

I will guide you with My eye

I often tell religious people that sheer human determination cannot achieve the type of righteous living that pleases God. I try to explain that only true followers of Jesus can achieve truly righteous lives that please God because they are empowered by God's Spirit. He leads and causes them both to desire and to do the things that please Him. During such discussions with Muslims, they often try to suggest that they too are guided by God. They tell me that there are two angels, one on their right shoulder and one on their left shoulder. One constantly tells them to do evil and the other constantly **tells them to do good.**¹ So, when they obey the good angel, they avoid evil and do the right thing. The Muslims want to think that their religion with its rules is capable of producing righteous lives. They think that all they have to do to achieve a righteous life is make up their mind to do the right thing and act upon those determinations. We followers of Jesus need to know what the Bible teaches if we hope to show them that the righteous living that pleases God cannot be achieved by sheer determination to keep God's rules.

Merely religious people seek God's acceptance through their attempts to keep His rules. The Apostle Paul referred to this approach as **"works of law."**² Another phrase he used is, "living according to 'oldness of the letter.'" (See Romans 7:6.) While it is never good to violate God's rules, no person can gain God's acceptance through his attempt to keep God's rules. But in addition, no person (including a Christian) has the power within himself to achieve righteous living that pleases God this way. He cannot rely upon sheer determination because according to the Bible, no good dwells within a **person's own flesh.**³ Therefore, no Muslim, nor any merely religious person is able to live a life that **pleases God.**⁴ But it is different for the true followers of Jesus Christ.

True followers of Jesus Christ (and only true followers of Jesus Christ) have God's Holy Spirit living **within them.**⁵ They are fully convinced that apart from Him, they can DO NOTHING that truly pleases God. (See John 15:5.) They no longer serve Him according to the letter. Rather, with joy and love for Him, they serve in **newness of the Spirit.**⁶ Before, they were weighed down with condemnation of God because of their sin. But now, their condemnation has been **lifted off their shoulders.**⁷ (Jesus bore all their sin and condemnation when He took their punishment on the cross.)

All people have a conscience that might convict them inside about what is right and wrong. Occasionally, a person might decide to do a right thing because his conscience is bothering him. But the follower of Jesus Christ has an increasingly sensitive conscience that is being renewed and retrained by God's Holy Spirit living within him. He no longer goes about his life **seeking his own pursuits.**⁸

With his condemnation now all gone, the follower of Jesus relates to God as his own father and His new Father relates to the follower of Jesus Christ in a very personal, intimate way. The Bible tells followers of Jesus Christ, *"You did not*

¹ The Muslims' two-angel concept seems (to me) to convey the nature of the human conscience. Concerning the conscience, Paul said, *"their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them"* (See Romans 2:15). The Bible teaches that no matter how religious a person might be, if he ignores his conscience and does something that his conscience tells him is wrong (all while pretending to be upright and moral), his conscience becomes seared. (See I Timothy 4:2.) A conscience is a good thing, but because it automatically becomes less and less sensitive the more it is seared, it cannot be relied upon to guide a person perfectly to do the right thing. And even if the conscience happened to be very sensitive, people still do not have the power within themselves to always do what their conscience is telling them to do.

² The Bible teaches that nobody can be justified before God by performing works of law. (See Romans 3:20.)

³ "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find" (Romans 7:18).

⁴ "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

⁵ "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:9).

⁶ "we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

⁷ *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).*

⁸ If a follower of Jesus lives his life seeking his own pursuits, he cannot be happy. It is a miserable existence for him. If this is the only way that he is accustomed to living, he should examine himself to see if he really is a true follower of Jesus Christ.

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receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

In this new relationship, the follower of Jesus Christ has in ever increasing desire to do the things that please God. Yet, he also knows that within himself, he does not possess the power to accomplish it by sheer determination. Because his desire to please God is now enhanced and ever increasing, he increasingly calls upon God to give Him **a greater measure of His Spirit⁹** to motivate and perform His pleasure. And because God Himself has adopted him as one of His own children, He listens intently and faithfully acts on his behalf.

The Bible uses the analogy of a father and his little child to convey the nature of this new relationship that followers of Jesus Christ enjoy with God.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).

God has indeed made known His commands and His desires in His Word. The follower of Jesus Christ can read it and learn. But the verse above conveys a more personal form of teaching reserved for God's children alone. In this analogy, the little child suddenly does not know what to do. He glances up at his father. His father who is constantly watching over him, does not even have to say anything. He simply motions with his eyes and the little child understands what his faithful father is directing him to do.

This analogy depicts several things about the nature of the relationship between the follower of Jesus and his heavenly Father. For this type of direction to be possible, the child must already be convinced that his father is always watching over him personally for good. From experience, the little child knows that he can trust his father's judgment. The little child also knows from experience that whenever he attempts to direct his own life (as opposed to looking to his father for direction), things generally go wrong. He increasingly learns that operating independent of his father creates anxiety and confusion. As time goes on, he increasingly appreciates and depends upon the guidance of his father while enjoying the peace and happiness from knowing his father deeply loves him and cares for him. This is the type of relationship that the follower of Jesus Christ has with his heavenly Father.

Contrast the personal nature of this ideal relationship to how a merely religious person relates to God. He may wish that he could achieve a deeply righteous spiritual life. But, if he is honest with himself, he would admit that he cannot accomplish it by sheer determination. To him, God is almighty, but not intimate with him or anyone else for that matter. He is not accustomed to thinking about God as being deeply and personally involved as the father in the analogy from Psalm 32:8. Though he might pray to God, he does not depend upon God as the only one able to help him live righteously. Such a person cannot have any confidence that God is even listening to him. For all he knows, God is angry at him and wants nothing to do with him. As a result, he cannot relate to God as a little child might **relate to his father**.¹⁰ So, though he might pray, he basically goes through life making decisions in keeping with his own pursuits. His religion might give him the false notion that all is well between him and God, especially if enough of his friends and family think that he is a faithful follower of his religion. But if he is honest with himself, he will admit that it is an empty and vain religion that can never bring about the level of intimacy of a child/father relationship as depicted in Psalm 32:8.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

⁹ "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

¹⁰ The little child in the analogy looks up toward his father fully knowing and expecting that his father is watching him intently, ready to direct him. In contrast, the Muslim, or any mere religious person would not tend to constantly look toward God fully expecting that He is lovingly watching over him personally with intentions to answer him.