

221 Jesus and US! - 2

In our previous Reflection in this short series concerning the Christian Church, we were reminded that the Church has currently replaced God's original covenant people the Jews as the custodians of God's Truth. At the heart of that Truth is one great problem: the gulf that now exists, because of human sin, between our perfect, holy God and all of us, His imperfect, unholy humanity. All the "World Faiths" of today tackle this problem, and all of them, including Judaism, with just two exceptions, give the same solution - the God-Man gulf can be closed from our side by human goodness.

The first of the two exceptions is Atheism, which states there is no God-Man gulf anyway because there is no God and no sin: "problem solved!" – or perhaps not Ironically the Atheist has more faith than any of us, in having to believe that this stupendous universe got here all by itself from absolutely nothing at all. Really??!

The second exception is Christianity with its beautiful message of the "Gospel of grace": salvation no longer depends on humans striving to be good enough for God, for that is impossible for any of us apart from Christ Himself. Instead it depends on our accepting by simple faith that our sinfulness has been fully paid for by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. This amazing self-sacrifice has opened the way for any to approach God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ and seek the Father's acceptance, forgiveness and peace, solely because we are "with Christ".

Because of Christ's sacrificial death, (followed by His resurrection as proof of these things, eg., Acts 1.3 / I Corinthians 15), the gulf that existed between our perfect God and the repentant individual is thereby gone forever (eg., Romans 5.1-11). No wonder the Christ-saved are full of alleluias! Whatever else the Church may get up to, this crucial truth, of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, is to be its one clear, constant, primary message.

So the choices before mankind are three-fold, and pretty clear: take the risk that there is no God anyway and that physical death is simply "the end"; or try to be good enough for the perfect God to let us in; or accept, with simple faith and tears of gratitude, who Christ is, what He has done, and why He has done it (eg., Acts 2.36 and 4.10-12 / and others). Put like this we are clearly in the realm of a "no-brainer" when it comes to making the wisest choice.

The believer in Christ is "born from above", "of water and the Spirit" (John 3.3-8), and also becomes a member of Christ's body, the Church. The Greek word translated into English as "church" is "ekklesia", literally meaning "called-out", so

straightaway we see parallels between the Church and the Jews, God's "called-out people" under the old, Law-based Covenant. We learn from the Book of Acts how this new body the Church was brought into being (Acts 2), with Jewish and Gentile believers gradually accepting one another on the basis of their shared faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the start the Church faced numerous problems. Most Jews loathed the Church as being a departure from the true Faith (eg., Acts 7.54-8. and 9.1-2), while the Romans took exception to the Christian claims of the uniqueness of Christ. Perhaps the trickiest problem of all within the small new Christian communities that came into being was the marked fault-line between Jewish believers with their Old Covenant assumptions (notably the need for circumcision) and Gentile believers, who had hardly heard of "the Law" and in many cases were literally "fresh off the streets", coming into the Christian Faith and Church from lives of idolatry and immorality. Suddenly these two very different groups of people, filled with negative preconceptions about "the other lot" found themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Yet the fact that the early Church – tiny, scattered and profoundly out-of-step with the prevailing cultures in which it was set - flourished in such difficult circumstances is a huge encouragement for us for today: the Church still has its problems, but still has the Lord Jesus Christ as its Head (eg., Ephesians 1.22-23). Next time God willing we can examine from the Scriptures how and why the Church thrived in its early days, with clear lessons for today. But as we close this Reflection we do well to give fresh thanks for the Church and for our fellow Christians: the Christian life is not just about "Jesus and me" but also about "Jesus and US"!

© 2017 Faithful Sheep Ministries - [www fsmins.org](http://www.fsmins.org)