

The Leading of the Holy Spirit

1. Introduction

- a. The Scriptures speak of the Christian being led by the Holy Spirit.
 - i. Rom. 8:14 - [14](#) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
 - ii. Gal. 5:17-18 - [17](#) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18](#) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
 - 1. Along with many others in the New Testament, these two verses make it obvious that walking by the Spirit is not simply a matter of passive surrender. The Spirit-led life is a life of conflict, because it is in constant combat with the old ways of the flesh that continue to tempt and seduce the believer. The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.
 - 2. A believer who is not actively involved in resisting evil and obviously seeking to do good is not being led by the Spirit, no matter how much he may think he has “surrendered.” The faithful believer is not an observer but “a good soldier of Christ Jesus” who is engaged in the “active service” of his Lord.
- b. How does the Spirit lead the Christian?
 - i. Is it by the Word of God only?
 - ii. Is through feelings, impressions, visions, dreams, etc.?
- c. Conflicting ideas on this subject is one reason for much religious confusion.
 - i. Many justify their beliefs and practices saying, "The Spirit led me to this."
 - ii. Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, non-Pentecostal, all claim to be led by the Spirit.
 - iii. Some believe that dreams and visions are employed in the leading of the Spirit.

2. How the Spirit Leads the Christian

- a. The leading is both internal and external.
 - i. External by the word of God
 - ii. Internal by the indwelling of the Spirit.

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1. From the previous lesson on the indwelling of the Spirit, this is not a mystical, occult, inexplicable influence, but a promise to be accepted by faith.
 - b. For the unconverted, there is no promise of the Holy Spirit except that the Spirit convicts of sin in conjunction with the gospel message, the word of God.
- 3. The Spirit Leads Externally Through the Word.**
- a. The Word is the instrument used by the Spirit to instruct and convict.
 - i. The Spirit was sent to convict the world
 1. John 16:7-11 – [7](#) Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. [8](#) And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9](#) concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10](#) concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11](#) concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.
 - ii. The Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth
 1. John 16:12-13 – [12](#) “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13](#) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
 2. Acts 20:26-27 – [26](#) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, [27](#) for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.
 3. 2 Pet. 1:3 – [3](#) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,
 - iii. What the Spirit revealed, the apostles received and preached.
 1. 1 Cor. 2:10-13 – [10](#) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. [11](#) For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except

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the Spirit of God. [12](#) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. [13](#) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

- iv. What they received, they wrote that we might understand.
 - 1. Eph. 3:3-5 – [3](#) how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. [4](#) When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5](#) which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
- v. The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching.
 - 1. Acts 2:42 – [42](#) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- vi. The word is the "sword" of the Spirit.
 - 1. Eph. 6:17 – [17](#) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God
- vii. To resist the Word is also to resist the Spirit.
 - 1. Acts 7:51-53 – [51](#) "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. [52](#) Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, [53](#) you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."
 - 2. 1 Cor. 14:36-37 – [36](#) Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? [37](#) If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.
- viii. When one sets their mind on the things of the Spirit (the one who guided the apostles and prophets)...
 - 1. They will live according to the Spirit
 - a. Rom. 8:5 – [5](#) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but

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those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit

2. They will experience life and peace.

a. Rom. 8:6 – [6](#) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

ix. When one walks in the Spirit (by heeding His Word)...

1. They will not fulfill the lust of the flesh

a. Gal. 5:16 – [16](#) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

2. They will be led by the Spirit.

a. Gal. 5:18 – [18](#) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

3. They will produce the fruit of the Spirit.

a. Gal. 5:22-25 - [22](#) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23](#) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24](#) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25](#) If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

x. It is by the word of God that we know of the work of the Spirit.

4. The Spirit Leads Internally Through His Indwelling.

a. By strengthening the inner man

i. Eph. 3:16-19 - [16](#) that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17](#) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18](#) may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19](#) and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

b. By putting to death the deeds of the body

i. Rom. 8:13 - [13](#) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

c. By giving life to our mortal bodies

i. Rom. 8:11 - [11](#) If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead

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will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

5. The Spirit Leads in Conjunction with the Word.

- a. When we make effort to heed the Word, the Spirit aids us.
 - i. Supplying what strength we may need
 - ii. So that which is produced may rightly be called the "fruit" of the Spirit
- b. To illustrate, consider the development of a Christ-like character
 - i. 2 Pet. 1:5-10 - [5](#) For this very reason, **make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6](#) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness (*aka patience*), and steadfastness with godliness, [7](#) and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [8](#) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9](#) For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. [10](#) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
 - ii. Gal. 5:22-23 - [22](#) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23](#) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
 - iii. Look for the commonality between what Peter writes and the fruit of the Spirit.

6. Misconceptions About the Leading of the Spirit

a. Scriptures Concerning Internal Guidance

- i. Prov. 28:26 - [26](#) Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.
- ii. Jer. 17:9 - [9](#) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
- iii. Acts 26:9-11 - [9](#) "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. [10](#) And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. [11](#) And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

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b. Dreams and visions had to be verified by the word of God.

- i. Deut. 13:1-5 - [1](#) “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, [2](#) and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ [3](#) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. [4](#) You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. [5](#) But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.
- ii. Deut. 18:20-22 - [20](#) But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ [21](#) And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’— [22](#) when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

c. It was prophesied that there would be dreams and visions.

- i. Joel 2:28-29 - [28](#) “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. [29](#) Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.
- ii. Acts 2:16-18 - [16](#) But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: [17](#) “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; [18](#) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

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1. Peter declared that what Joel spoke was fulfilled at Pentecost.

d. Matthew record 6 instances of dreams.

