

THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT

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An examination of the meaning and significance of being led by the Spirit according to Scripture, addressing misconceptions and clarifying the nature of divine spiritual guidance.

14 Chapters

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- Part 1 Introduction

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

These words constitute the classical passage in the New Testament on the great subject of the leading of the Holy Spirit. They stand, indeed, almost without strict parallel in the New Testament.

We read, no doubt, in that great discourse of our Lord's which John has preserved for us, in which, as he was about to leave his disciples, he comforts their hearts with the promise of the Spirit, that "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). But this guidance into truth by the Holy Spirit is something very different from the leading of the Spirit spoken of in our present text, and it is appropriately expressed by a different term.

We read also in Luke's account of our Lord's temptation that he was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil" (Luke 4:1-2), where our own term is used. But though undoubtedly this passage throws light upon the mode of the Spirit's operation described in our text, it can scarcely be looked upon as a parallel passage to it. The only other passage, indeed, which speaks distinctly of the leading of the Spirit in the sense of our text is Galatians 5:18, where, in a context very closely similar, Paul again employs the same phrase: "But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." It is from these two passages primarily that we must obtain our conception of what the Scriptures mean by "the leading of the Holy Spirit."

- A High Privilege

There is certainly abundant reason why we should seek to learn what the Scriptures mean by "spiritual leading." There are few subjects so intimately related to the Christian life, of which Christians appear to have formed, in general, conceptions so inadequate, where they are not even positively erroneous. The sober-minded seem often to look upon it as a mystery into which it would be well not to inquire too closely. And we can scarcely expect those who are not gifted with sobriety to guide us in such a matter into the pure truth of God. The consequence is that the very phrase, "the leading of the Spirit," has come to bear, to many, a flavor of fanaticism. Many of the best Christians would shrink with something like distaste from affirming themselves to be led by the Spirit of God, and would receive with suspicion such an averment on the part of others, as indicatory of an unbalanced religious mind. It is one of the saddest effects of extravagance in spiritual claims that, in reaction from them, the simple hearted people of God are often deterred from entering into their privileges.

It is surely enough, however, to recall us to a careful searching of Scripture in order to learn what it is to be led by the Spirit of God, simply to read the solemn words of our text: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." If the case be so, surely it behooves all who would fain believe themselves to be God's children to know what the leading of the Spirit is. Let us, then, commit ourselves to the teaching of Paul, and seek to learn from him what is the meaning of this high privilege. And may the Spirit of truth here too be with us and guide us into the truth.

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- Who Is Led By The Spirit

Approaching the text in this serious mood, the first thing that strikes us is that the leading of the Spirit of God of which it speaks is not something peculiar to eminent saints, but something common to all God's children, the universal possession of the people of God.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God," says the apostle, "these are sons of God." We have here, in effect, a definition of the sons of God. The primary purpose of the sentence is not, indeed, to give this definition. But the statement is so framed as to equate its two members, and even to throw a stress upon the co-extensiveness of the two designations. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these and these only are sons of God." Thus, the leading of the Spirit is presented as the very characteristic of the children of God. This is what differentiates them from all others. All who are led by the Spirit of God are thereby constituted the sons of God, and none can claim the high title of sons of God who are not led by the Spirit of God. The leading of the Spirit thus appears as the constitutive fact of sonship. And we dare not deny that we are led by God's Spirit, lest we therewith repudiate our part in the hopes of a Christian life. In this aspect of it, our text is the exact parallel of the immediately preceding declaration, which it thus takes up and repeats: "But if any one hath not the Spirit of Christ, that one is not His" (Romans 8:9).

It is obviously a mistake, therefore, to look upon the claim to be led by God's Spirit as an evidence of spiritual pride. It is rather a mark of spiritual humility. This leading of the Spirit is not some peculiar gift reserved for special sanctity and granted as the reward of high merit alone. It is the common gift poured out on all God's children to meet their common need, and is the evidence, therefore, of their common weakness and their common unworthiness.

