



Letting the Holy Spirit Lead

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14)

In my many years of ministry I have often taught about the Holy Spirit. It has been my experience that a better understanding of the Holy Spirit can make us more effective for God’s Kingdom. It is the Holy Spirit who continues the ministry of Jesus in our lives.

One key ministry of the Holy Spirit is to be our Guide. He has been sent by God the Father to lead us through life. In John 16:13 Jesus says:

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth . . .

In Romans 8:14, Paul explains practically how we can live as God’s children: it is by being led by the Holy Spirit.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The tense used here is the continuing present tense: as many as are regularly led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. The word son here speaks of maturity. It is not the word for an infant, but for a grown son. In order to become God’s children we have to be born again of the Spirit of God. Jesus makes this very clear in John chapter 3. But once we have been born again, in order to grow up and become mature and complete, we need to be regularly led by the Holy Spirit.

The sad truth is that many Christians who have been born again never really go on to be led by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they never achieve maturity. They never become the kind of complete Christians that God intends. That is why it is vitally important to deal with this theme of being led by the Holy Spirit.

Achieving Righteousness

The Bible deals with two methods by which to achieve righteousness with God: law and grace—and they are mutually exclusive. If you seek to achieve righteousness by law, you cannot achieve it by grace. And if you seek to achieve righteousness by grace, then you cannot do it by keeping the law. It is extremely important to emphasize this, because it has been my observation that many Christians try to mix law and grace. They seek to keep themselves in good standing with God partly by law and partly by grace. The truth of the matter is that they do not really understand either grace or law.

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Law is a set of rules that you must keep. If you keep all the rules—all the time—you achieve righteousness. Grace, on the other hand, is something that we cannot earn. Grace is received from God only by one way, as described in Ephesians 2:8:

For by grace you have been saved through faith...

Personally, I believe that only God Himself could conceive the method of achieving righteousness by faith. I believe that natural man, left to himself, would never have conceived such a way of achieving righteousness. To the best of my knowledge, every other major religion requires people to achieve righteousness by doing something. Different religions hold to different requirements, but, in essence, all of them think along this line: “I’ll be righteous if I do these things and don’t do those things.”

This means that the Christian faith, if we understand it rightly, is absolutely unique. There is no other religion that even tries to offer righteousness on the basis of grace received through faith alone. But, when you embrace God’s grace, He empowers you to live free from the control of sin. In Romans 6:14, Paul is speaking to people who have received the grace of God:

For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under law but under grace.

Notice that these two are mutually exclusive. If you are under law, you are not under grace. If you are under grace, you are not under law. You cannot be under both at the same time.

I notice also Paul says that sin will not have dominion over you because you are not under the law. The implication is that if you are under the law, sin will have dominion over you. If we seek to achieve righteousness by keeping the law, we will never be able to escape sin’s grasp.

Let us look once more at Romans 8:14:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Do we live as sons of God by keeping a set of rules? No. We live as sons of God by being led by the Holy Spirit. That is the only way we can live as God’s mature children.

Now let us look at Galatians 5:18:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Once again, the message is clear. You become a son of God by being led by the Spirit. And if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

For many professing Christians, however, following a set of rules is like a crutch. They limp around supporting themselves on the crutch. God says, “Throw the crutch away

and trust Me!” I have discovered that it frightens people to trust God’s grace completely. We all want to hang on to a little set of rules that we keep. That is our crutch. But it does not work! We must become completely dependent on the Holy Spirit.

God’s way to righteousness and holiness is not through struggling, but through yielding—yielding to the Holy Spirit. Come to the end of your efforts and say, “Holy Spirit, take over. I cannot handle this situation—but You can!” It does not mean you do not need willpower. It means you need to use your willpower in a different way. You have to use your willpower to not do it by yourself, but to trust the Holy Spirit.

By nature, I am an independent, strong-minded person. Any time I have a problem, my natural instinct is to work out the solution for myself. It has taken me years to come to the place where I do not do that. Instead, I say, “Lord, what is Your solution?” Often, God’s solution is different from anything I myself would ever have thought of. The Christian life is not a life of struggle, it is a life of yielding—to the Holy Spirit within us.

