

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

The Westminster Standards (Confession, Shorter Catechism, Larger Catechism) appeared after more than a century of English and Scottish effort to provide one doctrinal standard for the entire nation.

Henry VIII (from 1530s-1547): Protestant vs. Catholic. **Edward VI** (1547-53): How much reform? **Mary** (1553-58): keeping Protestantism alive. **Elizabeth** (1558-1603): Presbyterians vs. the Queen's church. **James I** (1603-25): Puritans vs. the King's church. **Charles I** (1625-1649): Puritans and Parliament vs. the King's church. **Interregnum/Oliver Cromwell** (1640-1660): Presbyterians vs. Congregationalists vs. Anglicans vs, radicals.

1639 and following. Bishops' War (England vs. Scotland)

Dec. 1640. Root & Branch petition (City of London) demanding thorough reform

Dec. 1, 1641. Grand Remonstrance to King, calling for a synod to address theological and ecclesiastical grievances

Apr. 1642. Long Parliament begins selecting members for synod.

May 13, 1643. Bill introduced in Parl. asking for synod (King objects)

June 12, 1643. Over King's protest, both houses of Parl. approve a synod

July, 1643. The Assembly convenes as civil war breaks out (Parl. vs. the King). Eventually about 140 participants, including 30 members of Parl. (most English but some Scots; most Presbyterians but some Congregationalists)

Aug. 21, 1644. Effort to reform 39 Articles abandoned; work on a new confession begins

Dec. 4-7, 1646. Confession presented to Parl., but Parl. wants prooftexts

Apr. 26, 1647. Confession with prooftexts sent to Parl.

Aug. 27, 1647. Church of Scotland adopts the confession and later also the catechisms.

Nov. 1647. Shorter Catechism to Parl., later also the Larger Catechism as well as a Form of Government and Directory of Worship (both Presbyterian)

Jan. 30, 1649. King Charles executed

Westminster Confession: I-V (Scripture, Trinity, Providence). VI-XVIII (Salvation). XIX-XXVI (Christian Life). XXVII-XXIX (Sacraments). XXX-XXXIII (Miscellaneous).

This and all other statements of Christian faith in perspective: XXI.iii (p. 867). This confession has also been altered and supplemented.

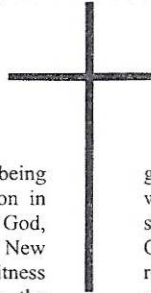
Alterations: XXII (Civil Magistrate), XXIV (Marriage and Divorce). XXV (Church), XXXI (Synods and Councils)

Additions: The EPC includes articles on the Holy Spirit and the Free Offer of the Gospel that were added by the northern Presbyterian Church in 1903.

Larger Catechism (7). **What is God?** God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. (Compare Sh. Cat. 4. p. 869).

(13). **What hath God especially decreed concerning angels and men?** God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory; and, in Christ, hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means thereof; and also, according to his sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of his own will (whereby he extendeth or withholdeth favor as he pleaseth) hath passed by, and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise or the glory of his justice. (Compare Sh. Cat. 7, pp. 869-70).

THE ESSENTIALS



All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!

2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, become flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.

3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.

4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free

grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.

6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)

7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

*In Essentials.....Unity
In Non-Essentials..... Liberty
In All ThingsCharity*

For more information on the history and place of the “Essentials” in the life of the EPC, see the explanatory statement on the reverse side of this page.