It is not the reward of special spiritual attainment; it is the condition of all spiritual attainment. In its absence, we should remain hopelessly the children of the devil; by its presence alone are we constituted the children of God. It is only because of the Spirit of God shed abroad in our hearts that we are able to cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

- What Is the Goal of the Spirit's Leading?

We observe, therefore, next that the end in view in the spiritual leading of which Paul speaks is not to enable us to escape the difficulties, dangers, trials, or sufferings of this life, but specifically to enable us to conquer sin. Had the former been its object, it might indeed have been a special grace granted to a select few of God's children, and its possession might have separated them from among their brethren as the peculiar favorites of the Deity. Since, however, the latter is its object, it is the appropriate gift of all those who are sinners, and is the condition of their conquest over the least of their sins. In the preceding context, Paul displays to us our inherent sin in all its festering rottenness. But he displays to us also the Spirit of God as dwelling in us and forming the principle of a new life. It is by the presence of the Spirit within us alone that the bondage in which we are by nature held to sin is broken, that we are emancipated from sin and are no longer debtors to live according to the flesh. This new principle of life reveals itself in our consciousness as a power claiming regulative influence over our actions--leading us, in a word, into holiness. If we consider our life of new obedience from the point of view of our own activities, we may speak of ourselves as "fighting the good fight of faith" (see 1 Timothy 6:12); a deeper view reveals it as the work of God in us by his Spirit. When we consider this divine work within our souls with reference to the end of the whole process, we call it sanctification. When we consider it with reference to the process itself, as we struggle on day by day in the somewhat roundabout and always thorny pathway of life, we call it spiritual leading.

Thus, the leading of the Holy Spirit is revealed to us as simply a synonym for sanctification when looked at from the point of view of the pathway itself, through which we are led by the Spirit as we more and more advance toward that conformity to the image of his Son, which God has placed before us as our great goal. It is obvious at once, then, how grossly it is misconceived when it is looked upon as a peculiar guidance granted by God to his eminent servants in order to insure their worldly safety, worldly comfort, and even worldly profit. The leading of the Holy Spirit is always for good, but it is not for all goods, but specifically for spiritual and eternal good.

I do not say that the good man may not, by virtue of his very goodness, be saved from many of the sufferings of this life and from many of the failures of this life. How many of the evils and trials of life are rooted in specific sins we can never know. How often even failure in business may be traced directly to lack of business integrity rather than to pressure of circumstances or business incompetence is mercifully hidden from us. Nor do I say that the gracious Lord has no care for the secular life of his people. But it surely is obvious that the leading of the Spirit spoken of in the text is not in order to guide men into secular goods. And it is not to be inferred to be absent when trials come--sufferings, losses, despair of this world. It is specifically in order to guide them into eternal good--to make them not prosperous, not free from care or suffering, but holy, free from sin.

It is not given us to save us from the consequences of our business carelessness or incompetence, to take the place of ordinary prudence in the conduct of our affairs. It is not given us to preserve us from the necessity of strenuous preparation for the tasks before us or from the

trouble of rendering decision in the difficult crises of life. It is given specifically to save us from sinning, to lead us in the paths of holiness and truth.

- When Does The Spirit Lead?

Accordingly, we observe next that the spiritual leading of which Paul speaks is not something sporadic, given only on occasion of some special need of supernatural direction, but something continuous, affecting all the operations of a Christian man's activities throughout every moment of his life. It has but one end in view, the saving from sin, the leading into holiness, but it affects every single activity of every kind--physical, intellectual, and spiritual--bending it toward that end. Were it directed toward other ends, we might indeed expect it to be more sporadic. Were it simply the omniscience of God placed at the disposal of his favorites, which they might avail themselves of in times of perplexity and doubt, it might well be occasional and temporary. But since it is nothing other than the power of God unto salvation, it must needs abide with the sinner, work constantly upon him, enter into all his acts, condition all his doings, and lead him thus steadily onward toward the one great goal.

