

The Christian Faith

The Christian faith can be expressed in few words or many words. The Bible, the book that God wrote, is a hefty volume. But it contains many short summaries of the Christian faith. Other good writings about the faith come in various sizes, from pamphlets to multi-volume works.

The summaries are short and sweet. We should want to learn all that God has told us in the Bible. That is a job for more than one lifetime. But we should not lose sight of the simple, straightforward, summary statements.

Over the years I have considered many outlines for presenting the Christian faith. Such an outline should include all the topics of the Bible. But it should be as straight and narrow as an arrow, always getting directly to the point. I keep coming back to a seven-point outline for the main topics of theology: God, World, Man, Christ, Word, Church, End.

If you can tell people what the Bible says on those seven topics, you can present the whole Christian faith, all Christian teaching. We cannot understand, define, or explain God perfectly. Much mystery remains, but the Bible speaks clearly enough for us to know about the true God and to trust Him for salvation. That is all we need to know.

Orthodox theologians have used many different outlines. That does not matter. What matters is the content.

In the Bible, God used a different outline than any of the above. In God's book, the basic arrangement is historical. The Bible records the facts of the faith in basically chronological order. Then it gives further explanations in other books. One should read first the historical books, then the prophetic books; first the Gospels, then the Epistles.

But what is missing from the outline suggested here? God, World, Man, Christ, Word, Church, End. That covers it all.

God: There is one and only one divine Being. But three Persons are each true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is present everywhere, knows everything, and can do anything. God is perfect. God is holy. God is just. God is loving.

World: God made the world out of nothing through His Word. That happened in six days about six thousand years ago. The world is not part of God and God is not part of the world. God made the world very good. Any problems in it are not His fault. God did not forget about the world after creating it. He governs and preserves it and blesses us in it every day.

Man: Man was made by God in the image of God. Man is body and soul/spirit. Man was created to love God totally and to love his neighbour as himself. But Adam and Eve, the parents of the whole human race, fell into sin, disobeying God. Now we are born sinful and are powerless to save ourselves. Man was created good and is still essentially good. But we are in the corrupt condition of sinfulness and commit many specific sins against God's Law (the Ten Commandments). We have deserved damnation.

Christ: God the Son became a true Man, Jesus Christ. True God and true Man, He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross for all human sin, in place of every sinner. He rose from the dead, proving that God has accepted His sacrifice and forgiven our sins. He reigns forever, and we are His forever.

Word: The Bible is the Word of God, written by God through men, and is completely true. The main teachings of the Bible are Law and Gospel. The Law proclaims God's wrath because of sin and condemns our sins. The Gospel proclaims God's grace because of Jesus and forgives our sins. The Gospel is proclaimed not only in preaching and teaching but also very significantly in Absolution, Baptism, and Communion. Through the Law, the Holy Spirit brings people to acknowledge their sinfulness and to know their need for forgiveness. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit brings people to trust that their sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake. The Gospel brings all spiritual blessings: the new birth to the new life of faith; growth in faith, hope, joy, peace, etc.; and the start and growth of love for God and the neighbour (Gospel motivation, sanctification).

Church: All believers in Christ and only believers in Christ are members of Christ's body, the church. Because we cannot look into one another's hearts, the church is invisible. Christ wants His people to be gathered locally around Word and Sacrament (Third Commandment). Through the local flock, God calls men to preach and teach, to administer the Sacraments with careful stewardship, and to exercise spiritual supervision over the flock.

End: When a human being dies, his soul/spirit goes to heaven or hell. Christ will visibly return to earth at the end of the world. He will raise all the dead and glorify all believers. Unbelievers will go to hell, body and soul, to suffer forever. Believers will go to heaven, body and soul, to praise God and to enjoy His presence forever.

That sums it up pretty well. Every Christian will see that many more specific statements are needed, especially about the Sacraments. Of course, every point would have to be proven by reference to Scripture alone. But that could all be done, and well done, with this outline.

This message is to be preached around the world to the end of the world. This message is to be preached for the salvation of the precious souls for whom Christ died. He died for all. We should want to proclaim this Word to all. That is what it is all about.