

# Led of the Spirit

by J. K. POPHAM -

*"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." (Galatians 5:18)*

THIS chapter sets forth two mighty and opposite principles, and exhibits them to us in their different fruits; so that if we have the true light of life, we may know what spirit we are of, who it is who actuates us, to whom we are moving and what is the end of all with us. The Galatians were proving the evil of false teaching, in the effects of it. They had had a revelation made to them of Christ crucified the greatest blessing that can come to a person and to a church. They had been called to the gospel, they had received the gospel, they had loved the messenger of the gospel to them; they regarded Paul with intense affection, and were at one time willing even to give their eyes for him. They little thought of the defection that would soon come to them. False teachers came, and they sowed seed which, dropped into a legal heart, quickly brought forth fruit, the fruit of turning to another gospel, which was not another; and it brought forth very bitter fruit in them. They soon regarded Paul as an enemy, because he came and taught them, and reproved them, and sought to bring them back to that gospel from which they had, to his great astonishment, so quickly turned. In this chapter he exhorts them to stand fast, not to give way by subjection to the enemy of Christ; no, not for an hour. It would be well for us to be suspicious of every influence, every voice, within us or without us, that in the least possible degree depreciates Jesus Christ, and sets up self or something agreeable to self in His place. O my friends in the Lord, be very particular about the influences that come upon you, and the spirits that rise within you; be assured that every spirit that turns you in the least possible degree from the cross, from the liberty of Christ, from the gospel of Christ, is from the devil and from your own legal nature. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." This liberty is liberty from the law; and looking into the perfect law of liberty, is looking into the gospel, into Christ's Person and righteousness and blood and grace; whereby the soul is brought into acceptance with, and access to, God, and has liberty from condemnation; as it is written, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1) Be very careful about your walk; not simply your external conduct, but the walk in your spirit. If you walk by reason, you stumble; you soon become hardened in a measure from the fear of God, from the life of faith, from the spirit of prayer, from a humble dependence on Christ; and have regard to yourself, to your convenience, and to the indulgence of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and the offence of the cross becomes great to you in proportion as you walk after the flesh. Nature ever will be offended with the cross, ever will dislike the absolute dependence of the soul by faith on Christ. Watch this very carefully in yourselves.

The general drift of the chapter is to set forth the two principles, grace and sin; and as the one rises, the other falls; like a pair of scales, if one is up, the other is down. If the flesh prevails, then Christ as to all effect becomes of no avail. If Christ prevails, the flesh as to all prevalence is dead; for if you live in the Spirit, by the Spirit you kill the deeds of the body, as the word is: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13) And the apostle declares that these two principles, of which I have made mention, are contrary the one to

the other. "The flesh lusteth" willeth, struggleth, laboreth" 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 you would." If you take the spirit to be the hidden man of the heart, you will find there is a conflict between them; as you are lively in the things of God, you oppose the things of the flesh. You have in your own soul "a company of two armies;" you will find it there. The flesh says, "There is no God," or, "What profit should we have if we pray unto Him?" "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" And the spirit says, "I would walk before God in the land of the living, and pray; I would believe and repent, hope and love, leave the world, and esteem none but Christ." And these two living in the same person bring about a conflict, because they are contrary the one to the other, as fire and water are contrary; they face in different directions, the flesh to the world, the spirit to God. If you take the Spirit to mean the Holy Ghost, the same effect will be found. When He moves, He leads you to Christ, to repentance, to faith, to dependence, to fix your whole dependence on Christ; and the flesh opposes that operation. Every step that you by faith take to heaven, the flesh opposes; "and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

And let me invite your very strict attention to this part of this verse: "So that ye cannot do the things that ye would." I believe you will find in your own cases that it is true in both respects; in respect of the flesh, in respect of the spirit. Paul found it, and relates it in the 7th of Romans: "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "How to perform that which is good I find not: for the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." There was a conflict, and the flesh could not have its own way. He said, "O wretched man that I am! yet I shall get the victory;" and he sang of the victory. If you are always living after the flesh, if you always indulge it, if there is no resistance, no crying out because of, and against, the violence offered, then you are, as Paul speaks, "after the flesh," and you cannot please God. But if you have the Spirit in you, then the flesh, always wanting its own way and never willing to yield, and determined not to yield, will find itself effectually opposed; its prevalence is broken, its dominion is taken away. Blessed be God, if we have in our own cases this sweet thing, bitter to flesh; namely, the operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Then he says in the text, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" not obliged to be circumcised, not obliged to obey and seek to fulfil the law, that you may live. No, you are not under the law as to its dominion. What a freedom this is, a wonderful freedom! Not under a covenant of works, not under that solemn word, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. 3:10) He who is not under the law is a favoured person; for he is under the law of Christ, the law that proceeds, not from Mount Sinai, but from Zion, from the house of the Lord that is built on the top of the mountains. And he who is thus favoured will be saying at times; "For all people will walk every one in the name of his god; and we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God;" that is, in the Name of Christ. For the word is fulfilled in him. "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His Name, saith the Lord."

