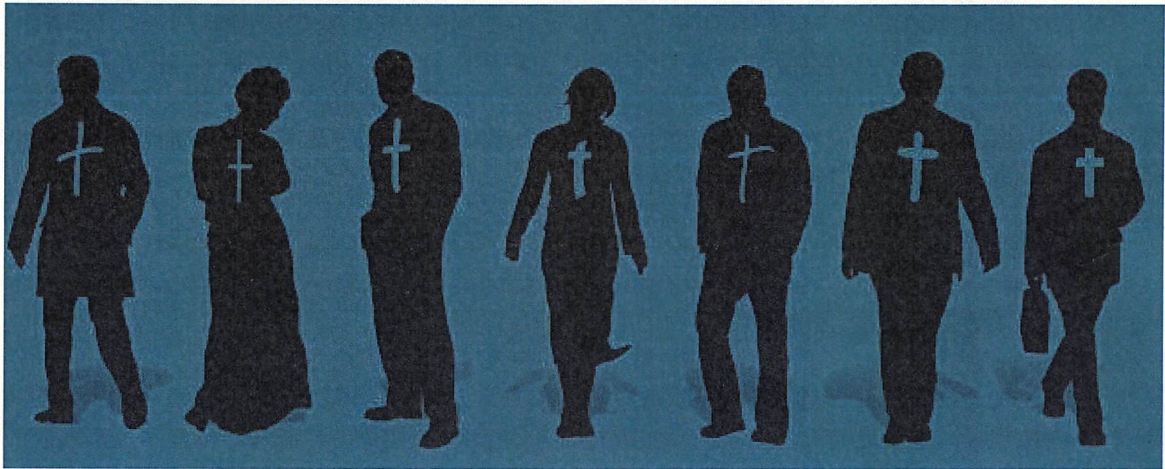


Publicly Professing Christ



A Primer

Publicly Professing Christ: A Primer

Jesus calls us to be His disciples. Jesus says, "Whoever would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). If we are going to be self-denying, world defying, suffering and dying followers of Jesus Christ, it's crucial that we know *what* we believe and *why* we believe it. This is why it's good for us to review together the basics of the Christian faith in preparation for your upcoming elders' interview and your public profession of faith.

(Personal Written Testimony) – one page

Faith requires content. If it has no content, it's not a genuine faith. Jesus says, "And this is eternal life, that they *know* You as the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Peter also writes that we must "be able to give *an account* (*apologia* – a defense) of the hope within us to anyone who asks" (I Peter 3:15). This is why we have taken years to train you in the Christian faith. In order that you may be able to give an account of the faith, hope, and love within you, let's review some basics.

Let's begin with our confessional standards: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

Q1. What year was the Heidelberg catechism written? Who wrote the catechism? Who commissioned its writing? What are its three main sections? Who wrote the Belgic Confession and when was it written? When were the Canons of Dort written? Why were they written? What is a common way to remember the outline of the Canons of Dort?

A1. The Heidelberg Catechism was written in 1563. Its authors were Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus. It was commissioned by Elector Fredrick the Third. It has three main sections: Sin, Salvation, and Service. The Belgic Confession, authored by Guido DeBres, was written in 1561. The Canons of Dort were written between 1618 and 1619. They were created to combat an error in the church that undermined God's initiative and outworking in salvation. A common way to remember the Canons of Dort outline is the acronym TULIP, standing for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement; Irresistible Grace and Preservation of the Saints.

Q2. Many churches have the motto: "No creed but Christ" or "No creed but the Bible." Why study the Heidelberg Catechism? Why not just study the Bible?

A2. The Heidelberg Catechism (and our other confessional statements) provide a faithful summary and overview of what the Bible teaches and aid us in understanding its contents. They function somewhat as a road map in navigating through the Bible, and in this way they provide a "birds-eye view" of its core teachings.

Q3. Let's begin with God. Does God exist? How do you know?

A3. Yes, God exists! God has clearly revealed Himself in creation - in his world! (Romans 1; Psalm 19) and in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21)

Q4. The Bible teaches that God made all living creatures, including Adam and Eve - who were the crown of His creative activity. In the beginning Adam and Eve were perfect, but through the instigation of the devil and the exercise of their own free will, they then rebelled against God and committed sin (Genesis 3:1-7). What is sin?

