

On Being Led by the Spirit

By David Morsey

**“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God”
(Romans 8:14)**

If prayer is the most puzzling part of our relationship to Christ, guidance is probably the most problematical. How does one ever really know if one is in the will of God? But, if it is problematical for most Christians, it is literally agonizing for a great many. Shall I marry this person? Move to that town? Take this job? How does one ever really know? How does one come to peace about it? Much of the answer to this dilemma is rooted in one's understanding of the nature of our being; and the nature of our relationship to Christ. Getting guidance from God is not like punching the keys of a computer. A certain continuous relationship must be established with Christ, in order for one to interact with Him in life direction and purpose. Many Christians live, pretty much, in the flesh—doing whatever they want. And then they scramble about for some “signs from heaven,” when confronted with hard decisions. Consulting God only when it suits one's fancy to do so, is like consulting the stars. It is a matter of chance. There is really little basis for understanding what God wants, even if He were to speak to them. The mind can become so cluttered with the sounds and misconceptions of the world, as to make it quite difficult to sense the Spirit of God, who tends to speak to us in the “still, small voice.” God does not make a habit of shouting at us through the barriers of world cacophony. Satan tries to make such a din that the believer cannot hear the voice of God.

So guidance, then, is not a matter of pausing, occasionally, to punch the “celestial computer.” It is rather the cultivating of the true nature of our being, so as to establish communion between ourselves and the Spirit of God.

The Nature of Our Being

Actually we have two natures—the spirit and the flesh, or as Paul calls them, “the spiritual man,” and “the natural man.” The natural self, which is the human mind and personality, is often in conflict with the spiritual self. As Paul has said, “*The flesh lusteth [has its desires] against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*” (Galatians 5:17). Paul also said, “*In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing . . .*” (Romans 7:18).

Thus, we conclude, with these, and many more texts, that we are of a dual nature, and that we cannot depend on the flesh at all, for sound desires, or sound judgment. To use the natural mind, alone, as the source of our decisions, can be quite disastrous. Nor can we rely on feelings, however spiritual they may seem, because emotions, too, are a function of the natural mind.

Then what is the difference between fleshly feelings and spiritual feelings?

Actually there are no human emotions in the spirit. The Holy Spirit brings truth to our spirits, and the human mind responds to the Spirit with its own

emotional mechanisms.

But isn't that splitting hairs?

No, indeed. There is a great difference between human emotions, and the inner communications of the spirit. The Holy Spirit often urges us to make decisions contrary to our emotions. Emotions are impulses that travel along the nerve paths in accordance with the natural patterns that are established on the cortex of the brain, as a result of hereditary and environmental factors. (Please see author's work, *"On Making It Through"*). Sometimes these emotions are quite uncontrollable, and often contrary to reality. They are totally undependable as a basis of sound decision-making.

On the other hand, what we call reason is also undependable, because it is based on the data accumulated in the brain, which data may be faulty. So then, as far as our human nature is concerned, the mind is undependable as a source of guidance because of unreliable emotions, and inaccurate thought processes.

Well then, how can we ever depend on our decision making?

We can't, if it is in the flesh. But, we can depend on the Holy Spirit to direct our minds, as we make our decisions.

But how can we know if it is the Holy Spirit directing us, and not our human minds?

How do the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? By listening to Him day by day. If we tune our spirits to hear Christ, our minds will get the message. But if, instead, we keep cluttering our minds with the sounds of this world, and listen more to them than to Christ, we are likely to make unsound decisions. What is it you pay most attention to? That will determine your sensitivity to Christ.

The first step in being led by the Spirit is to recognize this dual factor, and to function accordingly. To be in a position to be led by the Spirit, means to cultivate the spiritual sensitivities.

And how does one do that?

The spirit is nourished by attending to those things that pertain to our relationship to Christ. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd, because they hear him day by day. Prayer, attendance to the Word of God, fellowship with other believers—these are the things that help to nourish the spirit. But, sensitivity to the Spirit is dulled, or shut out, by the cacophony, and the clutter, of things of this world. It is not that interest in the world will cause one to lose one's salvation, but that it may make it difficult to be led by the Spirit. A vicious cycle develops so quickly—undue attendance to the world, dulls the sensitivities to Christ, which in turn escalates interest in the world.

Our true nature is spirit. The flesh is only a temporary vessel, exposed to the battering of the world. The spirit is the vital issue. Focus on the vessel—earthly comfort and bliss—can only bring grief and disappointment. The first step, then, in being led by the Spirit, is to recognize the priorities of the Spirit—to

want what Christ wants in your life. He will see to it that you have what He wants for you. He will do whatever is necessary to lead you in that direction.

What is the Nature of Our Relationship to Christ?

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21)

If one truly desires to be led by the Spirit, and is not merely assuming a religious pose, or game-playing with the Deity, it is essential that one know the nature of one's being—what we humans are all about—and the nature of the relationship of humans to Christ.

