

**THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT,
THE SECRET TOKEN OF THE SONS OF GOD
NO. 1220**

**A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

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

CHILDREN are expected to bear some likeness to their parents. Children of God, born of the grandest of all parents, regenerated by the almighty energy of the divine Spirit, are sure to bear a high degree of likeness to their heavenly Father. We cannot be like God in many of His divine attributes, for they are unique and incommunicable—it is not possible for us to wield His power, or to possess His infinite knowledge—neither can we be independent and self-existent, or possessors of sovereignty or worshipfulness. Man can never be so expressly the image of the Father as Jesus is, for He is, in a mysterious sense, the only-begotten Son of God. We can imitate God, however, in many of His attributes, mainly those of a moral and spiritual kind. We must, in these qualities, be “imitators of God as dear children” or our heavenly pedigree cannot be made out. The point mentioned in the text must never be a matter of question, for if that is doubtful, our filial relationship to God is unproved. We must be, “led by the Spirit of God.” That divine Spirit, who is ever with the Father and the Son, must be always with us so that we are guided, instructed, impelled, quickened, actuated, and influenced by Him, or else we must not dare to think ourselves the sons of God.

The idea of a divine fatherhood extending over all mankind does not appear to have been recognized by the apostle Paul, in this text, at any rate. Here the fatherhood is for *some*, not for *all*, and the text discriminates between the, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God,” and the rest of mankind who are under no such influence. In men who are devoid of the Holy Spirit, there is another spirit—and that other spirit marks them out as sons of another father—“They are of their father the devil, for his works they do.” There have been two seeds from the beginning—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—and it is both untrue and immoral to believe God stands in the same relation to the two opposing families. No, my brethren, *our* Father who is in heaven is not to be claimed as father by the unbeliever, for to them Jesus expressly says, “If God were your Father, you would love Me.”

The text furnishes us with a very simple, but sharp and decisive test which we shall do well to use upon ourselves. It should be employed to try every one of us. If it had said, “As many as have been baptized are the sons of God,” we might have been content to sit very easily in our places. If it had said, “As many as eat and drink at the holy feast of Christian fellowship are the children of God,” we might have remembered how short a time ago we were sitting with the saints around the communion table. If the doing of certain external acts, or the utterance of certain prayers, or the avowal of orthodox principles, or abstinence from the grosser vices had been made the royal mark and heavenly seal of the children of God we might have taken our ease after ascertaining that we are correct as to these things. If being united with an earnest church and being members of a faithful community had been divinely ordained to be an unquestionable certificate of sonship with the Lord Most High, we might have rested perfectly satisfied without putting ourselves into the crucible. But, since these things are not so arranged, I trust that none of us will be so unwise as to neglect the examination which the text suggests to every prudent mind. Come, my brethren, take nothing for granted on so weighty a business as your soul’s eternal interests, but search for evidence and see to the matter as wise householders would do if their whole substance were at stake. Those who are “led by the Spirit of God” are the sons of God. Those who are *not* led by the Spirit of God are not His sons. Therefore, search and see what spirit is in you, that you may know whose children you are.

To help you in this matter, I purpose that we should consider, first, where it is that the Spirit of God leads men, that we may see whether He has ever led us there.

