

# THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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## "Creed Bound!"

All readers of Restoration history will recognize the above charge that thundered across the land as pioneer preachers pled for the ancient order. And even in this enlightened age, when "progress" and "respectability" have blinded many to the restoration principle, the terms are familiar. But lest we become mere name-callers, forgetting the meaning of the name, let us re-examine the principles involved; and, lest the pot call the kettle "black", let us re-examine ourselves.

Creed, from the Latin, "credo" (cf. credible) means, "I believe." In the early Catholic church the so-called "Apostles Creed" is a notable example, line after line beginning, "I believe-". Basically, the creed was simply a statement of what one believed to be true; not proof of the articles. However, as Romanism taught the authority of the church to interpret and declare truth, the "I believe this is true" became dogmatically, "this is true." One's knowledge of "truth" (?) was measured by one's ability to answer the questions of the catechism according to the prescribed "creed." Individual study of the Bible was frowned upon, later forbidden. Minds surrendered their freedom to think, and became "creed-bound."

Underlying the Reformation movement was the gradual awakening of the individual mind. The discovery of the new world, growing demands for political freedom, scientific developments – all called for people to "think" – to weigh evidences, to draw conclusions. As investigation caused the overthrow of erroneous geographic, political, and scientific "creeds", so religious creeds and dogmas began to fall beneath the weight of Bible study. The printing press, making multiple copies of the Bible possible, was an important

factor in this great search for truth.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and others were great leaders of the people. They challenged the dogmas of Rome, and restated a declaration of freedom as old as the "who-so-ever-will" of the New Testament; freedom to *"search the scriptures daily whether these things be so;"* freedom to think. The Roman church, denying this freedom, is quick to point out that these men differed in their conclusions. Well, Catholic scholars have differed in their conclusions, and greatly so. Catholic "unity of faith" (which, through the ages, isn't as unified as they would like for us to believe) is achieved only through a central papal organization which makes an "infallible" (?) decision, and coerces objectors to accept or suffer excommunication. But, let us not excuse the reformers on the basis of other's errors.

The reformers differed. This was a time of religious upheaval. Many people, suddenly cut off from the Roman church because of their support of this "new" principle of individual study and decision found themselves without any well-formulated faith. Many of the leaders, while recognizing some errors of the Roman system, were hampered in their studies by their own Romish background. Others, swinging violently away from former doctrines, formulated untenable extremes. They, "running out of Rome, ran past Jerusalem."

Human minds being what they are, true evidence must contend with varying backgrounds, pride, selfishness, and other human elements. This is unavoidable in any study and need not be serious IF – a capital IF indeed – IF the truth-seeker will recognize God's Word as the absolute, complete, and final authority. Jesus put it simply, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). Differences may actually be a blessing, if they lead us to further study of God's Word; but differences frozen - made immobile by human stubbornness, written into "Creeds" and "Confessions of Faith," blight man's search for truth. Just such creeds, formulated by the reformers, became a curse upon the world, fostering religious sectarianism and denominationalism. And this same spirit, with "creeds" written or otherwise, has kept many sincere and well-meaning "protestants" in the same religious bondage which was formerly associated only with Roman Catholicism. Creed-bound minds are blinded to truth.

Then came the Restoration movement of the nineteenth century,

when such men as Campbell, Stone, and Fanning fought valiantly to overthrow the mental shackles of human traditions and doctrine. They considered the Word of God their complete rule of faith and practice. They did more than "lip-service" to this principle; they accepted it in reality, gladly paying the cost of friends, popularity, and financial rewards. Their studies were not perfect, nor their conclusions infallible, but their motto was and is the only consistent principle for those who would be creed-free. "LET US SPEAK WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS, AND BE, SILENT WHERE THE BIBLE IS SILENT." Believing, "the seed is the Word of God," (Luke 8:11) they sought to push aside human denominational ties, and allow the Word free course in the hearts of men. There, free from sectarian contaminations, this seed could and did produce simple New Testament Christians.

But there are new generations. What my grandfather found to be true, by virtue of slow, exhaustive Bible study, my father accepted – perhaps by reading a few confirming passages furnished by my grandfather. And what my father believed, – we may admit that he studied and understood the confirming passages – I may find myself believing, with neither confirmation nor understanding. Am I to contend that grandfather could make no error; that what has been practiced or believed through these past generations, and by my own kin, must not be questioned? Such creed-bound ("I believe" bound) thinking can be productive of nothing but harm to the cause of Christ. The need to "search the scriptures daily" exists today, just as it has always existed. Each individual must handle aright the Word of God, if he is to stand approved in God's sight (2 Timothy 2:15). We have no less need than did those of Thessalonica, to "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Truth does not fear investigation.

It is high time we realized that our "I believe" is no more sacred than that of the Roman Catholic, or the "Protestant". THE FAITH has been once for all delivered (Jude 3) ; it is found now in the inspired written Word. It waits our acceptance and obedience. By the written word we may know the certainty of the things believed (Luke 1:14) and to the written Word we must go in order to know the things spoken through Apostles and Prophets (2 Peter 3:1-2).

The "Old Paths" to which we must adhere, are not the "Old Paths"

of the restoration preachers. The path, (yea, the highway) is the way of Christ, as described in the New Testament. Many pioneer preachers have walked that path, and their footprints give us courage to "press on". But even Paul said, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:1). You can be a modern day pioneer by correcting your own creed-bound thinking, and being ready always "*to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*" (1 Peter 3:15). Have you the courage and Christian character necessary to be such a lover of truth? ✍ Robert F. Turner



## WRONG ORDER

I commend the preceding article by brother Turner. As he states, Paul told the Thessalonians, "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Sadly, many reverse that order. They hold fast to some teaching or practice and then try to prove it to be good. Foolish pride prevents them from admitting they are wrong. Next comes a twisting and perverting of scripture in an effort to "justify" their false belief or practice. We now have a complete departure from truth and God. All this could have been prevented by simply following Paul's instruction to "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*" We should only "hold fast" to that which we have first proven to be good (i.e., in harmony with God's word). (JH)

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<p><b>Schedule of Services</b></p> <p>Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.          Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.          Sun. Evening Worship... 5:00 p.m.          Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p><b>Elders</b></p> <p>Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873          James Hahn. . . . . (317) 745-1507</p>
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