

WEEKLY REFLECTION

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

Verses 2:8-9 from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians speaks wonderfully to Acts 15. As the early Church engaged in a fervent discussion about the role of circumcision in salvation, Paul reminds us that our salvation comes only through grace, by faith. Not by our own doing or as a result of works, but through the death of Christ Jesus alone.

As Peter addresses the believers who are anxious about the purity of the faith (v.5), he speaks with truth and candour when he reminds them of the weight of the Law. Neither they nor their fathers were able to keep and obey the Law in its entirety, and the reason that Jesus died was to fulfill the Law, to make His people clean and set them free. Why, then, would the Church require its new believers, whether Gentile or Jew, to do what they could not? Why would they invite God’s judgment on themselves for such a thing? (v.7-11)

As they argue for the full inclusion of Gentiles into the church with a completely new way of living, Peter appeals to his experience of direct guidance and intervention from God. Barnabas and Paul appeal to their experience of God’s confirmation of their work through signs and wonders. But James appeals directly to Scripture, believing that the words of the prophets agree with what has happened. (v.15-17)

While Acts 15 can act as a beautiful guiding example for church politics and debate, our focus is on the heart of their discussion. Can we remember to live as children of God, who are saved by grace through faith? Can we also accept the Holy Spirit’s call for us to be higher, as He works and enables us to live transformed lives for Him?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What has been your experience with the church decision-making process? Is it similar to the process described in Acts 15? Why or why not?

QUESTION TWO:

In James 1:19-27, James emphasizes being a “doer of the word, and not a hearer only”—he makes a similar argument in 2:14-26, that faith without works is dead. Despite all this, he still agrees with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, that they should not require new believers to undergo circumcision or to keep the Law in its entirety. (Acts 15:19-20)

What does it mean that we are saved by grace through faith? Is there a contradiction between the “works” mentioned in Ephesians 2:8-9 by Paul, and the “works” mentioned by James? What does this tell you about the grace that we experience?

QUESTION THREE:

Peter points out in verse 10 that if the early Church were to make circumcision a requirement for all believers, they would be “putting God to the test.” They would essentially be saying that His grace is insufficient to save (while the human act of circumcision and of keeping the Law is), thus belittling His love and His Son’s sacrifice for us.

What are some ways you might “earn” your way to salvation? How can you invite the Holy Spirit to speak truth instead?