Now if the Lord will help me, I shall speak of this being led of the Spirit. "If ye be led of the Spirit," you certainly will be led to Christ; for He it is who has made you free, He it is who has given you liberty Christ. You are led to Him. There are two things that are essential to vital religion in the beginning and all through; namely, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our

Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21) He is going to heaven who has these two. Many a tear will run down his cheek because of his sins, and many a sweet hope will warm and enlarge and strengthen his heart, as he looks to Jesus Christ. He who is led of the Spirit is certainly led into those two essentials. Repentance is never left out where the Holy Spirit is, never; religion is halt without it, prayer has no salt without it, an approach to God is not acceptable with it; indeed, there is no access with it. Repentance, O sweet repentance, there is nothing harsh in it; much bitterness of spirit, much trouble because of sin, many painful looks at it.

"Past offences pain my eyes;"

but there is no wrath in it. And this is being delivered from the law, for the law will not have repentance; all the law accepts is perfection of work, perfection of heart. Be perfect under the law, and you will be accepted; fail, and, apart from the gospel, you are not allowed to repent, you are only cursed: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." And were you to be instructed in this, particularly those who have as yet not attained to that liberty they are seeking, it would be a help indeed to see that that repentance which now and again softens your heart, moistens your eye, and brings you to the Throne of God's heavenly grace with a humble, sincere acknowledgment of your offences, attended with cries of forgiveness, comes not from the law; for the law never produces such effects.

"Law and terrors do but harden;"

gospel softens. The law rejects repentance, rejects tears, accepts perfect works, and nothing more, nothing less. The gospel acts a kinder part, and gives a sinner a soft heart, a repenting heart, a heart of flesh, a heart to weep, to confess sin, to forsake it: and that is always accompanied with faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. That faith fixes in Him, and as it is strengthened, liberty comes. A revealed Christ is laid hold of by a God-given faith, and liberty is the result; and we are to stand fast in this. He may seem to go from you sometimes; it may be expedient for you sometimes that He should leave you, as He did His disciples respecting His bodily presence. But He will give you such inklings, even at those times, of Himself and of His mercies as will cause you to cleave to Him.

More particularly, "If ye be led of the Spirit," you are led to labour "for that meat that endureth unto everlasting life." (John 6:27) And this is that meat which Christ speaks of: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." Now the life of faith as it is in the Spirit's power, standing and moving, is this way to receive a manifested Christ broken for sin and broken for you. It is a great point in vital religion. This orientation of the soul with regard to Christ is an indication that the soul is led of the Spirit. As you are fixed toward Him or as you are not, so will be the evidence or the lack of evidence that you are being led of the Spirit. Look at this, it is worth your closest attention. Christ put the question once, "What think ye of Christ?" And we may put it to ourselves, "What think we of Christ?" This is the test.

"To try both our state and our scheme.

We cannot be right in the rest  
Unless we think rightly of Him."

The orientation of a sinner's heart to Christ is a very vital thing. "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord." (Jer. 24:7) The covenant promise runs, "All Thy children shall be taught of the Lord." (Isa. 54:13) "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34) If you are led of the Spirit, that will be one certain thing in you, you will be after Christ. You were singing just now,

"I seek and hope to find a Portion for my soul."

and happy is he who can say it honestly, with some understanding of what it means. Inasmuch as the world has nothing to satisfy a living soul, or to be an abiding portion, it follows that Christ is that Portion. "The Lord is my Portion, saith my soul," said Jeremiah. Mary made a good choice; she chose that good part which Christ confirmed to her, saying, "It shall not be taken from her."