As to the nature of our being, we have determined in Part I, that we are, as redeemed humans, essentially spirit. Therefore, guidance must always be consistent with eternal spiritual values. That is to say, anything that would interfere with, or jeopardize spiritual growth, would be questionable.

If for example, one is experiencing blessing and growth in a given fellowship, and is confronted with a choice that would interfere with it, the chances are that it would be a poor choice, unless there is an acceptable alternative for fellowship.

So, the nature of our being dictates that guidance be consistent with our ultimate spiritual destiny.

Furthermore, guidance must be seen, not only in terms of the essential nature of our being, but also in terms of the nature of our relationship to Christ. We will consider five characteristics of that relationship, as follows:

1. SPIRITUAL—oneness with God.
2. ETERNAL—never ending life with God.
3. FAMILIAL—paternal and fraternal.
4. CONGENIAL—full of patience and grace.
5. PRACTICAL—based on workable realism, and not theoretical idealism.

We will now consider each of these items separately.

1. SPIRITUAL—oneness with God. A most essential element in our relationship with Christ, is that we are one with Him in the spirit. Jesus established this truth in His intercessory prayer to the Father—*“That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”* (John 17:21). There is, thus, a capacity for communication that goes beyond the external and circumstantial. *“The Spirit, Himself, bears witness with our spirits, that we are children of God”* (Romans 8:16). We will spend eternity in communion with God. According to the Scripture, such communion starts here on the earth. So, enter into it.

But how do we ordinary Christians, ever hope to achieve such communion?

You don't achieve it; you live it. In fact, you are living it, now, without realizing it. In many ways, the Spirit of God is ministering to your spirit, day by day.

Your prayers, for example, are a part of that communion. Every desire you have for God, is part of that communion, and every cry for help. We are, actually, surrounded by the Spirit of God. It is like the ether waves, which are constantly in the atmosphere around us. We have only to “tune in” on the right frequency.

But how do we know it is God who is addressing us?

In the first place, the sheep know the voice of the Shepherd (if they will only be still long enough to listen).

In the second place, if one really wants to hear the Shepherd, the Shepherd will find a way to get through.

However, sometimes, confusion comes, when we try to tune in on too many “Frequencies,” at once. We listen to too many amateurs—friends, neighbors, media “gurus,” as well as inadequate (if earnest) religious leaders. Confusion also comes when we, often inadvertently, drown out the voice of the Spirit with the cacophony of worldly input.

What, then, should we do to develop an ear for the Spirit?

There are some important suggestions.

- (a). Open the mind to the Spirit. Anyone who wants to hear from the Spirit, will hear from Him, ultimately. Wait for Him! Don't be in a hurry!
- (b). Spend time in communion with Christ. Who communes often with Christ, will often know what He wants.
- (c). Nourish the spirit by hearing the Word of God and fellowshiping with His people.
- (d). Trust the Spirit of God. Go in quiet confidence. When you have committed a matter to Christ, and are willing to do what He wants, be assured that He will see to it that you know what to do. Don't panic! The chances are, you won't really know till the time comes. When it comes, you will do the right thing.
- (e). Don't confuse your communion with the Spirit, either by advice from unqualified sources, or too much input from the world.

But who is qualified?

The only people you ought ever to listen to are shepherds whom you trust as responsible servants of Christ, and those who may be sharing with you in prayer. No one, however close to you, or professionally qualified, who is not praying with you, is qualified to advise you. Many a Christian with a fairly clear idea of what Christ wants, has become confused by input from well-meaning, but unqualified, advisors.

Remember—IF YOU WANT TO DO WHAT CHRIST WANTS, AND YOU COMMIT THE MATTER TO HIM, YOUR SPIRIT WILL KNOW WHAT HE WANTS.

2. ETERNAL—never-ending life with God. All matters of guidance should be viewed in the light of the endless nature of our relationship to Christ. Remember, it is He, with whom we will be involved, for eternity. Any temporary indulgence, that would jeopardize, in any way, the quality of that eternal destiny, would be unsound. A good question to ask, in any situation, is in the light of eternity, what does it matter?

3. FAMILIAL—paternal and fraternal. *“Like as a father pitieth [has mercy on] his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust”* (Psalm 103:13,14).

In the Deity, we have both father and brother. This puts the matter of guidance, not on the level of despot, who insists on slavish, and whimsical obedience, but father, who has only the welfare of his children in mind; and brother, who empathizes with the human condition. Fear not the guidance of God; it can only work for your good.

What is the Nature of Our Relationship to Christ?

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6)

4. CONGENIAL—full of patience and grace. *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger; and plenteous in mercy”* (Psalm 103:8).

Like a father, presiding over his children, so the Lord presides over the *“cosmic sandbox.”* Errors abound in the community of the redeemed. Nor will we be beyond such fallacies, this side of heaven. In spite of all we know of spiritual values and methods, we will make our mistakes, and yet, though God does not always prevent the distressing consequences of our follies, He remains ever open to us, and welcomes our constant *“clinging”* to Him.