I. WHERE DOES THE SPIRIT OF GOD LEAD THE SONS OF GOD? First of all, He leads them to *repentance*. One of the first acts of the Holy Spirit is to guide the sons of God to the Mercy Seat with tears in their eyes. He leads us into the abominable chambers of imagery concealed within our fallen nature, unfastens door after door, and sets open before our enlightened eyes the secret places polluted with idols and loathsome images portrayed upon the wall. He points out with His hands of light the idol gods, the images of jealousy, and the unclean and abominable things within our nature and thus, He astonishes us into humility. We could not have believed that such evil things haunted our souls, but His discoveries undeceive us and correct our boastful estimates of ourselves. Then, with that same finger, He points to our past life and shows us the blots, the errors, the willful sins, the sins of ignorance, the aggravated transgressions, the offenses against light and knowledge which have marred our career from our youth up. And whereas, previously, we looked upon the pages of our life and thought them fair, when the Spirit has led us into light, we see how black our history has been and being filled with shame and terror, we cry out to God that we may confess our sin and acknowledge that if He should throw us into hell, it would be no more than we deserve! Dear friend, did the Holy Spirit ever lead you to the stool of repentance? Did He ever cause you to see how basely you have treated your God and how shamefully you have neglected your Savior? Did He ever make you bemoan yourself for your iniquities? There is no way to heaven but by the weeping-cross. He who never felt the burden of his sin will yet be crushed beneath its enormous weight when, like some tottering cliff in judgment's dreadful hour, it will fall upon him and grind him to powder! No man ever goes to the chamber of true repentance till the Holy Spirit leads him there, but every child of God knows what it is to look on Him whom he has pierced and mourn for his sin. Holy sorrow for sin is as indispensable as faith in the atoning blood, and the same Spirit who gives us peace through the great sacrifice, also works in us a hearty grief for having grieved the Lord. If you have, from your youth up, never felt any special mourning for sin, then may God begin the gracious work in your heart, for salvation is certainly not worked in *you*. You *must* have repentance, for repentance is absolutely necessary to the divine life. "Except you repent you shall all likewise perish." The prodigal must cry, "Father, I have sinned!" The publican must smite his breast and pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner." As well destroy one of the valves of the heart and yet hope to live as take away repentance which is the inseparable life-companion of faith. A dry-eyed faith is no faith at all. When a man has his face towards Jesus, his back is necessarily turned on his sins. As well look for spring in the garden without the snowdrop as look for grace in the heart without penitence. That faith which is not accompanied by repentance is a spurious faith, and not the faith of God's elect, for no man ever trusts Christ till he feels he needs a Savior. And he cannot have felt that he needs a Savior unless he has been wearied with the burden of his sin. The Holy Spirit leads men, first, to repentance.

He leads them, at the same time, while they think little of themselves, to *think much of Jesus*. Were you ever led to the cross, beloved? Did you ever stand there and feel the burden fall off your shoulders and roll into the Redeemer's sepulcher? When Dr. Neale, the eminent Ritualist, took John Bunyan's, "Pilgrim's Progress," and Romanized it, he represented the Pilgrim as coming to a certain bath into which he was plunged and washed—and then his burden was washed away! He explains this to be the bath of "baptism," though I have never yet seen in any Ritualistic church a baptistery large enough to wash a pilgrim! However, according to this doctored edition of the allegory, Christian was washed in the laver of "baptism" and all his sins were thus removed. That is the High Church mode of getting rid of sin! John Bunyan's way—the true way—is to lose it at the cross! Now, mark what happened. According to Dr. Neale's, "Pilgrim's Progress," that burden *grew again* on the pilgrim's back, and I do not wonder that it did, for a burden which "baptism" can remove is sure to come again! But the burden which is lost at the cross never appears again, forever! There is no effectual cleansing for sin except by faith in that matchless atonement offered once and for all on the bloody tree! And as many as are led there by the Spirit of God are the sons of God! The Spirit of God never led a man to think little of Christ and much of *priests*. The Spirit of God never led a man to think little of the atoning blood and of simple faith in it, and much of outward forms and ceremonies! The Spirit of God sinks the man and lifts up the Savior! He lowers flesh and blood into the grave and gives to man new life in the risen Lord who also has ascended

up on high! “He shall glorify Me,” said Christ of the Comforter, and that, indeed, is the Comforter’s office.

Now, my dear friends, has the Spirit ever made the Lord Jesus glorious in your eyes? Brethren, this is the one point above all others. If the Holy Spirit has never made Christ precious to you, you know nothing about Him! If He has not lifted Jesus up and sunk your own confidences, if He has not made you feel that Christ is all you need and that you find more than all in Him, then He has never worked a divine change in your heart. Repentance and faith must stand gazing upon the bleeding Savior or else hope will never join them and bring peace as his companion.

