

GOD'S PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Lesson FOUR GUIDANCE — LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

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I. INTRODUCTION

God has always communicated with man. This has been so from the very beginning. God spoke to Adam and Eve, telling them all that was theirs, and warning them of the one thing that was prohibited (Genesis 2:16,17). When man fell, God didn't stop communicating; we see Him speaking to Adam and Eve even after the Fall (Genesis 3:9-11). He conversed with Cain, when Cain had killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:9). He spoke to Noah, to warn him of the coming flood (Genesis 6:13). He spoke to Abram, calling him out of Ur of the Chaldees, into the land of promise (Genesis 12:1). God communicated with Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:2-4; 28:10-13). Throughout the Old Testament we find that God was always in communication with His people, encouraging, admonishing, and leading them. The New Testament church was no stranger to God's direction. The book of Acts repeatedly records how God, in various ways, communicated His will and purpose to the Church (Acts 8:26; 10:10,11; 13:2; 16:6,7; 16:9,10).

Today, God is not silent. He is still speaking to His people; He still wants to guide and direct us, but it is up to us to *learn how to listen*. God speaks to Christians about what He desires for them to do, or what is going to occur, giving direction and guidance by His Spirit. But so often many believers simply aren't listening! Busy schedules and fast-paced lifestyles leave little time for the quiet prayer and contemplation which are necessary in order for us to hear what God is saying.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

Genesis 2:16,17

Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Genesis 3:9-11

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:9

Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."

Genesis 6:13

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you."

Genesis 12:1

And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 26:2-4

(over)

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God wants every believer to be led by Him, constantly "tuned-in" to His voice, obeying every impulse of His Spirit. This is the way in which we will stay in the center of God's will. It is often said by misinformed Christians, "God never speaks to me!" The fact is, however, that most of the time, Christians aren't listening for what God has to say. While looking for a spectacular form of guidance (a voice from heaven or an angelic visitation), they miss the much more common "still small voice" of God's Spirit within. *Every* Christian can know, *clearly*, what God is saying and where He is leading, because every believer has God's Spirit within (I Corinthians 6:19). This is the Spirit of Truth, whom Jesus said would lead us into *all truth* (John 16:13). But we must begin to understand in what *manner* God communicates with us, and become sensitive to that mode of communication.

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants."

Genesis 28:10-13

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Acts 8:26

And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground.

Acts 10:10,11

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:2

And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.

Acts 16:6,7

(cont'd.)

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And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16:9,10

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

I Corinthians 6:19

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

John 16:13

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II. THE HOLY SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
Romans 8:14

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
John 4:24

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.
Romans 8:16

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”
Genesis 1:26

Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty!
Psalms 8:5

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.
II Corinthians 4:16

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.
Ephesians 3:16

But let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.
I Peter 3:4

The Bible says that those who are sons of God are led by His Spirit (Romans 8:14). The Spirit of Truth, who was placed within us when we were born again, is God's means of communicating with us, and leading us in the way in which He wants us to go. God is a spirit (John 4:24), and He created man in His own image, a spirit being. Thus, when God speaks to us, it is a communication from His Spirit to our spirit. “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Romans 8:16). Specifically, this verse refers to our inward assurance that we are saved. And yet, there is a more general principle to be learned from this scripture: **God speaks to us and leads us by having His Spirit bear witness with our spirit!** It is this inward witness to which we must become sensitive.

A. MAN IS A SPIRIT

Before there can be any real understanding of how God leads His children, one must grasp the fact that man is a spirit being. When man was created, God said, “*Let Us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26). God is a spirit, as we have said. Being in God's image doesn't necessarily mean that our “physical” bodies look like God. Being in God's image means that at the very core we are *spiritual creations*. This can be said of no other creature on the face of the earth, for no other creature comes so close to God in Spirit, rationale, and will. Hence, the scripture says of mankind: “*Yet Thou has made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty!*” (Psalm 8:5).

