

## **The New Testament: Our Superior and Unchangeable Authority**

As the very Word of God, the New Testament is our final rule of faith and practice, and accepted as authoritative in all matters. Every belief and practice must be subjected to it. The Church has every right to expect its members to believe in and accept the New Testament fully.

When we say that the New Testament is our only creed, it often goes unsaid that all other statements and confessions of faith and creeds are inferior to it. This is not to say that we cannot compose statements of that which we believe from time to time. We need to recognize that all such statements are merely the works of human minds.

There does seem to be a need for people to set forth some kind of summary of their beliefs. It assists believers in their efforts to tell others--in a short way--the basics of their faith. Insofar as these summaries are faithful to the New Testament, they are helpful in communicating our faith. Many of us use the "Roman Road" as a help when explaining the Gospel to unbelievers. It simply covers the rudimentary facts of salvation. It does not include everything a person needs to know about the Christian faith. In the same way, a concise summary of beliefs does not include everything there is to the Bible or in the Christian faith. If it correctly relates the doctrines of the faith, then it is accurate and can be trusted. But the final authority is the New Testament itself.

William Beahm, former dean of Bethany Theological Seminary, writes, "Creedal statements can be useful, however, if they are regarded as a brief and memorable form of Christian belief as it faces spurious substitutes which from time to time might threaten to replace Biblical faith. It is valuable to have, in every age, short and simple statements of Biblical faith which may help to clarify and unify the church's consensus on vital issues" (*Studies in Christian Belief*, pp. 26-27).

Man-made creeds are subject to change over the years as issues confronting the Christian faith change. When the Apostles' Creed was written, no one ever expected the modern attack on the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Therefore, the doctrine of the Scriptures was not addressed. For the past century or so, however, the Bible has been questioned from both within and outside of the Church. Thus, in modern confessions

and statements of faith, the issue of Biblical reliability and authority is mentioned.

The New Testament, however, does not change. Its statements are forever true and forever pertinent to the human condition. Some argue that the early Brethren opposed formulating a statement of belief because they were open to new revelation. It was not new revelation they were seeking, but fresh illumination. When you enter a dark room, you turn on the lights to show you what is already there, not in the hope there will be something there that was not present before. We search the Scriptures, not for a vision of new things, but for the understanding of those things already there.

In the article on the "Bible" in the *Brethren Encyclopedia*, the writer says "Brethren sometimes single out the New Testament as that part of Scripture to be designated as the 'rule of faith and practice.' Underlying this special esteem for the New Testament is the conviction that it sets forth God's final and binding covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ" (p. 133, emphasis mine). Many raise the cry that we must be "on the cutting edge" of modern developments in theology and practice. Alexander Mack, when accused of starting a new church, replied, "We have neither a new church nor new laws. We only want to remain in simplicity and true faith in the original church which Jesus founded through His blood" (*Ground Searching Questions*, No. 38). Would that that be the concern of our leaders and preachers today!

When we mention that the New Testament is our only creed, we acknowledge that it has the highest authority in our Christian faith. While we may gain wisdom and insight from our experience, from the gathered body of believers, and from the Holy Spirit instructing us, the only objective measure we possess today is the Bible.

The early Brethren found no "canon within the canon" which they followed more closely than the rest of the New Testament. It was to be obeyed, in its entirety, without question. We cannot do better than to accept the New Testament unconditionally and uncritically, although we can definitely do much worse.

*Pastor Craig Alan Myers*