(Walking in the Spirit) 6. THE SPIRIT OF LIGHT

A.B. Simpson:

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1Cor. 2: 12.
The first aspect in which the Holy Spirit is revealed to us is as the Illuminator and Guide of our life. Even in the story of creation the first result of His brooding over the face of the deep is the command, "Let there be light." He is the Creator of the human mind and the Source of all the true light of reason and natural religion in the world; and He is the true Source of spiritual light. One of His special emblems is the oil and the seven-fold lamp of the temple.

I. He Gives the Light of Truth.

He has inspired the Holy Scriptures, the revelation of God's will, and the invaluable light that shines upon the heart of man, the pathway of the unseen world. The Bible is a standard of spiritual truth, and in all His teachings and leadings, the Holy Ghost never contradicts His own word. They who are more fully led of the Spirit will always most reverence the authority of the Scriptures, and walk in the most perfect conformity with their principles and precepts.

But it is not enough to have the letter of the word, He who gave it must also interpret it and make it Spirit and life. It is His to unfold to the heart the power and reality of the written word and to bring it to our remembrance in the opportune moment as the lamp of guidance, or the sword of defense in the hour of temptation. "He will bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." This is the blessed ministry of the personal Holy Spirit, and they who thus walk with Him shall find the Bible an ever new volume and the very light of life.

A prominent member of the House of Representatives, speaking the other day about the inestimable value of the National Library of Congress, was asked how it was possible for a busy member, without much study and labor, to know how to use it effectually, and to be able always to find the right volume or page where a given subject was discussed: "O," he replied, "that is made perfectly easy for us by our invaluable librarian who knows every book and subject, and all we have to do is to send a little page from our desk in the House with a note to him requesting the best authority on any subject we require, and he immediately comes back with the right book and the leaves turned down at the very spot where we need the information." Blessed be God, we have a Divine Librarian who understands the Bible better than we ever can, and who has come to be our Monitor and Guide, not only into its meaning, but also into its practical application to every need of life. "And if we walk in the Spirit He will guide us into all truth, and bring all things to our remembrance whatsoever Christ hath said unto us."

II. The Light of Revelation.

It is not enough to have a good light, we must also have the organs of vision or it is of no use; and we must have them in perfect condition. Now, the Holy Spirit comes to be to us sight as well as light; and as we walk in Him we shall be enabled to know the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures by a true spiritual apprehension, and from the very standpoint of God's own mind and thought.

In the chapter from which our text is taken the apostle uses a very fine analogy:

"No man," he says, "knoweth the things of a man except a spirit of a man which is in him; even so, knoweth no man the things of God except the Spirit of God is in us." You might sit down and talk to your little dog about the latest book, and explain to him in the clearest manner its wonderful teachings, and he would not understand a word; not from any defect in the truth, but because he had not the mind of a man to understand the things of a man; and so you might sit down and talk to the natural intellect about spiritual truth, even the brightest human intellect, and they would not comprehend it because it belonged to a higher sphere.

The only way by which that dog could understand you would be for you to impart to him a human mind, and the only way that man can understand the things of God is for God to impart to him the divine mind; therefore, the apostle says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto Him; neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned; but we have the mind of Christ."

This is the special work of the Holy Ghost, to give to us a new spiritual vision and organ of apprehension; so

that the soul directly perceives divine things and realities. Perhaps the first effect of this divine illumination is that the things of God become intensely real, and stand out with vividness and distinctness, like figures cut in relief on the wall. The person of Christ, the light of His countenance, the distinct sweetness of His Spirit, the "peace that passeth all understanding," the joy of the Lord, the heavenly world, all become to the heart more actual and intensely vivid than the things we see with our outward eyes, and touch with our human hands; so that we can say of Christ with the apostle, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life." This is the true meaning of this whole chapter. It is not a description of heavenly glories which we are going to see by-and-by, but of present revelations which the natural eye hath not seen, the material ear hath not heard, and the human heart hath not conceived: but which "God hath revealed to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

In the first chapter of Ephesians, the apostle Paul has given us a sublime view of the effect of this inward illumination upon the heart. "I cease not," he says, "to make mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." "The eyes of your heart being enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."

"Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places,"

"Far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come;"

"Which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ;"

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. "

Here we find it is not the eyes of our intellect, but the eyes of the heart that are to be illuminated, and when so quickened by the Spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Him, we shall understand what is the hope of our calling, and glorious privileges and prospects which we are to inherit in Christ.

