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MONDAY MANNA

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WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

By Rick Boxx

Whether it is in politics, sports, or business, many spiritually minded people tend to conclude that God is either with them – on their side, working in their favor – or He is against them. It is not uncommon to think this way, for instance, in hotly contested elections, is God in favor of the candidates of our choice? When our favorite team is competing against its hated rival, is God rooting for our team to win, just as we are?

And we extend this perspective to marketplace situations. When we are working to finalize a big sale, land a major contract, or earn a much-desired promotion, we may assume God wants us to succeed. After all, we are His children, right? This line of thinking, however, leads to problems. If we do not close that important sale, or if a customer fails to choose us or our company for the contract, we wonder what went wrong. Is God mad at us? Have we fallen out of His favor?

We find an intriguing perspective on this in the Bible's Old Testament when Joshua, who succeeded Moses as the leader of the people of Israel, saw a man with a drawn sword in his hand and realized it was actually a messenger from God. "Are you for us or for our enemies?" Joshua inquired. "Neither" was the angel's response, adding, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come" Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" (Joshua 5:13-14). It would be fair to conclude that the foundational issue is not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on His side. Are we choosing to align our lives with Him?

Much of the Bible presents a sad scenario: People acting as if they are their own gods, refusing to follow the precepts and principles God has presented to us through His Word. For instance, in the prophetic book of Ezekiel, we read about God's anger toward the people of Israel. Despite being His chosen people, they choose to defy the Lord and disregard His commands.

Repeatedly God promises very stern discipline for the Israelites' rebellion, but always explains why: So that they "shall know that I am the Lord." This phrase is repeated dozens of times in Ezekiel, sometimes several times in a single chapter. Reading through this book is a sobering warning. More than anything, God wants us to be on His side.

However, we also read that the Lord does have a unique, preferential love and compassion for His chosen people. For instance, after being told about how He

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“works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...” (Romans 8:28), we then read, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:31-32).

King Solomon, during his consecration of the temple built in Jerusalem to honor the one true God. At one point in his dedicatory prayer, Solomon asks, “May the Lord be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. The following verse, however, affirms that we should not only want God to be for us – but also that we should always be for Him: “May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers” (1 Kings 8:57-58).

We all want God to be for us. But are we willing to be for Him, in whatever He asks of us?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever wondered, as Mr. Boxx describes in the opening, whether God is acting in your favor, whether it concerns an important matter at work, the outcome of an election, or even who wins or loses an athletic contest involving one of your favorite teams? Explain your answer.
2. What in your opinion would it be like for God to be for you, to be acting in accordance with your best interests? Can you give an example of why you think that way?
3. Could it be possible for God to actually be for you – to be acting according to your best interests – and still allow for a different outcome other than one you desire and have praying for? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean to be acting for God, seeking to be on His side rather than worrying about whether He is on our side, especially in a workplace setting? How could putting Him foremost in our thoughts and actions make a difference in decisions we make?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Numbers 13:8-9; Psalm 56:9, 118:5-7, 14, 25-27; Isaiah 8:10, 13, 17, 41:10

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