

How the Guidance of the Spirit May Be Discriminated

by Daniel Steele

The guidance of the Holy Spirit is fundamental in Christian character and is the very pivot of eternal destiny, and it can be discriminated from the suggestions of our own minds and the tempter by the certainty and assurance of the guidance of the Spirit.

Scripture: Galatians 5:18

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christian Character"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the guidance of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the importance of discerning His leading from our own thoughts and the tempter's suggestions. Steele highlights that being led by the Spirit is a sign of being children of God, and that the Spirit's guidance is crucial in Christian character, impacting our eternal destiny. He discusses the certainty of inward revelations of the Comforter, focusing on personal justification and sanctification experiences. Steele also addresses the need to distinguish the Spirit's voice from our own reflections, moral intuitions, and the tempter's influence, emphasizing the Spirit's consistency with reason, Scripture, morality, and exaltation of Christ.

Transcript

IN this chapter we propose to discuss the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and how it may be discriminated from the suggestions of our own minds and those of the tempter. The importance of this very difficult topic cannot be overstated. When Paul asserts that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," he excludes from sonship all who are not under this spiritual guidance. He also says: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law," implying that the leadership of the Spirit is the token of our deliverance not from the law as the rule of life, but as the ground of justification, as the impulse to service, and the instrument of sanctification. Thus the guidance of the Spirit is fundamental in Christian character. Yea, it is the very pivot of eternal destiny; "For the minding of the flesh is death, but the minding of the Spirit is life and peace." "He that soweth to his flesh shall reap corruption, (spiritual death); but he that soweth to the Spirit shall reap life everlasting." Therefore in this discussion we walk in a path where a misstep may precipitate an immortal soul down the abyss of endless woe. For narrow, indeed, is the line between fanaticism and sobriety in respect to the operations of the Holy Spirit in advanced Christian experience. Thousands in stepping over that line have found it the edge of a precipice, down which they have plunged into rayless darkness. We dare not venture upon this path without light from above. When

Socrates, in his prison in Athens, on the day of his drinking the hemlock by the decree of the court, was about to begin his argument for the immortality of the soul, he said to his disciples: "Let us take hold of one another's hands, as we enter this deep and rapid river, and let us call upon the gods for help." Let us follow the example of this devout pagan by interlinking our souls in the closest Christian communion, and by invoking the aid of the Spirit in the prosecution of our inquiries respecting his own work in the human soul.

"Holy Ghost, the Infinite!

Shine upon our nature's night

With Thy blessed inward light,

Comforter Divine!

"Search for us the depths of God;

Bear us up the starry road

To the light of Thine abode,

Comforter Divine!"

1. In executing the scheme of salvation, God makes two revelations of Himself, one to the human race, and one to the individual believer in Jesus Christ, The Bible, the message to the race, discloses facts and truths of general interest, groups men into classes, and photographs their characters. Still, there are important personal facts which the Bible cannot communicate. Let me illustrate. I read that God is love. This affords hope. But I read again that He is angry with the wicked every day, and that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

My hope, kindled by the revelation of His love, is suddenly extinguished by the disclosure of His wrath against the wicked. For my conscience accuses me of sin. Guilt burns my soul like a live coal of fire. In vain do I study my Bible for relief. It discloses the conditions for forgiveness, but I can rest only in the certified fact. This fact must constitute a personal revelation to me. It must be certified that I have been taken out of the class of the wicked, on whom God frowns, and that I have been classified with the righteous, on whom He smiles.

This fact I cannot derive from any process of reasoning upon the general truths of the Scriptures. Inference in respect to a point so vital is not sufficient. A criminal awaiting the hour of his execution on the scaffold cannot infer his pardon from a study of the general statutes of the country. This must be specially revealed by the governor. A certificate, signed and sealed, must be put into the prisoner's hands before he can enjoy the bliss of undoubted assurance. Can the governor make such an unquestionable certificate of pardon?

