

# Two Common Errors

## **INTRODUCTION**

(1) Two wrong concepts keep on bringing frustration and disappointment to many Christians as they set out to serve God

- the *first* is the idea that clear and certain guidance is available at all times
- and the *second* is that if one is doing the will of God then success is sure.

(2) Both propositions are only partly true. That is

- specific guidance is only occasionally available; and
- success (in terms of statistical achievement) is nowhere guaranteed in scripture.

(3) Let us then look at these two fallacies, beginning with

## **A FALLACY OF GUIDANCE**

(1) Many people expect that detailed guidance should be available from God on demand, and that to begin any project without a clear word from God is to court disaster.

- Yet see *Luke 10: 10-11*, and notice how general was Jesus' instruction to his disciples.
- He left it to them to decide what town they would visit, and when.

- If he had thought it important for them to go only to such towns as they were commanded by God to visit, then he would have told them to be sure to ask for heavenly counsel before they embarked on their missions.

(2) What rule then should we follow?

### **(a) GENERAL GUIDANCE IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE**

See *verses 1-4*, which left the disciples in no doubt that they were called into mission, and laid down the broad parameters within which they had to work.

- But the details were apparently left for them to determine each day, based on changing circumstances and the response (or lack of it) they gained from their audiences (see again *vs. 10-11*)

The Greek text of verse 5 reads, *Into whatever house you enter ...*, which strongly implies that there was an element of accident in their choice of house.

- This is confirmed by uncertainty about the response they might find there (*vs. 6*)
- There is no suggestion that they should not go into a house unless they were specifically directed to do so by the Holy Spirit.

### **(b) SPECIFIC GUIDANCE IS SOMETIMES AVAILABLE**

To deny that God ever specifically guides his servants would be absurd, for scripture and life are full of examples of God doing just that, just as they are full of examples of people simply choosing what seems to be the best thing to do in each new situation.

There are two settings in which specific divine guidance appears

### ***(i) in response to divine initiative***

- That is, when God intervenes in some tangible way, making his purpose plain, either telling his servants exactly what he wants them to do, or preventing them from following some plan of their own (both ideas, for example, are in Ac 16: 7-9).
- Godly hearts will be ever alert for such divine intervention (as Paul was), and willing and ready to obey instantly every word from God.

### ***(ii) in response to believing prayer***

- We should, of course, bring every day s activities before the Lord in prayer, whether or not the Lord chooses to speak into the situation himself.
- But especially when we are unable to make a decision ourselves, or when there is no alternative to some clear direction from heaven, then we are instructed to ask for wisdom, and to ask in faith (James 1:5-8).

Note however, two more things –

*first*, there is still no guarantee that heaven will respond with clear direction, which usually means that you are both free required by God to make your own choice; and

*second*, some things are always required of the children of God, and it is pointless to ask any further direction on these matters: *holiness, marital fidelity, integrity in word and action, loyalty to the church, regular worship*, etc.

## ***A FALLACY OF PROSPERITY***

(3) Every believing Christian has a promise of prosperity

- see 3 Jn 2; Jn 15:16; 16:24; etc, which most Christians can and should expect to be fulfilled in this life; but if they are not fulfilled this side of the resurrection, then they certainly will be on the other side!

(4) Yet though it is right for us to have a general expectation of prosperity, we have no absolute guarantee of it in any particular circumstance, nor even in this world at all.

- Thus in our text, Jesus made it plain that the disciples would not succeed in evangelising every town they preached in.
- From some places they would be fortunate to escape with their lives (Mt 10:17-25; Mk 13:9,12).
- He did not suggest that when they were thwarted they should set themselves to break through with prayer and fasting.
- On the contrary, he basically inferred that success in ministry, or failure was something over which they had little or no control, for so much depended upon circumstances they could not change.
- Hence he told them (Lu 10:20) not to build their joy upon so-called success because he knew well enough they would not always be so fortunate but rather to build their joy on unchanging and unchangeable heavenly realities.
- See also James 4:13-16; which declares that we ought not to boast about any achievement until it is actually done, for in the meantime a thousand things may prevent it from being done.

(5) In harmony with the above, some pastors and missionaries, instead of battling along in an unresponsive environment, or struggling to make some ministry work when there is no reasonable chance that it ever will, would be wiser to follow Jesus' advice and *shake the dust off their feet* and go somewhere else.

- If they were to get out of the way, perhaps the Lord could send someone else into the situation who might be better able to accomplish a good work there; and they might also find that whereas success eluded them in one town it may well fall upon them riotously in another.
- The same rule is true for any Christian in any area of life; there is no point in trying to sow seed on a bed of marble; go and find a more fertile field!

(6) We must recognise also that there is a difference between success viewed as statistical or material achievement, and success viewed as holiness in character and faithfulness in service—

- the first is guaranteed to none of us; but the second is required from all of us; and
- the second (far, far more than the first) is the basis upon which we shall be assessed on the Day of Judgment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Why are these things so? Why doesn't God make it easy to get a "word" as often as we ask? Why does he seem to prosper some and not others?

- *In the case of guidance* it is because the Lord wants to bring us to wise maturity, to a capacity to make our own responsible decisions, not always needing to hold his hand like a toddler clutching its parent.
- *In the case of prosperity* it is because he wants to form character and strength, being far more concerned about who you are than what you do.

The Father's ultimate goal is to build a people who are fit to inherit, not this world, but the everlasting kingdom that lies on the other side of the grave.