

# **ARM Prison Outreach International**

**"Ministers' Minute" Volume X Number 7**

**"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"**

**#2: "What the Christian Faith Is"**

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**Editor's Note:** This "MM" is an email sermon, the 7th of 2011 --115th overall-- in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This is the second message in our current series. It is my prayer that this message by my brother, Larry Farthing, will encourage you and honor God. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors!

-- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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## **ARM QUICK FACT:**

ARM Prison Outreach International's "Joplin Tornado fund" has helped a number of those hurt or damaged by the May storm. Every dollar -- 100% -- so designated will aid ARM's staff and volunteers who have suffered great losses in this calamity. Any excess received will be given to other Christians in the area who have suffered losses.

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**"COMMUNICATING OUR FAITH TO OUR WORLD"**

**#2: "What the Christian Faith Is"**

**SCRIPTURE:**

Jude 3

"...contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

Matthew 28:19-20

"...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**INTRO:**

You have heard people speak about "the Jewish faith," or "the Islamic faith," or "the Christian faith." Sometimes we hear the words "Jewish religion," or "Islamic religion," or "Christian religion." When they use the word "faith," or "religion," they are referring to a "belief system."

Only “the Jewish faith” and “the Christian faith” are divinely-revealed belief systems. The Islamic “faith” is of human origin, namely from a self-proclaimed prophet named Mohammed, born in 570 A.D.

Other “faiths” or “belief systems” of human origin are Buddhism, Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism.

Many contend that Christianity really isn’t a “religion” but a “relationship” with the one true God and Creator of all things, Who has revealed Himself to man through the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 reads: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways (That was Judaism.), but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son (That’s Christianity.), Whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.”

Jude 3 exhorts us to “contend” for the Christian faith, and Matthew 28:19- 20 commands us to “communicate” it to the world. Before we can “contend” for it and “communicate” it, we must know what “it” is.

Let me offer you a definition of “the Christian faith”:

“THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS A DIVINELY-REVEALED, BIBLE-BASED, CHRIST-CENTERED BELIEF SYSTEM BY WHICH WE LIVE IN THIS LIFE AND THROUGH WHICH WE HOPE FOR ETERNAL LIFE.”

Now, I hope you will memorize this definition (or at least something like it). But let me break “the faith” down for you into its component parts.

There are a number of ways of doing this. I’ve chosen to define and describe Christianity by the following five things...

First,

### **CHRISTIANITY BEGINS WITH “THE REALITY OF GOD.”**

There are three basic ways we become aware of God’s reality or existence, according to Paul’s letter to the Romans:

1. We are aware of the existence of God through innate knowledge.

We are born with an awareness of – and even a need to believe in – a higher power – a deity. This is borne out in people groups that have been isolated and cut off from the rest of the world, like the ancient Native Americans, the aborigines of Australia, and others.

2. We are aware of the existence of God through observance of creation.

When people observe the world in which they live – its order, its beauty, etc., they reason that there must be a creator. Paul wrote in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

3. We are aware of the existence of God through the word of God – the Bible.

Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, “...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” Some discover God by reading the Bible, others come to believe in Him by hearing it read and taught or preached. While His reality – His existence – may be sensed apart from the Bible, His true nature, how we can have a personal relationship with Him, and His will for our lives is only revealed through His written revelation.

So many in our world will not give in to their innate awareness, nor to what their eyes see, or to what the Bible says. We can only hope that they will pay attention to the message of our lives lived for Christ.

Second,

### **THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS CENTERED IN “THE PERSON OF CHRIST.”**

Here’s where Christianity and all other “faiths” really part company. While other faiths generally recognize Jesus as a prophet of God or a great moral teacher, only Christianity recognizes Him as the only begotten Son of God, whose death paid every man’s sin debt and who was raised from the dead to prove the reality of eternal life after death.

Only Christianity recognizes the truth of the gospel of John, chapter 1, where John says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made.....The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (vv. 1-3, 12, 14).

In other words, Christ is deity – He left the Trinity and came to earth as God in the flesh. He existed with (or alongside) God in the beginning; He existed long before He was born of the virgin named Mary. Unless you’re willing to believe this about the Person of Christ, you can’t be a Christian – not a real one – not a genuine biblical Christian.