A4. Sin is a breaking of God's commandments (Romans 7:7) as well as an unwillingness and inability to carry out what they demand (Romans 7:18, 19).

Q5. Are you a sinner? How do you know?

A5. Yes. I know I'm a sinner because both God's law and my own personal experience tell me this every day (Romans 7:7-25).

Q6. Why must God punish sin?

A6. God must punish sin because He is a holy and just God. As a *holy* God (Isaiah 6:1-3) He is morally pure and distinguished from all that is creaturely. As a *just* God (1 Chronicles 13:1-11) He cannot ignore sin. He must justly judge it, rendering due punishment.

Q7. What are Total Depravity, Total Inability, and Absolute Depravity?

A7. The principle of "Total Depravity" states that we are sinful in every part of our being (Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:9-18). Total Depravity therefore deals with the *extent* of sin. The principle of "Total Inability" states that we are spiritually and morally dead and thus unable to save ourselves from sin (Ephesians 2:1-5). Total Inability therefore deals with the *depth* of sin. Both of these differ from the principle of "Absolute Depravity", which describes a being which is as thoroughly evil as it can possibly be. This is applicable to those dwelling in the demonic realm, but not to human beings.

Q8. Where did our sinful condition originate?

A8. It came from our first parents - Adam and Eve.

Q9. What is original sin? What does the word "impute" mean?

A9. Original sin is the *sinful nature* in which we are conceived and born due to the sin of Adam and Eve imputed to us (Romans 5:18,19; I Corinthians 15:21). The word "impute" means to "lay to one's account."

Q10. What is the penalty for sin?

A10. The penalty for sin is physical and spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Q11. Why do we need Jesus to save us from our sin?

A11. Because Jesus alone is qualified to save us from the penalty, power, and guilt of sin.

Q12. Why must Jesus be God? Why must he also be Man?

A12. Jesus must be God in order to offer the perfect sacrifice that God requires (Hebrews 7:26). He must also be *God* in order to shoulder the wrath of a holy and just God against sin (Nahum 1:6). Jesus must be *Man* because the human nature which sinned must make satisfaction for sin (Hebrews 2:14-16). We cannot pay for our own sin because we are neither holy nor are we able to endure God's wrath against sin.

Q13. How is Jesus revealed in both the Old and New Testaments?

A13. He is revealed in prophecies (over 300 of them in the Old Testament), types (prophets, priests and kings), covenant promises such as God's promise to Abraham that "in him all the nations would be blessed" (Genesis 12) and to David that he would "never lack a descendent to sit on the throne" (2 Samuel 7), temple offerings (countless bloody animal sacrifices), and in the Law itself, whose demands we are unable to keep, thereby requiring a Savior who can fulfill them for us.

Q14. What must we do to be saved?

A14. Repent of our sins and believe in Christ (Luke 26:46, 47; Acts 16:31).

Q15. What does it mean to repent?

A15. To repent means to be sorry for sin, hate it, confess it in the name of Christ, turn from it, and resolutely resolve not to sin again (Psalm 32; 51; 130).

Q16. What elements make up true faith? Can you lose your faith? Why or why not?

A16. True faith consists of an accurate knowledge of the gospel and a heartfelt conviction that Jesus personally died for me (Romans 10:9, 10; Hebrews 11:1). One can lose a false (ignorant or temporary) faith (Mark 4:1-20) but one cannot lose a true faith (1 Peter 1:3-5). The reason for this is because the Holy Spirit who indwells us is also the One who seals us (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and preserves us through His power (Philippians 1:6).

Q17. What is a covenant? With whom has God established His covenant throughout history? Who initiates the covenant? How do we keep covenant with God? How do we break covenant with God? What is the comfort of being covenanted with God?

A17. A covenant is a formal bond of friendship and love between God and believers in Christ along with their children (Genesis 17:1-7). God initiates His covenant with His people and His people are required to live a life of faith and obedience. Unrepentant faithlessness and disobedience constitute covenant

breaking. The comfort of being covenanted to God is that He is our God who promises to love and bless us in this life and the life to come.

Q18. The Apostles Creed explains the person and work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What work do we associate with the Father? With the Son? And with the Holy Spirit?

A18. With the Father we associate the works of creation and providence. The Son is associated with the work of redemption. And the Holy Spirit is associated with the works of regeneration and sanctification.

Q19. Define the Trinity.