The riches of the glory of His inheritance are not only for us, but even in us now. We shall be stirred with a realization of the exceeding greatness of His power toward us and for us. We shall rise to an adequate conception of the mighty things that we may dare to claim of Him; especially shall we see the full meaning of Christ's resurrection and ascension. We shall see Him lifted up, not only above the grave and the burden of our guilt and sin, but far above all beings, all forces of natural law, all might and dominion, and every name that is named, up to the very throne of God where all things are under His feet. Not only so, but we shall see ourselves lifted above our sins, and fears, and sorrows, and enemies, and difficulties, and imperfections, until we, too, are sitting with Him far above all principality, might and dominion, in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, as safe and triumphant as if we were already in heaven and had been there for ten thousand years.

Oh! such a view takes the sting out of life and stimulates to higher aspirations and victories, conflicts and service. But we must first perceive our inheritance before we can claim it, and as we look out upon all the fullness of His promise and provision we arise and walk through the land in all the length and breadth of it and make it our own. Under this divine light the promise of God grows strangely real, and the heart swells with faith and confidence. Doctrines which in the abstract we could not understand become simple and living realities. The profound truth of the Trinity changes into the personal and sweet fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The doctrine of sanctification ceases to perplex and discourage, and becomes a simple experience of union with Jesus and abiding in Him. The mightiest supernatural works of Christ even in our bodies cease to be strange and incredible. The doctrine of His personal coming becomes a bright and personal expectation, and the whole world of spiritual things is more real to us in our own consciousness.

Sometimes the vision opens upon our own hearts and we are permitted to see their failures, imperfections, and needs; but under the light of God this is never discouraging because there always comes with it the revelation of Him who is the supply of every need and the provision for every defect in sin. Satan's pictures of our sins are

terrible and always depressing; but the light of heaven reveals our errors only to heal them, and brings such sweetness and rest that we can only thank Him for making greater room for His all-sufficiency.

Sometimes, too, the curtain is lifted upon the heavenly world, and some souls whom God can trust are permitted, like Paul, to be brought so near that they behold what it were unlawful for a man to utter, and know not whether they are in the body or out of the body. Let no one covet such experiences, for they bring with them many a thorn in the flesh, lest we be exalted above measure. And above all let us not seek, with morbid curiosity, to intrude into things which belong not to our simple sphere of humble duty, but rather seek the light that is practical and useful.

And yet, if God gives the higher visions at times, and even lifts the veil of things to come for humble and holy souls who dwell hard by the gates of heaven, let us not wonder or question; and let them use such glimpses of glory as the mariner uses the burst of sunlight that sometimes pierces through the skies that have been clouded for weeks, and sails, by the observations of that hour, through all the coming days of cloud and storm.

III. The Light of Guidance.

The Holy Spirit is promised to us as our personal Guide in the path of life. "As many as are led of the Spirit they are sons of God." Some persons are so zealous for the word of God that they deny any direct guidance of the Spirit apart from the Word, but if we truly believe the Word itself we will be forced to accept its distinct statements, that the personal presence of God is given to the humble and obedient disciple for the needed direction in every step of life. "I will instruct thee in the way that thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." The Lord shall guide thee continually: "When He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them and they know His voice." "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."

We find the apostle Paul constantly recognizing the personal direction of the Holy Spirit even in matters where there was no distinct direction in the Word. The whole course of Paul's missionary journeys was ordered by the personal direction of the Lord. Being sent forth, we are told, by the Holy Ghost, he and Barnabas sailed unto Cyprus. A little later the same Spirit restrained them from preaching in Bithynia and Asia, and led them from Troas to Philippi to begin their European ministry. Still later, we are told that he purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and Rome, and none of the perils of the way could afterward turn him aside from that which had come to him as the voice of God. No life was ever more practical, sensible, and scriptural than Paul's, and yet none more constantly recognized the supernatural direction of the Holy Ghost. The methods of divine guidance are various.

1. The Spirit guides us by the Scriptures, by their general principles and teachings, and by bringing to us special passages from the Word, either through the law of mental suggestion, and impressing them upon our heart, or by various ways fitted to emphasize a passage as a divine message to our hearts.

2. He also directs us by His own direct voice when necessary; and yet we must not expect the special and remarkable intimations of the Holy Ghost at all times, or when we have sufficient light from other sources. There is danger of fanaticism here. We have no right to ask God to give us a special revelation of His will where either the light of our own common sense or the teaching of Scripture have already made the matter sufficiently plain. For example: It would be foolishness to expect the Lord to show us by a direct message whether we ought to get up in the morning, to take our proper food, to attend to our daily business, to keep the Sabbath, or to perform the ordinary acts of kindness, courtesy and necessity; to pay our debts, to love our neighbor. All these things the Spirit has already told us, and it would be an impertinence to expect Him to come with a new revelation every time.