Many in our world believe in God, but their belief about Jesus stops short of believing that He came to earth as God in the flesh. They believe He was a godly teacher, and they buy into His moral teachings, but they do not believe in Him as the Son of God and “the way” to God and “the truth” of God and “the life” of God. They

ignore his words: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Membership in a lot of so-called churches today does not require belief in the deity of Christ.

Those who believe in God must be introduced to Jesus as the Christ and invited to “receive Him” as their Lord and Savior.

Third,

### **CHRISTIANITY IS AIMED AT MEETING “THE NEED OF MANKIND.”**

This need is revealed throughout the Scriptures, but Ezekiel 18:4 says it about as straightforwardly as it can be said: “The soul who sins will die.” Isaiah 59:2 puts it: “...your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hid His face from you...”

Mankind has a sin problem. Sin is transgression of the law of God. It was sin that got Adam and Eve ejected from the Garden of Eden and that destroyed their relationship with God in the first place. It was sin that brought a punishing, cleansing worldwide flood to the earth. It was sin that brought about the Law of Moses and the system of sacrificial offerings. However, as Hebrews 9:9-10 explains, “...the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”

Paul explains in Romans 3:9 and 23: “...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.....for all have sinned...” And in 6:23: “...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So mankind’s need is atonement and forgiveness. We weren’t born with this need, but we were born with a human weakness that eventually caused us to sin. And that sin has destroyed our relationship with God and caused our relationship with Him to be destroyed. The old covenant of Judaism was a temporary fix until Christ came as a Mediator of a new covenant, which is Christianity. The message of Christianity is that Jesus’ death on the cross atoned for all the sins of all mankind, past, present, and future.

The people of our world are much like those of the ancient world, of whom the Bible says, “...did what was right in their own eyes.” They will not want to know about, let alone embrace, Christianity until they recognize that they are guilty of sin and separated from God, and, therefore, doomed to a Godless eternity. In other words, until they realize they are lost, they will not care whether or not they’re saved.

Fourth,

### **CHRISTIANITY RECOGNIZES “THE WORK OF CHRIST.”**

Paul explained in his letter to the Ephesians: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works...” (2:8-9).

In the religions of the world, it is believed that the ultimate can be achieved (whatever that ultimate might be) through self-discipline and good works. The message of Christianity is that nothing we can do is good enough to offset or cancel out our sin-debt. You might get off with community service or a hefty fine in a Garland County Court, but not in God’s court. In God’s court the debt has to be paid and paid in full.

This is where Jesus comes in. He lived a sinless life, so when He was unjustly condemned and executed, He was the sinless dying for the sinful. Peter explains: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed..., but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

This is what our world needs to know. Our world needs to know that Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty of their personal sins. People need to know that God has a pardon for everyone who will accept Jesus as Lord and Savior! As Peter said in Acts 4:12, “...salvation is found in no one else...” There just isn’t any other way!

Finally,

### **CHRISTIANITY CALLS FOR “A RESPONSE FROM EACH INDIVIDUAL.”**

Our pardon from God is free – we can’t buy it or do anything to earn it – but we must receive it; we must reach out and take it.

When this message was preached for the first time, in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem, Peter concluded the message by saying, “God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Thousands listening cried out, “What shall we do?” And Peter told them what they were to do. He said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

In other words, there was a prescribed response in order to receive the free gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. It was not, “Pray to receive Christ.” It was not, “Ask Jesus to come into your heart.”

As we read through the New Testament Scriptures, we find that people responded to the Christian message by:

1. Believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God;
2. Repenting of their sins – sorrowfully turning away from their sinful ways to live God’s way;

3. Confessing their belief in Jesus;
4. Being baptized; and
5. Living a new life in Christ.

Our world needs to know how to respond to what God has done for them in Christ. We need to communicate this to them. We just need to tell them what people did to be saved in the first century as the Bible clearly reveals, and that is just what I've given you this morning.

CONCLUSION:

Can you contend for and communicate the faith? Will you?

In the future messages in this series, I will be trying to help you contend for and communicate your faith to your world.

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**"Remain faithful unto death ..." Rev. 2:10B**

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Check out our web sites: [www.arm.org](http://www.arm.org) [www.abarc.org](http://www.abarc.org)

**In 2010, 71 ABA Bible courses were mailed from ARM every day!**