1. The hidden man

Believers need to become conscious of the fact that their minds and bodies don't constitute their identity. Often we forget about the spirit within, because the outward man is always before our eyes and in our consciousness. Yet, this outward man which we see is not the “real” man. The “real” man is the one within, the spirit which God created. Paul calls this the “*inner man*” (II Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:16), while Peter refers to it as the “*hidden person of the heart*” (I Peter 3:4).

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This "inner man" is within *every human being*. Every person has a spirit within. Those who are not born again are spiritually dead, to be sure; but their spirit, though corrupted and alienated from God, does indeed exist within them, and it is active. (Spiritual death means separation from the life of God; it does *not* mean spiritual non-existence, nor even spiritual dormancy.) It is this inner man that is miraculously transformed at the new birth. It is a man's spirit that is made a new creature in Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). It is a man's spirit which becomes "*the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ*" (II Corinthians 5:21). Thus, every Christian has an inner man which is totally recreated. The spirit of every believer is attuned to the impulses and desires of God the Father.

2. The earthly tent

How the apostles viewed their spirits, in relation to their bodies, is evident from what they wrote to the churches. Peter, when referring to his imminent death, spoke of his body as an "*earthly dwelling*" (II Peter 1:13-15); physical death to him meant simply shedding this earthly dwelling and going on into the presence of God. Paul called his body a "*tent*" which he had simply to put off in order to be with Jesus. For both these men, the real person was the spirit within, and not the outward shell. Paul reflects this very attitude in addressing the Philippians: "*But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to **depart and be with Christ**, for that is very much better; yet to **remain on in the flesh** is more necessary for your sake*" (Philippians 1:23,24). Paul speaks of himself as "*departing*" or "*remaining*" in his body, indicating clearly that he viewed his body as a temporary earthly "house." The real "Paul" was the man inside the body.

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

II Corinthians 5:17

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

II Corinthians 5:21

And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.

II Peter 1:13-15

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Philippians 1:23,24

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Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

So He said, "Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. And it came about when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

I Kings 19:9-13

And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.

I Kings 19:12

B. HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Since man is primarily a spirit being, God communicates with him on a spiritual level; His Spirit "bears witness" with a man's recreated spirit. It is through our spirits, the recreated inner man, that God leads us. This inner witness is many times subtle; it is never showy or conspicuous. Sometimes it is little more than an inward intuition; what some might call a "hunch." It is often so quiet that it is passed off as inconsequential, or of only minor importance. And yet, this quiet, inner insight is God's means of leading and directing our footsteps.

Although God does lead in outwardly spectacular ways from time to time (e.g. visions or angelic visitations), this is very much the exception rather than the rule! All too often, the leading of God's Spirit is missed because Christians are looking for something dramatic. While seeking the dramatic, they miss the less conspicuous (but no less supernatural) inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

1. Elijah and the still small voice

Read I Kings 19:9-13.

Elijah's audience with God gives us a fine example of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Notice that God was not in the mighty wind, nor in the shattering earthquake, nor even in the roaring fire. He was in the "gentle blowing." "**And after the fire a still small voice**" (I Kings 19:12 KJV). When Elijah heard that "still small voice," he went out to converse with God. Unfortunately, many believers today are unsatisfied with anything less than "mighty winds," "earthquakes," and "fires." That is, they want outwardly manifested forms of guidance.

2. No less supernatural

The still small voice of God's inward witness may not be outwardly showy, but it is no less supernatural than any form of spectacular guidance. Whenever God guides and directs us by His Spirit, it is miraculous. Bear in mind that the rest of the world (i.e. the unsaved) are not in touch with the living God. But every believer can receive instruction and direction from the One who is "All-Knowing!" This is not commonplace among the unsaved. In fact, it is completely unknown.