So, also, we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to reveal to us directly whether God will forgive us our sins, or sanctify our souls, because these things He has already explicitly promised us, and we can expect no added witness of the Spirit until we have first believed and acted upon His Word; then the Spirit will follow this by a confirming voice and a sweet inward assurance of the fulfillment of His promise. Many persons expect the Spirit to come to them with the assurance of forgiveness and salvation before they have even believed the promises that He has already spoken.

So also, we may add in regard to prayer for physical healing. When we are living in accordance to His Word it does not require a special revelation of the will of God, but that we should believe the revelation already made in the Scriptures, in His promises of healing through faith in Christ. But, where the matter is one on which the Scriptures have not spoken distinctly, and the circumstances are so peculiar as to require direct and new light, He has distinctly promised that He will lead us in the right way wherein we shall not stumble. He has said, "If in

anything we be otherwise minded, and our views and ideas be mistaken, He will reveal even this unto us."

3. The Holy Spirit guides us most frequently by intuitions of our sanctified judgment, and the conclusion of our minds, to which He leads us with the quiet assurance of acting in perfect freedom and naturalness, and yet of being influenced by the presence and suggestion of His own Spirit. Under such circumstances the mind and judgment are perfectly simple and natural. The thoughts come as our own, with delightful tranquility, and a certainty, and a sort of intuition that it is the right thing to do, and yet the secret consciousness that it is not our wisdom, but has been somehow reflected upon the soul by another. It is not so much the Spirit speaking to us as the Spirit speaking with us as part of our very consciousness, so that it is not two minds, but one.

The truly consecrated spirit may expect to be thus held and influenced by the Divine wisdom; and it will often find itself restrained from things by an inward reluctance, or repulsion, which it cannot fully explain, and led to other things by a strong and distinct inclination and sense of rightness and fitness which afterwards prove, by the result, to have been the directing presence of God. Of course, as we shall see immediately, there must be real consecration and holy vigilance in such a walk, to guard against our own impressions and inclinations in cases where they are not the intimations of the Spirit's will.

4. We are sometimes taught that we are guided by providences. A devout mind will, of course, always have regard to the external providences of God, and will be habitually watching to see His hand in everything that occurs; but it would be very dangerous to allow ourselves to be directed by outward events apart from the distinct leadings of God in our spirit and by His Word. Quite as frequently we shall find ourselves led to go in the face of circumstances as to follow the favoring gales of outward events. Most of the important events and accomplished purposes in the lives of God's servants, as recorded in the Scriptures, were in direct opposition to all the circumstances that were occurring around them. Take, for example, the life of David. From the very first time that he received the call of God to recognize himself as Israel's future king, everything in his life for nearly ten years seemed to conspire to forbid any such expectation.

Take again the life of Paul. We find him directly led by the Holy Spirit to cross the Hellespont and begin his ministry in Greece. But instead of being met by open doors and favoring circumstances, everything opposed, until at last he found himself scourged and bound, a helpless prisoner in a Roman dungeon. Had he been watching for the guidance of circumstances he would have concluded that he had made a mistake, and would have hastened to get away; but on the contrary, the more firmly believed that God had led him, and ere long the very circumstances were conquered and transformed by the victorious power of faith. So again, he was led to Jerusalem and Rome, but from that moment everything opposed him. All along the way the people of God even seemed to throw themselves across his path.

At Ephesus, they wanted him to remain to preach the gospel in the very place where a year before he had in vain tried to enter; but instead of recognizing this as a providence that ought to change his purpose he quietly deferred his work in Ephesus and pressed on to Jerusalem. Again and again on his way did the very prophets of the Lord warn him against visiting Jerusalem, and plead with him to abandon the dangerous purpose which would perhaps cost him his life; but he only replied "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Arriving at Jerusalem all that had been intimated comes to pass. Instead of being received by his countrymen, he is mobbed and well nigh killed, but he still presses on and the Lord meets him at night in his dungeon to assure him of His protection and direction.

Next, he is detained at Caesarea for two whole years languishing in a prison; but, instead of doubting his divine direction he presses steadily on, and uses the delay as an occasion of service for the Master. At length he has embarked for Rome; but even then the storm pursues him and the wild Euroclydon threatens to engulf him in the depths of the sea; but he falters not in his purpose, but rises majestically above the storm and carries even the lives of his fellow passengers, on the wings of his mighty faith, above disaster and destruction. Narrowly saved from shipwreck on the shores of Malta, a viper from the ashes springs upon his hand, and it seems as though earth and hell had determined to prevent his reaching Rome, but he only flings it off and suffers no harm, and so at length he marches up the Appian way more like a conqueror than a prisoner, thanking God and taking courage, as he realizes that not one word of all God's promise and direction has failed. Thus must we ever interpret the providences of God; instead of yielding to opposition, or following that which seems to favor us, press firmly on in the path of conviction and obedience, and our way shall be established, and our very difficulties become the occasions of our greatest triumphs.