A19. The Trinity refers to God as One God who exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Q20. What is the providence of God?

A20. Providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God through which He rules and governs all things, so that nothing in this world comes about by chance. All things come from God's Fatherly hand (Psalm 104; Ecclesiastes 7:14; Matthew 10:29, 30; Acts 17:24-28).

Q21. Does God also will evil? Why does God permit evil?

A21. Yes. God is not the author of evil (James 1:13) but evil does exist (sometimes mysteriously) in His overall plan for His creation (Ecclesiastes 7:14). God permits evil for a number of reasons: to discipline us, to teach us obedience, to teach us a greater dependence upon Him, to humble us, and to bring about some greater blessing for us. Sometimes evil happens in God's plan for reasons known only to God.

Q22. What does the name Jesus mean? What does the name Christ mean?

A22. Jesus means "Savior", and Christ means "Anointed One". Jesus is our Lord's personal name and Christ is our Lord's official name (pointing to His office/calling as prophet, priest and king).

Q23. What three offices does Jesus have? What three offices do we have and how do we carry them out?

A23. Jesus has the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. We as Christians and imitators of Christ also have the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. As prophets we confess Christ's name personally and before others. As priests we are to live a life of self-sacrificial service before God. As kings we are to rule with Christ over His creation and in time reign with Him for all eternity.

Q24. What does it mean that we are adopted children of God?

A24. To be adopted children of God means that we have been taken from one family (the family under the direction of Satan) and placed into another family (the family of God) (Romans 8:15, 16). This occurs by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Q25. Why did Jesus have to be conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary?

A25. Jesus needed to be conceived by the Holy Spirit to ensure His divinity and sinlessness and He needed to be born of the Virgin Mary in order to ensure His humanity – both were required for Jesus to be our qualified Savior.

Q26. Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn't He simply have suffered for our sins?

A26. The reason why Jesus as our sin-bearer had to die, and not merely suffer for our sins, is because while His suffering reflected the consequence of sin His death reflected the penalty of sin. Sin doesn't result only in suffering; the due payment and penalty for sin is death. "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Q27. Why did Christ have to die by way of crucifixion?

A27. According to the Bible, crucifixion was an accursed way of dying (as opposed to death by hanging or stoning). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

Q28. For whom did Christ die?

A28. Christ died for all those whom the Father gave Him (John 6:37, 39).

Q29. What do we confess when we say that Christ descended into hell?

A29. We confess that Christ suffered all the torments of hell for His people, including pain in body, torment of soul, darkness, isolation, being forsaken by His Father, and the wrath of God. (Psalm 22; Matthew 26:36-46; 27:32-50).

Q30. What three benefits do we receive from Christ's resurrection?

A30. Jesus proved by His resurrection that He is a living Savior, providing us **forgiveness and right standing** with God. By the power with which He raised Christ from the dead, God gives us the power to be raised to new life and spiritual growth in this life, which is **sanctification**. Jesus's bodily resurrection is the **guarantee of our own bodily resurrection** one day.

Q31. What is the great resurrection chapter of the Bible?

A31. I Corinthians 15.

Q32. Why is it necessary that we believe that Christ rose from the dead?

A32. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Jesus is a liar because He said He would rise from the dead. The apostles too are therefore liars, our faith is in vain, we are still in our sins, and we have no guarantee that we will rise from the dead one day (I Corinthians 15:3-11).

Q33. What three benefits do we receive from Christ's ascension?

A33. He intercedes for us before our Father in heaven (Hebrews 7:26), He is preparing a place for us to join Him one day (John 14:1-3), and He has poured out His Spirit so that we can be empowered to seek first the things of God (Acts 2).

Q34. If Jesus should ask you why He should allow you into heaven, what will you say?

A34. I am not worthy! But by Your grace, O God, and through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ I am forgiven and clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It's not on the basis of who I am or what I have done that I merit heaven, but it is who Jesus is and what He has done that merits for me my place in heaven (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Q35. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A35. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is co-eternal, co-essential and co-powerful with the Father and the Son.

Q36. What is regeneration?

A36. Regeneration (which John calls being "born again") is the infusion of new life into spiritually, morally dead people through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit (John 3:1-8). Regeneration or spiritual rebirth results in a repentance and faith in Christ.

Q37. What is sanctification?