Right up to the end of His life, David, the ultimate example of rebel human nature, clung to God, and urged Solomon, his successor, and, ironically, the fruit of his folly, to honor God, and follow His precepts. There was no question of whether or not David had a right to talk about *“keeping the commandments.”* He made his mistakes, wept his tears of remorse, accepted the forgiving grace of God, and clung persistently to Him. His resilience, was admirable. He refused to let his failures defeat him, and chase him from God.

Peter provides a similar example in the New Testament. There is, perhaps, no more heinous offense, than deliberately and publicly to deny Christ. Even Christ said that to deny him publicly would bring denial before the Father in heaven. But Peter, doubtless inspired by the Holy Spirit, was eager to go to Christ, on the shores of Galilee, and accept from Him, full recovery.

Perhaps the most comforting expression of this truth is in Psalms 107. Speaking of the failures of Israel, the Psalmist says, *“Because they rebelled against the word of God, and condemned the Counsel of the most high: Therefore he brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their*

distresses” (Psalm 107:11-13).

The Lord certainly, wants you to make sound decisions, for your own well being and safety, but if you don't, do not let Satan cause you to back away from God. You are His child. Stay home, where you belong, in spite of your troubles. He is infinitely gracious and longsuffering.

5. PRACTICAL—based on workable realism, and not theoretical idealism. God knows who we are, and where we are at. He understands, thoroughly, the human struggle. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, having been tempted in all ways, in the likeness of ourselves, without sin. Let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and find grace for a timely help”* (Hebrews 4:15,16).

Christians sometimes work themselves into a frenzy, striving to ensconce their fleshly minds in spiritual *“dream castles.”* Sometimes they become so *“heavenly,”* that they are no *“earthly”* good. That is, everything becomes *“spiritualized,”* and life on the earth becomes distorted. So eagerly do they press for special visions and revelations from God, that they are often deceived into attaching reality to their fantasies. If heaven could be purchased for the price of frenzy, the cultists would have a monopoly on the streets of gold. God did not deliver us from bondage to Satan, only to imprison us on a religious treadmill. Life with Christ is not slavery to exercises, but a blessed experience of fellowship with Him, in quiet reliance on His grace. We have a heart for God, else we would not be so concerned about His will. And, if we have a heart for God, His Spirit is surely working in us. And, if His Spirit is working in us, we will ultimately fulfill His purpose for us.

“Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus; the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect (restore & repair you) in every good work, to do His will, working in you, that which is well pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20,21).

With all of these assurances, however, guidance can be a troublesome thing. Christians become quite anxious. They tend to want some special revelation from God, in the form of a kind of *“handwriting on the wall.”* The truth of the matter is, however, that such symbols were more likely to be required in the Old Testament era. When we are open to Christ, He can move us without such material symbols. To the person who possesses Christ, what seems reasonable, is often what is right.

When all else fails, the following is a good rule to follow:

If you know absolutely, what God wants, do it, even if it does not seem reasonable. If you are not sure what God wants, do what is reasonable, even if it does not seem revelational.

Above all, learn to relax, and trust in the power of the Spirit to bring you through the maze, and fulfill His purpose in you. As Paul says, *“Be confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

The Practical Application

“If any man will to do His will, he shall know . . .” (John 7:17)

Ultimately, what we all seek is a meaningful, workable relationship with Christ. That is what the issue of guidance is really all about. We want from God both help and approval, but approval probably stands higher. That, of course, is a good sign. It assures us that the Spirit of Christ is in us. Else, we would not care.

In many quarters of Christendom, most of the peace that is held out as the enticement to salvation is lost in the constant tension in the struggle for approval. Very few Christians really believe that Christ is satisfied with them. Well-meaning, but misguided zealots keep the Christian constantly in turmoil with the incessant pressure to perform. “Have you done your best for Jesus?” One gets weary of the incessant challengers. Where is the rest that Jesus promised? “*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30). It was the Pharisees who brought bondage with their religious perfectionism. If perfection were the criterion for God’s approval, the Pharisees should have had His favor. Jesus never found fault with their adherence to the letter of the law, but the letter had crushed out the life. Love and mercy were gone, and in their place only a barren wilderness of regulation and striving. So would many make of Christianity today.

Jesus said, “*THESE THINGS HAVE I SPOKEN UNTO YOU, THAT IN ME YOU MIGHT HAVE PEACE*” (John 16:33). When we come to Christ, we are made members of His family. We are, in a sense, granted asylum from the world. But, the asylum is in the Spirit realm—not the flesh. Our spirits are completely safe in the haven of God’s Spiritual Kingdom, for all is in order and under the Divine aegis. Thus, we do have the peace Jesus promises, but it is in the Spirit realm. The Bible, everywhere, indicates that God wants peace for His children. Satan tries to rob us of that peace, either by getting us stirred up in the religious flesh, or by disrupting our earthly circumstances.