Can God give a perfectly satisfactory assurance of forgiven sin, excluding all grounds of doubt? Can he enter the soul with badges of divinity so unmistakable as to distinguish his utterances from the mind's own fantasies and from the deceptions of Satan? It is probable beforehand that, if a revelation should be made, either to the race or to the individual, it would be so strongly authenticated that the candid mind would find no ground for doubt. Hence the Bible comes to man accredited by miracles, and by something still more

convincing, the purity and sublimity of its disclosures.

These evidences never fail to convince all honest and earnest seekers after truth. God is under no obligation to satisfy cavilers whose chief difficulty is not the insufficiency of the Christian evidences, but their own hostility to the truth itself. In like manner, we should expect that when God speaks to the individual, His intonations would be so peculiar as to be recognized sooner or later, as clearly as when he walked in Eden and conversed with our first parents. We say that His voice would be recognized sooner or later, because God may make the manner of His address to our consciousness a part of our probation.

His first utterances may be faint and indistinct in order to test our sincerity, awaken inquiry, and inspire earnestness and intense spiritual hunger, which his later manifestations will completely satisfy. "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." At this point many have failed who have expected that the full orb'd sun would instantaneously arise, without the premonitory twilight. They have thrown away the dawn because it was not the sunrise, and a cloudy sunrise because it was not a cloudless noon.

2. In addition to the antecedent probability of a final and assured disclosure of God to the persevering believers in the present life, we have proof of His ability to authenticate His presence in the soul, as illustrated by man's power to communicate with his fellow in a manner which leaves no doubt of its reality. The mother hungering for the love of her babe a month old bends over it with a smile. Her eager heart is gladdened by an answering smile rippling over the dimpled cheeks. She has laid a telegraphic cable, from the continent of conscious humanity, to this little island, and the first message flashed under the sea is love. Shall a mother more certainly unveil her heart to her babe than God to the soul born from above? Must uncertainty shroud the manifestation of the Creator to the creature, while certainty attends the revelation of that creature to his fellow? Is there greater liability that God will be so mixed up with our fancies as that they will be mistaken for His utterances, than there is that your personality will be so confounded with my thoughts and feelings that I will imagine that they are your communications? Can you unmistakably enter my consciousness with a key of a spoken word, so that I discriminate you from the varying states of my own mind and from the millions of articulate mortals around me, while the Holy Spirit is baffled in His attempt unerringly to impress upon my soul the word Abba, Father, the seal of my spiritual adoption? To answer these questions negatively is to put limitations upon God which not only destroy His omnipotence, but degrade Him below His creatures.

3. Christian experience, especially in its higher phases, abundantly testifies to the certitude of the inward revelations of the Comforter. The burden of this testimony, all along the Christian ages, is not that dogmatic truth is inwardly revealed, but that the facts of personal justification and entire sanctification, fundamental to complete Christian character, are disclosed to all who perfectly trust in Him who is able to save to the uttermost. Nor will the attestation of these souls, who with Moses have trodden the Mount of God, and conversed with Him face to face in spiritual communion, be invalidated in the estimation of the wise, by the fact that they have been stigmatized as fanatics, Pietists, Lollards, Mystics, Waldenses, Quakers, and Methodists. For in this series of opprobrious nicknames we find the real apostolical succession, and not in an unbroken chain of prelatical ordinations. The martyr fires, which illumined the dark ages, conserved our spiritual Christianity against councils and inquisitions. What was the heresy of Tauler, Suso, Eckhart, Madame Guyon, Luther, and Wesley, but the manifestation of Christ to the believer, through the Holy Spirit, certifying forgiveness, renewing and sanctifying the soul. The conscious incoming of the Paraclete into the heart of John Wesley was the secret of that impulse which he communicated to Protestant Christianity throughout the world. These are his words: "Then I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me,

that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death; and I testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart." Toward ten o'clock a troop of friends attended him from the Moravian chapel to his brother Charles's, and sang a hymn with joy. Here we find the mainspring of those tireless and herculean labors of Wesley, preaching forty-two thousand and four hundred sermons, editing books by the hundred, and founding Christian charities which shall endure to the end of time, and missions which have already belted the world with a girdle of light. The three elements of the success of the Wesleyan movement are all found in the experience of its providential founder -- the direct witness of the Spirit, an open testimony, and joyful hymns. Before dismissing Methodism from our witness-stand, we will ask her how she conserves the orthodoxy of her multitudinous Church of more than four millions in all her branches, through nearly a century and a half, without a doctrinal schism. Not by papal anathemas, but by an open Bible, interpreted in the light of a spiritual experience. These, instead of disintegrating the Church into individualism, bind it into a spiritual unity animated by freedom.