When the Spirit has glorified Jesus, He leads us to know *other truths*. The Holy Spirit leads the sons of God into all truth. Others go astray after this falsehood or that, but the sheep of God will not hear the voice of strange leaders—their ears are closed to their flatteries—“A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.” Beloved, no lie is of the truth of God, and no man who receives a lie has been led by the Spirit of God into it, let him say what he may. On the other hand, truth is like a closed chamber to the unregenerate man. He may read the table of contents of the precious storehouse, but into that secret room he cannot enter—there is One that has the key of David, who opens and no man shuts—and the key with which He opens is the power of the Holy Spirit! When He opens up a doctrine to a man, the man learns it aright, but he never can know it otherwise. You may go to college and sit at the feet of the most learned Gamaliel of the day, but you can never know the truth of God in the heart unless the Holy Spirit shall teach you. We never know a truth in the power of it till it is burned into our soul, as with a hot iron, by an experience of its power, or engraved as upon brass by the mystic revelation of the Spirit. Only the Spirit of God can interweave the truth with the heart and make it part and parcel of ourselves, so that it is in us and we are in it. Have you thus been led into the truth of God? If so, give God the glory, for thus the Spirit of God certifies your adoption!

The children of God are led not only into knowledge, but into *love*. They are brought to feel the warmth of love as well as to see the light of truth. The Spirit of God causes every true-born son of God to burn with love to the rest of the family. He who is a stranger to Christian love is a stranger to divine grace. Brethren, we have our disputes, for we dwell where it must be that offenses come. But we should be slow to take offense and slower, still, to give it, for we are one in Christ Jesus and our hearts are knit together by His Spirit. I take it that no honest man ought to hold his tongue concerning any of the errors of the day—it is a dishonest way of cultivating ease for yourself and gaining a popularity not worth the having! We must speak the truth whether we offend or please, but this is to be done *in love* and *because* of love. God save us from that suggestion of Satan which advises us to speak only those soft things which please men’s ears, for he who gives way to this persuasion is a traitor to truth and to the souls of men. The true man of God must speak against every evil and false way—but there beats in his heart a strong affection to every child of God—whatever his errors and his faults may be. The knife of the surgeon is mercifully cruel to the cancer, not out of ill-will to his patient, but out of an honest desire to benefit him. Such affectionate faithfulness we have need to cultivate. Love to the saints is the token of the saints. There is an inner church of God’s own elect within every one of the Christian denominations—and this church is made up of men spiritually enlightened—who know the marrow and mystery of the gospel. Whenever they meet, however diversified may be their views, they recognize one another by a sort of sacred code—the one Spirit, which quickens them all alike, leaps within them as it recognizes the one life in the bosoms of others. Despite their mental divergences, ecclesiastical associations, and doctrinal differences, spiritual men no sooner hear the password and catch the mystic sign, than they cry, “Give me your hand, my brother, for my heart is even as your heart. The Spirit of God has led me and he has led you. And in our way, we tread step by step together. Therefore, let us have fellowship with each other.” The outsiders of the camp, the mixed multitude that come up out of Egypt with our Israel, fall both into fighting and lusting—but the children of the living God, who make the central bodyguard of the ark of the Lord, are one in heart with each other and must be so. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

The Holy Spirit leads us into *intense love for the souls of sinners*. If any man shall say, “It is no business of mine whether men are lost or saved,” the Spirit of God never led him into such inhumanity. Hearts of iron have never felt the touch of the Spirit of love. If ever a preacher’s spirit and teaching le-

gitimately lead you to the conclusion that you may view the damnation of your fellow men with complacency or indifference, you may be sure that the Spirit of God never led him or you in that direction! The devil has more to do with some men's pitiless theology than they imagine. Christ's eyes wept over the sinner's doom—may the Lord save us from thinking of it in any other spirit! He who does not love his fellow man whom he has seen—how can he love God whom he has not seen? Does God look with satisfaction upon the ruin of our race? Did He not love men so well that He gave His only-begotten Son for them? And will He have His own children cold, stoical, and indifferent to the loss of human souls? Beloved, if we dwell with Cain and cry, “Am I my brother's keeper?” the Spirit of God never led us there! He leads us into tenderness, sympathy, compassion, and tearful effort, if by any means we may save some.