It is true that we are given refuge in Christ, but that secures only our spirits. Our spirits are beyond the reach of Satan. Where he can get at us, however, is in the realm of the flesh. Our flesh is still subject to the afflictions and adversities of the earthly realm. The measure in which these things devastate us is, in a way, proportionate to the measure in which we expose ourselves to them. In other words, if we look to the fleshly, or earthly, realm for security, or satisfaction, we are bound to be hurt by its perversity. In many ways the situation is analogous to the circumstances of human asylum. If one seeks asylum in the United States, and then wanders back into the country from which one has fled, one loses the protection that had been gained. As long as we “*walk in the Spirit,*” that is, as long as our lives are governed by the will of God for us and the principles of His Spiritual Kingdom, we minimize the effects of the world. Jesus said, “*The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*” (John 14:30). In other words, there were no earthly ambitions or desires to which Satan could appeal. Every earthly ambition is like a handle with which

Satan can shake us. He has a strong control over the affairs of this world.

As surely as he knows that one has one's heart set on a certain thing, he will attempt to frustrate that desire and then to bring us into torment. Often, we begin to blame the Lord for not granting our desires, or we question the promise of His peace. "*Why did I not get that promotion?*" Or, "*Why can't we have a nice home like everyone else?*" Or, "*Why doesn't God give me a husband, or wife?*" If God would always grant our earthly desires, we would never grow up. We would not be prepared for the Spirit realm, which is our eternal destiny. A pacifier may be acceptable at 12 months, but ludicrous at 12 years, and psychotic at 21. God wants to wean us from depending on earthly circumstances for our peace. If we insist that He must always whisk away our troubles and banish sickness and pain, we put ourselves in the position of focusing our lives on the flesh.

The more handles one has for Satan to shake one with, the more one allows him to rob one of peace and to retard one's spiritual growth. One of the fundamental criteria of guidance is—how much does this decision feed earthly ambitions and desires. If it doesn't matter whichever way it goes, it is evident that one has unscrewed that handle.

Reach out and grasp the tranquility that accompanies the life that can say with Christ, "*The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*"

So you see, guidance is not so much a matter of striving always to make just the right move so we don't lose God's approval. It is rather a matter of following His guidance so that we may avoid the pitfalls of Satan, with which he would attempt to destroy us. Some people see guidance as a sort of "*celestial pinball game,*" where one must light up the right pins in order to win. In this respect, it becomes a problem of trying to outguess God. Rather, guidance is a fellowship of interaction with God regarding the issues of our lives. It is reasonably assessing the known, and trusting God for the unknown. Discuss your life with Christ. Share with Him the options and potentials; the immediate and long range plans; the crucial decisions confronting you. Then, go in peace and trust that He will make the way known, when the time comes.

There is no need to make a decision until one needs to make a decision. One cannot always know in advance. Sometimes factors may enter the picture at the last minute that will have an ultimate bearing on the decision. For example, one may contemplate changing to another firm. The day before the decision is to be made, the owner of the firm dies, or the firm goes into receivership. Or, something may come up with the firm one is going to leave that may spur the move. There are scores of illustrations.

In decision making, one must first be open to whatever God wants. If that is not the case, just tell the Lord about it. Admit the difficulty. The Lord has ways of helping us overcome our feelings if He wants us to make the move.

Then lay the matter out before the Lord and discuss it with Him. Don't press Him for special revelations. Going by "*tokens*" can be very tricky. When we ask for tokens, we limit God's options in making His will known. Furthermore, we keep things at a fleshly level. Tokens can have a confirming effect, but the main communication should be in the Spirit. That is, we are moved to make the right decision without always knowing why or feeling one way or another. Going by

feelings is different than being moved by the Spirit. When we are moved by the Spirit, we make the decision in spite of ourselves. When we are moved by the flesh, we are affected by how we feel about the matter. Feelings can be very misleading. They can be based on all kinds of biases, or habit patterns of thought. Feelings are not always wrong—just undependable as the ultimate test.

When you have discussed the matter with the Lord, leave it. Don't brood over it. Don't keep hashing it over. You'll only confuse yourself. Above all, don't get a variety of amateur opinions; that will confuse you even more.

Ultimately, we must trust the Lord's ability to deal with us and work with us and communicate with us in regard to our lives. We always try to fortify ourselves with sure-fire indicators. Usually, this is because we simply don't trust our capacity to be guided by the Lord. If guidance depends on our own spiritual qualifications, or our ability to outguess God, or our ability to make proper evaluations of the situation, we are all in difficulty. Our only hope is that God is able to cut through the veneer of human illusion and misconception, and ultimately bring about within our spirits and within our minds that which He desires for us. You don't need to be an expert. You don't need ten sure-fire rules. You only need to come as a child to the Father, and trust Him to do with you and through you and for you what He will.

