

An Introduction to the Reformed Faith

Nov. 5. Introduction
Nov. 12. History and variations
Nov. 19. Heidelberg Catechism
Nov. 26. Westminster Standards

Dec. 3. Salvation, Election, Predestination, Providence
Dec. 10. Covenant; Christ as Prophet, Priest, & King
Dec. 17. Culture and Society

1540s-50s. Lutherans divide between “Gnesio” (no deviations from Luther) and “Philippists” (willing to modify a little, following Philip Melancthon)

1557-76. Frederick III the Pious, Elector of Palatinate, is a serious Protestant of Melancthon type. Early in his reign his pastors and university professors argue aggressively over the Lord’s Supper. September 1559: Frederick dismisses the foremost Gnesio-Lutheran and Reformed champions and writes to Melancthon for advice (Melancthon: follow 1 Cor. 10:16 in emphasizing *koinonia* with body of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.) Melancthon dies shortly thereafter; influences of Geneva and Zurich increase. June 1560: Frederick chairs public debate over Lord’s Supper. Thereafter he retreats from Lutheran positions; he appoints Caspar Olevianus as chief city pastor and Zacharias Ursinus, who had studied with Melancthon, as head theologian at the university. Early 1562: Frederick charges a committee to write a new catechism; Jan. 1563, new catechism (in German) published. Two new editions by the end of the year (2nd and 3rd add Q&A no. 80), also editions in Latin and Dutch (first English translation in 1572).

1566. Revolt of the Netherlands begins against Spanish Habsburgs. Many editions of Catechism re-printed for Dutch exiles fleeing to north of Amsterdam

Outline.

1-2. Our only comfort 3-21. Sin, judgment, redemption, and faith
22-58. The Apostle’s Creeds 59-85. True faith, the sacraments, baptism, the Lord’s Supper
86-115. Good works and the Ten Commandments 116-129. Prayer (the Lord’s Prayer)

(1) **What is your only comfort in life and in death?** That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

(2) **What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?** Three things. First, the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption.

(12) **According to God’s righteous judgment we deserve punishment both now and in eternity: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God’s favor?** God requires that his justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.

(15) **What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then?** A. One who is a true and righteous human, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.

(16) **Why must the mediator be a true and righteous human?** God’s justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for sin; but a sinful human could never pay for others.

(17) **Why must the mediator also be true God?** So that the mediator, by the power of his divinity, might bear the weight of God’s wrath in his humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

(18) **Then who is this mediator— true God and at the same time a true and righteous human?** Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given to us to completely deliver us and make us right with God.

(21) **What is true faith?** True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted,

not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.

(26) **What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?** That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ the Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world. God is able to do this because he is almighty God and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

(27) **What do you understand by the providence of God?** The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty— all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

(28) **How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?** We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love. For all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

(32) **But why are you called a Christian?** Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity.

(44) **Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?** To assure me during attacks of deepest dread and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from hellish anguish and torment.

(69) **How does holy baptism remind and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?** In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing and with it promised that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, that is, all my sins.

(74) **Should infants also be baptized?** Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people, and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

(75) **How does the holy supper remind and assure you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all his benefits?** In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of him. With this command come these promises: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup shared with me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.

(80) **How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?** The Lord's Supper declares to us that all our sins are completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself accomplished on the cross once for all. It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ, who with his true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father where he wants us to worship him. But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present under the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.

(116) **Why do Christians need to pray?** Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking God for them.