



# THE NEED FOR CREEDS TODAY

BY J.V. FESKO

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I grew up in an evangelical Anglican church in Sydney. Every Sunday, the leaders, often barefoot and with long, surfy hair, would conduct casual and contemporary services but interspersed with a disjointed set of archaic set prayers, creeds, and communion from the *Book of Common Prayer*. The contrast led most of us to dislike these traditions, and it left me wondering why we didn't just ditch the old-fashioned and out-of-place prayer book for a completely modern service.

Why was this? It was because I lacked a biblical and historical understanding of their purpose and the importance of joining in the chorus of the great cloud of witnesses who had gone before me. I didn't see that the creeds, confessions, and prayers of the past were not "the dead faith of the living but the living faith of the dead" (xix), which can help us know, love, and protect the gospel today.

## **The Living Faith of the Dead**

J.V. Fesko's *The Need for Creeds Today* is a book designed to bridge that gap. In the wake of hyper-individualism and the deconfessionalisation of the church, this (short) book is a helpful guide to the biblical and historical arguments for the necessity and benefits of a confessional faith. That is a faith rooted firmly in the Bible but draws from the deep wells of the church's history to explain and defend the truth in our time.

Apart from the story about a theology debate that narrowly avoided devolving into a duel to the death (see chapter 5), this book is quite academic and reads as a collection of five cogent and concise essays, heavily footnoted, that would likely suit pastors and leaders who are looking for an introduction to

the topic, more than the average church member.

### **Biblical Argument**

The first chapter outlines the biblical argument for creating and passing down confessions. Drawing from the Passover liturgy (Ex. 13:14–15), the giving of the Shema (Deut. 6:4–6), the apostle Paul's five "trust-worthy sayings" (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:7–9; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; Titus 3:4–8), and Jude's exhortation (Jude 3), Fesko concludes that all Christians must contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and that Christians cannot merely quote scripture references but "must explain, interpret, and restate in their own words what the Bible means" in their own historical moment.

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To do this well, "we must stand on the shoulders of giants to catch a glimpse of the glory of our triune God," and so we need the work of those who have gone before us, which leads us to chapter 2 (17).

### **A Brief Tour of Protestant Confessions**

Chapter 2 surveys the creeds and confessions borne out of the Protestant Reformation from 1500–1700 and their usefulness for today. This tour of confessions was like being guided through a grand estate (think Downton Abbey!), the opening of each door revealing a room of treasures, history, and complexity that left me overwhelmed with all that I didn't know but intrigued to learn more.

### **We Need More Than 'No Creed but The Bible'**

Chapter 3 traces the internal and external causes of how the modern Church has drifted away from a confessional faith into the anaemic "no creed but the Bible," resulting in a capitulation to the sins of our age.

Chapter 4 helpfully outlines the benefits of confessions; namely, that they help us distinguish the truth from falsehood, create wider fence-lines for a more diversified orthodoxy (that is, leaving room for chari-

table disagreement on contestable matters), and create a time-stamp of the truths the Church needed to guard and defend in each moment in history (for example, the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood).

The final chapter, the near theological duel to the death story(!), argues for the necessary link between our confessional faith and our holiness as believers. It is a warning against allowing the sins of our age to influence our defense of the truth (e.g., flame wars on Twitter) and a call to rest in our union with Christ for the requisite holiness for the task.

### **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**

This book has helped me to appreciate the biblical and historical significance of our new *Statement of Faith*—how it will assist us to be unified globally as a family of churches centered on the gospel, and how it will help us to train future generations of pastors and members who will contend for the faith delivered to the saints.

I am also excited to lead my church in Parramatta to jump up onto the back of the theological giants of the ages so that we may gain an even better view of the glory of our Triune God as expressed in old, rich, and well-worn statements, helping us to know, apply, proclaim, and protect the gospel in our day and age.

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