Not Practicing Christianity, but Living with Christ

“As the father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:13)

Christianity has become, over the centuries, a rather highly specialized system—quite a far cry from the simplistic fellowship with Christ enjoyed by the early disciples. In fact, the very term, “Christianity,” is itself a label, which irrevocably classifies the follower of Christ with sectarian, or cultic groups.

But were not the followers of Christ called “Christians” in the book of Acts?

Yes, indeed. That is true. However, the term, “Christianity,” differs from the term, “Christian,” in the same sense that the term, “Americanism,” differs from the word, “American.” The name, “American,” is applied, *de facto*, to anyone who is a citizen of the United States of America, regardless of one's application to the promoting of American interests. “Americanism,” on the other hand, describes a particular category of American interest, that carries with it certain fundamental concepts, or principles, relative to the American nation, that are held in common by a segment of the citizenry which has a special focus on the promotion of national interests. Obviously, not all Americans are “Americanists,” or proponents of “Americanism.” The terms are not synonymous. That is not to say whether or not all Americans should be promoting the national interest, but rather to make the point that there is a difference. Similarly, the term “Christianity” would, technically, denote a special category of the followers of Christ, who have formulated a given set of principles and regulations pertaining to life as a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ. It is not necessarily true that all who identify with Christ must be, *de facto*, engaged in the religious pursuit of so-called Christianity.

This may seem like quibbling over terminologies, but the fact of the matter is that the Church has been monstrosly savaged and divided by the pursuit of Christianity, instead of being primarily involved in the personal experience of life with Christ. Christianity is a matter of theological concepts. Life with Christ is a familial matter. It goes back to the simple principle expressed by my friend and colleague, Dr Harold Ellens: “The *fact* of salvation does not necessarily include the *content* of salvation.”

That is, one is saved by virtue of the new life given through the Holy Spirit within, but the knowledge of the meaning of that life within is a matter for theology, just as one born with natural life does not automatically possess the meaning of that life. Herein is the root of much confusion and division in the church. One assumes that because one is saved, one automatically understands the theology of salvation. In another figure, marriage is a living relationship. To assume that one must be a sociologist to be married is absurd. By the same token, one who assumes that being married automatically qualifies one to be a marriage counselor, is equally absurd.

As there are many different approaches to marriage, and many disagreements among sociologists, so there are many variables in the theological approach to salvation, or Christianity. The sociologist sees marriage as an institution. The theologian may, in the same vein, see the new birth as a theological system called Christianity. But, as the institution of marriage has little to do with the experience of living with a mate, so the religion of Christianity has little to do with the experience of living with Christ.

It is not that there is no value to the consideration of all the theological aspects of Christianity, any more than it could be said that there would be no value to the pursuit of the knowledge of the institution of marriage. Rather, we must understand there is a limit to the possibilities of ultimate, or absolute veracity in the conclusions of such pursuits.

In summary, it is vital that we see our salvation as a new birth, with entrance into the family of Christ, rather than as the joining of a religious institution, or sect called “Christianity.” If salvation be seen as joining Christianity, our lives will be subservient to the regimentations of a religious institution, and guidance will be a matter of conformity to certain humanly proscribed patterns; but if salvation be understood as being identified with the family of Christ, then our lives will be lived as members of His family, whether or not we conform to specific regulations, and guidance will be a matter of getting counsel and direction from God, as our Father.

In the above respects, one may possess the Spirit of Christ within and thus be a member of the family, and yet still hold questionable theological views, or have unresolved conflicts in one’s personal life. The criterion is not the theological correctness of one’s views, nor the perfection of one’s life, but rather the interest in being identified with Christ.

And thus, guidance is really a matter of working together with Christ to achieve a sound life on the earth, for one’s personal benefit, and not a matter of maintaining favor with God by not making mistakes, or as some have put it—“being always in the center of God’s will.” If making mistakes puts one in

disfavor with God, “who would be able to stand?”

In conclusion, one ought to work with Christ in terms of one’s decisions and plans. Don’t be a prisoner of omens and tokens and signs. Share with Christ your decisions. Express your willingness to do what he wants. Come to Him as a child to a father, and not as a slave to a master, trembling in fear, lest one make a mistake. Christ is the Master of the universe, but He has made it quite clear in His revelation to us, that as far as His relationship to us is concerned, He is the Father. Trust Him, then, to be able and willing to overcome your human inadequacy, and to see to it, in one way or another that you have His will.

A final word of caution. If you make a mistake, for some reason, even willfulness, remember that while you may have consequences to suffer, Christ does not cut you off, anymore than a good parent cuts off an erring or foolish child. In the words of Edgar Guest, “It takes a heap o’ livin’ in a house to make a home.” It takes a “heap o’ livin’” with Christ to learn how to relate to Him and to be sensitive to His guidance. Fully aware of this, Christ relates to His family, with infinite grace and patience. Trust Him for that.

