

Buzzfeed vid - *“Groups have their own lingo and language and terms for things because they are inclusive. Anyone from the outside will question those things...”*

We grow up in inclusive religious communities where we have used some words over and over. And yet research we’ve looked at the past couple weeks shows us that we are using that same religious vocabulary less and less.

It’s clear it’s not for lack of knowledge. We’re fully immersed in the language.

But we grow up in religious communities where we have used some words over and over again and again without pausing to reflect on what they mean.

And we aren’t just talking funny and quirky phrases like the ones in the video.

We’re talking the Gospel. Grace. Blessings. Sin. Salvation.

The underlying thought behind it:

The definition of our words can make a world of a difference.

The poet Christian Wiman asked the question that stirred the pot for this series:

“Does the decay of belief among educated people in the West precede the decay of language used to define and explore belief, or do we sense the fire of belief fading in us only because the words are sodden with overuse and imprecision and will not burn?”

Proverbs 18:21 – words can bring death or life!

We often make this verse about the totality of our words and what comes out of our mouth.

But what about *each* word?

When we lose our spiritual vocabulary... it can result in a decay of belief, instead of life.

This week? CREED

Rich Mullins had a song my parents used to play when I was a child called Creed. In the music video, here’s this guy playing a hammer dulcimer in the middle of a field, singing lyrics that begin with... *“I believe in God the Father, almighty maker of Heaven and maker of Earth...”*

The name of the song didn’t mean anything to me. It could have been named Croissant.

Because as a kid the word “creed” didn’t mean anything to me.

But considering creeds will elevate our belief.

In a culture that values questioning and shrugs off truth, creeds point us to the supremacy of scripture. To the supreme value of scripture.

There are countless creeds,

But I’ve long had the Nicene Creed, also known as the Apostle’s Creed, memorized my whole life thanks to that Rich Mullins song.

The whole thing reads:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

*He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of the saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Creed is a dirty word that gets tossed in the same basket as ritual, and ritual is bad, right?
In our progressive culture, we get jazzed with the idea of throwing off tradition and religion.

“Jesus vs. Religion” It was a great spoken word. But it was a false choice.
We pit Jesus against “religion” again and again and again ... and we create a false choice.
Religion by definition, is a system and tradition of worship.
Tradition is not the problem. *Unbiblical* traditions are the problem.
Worship is good. Systems of worship – also good.
God spends entire books of the Old Testament on HOW to worship. Truly God cares.

Listen to these New Testament, New Covenant, AD words of James in James 1:26-27
*Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues
deceive themselves, and their **religion** is worthless.*
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and
widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Religion isn't the enemy of Jesus. Religion is the goal. The pure and faultless variety.
But in Galatians we see a supremely jacked up variety.

GALATIANS 1:6-9

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of
Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some
people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if
we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let
them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is
preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

What is a CREED? **a Latin word that means “I believe”**
“Well I believe the Bible.”

The Bible has roughly one million words in it It is easy as individuals to pick and choose from
portions we read and create a copy and paste belief system.

Creeds are, by definition in Webster's – *a brief, authoritative formula or religious belief.*
// the Nicene Creed

Its 100 words give us the cliffnotes summary of the million words in the Bible.
Not to replace. But to educate. To make clear.
MARTIN LUTHER – *“Christian truth could not be put into a shorter and clearer statement
than these 100 words”*

The purpose of this and any creed is to articulate what is at the core of being a Jesus follower. What beliefs make up the essence. What is the unquestionable, unshakable foundation?

But this is also exactly why creeds have fallen out of style. In our culture, there's nothing more offensive than being dogmatic.

Our culture's creed is *do what makes you happy as long as it doesn't hurt anyone*. It boils down to behavior. Just don't hurt anyone. But what you **believe** determines how you **behave**.

The Apostles Creed lays the foundation of belief for a Christ follower. It's not just educational. It's unifying. In three ways:

Unity that comes from **clarity**. We agree on these things. We're family. We can debate the other stuff in Heaven. In a culture of division creeds can serve as a gentle reminder we agree on more than we often may think.

So often we major in the minors and minor in the majors. Creeds like the Apostle's Creed remind us again of the truths we find unity in.

Unity – this is **worldwide**.

"I believe in the holy catholic Church." Catholic means global. Universal. The same reason I want to share about China and the mission work being done there... The same reason we sent teams to the DR on trips like the one we just got back from... To see the people there are being reached and transformed by the same Gospel. God says of Jesus in Isaiah and it's echoed in Acts: "I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." It's doing just that.

Unity – this is **historic**

The Nicene Creed was drafted in the 300s as a response to a heresy that claimed Jesus wasn't both fully God and fully man. These words have been spoken for centuries and centuries. There are people who are now cheering us on from Heaven who we like arms and spirits with when we speak these words as a declaration of faith.

We get our turn at the wheel. In our culture that tries at every turn to turn away from truth that would demand obedience, Scripture is the map that keeps us steering straight. Creeds work as cliffnotes.

Paul uses creeds in multiple epistles, but none in Galatians. So why are we digging into chapter 1 of Galatians? Galatians topples two movements that Creeds hit with the same force:

LEGALISM and LAWLESSNESS.

LEGALISM

“If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”

Legalism for the Jews hadn’t just become a problem. It had become another Gospel altogether. Not Christ alone, cornerstone. But Christ + this and that. Circumcision and eating kosher.

