

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 (The Heidelberg Catechism 海德堡问答, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dort), he may not know anything about these significant historical confessions. Many Christians don't understand why we have confessions in the first place. Some might piously 虔诚 look at you and say: "I have no creed 信条 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.*** Christians are expected to have confessional statements... Christians always have had confessional statements. Sometimes they are simpler and others more complex. But it is evidence of a weak church when we have not confessional statements.

Why am I raising this topic about having confessional statements? Well, last time we said that **you must have faith...** and that **faith is based on knowledge.** If you don't have knowledge you can't believe. That's where confessions come in. Confessions teach.

Our headings are:

Essentials 要点 of what you must Believe

Codification 法典编纂 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.**

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 – 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 that **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 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 at least weekly in the Scriptures, and it is a good thing, but we don't have an explicit command to do so.

3. There are things 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 at the same level as an essential of the faith. So Christians are not 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 that the one who doesn't allow God to mark his baby will go to hell.

4. So the question: What are essentials, things you must believe to be a Christian? Examples:

a. Christ is God. If someone denies that Jesus Christ is God he can't be a Christian. That Christ is God is essential to your salvation.

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

5. Since there are essential doctrines, this means that elders and fathers must teach these truths to their charges, as Jesus explicitly commanded in the Great Commission.

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 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.**

6. One further point: When Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2) The people were "cut to the heart." IOW, 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." **Anything that would lead your children or members to be saved and sanctified cannot be avoided.** Apostle John gave us a good example.

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 Charles Price argues. Faith is **knowledge** and **hearty trust** in who Jesus is and what he has done.

6. No Christian may doubt the words of the Apostles' Creed. It summarizes Gospel essentials.

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 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?**) He is the 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 漂浮的 doctrines, and discipline 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? Absolutely. 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.

In these cases, 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 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 agreement to the doctrines that are taught in this church – the Three Forms of Unity and the Apostles' Creed使徒信经.

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 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.

6. With all of these things as essential, isn't it ridiculous when people pretend they can preach for a few minutes and lead people to Christ? Isn't it obvious that for these things to be taught, understood, and believed, that it would take much time? Be warned against easy-believe-ism. Be patient when people are stubborn to respond. Keep teaching. Keep praying for the Word of God to sink in.

Conclusion:

You must know the essentials of the faith and have it codified in order to properly know what to believe to be saved and sanctified. Having a codified faith, you will be able to teach what you believe. Having a confessional standard is essential because it is a standard for discipline for those who are delinquent 违法的-straying 误闯 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 practice ecclesiastical discipline. When there is no discipline, Christians set a poor example for the world. And this causes Christians to rob themselves of Christ blessings, and rob Christ of his rightful glory.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. 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 赎罪. Learn about how sinful and helpless you are. Learn who holy God is and the great chasm 断层 that exists between God and man and how Jesus bridged the gap.

2. Remember, knowing and believing doctrines will make your love increase – love for man and 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 – Jesus and his work...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... 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.