The Place of Counsel

**“And he gave gifts . . . For the edifying of the body of Christ”
(Ephesians 4:8,12)**

If one is being led by the Spirit, what need is there for counsel?

Because we are not alone. God guaranteed this at the Garden of Eden. After each of His creative fiats, He said, “*It is good*”—except one—man. “*It is not good—that he is in His aloneness*” (Hebrew). That is, that he should be complete in himself. In his original state, man was really “co-personal.” That is, he possessed qualities of both male and female. (Probably, so also God, Himself). But God was not satisfied with this condition of aloneness, and so He divided man, and took from him certain elements, from which He fashioned the female. Never again would the man be complete in himself. Ideally, the man and the woman make the perfect team, with the complementary qualities each possesses. (The modern “feminist” movement ignores this factor completely). But, of course, in the distorted state of fallen man, the ideal is not often attainable. So, marriage cannot be the universal standard.

But what then is the alternative?

Ultimately, the alternative is provided through Christ, since we are all considered His bride. He completes our intended quality of being. Meanwhile, on the earth, we have His Spirit within. We also have the fellowship of believers—the *camaraderie* of the body of Christ. Given the realities of our earthly circumstance, we need each other. We are none of us complete within ourselves.

It is on this basis that guidance, or counsel, through the body of believers, becomes an important part of our fulfillment. It is not that God could not, if He chose, send a direct message in the form of angels, or “words-on-the-wall,” but

that He wants to cultivate in us that sense of our dependence on one another.

Thus, He has set within the church a full complement of gifts, for the edifying of one another. Through these gifts, we have a Divinely ordered system of checks and balances. On the one hand we have a spirit-oriented interaction with God. That is, via the energy of His Holy Spirit, we have a “receiving set” within us that is tuned to God. He is able to communicate with us beyond our human mental capacities, which include both reason and emotion. In guidance, there is a sense beyond reason, beyond feeling, of that which God really wants. On the other hand, we have a process of interaction with our fellow believers that is energized by the Holy Spirit—also beyond feeling and reason. Such an interaction takes place when believers come together in the Spirit to worship and be nourished in the Word. Gathering together with our fellow believers helps keep our perspective sound. Further, the Holy Spirit seems to energize the believers through one another, as they join in fellowship. This fortifies one to resist human reason and emotion, in the decision-making process.

In addition to the fellowship of believers, there is also the assistance of believers, in helping one to make sound decisions. The use of special personal revelations is limited in these days of a universal Biblical revelation, so that believers may not become too self-oriented, and self-sufficient. It is well to share one’s ideas and plans with a trustworthy fellow-believer, who is able to pray with one and provide a check against deceptive thinking. It is so easy for human beings to be self-deceived.

Relating effectively to the body of believers is crucial to our well-being on earth, as well as to the cultivating of our sense of the unity of the Spirit, which will mark our eternal destiny with God. Guidance is one of the areas in which this relationship is crucial. In the matter of guidance there are two levels of involvement. First, there is the level of the mutual assistance in daily living, afforded by our fellow believers. In gathering together with the members of the body, our spirits are nourished, and our sensitivity to Christ, strengthened, so that our perspective is clear in determining the desire and purposes of Christ for us, in a general way. Without such fellowship, we tend to drift toward the interests and ideas characterized by the world. We then find it difficult to keep our focus on what Christ wants. And then there is the need of sharing with someone our ideas and plans, not for specific guidance, but for prayer fellowship and the checks and balances of another view outside of ourselves.

The *second* category is the need for special guidance—matters beyond the capacity of one who is untrained. Perhaps a good analogy is the difference between sharing ideas about health care, versus getting medical advice. Believers can profit from exchanging ideas about daily living, but need the help of specially prepared teachers and counselors for the more crucial issues. Altogether, however, whether fellow-believers, or leaders in the body, one finds one’s well-being closely tied to fellowship with the body of Christ.

A few guideposts, or criteria are in order. First of all, in regard to sharing with another believer—

1. Limit the extent of sharing. If you talk to too many, you will get confused, and you will give Satan opportunities to stir up trouble.