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It is in this way, by the inner witness of His Spirit, that God will lead us in *the majority of cases*. This is supernatural guidance to which we must stay sensitive and alert. If God never once speaks to us by spectacular means, that is not a reflection of shallow spirituality. On the contrary, those who always require outward manifestations before they believe that God is speaking, are the ones who are immature. A mature Christian is one who is spiritually sensitive enough to be able to hear the "still small voice" within every time it speaks.

C. BECOME SPIRIT CONSCIOUS

When God leads us by His Spirit, He communicates with our spirit. It is to our spirit that the Holy Spirit speaks when God is directing us. **This is not a mental phenomenon**, for sometimes the things which we are directed to do don't appear to be rational. Nor is it an emotional phenomenon; there are times when the leading of God's Spirit goes against our emotions. It is a **spiritual interaction**, by which God's Spirit communicates (bears witness) with our **spirit!** Hence, the Bible says: "*The **spirit** of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of his being*" (Proverbs 20:27). It doesn't say that the "mind" of man is the lamp of the Lord, nor that the "body" is the lamp of the Lord. It is through our recreated spirit that God will illumine our path and guide us in the right direction. Our spirit is God's lamp, His means of communicating with us and leading us.

Much attention today is paid to the enhancement and development of the human body. Health and exercise programs are instituted in an attempt to make people aware of the needs of their body. The same is true of the human mind. Great amounts of time and money are spent on developing people's minds. Intellectual awareness is given high priority in the world today. Society around us is very "body" and "mind" conscious. And yet little, if any, attention is paid to the human spirit. Indeed, many are ignorant of the fact that there is such a thing. Even in many Christian circles, awareness of the inner man is minimal, if present at all. While body and mental awareness and development have their place, we must remember that these are not the avenues through which God leads us. **God does not lead us through our bodies or through our minds; God leads us through our spirits!**

The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of his being.
Proverbs 20:27

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This means that in order to be led by God, we must become conscious of and sensitive to the inclination of the inner man. The inner man is God's lamp, His means of lighting us up on the inside, so that we can know Him and truly know ourselves. When we become spirit conscious, aware of the presence of the new creature who is in contact with God, then we are ready to "hear" the voice of God's Spirit as He directs us.

1. The example of Jesus

Becoming spirit-conscious requires regular times of prayer and meditation in God's Word. Our bodies and minds are constantly speaking to us, sending us signals of all that is happening around us. Often, it is difficult to hear the "still small voice" within, because of the clamor of other voices within our consciousness. Some believers have no sense of God's inward witness because it is drowned out in the "noise" of everyday life. Unless a person takes the time to **STOP!** and allow his mind and emotions to become quiet, he'll never clearly hear what God is trying to say.

Jesus often withdrew from the crowds, and even from His own companions, in order to spend time alone in prayer with the Father (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). Only *after* having spent an *entire night* in prayer, did He choose twelve men from among His disciples to be His chosen apostles (Luke 6:12,13). These were not times of corporate prayer, spent with His followers and friends. They were times of *solitude*, in which there was only Jesus and the Father. In this way, Jesus remained conscious of God's voice. He was always attentive to what the Spirit of God had to say. The "noise" and the voice of the outside world never dimmed His awareness of God's presence and His leading, because He regularly took time to get away, and to pray.

Those of us who desire to become sensitive to our spirit, and to the voice of God's Spirit, must do the same thing the Lord Jesus did: we must regularly *get alone with God*, prayerfully meditating in His Word.

and after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

Matthew 14:23

and in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.

Mark 1:35

that He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Luke 5:16

and it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also appointed as apostles.

Mark 12,13

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2. One thing needful

In order to hear the witness of God's Spirit in our spirit, we must be listening carefully, always aware of the fact that the Holy Spirit is within us to lead. This means not allowing ourselves to get so "busy," that we neglect spending time alone with the Lord. Sometimes Christians can get so caught up in the "activities" of life that the Spirit's witness within them gets dim and indistinct. These activities are not necessarily "evil" or "wrong"; sometimes they are even in the Lord's work. But often they are given so much attention, that more needful things are omitted. Such was the case with Martha, sister of Lazarus and Mary.