It is easy to estimate, then, what a perversion it is of the "leading of the Spirit" when this great saving energy of God, working continually in the sinner, is forgotten, and the name is accorded to some fancied sporadic supernatural direction in the common offices of life. Let us not forget, indeed, the reality of providential guidance, or imagine that God's greatness makes him careless of the least concerns of his children. But let us much more not forget that the great evil under which we are suffering is sin, and that the great promise which has been given us is that we shall not be left to wander, self-directed, in the paths of sin into which our feet have strayed, but that the Spirit of holiness shall dwell within us, breaking our bondage and leading us into that other pathway of good works, which God has afore prepared that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

- Part 2 Introduction

All of this will be powerfully supported and the subject perhaps somewhat further elucidated if we will seek now to penetrate a little deeper into the inmost nature of the work of the Holy Spirit which Paul calls here a "leading," by attending more closely to the term which he has chosen to designate it when he calls it by this name. This term, as those skilled in such things tell us, is one which throws emphasis on three matters: on the extraneousness of the influence under which the movement suggested takes place;

on the completeness of the control which this influence exerts over the action of the subject led;
and

on the pathway over which the resultant progress is made.

Let us glance at each of these matters in turn.

- A Supernatural Influence

One is not led when he goes his own way. It is only when an influence distinct from ourselves determines our movements that we can properly be said to be led. When Paul, therefore, declares that the sons of God are "led by the Spirit of God," he emphasizes, first of all, the distinction between the leading Spirit and the led sons of God. As much as this he declares with great emphasis-that there is a power within us, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. And he identifies this extraneous power with the Spirit of God. The whole preceding context accentuates this distinction, inasmuch as its entire drift is to paint the conflict which is going on within us between our native impulses which make for sin, and the intruded power which makes for righteousness. Before all else, then, spiritual leading consists in an influence over our actions of a power which is not to be identified with ourselves-either as by nature or as renewed-but which is declared by the apostle Paul to be none other than the Spirit of God himself.

We thoroughly misconceive it, therefore, if we think of spiritual leading as only a conquest of our lower impulses by our higher nature, or even as a conquest by our regenerated nature of the remnants of the old man lingering in our members. Both of these conquests are realities of the Christian life. The child of God will never be content to be the slave of his lower impulses, but will ever strive, and with ultimate success, to live on the plane of his higher endowments. The regenerated soul will never abide the remnants of sin that vex his members, but will have no rest until he eradicates them to the last shred. But these victories of our nobler selves-natural or gracious-over what is unworthy within us, do not so much constitute the essence of spiritual leading as they are to be counted among its fruits. Spiritual leading itself is not a leading of ourselves by ourselves, but a leading of us by the Holy Ghost. The declaration of its reality is the declaration of the reality of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and of the subjection of the activities of the Christian heart and life to the control of this extraneous power. He that is led by the Spirit of God is not led by himself or by any element of his own nature, native or acquired, but is led by the Holy Ghost. He has ceased to be what the Scriptures call a "natural man," and has become what they call a "spiritual man"; that is, to translate these terms accurately, he has ceased to be a self-led man and has become a Spirit-led man-a man led and determined in all his activities by the Holy Ghost. It is this extraneousness of the source of these activities which Paul emphasizes first of all when he declares that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

