

257 It seemed good

In Acts 15.6 “the apostles and elders came together” to discern God’s answer to a serious doctrinal question that had arisen – did the Gentile believers in Christ have to accept circumcision (a sign that the law of Moses had a role in their salvation) or was their salvation based on faith alone? Thanks be to God, “salvation by faith alone” won the day because God had already manifestly blessed the Gentile believers, ignorant of the law, just as He had already blessed the Jewish believers (vv 7-21). This doctrine was soon abundantly confirmed in the Gospels and Epistles when they were in circulation.

“The apostles and elders and brethren being assembled with one accord” (from vv 23 and 25) came through to this settled decision by prayer and discussion: and they then acted upon that decision by going forward in faith. In their letters to the Antioch Christians bringing the good news of the outcome – that faith alone in Christ alone is sufficient - we read these simple words, “It seemed good unto us it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us” (vv 25a and 28a).

In those few words “It seemed good ...” is a vital lesson for those of us who follow after.

Now clearly “faith” operates on different levels in the Christian life. First and foremost we believe, by faith that is built on wonderfully solid grounds, that the Holy Bible is truly “God’s Word written”, with all that follows from that truth. Arising from our faith in God’s Word, we also all know in general terms how God wants us to live our lives, as in Exodus 20.1-17 and Luke 10.27 for example.

But at the more local level in our Christian walk things can be different, for we are frequently faced with tricky choices great or small, perhaps over jobs or relationships for example, or the right use of our time and money. In such times we “seek the Lord” for His particular guidance as well as we are able, and then take our own decisions, by faith, under the Lord, on the basis of “it seemed good ...”.

Not surprisingly Scripture is filled with examples of those who sought the Lord’s guidance in specific situations, and then in response acted in “it seemed good”-faith. Two or three examples must suffice here. In Acts 7 for instance “seven men of honest report” were needed (v 3), who were subsequently chosen and appointed (vv 5-6) – by faith. In Acts 13 they believed by faith that the Holy Spirit wanted Barnabas and Saul to be set aside, and this was duly done – by faith. Thereafter these two men knew their broad God-given commission, which they then carried out as best as they could, taking their own decisions day by day within the wider picture – by faith. And in Hebrews Chapter 11 we have that classic “roll of honour” in terms of those acting in their own lives and situations in response to the great promises of the Lord God – by faith.

From all this we see that this “walking by faith” has always been the norm for God’s people, and is simply how He has arranged things to foster our spiritual growth: “the

just shall live by faith" (Rom 1.17, from Habakkuk 2.4); "for now we see through a glass, darkly" (I Corinthians 13.12a); for now, "we walk by faith and not by sight" (II Corinthians 5.7); and indeed "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11.6).

Now of course with hindsight, because of our fallenness and sinfulness, such faith-responses may turn out at times to have been mistaken in relation to "the mind of the Lord" in the matter of concern. But the Lord knows this full well! Would He not far rather that we humbly seek Him and then step out in "it seemed good"-faith despite the possibility of our getting it wrong, than that we sit about risking nothing and venturing nothing in His service and for His glory? Praise God, as we acknowledge and confess our failings before Him, He is indeed "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1.9).

Within our settled faith in the great truths of the Christian Faith itself, the Lord expects us to seek His particular guidance whenever there is need, and then to take responsibility ourselves, by making up our minds and going forward in the faith that rests on that simple precedent, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us".

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