Further, the Spirit of God leads the sons of God into *holiness*. I shall not attempt to define what holiness is. That is best seen in the lives of holy men. Can it be seen in your lives? Beloved, if you are of a fierce, unforgiving spirit, the Holy Spirit never led you there. If you are proud and swaggering, the Holy Spirit never led you. If you are covetous and lustful after worldly gain, the Holy Spirit never led you there. If you are false in your statements and unjust in your actions, the Holy Spirit never led you there. If I hear of a professor of religion in the ballroom or the theater, I know that the Holy Spirit never led him there. If I find a child of God mixing with the ungodly, using their speech and doing their actions, I am persuaded the Holy Spirit never led him there. But if I see a man living as Christ would have lived, loving and tender, fearless, brave, honest, and in all things minding to keep a good conscience before God and men, I hope that the Spirit of God has led him. If I see that man devout before his God and full of integrity before his fellow men, then, I hope and believe that the Spirit of God is His leader and influences his character. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” I do not wish to speak sharply, but I feel that I must speak plainly—and I feel bound to say that there is far too much hypocrisy among professing Christian people. Many wear the name of Christian and have nothing else that is Christian about them. It is sorrowful that it should be so, but so it is—false professors have lowered the standard of Christian character and made the church so like the world that it is hard to say where one begins and the other ends. We exercise church discipline as best we can, but, for all that, there is a seed of mischief which does not develop into open and overt sin which we cannot remove by discipline, for we are forbidden to root up the tares lest we root up the wheat with them. Men and brethren, we must be holy! It is of no use our talking about being orthodox in belief—we must be orthodox in *life*—and if we are not, the soundest creed will only increase our damnation! I hear men boast that they are Nonconformists to the backbone, as if that were the essential matter! Better far be Christians to the *heart*! What is the use of ecclesiastical Nonconformity if the heart is still conformed to the world? Another man will glory that he is a Conformist, but what is the good of *that* unless he is conformed to the image of Christ? Holiness is the main consideration, and if we are not led into it by the Spirit of holiness, neither are we the sons of God!

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit leads those who are the children of God into *vital godliness*—the mystic essence of spiritual life. For instance, the Holy Spirit leads the saints to prayer, which is the vital breath of their souls. Whenever they get true access to the Mercy Seat, it is by His power. The Holy Spirit leads them to search the Word and opens their understandings to receive it. He leads them into meditation and the chewing of the cud of the truth. He leads them into fellowship with Himself and with the Son of God. He lifts them right away from worldly cares into heavenly contemplations. He leads them away to the heavenly places, where Christ sits at the right hand of God and where His saints reign with Him. Beloved, have you ever felt these leadings? I am talking of them, but do you *understand* them? Are these things matters of constant experience with you? It is easy to say, “Yes, I know what you mean.” Have you *felt* them? Are these everyday things with you? As the Lord lives, if you have not been led into prayer and into communion with God, the Spirit of God is not in you, and you are none of His!

The Spirit of God, moreover, leads the sons of God into *usefulness*—some in one path and some in another—while a few are conducted into very eminent service and into self-consecration of the highest order. We bless God for missionaries, who have been led of the Spirit of God, among the wildest tribes to preach Jesus Christ. We thank God for holy women who, at home, have been led into the darkest parts

of this city to labor among the most fallen and depraved, to lift up Christ before them that He might lift them up to Himself. Blessed are those men and women who are led by the Spirit of God into labors more abundant, for the more abundant shall be their joy. I think I ought to remind you all that if you are doing nothing for Jesus, the Spirit of God has never led you into this *idleness*. If you eat the fat and drink the sweet in the house of God, but never do a hand's turn for the household, the Spirit of God cannot have taught you this abominable *sloth!* There is a something for every one of us to do—a talent committed to the charge of every believer—and if we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, He will tell us what the Lord has appointed us to perform. He will strengthen us for the doing of it and set His seal and blessing upon it when it is done. Those dead branches of the vine, which yield no clusters for the Lord, either by patience in suffering or activity in working, have no evidence that they are of the household of faith! Those who take no part in labors for Jesus can hardly hope that they will ultimately be partakers in His glory with Him.

Thus have I, in a plain manner, without diving too deeply into the matter, given you an answer to the question, "Where does the Spirit of God lead the sons of God?"

II. I shall now answer another question with still greater brevity—HOW DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD THE SONS OF GOD?

