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What do you really need to know about God?

Our understanding of God determines our response to him. If we see him as an angry, demanding tyrant, we will not love him. If we view him as the jolly, Santa-Claus type, we will not take him seriously. And if we see him as a weakling who helplessly watches his world self-destruct, we will not trust him. To get along with God we need a clear picture of who he really is.

Some Possible Answers

God is almighty. God is Spirit. He needs no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no hands to act. Unlimited by time or space, he has no beginning and no end. He can do whatever he wants and be wherever he pleases. Nothing and no one can stand in his way. He always accomplishes what he sets out to do and leaves no loose ends. He is so powerful that our lives and our futures are fully in his hand.

God is the Great I Am. His covenant name, I AM WHO I AM, assures us that God always remains faithful to the promises he makes to us because he always stays the same. He will not and cannot lie, cheat, change his mind, or break his promises. We can fully rely on everything he tells us. Because receiving his promises is worth every sacrifice, we venture out in faith, doing what he tells us to do. He is the one sure thing in our lives.

God is triune. As three sides make up one triangle, so Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make up the one true God. Though we cannot fully grasp it, that mystery makes us see God for who he really is and what he does for us.

God is holy. God lives in unapproachable light. As sinful, imperfect creatures we can never reach God on our own. Nor will his justice allow God to sweep our sins and disobedience under the rug. We cannot coast along in life without seriously dealing with our relationship to him. By ignoring his holiness we commit spiritual suicide. But like a powerful bleach, his complete purity holds out to us the promise that he can make us clean like himself. If we believe, he will wash us in the blood of his Son.

God is love. The deepest mystery we discover about God is his all-embracing love by which he binds us to himself. As a baby's life depends completely on the loving care of his parents, so we depend with our whole being on God's love. In John 3:16 we discover how deeply God cares for us: "For God so

loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The Church Says

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

(Apostles' Creed)

Honest Question

Where have you let your picture of God get lopsided?

Check It Out

Exodus 3:13-17; John 1:1-8; John 3:13-21

How has your view of God changed over time?

Why is he your only Savior?

We Christians would get along much better with others if we dropped our claim that Jesus is the only Savior of the world. Why not play football with Hindus, Humanists, and New Agers—all of whom believe that we can find our way back to God through many different paths? Jesus clearly rejects this "simple" solution. "I am the way and the truth and the life," he tells us. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Some Possible Answers

because I cannot save myself. Most religions teach that we can save ourselves by meditation, good works, or other achievements. The Bible explodes this myth. Anything we do to gain our own salvation is too little, too late. We cannot crawl back to God on our own. He must reach down to bring us back to himself.

because only Jesus comes from the Father. Regardless of their boasts, all other religious leaders are only sinful people who need God to save them as much as we do. Only Jesus came from heaven to bridge the gulf between God and us. He warns: "All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:8-9).

because only God can bear the punishment. I deserve. No one except Jesus could ever shoulder the awful punishment our sins deserve. Only his divine power made him able to endure it for us all.

Because he alone is sinless. No one descended from Adam and Eve escapes the rot of sin. We inherit it from them like a genetic disease. Our sins disqualify even the best of us from saving others because we cannot even save ourselves. God had to break through the hopeless chain of human failure. Only the One conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary could break it. He alone stands as the spotless Lamb of God who alone is worthy to take our place.

Because God will not let other creatures pay for my sins. God's justice demands that only a human representative can stand in our place. Animal sacrifices never for sin. Like a check, they only held out the promise of real payment at some future time. In all fairness, only someone who was

really one of us could shoulder our punishment. Only the blood of Jesus would do.

He's all I need. Paul writes: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things" (Col. 1:19-20). Jesus is our One and only.

The Church Says

Can we pay this debt ourselves?

Certainly not.

Actually, we increase our guilt every day.

(Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 13)

Can another creature—any at all—pay this debt for us?

No.

To begin with,

God will not punish another creature

for what a human is guilty of.

Besides,

no mere creature can bear the weight

of God's eternal anger against sin

and release others from it.

(Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 14)

Hotseat Question

If you reject other faiths, are you narrow-minded?