4. Having thus far argued the certitude of the Holy Spirit's communications to the believer, first, from the antecedent probability; secondly, from the power of God; and, thirdly, from the testimony of the deepest Christian experience we proceed, lastly, to adduce a few of the abundant scriptural proofs. It is the Spirit's office to convict of sin. If His testimony is not infallibly sure, then sin may either have no real existence, and be only the illusion of a superstitious imagination, or, if sin has a being, we have no divinely certified knowledge of that fact -- a conclusion repugnant to both reason and conscience. Again, it is the work of the Spirit to lead all willing souls to Christ, When the human conditions are perfect -- an entire and irreversible surrender to Him as both Saviour and Lord -- if the Spirit does not, without fail, guide to Christ and lead into all saving truth, the bottom falls out of all God's promises to penitent believers in the record which he has given concerning His Son.

The supposition that there is uncertainty in the guidance of the Spirit in all matters necessary to salvation strikes at the very heart of the New Testament, and lets the very life-blood out of the Epistles of Paul and John. In that case the Gospel would be like a farm deeded to a son, with no right of way to it from any direction. If the office of the Spirit is uncertain, our Protestantism is forever in the mists of doubt, the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures is blotted out of Christian theology, and all assurance of eternal life is stricken out of human hearts, And yet all this dubiousness exists, if we are unable to distinguish the voice of God from the suggestions of our own minds and of the tempter in questions pertaining to salvation. Observe the frequent use of the words know and knowledge in the New Testament, God, Christ, the Comforter, and forgiveness, being the objects. Jesus, in His wonderful high-priestly address to the Father in John xvii., declares that "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." We are promised a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Paul speaks in emphatic condemnation of those who are never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. He is speaking not of an intellectual grasp of the truth, but of its spiritual realization. The English reader of the Pauline Epistles fails to discover the fullness and certainty of the knowledge of spiritual realities on which the apostle insists.

In his struggle of mind and strain of style to express the Christian's privilege of full and undoubted knowledge of spiritual realities he accumulates epithets which burden his sentences as in Col. ii. 2: "That their hearts might be comforted being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ."

He employs the compound word epignosis, full knowledge, when he wishes to be emphatic, instead of gnosis, knowledge. Bishop Ellicott and Dean Alford authorize this strengthened translation in the following

passages: Eph. i.17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him;" Eph. iv. 13, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the (full) knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" "perfect knowledge of the Son of God;" Col. iii. 10, "renewed unto perfect knowledge after the image of Him that created him;" 1 Tim. ii. 4, "who willeth all men to be saved and come to the certain knowledge of the truth;" 2 Tim. iii. 7, "ever learning, and never yet able to come to the full knowledge of the truth." Peter uses the strengthened form in his Second. Epistle i. 8, "toward the perfect knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But the most astonishing declaration of the intimate and assured knowledge of Christ which the believer may enjoy is found in John x. 14, 15, when correctly translated and punctuated: "I know My sheep and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father." The believer knows Christ as the Son knows the Father. The Son knows the Father by an inexpressible union with Him. The Son knows the Father as a person, for love has only a person for its object. He knows not by inference, but by intuition. Thus do we by direct spiritual perception know Christ as our adorable Saviour. As Jesus never doubts His communion with the Father, so the full-grown disciple may say of his fellowship with the Son of God,

"I know not what it is to doubt."