- A Complete Control: Not Merely Guided

The second matter which is emphasized by his declaration is the controlling power of the influence exerted on the activities of God's children by the Holy Spirit. One is not led, in the sense of our text, when he is merely directed in the way he should go, guided, as we may say, by one who points out the path and leads only by going before in it; or when he is merely upheld while he himself finds or directs himself to the goal. The Greek language possesses words which precisely express these ideas, but the apostle passes over these and selects a term which expresses determining control over our actions. Some of these other terms are used elsewhere in the Scriptures to set forth appropriate actions of the Spirit with reference to the people of God. For example, our Lord promised his disciples that when the Spirit of truth should come, he should guide them into all the truth. Here a term is employed which does not express controlling leading, but what we may perhaps call suggestive leading. It is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament of God's guidance of his people, and once, at least, of the Holy Spirit: "Teach us to do thy will, for thou art my God; let thy good Spirit guide us in the land of uprightness" (Psalms 143:10). But the term which Paul employs in our text is a much stronger one than this. It is not the proper word to use of a guide who goes before and shows the way, or even of a commanding general, say, who leads an army. It has stamped upon it rather the conception of the exertion of a power of control over the actions of its subject, which the strength of the led one is insufficient to withstand. This is the proper word to use, for example, when speaking of leading animals, as when our Lord sent his disciples to find the ass and her colt and commanded them "to loose them and lead them to him" (Matthew 21:2), or as when Isaiah declares in the Scripture which was being read by the Eunuch of Ethiopia whom Philip was sent to meet in the desert, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter" (Acts 8:32). It is applied to the conveying of sick folk-as men who are not in a condition to control their own movements; as, for example, when the good Samaritan set the wounded traveler on his own beast and led him to an inn and took care of him (Luke 10:34), or when Christ commanded the blind man of Jericho "to be led unto him" (Luke 18:40). It is most commonly used of the enforced movements of prisoners, as when we are told that they led Jesus to Caiaphas to the palace (John 18:28), or when we are told that they seized Stephen and led him into the council (Acts 6:12), or that Paul was provided with letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, "that if he found any that were of the Way, he might lead them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2). In a word, though the term may, of course, sometimes be used when the idea of force retires somewhat into the background, and is commonly so used when it is transferred from external compulsion to internal influence-as, for example, when we are told that Barnabas took Paul and led him to the apostles (Acts 9:27), and that Andrew led Simon unto Jesus (John 1:42)-yet the proper meaning of the word includes the idea of control, and the implication of prevailing determination of action never wholly leaves it. Its use by Paul on the present occasion must be held, therefore, to emphasize the controlling influence which the Holy Spirit exercises over the activities of the children of God in his leading of them. That extraneous power which has come into our hearts making for righteousness, has not come into them merely to suggest to us what we should do-merely to point out to us from within the way in which we ought to walk-merely to rouse within

us and keep before our minds certain considerations and inducements toward righteousness. It has come within us to take the helm and to direct the motion of our frail barks on the troubled sea of life. It has taken hold of us as a man seizes the halter of an ox to lead it in the way which he would have it go, as an attendant conducts the sick in leading him to the physician, or as the jailer grasps the prisoner to lead him to trial or to the jail. We were slaves to sin; a new power has entered into us to break that bondage-but not that we should be set, rudderless, adrift on the ocean of life, but that we should be powerfully directed on a better course, leading to a better harbor. Accordingly, Paul, when he declares that we have been emancipated from the law of sin and of death by the advent of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus into our hearts, does not leave it so, as if emancipation were all. He adds, "

Accordingly then, we are bound." Though emancipated, still bound! We are bound, but no longer to the flesh, to live after the flesh, but to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit. He hastens, indeed, to point out that this is no hard bondage, but a happy one; that "sons" is a name better fitted to express its circumstances than "slaves"-that it includes childship and heirship to God and with Christ. But all this blessed assurance operates to exhibit the happy estate of the service into which we have been brought, rather than to alter the nature of it as service. The essence of the new relation is that it also is one of control, though a control by a beneficent and not a cruel power. We do not at all catch Paul's meaning, therefore, unless we perceive the strong emphasis which lies on this fact-that those who are led by the Spirit of God are under the control of the Spirit of God. The extraneous power which has come into us, making for righteousness, comes as a controlling power. The children of God are not the directors of their own activities; there is One that dwells in them who is not merely their guide, but their governor and strong regulator. They go, not where they would, but where he would; they do not what they might wish, but what he determines. This it is to be led by the Spirit of God.

