

God-man-God...

Laurence Crutchlow suggests an easily remembered gospel outline

You've just enjoyed a discussion about patient autonomy in an ethics seminar, and on the way to coffee before the next lecture, your friend Steve walks with you. He says 'you Christians seemed to have a lot to say in that session. What do you actually believe?' There's only five minutes before the next lecture. What will you say?

Being prepared for such a situation is important, and many Christians memorise a 'gospel outline' to help - much like the way a medic would use mnemonics to prepare for an anatomy exam. But aren't there hundreds of gospel outlines around? How do you know which one to learn?

what makes a good gospel outline?

1. start in the right place.

Many outlines assume too much - if you start with sin, you assume that the listener knows God exists, and understands his character as pure and holy. Begin by affirming that God is real, and describe him briefly.

2. being Christ centred. All too often Jesus features merely as a mechanism to

solve a moral conundrum for a God who has to work out how to reconcile his own mercy and justice. We can't ask people to trust Jesus if we don't tell them about him!

3. calling for repentance. The term 'repent' is repeatedly used in the New Testament.¹ We must include it, however unfashionable.

4. putting the cross centrally, but not first. The cross is central,² but some things must be explained before it will be understood. The important fact is not that someone was crucified, but who was crucified. We want people to trust in 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'.³

5. faithfulness about judgment. If judgment is ignored, what is the point of the gospel? If we are not going to be called to account for how we have lived, why do we need forgiveness? Without the reality of judgment, the entire logic of the gospel collapses.

why this outline?

Many outlines require much memorising. Others (like 'two ways to live'⁴) work best if you

have good drawing skills! This outline is succinct (only five points), and adaptable to a one minute answer to a question or a whole hour's lecture (if anyone will listen for that long!)

five points

- God
- man
- God
- what if I don't?
- what if I do?

God (ruler)

God exists. Not only did he create the universe,⁵ but he sustains its very existence.⁶ Humans were made for a relationship with him. God is holy⁷ - that is, he is pure, perfect, and unable to relate to that which is not holy. We know this because he has revealed himself to us through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.⁸

man (rebel)

God created humans to be holy⁹ - pure and perfect like him. But none of us lives consistently as if God were truly our ruler and creator.¹⁰ We all assume (wrongly) that we are to govern our own lives. This results in either wilful disobedience of God (sin), or at other times

plain ignorance of him. Rebels like us are no longer holy. We deserve God's judgment,¹¹ and have no right to be in his presence.

God (rescue)

God's love for us means that he wants to rescue us from punishment - despite our rebellion.¹² Only someone who has always lived consistently with God's commands could take that punishment in our place - as everyone else deserves punishment of their own.¹³ Only Jesus has lived a life free from rebellion against God.¹⁴ Jesus Christ was sent to earth by God. His three years of public ministry in the Middle East about 2,000 years ago culminated in his execution on a cross. In dying, he received the punishment we deserved for our rebellion against God. On the third day after his death, Jesus came back to life - not just in a spiritual sense, but fully alive - walking, talking, eating. Jesus had showed he was victorious over the power of sin. Jesus was given all authority in the universe by God. Our punishment had now been meted out to someone else, leaving us an offer of forgiveness that demands a response. Jesus' teaching whilst on earth invited us to repent

(turn from our rebellion against God) and believe in him (trust he is God's son, and live in obedience to him).

what if I don't? (rejection)

If we ignore or reject Jesus' offer of forgiveness, we remain banished from God's presence because of our rebellion. There is no hope for us. Nothing that we can do will repair our broken relationship with God. We will receive the judgment we deserve, and be in hell for ever, cut off from God.

what if I do? (reconciliation)

If we repent and believe that Jesus has taken our punishment upon himself, God forgives our wrongdoing. We are treated as if we had never rebelled in the first place. The Holy Spirit is given to us, enabling us to live a life pleasing to God, and in which we obey his commands. The Holy Spirit is also a 'deposit' - a guarantee that we will spend eternity with God in heaven, adopted as his children into his family. We must choose soon whether to accept God's offer, since only God knows when the world will end, and tomorrow may be too late.

how to use it

This outline really helps if someone asks 'What do Christians believe?' It could also be used by a speaker at a dialogue dinner,¹⁵ or you could also use individual sections to answer questions such as 'You don't really believe in hell, do you?' To learn more about sharing the gospel with friends, why not come to a *Confident Christianity* day conference? The CMF website has details of upcoming conferences.¹⁶ If none are planned in your area, why not ask your local CMF reps to organise one?

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REFERENCES

1. Acts 2:38, 3:19; Revelation 2:5
2. 1 Corinthians 15:3
3. 1 Corinthians 2:2
4. www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl
5. Genesis 1:1
6. Hebrews 1:3
7. Leviticus 19:2
8. Hebrews 1:1-3
9. Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 1:16
10. Romans 3:23
11. Romans 6:23
12. 1 Timothy 2:3-4
13. 1 John 1:8
14. Hebrews 4:15
15. For a fuller discussion of dialogue dinners see Pickering M. Dialogue Dinners. *Nucleus* 2009; Christmas: 23-25
16. www.cmf.org.uk/students/events.asp