My reader, if your knowledge of Christ is not thus undoubting, it proves that you have not, through the fullness of the Holy Spirit, received a spiritual revelation of Him within you (Gal. i. 16). As a lamb, you may not discriminate the voice of the Good Shepherd; as a wanderer from the fold, you may be too far away to hear it; or, as a stranger, never knew Him. For the excellency, or super-eminence, knowledge, Paul counted all things but loss. His "Yea, doubtless," indicates that he thought that he had made a good bargain.

"Other knowledge I disdain;

'Tis all but vanity;

Christ, the Lamb of God, was slain,

He tasted death for me."

Now, in every Perfect cognition, or act of knowing, there is a separation of the object from all its surroundings. This is expressed in the very derivation of the word discern, from the Latin 'dis', 'apart', and 'cernere', to 'see'. Therefore when we savingly know God we discriminate Him from our own thoughts and feelings and from all other objects of knowledge.

We come now to that topic in our theme in which its chief interest centers. How may the movements of the Holy Spirit be discriminated from the suggestions of our own minds or of the tempter? On this point many an acute sceptic has puzzled many an untaught believer. "How do you know that all this experience of God in your soul of which you testify is not illusory, the play of your own emotions, or, as the philosophers say, subjective, having its origin within the thinking subject, and having no objective or external cause?" The inability of the Christian to answer this question by explaining the how, or manner, of this knowledge of Christ, has often sorely distressed him: and afforded a seeming triumph to the infidel. Both the distress and the triumph are without sufficient grounds. Knowledge is of two kinds, historical and philosophical -- the knowing that a thing is and the knowing how that a thing is. By far the most important part of our

knowledge is historical; we know the facts and nothing more. We can give no reason for the fact of our personal existence and identity. We cannot tell how we apprehend the existence of time and space, cause and effect, right and wrong. We cannot tell why a rose is beautiful, and Niagara sublime. We cannot give the why or wherefore of the axioms of mathematics, as that two quantities equal to a third are equal to each other. All these cognitions are intuitions of our reason, of which we can give no other account than that they exist, and we know them. They cannot be taken in pieces and explained in their component parts because they are simple and primordial ideas. They lie at the bottom of all our other knowledge. They are the original capital with which our Creator has endowed our reasoning faculties and set them up in business. These truths are called intuitive, from the Latin verb 'intueri', to look straight at. There are not only intuitions of the reason, but also those of the five senses. These we call perceptions. We see the clouds above and the landscape beneath, but we can give no explanation of the mode of our seeing. A cunning lawyer, in cross-examining a witness respecting some fact to which he had testified as having occurred under his own observation, being seen and heard, asked "How do you know that you know this fact?" The witness replied, "I cannot tell how I know, while I am sure that I know." The lawyer turning to the court, called attention to this admission of the witness. The judge immediately replied, "This court requires witnesses to tell what they know, but not how they know that they know."

There is a class of people who have not only the intuitions of the reason and of the senses, but spiritual perceptions also. These are they whose spiritual senses have been quickened into activity by the Holy Spirit. Paul, in strict accordance with the best modern psychology, describes man as a trichotomy, or threefold compound, having a body, an animal soul, and a spirit, like a dome crowning this splendid temple of God on the earth. In the unregenerate this dome is thickly curtained, so that no light enters, and spiritual perception is impossible. Faith in Christ removes the curtain; God's Spirit instantly lights up the dome, and there is the entrancing gladness of spiritual vision. Jesus Christ stands forth, the One altogether lovely, the soul's personal Saviour. How this revelation is made the soul knows not. A new class of intuitions has been suddenly unfolded before the astonished gaze of the consciousness. Scenes of spiritual beauty, the creations of divinity, stud the canvas, but how the soul sees them or discriminates them from its own inventions it cannot tell. When the sun arises, he brings his own light with him. We do not light a candle to see the king of day come forth from his chamber, nor are we in doubt whether it is the sun, or a light in the window of some early rising neighbor. Some facts are self-evidenced.