- Not Merely Carried or Dragged

It is to be observed, however, on the other hand, that although Paul uses a term here which emphasizes the controlling influence of the Spirit of God over the activities of God's children, he does not represent the action of the Spirit as a substitute for their activities. If one is not led, in the sense of our text, when he is merely guided, it is equally true that one is not led when he is carried. The animal that is led by the attendant, the blind man that is led to Christ, the prisoner that is led to jail—each is indeed under the control of his leader, who alone determines the goal and the pathway; but each also proceeds on that pathway and to that goal by virtue of his own powers of locomotion.

There was a word lying at the apostle's hand by which he could have expressed the idea that God's children are borne by the Spirit's power to their appointed goal of holiness, apart from any activities of their own, had he elected to do so. It is employed by Peter when he would inform us how God gave his message of old to his prophets. "For no prophecy," he tells us, "ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being borne by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). This term, "borne," emphasizes, as its fundamental thought, the fact that all the power productive of the motion suggested is inherent in, and belongs entirely to, the mover. Had Paul intended to say that God's children are taken up as it were in the Spirit's arms and home, without effort on their own part, to their destined goal, he would have used this word. That he has passed over it and made use of the word "led" instead, indicates that, in his teaching, the Holy Spirit leads and does not carry God's children to their destined goal of holiness; that while the Spirit determines both the end and the way toward it, his will controlling their action, yet it is by their effort that they advance to the determined end.

Here, therefore, there emerges an interesting indication of the difference between the Spirit's action in dealing with the prophet of God in imparting through him God's message to men, and the action of the same Spirit in dealing with the children of God in bringing them into their proper holiness of life. The prophet is "borne" of the Spirit; the child of God is "led." The prophet's attitude in receiving a revelation from God is passive, purely receptive; he has no part in it, adds nothing to it, is only the organ through which the Spirit delivers it to men; he is taken up by the Spirit, as it were, and borne along by him by virtue of the power that resides in the Spirit, which is natural to him, and which, in its exercise, supersedes the natural activities of the man. Such is the import of the term used by Peter to express it. On the other hand, the son of God is not purely passive in the hands of the sanctifying Spirit; he is not borne, but led—that is, his own efforts enter into the progress made under the controlling direction of the Spirit; he supplies, in fact, the force exerted in attaining the progress, while yet the controlling Spirit supplies the entire directing impulse. Such is the import of the term used by Paul to express it. Therefore, no prophet could be exhorted to work out his own message with fear and trembling; it is not left to him to work it out—the Holy Spirit works it out for him and communicates it in all its rich completeness to and through him. But the children of God are exhorted to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling because they know the Spirit is working in them both the willing and the doing according to his own good pleasure. In

order to appreciate this element of the apostle's teaching at its full value, it is perhaps worthwhile to observe still further that in his choice of a term to express the nature of the Spirit's action in leading God's children, the apostle avoids all terms which would attribute to the Spirit the power employed in making progress along the chosen road. Not only does he not represent us as being carried by the Spirit; he does not even declare that we are drawn by him. There was a term in common use which the apostle could have used had he intended to express the idea that the Spirit drags, by physical force, as it were, the children of God onward in the direction in which he would have them go. This term is actually used when the Savior declares that no man can come unto him except the Father draw him (John 6:44)-which is as much as to say that men in the first instance do not and cannot come to Christ by virtue of any powers native to themselves, but require the action upon them of a power from without, coming to them, drawing their inert, passive weight to Christ, if they are to be brought to him at all. We can identify this act of drawing-"dragging" would perhaps express the sense of the Greek term none too strongly-with that act which we call, in our theological analysis, regeneration, and which we explain in accordance with the import of this term, as the monergistic act of God, impinging on a sinner who is and remains, as far as this act is concerned, purely passive, and therefore does not move, but is moved.