Read Luke 10:38-42.

Martha was "*distracted with all her preparations*"; Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard Him teach. Martha's complaint drew this response from Jesus: "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her*" (Luke 10:41,42). While Martha's industriousness was commendable, she had placed too much weight on things of lesser importance. Mary chose the "*good part,*" the one thing "*needful.*" In the same way today, many believers are busy with numerous, worthy, and noble pursuits. They are active in the Lord's work, or they are caring for their families, or they are diligently involved in their occupations. Yet, while all of this must be done, some Christians allow these activities to "distract" them from the main thing that is needful: **Hearing God's Word and staying in fellowship with Him.**

When the necessary activities of life begin to supercede, in importance and priority, prayerful times of fellowship with the Lord, then the subtle inner witness of God's Spirit is drowned out in the clamor of distractions that assail one's consciousness. If this continues, one becomes less and less *spirit-conscious*, and more and more *body and mind conscious*. But, if a believer gives proper place to the things of God's Word and Spirit, he will become more and more spirit-conscious, able to an ever-increasing degree to hear and understand the leadings of God's Spirit. If he will choose that "good part" of consistent, private fellowship with God, then his spiritual perception will become sharper and sharper.

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

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III. LED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
Romans 8:14

Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.
Proverbs 15:22

For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.
Proverbs 24:6

One of the hallmarks of the New Covenant is that we have individual access to the Father. We need no human mediator between God and man, because Jesus is our heavenly Mediator. Thus, as New Testament saints, we have **direct access to God**, without the necessity of any human go-between. This is true of all aspects of our relationship with God, including our receiving guidance and direction from Him. We can receive guidance directly from God Himself, without having to go through a mediator who might tell us what God is saying. We have this privilege as children of the Living God. "*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*" (Romans 8:14). Specifically, the way in which we are led by God is through direct communication between His Spirit and our spirit.

Every Christian can expect to be led by God's Spirit. Just as we don't need a human mediator in order to approach God, so also **we need not seek guidance from men**. God said that He would guide us *individually* by His Spirit. This does not mean that we are to spurn godly counsel; the scriptures are explicit as to the value of wise men's advice (Proverbs 15:22, 24:6). But any man's counsel must always be weighed against what the inner man is saying. Only if that wise person's advice coincides with or stirs a recognition of the spirit's inner witness, can that advice be accepted. Under this New Covenant, God doesn't want us to be led by men (even wise men), nor by prophets or circumstances. He wants to lead us directly by His Spirit.

A. GUIDANCE UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

Under the Old Covenant, not everyone had direct access to the leading of God's Spirit. Remember that in that dispensation, the Spirit of God rested *upon* men, and not *in* them. What's more, only the prophets, the priests, and the kings had the privilege of this anointing. Thus, the guidance of God had a different form under the Old Covenant than it does under the New Covenant. To be sure, people under both covenants are directed by God's Spirit. But the means by which this direction is given differs between the Old and the New Testament.

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1. Guidance through prophets

Because the Spirit of God rested only on the prophet, priest, or king, these men were often solicited for guidance. It was not at all uncommon for an Israelite to seek out a prophet of God in order to obtain direction. The prophet mediated between God and man, hearing God's direction for the people, and then relating it to them (II Chronicles 18:4-7; II Kings 22:12-14). Moses expressed his wish that all of God's people of that time could be prophets and have God's Spirit upon them (Numbers 11:29). But this was not possible under that covenant.

Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the Lord." Then the king of Israel assembled the prophets, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go again to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king." But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of him?" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

II Chronicles 18:4-7

Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

So Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and they spoke to her.

II Kings 22:12-14

But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Numbers 11:29

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Guidance through prophets or other anointed men of God was perfectly acceptable under that existing covenant, since the Holy Spirit was not *within* the people of God. Seeking out a prophet of God was commendable, in a day when the heathen were seeking after idols and spiritualist mediums (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19). The Israelites were exhorted to consult God for guidance, and this they were to do through the anointed men of God. Thus it is that the appearance of the Lord was always linked with His revealing Himself to one of His chosen prophets (I Samuel 3:19-21), and success was linked with obeying the leading of the Spirit which came through those prophets (II Chronicles 20:20).

