

THE SOUTHEAST SOWER

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GOD LED ME

ROBERT HARKRIDER

Ever heard that claim before? It is common to hear talk of the Lord leading a person in a direct way in every action. Whatever thoughts some have or business dealings they make, the Lord is given credit for causing it.

While this writer deeply believes in the providence of God and the ever present help He has promised (Hebrews 13:5-6), it seems to me we should balance the scales a little by asserting that God is not responsible for every action or thought of a Christian. If He were, God would be guilty of causing us to sin (1 John 1:8-10). In fact, the backlash of such current claims will be an undermining of faith when tragedy occurs. "Why did God let this happen?" is frequently asked now by agnostics and atheists. But let the

uninformed Christian begin to think of God as though He is the great Puppeteer who holds us at the end of strings and orders our every movement, and when trouble does come, he too will become bitter toward God and blame Him.

Laws of nature (originally set in order by God) are the cause of much that is occurring today. A child is born blind is not a direct punishment of God for sin (John 9:1-3), but may be the result of some birth malfunction or hereditary disorder. Job knew that his troubles were not due to sin. Even though his friends kept pointing an accusing finger, God had not directly caused any of Job's problems.

The point is that we must guard against making God in our image! It is possible to wish for something so much that we convince ourselves, "God

wanted it that way," when in fact He had no direct part at all in our decision.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote against the religious leaders of his day who made wild claims about the Lord. They became so intolerable the Lord warned them not to use the expression, "the burden of the Lord," i.e., "this is the Lord's word" (Jer. 23:33-40). Though they said, "I have dreamed," they prophesied lies (Jer. 23:25) and spoke a vision of their own heart and not the Lord's (Jer.23:16). Their message was devised out of the imagination of their own mind, and consequently, they were cursed for leading God's people astray.

GOD MUST LEAD US

Lest we be misunderstood, if we walk by faith it is certain

The Southeast Church of Christ meets at:

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SERVICES:

Sunday

Bible Study:

10:00 am

Worship:

10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study:

7:30 pm"

that God must lead us. But the question before us is, "how does God lead us today?" The answer is found in understanding the basis of faith. Just as "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17), it is through the inspired word of God that He leads us.

It is imperative therefore that Christians make time for Bible study! We must "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13). In Paul's charge to Timothy he urged, "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved of God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:14-15).

When one fills his heart with the word of God he has inspired direction for every facet of life: social, economic, physical, and spiritual. Through learning God's will we can know whether or not the Lord approves of our marriage, of the kind of friends with whom we associate, or even the type of work we do. We also learn to abstain from sexual immorality, dishonesty, or enslaving habits like drugs and alcohol. Therefore in this broadest sense, God leads us in paths of righteousness.

But what about specific decisions we make that are

within the scope of righteousness? Does the Lord lead us directly in those? The answer is found in 1 John 5:14-15: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

While there will not be a miraculous "voice" that answers our prayers, God does respond to those who keep His commandments (1 John 3:22). Pray for wisdom, and often a way that best is opened and easily accessed; or else a way we had thought was best, but wasn't, will be cast with difficulty and closed doors. Always be asking as Jesus did, "Thy will be done."

Is God leading you? If so, it is because you make time for Bible study and have filled your heart with His word!

Smyrna: The Poor Church that Was Rich

Leon Mauldin

The letter to the church of Smyrna was the second of seven letters Jesus addressed to the churches of Asia (Rev. 2:8-10)

Ironically, in this port city of great commerce and prosperity, Jesus said He knew the "poverty" of the Christians there, but at the same time said they were "rich." Discrimination and persecution was directed toward those who would not worship the patron gods of the trade guilds, making it difficult for faithful Christians to find employment, or buy or sell.

Though they were destitute in this world's goods, they had true riches: they had access to all the spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3ff.). They had been chosen in Christ, they had received the adoption as sons of God, they were redeemed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus, and had hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2).

Jesus did not promise to remove their difficulties. He said, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." Jesus expected His people to be faithful as long as they lived, even if it cost their lives. ...

One famous citizen of Smyrna who died a martyr's death was Polycarp, said to be a disciple of the Apostle John (ca. Ad 70-156). Church historian Eusebius tells what happened when this octogenarian was given the opportunity to recant his faith and save his life:

But when the magistrate pressed him, and said, "Swear, and I will release thee; revile Christ." Polycarp said, "Fourscore and six years have I been serving him, and he hath done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

Polycarp had learned to fear God rather than man (Mt. 10:28).

Jesus concluded the letter with the promise, "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (cf. 21:8: "the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (21:8).