

The Leading
of the



HOLY
SPIRIT

ARTHUR W. PINK (1886-1952)

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Divinely Drawn | 3 |
| Active Guidance..... | 6 |
| A Caution..... | 6 |
| Divine Direction..... | 7 |
| Knowing We Are Led by the Spirit..... | 8 |

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The Leading of the Holy Spirit

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
they are the sons of God.” – Romans 8:14*

This verse presents to us another aspect of the varied work of the blessed Holy Spirit. In addition to all His other functions, He performs the office of guide unto the godly. Nor is this peculiar to the present dispensation: He so ministered during the Old Testament times. This is brought out clearly in Isaiah 63:

“Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name” (vv. 11-14).

Moses was no more able, by his own power, to induce the Hebrews to pass between the divided waters of the Red Sea and to cross the trackless desert, than by the mere extending of the rod he could divide those waters. Moses was simply the human instrument: the Holy Spirit was the efficient agent.

Divinely Drawn

In the above passage we have more than a hint of *how* the Holy Spirit “leads”: it is by means of an inward impulse, as well as by external directions. Among his comments upon Romans 8:14, Matthew Henry says, “Led by the Spirit as a scholar in his learning is led by his tutor, as a traveler in his journey is led by his guide, as a soldier in his engagements is led by his captain.” But such analogies are inadequate, for they present only the external side, leaving out of account the internal operations of the Spirit, which are even more essential. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). By nature we are not only ignorant of God’s way, but reluctant to walk therein even when it is shown us, and therefore we find the Church praying, “Draw me, we will run after thee” (Song 1:4). Ah, we never seek unto God, still less “run after Him,” till we are divinely drawn.

This humbling truth was well understood by David of old. First, he prayed, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes ... Give me understanding” (Psa 119:33, 34). But second, he realized that something more than divine illumination was needed by him: therefore did he add, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments...Incline my heart unto thy testimonies” (vv. 35, 36). By nature our hearts are averse from God and holiness. We can be worldly of ourselves, but we cannot be heavenly of ourselves. The power of sin lies in the love of it, and it is only as our affections are divinely drawn unto things above that we are delivered from sin’s dominion. Moreover, our *wills* are perverse, and only as supernatural grace is brought to bear upon them are they “inclined” godwards. Thus, to be “*led* by the Spirit of God” is to be *governed* by Him from within, to be subject unto His secret but real impulses or strivings.

Not only are our hearts inclined *by nature* unto temporal, material, worldly, and evil things rather than unto eternal, spiritual, heavenly and holy things, but they are by inveterate *custom* too. As soon as we are born we follow the bent of our natural appetites, and the first few years of our life are governed merely by sense; and the pleasures begotten by gratifying our senses become deeply ingrained in us. Moreover, by constant living in the world and long contact with material things, the tendency increases upon us and we become more strongly settled in a worldly frame. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed* to do evil” (Jer 13:23). Custom becomes a “second nature” to us: the more we follow a certain course of life, the more we delight in it, and we are only weaned from it with very great difficulty.

Natural lusts and appetites being born and bred in us from infancy, continue to cry out for indulgence and satisfaction. The will has become bent to a carnal course and the heart craves material pleasures. Hence, when the claims of *God* are presented to us, when the interests of our *souls* and the things of *eternity* are brought before us, when the “beauty of *holiness*” is presented to our view, they find our wills already biased in the contrary direction and our heart prepossessed with other inclinations, which by reason of long indulgence bind us to them. The heart, being deeply engaged with and delighting in temporal and worldly things, is quite unable to respond to the dictates of reason and set itself upon that which is heavenly and divine; and even the voice of conscience is unheeded by the soul, which prefers the insidious lullaby of Satan. Nothing but the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit can turn (“lead”) the heart in a contrary direction.

Now the heart is *inclined* toward God when the habitual bent of our affections is more to holiness than to worldly things. As the power of sin lies in the love of it, so it is with indwelling grace. Grace prevails over us when we so love the things of

God that the bent of the will and the strength of our affections is carried after them. When the course of our desires and endeavors and the strength and stream of our souls runs out after holiness, then the heart is “inclined” godwards. And how is this brought to pass? How does God reduce our rebellious hearts and mold them to the obedience of His will? The answer is, by His Word and by His Spirit; or putting it another way, by moral persuasion and by gracious power.

“And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Eze 36:27). God does this by combining together invincible might and gentle inducements. God works upon us morally, not physically, because He will preserve our nature and the principles thereof. He does not force us against our wills, but sweetly draws us. He presents weighty reasons, casting into the mind one after another, till the scales be turned and then all is made efficacious by His Spirit. Yet this is not a work which He does in the soul once and for all, but is often renewed and repeated; and that because the “flesh” or sinful nature remains in us, unchanged, even after regeneration. Therefore do we need to ask God to *continue* inclining our hearts toward Himself.

