

What truths held by the Protestant reformers mean the most to you?

Through people such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, the Lord corrected his badly blundering church. These reformers urged church leaders to submit to the clear teachings of Scripture. Church leaders responded by rejecting the ideas the reformers set forth and expelling these "protestants" from the Rome-ruled church. As Reformed Churches, we stand in the tradition of these reformers. We hold dear the truths they mined from God's Word. Which of these truths speak most strongly to you?

Some Possible Answers

saved by grace alone. The Roman Church taught that Christ died only for our original sin. We somehow had to make up for our actual sins by doing good works, praying to saints, or having our souls purified in the fires of Purgatory.

Against the notion that we had to earn our own salvation to some degree, the reformers taught that Jesus paid the full price for all our sins. As Paul tells us, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:17)

Scripture alone is my rule for faith and life. The Roman Church taught that Christians had to obey the pope and church tradition in addition to the Bible.

The reformers denied this. They accepted only God's Word as our infallible guide. Whatever teaching or leadership the church provides must always stand clearly under Scripture's norm, the reformers said. And the apostles need no successor on earth to exercise their authority. The Word they proclaimed is enough. Through it Christ rules his people until he returns.

Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is all-sufficient for me. The Roman Church taught that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was only the beginning; his body had to be resacrificed every day by the priests. As the priests blessed the bread and wine, claimed Roman church leaders, these elements turned into the actual body and blood of the Lord.

The Reformers denied this. They saw the elements shared by believers as symbols pointing back to Golgotha. By that remembrance, through the Spirit's power, believers find fellowship with their risen Lord.

The sovereignty of God. The Reformers rediscovered the biblical confession of God's active rule over all things. God, they maintained, does not just sit around waiting to see what we might do with the pieces of our broken lives. He takes the initiative, binding our rebellious hearts and lives back to it. Far from relieving us of our responsibility, this doctrine calls us back to it. As Paul urges, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The Church Says

How are you right with God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.

(*Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 60*)

God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on [the] gospel testimony.

(*Heidelberg Catechism A. 84*)

The Lord's Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which he himself finished on the cross once and for all.

(*Heidelberg Catechism A. 80*)

All creatures are so completely in [God's] hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

(*Heidelberg Catechism A. 28*)

Hotseat Question

Was it worth splitting the church over these issues?

Check It Out

Job 42:1-6; Psalm 119:9-16; Philipians 3:7-11; Hebrews 10:10-18

QUEST
63

Can you name and briefly summarize the three Reformation creeds?

Along with the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, most Reformed churches share three statements of faith that arose during the time of the Reformation. These we call doctrinal standards, because we use them to distinguish Reformed teaching from non-Reformed teaching. Your church may call you, as a confessing member, to office and ask you to sign your agreement with these doctrinal standards. Can you name them and summarize their content?

Some Possible Answers

The Belgic Confession. A preacher named Guido de Brès wrote this confession in 1561 in Belgium, then still part of the Southern Netherlands. The Roman Catholic government had launched a smear campaign against the Reformed Church, accusing them of treason and heresy. In his confession de Brès clearly refutes these charges and states what Reformed Christians believe. De Brès' efforts failed to stop the persecution, and he himself was hanged. But the Reformed churches adopted a revised version of his beautiful testimony as their own.

We can outline this confession as follows:

- Articles 1-11: God and His Revelation
- 12-15: Creation and Fall
- 16-26: Christ and Salvation
- 27-35: Church and Government
- 36: Civil Government
- 37: Last Judgment

The Heidelberg Catechism. Zacharius Ursinus, a theology professor, and Caspar Olevianus, a court preacher, completed this catechism in 1563 at the request of Frederick III. Frederick was prince of the Palatinate province, of which Heidelberg was the capital.

The word *catechism* means "echo." Because few people could read or write in those days, the best way to teach was to have students echo back short answers, committing them to memory. The Heidelberg Catechism was written to help pastors teach the basics of the faith to youth. Later it was divided into fifty-two "Lords Days" for use in Sunday worship as well.