When God, the Holy Spirit, enters the human soul, His temple on earth, it knows it. We need not light the flickering lamp of philosophy to show the King of Glory to His throne within. We are in no danger of confounding His sublime utterances with our groveling thoughts. Who is so foolish as to suppose that a company of stone-masons built up Niagara Falls, or reared the arch of the Milky Way? God's works bear His unmistakable impress, whether they are wrought in matter or in spirit. They need no label to inform us that they are the products of almighty power. Their divine authorship is recognized at the first glance. Christians have needlessly suffered from that mistake that they must construct a philosophy of all the facts of Christian experience, and that a failure in this regard argues some weakness in the Christian system. The demand for such an account of the manner of spiritual phenomena should be just as strenuously resisted as it is in the case of the intuitions of the reason and of the senses. To our Mental Philosophies we should add this third class of intuitions, which are attested by all persons who have experienced the incoming of the Paraclete, either as the witness of their adoption, or as their abiding Sanctifier. We recognize His inward presence and activities, and in our more exalted experiences we discriminate between these and the operations of our own minds; but how we do this is an enquiry as impertinent in respect to the spiritual as it is in respect to the natural intuitions.

God has endowed us with the capacity to grasp all needful historical knowledge. Philosophical knowledge may be dispensed with till we can construct it. It is enough to know the fact that bread nourishes. We shall do very well with this knowledge, a plenty of bread, and a good appetite, though we may be ignorant of the philosophy of bread-making and of the physiology of nutrition.

Let us see how it is in other departments of our knowledge. Can we discriminate between concepts of the memory and those of the imagination? If we cannot, there is an end to all testimony in courts, to all writing of history, to all truth-telling. We should all be afloat on a sea of doubt unless we had this power to distinguish between fact and fiction, as presented to our minds by the representative faculty. But how do we thus discriminate? Who can tell? Every sane intellect discriminates, but none has ventured to explain the process. In the same way we distinguish between a perception and a conception. We see the waters leaping down Niagara's cataract. We return to our room, close the window blinds, and in the darkness, with closed eyes, the mind's eye sees another waterfall, rivalling Niagara, and resembling it in all particulars. Can we tell the difference between the cataract out of doors and that which is in our mind? Yes, we can tell it to ourselves, but to none other. We can give no philosophy of this matter. Yet we are not thrown into doubt and distrust of the veracity of our faculties because we cannot draw a line which everybody can see between the objective and the subjective, between a perception and a conception. In the we those are not included who are wandering in the fog of extreme German idealism.

If the Spirit-illuminated soul is endowed with spiritual intuitions we should expect these to stand the tests of natural intuitions. Intuitive ideas, according to Sir W. Hamilton, are necessary, self-evident, universal, and incomprehensible. Christians filled with the Spirit attest that their knowledge of Christ, as a personal, loving Saviour, has these four characteristics. We ought not to be surprised that the spiritual intuitions have hitherto attracted so little scientific study when we learn that the whole subject of primary truths is with philosophers a gold mine only just opened. No shaft has yet been sent down to the bottom. The number of intuitive ideas, their relation to one another and to science, have not been determined with any degree of accuracy, though there is an increasing tendency to recognize and classify these primordial elements of knowledge. One very important distinction has been established, which relieves the subject of a difficulty at the very threshold, the distinction between comprehension and apprehension. We cannot comprehend the infinite and the absolute, but we can apprehend them. We cannot comprehend God the Holy Spirit, but, when we fulfill the required conditions, we do assuredly apprehend the Paraclete dwelling within. This accords with the discrimination between that and how that -- knowledge historical or experimental, and knowledge philosophical. The command given by the Spirit to Peter on the housetop at Joppa beautifully illustrates this distinction: "And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting." The Greek for "doubting" signifies separating, analyzing, discriminating that process of mental action necessary to a perfect comprehension of the matter. Peter, having apprehended the will of the Spirit, is forbidden to sit down and philosophize and sharply define, to the satisfaction of all inquirers, the boundary between the Spirit's command and his own thoughts. If he had waited till he fully comprehended what he undoubtedly apprehended, Peter would never have reached the headquarters of Cornelius and opened the kingdom of Christ to the Gentile world. Thank God that he was a man of sound common sense, and not a Hegelian philosopher!