A37. Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Spirit in those whom He has regenerated. Over time this work makes them more holy in heart and behavior (Romans 6:5-14).

Q38. List some other facets of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

A38. These would include regeneration, sanctification, convicting of sin, spiritual gifting, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.), assurance that we belong to God, and both sealing and preserving those in whom dwells. The Holy Spirit is vitally important!

Q39. What is justification?

A39. Justification is an act of God whereby through genuine faith in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven and we are clothed with Christ's righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). Thus, we are *declared* to be in right standing with God. Though we are sinners, God declares us to be righteous not because we are righteous but because of Christ's righteousness - which is laid to our account. "For our sake He made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Q40. Why can't the good we do make us right with God?

A40. The good we do cannot make us right with God because even our best deeds are stained with sin and thus are unable to meet the perfect requirements of a holy God (Isaiah 6:1-7; Romans 3:9-20).

Q41. What are sacraments? How many sacraments do we have? Why do we have the sacraments?

A41. The sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see that make us understand more clearly the promises of the gospel (Romans 4:11). We have two sacraments: baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28). The purpose of the sacraments is to help us understand more clearly the promises of the gospel and help us to remember what Jesus has done for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Through participation in the sacraments our faith is strengthened.

42) Q. Why do we baptize babies?

A42. We baptize babies because they are so cute. No! We baptize babies because they (along with their Christian parents) belong to God's covenant and are members of His church. The water in baptism is God's mark upon them and God's sign and seal to them that all the promises of the covenant (such as the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) are for them (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:37-39).

Q43. What do the water in baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, point to?

A43. The water in baptism points to the washing away of our sins through faith in Jesus Christ. The bread and wine in the Lord's Supper point to the pierced body and shed blood of Jesus Christ given for the forgiveness of sins.

Q44. What are the keys of the kingdom?

A44. The keys of the kingdom are the means whereby the kingdom of God is opened to those who are repentant and believing, and closed to those who are unrepentant and unbelieving. There are two keys: the preaching of the gospel and church discipline (Matthew 16:19; John 20:22, 23).

Q45. If we are saved by grace through faith, why must we still do good works?

A45. Our works demonstrate that the faith we have in Jesus is a living faith (James 3:14-17). Our works also show God just how thankful we are for His grace toward us (1 Peter 2:5-10). Our works finally provide a powerful witness to the nations of the world that Jesus is real and that they are to turn to Him for forgiveness, peace and life (Matthew 5:14-16).

Q46. Why is the church important? If you were to move to another area and you had to search for a church, what would you look for?

A46. The church is important because it's the place that God has chosen for people to come to faith in Christ and grow in Christ. Apart from the church we die. It's important to know what to look for in a church when you move to a new area. (You'd be surprised how many people don't know what to look for in a church!) Things to look for include: Christ-centered, faithful and applicatory preaching; the pure administration of the sacraments; genuine Christian fellowship and meaningful relationships; a praying community; God-centered worship; a willingness to exercise church discipline; solid leadership and the faithful shepherding of elders; and a participation in God's mission to the world (Acts 2:42-47).

Q47. It's not just enough to know what we believe, nor is it enough to truly believe what we've been taught. We must also **profess and speak openly** about what we believe. Why must we profess our faith publically?

A47. We must profess our faith openly because the Bible never speaks about a faith that is merely private. Our faith must always be openly confessed (Romans 10:9, 10) with courage and joy. It's also important to openly confess our faith so that our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ may hear and see and know that our hearts are committed to Christ with them before joining them at the Lord's Table.

Q48. When a person publicly professes their faith in Christ, they become a professing member of the church. List some privileges and responsibilities that come with church membership.

A48. These would include participation in the Lord's Supper, voting on important matters at congregational meetings, the responsibility of contributing to the ministry of the church through the exercise of your gifts, and the commitment and love of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Q49) Look at the form for the public profession of faith on page 132 of the Psalter-Hymnal. It asks four questions.

First, do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second, do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed to you in your baptism, and do you confess that you humble yourself before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourself, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third, do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to put to death your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth, do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

Are you able to answer these questions with a sincere and joyful “yes?”

Lastly, recite Question and Answer One of the Heidelberg Confession

Question 1 - “What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

Answer 1 - “That I am not my own but I belong, in 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 heavenly Father. In fact, all things must work together for me and my salvation. Because I belong to Him Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and able to live for Him.”