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you."

Deuteronomy 18:10-12

And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?

Isaiah 8:19

Then Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

I Samuel 3:19-21

And they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed."

I Chronicles 20:20

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2. Guidance through signs

Under the Old Covenant, God would sometimes grant direction or confirmation through signs. This was true in the case of Gideon.

Read Judges 6:36-40.

God had told Gideon that through him He would deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites (Judges 6:14-16). Gideon then asked for a sign to prove that this was indeed the leading of the Lord, and two times God obliged him. The fleece was miraculously full of moisture, while the ground remained dry; then the fleece was dry, while the rest of the ground was wet. With these outward signs, Gideon had the courage to follow through on what God had said. God granted a physical token to verify the leading which He had given to Gideon.

B. GUIDANCE UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

Guidance under the New Covenant is in a completely different dimension than it was under the Old Covenant. This is principally because the New Testament believer has God's Spirit dwelling *within*. While the Holy Spirit rested *upon* a few individuals in that dispensation, the Spirit is *within every member* of the Body of Christ. What Moses wished could be *upon* all the Israelites, is now *within every Christian*. The indwelling presence of God's Spirit, promised long ago through the prophets (Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 2:28), is a present-day reality in our lives.

Then Gideon said to God, "If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken." And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Thine anger be kindled against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

Judges 6:36-40

And the Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

Judges 6:14-16

"And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

Ezekiel 36:27

"And it will come about after that that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

Joel 2:28

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But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.

John 2:20

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

John 2:27

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

John 16:13

The Bible states that as sons of God, we are to be led by the Person inside. We needn't seek for *outward signs* and manifestations, because we have the *inward witness* of God's voice directing us. We needn't seek out anointed individuals to hear from God on our behalf, because every one of us has the *same anointing* as did the privileged prophets of the Old Covenant (I John 2:20). "And as for you, **the anointing** which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him" (I John 2:27).

The anointing which we have received, and which abides within us, is no less than **the Spirit of Almighty God!** This is the Spirit of truth, of whom Jesus spoke, when He said: "**He will guide you into all the truth**" (John 16:13). This refers not only to His teaching us about God and His Word, but also to His actually "guiding" us in the path in which God wants us to walk. The anointing within (i.e. the Holy Spirit) teaches us about "*all things*," so that we don't need anyone to teach us. This isn't a license for isolation or arrogance. It simply means that we as believers have *direct access* to the leading of God. We can know, from within ourselves, what God is saying to us. Hence, there is no more need for *signs* or the *mediation of other men* so that we may know God's leading. God now guides *every Christian* individually, through the Person that He placed inside them at the new birth.

C. DON'T BE LED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

Because we have the inward witness of God's Spirit, guiding and directing us, we do not need some of the things that Old Testament saints did in order to be led by God. Unfortunately, many Christians do not understand this. Often, Old Testament means of guidance are sought by New Testament saints, with disastrous results. God does not want to lead us through signs, nor even through circumstances. These are all *visible* means of guidance; God wants us to hear the "still small voice." It is little more than unbelief to insist on signs, or circumstantial evidence for guidance, when all the time there resides within us the Spirit of truth who can guide us into *all truth*. Yet, some believers still stumble about in a "fog" of confusing events, never clearly understanding what

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God is saying or where He is leading. They are so busy looking for signs and watching circumstances that they don't hear the *voice* of the Lord in their hearts.