- i. [Matt 1:20](#) But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a **dream**, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
- ii. [Matt 2:12](#) And being warned in a **dream** not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.
- iii. [Matt 2:13](#) Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a **dream** and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."
- iv. [Matt 2:19](#) But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a **dream** to Joseph in Egypt,
- v. [Matt 2:22](#) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a **dream** he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
- vi. [Matt 27:19](#) Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a **dream**."

e. Vision is used 15 times in the New Testament.

- i. [Matt 17:9](#) And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "**Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.**"
 1. May be better understood as, "tell no one what you have seen."
- ii. [Luke 1:22](#) And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a **vision** in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute.
 1. The people called it a vision; the narrative says that the angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah.
- iii. [Luke 24:23](#) and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a **vision** of angels, who said that he was alive.
 1. They did see and hear angels, two men in dazzling apparel.

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- iv. Acts 9:10-12 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a **vision**, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."
 - 1. Two visions: Saul saw Ananias, and Ananias heard the Lord.
- v. Acts 10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a **vision** an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."
- vi. Acts 10:17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the **vision** that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate
- vii. Acts 10:19 And while Peter was pondering the **vision**, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you."
- viii. Acts 11:5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a **vision**, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me."
- ix. Acts 12:9 And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a **vision**.
- x. Acts 16:6-10 6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a **vision** appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when Paul had seen the **vision**, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
 - 1. Have been forbidden by the spirit to speak the word in Asia and Bithynia, a vision is given to Paul about where to go.
 - 2. Exactly how the Spirit expressed the forbidding is not given.

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3. They had planned to go, or felt they should go, to the other places, but their feelings were not a leading of the Holy Spirit.
4. Feelings are not a reliable source.
5. What one feels may not be the truth.
 - a. One may say, "Hinduism is the only way to be saved. I feel in my heart that this is right."
 - b. Another may say, "Islam is the only way to be saved. I feel in my heart that this is right."
 - c. Another may say, "Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. I feel in my heart that this is right."
 - d. Three mutually exclusive claims cannot all be correct.
 - e. If one says, "The Holy Spirit is leading me to embrace all world religions. I feel in my heart that this is right."
 - f. Is self-testimony reliable?
 - g. It is certainly subjective.
 - h. The fruit of the Spirit may be observed in the life of another Christian, but, like the wind, we cannot see it: we see its effects!
- xi. [Acts 18:9](#) And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,"
- xii. [Acts 26:19](#) "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,"
- xiii. [Rev 9:17](#) And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.
- f. *Each of the dreams and visions had a specific and necessary purpose.*
 - i. Announcing the birth of John to Zechariah
 - ii. Protection of the Messiah
 - iii. Conversion of Saul
 - iv. Conversion of Cornelius and his household
 - v. Spread of the Gospel into Macedonia and at Corinth.
- g. *If one thinks the Spirit is leading them through a dream or vision, it should be remembered that:*
 - i. The dream or vision must be verified as true.

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- ii. The dream or vision must have a purpose.

h. Some believe that the Spirit's leading is enlightenment, to understand the Bible.

- i. 1 Cor. 2:14 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
 - 1. The context is contrasting apostles with philosophers.
 - a. 1 Cor. 1:18-20 - **18** For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." **20** Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
 - b. The wisdom of the world is no help in knowing God's will.
 - 2. It is a source of confusion when one claims to be enlightened in one way, and another person claims to be enlightened in a different way.
- ii. 1 Cor. 2:6-13 - **6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— **10** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.
 - 1. The apostles have received the Spirit of God, and they have taught in words taught by the Spirit.

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2. To claim enlightenment which is contrary to what the apostles received and taught is to doubt the truth of God who send His Spirit precisely for the purpose of guiding the apostles into all the truth.
 3. We do not need the Spirit's help to understand what the Spirit himself has revealed.
- i. Some believe the leading of the Spirit is necessary to discover new truth.*
- i. John 16:13 - [13](#) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
 1. This promise was given to the apostles.
 2. It is a misapplication to hold that it is true of us today.
 3. When Jesus promised, "he will guide you into all the truth", there is nothing excluded.
 4. To believe there will be further divine revelation is to deny the promise of Jesus to the apostles.
 - ii. What does happen is that some seek to justify what they want or believe separately from the word of God – the truth revealed through apostles and prophets.
 1. Among such things as you may have seen or heard about, are:
 - a. Homosexuality is not sin.
 - b. Women can be leaders in the church.
 - c. Baptism is not essential for salvation.
 - d. The Lord's Supper was not intended to be observed every Sunday.
 - e. Etc., etc., etc.
 - iii. Some scriptures to read
 1. Acts 20:26-27 – [26](#) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, [27](#) for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.
 2. 2 Pet. 1:3 – [3](#) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,
 3. Jude 3 – [3](#) Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to

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write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

4. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 - [16](#) All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17](#) that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

7. Conclusion

- a. Consider the blessings of being led by the Spirit.
 - i. His dwelling with us guides us through His revealed Word.
 - ii. He strengthens us in our inner man.
 - iii. He keeps us from gratifying the desires of the flesh.
 - iv. He has provided the word of God for our instruction.
- b. Such blessings are only for those who:
 - i. Are the sons of God
 1. Gal. 4:6-7 - [6](#) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” [7](#) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.
 - ii. Set their minds on the things of the Spirit
 1. Rom. 8:5-8 - [5](#) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. [6](#) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [7](#) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. [8](#) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.