Check It Out

John 14:1-6; Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 7:22-28



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What does the Holy Spirit do for you?

Because the Holy Spirit points away from himself to Christ, we could easily overlook the crucial role he plays in our lives. This question asks us to identify some ways we experience his vital, saving work.

Some Possible Answers

He's my link to Christ. Like power lines transmit electrical energy from the generator station to our homes, so the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Jesus' saving work to us. By living in our hearts, the Spirit unites us with the risen, ascended Christ. Jesus promised: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

He fully assures me that I'm God's child. Paul says: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:15-16).

He gives me saving faith. Even with the best of intentions we cannot choose to believe the Bible. We can come to saving faith in Christ only through the Spirit's convicting power. He must melt our rock-hard hearts into hearts of flesh. He must perform in us the miracle of rebirth: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. . . . no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3-5).

He sanctifies me. Already in this life the Holy Spirit begins to purify us. He replaces our selfishness with the love of Christ. He replaces our despair with hope and our unbelief with true faith. He gives us gentleness, kindness, patience, and forgiveness. He makes us nail our old selves to Christ's cross and helps us walk in his footsteps. He makes us hate evil and love the good. One day he will remove completely our old nature and perfect the new. As the life-giver, he will remove all suffering, sin, and evil from us. He will fully make us what we already are in Christ: saints.

He makes me a living member of Christ's Church. Through all his gifts, and with love as the glue, the Holy Spirit molds us together into the new people of God. We do not remain individuals who stay separate and aloof from one another. Through the bond of love, the Spirit makes us share the resources he provides. We now work for the good of the whole body of Christ. By

making us interdependent the Spirit makes us the everlasting, close-knit family of God.

The Church Says

What do you believe concerning "the Holy Spirit"?

First, he, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God.

Second, he has been given to me personally, so that, by true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his blessings, comforts me, and remains with me forever.

(*Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 53*)

Hotseat Question

Where in your life do you most strongly resist the work of the Spirit? Why?

Check It Out

John 15:12-15; Acts 2:1-21; Galatians 5:13-26

You are here because of the Holy Spirit.

QUEST
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Why do you want to make public profession of faith in a Reformed denomination?

By saying yes to your Savior in a particular church, you are committing yourself to adult membership there. Out of all the many denominations and churches, you chose this one. Can you give some reasons for your choice?

Some Possible Answers

My parents raised me in this church. Unless we have definite reasons to make a break, it's probably a good idea to remain in the denomination in which we were raised. We don't pretend our church is the best, but we understand better how our church should grow in obedience to the Lord.

I like it here. While taste should not dictate which church we choose, it certainly plays a part. We can best serve and be served by a church in which we really feel at home.

Because this church has strong biblical preaching. Reformed preaching runs deep. Its power lies in its refusal to take shortcuts and cheap shots. It tries hard to explain the genuine intent of the Scriptures and apply it to our lives. Reformed preaching may not get high marks as entertainment, but it gives us solid spiritual food. It feeds us on Christ.

I agree with its teachings. The Reformed tradition shares the heart of the faith with all true churches. But we also have our own unique, doctrinal contribution to make to the rest of Christ's body. Our understanding of God's role in salvation, the meaning of sacraments, and the place of God's kingdom in this world sets us apart from other Christian traditions. Our interpretation of Scripture on such matters differs from theirs.

I like its strong covenantal emphasis. Reformed churches take God's covenant seriously. By baptizing infants, we recognize God's claim on our members from birth. We support parents in teaching their children the blessings and obligation of being God's kids. We provide a strong program of instruction to train young and old to serve our Lord better. And we supervise the spiritual development of our members through family visiting and Christian discipline.

I like its balance of Word and deed ministry. With the evangelicals, Reformed churches affirm the importance of evangelism. At the same time, we affirm with "mainline" churches the importance of helping the needy and poor in Christ's name. We do not see evangelism and diaconal work as opposites. We refuse to choose between being the hands or voice of Jesus: we want to be both.

The Church Says

This Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities . . . but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions.
(The Canons of Dort, Conclusion)

Hotseat Question

Which factor played the deciding role in your choice? Why?

Check It Out

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 John 4-11

Debate diff between professing faith and possessing faith.