Their primary concern was two cultural practices that separated Jew from Gentile. They weren’t just converting people. They were nationalizing them. It was as if the culmination of salvation after accepting Christ was to join a specific denomination or Church.

To Paul it wasn’t just problematic. It was heresy. He says look, if somebody preaches something that adds to the Gospel like this, even if its myself, let them be damned.

This is bold. This is fiery... at first it may make us raise our eyebrows because its in scripture. But in our culture? On our keyboards? We absolutely LOVE this.

We love to label people as heretics. Name a prominent pastor. There’s a twitter account or website dedicated to prove them as a false teacher or heretic.

This isn’t new. Look through history...

William Tyndale, the first to translate the Bible into English, seeking to reach them with the Gospel – condemned as a heretic, stripped of priesthood, and strangled and burned at the stake. From Martin Luther to Martin Luther King Jr. – they’ve worn the label heretic. We’d do good to not forget that Jesus Christ himself – died for being a heretic. For pushing against unbiblical tradition and broken religion.

We don’t crucify people anymore or burn them at the stake – we just cancel them, drag them on social media, and shun them from our Christian subculture. For anything from women in leadership to stances on speaking in tongues.

Jesus says the world will know us by our love for one another. But instead of unity we drift into divisiveness. Instead of being known for love we’re known for our pettiness.

Heresy hunting can get messy because there’s no locked and loaded standard for heresy.

Early Christians at the time Paul wrote Galatians, the ones that were causing all the trouble Paul was addressing- believed that to reject circumcision was heretical.

This is why the Jerusalem Counsel happened. To define the major truths, and remind the growing church that minor issues shouldn’t keep us from unity and worshipping Christ together.

This is also where creeds come in. And why many counsels in history produced them.

They turn our focus from the minors and back to the majors.
To the heart of God. To the heart of scripture.

They produce unity of belief.
They join us across denominations, across borders, across history.
They produce this reminder that we have more in common than we think.
They remind us that these foundational beliefs aren't shaken in the name of progression.

LAWLESSNESS

Beliefs that runs counter to the Creed are more common than you'd think.
LIFEWAY did a MASSIVE survey a couple of years ago among Church goers in America.
More than half of Christians deny that Jesus was God in the flesh.
More than half think the Holy Spirit is a power, not a person.
Most believe worshipping alone is just as valid as being a part of a Church.
Most don't think the Bible as a whole is the Word of God, or that it's true.
In no surprise, these same people don't think the Bible speaks to ethical issues.
Because it has no authority.
Because authority is bad.

It's why what's en vogue these days in our Christian culture is the **De-Conversion Story**.

There's an awakening that involves questioning what one has long believed in the Church.
Part of the awakening is the assertion that certainty is not consistent with the way religion works.
We need to humble ourselves and be open to questioning our interpretation of the Bible.

But eventually this goes off the rails... if we're all required to be uncertain in our interpretations of the Bible, then what doctrines can really be affirmed? We cannot affirm with assurance even the most basic Christian truths in the Creed — including the divinity of Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, the forgiveness of our sins.
Now- most aren't willing to abandon the certainty of these basic truths.
But that just reveals a selective commitment to questioning.
The appeal to uncertainty is often used to justify one's own beliefs.
Really- one's own truth.

Elephant Analogy. Five blind men run into an elephant. They had no knowledge of elephants.
They were asked afterwards what's an elephant like?
Back leg – “like a tree trunk” Trunk – “it's like a python, a massive snake”
Side – “it's like a wall” etc.

This analogy is used by skeptics to say that no one religion has a hold of truth and reality, each is feeling a different part of the elephant.

But the analogy collapses on itself because its told by someone who's not blind, and what attempts to come off as a humble “we don't really know” is spoken from an arrogant claim to see what others can't. You can't possibly know the no religion sees the whole truth, unless you have vision that you just claimed none of those religions have!

We believe in a God that doesn't just see all of reality and the proverbial elephant. He created the elephant.

Scripture says we see dimly. Sometimes if we're honest, we feel like blind men feeling around an elephant.

This is why we cling to scripture. God's revealed word.

This is why we cling to the Holy Spirit, who guides us in it.

And this is why we come together as the Church, not relying on our limited perspective and wisdom, to create things like creeds.

But many Christians today would say that legislation or regulation of anything is modern day legalism, since we as believers are to be led by the Holy Spirit.

We forget the Holy Spirit isn't given to us by God to guide us in all our feelings.

Jesus didn't say when the Spirit of feels comes, He will guide you in all your feels.

Jesus says when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide us in all truth.

The New Testament clearly contains commandments and hard lines in the sand for believers.

Paul's problems with legalism isn't the application of moral rules or regulations.

It wasn't wrong because laws and commandments are wrong, but because law had supplanted Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It uprooted the sufficiency of Christ and punted the function and centrality of the Holy Spirit in Christian living.

Traditions are not the problem. Unbiblical traditions are the problem.

To give religion the stiffarm in the name of progress is to punt the pure and faultless religion that God desires.

In the beginning was THE WORD.

How you define that word. What you believe about Jesus. Effects everything.

"I BELIEVE..."

Not I know.

Belief dictates behavior.

We gain knowledge in school and many we graduate having learned largely the same things... but believe wildly different beliefs.

So we DO wildly different things... because knowledge doesn't dictate behavior. Beliefs do.

Not I do.

The Gospel proclaims that we have done nothing.

Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe.

We don't do in order to be saved. We do because we were saved.