"If ye be led of the Spirit," this certainly will be with you, "Let us therefore labour to enter into that rest." (Heb. 4:11) That rest was the rest that Jesus gave of old, and gives now to His children; that is the rest. Christ laboured, and entered into rest when He had finished His labour; and there remains a rest, a sabbatism to all the Lord's people. And that is the rest of faith, living faith entering into the blessed Person and finished work of Christ. The Spirit makes a revelation of Christ, and the rest of faith follows. And if you are led thus, you are not under the law. It is not the law that brings this, it is the gospel demonstrated by the Spirit, a free gospel of blessing; and the Spirit brings it, and out of that gospel comes a seeking spirit. As when the captives were being returned, then said the Lord, "I will lead them in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble." (Jer. 31:9) And this sets forth that straight way of seeking, wherein sinners walk, and do not stumble. They seek a manifested interest in Christ, an application of His blood, a manifestation of His righteousness; and that not once or twice, but all their days they seek, because the more they know of this, the more they want to know.

There will be an exercise of hope accompanying the labour of faith. Hope is likened to an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the veil. (Heb. 6:19) Now this grace of hope enters into the Person of Christ, who is the Object of hope. "O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble!" (14:8) The Object of hope is the Person and work of Christ; the grace of hope, seeing the Object, fixes in it. Here the soul fixes. If you say, "My hope is in the Lord," out of your heart's experience, you say a very great thing. Hope in Christ, why, it is of celestial birth; and it is a powerful grace, it will keep you from despair, it will tell you to look out for better days, it will inform you that there is a good God in heaven ready to pardon. Good hope through grace will preserve you from sinking into despair. If you are led of the Spirit, you will hope, hope all that heaven has good, hope for the coming of Christ to you, for the indwelling of the Spirit, for the love of the Father, for deliverance from affliction; for sanctification, that your nature, though base, shall from time to time be brought under, and you walk in the sanctification of the Spirit through belief of the truth. Hope will be this to you, if you are led of the Spirit. This is contrary to the law, for the law says to a sinner there is no ground for hope. "Pay me that thou owest," (Matt. 18:28) is the one demand of the law; and failing to receive what it demands, then its only voice to the defaulter, the sinner, is, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. 3:10)

But the labour of faith is to keep Christ in view. It is a great labour, and here the flesh comes and opposes it. The flesh lusteth against this labour of faith exceedingly; because the more Christ is known, the more the flesh is ground and put down, brought into the dust. The exaltation of Christ means the putting of the flesh down into the dust. Faiths labour is this. Standing in the power of the Holy Spirit, it labors to reach, and to hold fast when He is reached, the Lord Jesus. See now if you enter at all into that. Is Christ the Object first and last of your soul's desire and aim and labour? If you are led of the Spirit, it is so. There will be declensions, there will be suspensions of the mighty operations of the Spirit; but the bent of your mind, the trend of your wishes, will be in this direction, always this way. You may dam a spring, you may divert its course, you cannot stop it moving; and sin and Satan may divert the mind, and dam the spring, and warp the waters of the spring, but the spring will move, and find its way, and make a channel for itself. And you will find whatever opposition there may be in your flesh to the spirit, it will move and move and move in its own direction, and after its own proper Object.

If you live in the Spirit, you will find at times there will be the fruit of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." (Gal. 5:22) Now if you have a real knowledge of Christ, you certainly will have that fruit of love. Spiritual love has several objects. The first is God. There are moments when a sinner can say out of his very heart that he loves God. It may not be that he can say it often, or that he can say it very fixedly, certainly, for any length of time, but he will be able to say it sometimes. The Name of God the Father who gave His Son, the Name of God the Son who freely came and gave Himself, the Name of God the Holy Ghost who has quickened the soul and taught it, and led it thus far, this God will be dear to faith. "This God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our Guide even unto death." (Ps. 48:14) The fruit of the Spirit will be a love that will entwine itself about Him. If the Lord has drawn you with the cords of a Man and the bands of love, (Hos. 11:4) you will love the Lord; if Jesus visits you, then you will love Him; if the Spirit operates upon you, and brings some light and life from Christ, you will love the Spirit. If you are led of the Spirit, you will be sure to have that fruit of the Spirit, and a sweet fruit it is.

