

Creeds should clarify Christian living, not build barriers, speakers stress_51704

May 14, 2004

Posted: 5/14/04



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By John Hall

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ARLINGTON—Creeds have a clarifying role in Christian life, but they build barriers between believers when used incorrectly, Baptist leaders told a national leadership conference.

Russell Dilday, chancellor of the new B.H. Carroll Theological Institute in Arlington, and Keith Putt, professor of philosophy at Samford University in Birmingham, addressed the role of creeds as part of a discussion of biblical authority at the conference, sponsored by the John Newport Foundation.

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Using human words as a tool for enforcing orthodoxy is a misuse of creeds, Dilday and Putt agreed.

Creeds are correctly utilized as confessions of a relationship between an individual and God, Putt said.

The statements of beliefs are more like testimonies than statements of exclusion, he emphasized.

Incorrect use of creeds occurs when those statements are elevated above traditional means of authority, primarily the Bible and Jesus in Baptist life, Dilday said.

Other denominations would more strongly emphasize tradition, experience and reason, he noted.

Creeds are man-created rather than God-inspired like the Bible, Dilday said. Answers to life questions can be found in the Bible, not in creeds.

Creeds restrict how people can respond to Scripture, Putt said.

Often, leaders use them as weapons to further an agenda, he added.

“We take these creeds, like stones, and build walls with them,” Putt said.

Rather than using creeds to restrict biblical interpretation, Putt and Dilday suggested Christians use the “theological principle” in interpreting the Bible.

This states that believers should look for messages expressed clearly through the entire text, especially in contexts that apply to humanity in all cultures.

The notion may seem simple, but Bible interpreters must know a great deal about the text to do it, the pair agreed.

Interpreters must understand the cultural differences between the biblical Middle East and the contemporary United States. Readers also must recognize the different literary genres that comprise the Bible.

Fortunately for Christians, God provides help, Putt said. The Holy Spirit assists Christians in discerning God's message.

God gave the Bible “for us” to comprehend his nature, Putt said.

But Christians obviously do not interpret the Bible the same way, he added.

Though they agree on the authority of the Bible, they make different “cuts” of interpretation that delineate the lines between denominations and believers, Putt said.

Stringent support of biblical authority rather than creeds allows for strong faith with diversity, Putt stressed.

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