

Whose side is God on?

Jay Abshier July 2012

Have you ever heard someone wonder "Whose side is God on"? Sometimes the question is in reference to personal conflicts and sometimes events of great significance, such as warfare. In the US Civil War and World War II there were some on both sides who thought that God was on their side and prayed for God to help them be the victors.

But what are the implications of "taking sides". If we take sides in a conflict it means that we endorse the cause of the side we are taking and by implication that we are followers of that side. If that side does something we disagree with we either have to accept what they did or admit that we made a mistake. But God does not place Himself in a subservient role and God does not make mistakes.

Regarding spiritual conflicts and suffering Romans 8:31 states that "If God is for us, who can be against us?", and this verse probably provides some of the foundation for the idea that God is on our side and for hymns such as "Be Still My Soul". But Paul is not talking about God taking sides or helping Christians achieve their ambitions. He is talking about trusting in our salvation through Jesus and that nothing can separate us from God's promise through Jesus to provide our salvation.

There may be other scriptures dealing with God "taking sides", but the one with which I am familiar is Joshua 5: 13-15. The setting is Jericho. God's people have crossed the Jordan and Joshua has gone by himself to look at Jericho. He turns to go back to the Hebrew camp when suddenly he sees a mighty warrior that is God in human form.

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

14 "Neither," he replied, "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?"

15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

I am going to be bold and paraphrase this passage to illustrate a possible meaning. I imagine Joshua pointing his sword at the warrior expecting to have to fight, but first he asks;

"Who are you? Are you fighting for me or are you on the side of my enemies?"

"I am neither for you nor am I against you.", says the warrior. "I am the commander of the Army of the Lord and I do not take sides. You, Joshua, are either on MY side or you are against me. "

Even though Joshua is a wise and Godly man, he was still required to declare which side he was on. The first step in that decision was to ask God what he wanted Joshua to do. As Christians, even though it is our desire to follow God that does not mean that God is necessarily on our side in everything we do. It all depends on whether what we are doing AND how we behave while doing it is what God wants us to do.

So how do we know when we are on God's side? God gives us a lot of latitude in what we chose to do and chose not to do, but just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden some things are clearly stated about what is expected of His disciples regarding actions and behavior. Perhaps part of our daily spiritual struggle is to pray that we are on God's side and to ask God "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

Reference:

Romans 8:31-36

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 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? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

35 Who shall separate us

from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."