2. Share in a prayerful spirit. Merely talking in the flesh can be, at best, unprofitable; at worst, misleading. So pray together about the matters you are discussing.
3. Share with ones who are like-minded in devotion to Christ, and open to Him in their desire to follow Him. (There is nothing like an unsubmissive Christian, to throw one off the track).
4. Share with ones who are willing and faithful in praying for you. Such ones will be most likely to be of help in your particular needs.
5. Share with ones who are faithful in getting together with the believers for fellowship and instruction. The book of Hebrews says, "*Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is*" (Hebrews 10:25).
6. Be faithful, yourself, in fellowship. Not only will you receive valuable instruction for sound living, but you will be strengthened in spirit.
7. Avoid sharing with "self-appointed" guides and "gurus." The more anxious one is to give advice, the less likely one is to be qualified. Conversely, the more one understands about life, the less anxious to assume responsibility for other people's lives.
8. Avoid also self-appointed prophets. The one who has a "special message" for you from Christ. There is, of course, a difference between the one who merely offers a suggestion, based upon a prayerful consideration of your need, and the one who is presumptuous enough to assume the role of "special agent" of the Deity. This of course, does not include those who are recognized by the body to be anointed servants of Christ. (It is not enough for one to judge oneself to be so anointed. There must be the concurrence of the body). "*The prophet is subject to the prophets*" (I Corinthians 14:32).
9. Ask the Lord to direct you in finding someone to share with. And, ask the Lord to direct you to the fellowship that can most nourish your spirit.

Then, there is the second level of guidance—"special counseling," in regard to major issues, such as marriage, career, personality problems, etc. This is quite another thing from "sharing" and requires great care in the selection of the right counselor "Spirituality, does not qualify one to be a counselor," just as it does not qualify one to be a surgeon. There are some guidelines as to when and who.

1. Seek help any time a problem is "too much." Don't try to bear it alone on the ill-advised assumption that if you really trusted Christ, you could handle it. Don't let the matter "get away from you." That is why the Lord has given "gifts" to the body. If everyone could bear one's own problems, there would be no need for the "gifts."
2. Obviously one should always seek help in checking out major moves—marriage, career, job, cities, family problems.
3. Let the level of the problem determine the level of assistance. A competent pastor, with basic training in psychology, as well as theology, should be able

to handle most routine matters. This presupposes that the pastor is a true servant of Christ, and not just a “professional.”

4. Look for the “voice of the Shepherd” coming through, in any pastor you talk to. Beware of anyone you do not feel comfortable with, or that “has all the answers,” or that is harsh and censorious.
5. If there are strong personality problems, a psychologist may be in order, but do not, under any circumstances, seek guidance from a non-Christian psychologist, or a Christian who leans more toward the controversial methods of psychotherapy, rather than toward the work of Christ in consonance with sound principles of therapy. A non-Christian psychologist, not recognizing the place of the spirit, is as inadequate to help, as a physician who would not recognize the place of the mind in illness.
6. If there is significant evidence of psychosis, it may be necessary to seek psychiatric help in order to protect the individual and those involved. (Psychosis is a form of mental illness that is severe enough to render the individual non-functional). The difference between a psychiatrist and a psychologist is that the psychiatrist is an M.D., with a license to prescribe medication. A psychologist is a Ph.D., without medical training or the right to prescribe medication. Both have their place.
7. In all cases, whether pastor, psychologist or psychiatrist, the same criterion applies. Be sure the counselor in question is oriented to the Holy Spirit. Don’t assume that the label is a guarantee of the package.
8. Do not assume that because one has a physical or psychological problem one is substandard, spiritually. There are many problems in our natural selves—mind and body—that are the products of factors beyond our control—hereditary and environmental. What we conceive to be a spiritual problem—depression, anxiety, lethargy, for example—is most likely rooted in a physical condition that has nothing to do with faith, or spirituality. Don’t let Satan get the advantage by putting you under the bondage of guilt.
9. Don’t trust amateurs. Many people try, brazenly, to give advice. Some matters are too serious for such untrained opinions. Would you let an untrained friend take out your appendix?
10. Above all, pray that the Lord will guide you to the right source of help. He knows exactly what you need, and who can best help you.

The Place of Circumstances

There is far more to the matter of guidance than the manipulation of circumstances, or the “handwriting on the wall.” The tendency to view guidance as an extraordinary exercise, defeats the basic meaning of our new birth. In reality, we have become spirit-oriented beings who are possessed by the Spirit of Christ, and therefore readily in touch with Him.

But isn’t that kind of closeness dependent upon our spiritual condition? Do we not have to be functioning at a very high level of devotion and commitment?

Only if you are a Pharisee in good standing. The tendency to put the willingness of Christ to help us, on the basis of the human capacity to perform, puts the “cart before the horse.” How can we perform if we do not have His help? The issue of guidance is so intertwined with the whole process of life in the family of Christ, that we must see it as a part of the larger implication of the destiny of the human spirit, which is to abide forever in camaraderie with God, the Eternal Spirit. Therefore, it is essential that Christ must help us in every phase of our family life with Him on the earth.

Now, on the earth, we are passing through a phase—apparently essential—in the fulfillment of God’s work within us. What its true function is in our preparation, only God knows. Most efforts to explain it are unsatisfying. But, sojourn on earth we must, for God’s own reasons. Meanwhile, while we are on the earth, we are involved in many different exercises of faith—guidance, fellowship, service, suffering—which only God really understands, but which obviously are a part of our preparation.