The reply would be this—*the Spirit of God operates upon our spirits mysteriously*. We cannot explain His mode of operation, except that we shall probably be right if we conclude that He operates upon our spirits somewhat in the same way in which our spirits operate upon other men's spirits, only after a nobler sort. Now, how do I influence the spirit of my friend? I do it, usually, by imparting to him something which I know, which I hope will have power over his mind by suggesting motives to him and so influencing his acts. I cannot operate upon my neighbor's mind mechanically. No tool can touch the heart. No hand can shape the mind. We act upon matter by machinery, but upon mind, by argument, by *reason*, by instruction, and so we endeavor to fashion men as we desire. *One great instrument which the Holy Spirit uses upon the mind is the Word of God*. The Word, as we have it printed in the Bible, is the great instrument in the hand of the Spirit for leading the children of God in the right way. If you want to know what you ought to do, say as the old Scotchman used to say to his wife, "Reach down yon Bible." That is the map of the way—the heavenly pilgrim's knapsack guide—and if you are led by the Word of God, the Spirit of God is with the Word, and works through it, and you are led by the Spirit of God. Quote chapter and verse for an action, and unless you have twisted the passage, you may rest assured you have acted rightly. Be sure that such-and-such a thing is a command of God written in the Book, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and you do not need a voice of thunder from heaven or an angelic whisper—you have a more sure Word of prophecy, unto which you will do well if you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place.

The Spirit of God also speaks through His ministers. The word preached is often blessed, as well as the written Word, but this can only be the case when the word preached is in conformity with the written Word. At times, God's ministers seem to give the written Word its own voice, so that it sounds forth as if just spoken by the seer who originally received it. As they speak, it drops into the ears like honey from the comb. It leaps forth like water from the wellhead! And at such times, it goes into the heart fresh and warm, with even a greater energy than when we read it alone in our chamber. How often do we feel, when we read a truth in a book, (even though that book is God's Word), our sluggish condition prevents its having such power over us as it has when a man of God, who has experienced it and tasted it, and handled it, speaks of it as the outpouring of his own soul? May God grant that the ministry which you usually attend may be to you the voice of God; may it be guidance to your feet, comfort to your heart, invigoration to your faith, and refreshment to your soul! And while you are sitting in the house of prayer may you feel, "That word is for me. I came here not knowing what to do, but I have received direction. I was faint and weary, but I have obtained consolation and strength. The voice of the pastor has been as the oracle of God to my soul, and now, I go my way comforted as Hannah did when the Lord's servant had spoken peace to her soul."

Upon another point, I would speak with great caution and would have you think of it with more caution, still, for it is a matter which has been sadly abused and turned to fanatical purposes. The Spirit of God does, I believe, *directly, even apart from the Word, speak in the hearts of the saints*. There are in-

ward monitions which are to be devoutly obeyed. There are suggestions, mysterious and secret, which must be implicitly followed. It is not a subject for common talk, but is meant for the ear of the intelligent believer who will not misunderstand us. There will come to you, sometimes, you know not why, certain inward checks, such as Paul received when he essayed to go into Mysia, but the Spirit suffered him not. There is a certain act which you might do or might not do, but an impulse comes upon you which seems to say, "Not that, or not now." Do not violate that inward restraint! "Quench not the Spirit." At another time, a proper thing, a fit thing, will have been forgotten by you for a time, but it comes upon you strongly that it is to be done at once—and for some reason you cannot shake off the impression. Do no violence to that impulse! It is not to every man that the Holy Spirit speaks in such a way, but He has His favored ones, and these must jealously guard the privilege, for perhaps if they are deaf when He speaks, He may never again speak to them in that way. If we render reverent obedience to divine monitions they will become far more common with us. "Why," says one, "you run into Quakerism." I cannot help that! If this is Quakerism, I am so far a Quaker! Names do not concern me one way or another. You, each one, know whether your personal experience gives confirmation to what I have advanced, or otherwise. There let the question end, for, mark you, I advance this with caution and do not set up such monitions as indispensable signs of a son of God.