1. The Gideon complex

Some believers have a "Gideon complex"; they insist on practicing what Gideon did, in order to get the mind of God in a matter. They put out a "fleece" before the Lord. This figurative "fleece" usually consists of a request for God to do some specific things which will indicate a "Yes" or "No" answer to their quest for direction. For example: "Lord, if you want me to go overseas, provide the money by next week. If the money comes in by then, I'll know that You want me to go!" The problem with this kind of guidance is that, even if the money does come in, this is no sure indication as to the will of God. Those who are led by "fleeces" are in reality led by *events*, which certainly are not proof of the mind and desire of God. We must listen to the voice of God in our hearts.

Even though God did move in this manner for Gideon, and does still sometimes for baby Christians, He expects much more out of mature believers. God expects mature believers to begin to *listen* to the Spirit within for direction, and not to rely on *outward signs* for evidence of His leading. It is dangerous for a Christian to be led by signs, because God is not the only one who produces them. Satan can also produce signs. Some precious saints of God have been led far off the track by following "fleeces" which they put before the Lord. God expects us to be led by His Spirit, by the inclination of the new creature within us.

2. The open-closed door theory

Very similar to the idea of "fleeces" is the concept that God directs us by opening and closing "doors." It is thought that God uses circumstances to bar our going in certain directions (i.e. closes doors), and offers other circumstances (i.e. opens doors) so that we are able to proceed in other directions. This, however, is not the same as being led by the Holy Spirit. If one is led by opened and closed doors, always going off where the opportunity arises, and never pursuing a direction any further because difficulties arise, then he is in reality being *led by circumstances!*

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Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord.

II Corinthians 2:12

Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned.

Colossians 4:3

And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

A. 21:10,11

There are times when an opportunity may arise which God doesn't want us to follow. And, there are also times when our way is seemingly blocked (an apparent "closed door"), but God wants us to pursue that direction in faith, in spite of opposition. We must be led by the Spirit and hear His voice. If a door does open, we need to listen within to see if God wants us to proceed in that direction. God does indeed open doors (II Corinthians 2:12). Paul asked the Colossians to pray for this very thing (Colossians 4:3). But **we must never use opened or closed doors (i.e. circumstances) as the only indicators of God's will.** Whenever opened or closed doors appear, we must be sensitive to what the Spirit is saying *about* those circumstances.

D. DON'T BE LED BY PROPHECIES

Under the Old Covenant, prophets gave two basic kinds of direction to the people: personal direction for individuals and corporate direction for the nation of Israel, the people of God. The prophetic ministry of the New Covenant retains this element of corporate direction; New Testament prophets can indicate what God is saying to the Church as a whole. But *personal direction* is not to be sought from prophets or any other anointed man of God in this dispensation. This does not mean that we can spurn what today's prophets have to say; what these men receive from the Lord and deliver to the Church must be taken seriously and given heed to. But as to *personal direction*, the Bible says that we are to be led *by the Spirit through the inward witness*.

1. Personal prophecy

Personal prophecy (by which we mean a prophetic word spoken over an *individual* by a man or woman of God) is a genuine operation of God's Spirit in the Church today. It is given to help or bless the particular individual to whom it is spoken. This is not a contradiction of what we stated earlier concerning *seeking* guidance from prophets. We find this very thing happening to Paul in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 21:10,11). Notice, in the account of Agabus' prophecy over Paul, that Paul did not *seek* that prophetic word. He did not go to Agabus for direction; the Holy Spirit prompted the prophet to speak.

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More importantly, what Agabus said to Paul was not fresh news to the apostle; Paul already knew within what would happen in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22,23), because **the Spirit had told him**. Agabus' prophecy simply confirmed what the Spirit already indicated to Paul. This is the very manner by which every personal prophecy must be judged. If it does not coincide with what God's Spirit has said or is saying within, it cannot be taken as personal direction. If someone prophesies over us something which does not bear witness in our hearts, then we are not obligated to follow it. Too many Spirit-filled believers have been led astray by following a "prophetic word" which did not line up with what was in their hearts. No matter how mighty in God any man may be, believers cannot afford to unquestionably follow their prophetic words, without first verifying it with the Spirit of God within.