Guidance, gifts, service, submission, are all elements in our life with Christ. But so also are learning and maturing; success and failure and weakness. Many problems which people see as spiritual are really immaturity, and need time as the ally of change.

Now, if we could only get guidance from God when we have passed all the earthly tests of spirituality, we would indeed be in a fix. We would be like the person applying for a job without experience. We can’t get experience without a job, but you can’t get a job without experience. How can we grow in the spirit, if we are not in God’s place for us. But, according to many, we can’t find God’s place without “spirituality.” So then the search for guidance becomes an intensive effort to impress God with our spirituality so He will reward us with His help.

The answer to the dilemma, of course, is that since doing what the Lord wants is intrinsic to the growth process, it is therefore something wherein we can expect the help of the Spirit of God within, in spite of our struggles with the flesh. Our responsibility is willingness; His is effectiveness. That is, He will effectively work with us to see to it that we do what He wants, if we want what He wants. It is not a matter of worthiness, or cleverness, or fervor, or feelings of faith. It is a matter of simply accepting our need of His help, and leaving it to Him to see that we do what He wants.

But what about willingness? Can’t we hinder His guidance by being willful?

If you mean by willfulness, strong feelings about what we wish He would let us do, that is a common condition in the natural self. He works in spite of our feelings, as a parent does what is best for the child, in spite of the child’s desires. But, if you mean by willfulness, the determination to do what we want in spite of what Christ wants, He will probably let us have our way, and let us suffer the consequences, so we will learn to be submissive. People who get their own way, either with God, or others, usually pay a heavy price for it.

Guidance is a part of our growth process, like children learning from parents and wrestling with the problem of growing up.

But what about the place of circumstances? Doesn't God use circumstances to guide us?

Yes, indeed. But we must only use them as confirming, and not as the ultimate test. Circumstances by themselves are too subject to misinterpretation. Further, when we hold God to particular circumstances, we limit Him to our own narrow perspectives. We can so box God in with our own system of "sign post," that He can't work out His own guidance system. The same problem attends the use of "tokens." "If you do this, I'll do that," or, "If you do that, I'll know you want me to do this." It becomes an exercise in enigmas—trying to find one's way through the maze of clues.

Well, what part do circumstances ever play?

A very important part, but only in concert with other factors. As we said in the beginning, guidance is part of a larger process, and not a "thing in itself." It is like learning to get along with a friend, or mate. One gets to know what the other one wants by time together and by sharing experiences; by trying to please, and failing, and trying again. If that seems too much of a "trial and error" approach, one must confess that after nearly forty years of living with Christ oneself, and observing countless other Christians from the least to the greatest, one finds that to be a rather common experience. No one that I have ever met, would insist that they always know exactly what the Lord wants. But the mistakes themselves are part of the growth process. Nor does Christ ever fail to take into consideration the frailty of the flesh. **"He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust!"** (Psalm 103:14). Legion are the passages in both Old and New Testaments that assure us of the longsuffering of Christ towards us. But, one cannot simply come to Christ for guidance, when one has had only infrequent contacts, and limited experiences with Him.

Guidance is a combination of many things—sensitivities to Christ, which we acquire by time with Him and the Word; circumstances; fellowship with believers; as well as the general flow of one's life with Christ. One gets a sense of the overall pattern of things as one continues in the process of growth. Circumstantial evidence by itself is misleading, but it can be an important confirming factor. Sometimes it can be a strong factor, if it is a matter of closing doors, or opening them. But, here again, caution is needed. It is difficult to tell whether the circumstance is a hindrance of Satan—a road block to go through, or a check by the Spirit. It is also difficult, sometimes, to tell whether it is a door opened by Christ for His purposes, or a side track by the enemy. If we are in the habit of fellowship with Christ, and we are in touch with the general pattern that He has been working out in our lives, we will be more apt to have a sense of which is which. One indicator is that Satan's choices always, in one way or another, tend to lead us away from Christ rather than toward Him.

In the ultimate, however, our only true guarantee that we are doing what Christ wants, is the capacity and willingness of Christ to work out His purposes in us, in spite of our human inadequacy to make sound decisions, or to assess what God has in mind for us. In summary, the following observations.

1. Keep in touch with Christ, daily. Don't just come to Him when you need

special guidance.

2. See your mistakes as part of the growing process and not a hindrance to your fellowship with Christ, or to His willingness to work with you.
3. Use circumstances only as a confirmation, and not a final indication.
4. Express to Christ your willingness to do what He wants, whatever your feelings may be. (Don't pay any attention to feelings. It is your will that counts).
5. Beware of the kind of willfulness that stubbornly insists on one's own way, or elects not to inquire of Christ.
6. Beware of advice from anyone not in tune with Christ.
7. Trust the Lord to work out His purposes with your life, in spite of your fluctuating feelings and human inadequacy, to make the right decisions. Put your whole life in His hands, and ask Him to work out His will in spite of you. That is your ultimate safeguard.