There is a story told, (and many such some of us could tell almost as striking), of a certain friend who, one night, was influenced to take his horse from the stable and ride some six or seven miles to a certain house where a person lived whom he had never seen! He arrived at dead of night, knocked at the door, and was answered by the master of the house, who seemed to be in great confusion of mind. The midnight visitor said, "Friend, I have been sent to you. I know not why, but surely the Lord has some reason for having sent me to you. Is there anything peculiar about your circumstances?" The man, struck with amazement, asked him to come upstairs, and there showed him a halter tied to a beam. He was putting the rope about his neck to commit suicide when a knock sounded at the door. He resolved that he would go down and answer the call, and then return and destroy himself; but the friend, whom God had sent, talked to him, brought him to a cooler mind, and helped him in the financial difficulty which embarrassed him, and the man lived to be an honorable Christian man. I solemnly declare that monitions equally powerful have guided me and their results have been remarkable to me, at any rate. For the most part, these are secrets between God and my own soul. Neither am I eager to break the seal and tell them to others. There are too many swine about for us to be very lavish with our pearls. If we were obedient to such impulses, if we did not save suicides, we might save souls and might often be, in the hands of God, as angels sent from heaven! But we are like the horse and the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle—we are not tender enough to be sensitive to the divine influence when it comes, and so the Lord does not please to speak to many of us in this way so frequently as we would desire. Still, it is true that, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God," however He may lead them, "they are the sons of God."

Let me here remark that being, "*led* by the Spirit of God," is a remarkable expression. It does not say, "As many as are *driven* by the Spirit of God." No, the devil is a *driver*, and when he enters either into men or into hogs, he drives them furiously. Remember how the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea. Whenever you see a man fanatical and wild, whatever spirit is in him, it is *not* the Spirit of Christ! The Spirit of Christ is forcible. It works mightily, but it is a *quiet* Spirit. It is not an eagle, but a dove. He comes as a rushing wind and fills the house where the disciples are sitting, but at the same time, He comes not as a whirlwind from the wilderness to smite the four corners of the habitation, or it would become a ruin. He comes as a flame of fire sitting upon each of the favored ones, but it is not a flame of fire that burns the house and destroys Jerusalem. No, the Spirit of God is gentle! He does not drive, but leads. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Spirit treats us honorably in thus working. He does not deal with us as with dumb, driven cattle, or soulless waves of the sea. He treats us as intelligent beings, made for thought and reflection. He leads us as a man guides his child, or as one leads his fellow—and we are honored by subjecting our minds and wills to so divine a Spirit. Never is the will truly free until the Holy Spirit sweetly subdues it to willing obedience.

Thus the Spirit of God works, though we cannot explain the method, for that is a thing too wonderful for us, and sooner may we know the path of an eagle in the air, or the way of a serpent upon a rock. As we cannot walk in search of the springs of the sea, so is this, also, hidden from all living. We have said somewhat upon the subject, and as far as we can, have answered the question, "How does the Spirit of God lead the children of God?" But we are of yesterday and know nothing. And, therefore, confessing our ignorance, we pass on.

III. The last question is, WHEN DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD THE SONS OF GOD? Ah, brethren, that question needs anxious answering.

The Spirit of God *would always* lead the sons of God, but, alas, there are times when even children of God will not be led! They are willful and headstrong, and start aside. The healthy condition of a child of God is to be always led by the Spirit of God. Mark this—led by the Spirit everyday—not on Sundays only! Nor alone at periods set apart for prayer—but during every minute of every hour of everyday! We ought to be led by the Spirit in little things as well as in great matters, for observe, if we were led by the Spirit all our lives in all matters, yet if only one action apart from the Spirit were suffered to run to its full results, it would ruin us! The mercy is that the Lord restores our souls, but there is never a single hour when a Christian can afford to wander from the way of the Spirit. If you have a guide along an intricate pathway and you allow him to conduct you for half an hour, and then say, "Now, I shall direct myself for the next five minutes," in that short space you will lose the benefit of having a guide at all! It is clear that a pilot who only occasionally directs the ship is very little better than none. If you were traversing an unknown and difficult pathway, it would render all directions useless if you were to say, "They told me to turn to the right at this tower, but I mean to try the left." That one turning will affect the whole of your later journey. If we err, and are really sons of God, our divine Leader will make us retrace our steps with bitter tears and feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to have chosen our own delusions. If we use our divine Leader wisely, we shall always follow Him. Child of God, the Spirit must lead you in everything! "Well, but," you say, "*will He?*" Ah, "*Will He?*" Yes, to your astonishment! When you are in difficulties, consult the Holy Spirit in the Word. Hear what God speaks in the inspired volume and if no light comes from there, kneel down and pray. When you see a signpost in a country road, and it tells you which way to go, you are glad to follow its directions. But, if in your perplexities you see no signpost, what are you to do? *Pray*. Cast yourself upon the divine guide and you shall make no mistake, for even if you happen to pick the roughest road, it will be the right one if you have selected it with holy caution and in the fear of God. Beloved, the Lord will never let a vessel be dashed upon the rocks whose tiller has been given into His hands. Give up the helm to God and your boat will thread the narrow winding channel of life, avoid every sandbank and sunken rock, and arrive safely at the fair havens of eternal bliss!

