

# Heidelberg Catechism 22-23 – The Essentials of the Faith

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: If you say to someone that you hold to the Three Forms of Unity, even Christians, they may not know these significant historical confessions. They probably won't understand why you have confessions in the first place. In fact, some might pietistically 敬虔的 look at you and say: "We have no creed 信条 but Christ." Or they might say: "We just believe the Bible" or "We believe in Jesus." And they might even make you feel uncomfortable and awkward. But you should not be. Christians are expected to have confessional statements 认信声明. Christians always have had confessional statements. This is our topic today.

Our headings are: Essentials 本质上 of what you must Believe, and Codification 成文化 of what you must Believe.

Our goals are: That you must **know what is required of a true believer to believe about Jesus Christ**, knowing that your faith is not blind but it is a faith based on knowledge. And knowing what is required for you to believe, **that you then accept it and teach it to others.**

## Essentials 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 essentials** of what you must believe to be a Christian. You must believe everything in the Gospel. "Gospel" refers to the whole Bible – which is God's plan for saving man. How can you say so, after all, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the "Gospels?" Jesus said so!

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 解释 to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Notice that the Jesus reminded the Jews that they should have known the good news long before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written. (To Nicodemus: Are you a leader in Israel and don't know this?) And he then proceeded to teach them the Gospel from the Old Testament.

**2. Now if there are essentials** to what you must believe to be a Christian, it means **there are non-essentials 次要的**. And even then, there are **different levels of non-essentials**. Some things are simply a matter of choice.

**Example of things that are not sinful:** a. A man might believe that he must stand and pray, others do not. b. Some congregations require that you take your shoes off at the door before entering. c. Some congregations have the Lord's Supper every week. The Lord's Supper was celebrated at least weekly in the Scriptures, and it is a good thing, but we don't have an explicit command 外在的命令 to do so.

**Examples of things that might be wrong but not at the level that would deny a fundamental of the faith 基本的信仰** a. God does not require that you attend worship twice on Sunday. The elders call you to worship twice because they think it is helpful to your souls. While it is wrong to disobey your elders, and you promised to submit to them, it is not at the same level as an essential of the faith. b. Some congregations have women elders and deacons. That is a sin, but it does not mean that they are not Christians. They may be good Christians in other ways. c. It is a sin not to baptize your babies, but it does not mean that the one who doesn't will go to hell.

**3. What are essentials, things you must believe, or you are not a Christian?**

Examples: a. If someone denies that Jesus Christ is God they can't be a Christian. That Christ is God is essential to your salvation. b. Or if someone denies the Virgin birth of Jesus they can't be a Christian. The Virgin birth is essential to his work...as he had to be a perfectly pure man.

**4. So since there are essentials, you have to distinguish between what is (and hold to them) and what is not (you must hold to them), but you don't go to hell if you don't believe those lesser doctrines.**

**5. Since there are essential doctrines, this means that elders and fathers must teach these truths to their charges, just as Jesus explicitly commanded in the Great Commission.** This is a most important application of this Catechism question. 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 that the disciples were not commissioned 委任 to memorize the exact words that Jesus spoke, but he told his disciples to say what he said...to teach his teachings... This is doctrinal teaching 教义上的教导

6. One further point on this: The Bible makes it clear that when Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts Chapter 2) that the people were "cut to the heart 扎心" In other words, they were convicted of their sins and believed. The essentials of the Gospel had to have been pointedly preached in order for this to happen. Failure to do so brings judgment on the shepherds. Ezekiel 34. Nothing "wishy-washy." Even lesser truth you must teach, but you must not avoid any of these fundamental truths. Anything that would lead your children or members to be saved or sanctified cannot be avoided under any circumstances 任何情况 The Apostle John gave us a good example of this.

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.

7. No Christian might doubt the words of the Apostles' Creed. The Apostle Creed summarizes the Gospel.

### **Codification 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? If you don't have a statement of what you believe how can you hold people accountable 有责任 for what they are supposed to believe? How can the church discipline others for failing to hold to the Gospel truth? (Don't you have to make clear rules for your children so they know why you discipline them if they break the rules?) Again, how can you know that a member is denying a fundamental of the faith? Christ's honor 尊荣 is at stake. He is the Redeemer and he decides what you must know and believe. He demands the highest standards. And he gives those standards to you.

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 浮动的教义, and discipline 纪律 soon disappears. Remember, Muslims believe in Jesus, but you don't believe the same about Jesus. Mormons believe in Jesus, but your belief in Jesus is certainly different from theirs. It absolutely is.

2. Are there examples of Confessions or creeds in the Bible? Absolutely. There are Confessions – as in a written creed, and there are confessions where you were trained to say what you believe.

1 Timothy 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.

In both of these cases, you can surely see that part of the confession had to do with the work of Jesus Christ and was to be done publicly. Secret confessions were not useful to the church.

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

1 John 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, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

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 confess who Jesus is (Savior)...that he was the Messiah (Christ)...that he was incarnate...God and man...and in his death and resurrection...And his resurrection implies his glory. You will notice that in the forms we use for membership, you have to give ascent to the doctrines that are taught in this church – the Three Forms of Unity and the Apostles' Creed. If you think they are faulty confessions, you may not be a member.

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 neatly divided into the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Godhead's function and 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 man. He is rightly called the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam or Son of Adam.

6. With all of these things as essential, doesn't it make it ridiculous when people pretend they can preach for a few minutes and lead people to Christ? Isn't it obvious that for all of these things to be taught, understood, and believed, that it would take much time? Be warned against easy-believism“轻易相信主义”. Be patient when people are stubborn to respond. Keep preaching.

### **Conclusion:**

You must know what the essentials of the faith are and have it codified in order to properly know what to believe to be saved and to be sanctified. Further, having a codified faith, you will be able to teach what you believe. Further, having a confessional standard is essential because it is a standard for discipline for those who are delinquent 失效- straying 偏离 from truth. One sad reality is that those who reject having and holding to Confessions are often frustrated, struggling to say what they really believe and what the essentials of the faith are, and they do not discipline in the churches. When there is no discipline, Christians set a poor example for the world. And this causes Christians to rob themselves of Christ blessings, and they rob Christ of his rightful glory.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Love you Confessions. Thank God for them. But Confessions mean nothing unless they are known and believed. Make it a part of your life to know doctrines...the important doctrines. Memorize those doctrines if you can. Learn about the nature of the atonement. Learn about how sinful you are. Learn how holy God is and the great chasm 大割裂 that exists between God and man and how Jesus bridged the gap. Learn of your utter helplessness in pleasing God. Remember, knowing and believing doctrines will make your love increase – love for man and Christ. And carefully and persistently share this good news with those who are in sin. Concentrate of the important things...not on frivolous matters. And let the Gospel go out in power.

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...the promised Messiah...God who took on human flesh to redeem those who were in darkness. May you recognize this truth today and may you call upon God to be your Father on account of the work of Jesus Christ. Amen.