical creeds. 4. We do not have liberty to deny the Gospel in the creeds.

The Creedalists presuppose that:

The futuristic eschatological interpretation of prophecy in the creeds is rudimentary to the Gospel of Christ, so that if a man does not believe futurism he must be damned.

The Preterists believe, in contrast, that:

The futuristic eschatological interpretation of prophecy in the creeds not only is not rudimentary to the Gospel of Christ, but it is an historical Church-error which, though not fatal to the life of the Church, has been damaging to its health.

Because the creeds can contain non-fatal errors, and because futurism could be such an error, preterism must not be automatically dismissed without a hearing. It must be exegetically proved or disproved from the Scriptures.

We counsel the Creedalists to realize that:

They are losing the exegetical battle against preterism by default, They have no firm biblical basis to pronounce all preterists as damned, They should check their zeal for the futuristic traditions to which they adhere.

Conclusion:

A time is coming when preterism must be answered with the Scriptures in an ecumenical council, in order to authoritatively find whether it is true or false. History has never seen such a council on prophecy, much less on preterism. We preterists look forward to that council. Until that time, our creedalist brothers who refuse to prove or disprove us from the Scriptures should wisely withhold their fiery indignation until and unless such a time comes as it may be appropriate. If the creedalists will not repent, if they continue to refrain from using reasoned Bible exegesis, they will find that in all of their angry rebukes, they did nothing of consequence while preterism became the wave of the future.

THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

A creed is a confession or rule of faith that is meant to authoritatively set forth the articles of the Christian Faith, especially those cardinal articles that are necessary for a man to know in order to be saved.

The authority of creeds is limited. They are always and forever subordinate to the Scriptures. Though the ecumenical creeds do contain the Gospel of eternal life and other truths, they are only a feeble attempt of men to put into brief systematic form the doctrines of divine truth. They are the interpretative formulations of uninspired men.

The ecumenical (general or worldwide) creeds are the doctrinal confessions of the ancient, post-apostolic Church. The historic, universal Church has in general, either explicitly or implicitly, regarded these creeds as authoritative expressions of the Christian Faith. There are three ecumenical creeds: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and The Athanasian Creed.(6)

THE APOSTLES' CREED (c. 340; received form, 6th - 8th century)

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED (A. D. 381)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] one Holy Catholic and

Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED (c. A. D. 400 - 800)

Whosoever will be saved: before all things, it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith: Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated: the Son uncreated: and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible [unlimited]: the Son incomprehensible [unlimited]: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible [unlimited, or infinite]. The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal: but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles [infinities], but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible [infinite]. So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty: but one Almighty. So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord: So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion: to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created nor begotten: but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another: none is greater, or less than another [there is nothing before, or after: nothing greater or less]. But the whole three Persons are co-eternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped. He therefore that will be saved, must [let him] thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly [faithfully] the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God: and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking [assumption] of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]: but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell [Hades, spirit-world]: rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father God [God the Father] Almighty. From whence [thence] he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully [truly and firmly], he can not be saved.

Footnotes:

1. The term "preterism" in this article refers to the belief that all (or virtually all) Bible prophecy is fulfilled. It does not refer to the belief of "partial preterism," which says that the Great Tribulation is fully past but that a great many other things are not fulfilled. Specifically, the Second Coming, the death of the Devil, the general Resurrection of the dead, and the Great White Throne Judgment.

2. Some preterists and others have said that since the creeds were written by, and have been endorsed by, the "institutional church," (meaning potentially, the false church) there is no reason to presume that the true Gospel ever found its way into the creeds. I cannot agree with this view, as it is not credible that the true Church has, throughout all history, been radically disconnected from the visible Church.

3. As we suggested above, this primarily means that we are not free to attack the Church's teaching of Christ's death and resurrection from the dead.

4. Note that this conclusion is based upon biblical reason: Since Scriptures teach that worshipping another god is damnable, and since the universal Church worships Christ, Christ must be God. This conclusion was not reached by means of a blind faith in creedal statements. The Scriptures do not teach us that it is damnable to believe that the resurrection of the dead took place spiritually at the Parousia in A.D. 70, after II Tim. 2:18 was written. The creedalists, in their condemnation of preterists, are forced to rely upon traditional doctrines that are disconnected from the reasoning of the Scriptures.

5. The creedalists have even been driven to demonize us, slanderously reporting to the world that we "revise the orthodox definition of Christ's resurrection" and actually deny that it was bodily. (Ken Gentry, Taking A Closer Look, Table Talk, January 1999, page 56; Andrew Sandlin, Open Letter to Ligonier Ministries, February 10, 1999)

6. See The Creeds of Christendom, by Philip Schaff

David Green @ Jer2329@juno.com or Jer2329@preteristcosmos.com

Comments:

June 14, 2006: This is a great article. Those who are creedalists should read Jack Rogers, "Guide to the Book of Confessions." On pages 22-25, he reminds us that the P.C.A. has always maintained a balance between individual freedom of conscience and the "Essential" beliefs. He says that the "Book of Order of the P.C.A. lists ten beliefs as essential: Trinity, Incarnation, Justification, Scripture, Sovereignty, Election, Covenant, Stewardship, Sin, and Obedience. A belief in the second coming as future is nowhere stated as being an essential.

<http://www.newjerusalemcommunity.net/?c=54&a=1058>

http://www.preteristarchive.com/Preterism/green-david_p_04.html

<http://www.preteristcosmos.com>