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1. The Christian Faith

Which two or three Bible verses sum up your understanding of the Christian faith? Why?

For me, there are three verses that stand at the center of Christian theology. I don't by any stretch mean that these are the only three choices; A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Alliance, might be happier if I chose Colossians 1:27 and Matthew 24:14. The important thing is that before you come to your accreditation interview you have taken the time to think through what it actually means to be a Christian—and to be a Christian minister—and that your explanation is an explanation that comes from the Bible. So, for myself, if I had to pick out verses to sum up what Christianity means, these would be my top three.

The distinguishing mark of Christianity is this: we believe that when you look at Jesus, you see God himself at work: not a messenger from God, nor a project that God is putting into action, but actually God, coming to save us. Sin had created this irreparable rift between God and humanity, and God, rather than waiting for us to come and meet him halfway, bridged the whole gap in Jesus Christ, not counting our sins against us, and created anew the relationship that we had destroyed. And now, he has committed this message of reconciliation to us, meaning not only that we are responsible for

communicating this message to the world—the message that it was God who was in Christ, reconciling us to himself—but also that we are responsible to ourselves be God’s agents of reconciliation, people who by the power of God the Holy Spirit work to create restored relationships in the world. This is what the Holy Spirit teaches us through Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.”

Nothing can stand in the way of God accomplishing his plan, and his plan is this: that he would freely share his love with us, and that we would receive it and would freely love him back. The fact that God accomplishes this plan displays his might; the fact that he does it without compromising displays his holiness. But the plan itself—a plan he made before the creation of the world—tells us something about who he is. He is so full of love that it overflows: the Father loves the Son so super-abundantly that God makes a plan to create, just so that there are creatures who can receive his love and respond to it. He is unsatisfied sharing his love just a little, and so he chooses to create human beings, creatures who share his own image and are capable of genuinely responding to his love. When they choose to reject him, he woos them and makes possible their return; when they return he makes possible their love and calls them his sons and daughters. This is not something he pieces together as he goes along, it has always been his plan: to share the loving life of who he is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that the Son would stand as the firstborn in the midst of a joyous, large family. This is the message of Romans 8:29, that “God knew his

people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

For many, God seems hard to see. To be sure, God is always far above us, in the fullest sense of the word above. Nothing we can do can reach up to or around him, or control even the idea of him with our minds. But although we cannot corral God intellectually, we can know him. An idea is something that you know about; a person is someone you can know. God is not an idea that we can comprehend with our brains, he much bigger and much different than that. We know God in the kind of way that we know another person, because persons, created in the image of God, are in this way the same kind of thing that God is. We come to know God personally—like a person—not because we have somehow grabbed hold of him like an idea, but because he expresses himself in such a way as to be knowable by us. He doesn’t push his way into our lives; if we do not wish to know him, he does not force himself upon us. But if we seek hard for him, he promises that we will be able to find him. Seeing him is the reward of seeking him. Before, however, we can seek him, we must believe that he exists. Apologetics are not something that can prove the existence of God; their usefulness is in pointing to the fact that belief in God is a reasonable stance, likely the most reasonable. But for us to know God, we must decide ahead of time to accept that he exists, which always remains an act of faith. Christianity can never be proven, it is always based on faith in the Person and saving act of Jesus Christ. This guarantees that when we love God back, our love has never been forced, which is im-

portant because forced love is not real love. And so, Hebrews 11:6 says that “it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.”

If I was preparing for accreditation I would . . .

- Take the time to think through what Christianity means to me, and be prepared to share about it
- Double check that I had memorized my favorite Bible verses, and think through how I would explain why they are important to me