

# The Book Of Common Prayer

Gary McDade

One of the older creed books popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was known as *The Book Of Common Prayer* which was a creed book for the Protestant Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church sprang out of the Church of England. When members of the Church of England came to America they made up the Episcopal Church. For example, in *The Book Of Common Prayer* it says, “The *Church of England*, to which the Protestant Episcopal Church in these States is indebted, under God, for her first foundation and a long continuance of nursing care and protection...” which shows the connection of the two churches.

The first of twenty-nine numbered sections in the book is titled, “The Ratification of the Book of Common Prayer” (p. iv). The self-appointed authoritative body “ratifying” the creed was “the Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in Convention, this sixteenth Day of October, in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine [1789]” (p. iv). [The copy of *The Book Of Common Prayer* used in this article is dated January 1, 1894.] A point follows which some dispute today that shows such creeds held the force of spiritual law to those using them. Note: “This Convention having, in their present session, set forth *A Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, do hereby establish the said Book: And they declare it to be the Liturgy of this Church: And require that it be received as such by all the members of the same...” (p. iv). The point to be stressed here is that the officials in the Episcopal Church did view it as constituting authority in religion and did, indeed, “require that it be received as such by all the members.”

Although there are many passages from the Bible interspersed throughout the Book, they are forced into the observance of holy days, a practice which the Bible teaches against in Galatians 4:9-11, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.”

Further, the Book advances departures from the Bible by advocating infant baptism (pp. 244-257) and officers in the church who have Scriptural names but unscriptural definitions are assigned to those names. Repeatedly, in the discussion of the officers in the Episcopal Church reference is made to the “Canons of the Church” and not to the Scriptures (cf. pp. 509-529).

The Book closes with what is commonly referred to in church history as “the Thirty-Nine Articles” (pp. 555-566). These might be referred to as the core of the creed. Quite hypocritically, Article VI is “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation” (p. 557). Why would someone mandate a Book of 566 pages be imposed on members of the Episcopal Church and then end it with the notion that the Scriptures are sufficient for salvation?

Well did Isaiah say, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). In Philip Schaff’s *Creeds of Christendom*, he has hundreds of such creeds as *The Book Of Common Prayer* consisting of three volumes and covering 2,547 pages! The relevance of the plea of churches of Christ for the Bible to stand as the sole rule in matters of faith and practice is all the more meaningful in light of

these unfortunate developments across the centuries (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19).