

Led by the Spirit — Listen to the Still Small Voice

By Anand Peter

This theme is the exploration of post-Pentecostal Christian life. Before we examine the theme, it may be expedient to refresh our understanding of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we will refrain from entering into a discussion on the complex subject of the Trinity, a concept not understood by anyone in its entirety.

Let me give you an illustration to argue the point. Trying to work out why Christians so often pray in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, a Japanese convert, struggling to grasp this Christian theology, said to his missionary teacher, "Honourable Father, very good; Honourable Son, very good; but Honourable Bird, I do not understand at all" — referring, perhaps, to the representation of the Holy Spirit as a white dove. When it comes to the person of the Holy Spirit, there is often a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding, and misinformation.

We notice that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in the act of creation. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. The Holy Spirit participates in the work of creation together with God the Father and God the Son. He causes new things to come into being, and brings order out of chaos. When God created mankind, He breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). You are not merely your body; you are your soul, embellished by the spirit. As we read through the Old Testament, we often notice the work of the Holy Spirit throughout, though He acted as a visiting Spirit rather than the resident Spirit we know Him to be today.

God gave His Spirit to Moses when he expressed his limitations in leading the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (Numbers 11:14). It was not only Moses, but also the seventy appointed elders, who received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:16-17). During the period of the Judges, in the twelfth century BC, the Holy Spirit led Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. During the period of the Kings, Saul and David received the gift of the Holy Spirit. David, steeped in sin, pleaded with God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10), knowing well that a clean heart is a prerequisite for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He continued his prayer, pleading, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). David, perhaps, knew the nature of the Holy Spirit, and did not want Him to depart. How fortunate we are to have been given the indwelling Spirit of God.

During the Old Testament period, God made numerous covenants with His people, the principal ones being the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic, or Sinaitic, Covenant. Through these covenants, God set apart a people for Himself. But they constantly broke their side of the bargain, and so God promised a New Covenant, in which the law would be written within us, forgiveness would be complete, and the knowledge of God would be universal.

We also see the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, in the ministry of John the Baptist, and in the baptism of Jesus. Jesus promises His Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him, to be a counsellor, an advocate, a mediator, an intercessor, and a helper. Jesus knew that His inimitable

sacrifice on the rugged cross would be wasted were He to leave us on our own, and that we need constant spiritual help in our lives. In other words, we need to be led by His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. It is relevant, at this point, to understand that the nature of the Holy Spirit is the nature of God the Father and God the Son. He is what God is, just as Jesus is what God is. He has the same characteristics as God the Father and God the Son. He is eternal. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He gives us the power to live like Jesus.

I have no doubt that most of us believe in the leadership of the Holy Spirit. However, too often in our lives, we tend to lead instead of letting the Holy Spirit lead us. Either we secretly think that modernity has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, or we think that our own feelings, urges, and desires are the very things the Spirit has led us to do. It is essential that we understand how to be led by the Holy Spirit, and what we must do in order to be Spirit-led.

A "Spirit-led" Christian is ready for the Holy Spirit to interrupt their plans and to follow His. If we make ourselves available, and listen, Jesus will speak to us through His Spirit. Then we must do something with what He says. It does not matter whether we like what He has told us or not; what matters is that we obey. The heartbeat of a Spirit-led Christian is obedience. The Holy Spirit knows best, and His way is best, even when we do not understand or agree. We must also understand that He does not communicate with us in a dramatic manner, but speaks to us in a still, small voice. We read in 1 Kings 19:11-13: "...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 still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him..." It is that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit to which we should listen carefully, and with an obedient heart.

A typical example of a life led by the Holy Spirit is that of Paul. As Saul, he worked against Jesus Christ, but when he received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the change in him was so dramatic that he went on to write almost half of the books in the New Testament. Please keep in mind, as we review these extraordinary experiences of Paul, that he served as an apostle of Jesus Christ for approximately thirty years, and that during that time he was, without doubt, the most spiritual and anointed Christian who walked the face of the earth. It would be surprising to find a mature Christian who would claim that anyone was more familiar with the filling and the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit than was Paul. His profound statements in Romans 8:11-17, read to us a while ago, are quoted as the very foundation for a Spirit-led life.

What we must remember is that sailors cannot create the wind, but they can hoist their sails to welcome it; neither can we create the breath of the Spirit, but are we to miss it when it comes, through failure to keep our sails hoisted?

What is this life all about, with its trials, pleasures, and complex relationships? How do we untangle ourselves from that web? If we are so busy with our own lives that we have no time for the Holy Spirit, He cannot speak to us. We need to pass through a progression in our lives, as Paul points out in the passage from Romans. He wrote, in verse 13, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye

through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." We have to search out and eliminate all that is contrary to the will of Jesus. Those sins may be small or great, or hidden deep within us. Like soldiers, we need to look carefully for these landmines and neutralise them. The prize for doing so is our admission to the sonship of Jesus, to which we are led by the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God...The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (verses 14 and 16). The result of all this, Paul tells us, is that "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (verse 17).

Our text focuses on this very fact: that we who are saved are led by the Holy Spirit of God. Indeed, it is the leadership of the Holy Spirit that affirms our identity in Jesus, both inwardly and outwardly. When the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts, it assures us that we are, indeed, children of God. When we follow that voice, others take notice, and see the spiritual dimension and depth of our lives.

How does the Holy Spirit lead us? It is plain that He can lead us in various ways. The important thing is for us to seek His leadership, and to listen with the intent to obey. Before the Holy Spirit can lead us, we must place ourselves in a position of neutrality: to go or to stay; to speak or to be silent; to purchase or to save; to lead or to follow; to contend or to submit.

We must also understand, very plainly, that the Holy Spirit is not a thing or a force, but a person, as Scripture makes clear. As such, He is to be revered as God. He serves in perfect unity with the Father and the Son to lead us in our spiritual lives. God the Holy Spirit is with us, seeking to lead and guide us. How?

1. The Holy Spirit leads us through our prayer life. Prayer has a way of changing our hearts, or preparing them to hear the voice of Jesus. Our prayers can invite the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
2. The Holy Spirit leads us through our time in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth." The Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and He speaks to us as we read it prayerfully, openly, and thoughtfully.
3. The Holy Spirit always accompanies the teaching and preaching of God's Word. Sometimes the Holy Spirit tells us things that are not directly contained in the Bible lesson or sermon we are hearing; sometimes a lesson or sermon confirms what the Holy Spirit has already said to us.
4. The Holy Spirit leads us through the voices of others. God has placed wise, proven, and godly believers in our lives to help us discern His voice. We would be foolish to ignore the wisdom to be gained from those in our lives who are spiritually mature and proven. While even the most godly cannot tell us specifically what to do, God's Holy Spirit can use their voices to speak to our hearts and minds.
5. The Holy Spirit leads us through circumstances, situations, and experiences. We must never underestimate God's ability to speak to us through the experiences and situations in which we find ourselves. Whatever these might be, we must know that the Spirit of truth is at work within us, and look out for the way He wants us to go.

The real challenge for the believer is to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from all the competing voices. Every day, the devil speaks to us; our own fleshly nature speaks to us; and the voice of God's Spirit speaks to us also. It is our responsibility to distinguish between them.

Let us, therefore, resolve to surrender completely, in obedience, trust, and reverence, to the will of God the Holy Spirit, with the assurance that He will never lead us contrary to the Word of God, that He will never lead us contrary to His nature, and that He will strengthen our relationship with Jesus. Amen.