

## **Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 22-23 – Fundamentals and Formulations of the Faith**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: The Reformed churches hold to the Three Forms of Unity as our doctrinal standards. But sometimes when you talk about the Three Forms of Unity (The Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism) someone might look at you and say, sometimes boastfully: “I have no creed but Christ.” Or he might say: “I just believe the Bible,” or “I just believe in Jesus.”

And you might feel uncomfortable and awkward. **But you should not be.** That is neither pious nor superior.

The truth is, Christians are expected to have confessional statements. **Christians always have had confessional statements.** Sometimes those statements are simpler and other times more complex. But the church has had them.

**Why is it better to have doctrinal or creedal statements?** The last time I said **you must have faith...and faith is based on knowledge.** If you don't have knowledge you can't believe. That's where confessions come in. Confessions teach. **They impart systematic knowledge of all things essential for what you must believe and how you must live.**

You will generally find those who have no confessional or creedal statements have weaker faith and therefore, weaker churches. You will see why today.

Our headings are:

**Fundamentals of what you must Believe**  
**Formulations of what you must Believe**

Our goals are: That you must **know what is required to believe about Jesus Christ, that you accept that knowledge to gain faith, and that you then share that knowledge with others.**

### **Fundamentals of what your must believe**

Q&A 22 What then must a Christian believe?

**Everything God promises us in the gospel.** That gospel is **summarized for us in the articles of our Christian faith--** a creed beyond doubt, and confessed throughout the world.

#### **1. There are essential things you must believe to be a Christian.**

**You must believe every essential thing in the Gospel.** “Gospel” refers to the whole Bible – God’s plan for saving man. You might ask: “How can you say that the Gospel is in the whole Bible, after all, only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the “Gospels?” Jesus said that the whole Bible is the Gospel!

**Luke 24: 24** "And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." **25** Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to **believe in all that the prophets have spoken!** **26** "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these

things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Jesus reminded the Jews **they should have known the good news** long before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And he then proceeded to teach them the Gospel from the Old Testament. He said to Nicodemus: Are you a leader in Israel and don't know this? And who has a clearer Gospel of Jesus than Isaiah?

**2. Now if there are essentials you must believe to be a Christian, it means there are non-essentials. Examples:**

**a. A man might believe that he must stand and pray**, others do not. You may even sit or lie down to pray.

**b. Some congregations require that you take your shoes off at the door before entering...to prevent mud!**

**c. Some congregations have the Lord's Supper every week**. The Lord's Supper was celebrated regularly in the Scriptures, and it is be a good thing, but we don't have an explicit command to do so every Sunday. They celebrated it on other days too!

**3. There are things that others hold to that are wrong, but they not deny a fundamental of the faith.**

**a. Based on your promised submission to the elders, it would be wrong not to attend worship twice per week**. But this error is not an essential of the faith. So Christians are not put under church discipline for attending one worship service.

**b. Some congregations have women elders and deacons**. That is a wrong, but it does not mean that they are not Christians. They may be good Christians in other ways.

**c. It is a wrong not to baptize your babies**, but it does not mean the one who doesn't allow God to mark his baby will go to hell. No, not at all! They may be godlier than you who have baptized your babies if they raise their babies well.

**4. So the question: What are essentials, things you must believe to be a Christian? A couple of examples:**

**a. Christ is God. If you deny Jesus Christ is God you can't be a Christian**. That Christ is God is essential to your salvation.

**b. Virgin Birth. If you deny the Virgin birth of Jesus, you can't be a Christian**. The Virgin birth is essential to Christ's work as he had to be a perfectly pure real man.

**5. Since there are essential doctrines, this means elders and fathers must teach these truths to their charges, their children.**

Matthew 28: 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

It is obvious the disciples were **not commissioned to memorize the exact words Jesus spoke**, but he told his disciples to say what he said...to teach his teachings... **This is doctrinal teaching**. This is what we do especially in our 2<sup>nd</sup> worship services.

## **6. An illustration: When Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2) The people were “cut to the heart.”**

This meant they were convicted of their sins and then believed. The essentials of the Gospel had to have been pointedly preached for this to happen. Failure to do so brings judgment on the shepherds. Ezekiel 34. So teach nothing “wishy-washy.”

**Everything that would lead your children or members of the church to be saved and sanctified must be taught.** Everything!