In Romans chapter 7, Paul illustrates this by an example from the marriage relationship. The fruit of your life will not be determined by the amount of effort you make, but by the person to whom you are married. If you are married to your fleshly nature, you will bring forth the works of the flesh. But if—through the Holy Spirit—you are united with the

resurrected Christ, through that union you will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Just Stay Connected

In John 15:1 Jesus compares our relationship with Him to a vine and its branches:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

The vinedresser is the one who does the pruning.

In verses 4 and 5, Jesus goes on to say to His disciples:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

The branches of a vine do not bear grapes with a lot of effort. They do not make resolutions and say: “Now I’m going to bring forth grapes!” They bear grapes simply by being united to the trunk—the stock of the vine. The same life that is in the trunk flows through the branches, and the life in the branches brings forth the appropriate kind of fruit. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you will remain

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related to Me—joined to Me—you'll bring forth much fruit.”

Jesus goes on to talk about pruning. When a vinedresser prunes a vine, he is ruthless. He cuts the branches all the way back to the stem. You would think that vine is never going to bear fruit again. But the next year, it is more fruitful than before.

Some of our most painful struggles may be the result of bearing fruit. Right now, the Father may be pruning you. But do not give up! Do not say, “How could this happen to me?” Simply yield! Surrender to the vinedresser.

All three Persons of the Godhead are involved in this process of bringing forth fruit. The Father is the vinedresser. Jesus is the vine. And the Holy Spirit is the life that flows through the vine and into the branches. The Holy Spirit is the one who actually produces the fruit. It is not the fruit of our best efforts. It is not the fruit of religion. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

A Map or a Guide?

Let me share with you a little parable to make this vivid. I am sharing this out of my own experience. I know what it is to struggle to please God with my own efforts. I have tried at times to be more “religious.” But I have felt so frustrated. I have not known what to do! But I have learned that this is just part of the process that makes our walk with Jesus come alive.

This parable concerns a map and a guide: suppose you are in a certain place and you need to find the way to a distant destination over country that you have never travelled. God gives you two options. You can have a map, or you can have a personal guide.

You are strong. You are clever. You are self-reliant. God says to you, “What do you want, the map or the guide?” You respond, “I’m good at reading maps. I’ll take the map.” Knowing the right direction to take, you set off down the road. The sun is shining, the birds are singing and you feel happy. You say to yourself, “This is easy! This is a piece of cake!”

About three days later, you are in the middle of a jungle. It is midnight. It is raining. Hard! Furthermore, you are on the edge of a precipice. You do not know whether you are facing north, south, east or west. But a gentle voice says, “Can I help guide you?” And you reply, “Oh, I need you! I need you!” The Guide says, “Give me your hand and I’ll get you out of this.” A little while later, you and your Guide are out on the road again and walking along side by side.

Then it occurs to you, “I was pretty silly to get so panicky just about being in that jungle. I could have made it on my own.” So you turn around to explain this to your Guide, and the Guide is not there any longer! You shrug your shoulders and say, “Well, I can make it on my own,” and you set off again.

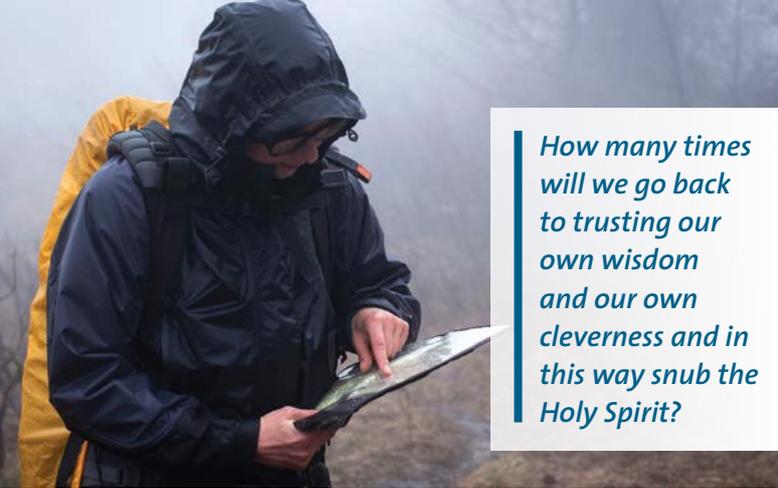
About two days later, you are in the middle of a bog and you sink a little deeper with every step you take. You do not know what to do! You think to yourself, “I can’t ask for help again. Last time I got it and I didn’t do the right thing.”