Then you will love also the Scriptures the Scriptures trampled under the foot of men like the vine of old trampled down by he wild beast and the boar out of the wood; the Scriptures denied as to their perfect inspiration; the Scriptures, the voice of God to some of us, the power of God in some of us, the light of God in some of us; the holy Scriptures, this blessed, beautiful Book so full of revelation, so full of consolation, so full of exceeding great and precious promises. Sometimes believers can say, "Precious Bible, blessed Book!" It shows you your Father, your Saviour and elder Brother, your only Guide and Teacher the Spirit; it shows you the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, it shows you the narrow way of life, it shows you the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul. It tells you of heaven, and makes a promise to you that one day you will be taken to heaven by the God who has prepared a place for you. Yes, the Scriptures speak to the saints in the Spirit. He takes them, He applies them, He opens and explains them in some degree of life, light, and unction, and makes them spirit and life, as Christ says. And while this is true of the Scripture as a whole, there will be certain outstanding passages which, being made over to you by the Spirit, will be particularly dear to you.

And the fruit of the spirit will be love to God's ways, even the way of tribulation. Nothing will offend you while love is active and prevalent. "Great peace have they which love Thy law" the Scriptures "and nothing shall offend them." Their faces through faith are "steadfastly set to go to

Jerusalem," as was the face of their Leader and Commander Christ. And they see this difficult path they wish to walk in: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace;" and seeing the track of Christ, faith will make you say,

"His track I see, and I'll pursue  
The narrow way till Him I view."

It is good to love the way the Scripture sets forth, the path you must walk to heaven. It tells us honestly what it is; "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Think of it. Christ, teaching the way to heaven, says, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men;" (Luke 9:44) by which He would seem to say, "You will need your faith in My teachings when you see Me crucified through weakness; you will need your faith in My Person when you see Me led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so shall I be." This is the way Christ crucified, and you walking in a path that crucified the old man with the affections and lusts. The fruit of the Spirit is love to God's way. If you try to pad, and to make easy to your shoulder, to your neck, the cross and the yoke that Christ will have you bear, you will not succeed. But when faith prevails, and love works by it and with it, then you will say, "The will of the Lord be done."

And once more, with regard to love I will say this: the fruit of the Spirit will be love to the saints. "Ye are taught of God," says Paul, "to love one another. You need not that I should tell it you," he says; "you are taught of God to do it." And says the Lord Himself, "So shall ye be My disciples, if ye have love one to another." And this love will be always humble; it will make you the chief of sinners with respect to your brethren, and the least of saints. It will lead you to honour them more than yourself: "Let each esteem other better than himself." "In honour preferring one another." What a great thing it is to love the Lord's people! You love them in respect of things that are in them. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publican the same?" There is plenty of publican love about, but O, the love of the saints, this is particular, and this is the fruit of the Spirit. If you are led of the Spirit, you will have this love, and it will show itself; if one is in trouble, you will be there; if there is any peculiar affliction, you will sympathize, and seek to pray for the afflicted. "Brethren, pray for us." "Praying always," as Paul says in the Ephesians, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." "Walk in love as dear children." These are scriptures which are not grievous when love is in exercise; no, they are pleasant, pleasant to the soul, attractive; and all the saints desire to walk in them. If you are led of the Spirit, then you have love, love without dissimulation. May the Lord grant we may have this fruit.

Other fruits follow. "Joy," joy in Christ; "peace," peace by Christ, "longsuffering" in affliction, "gentleness" when you are roughly treated; "goodness," a "being filled with goodness," as Paul speaks to the Romans, out of the fullness of Christ; "faith," which holds fast to Christ; "meekness," that does not behave itself proudly, haughtily; "temperance" in all things, in meat, in drink, in dress, in behaviour. "Against such there is no law." Did you ever feel thankful for this word, "Against such there is no law?" Take the obedience of a sinner which he attempts as under the law. The least flaw makes him guilty of the whole law. He that offends in one point, "he is

guilty of all." (James 2:10) You who are under the law, have a hard taskmaster to please, and you will never please him. He will insist on your doing what he bids you, and he will bate not one inch, not give way one iota. But if you are under Christ's law, the law of grace and mercy, the law of forgiveness and justification, the law of God's compassions and pity, the law that brings Him to you to help you in time of need; and your faith, though weak, still hangs about Him, and your love, sometimes waxing cold, still moves and flickers towards Him, if you have these graces, these fruits says Paul, there is no law against you; that is to say, there is no exacting law, saying you must increase these graces; if you do not, you are lost. No, there is a fire to increase them, that is, the love of God. "Ye are not under the law."

May the Lord open this to us. We shall find plenty of trouble and conflict if we are led of the Spirit, but we shall find no curse, no condemnation.