- Supernaturally Led as an Active Agent

Such, however, is not the method of the Spirit's leading of which Paul speaks in our text. This is not a drawing or dragging of a passive weight toward a goal which is attained, if attained at all, only by virtue of the power residing in the moving Spirit, but a leading of an active agent to an end determined indeed by the Spirit, and along a course which is marked out by the Spirit, but over which the soul is carried by virtue of its own power of action and through its own strenuous efforts. If we are not borne by the Spirit out of our sin into holiness with a smooth and easy movement, almost unnoted by us or noted only with the languid pleasure with which a child resting peacefully on its mother's breast may note its progress up some rough mountain road, so neither are we dragged by the Spirit as a passive weight over the steep and rugged path. We are led. We are under his control and walk in the path in which he sets our feet. It is his part to keep us in the path and to bring us at length to the goal. But it is we who tread every step of the way, our limbs that grow weary with the labor, our hearts that faint, our courage that fails-our faith that revives our sinking strength, our hope that instills new courage into our souls-as we toil on over the steep ascent.

- Part 3 Introduction

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If we are not borne by the Spirit out of our sin into holiness with a smooth and easy movement, almost unnoted by us or noted only with the languid pleasure with which a child resting peacefully on its mother's breast may note its progress up some rough mountain road, so neither are we dragged by the Spirit as a passive weight over the steep and rugged path. We are led. We are under his control and walk in the path in which he sets our feet. It is his part to keep us in the path and to bring us at length to the goal. But it is we who tread every step of the way, our limbs that grow weary with the labor, our hearts that faint, our courage that fails-our faith that revives our sinking strength, our hope that instills new courage into our souls-as we toil on over the steep ascent.

- The Path of Sanctification

And thus it is most natural that the third matter to which Paul's declaration that we are led by the Spirit of God directs our attention concerns the pathway over which our progress is made.

One is not led who is unconscious of the road over which he advances; such a one is rather carried. He who is led treads the road himself, is aware of its roughness and its steepness, pants with the effort which he expends, is appalled by the prospect of the difficulties that open out before him, rejoices in the progress made, and is filled with exultant hope as each danger and obstacle is safely surmounted. He who is led is in the hands of an extraneous power, of a power which controls his actions; but the pathway over which he is thus led is trodden by his own efforts-by his own struggles it may be-and the goal that is attained is attained at the cost of his own labor. When Paul chooses this particular term, therefore, and declares that the sons of God are led by the Spirit, he is in no way forgetful of the arduous nature of the road over which they are to advance, or of the strenuous exertion on their own part, by which alone they may accomplish it. He strengthens and comforts them with the assurance that they are not to tread the path alone, but he does not lull them into inertness by suggesting that they are not to tread it. The term he employs avouches to them the constant and continuous presence with them of the leading Spirit, not merely setting them in the right path, but keeping them in it and leading them through it; for it designates not an impulse which merely initiates a movement in a given direction, but a continuous influence unbrokenly determining a movement to its very goal. But his language does not promise them relief from the weariness of the journey, alleviation of the roughness of the road, freedom from difficulty or danger in its course, or emancipation from the labor of travel. That they have been placed in the right path, that they will be kept continuously in it, that they will attain the goal-of this he assures them; for this it is to be led of the Spirit of God, a power not ourselves controlling our actions, prevalently directing our movement to an end of his choice. But he does not encourage us to relax our own endeavors; for he who is led, even though it be by the Spirit of God, advances by virtue of his own powers and his own efforts. In a word, Paul chooses language to express the action of the Spirit on the sons of God which is in perfect harmony with his exhortation to the children of God to which we have already alluded-to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling because they know it is God that is working in them both the willing and the doing according to his own good pleasure (Php_2:12-13).