The Heidelberg Catechism divides into three main parts:

- Introductory Summary: Lords Day 1
- Part 1: Human Misery: Lords Days 2-4
- Part 2: Human Deliverance: Lords Days 5-31
- Part 3: Human Gratitude: Lords Days 32-52

Within this structure the catechism weaves four things new communicants were expected to know: the Apostolic Creed, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and The Lord's Prayer.

The Canons of Dort. The word *canon* in this context means a "rule of doctrine laid down by the church." In 1618-19 delegates from the Reformed churches met in the city of Dordrecht, the Netherlands, to settle a dispute over the teachings of a theologian named Jacob Arminius. These canons make up the official response of the synod in which it refutes his teachings.

The canons affirm five points of doctrine:

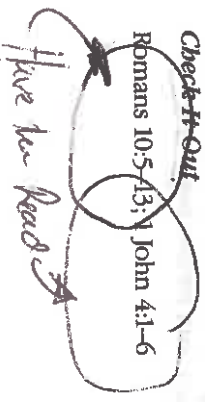
- T - Total Depravity (pt. II/IV)—sin has affected every part of our nature.
- U - Unconditional Election (pt. I)—God chose us in Christ, apart from our own merits or foreseen faith.
- I - Limited Atonement (pt. II)—Christ's death is sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect.
- I - Irresistible Grace (pt. III/IV)—We come to saving faith only because God breaks through our rejection of him.
- P - Perseverance of the Saints (pt. V)—God preserves his own, assuring them that they will always be his.

Hotseat Question

What should you do if you disagree with what these confessions teach?

Check-It-Out

Romans 10:5-13; John 4:1-6



QUEST
65

As Reformed people we emphasize the lordship of Christ over all of life. What does that mean to you?

Every Christian operates with a worldview—a way of understanding what life is all about. Many mentally carve the world up into two parts: the spiritual and the physical. They consider the spiritual all-important. That's the area of life concerning our relationship to God, our souls, and the afterlife. Our everyday existence has little lasting value. In contrast, the Reformed faith teaches that life is of one piece. God created all of it. He cares about all of it. Jesus saves all of it. And he rules not only our souls but also our bodies. What might this Reformed view mean for the way you look at the world?

Week 3 Readings

Some Possible Answers

That all of my life is sacred. Nothing in our lives is religiously neutral. Jesus is Lord of our tennis playing as well as our Bible reading. In every area of life he calls us to respond obediently to his command to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. This means that our daily work is and should be kingdom work. Not only preachers receive their calling from God. We all do: farmers, homemakers, plumbers, and artists. The other things we do in life—visit, play, eat, and study—we also dedicate to his service.

The real conflict in my life is between my old self and new self, not between body and soul. The real struggle in our lives is not between a polluted body and a perfect soul trapped inside it. Sin poisoned both. Yet together soul and body belong to Christ, and he will restore both of them.

The real battle rages between our old nature and our new nature. Our old, sinful self keeps trying to regain control of our life. But Jesus helps us nail it to the cross of self-denial. There it cannot harm us if we follow him—body and soul.

We need to extend Christ's claim into every area of life. We may not bottle the kingdom of heaven up behind solid oak church doors. Jesus asks us to represent him everywhere: in the marketplace, the theater, and the office. Our king calls us to action in every area of life—in politics, labor, technology, and the arts. All areas offer opportunities for communal Christian action and witness.

We recognize the crucial importance of Christian education to equip us for this life-embracing task. Parental instruction, church education, Christian schools and universities, are all ways in which we can equip God's ambassadors to live out their conviction that our whole world belongs to God.

The Church Says

- Your kingdom come means,*
- Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.*
- Keep your church strong, and add to it.*
- Destroy the devil's work;*
- destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word.*
- Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all.*

(Heidelberg Catechism A 123)

Hotseat Question

Where can you involve yourself in fruitful Christian action?

Check It Out

Romans 8:18–25; Ephesians 1:19–23; Colossians 1:15–23

He says we need to think us the way we now know the.