He is strong who grounds himself in intuitive truths. This made the shepherd boy, George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, irresistible in his conflicts with the university graduates two hundred years ago. Says Bancroft "They trembled and scud as he drew near; so that it was a dreadful thing to them when it was told them, 'The man in leathern breeches is come!'" It was intuitive truth that made Theodore Parker

strong as a moral reformer. His failure to build on the whole range of those truths made his "Absolute Religion" a manifest failure, as is shown by the providential man who has come to prove him, Joseph Cook.

We have only a few hints to give respecting the suggestions of the tempter and their discrimination from our own thoughts. Wicked men do not make this discrimination, so closely do their own feelings and activities resemble those of the great adversary. Hence young converts often testify that they were not conscious of the existence of the devil till they were regenerated. Into the muddy stream of human depravity Satan plunges, and, concealed from consciousness, floats through the sinful soul unseen, because he is of the very hue of the stream. But let that river become clarified, and the tempter can then no longer enter the soul in disguise. To the holy soul he comes in his own proper character, and is quickly recognized as an objective power attempting to intrude into an element wholly unlike himself. Thus a man entirely sanctified may have severe outward conflicts with Satan, but he has the advantage of knowing his foe, and his outwardness, if, "by reason of use, [habit,] he has his senses [spiritual perceptions] exercised to discern [discriminate between] both good and evil."

With respect to the daily guidance of the soul irreversibly self-surrendered to God, we believe that the Holy Spirit animates and informs the whole man, using his common sense, his stores of knowledge, his reason, judgment, spiritual aspiration and aptitude, deference to the advice of holy people, providential events, and the Holy Scriptures in determining any particular question of duty. In many instances he need not discriminate the Spirit's voice from his own reflections, for the Spirit may have gone down into the mysterious depths, and originated that train of thought which will unerringly conduct him to the desired conclusion. This remark applies only to daily guidance, and not to the direct witness of the Spirit to our adoption and entire sanctification. [See Rom viii. 15,16; Gal. iv. 6; I Cor. ii. 12; I John ii. 27] Cases of marked and persistent impressions made by the Spirit, impelling to a certain act or restraining from it, do occur. But these are exceptional to the general law of the Spirit, and they may be known generally by their peculiarity and persistence. Our advice respecting them is like that of Dr. Samuel Johnson respecting dreams: "Do not wholly reject them, for they may be true; do not fully believe them, for they may be false." Do not wait for a special impression to make personal effort to save a soul; but rather say with Dr. Chalmers, when a human being is within your reach, "Here is an immortal soul whose eternal destiny I may influence. Let me stir up all my powers to make the most of this great opportunity." A favorite method of determining divine direction, with minds not the best informed, is a species of Bible sortilege. At the random opening of the book the first verse that meets the eye is regarded as decisive of the question. For instance, a Methodist preacher in his perplexity about "the five points," arising from his Calvinian education, kneeled down, opened his Bible, appealing to God to direct his eyes, and read, "This persuasion cometh not of Him who calleth you." This lottery ticket drawn out of the sacred oracles afforded the distressed Arminian more comfort than it probably does to my Calvinistic reader. A much safer way would be to "search the scriptures," and not treat them in this lazy and presumptuous manner.

But the question still recurs, "Can we expect divine guidance so perfect as to be kept from mistakes in our daily lives?" Not from what men call mistakes. These may not be mistakes in the plan of God, but stepping-stones to some higher good, like Paul's prayer for the removal of the thorn.

"All things work together for good to them that love God," and just in proportion to the degree of this love. If this precious promise does not include our innocent misjudgments, overruled by a benignant Providence for his greater glory and our higher well-being, it is only a mockery of our wants, for our lives are full of errors.

"The mistakes of my life have been many."