This brings us to notice the intimate connection which exists between our present text and the verse immediately preceding it. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). If we yield ourselves to the Spirit’s impulses to restrain our evil propensities and our proneness to indulge them, then Heaven will be our portion. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (v. 14). Thus Romans 8:14 is said in confirmation and amplification of verse 13: only those who are *ruled by* the Spirit give evidence that they are the “sons of God.” To be “led by the Spirit,” then, means, as the whole context clearly shows, to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (v. 4), to “mind the things...of the Spirit” (v. 5), to “through the Spirit...mortify the deeds of the body” (v. 13). Suitably did Calvin remark on Romans 8:14, “Thus the empty boasting of hypocrites is taken away, who without any reason assume the title of sons of God.”

Thus we are “led by the Spirit” both actively and passively: actively, with respect to His prompting; passively on our part, as we submit to those promptings; actively, by His pressing upon us the holy requirements of the Scriptures; passively, as we yield ourselves unto those requirements. The Spirit is our Guide, but we must obey His motions. In the immediate context it is His *restraining* motives which are in view, moving us to the mortifying of sin. But His “leading” is not to be restricted to that: He exercises *inviting* motives, encouraging us unto the perfecting of holiness. And this being guided and governed by the Holy Spirit is an infallible proof that we are living members of God’s family.

Active Guidance

It is the office of Jehovah the Spirit in the covenant of redemption, after He has called the elect out of the world, to place Himself at their head and undertake their future guidance. He knows the only path which leads to Heaven. He knows the difficulties and dangers which beset us, the intricate maze of life's journey, the numerous false routes by which Satan deceives souls, and the proneness of the human heart to follow that which is evil; and therefore does He, in His infinite grace, take charge of those who are "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb 11:13) in this scene, and conduct them safely to the Celestial Country. O what praise is due unto this heavenly Guide! How gladly and thankfully should we submit ourselves unto His directions! How hopeless would be our case without Him! With what alacrity should we follow His motions and directions!

As we have already pointed out, the blessed Spirit of God "leads" both objectively and subjectively: by pointing us to the directive precepts of the Word, that our actions may be regulated thereby: and by secret impulses from within the soul, impressing upon us the course we should follow—the evils to be avoided, the duties to be performed. The Spirit acts upon His own life in the renewed soul. He works in the Christian a right disposition of heart relating to truth and duty. He maintains in the believer a right disposition of mind, preparing and disposing him to attend unto the revealed will of God. He speaks effectually to the conscience, enlightens the understanding, regulates the desires, and orders the conduct of those who submit themselves unto His holy suggestions and overtures. To be "led by the Spirit of God" is to be under His guidance and government.

A Caution

The wayward child and the self-willed youth is guided by his own unsanctified and unsubdued spirit. The man of the world is controlled by "the spirit of the world" (1Co 2:12). The wicked are governed by Satan, "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). But the Christian is to yield himself unto "the still small voice" (1Ki 19:12) of the Holy Spirit. Yet a word of caution is needed at this point, for in our day there are many fanatics and impious people who do that which is grossly dishonoring to God under the plea that they were "prompted by the Spirit" so to act. To be "led by the Spirit of God" does not mean being influenced by unaccountable suggestions and uncontrollable impulses which result in conduct displeasing to God, and often injurious to ourselves and others. No, indeed: not so does the Spirit of God "lead" anyone.

There is a safe and sure criterion by which the Christian may gauge his inward impulses and ascertain whether they proceed from his own restless spirit, an evil

spirit, or the Spirit of God. That criterion is the written Word of God, and *by it* all must be measured. The Holy Spirit never prompts anyone to act contrary to the Scriptures. How could He, when He is the author of them! *His* promptings are always unto obedience to the precepts of Holy Writ. Therefore, when a man who has not been distinctly called, separated, and qualified by God to be a minister of His Word, undertakes to “preach,” no matter how strong the impulse, it proceeds not from the Holy Spirit. When a woman “feels led” to pray in public where men are present, she is moved by “another spirit” (2Co 11:4); or if one claimed “guidance” in assuming an unequal yoke by marrying an unbeliever, 2 Corinthians 6:14 would prove conclusively that it was *not* the “guidance” of the Holy Spirit.