The question—when are the sons of God led by the Spirit? is to be answered thus—when they are as they should be, they are always distinctly led by Him; and though, owing to sin in them, they are not always obedient to the same degree, yet the power which usually influences their lives is the Spirit of God.

Now I close, using the text thus. First, as a *test*. Am I a child of God? If so, I am led by the Spirit. Am I led by the Spirit? I am afraid some of you never think of that matter. By whom are you led? Hundreds of religious people are led by their minister or by a Christian friend and so far, so good, for them. But their religion will be a failure unless they are led by the Spirit. Let me put the question again that you may not shirk it—Are you led by the Spirit? If you are, you are a child of God—if not, you are none of His.

That gives me a second use of the text, namely, the use of *consolation*. If you are a child of God, you will be led by the Spirit. Now, are you in doubt tonight? Are you embarrassed? Are you in difficulties? Then, the sons of God are led by the Spirit and you will be led. Perhaps you are looking a long way ahead and you are afraid of difficulties in your old age, or at the death of a relative. Now, God has not given us eyes to pry into the future—so what is the use of our peering where we cannot see? Leave it all to your heavenly Father and you will be unerringly led by the Holy Spirit! When you come to the place where you thought there would be a difficulty, very likely there will be none. "Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?" said the holy women. But when they came to the sepulcher, lo, the stone was rolled away already! Go on as a child of God, walking by faith, with the full assurance that

the path of faith, if not an easy one, will always be a safe one—and all will be well and you will be led in a right way to a city of habitations.

The last word of all is, the text is an *assurance*. If you are led by the Spirit of God, then you are most certainly a son of God. Can you say, tonight, “I do yield myself up to the Lord’s will; I am not perfect, I wish I were. I am burdened with a thousand infirmities, but yet if the Lord will teach me, I am willing to learn. If He will have patience with me, I will strive to follow Him. Oh, what would I give to be perfectly holy! I long to be pure within; I wish above all things else in this world that I may never grieve my God, but walk with Him in the light as He is in the light, and have fellowship with Him, while the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses me from all sin”? My brother, my sister, be well assured that none ever longed like that but a child of God! Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you. No soul, except an heir of heaven, ever had such wishes, aspirations, and groaning after holiness, and such sorrow over failures and mistakes. The text does not say, “He who runs in the Spirit is a son of God,” but he that is *led* by the Spirit of God. Now, we may stumble while we are being led. A man may go very slowly while he is being led. He may go on crutches as he is being led. He may even crawl on his hands and knees while he is being led. But none of these absolutely prevent his being truly led! With all your weaknesses and infirmities, the question still is—Are you led by the Spirit of God? If you are, all your infirmities and failures are forgiven you for Christ’s sake, and your being led is the mark of your being born from above! Go home and rejoice in your sonship, and ask God, if you have been weak, to make you strong. If you have been lame, ask Him to heal you. And, if you have crept along on your hands and knees, ask Him to help you to walk uprightly. But, after all that, bless Him that His Spirit does lead you! If you can only walk, ask Him to make you run. And if you can run, ask Him to make you mount on wings as eagles! Do not be satisfied with anything short of the highest attainments and at the same time, if you have not reached them, do not despair! Remember that in most families, there are babes as well as men and women—the little child in long clothes carried in the arms, and laid on the breast, is just as dear to the parent as the son, who in the fullness of his manhood, marches by his father’s side and takes of his share in the battle of life. You are sons of God if you are led by the Spirit, however small your stature and feeble your grace. The age, strength, or education of the man is not essential to his sonship—the trueness of his birth is the all-important matter. See to it that you are led by the Spirit, or your parentage is not from above!

If you have been condemned by this sermon, then fly away to Jesus, and penitently and trustfully rest in Him! May the Spirit of God lead you to do that, and you are then a child of God. May He bless you now. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 8:1-17.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—722, 448, 456.

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