

1. 'I BELIEVE'

'Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' (Jude 1.3)

Talking to folk at open-air meetings we hear a variety of views as to what Christianity is. Each person seems to have his or her own brand. We begin to wonder if there is a common faith any longer. The New Testament provides plenty of evidence of variation of belief but the apostles kept on insisting that there is 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.' (Ephesians 4.5). They allowed diversity in things indifferent but insisted on unity in doctrine, worship and practice. Jude did not recognize *many* faiths but only *the* faith. For what is the point of a faith which does not save? There is *one* Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. The church must always strive to clearly state what is to be believed in order to be saved and to serve God.

Here is something to hold to - A creed ('the faith')

Jude does not refer here to 'our' faith but 'the' faith. He is not thinking of our act of believing but the body of knowledge that is to be believed. As soon as we make further statements about the Jesus Christ we trust we formulate a creed. The Apostle's creed is the most ancient creed that is generally known. It was not written by the apostles but gives a summary of their doctrine.

A creed can be defined as 'a brief summary of the articles of religious faith'. Our English word 'creed' is from the Latin verb 'to believe'. Our creed is *what* we believe. Everyone believes something whether it is written down or not. Even the atheist has a creed. Many atheists believe that science is the only source of true knowledge and that it alone tells them everything that they need to know. On this basis they affirm that it has been proved that God does not exist. This atheistic belief is invalidated by the facts that the scientific method can only make statements about *physical* things and make *provisional* not absolutely final judgements. At most science could affirm that God *probably* does not exist which would leave open the possibility that he does and that this might yet be proved. The scientific method requires this openness. Further, all know that they have a conscience and can discern between right and wrong but this valid knowledge is not obtained by the scientific method but is an independent source of knowledge that is also valid. Indeed, it is so important as to underpin our social culture and

legal system. Human communities can only survive on the basis of this knowledge of right and wrong and this knowledge of right and wrong is independent of the scientific method.

Some will say that we do not need a creed or statement of our faith. It sounds right when someone says that all that they need is the Bible. Professor A. A. Hodge has some wise words about this. He writes of Christians who reject creeds, 'If they refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine slowly elaborated and defined by the Church, they must make out their own creed by their own unaided wisdom. The real question is not, as often pretended, between the Word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God's people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds.' (*The Confession of Faith*, pages 1 – 2). Any creed is only a subordinate standard and may require revision if found contrary to scripture but *The Apostles' Creed* has stood the test of time for almost 2000 years and *The Westminster Confession of Faith* likewise for over 350 years. Creeds can unite many in any particular generation and also unite following generations. They have a historical and geographical impact. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* stretches from the Americas through Europe and America to the Far East and Australia.

Here is something to do - 'Contend'

There is a need to 'contend'. One issue of *The Evangelical Times* had two disturbing articles. 'The shop around the corner' dealt with the demise of Christian bookshops and 'The evangelical Cinderella' dealt with the way in which music has replaced worship and displaced preaching. A common thread is the move from thought to emotion and action. John Grier of the Evangelical Bookshop, Belfast commented, 'the younger generation are more concerned with evangelizing the world than getting a good grounding in doctrine.' Coming from Northern Ireland with its strong preaching tradition this comment is a sombre warning. Though we deplore the move from *thought* to *emotion* and *action* this is not to deny that each has its place but we must recognize that truth is paramount. The Lord described himself as 'the way, the truth, and the life' adding 'no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' (John 14.6). With respect to believers he prayed, 'Sanctify them through thy truth' adding 'thy word is truth.' (John 17.17). Jude urges us to 'earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints' (Jude 1.3) because, if truth is bypassed, salvation is impossible.

We find pardon and get to heaven by faith not emotion or action.

What is the issue in contending? Jude emphasizes *the* faith as being the true faith because different professing Christians believed different things. In Galatia some believed that meritorious human works had to be added to the work of Christ. The Apostle Paul's reaction was very strong. He begins with the affirmation that Christ 'gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God...' (Galatians 1.4). This was a summary of Paul's creed and we can see that it involved the divine existence, a divine decree, a divine Saviour sacrificing himself to atone for sin, and a real deliverance from the bondage of sin and dominance of evil. Some might say, that was Paul's faith but I have my own faith. In reply Paul writes, 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.' (Galatians 1.8).

Should he become king, HRH the Prince of Wales wants to be known as 'The Defender of Faith' not 'Defender of *the* Faith'. He does not see *the* faith of our founding fathers as unique. According to this view, it is important to believe but less important what we believe. Jesus Christ took the opposite view. He said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou *this*?' (John 11.25 – 26). Jesus taught that it is not enough 'to believe' in order to be saved. You must believe the right things about him and believe in him. Martha did and answered, 'I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.' (John 11.27). We can be sure that if we believe something different we will not have a resurrection to eternal life. We will be raised but it will be to judgement, condemnation, and everlasting shame and misery. 'What' we believe *is* a matter of life and death! Our personal creed is important. If it does not correspond with the creed of Jude, Paul and Jesus Christ our creed will not save us.

Here is an important reassurance - Completion

We have seen that what we believe determines whether or not we are saved. It is a trick of Satan, the father of lies, to suggest that we must move on from the ancient Christianity. The world has changed we are told. We are told that we have new understandings of reality now. Look at all that science has taught us. We are told that we have new understandings of morality now. The concept of equality has led

politicians to view same-sex relationships of commitment as equivalent to the male-female bond of marriage as though procreation was not a purpose in defining marriage. Marriage must become designer marriage defined by the individual's choices. We are told that we have new understandings of truth now. Truth is regarded as multi-faceted. Different traditions, we are told, have different insights and no single tradition can claim a monopoly of truth. Indeed, like Pilate of ancient time, the modern philosopher and common man asks, 'what is truth' and doubts there is any such thing. Against all of this confusion we have the statement of Jude concerning 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' It is not some caterpillar that by metamorphosis will become a butterfly. *The* faith has a definite form fixed by divine revelation once and for all and it does not change. We might misunderstand the truth and need to change to be holding to what is right. The principle of *semper reformanda*, 'always reforming' commits us to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ but it is we who have to change. The Saviour, who is truth, is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Closing thought

Many believe in 'Jesus' but *which* Jesus Christ do we believe in? The Christ of the Jehovah Witnesses is a creature. The Christ of 'liberal' theologians is merely a man. We must go beyond a name and define whom the Saviour is and as we do so we formulate our creed. Let us be sure it is scriptural at all points or we dishonour God.