



Dear Friends,

In Year 12, I went away for the Easter weekend with a group of Christian teenagers and young adults. Back then, I would have called myself a Christian. But I wasn't attending a church. I also didn't take Jesus seriously. I was too interested in girls, sport and having a good time.

On that weekend away, I experienced a spiritual renewal. The experience was so profound and lasting, I sometimes wonder whether this is when I first became a Christian.

I heard Jesus preached and the good news that we are saved by grace through faith, and not by what we do. My heart was "strangely warmed" by the gospel. I felt convicted of my sin. My heart was gripped by Christ's love for me at the cross. I asked God to forgive me, and I prayed for help to live with him as my Lord.

This was life-changing! For weeks afterwards, I felt God present in a palpable way and strongly sensed his love for me. I joined a church and a youth group. I eagerly listened to sermons and read the Bible. I enjoyed praying instead of finding it a chore. And I felt energised hanging out with fellow Christians. Their love for me and godly example helped to experience the gospel.

Even though that life-changing event occurred in 1983 – 43 years ago - I can still visualise it and relive the feelings I experienced back then as though it were yesterday. There was a strong connection between what Jesus did for me at the cross and my lived experience.

This week, I have been preparing to speak at a retreat for Presbyterian church leaders in Northern NSW. One of the biblical truths I am speaking on is Union with Christ.

I chose this subject because many Christians (including me) can feel a disconnect between what Christ did for them at Easter and their own personal experience of God. They strongly believe Jesus died and rose again. They know God's forgiveness. They sing, "Jesus loves me," because he died for them, and because "the Bible tells me so." But they struggle to sense Christ's presence on a daily basis. God's power, evident at the cross, seems strangely elusive.

Christians who feel this way may express their experience as spiritual distance. God feels far from them.

Other believers who experience this disconnect between what happened at Calvary and their present experience of Jesus may feel stuck in sin. It's as if belonging to Jesus gives them a clean formal criminal record but makes scant difference to how they live.

John Calvin (1509-64) recognised that the Bible's teaching on union with Christ bridges the gap between the cross and the believer's present experience. By faith in Jesus, we are united to Christ. He said:

"First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and dwell within us."

To be united to Christ means that when you receive Jesus by faith, what he did at the cross, he did for you. To be united to Christ also means that he is also personally present to you by his Spirit. Every believer has the Spirit of God living in them. You don't have to go looking for him.

So, how can you experience the Spirit's presence and power? By being with God. I am with God when I meet regularly with my church family. I am with God when I read and meditate on Scripture. I am with God when I pray and praise him. Do you want to be with God?

God Bless,
Mark Adams