Sin is always a sad mistake. Its primary meaning in the Greek is missing the mark. Beyond this we cannot say that any particular act is a mistake when measured by that higher standard, the glory of God, or good in the long run, under the moral government of Him "whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9). If we are wholly consecrated to God, and unwaveringly trusting him, exercising to the utmost the gift of common sense, we may without presumption say of our lives, as a whole, that we are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

He enters into our whole being. In minor questions, not relating to our personal salvation, he may not distinguish himself from our thoughts, feelings and volitions, because he originates and animates them. As there are two theories of inspiration, so there are two theories of spiritual guidance. The verbal inspirationist would have every word of the Bible injected into the writer's mind, distinguishable from his own thoughts. The plenary inspirationist teaches that the whole man is inspired and exalted by the divine afflatus, his scholastic culture, the treasures of his memory -- as Paul's knowledge of the Greek poets -- his logic and style, all being used by the Holy Spirit.

Some may desire a guidance corresponding to verbal inspiration, eager to see the very footsteps of God within; but others are content with what we may style a plenary guidance, the assurance of the fullness of the indwelling Spirit diffused through all our being, but in thought generally not distinguishable from ourselves. We teach that God has an ideal of every man's life. This involves two things, His highest glory and our highest happiness. It is the office of the Spirit to lead the child through this plan from the cradle to the grave.

If we always follow our divine Guide, we shall invariably attain these two ends. History gives us but one such life, the life that was cradled in the manger. All others at some point have marred the divine ideal by deserting the heavenly Leader, and following their own will. So we have all failed to fill out God's programme, which involved our highest possibilities of usefulness and enjoyment. We are all doing our second best. We mean Christians, who walk in the light and realize that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, "actual and original," as says Bengel.

The great difficulty in the matter of the Spirit's guidance is not in discriminating his movements in all the details of life, but in our total and irreversible abandonment of self, and enthronement of Christ within. When this has been done once for all, details adjust themselves without special impressions. Waiting for these before putting forth Christian activities has blighted many lives. Said a Quaker preacher, in answer to John Wesley's question, "Will you preach in your meeting today?"

"Yes, if the Spirit moves." "But," replied Mr. Wesley, "I shall preach that the Spirit may move." He needed but one impulse to service, and that lasted all his life. In respect to the Spirit's call to preach, the capital mistake is in preaching under the woe, and not under the Anointing. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel." The Church has less to fear from Huxley and the materialists than from preachers crammed with rhetoric, but destitute of the Anointing that abideth and teacheth.

We conclude our discussion by laying down the four following negative limitations to the revelations of the Holy Spirit in the human soul.

1. They must not be repugnant to the divine endowment of reason. Whether or not Cousin's doctrine be true, that reason is impersonal, and hence the same in man, archangel, and God, it is evident that it is a gift of the Creator, and can never clash with His other gift, the Comforter. We must ever hold fast to the declaration that faith in Jesus Christ is the highest dictate of reason. There may be a conflict between faith and the erroneous deductions of reason, but there never can be hostility between intuitive truth in the domain of the intellect and intuitive truth in the realm of the spiritual nature illumined by the Spirit divine. The spiritual intuitions may be far above the merely intellectual, but they can never contradict them.

2. The Spirit's inward utterances are never contrary to His declarations in the Holy Scriptures. This is too obvious to require proof. If any so-called spiritual guidance is repugnant to the plain teachings of God's Word as interpreted by that universal agreement styled the analogy of faith, this professed guidance must be erroneous. We have no just grounds for the expectation that the Paraclete will open to the believer, independently of his acquaintance with the original tongues, commentaries, lexicons, and other critical aids, the treasures contained in the Bible, and pour them into his mind without danger of error. Nevertheless, a perfectly candid enquirer, putting his intellect under the guidance of the Spirit in unwavering trust, though he may make many mistakes in non-essentials, will infallibly be led to Christ, the sum and substance of all saving truth.

3. The Holy Spirit can never antagonize our moral intuitions, or, in plainer terms, impel us to do what we know is wrong. He is called the Holy Spirit not because He is holier than the Father and the Son, but because His mission is to make men holy. He can never sanction unrighteous acts, which the universal conscience unhesitatingly condemns. Hence no individual can ever truthfully plead the promptings of the Holy Spirit in doing evil that good may come.