2. Trusting the One within

While God does sometimes open doors for our path, and does encourage us through a personal prophetic word, we must not put our trust in these things for guidance. When we seek direction only from *men*, never listening to what is in our hearts, then we are ignoring the One whom God has placed within us. **Trust your heart!** and that inclination of the hidden man of the heart who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Our spirits, the inner man, are safe guides, because they hear directly from the all-knowing God. While God will sometimes speak to us through an anointed man of God, we must always retain our sole confidence in the Spirit for direction. Remember that the spirit of man is God's lamp, by which He enlightens and leads us (Proverbs 20:27). Every believer has this capability of being dynamically led by God's Spirit, from faith to faith, from victory to victory, and from glory to glory.

"And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me."

Acts 20:22,23

The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of his being.

Proverbs 20:27

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E. UNUSUAL FORMS OF GUIDANCE

Whenever one addresses the subject of "God communicating with man," people commonly think of *audible voices*, *angelic visitations*, or various types of *visions*. And indeed, no one can read the Bible (Old or New Testament) without finding frequent mention of these kinds of manifestations (I Samuel 3:2-10; Numbers 22:22-31; Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:26,27; Genesis 46:2; II Chronicles 26:5). In all that we have said about the "still small voice," we do not want to give the impression that these unusual forms of guidance no longer occur in this day of the New Covenant. The book of Acts is replete with examples of angelic visitations, visions, and audible voices from God, of the same type as occurred under the Old Covenant (Acts 8:26; 9:3-7; 10:3; 10:10,11; 16:9,10; 22:17,18; 27:23,24).

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 1:20

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:26,27

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."

Genesis 46:2

And he continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.

Chronicles 26:5

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south on the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Acts 8:26

And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.

Acts 9:3-7

(cont'd.)

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About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in to him, and said to him, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:3

And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground.

Acts 10:10,11

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16:9,10

"And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' "

Acts 22:17,18

"For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' "

Acts 27:23,24

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And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
II Corinthians 11:14

God still does move in this fashion, but it is always **the exception rather than the rule!** The accounts of unusual guidance recorded in Acts are rare occasions in the lives of the men of whom we read. Bear in mind that this Biblical history covers a time period of over *thirty years*. These manifestations did not occur every day, but only rarely, perhaps two or three times in a person's entire life.

Christians must exercise *caution* and *restraint* in this area. When, where, and to whom these manifestations occur are totally up to God. He may choose to give someone a vision and He may not; it is *God's choice*, and not man's. Thus, it is dangerous to *seek* after these unusual forms of guidance. Those who do, open themselves up to the deception of Satan. "*For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*" (II Corinthians 11:14). Many of the cults that exist today started with an "angelic" visitation to a man, the "angel" being none other than a masquerading demon. Remember, Satan operates in the supernatural realm and is well acquainted with angelic manifestations, audible voices, and visions. When he sees a believer with an inordinate desire for visions, he knows that that Christian is likely to "swallow" any vision that comes along, without testing it.

And so, a word of caution. There is nothing wrong with desiring to see the supernatural; this kind of desire God will honor. **But we must not seek for visions, angelic manifestations, or audible voices!** Seek to know God, and His will by listening to that *inner* voice. God *may* give us an unusual manifestation, but He mainly wants us to listen to our hearts, and the Spirit within, for guidance and direction. If God never once gives a person a vision, that does not mean that he is any less capable of being led by God than a person who has had many visions. God wants to guide us by His Spirit, through our spirit.

F. HOW TO TEST OR JUDGE GUIDANCE

Every kind of guidance (whether the inner witness, or the more unusual kinds of leading) must have some standards by which they can be judged, to determine whether a particular leading is from the Spirit of God, or whether it is simply the flesh or even from the enemy. The standards are not complex, but must be applied if one is to stay out of error.