At this moment, you discover to your astonishment that the Guide is right beside you once more. He says, “Let me help you,” and you start off together again.

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How many times will we go back to trusting our own wisdom and our own cleverness and in this way snub the Holy Spirit?

At this point, you remember the map that is still in your pocket. So you take it out and offer it to the Guide saying, "Maybe you'd like that." But the Guide says, "Thanks, I know the way, I don't need the map." Then he says, "As a matter of fact, I made the map."

The map, of course, is the law. It is perfect. Every detail is exactly right. Every single item in the geography is correctly marked. It is up to you to decide, "I won't take the map. I'll trust my Guide."

Who is the personal Guide? The Holy Spirit, of course!

How often does this kind of thing need to happen? How many times will we go back to trusting our own wisdom and our own cleverness and in this way snub the Holy Spirit?

The Bride Who Trusted Her Guide

Genesis 24 is a vivid account of how Abraham obtained a bride for his son Isaac. He sent his servant back to the land of Mesopotamia to find a young woman of his own family line, which—according to the culture of that time—was an essential requirement.

This story is a parable acted out in history. Abraham is a type of God the Father. Isaac is a type of Jesus Christ the Son. The chosen bride (whose name was Rebekah) is a type of the church. Then there is one other main character who remains nameless: the servant. The servant is a type of the Holy Spirit. Genesis 24 contains the Holy Spirit's self-portrait. It is characteristic that he does not even name Himself. The Holy Spirit never draws attention to Himself, but always works to bring glory to the Father and the Son.

The servant sets off, taking with him ten camels laden with various gifts, having in mind that he is going to choose a



bride. In the Middle East, whenever you make a significant choice and build a relationship, you always give a gift. If your gift is received, you as a person are received. If your gift is rejected, then you are rejected. This is an absolutely critical part in establishing any relationship.

Having lived in that part of the world, I can tell you that camels carry an immense amount of baggage—and the servant is making the trip with no less than ten camels! He arrives at the place where they water the flocks and he prays: "I'm going to ask one of these young women to draw water for me. Let the one who is the chosen young woman say, 'I'll draw water for you and for your camels as well.'" (Bear in mind that a camel can drink forty gallons of water. So, this chosen young woman would be volunteering to draw up to four hundred gallons of water.)

So here comes Rebekah, and the servant says, "Give me something to drink." Rebekah replies, "Certainly! And I'll draw for your camels as well." Then the servant says to himself, "This is the girl!" Let me add that Rebekah is a pattern of faith and works. It takes a lot of work to draw water for ten camels.

Then the servant pulls out a beautiful jewel and places it on Rebekah's forehead. The moment she accepts the jewel, it marks her as the appointed bride. What would have happened if Rebekah had refused the jewel? She would never have become the bride! What can we say of a church that refuses the gifts of the Holy Spirit? It lacks the distinctive marks of the bride!

Rebekah never had a map. She had never been where the guide was taking her. She had never seen either the man she was to marry or his father. But she had a guide who knew the way! He also knew both the father and the son. He could supply her with all the information she needed.

That is how it is with you and me. We cannot make it with a map, but we must have a Guide. In this life we will probably never see the Father or the Son or the place that is our destination. But if we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, He will show us the way. He will also be our source of information concerning the Father and the Son.

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