4. The last limitation is that the Holy Spirit never utters a word or prompts to an act derogatory to Christ. Since it is His office to glorify Christ, the Comforter will never degrade Him by denying or detracting from one of His claims. He professed to be an infallible Teacher, to be absolutely sinless, to set a faultless example, to have a right to universal obedience, to work miracles, to fulfill the prophecies, to be the Messiah of the Jews, the Light of the world, the Saviour of men, the Son of God, in a sense so unique that He was the only-begotten; He declared that He would raise the dead, and judge the world; and, lastly, that He was one with the Father, having all power in heaven and on earth. The Paraclete is a mirror, wherein is reflected the image of the risen and invisible Jesus, as He truly is, without distortion. "The Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME. . . He shall GLORIFY ME, for He shall receive of Mine and show (tell, Greek) it unto you." He never mars the symmetry of the God-man. Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed" (I Cor. xii. 3). Hence it is an incontestable fact of Church history that every lapse from orthodoxy has been preceded by spiritual decay. The Holy Ghost leaves the Church before she can deny the lordship of Jesus her great Head. For proof of this, study the religious history of New England. "Every spirit that confesseth not Jesus Christ come in the flesh, is not of God." This is Dean Alford's version, who asserts that the PERSON of Christ, and not some fact pertaining to Him, is the object of the confession. Whatever that spirit is that denies one claim of Christ, or obscures one feature of His glorious likeness, as it beams upon us in the Gospels, we may be well assured that this spirit is not the Divine Limner who portrayed that likeness with the pen of the four evangelists. When Jesus is ranked with Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, and Mohammed, in the style of our modern free- religionists, we may feel certain that the Spirit of truth does not suggest this degrading classification,

The conclusion at which we arrive is this: On the vital and all-important question of our relation to the law of God -- whether condemned or justified, polluted or purified -- He unmistakably reveals Himself in our consciousness, as distinct from the suggestions of our own minds and of the tempter. On minor questions of daily guidance in life's duties the Spirit usually mingles, unconsciously to us, in our meditations, and originates our trains of thought in such a manner as to assure us that we are under His general guidance, but not in such a degree as to enable us to say that He is the author of our words. We deem that person on the verge of fanaticism who prefaces his utterances thus, "The Spirit would have me say."

We cannot finish this chapter without frankly confessing, what our readers have already discovered, that we have not thrown much light upon the obscurities involved in this theme. Our discussion has taken us into a region where modest suggestions are far more appropriate than oracular assertions. But possibly we may have done service to the reader by marking out clearly the boundaries by which it is impossible for the human intellect to pass; just as the mathematician does good service to the student by designating the insoluble problems, and the natural philosopher benefits the whole class of mechanical inventors by demonstrating that perpetual motion cannot be created by the ingenuity of man. It is a great gain to know which are the insoluble problems in the algebra of human life. Thus we gain time for the practical and profitable problems of Christianity. Moreover, we could also earnestly desire that minds prone to skepticism in regard to the operations of the Holy Spirit in the human consciousness may, in the light of this dissertation, see the unreasonableness of their demand for the rationale of the communication of the Divine Intelligence with the soul of man, and accept the concurrent testimony of myriads of credible witnesses in all Christian lands and ages. But we have little ground for the hope that they who, because they see Him not, receive not the Paraclete, but

"His presence doubt, His gifts deride,"

will believe their fellowmen in testifying of an inward Christian experience. They who deny the existence of the workman will discredit his work.

"In us, for us, intercede,

And with voiceless groanings plead

Our unutterable need,

Comforter Divine!

"In us 'Abba, Father,' cry --

Earnest of our bliss on high,

Seal of immortality --

Comforter Divine!

"We are sinful; cleanse us Lord,

We are faint; Thy strength afford;

Lost -- until by Thee restored.

Comforter Divine!

"Like the dew, Thy peace distil,

Guide, subdue our wayward will,

Things of Christ unfolding still,

Comforter Divine!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/how-the-guidance-of-the-spirit-may-be-discriminated/>

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