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Believers must learn to distinguish between what is actually God's leading, and what is not. The primary standard, of course, is the *Word of God*. But the Word does not speak specifically to many cases in which we need direction (e.g. what occupation to hold or whom to marry). The best test here is the *test of time*. The movings of God's Spirit within always endure, while the whims of the mind and emotions come and go.

By testing guidance and remaining teachable, believers can be assured that they will not be led off the track, but will stay in the center of God's will.

1. Judging by the Word

This is the first standard against which we must measure any guidance that we may receive, inward or outward. It goes without saying that any leading which prompts us to do something which is contrary to the Word of God is not from the Spirit of God. God does not contradict Himself. God does not lead business men into dishonest business practices, nor does He lead young couples into immorality. God does not speak anything which contradicts what He has stated in the Bible. What the Bible plainly speaks against, God will not lead us into.

No supernatural manifestation or inner leading, no matter how convincing or how strong, takes precedence over God's Word. The Bible is the *final authority* in any questionable leading.

2. The test of time

As we have said, the leadings of God's Spirit always stand the test of time. That is, they don't diminish with the passing of days, but remain consistent. The question that often arises in the minds of believers is: "How do I know if this is the Spirit of God, or simply a passing whim?" The answer to that question is — "**Time will tell!**" If, after days, weeks, perhaps even months, that inner inclination remains unchanged, then one has a good indication that it is truly a leading from the Lord. To be sure, there are times when one does not have time, when a decision must be made soon. In these cases, one should ask God for a specific direction, and then move out in faith in the way he senses God leading. God will not let His children down.

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The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

Proverbs 21:5

Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

I Timothy 5:22

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

I Peter 5:5

However, if time is available, **USE IT!** This is especially true of decisions that will affect a person's entire life, such as whom to marry, or whether or not to quit a job to go into full-time ministry. Major decisions like these should never be settled hastily. "*The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty*" (Proverbs 21:5). Paul said, "*Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily*" (I Timothy 5:22). (This laying on of hands refers to separating someone for the work of the ministry, ordaining them into full-time service.) Both these scriptures show that time, if it is available, is essential in determining the real leading of God in major decisions. Remember: **God is not in a hurry!**

3. Stay Teachable

The best way to stay out of difficulties in this area is to **stay teachable, to stay humble.** Anyone who claims never to have made a mistake is a liar. Anyone who says there is no way he could now be wrong is mistaken and headed for a fall. Those who have a hardened attitude about what they believe God is saying cannot be retrieved from disaster, if they have heard wrong. **We must stay open-minded to the possibility that we might be missing it!**

This doesn't mean that we are to throw away an inner leading just because someone disagrees. But it does mean that we must remain teachable and search our hearts daily to see if our brethren's opposition is warranted. Those who are arrogant about their "spirituality," about their ability to hear from God, cannot receive well-meant advice or correction. But those who are humble before God and man are sensitive to the fact that they haven't "arrived" yet, and are still capable of misunderstanding or missing altogether what God is trying to say to them. Bear this in mind: "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (I Peter 5:5).

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IV. SUMMARY — TRAINING FOR THE SPIRIT-LED LIFE

A mature believer is a Spirit-led believer, one who is conscious of his inner man, and who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit's witness in that inner man. God wants every one of us to be led from within, by listening to His "still small voice." As real and as wonderful as outward manifestations of guidance may be, we must cherish even more the very real, yet not so showy, witness in our hearts. This is how God will lead His children and direct them to do what He has predestined them to do.

But this will never happen until we begin to train ourselves to be spirit-conscious, and recognize the manner in which God speaks to us individually. Only long seasons of prayer and Bible meditation will get our minds and bodies to a place where the inward man can be heard. As we have said, this is not an impossible task; in fact, being new creatures, indwelt by God's Spirit, it is a simple task. But diligence is required to accomplish it, diligence to pray and to meditate in the scriptures. The more we fellowship with God, through prayer and meditation, the more sensitive we will become to His Spirit. And the more sensitive we become to His Spirit, the more clearly we'll hear and understand His voice within us.

