

Almighty Father, who by Your Son Jesus Christ taught us to beware of false prophets: Have mercy upon Your Church, we beseech You, to deliver it from all evil; and give us faithful pastors and teachers who shall truly fulfill Your command and preach nothing contrary to Your Holy Word; that we Your people, being instructed, nurtured and comforted by Your heavenly truth, may *worship You aright by confessing the truth of Your Word* and bring forth fruit to Your glory; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 114)

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked [Jesus], "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And He said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And He said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)-- then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do." And He called the people to Him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

In Christ Jesus, who is worshipped aright when we take Him at His Word and hold to His teachings, dear fellow redeemed:

*"I believe in god, who is loving and accepting of all people, punishing no one, except for those who are universally considered to be the most wicked, but even they do not suffer everlastingly in hell, just cease to exist. I believe in god, who overlooks most wrongdoings unless the wrongdoer in great hypocrisy does not overlook the wrongdoing of others. I believe in god who understands the prayers directed to him/her with such names as Allah, Sophia, Zeus, Ashera, Thor, and even Lucifer, if the prayers are addressed with true sincerity. I believe in god who accepts my set of beliefs I feel in my heart to be valid."* This is the confession of most of our neighbors today. It is endorsed by much of the mass media and politicians, especially those seeking reelection. Chapter and verse from the Bible may be used, but primarily these creeds come from popular books, articles, talk shows, movies, entertainment & award shows, especially given voice by modern celebrities. However Jesus warns us about

such world-pleasing creeds, as in our text, so take note: **Sweet Sounding Human Creeds Are False Worship.**

### I

Jesus' enemies thought they had Jesus condemned because His disciples did not fulfill the traditions taught by the elders of the Church. Most in that day would agree with their assessment, but Jesus did not wait very long and He went on the offensive quoting not tradition, but from God's Word, from His prophet Isaiah: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

What the rabbis had done was built on the rituals given to priests by God in His Word about ceremonial washings making it obligatory for all Israelites to do. We can see the natural progression here, taking what was good for the priests and making it a rule for everyone, but this was a man-made teaching. Now you might question that this man-made rule is really sweet sounding. After all, children often groan when they are told to wash their hands before dinner. But this ritualistic washing was viewed as an activity making the sinner more acceptable before God and in that way appealing to Him.

It fits with the perverted understanding of the sinner and his relationship with his/her Creator God. It is assumed that since we cannot keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, if more rules are added which can more easily be performed on a regular basis, the level of righteousness improves. But of course this is not how it works. God says we must obey His Ten Commandments perfectly, not less imperfectly. Adding rules, which can be more easily fulfilled does not find favor with God, no matter what the sinner thinks.

Jesus cites a clear example in regard to the 4th Commandment – honoring mother and father. The tradition of the elders allowed greedy adult children to withhold financial help from their aging parents, by designating a portion of their resources to be given as a gift to God. But the elders also made the rule if the gift was never really given, it would be all right since the intention was good. The mere appearance of piety with such a gift does not please God. He requires that people obey His Commandments.

### II

Sweet sounding creeds which sinners invent dishonor God who alone has given us His teachings, which we are to hold to and confess. As Jesus says: *"You are really my disciples if you hold to My*

*teachings, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* A shallow understanding of ourselves as sinners is often what gives shape to man-made creeds. So as Jesus points out to His hearers who had heard of the attack upon Jesus by His enemies: "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

You and I as violators of God's holy Law are in an inescapable predicament, inescapable that is by our own power and ingenuity. Our sin arises within us and manifests itself on the outside. Our hatred may be kept on simmer, but on occasion it boils over with our words or fists. The secrets of our hearts are exposed. All man-made ceremonial washings will not cleanse us from such guilt and shame, even if we are able to control our tongues and hands. Pontius Pilate tried to wash himself clean at Jesus' unjust trial, but how did that man-made ritual work out for him?

But while the predicament of our condition as sinners is inescapable by our doing, there is an escape, or as we are accustomed to call it, a salvation provided by God. Sweet sounding human creeds deny such a rescue plan completely secured and freely offered to us by God through His only begotten Son. That is what makes human creeds not only false worship but deadly, eternally deadly formulas. Human creeds may come close by calling Jesus a "helper", but not Savior upon whom we sinners are completely dependent.

There are what are known as non-creedal Christian churches. At least that is what they proudly call themselves. They will point to the Lutheran Church and claim we hold to man-made creeds. It is true our theological forefathers authored the creeds we use, but their content and even many expressions are taken directly from the Word of God. The so-called non-creedal churches actually do have creeds, but usually not in print, rather found in the feelings of their hearts. That is what makes them so dangerous. Their man-made creeds are shaped by sinful hearts and minds, not by the very Word of God.

There is however a true cleansing of water instituted by Christ for His Church, namely Holy Baptism. Baptized in His name we are united with Him in His death and in His resurrection. Our old sinful natures are drowned and buried by that water and our new men of faith arise forth living a new life every day, free from sin, death and hell.

Interestingly the Scribes and Pharisees who insisted that Jesus' disciples participate in their man-made ritual of hand-washing, refused to be washed by the gracious water of life found in John's baptism. We are told that they rejected the purpose of God for

themselves. Their human creeds seemed more reasonable. Instead of confessing to their sin and their absolute inability to save themselves, they saw no need for the concept that God would send them a Substitute. Rather they confessed to their superior ability to take care of their problem of sin and death by their merit. Compliance with the laws they deemed to be significant should be more than enough to answer the call to righteousness. Human creeds make sense to the sinful mind, but they fail miserably before the just courts of heaven.

Have you found human creeds more to your liking, even enticing? Human creeds speak of your actions for God, whereas creeds given to you by the Word of God speak of God's actions for you. Take note of this the next time you recite one of the ancient creeds. Statement after statement speaks of the work of God for you, whether accomplished or in the process of happening now. As you speak back to God the works of your salvation as He has revealed it in His Word - that is true worship. We do this in our hymns and in the introductions of many of our prayers. Know that any dabbling in human creeds by you is forgiven by our Savior God for Christ's sake.

Creedal worship begun here in this life will continue in heaven for all eternity as we learn in the book Revelation: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! ...Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, ... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We believe therefore we speak and God our Savior is praised not only with our lips but from our hearts as well. Amen.