

Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Children of God, Led by the Spirit of God**

November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Romans 8:9-17; John 14:15-17,21-26**

## 1. **Knowing God's Will**

We have seen in our Genesis study that the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith - Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, ... were all led in their life of faith by God speaking to them. Sometimes God spoke to them through dreams. Other times, it was through angels who appeared to them. Sometimes it is unclear how they were instructed but the scripture is clear that the Lord spoke to them.

God wants us to know and be able to discern the Lord's voice and leading in every situation. As Paul instructs us,

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is  
- his good, pleasing and perfect will"*

Romans 12:2 NIV

There is much to learn from how God led people in the Old Testament. However, we have much more available to us in the New Covenant of Christ, the New Testament.

- **How God Led In the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament the Spirit was poured out on specific people to help them fulfill their calling. In particular, prophets (Moses, Isaiah, ....) and kings (Saul, David, ...) were specially anointed.

People generally sought the will of God by going to the prophets and priests of the day. For instance, King David went to Abiathar the priest to seek guidance from the Lord (1 Samuel 30:7-8). There are many instances where we see people being given directions and instructions through dreams and visions and the appearance of angels as well - e.g. we see this in the life of Abraham and Sarah.

- **New Testament Evidence**

In the New Testament we see that people experienced guidance through some of the means we see in the OT. However, unlike the people of the OT, all genuine believers in Christ have something special - the Holy Spirit in us to lead and guide us.

## 2. The Inner/Inward Witness.

A primary difference between the people of the Old Testament and Christians, since the time of Jesus on earth, is that the Holy Spirit is part of our spiritual rebirth and remains in us throughout our lives after we become Christians.

- **Child of God**

Every believer in Christ is born of God - this is a spiritual transformation within by the Holy Spirit. It is our inner being, the human spirit, that is reborn (regenerated) by the Holy Spirit.

12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13NRSV

5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."

John 3:5-6 NRSV

- **The Holy Spirit in Us**

Paul wrote much on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. These include:

- **Marked by the Holy Spirit**

"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance ..."

Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV

This means that, every Christian received the Holy Spirit as part of the act of becoming a Christian.

- **The Spirit Leads Us**

The Holy Spirit is not just in us to be a spectator.

One of the most important roles He is to play in our lives is to lead us.

**"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God"**

Romans 8: 14 NIV

Jesus said:

**"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything"** John 14:26 NRSV

- **How The Holy Spirit Leads Us**

How do we know something is the Holy Spirit's leading? The means include:

- **The inner witness**

- **Scripture**

**His leading does not contradict scripture**

- the scriptures are inspired by the Spirit

- **Some have testified of hearing a voice**

This is not the universal experience of believers and **we must be particularly careful about hearing voices.**

- **Visions, etc.**

The Bible is clear that God sometimes gives guidance (even in the New Testament) through visions, dreams, etc. **However, the evidence is that whether we are guided through a vision or not is at God's discretion and should not be deemed the normal way in which God leads us. For the Christian, the more normal daily leading comes from the Holy Spirit within through the inner witness.**

### **The Inner Witness**

In the most important event in the Christians life, becoming a Christian, we only know we are Christians because of this inner witness.

**"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God"** 8:14 NIV

**"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"**

Romans 8:16 NKJV

Some versions use "testifies" instead of "bears witness"

We know we are Christians because of the Spirit's witness in our hearts. Paul said this after saying that those who are led by the Spirit are God's children.

In other words, the first "bearing witness" is that we are God's children. But that "bearing witness" continues as He leads us in all things because His leading us is also evidence of our being children of God.

### 3. Being Sure of God's Leading

#### ○ Waiting on God

**"Be still and know that I am God"** comes to mind (Psalm 46:10)

Every whim or emotion we feel is not to be interpreted as the inner witness of the Holy Spirit or the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must spend time in the Word and in prayer (sometimes extended periods of prayer with fasting) to receive assurance that the inner sense we have about a given situation is indeed the Holy Spirit's witness with our spirit (i.e., the Spirit's leading).

It is instructive to read about how the apostles were led in the book of Acts. E.g., "Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: ...

**While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,** 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' **So after they had fasted and prayed,** they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:1-3 NIV

John Wesley said,

"Trust not in visions or dreams; in sudden impressions, or strong impulses of any kind. Remember, it is not by these you are to know what is the will of God on any particular occasion, but **by applying the plain Scripture rule, with the help of experience and reason, and the ordinary assistance of the Spirit of God.**"<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Wesley, John. Sermon "Nature of Enthusiasm"

## ○ **Patience**

Patience is very important when it comes to being led by the Lord. Sometimes uncertainty can last a while ... but we must not be in a rush to jump to conclusions. Uncertainty can also be uncomfortable. We must be patient though.

An instructive story from one of St. Paul's missionary journeys:

"6 Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'

10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Acts 16:6-10 - NIV

## ○ **Peace As Umpire**

One indication that something is God's leading is the peace we experience about it (though we might not be able to explain it):

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."

Colossians 3:15 NIV

## ○ **Seeking Counsel**

Advice is also important:

"Where there is no guidance, a nation falls,

but **in an abundance of counsellors there is safety.**" Proverbs 11:14 NRSV