Divine Direction

The Holy Spirit fulfills His office of guide by three distinct operations. First, He communicates life and grace, a new “nature”; second, He stirs that life unto action and gives “more grace”; third, He directs the action into performance of duty. Life, motion, and conduct are inseparable in nature and grace alike. First, the Holy Spirit quickens us into newness of life, infusing gracious habits into the soul. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Eze 36:26). Second, He moves upon the soul and assists the new nature to act according to its own gracious habits and principles: He “worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). Third, He *directs* our actions by enlightening our understandings, guiding our inclinations, and moving our wills to do that which is pleasing unto God. It is the last two we are now considering.

Divine direction is *promised* the saints: “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psa 25:9): and this not only by general directions, but by particular excitations. “I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (Isa 48:17). Divine guidance is *desired* by the saints as a great and necessary blessing: “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Psa 25:4, 5). Mark the earnestness of this prayer: “shew me,” “teach me,” “lead me.” Note the argument: “Thou art the God of my salvation,” and as such, pledged to undertake for me. Observe the importunity: “on thee do I wait all the day,” as if he would not be left for a moment to his own poor wisdom and power. Even the “new nature” is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Though the children of God are “light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8) and have a general understanding of the way of godliness, yet much ignorance and darkness still remains in them; and therefore in order to a steady and constant course of obedi-

ence they need to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that their light may be both directive and persuasive. Though Christians have a general understanding of their duty, much grace from God is needed to perform it by them. If left to themselves, their own corruptions would blind and govern them, and therefore do they pray, “Order my steps in thy Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133). The way to Heaven is a “narrow” one (Mat 7:14), hard to find and harder still to be kept, except God teach us *daily* by His Spirit. Wisdom from on high is continually needed to know how to apply the rules of Scripture to all the varied details of our lives. The Holy Spirit is the only fountain of holiness, and to Him we must constantly turn for directions.

But something more than knowledge is needed by us: the Spirit must persuade and incline our hearts and move our wills. How strong are our inclinations to sin, how easily fleshly impulses override our better judgment, how weak we are before temptation! We know what *we should* do, but are carried away by corrupt affections to the contrary. It is at *this* point the Holy Spirit governs from within. First, by His restraining motions, bidding us to avoid and mortify sin; second, by His quickening motions, inviting us to the pursuit of holiness. And just so far as we *yield* to His “strivings” are we “led by the Spirit of God.” As moral agents we are responsible to cooperate with the Spirit and respond to His gentle sway over us. Alas, we so often fail to do so. But though He allows this up to a certain point—for our humbling—yet by His invincible power He prevents our making shipwreck of the faith, and after many chastenings, conducts us safely to glory.

Knowing We Are Led by the Spirit

In conclusion we will seek to supply answer to the following question: *How* may Christians know whether they be among those who are “led by the Spirit of God”? In general, those who are directed by this divine guide are moved to examine their hearts and take frequent notice of their ways, to mourn over their carnality and perverseness, to confess their sins, to earnestly seek grace to enable them to be obedient. They are moved to search the Scriptures daily to ascertain the things which God has prohibited and the things which He enjoins. They are moved to an increasing conformity to God’s holy Law, and an increasing enablement to meet its requirements is wrought in them by the Spirit blessing to them the means of grace. But to be more specific:

First, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *led from ourselves*: from confidence in our own wisdom, from dependence upon our own strength, and from trust in our own righteousness. We are led from self-aggrandizement, self-will, self-pleasing. The Spirit conducts away from self unto

God. Yet let it be pointed out that this weaning us from ourselves is not accomplished in a moment, but is a perpetual and progressive thing. Alas, God has at best but a portion of our affections. It is true there are moments when we sincerely and ardently desire to be fully and unreservedly surrendered to Him, but the ensnaring power of some rival object soon confirms how partial and imperfect our surrender has been.

Second, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *brought to occupation with Christ*. To whom else, in our deep need, can we go? Who so well-suited to our misery and poverty? Having severed us in some degree from ourselves, the Spirit brings us into a closer realization of our union with the Savior. Are we conscious of our filth and guilt?—the Spirit leads us to the blood of Christ. Are we sorely tried and oppressed?—the Spirit leads us to Him who is able to succour the tempted. Are we mourning our emptiness and barrenness?—the Spirit leads us to the One in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It is the special office of the Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

Third, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *conducted along the highway of holiness*. The Spirit leads the Christian away from the vanities of the world to the satisfying delight which is to be found in the Lord. He turns us from the husks which the swine feed upon unto spiritual realities, drawing our affections unto things above. He moves us to seek after more intimate and more constant communion with God, which can only be obtained by separation from that which He abhors. His aim is to conform us more and more to the image of Christ. Finally, He will conduct us to Heaven, for of it the Spirit is both the pledge and the earnest. ❧