

The Unchanging Gospel

Recently we've looked lots at the importance of change in situations where churches are replanted and revitalised through the involvement of an established, larger church nearby. This time we're looking at what stays the same – the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour. What does it mean to be a Christian? I'm also writing for those who don't know the Lord yet, it has been so encouraging seeing the number of EFCC churches that are engaged in evangelism and have a number of non Christians at their meetings.

History

'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now' (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

The death and resurrection of Christ are presented in the Bible as historical facts that are of first importance. Early writers who opposed Christianity, people like Josephus, Pliny the Younger, and Celsus, don't deny the resurrection, instead they try to explain it away. Jesus of Nazareth really died on a cross under Pontius Pilate and he came back from the dead on the third day. These things happened according to the Scriptures, and Christ's death was for our sins. God the eternal Son became a human baby – the infinite infant. He lived the perfect life of obedience, and he suffered death on the cross in the place of sinners like us.

Saving Faith

When a sinner confesses their sin to the Lord, and believes that Christ died and rose again for them, that person is saved (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9). The sinner is raised from spiritual death to new life in Christ (Ephesians 2:5), the sin is gone, dealt with at the cross, punished in Christ's body (1 Peter 2:24), God's anger at sin is satisfied (Romans 3:25). And the perfect obedience of Christ, his righteousness, is given to the believer (Isaiah 61:10). All of this, including faith (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 2:8-9 Philippians 1:29), is the gift of God, and all of it is summed up in the believer's union with Christ Jesus: chosen, predestined, adopted, redeemed by his blood, forgiven, saved to eternity: all in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). The Gospel is AWESOME!

This faith by which the sinner is saved is what unites the believer to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, like a stone in a building (1 Peter 2:4-10); like husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-32); like the branches and the vine (John 15:1-11). Do you have saving faith? Have you confessed your sin to the Lord? Do you know the forgiveness of your sins before the Almighty Triune God?

Saving Faith in Action

When someone is saved from sin and hell, for heaven and for the Lord, everything changes. The Bible is really clear that these changes do not save a person, they are evidence that the person is saved; we're justified by faith. God's Word gives so much comfort to the believer, so that we can have assurance of salvation, because we look to Christ's finished work on the cross, not to our faltering efforts. But God's Word does not let us take it easy.

'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?' (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Here is an outline of a few of the main key marks of saving faith that flow from love for the Saviour.

First, the believer loves God's Word the Bible through which God speaks to us. And the believer loves prayer, by which we speak to the Lord.

Secondly, the believer grows in godliness, becoming more and more like Jesus. Sometimes this is slow, sometimes we backslide and mess up, but saving faith is persevering faith and we keep going, we keep growing.

Thirdly, the believer loves the Church which is the body of Christ. The Lord's Day suddenly becomes the highlight of the week for the believer, because it is at Church that we get to hear God's Word preached, we get to pray with other believers, and we get to take the Lord's Supper as well as experiencing baptisms. In this issue of InFellowship we're starting a new series on the Church, this time round it is an introduction and overview.

We worship the Almighty Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are saved to be with God and with his people both now and forever – WOW!