John 20:30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

**Faith in not “your attitude toward God” as the pastor from People’s Church announced on TV.** Faith is **knowledge** and **hearty trust** in who Jesus is and what he has done.

## **7. No Christian may doubt the words of the Apostles’ Creed.**

The Apostles’ Creed summarizes the Gospel essentials.

### **Formulations of what you must believe**

Q&A 23 What are these articles?

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

**And in Jesus Christ,** His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. **I believe in the Holy Spirit;** I believe a holy universal church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **1. Why do you need a codification of what you believe?**

**You need a statement of what you believe so you can hold people accountable for what**

**they are to believe.** How can the church discipline others for failing to hold to the Gospel truth if there were no standard of truth?

**(Don't you have to make clear rules for your children so they know why you discipline them?)** Jesus is Redeemer and **he decides what you must know and believe.** He demands the highest standards.

**Matthew 5: 20** "For I say to you, that unless **your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,** you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

**So you need to be able to say without doubt what you believe the Bible says – a standard. If you can't, you will have floating doctrines, and discipline in the church soon disappears.**

Remember, Muslims and Mormons believe in Jesus, but you don't believe the same things about Jesus as they. Distinction is important. **That distinction is doctrine!**

## **2. Are there examples of Confessions or creeds in the Bible?**

There are Confessions– as in a written creed, and there are confessions where you were **trained to say what you believe.**

**1Timothy 6:12** Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have **confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.**

**Hebrews 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession.**

You can see that part of the confession had to do with the work of Jesus Christ and it was publicly done.

**Secret confessions were not useful to the church.** Those are lodges!

## **3. Those who refuse to have a confessional statement evidenced a serious spiritual problem.**

**1John 4:3** and every spirit that **does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.** And this is the spirit of the Antichrist...

**2John 1:7** For many **deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.** This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Romans 10:9 that if you **confess with your mouth** the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

**The people were not simply saying I believe in Christ – that he existed.** No. Christians confessed who Jesus is (Savior) ...that he was the Messiah (Christ)...that he was incarnate...God and man...and as man he died and was raised. And his resurrection implied his glory.

**You will notice in the forms we use for membership you have to give agreement to the doctrines that are taught in this church – the Three Forms of Unity and the Apostles' Creed.** Assenting to these doctrines together **help you to better work together** for Christ's glory.

**4. The Apostles' Creed was not written by the Apostles, but these doctrines were taught by them.**

So the Creed can be rightly attributed to them.

**5. The Apostles' Creed is divided into the works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Godhead's work for man's salvation** is stated and must be believed.

**Of course the emphasis is on the work of Christ,** since he came into the world to live and die for his children and most directly interacted with them.

**6. With all of these things essential for faith, it is practically impossible to preach for a few minutes and lead people to Christ.**

**Isn't it obvious** for these things to be taught, understood, and believed, it would take much time?

**Be warned against easy-believe-ism.**

**Be patient** when people are stubborn to respond; keep preaching faithfully.

**Keep praying** for the Word of God to sink in.

### **Conclusion:**

You must know the fundamentals of the faith and have it formulated in a code in order to properly **know what to believe to be saved and sanctified.** Why?

**Having a codified faith, you will be able to teach what you believe.** You wouldn't be frustrated, struggling to say what you believe and what the essentials of the faith are!

**Having a codified faith, you will have a standard for discipline** for those who stray from truth. When there is no discipline, Christians set a poor example for the world. And this causes

Christians to rob themselves of Christ's blessings, and rob Christ of his rightful glory.

**Having a code express unity between brothers.** You will be able to work better for Christ's glory.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Love your Confessions.** Thank God for them. But Confessions mean nothing unless you know and believe them. **Make it a part of your life to know doctrines**-important doctrines. Memorize those doctrines if you can. Learn about the **nature of the atonement**. Learn about **how sinful** and helpless you are apart from God. Learn who your **holy God** is and the great **chasm that exists** between God and man. Learn how **Jesus bridged the gap**.

**2. Remember, knowing, and believing doctrines will make your love increase – love for man and love for Christ.** Love leads to service. This is the goal.

**3. Carefully and persistently share this good news with those who are in sin.** Concentrate on the important things –the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the work of Jesus...not on frivolous matters.

Finally: Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is the most basic confession. If you can't confess this, you will die in your sins and go to hell. Jesus is the Savior...who took on human flesh to redeem those under God's just condemnation. Recognize this truth today and call on God to be your Father on account of Jesus Christ.