- A Great Fire of Hope and Confidence

What a strong consolation for us is found in this gracious assurance-poor, weak children of men as we are! To our frightened ears the text may come at first as with the solemnity of a warning: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these and these only are sons of God." Is there not a declaration here that we are not God's children unless we are led by God's Spirit? Knowing ourselves, and contemplating the course of our lives and the character of our ambitions, dare we claim to be led by the Spirit of God? Is this life-this life that I am living in the flesh-is this the product of the Spirit's leading? Shall not despair close in upon me as I pass the dreadful judgment on myself that I am not led by God's Spirit, and that I am, therefore, not one of his sons? Let us hasten to remind ourselves, then, that such is not the purport nor the purpose of the text. It stands here not in order to drive us to despair, because we see we have sin within us, but to kindle within us a great fire of hope and confidence because we perceive we have the Holy Spirit within us.

Paul, as we have seen, does not forget the sin within us. Who has painted it and its baleful power with more vigorous touch? But neither would he have us forget that we have the Holy Spirit within us, and what that blessed fact, above all blessed facts, means. He would not have us reason that because sin is in us, we cannot be God's children; but in happy contradiction to this, that because the Holy Spirit is in us, we cannot but be God's children. Sin is great and powerful; it is too great and too powerful for us; but the Holy Ghost is greater and more powerful than even sin. The discovery of sin in us might bring us to despair, did not Paul discern the Holy Spirit in us-who is greater than sin-that he may quicken our hope. This declaration that frightens us is not written, then, to frighten, but to console and to enhearten. It stands here for the express purpose of comforting those who would despair at the sight of their sin. Is there a conflict of sin and holiness in you? asks Paul. This very fact that there is conflict in you is the charter of your salvation. Where the Holy Spirit is not, there conflict is not; sin rules as undisputed lord over the life. That there is conflict in you, that you do not rest in complacency in your sin, is a proof that the Spirit of God is within you, leading you to holiness. And all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. This is the purport of the message of the text to us. Paul points us not to the victory of good over evil, but to the conflict of good with evil-not to the end, but to the process-as the proof of childship to God. The note of the passage is, thus, not one of fear and despair, but one of hope and triumph. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"-that is the query the apostle would have ring in our hearts. Sin has a dreadful grasp upon us; we have no power to withstand it. But there enters our hearts a power, not of ourselves, making for righteousness. This power is the Spirit of the most high God. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Let our hearts repeat this cry of victory today. And as we repeat it, let us go onward, in hope and triumph, in our holy efforts. Let our slack knees be strengthened and new vigor enter our every nerve. The victory is assured. The Holy Spirit within us cannot fail us. The way may be rough; the path may climb the dizzy ascent with a rapidity too great for our faltering feet; dangers, pitfalls are on every side. But the Holy Spirit is leading us. Surely, in that assurance, despite dangers and weakness, and panting chest and swimming head, we can find

strength to go ever forward. In these days, when the gloom of doubt (if not even the blackness of despair) has settled down on so many souls, there is surely profit and strength in the certainty that there is a portal of such glory before us, and in the assurance that our feet shall press its threshold at the last. In this assurance, we shall no longer beat our disheartened way through life in dumb despondency, and find expression for our passionate but hopeless longings only in the wail of the dreary poet of pessimism- But if from boundless spaces no answering voice shall start,

Except the barren echo of our ever yearning heart-

Farewell, then, empty deserts, where beat our aimless wings,

Farewell, then, dream sublime of uncompassable things.

We are not, indeed, relieved from the necessity for healthful effort, but we can no longer speak of "vain hopes." The way may be hard, but we can no longer talk of "the unfruitful road which bruises our naked feet." Strenuous endeavor may be required of us, but we can no longer feel that we are "beating aimless wings," and can expect no further response from the infinite expanse than "a sterile echo of our own eternal longings." No, no-the language of despair falls at once from off our souls. Henceforth our accents will be borrowed rather from a nobler "poet of faith," and the blessing of Asher will seem to be spoken to us also-

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,

And as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

There is none like unto God, O Jeshurun,

Who rideth upon the heavens for thy help,

And in his excellency on the skies.

The eternal God is thy dwelling place,

And underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:25-27).

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The Leading of the Spirit By

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