Let us notice also some of the principles and conditions of divine guidance.

The first is a surrendered spirit. Before we can know His will we must always first yield our own. "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way."

Next, there must be a readiness to obey. He will not give us light unless we mean to follow it; to do so would only add to our condemnation. "If any man will do His will he shall know." "Then shall we know if we follow to know the Lord."

Secondly, we must trust His guidance; we must believe that He is with us and directing us. We must lean upon His arm with all our heart, and implicitly look up into His face and expect Him to be true to us. We must also have "our senses exercised by reason of use, to know the difference between good and evil." Sometimes our mistakes will become most instructive to us by showing us the places where we have erred, and save us from repeating the mistake afterwards with more serious consequences. We must learn to distinguish between mere impressions and the deeper convictions of the entire judgment under the light of the Spirit, and between the voice of the Shepherd and that of the spirit of error. This He will teach us, and teach us more and more perfectly through experience. We shall have to learn also to walk with Him when we cannot understand the way. His path is often a way that we have not known, and the answer to our prayer may seem to lead us directly contrary to our expectation and to the ultimate issue.

Once in my life I was led to ask the Lord for a special building as a residence, and received full assurance that it would be given; almost immediately afterwards it was sold to a person who insisted on occupying it himself, and refused under any circumstances to part with it. After much prayer I was led to consent, most unwillingly, to accept, instead of the house I had most desired, another owned by this very man. So distasteful was it to me that on the night I went to sign the lease I walked repeatedly past the door before I could bring myself to enter. At length, in simple obedience to the Holy Spirit, I did, but, to my surprise, the man met me and said that very afternoon he had been led to change his mind. While attending the funeral of an old friend a strange dread came over him about occupying the house that he had purchased and he had just decided to let me have it on terms more favorable than I could have expected had not God interposed. Thus, as I went forward in the path of simple obedience, by a way that I could not understand the true way opened up, and it was only blessing and delight. The most remarkable feature of it was that the house thus given became afterwards the place where all the work of the Lord, in which we are now engaged, began. God thus signally chose the place for His work, and put His seal upon it as a pattern of the providences which we should afterwards expect. So, still, "through fears, through clouds, through storms, He gently clears our way."

Let us trust His guiding hand, and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

IV. Light for Service.

"It is not ye that speak but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." "Say not I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak." "And the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, behold! I have put my words in thy mouth." "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of one that hath been instructed that I might know how to speak the Word in season to him that is weary." "He openeth my ear morning by morning to hear as one that is instructed." This was the secret of even Christ's ministry. "The Word that I speak is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." "As I hear I speak."

Before we can speak God's messages we must learn to listen. The opened ear comes before the opened mouth. It is very hard sometimes to die to our own thoughts and elaborate preparations for service, and to be free and open for God to use us as vessels meet for the Master's use. Sometimes He has to humble us by showing us the barrenness of all our best intellectual work, and then lead us to receive the living messages of His Holy Spirit. Sometimes we may think the message very unworthy and almost unsuitable, but God loves to take "the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh may glory in His presence."

A saintly spirit whom God has greatly used in personal messages, tells how once she was distinctly sent by the Lord on a certain train; but when she arrived at the station the train was crowded and the guard told her she could not go. Still she waited, having learned that a point-blank refusal is often the best evidence of God's working; but just as the train was about to leave, suddenly the guard came to her and hurried her into a carriage which had just been put on. There she found herself sitting beside a young gentleman, and immediately the thought came, "This is the service the Lord has sent me to do." After a little she introduced the subject of personal religion, but he haughtily replied, "My family object to my being talked to on such subjects." "My dear

sir," she replied, "I had supposed that this was not a question for your family, but for yourself." "Then," he answered, still more stiffly, "I object to be talked to on such questions." It seemed as though the way of service was blocked, and yet the unerring Spirit had led her there.

Then the thought came that she should give him a tract, and that God would bless the silent messenger even after they had parted. But as she searched through all her pockets she found she had forgotten all her tracts. Suddenly, amid her movements, her valise fell on the floor, and all its contents were poured in disorder at their feet. With the instincts of a gentleman he helped her to pick up the wreck, when suddenly her eye fell upon a single tract that had fallen out with the other articles; but as she picked it up she felt, why, this will never do, for it was a tract especially addressed to a young man that had just been saved from shipwreck. But the same unerring Guide whispered to her to put it in his hands and ask him to read it.

He took it, having grown a little freer, through their better acquaintance, and as he read the title his face became deadly pale. Before he had read the second page the tears were pouring down his cheeks. "Madam," he cried, turning to her, "who told you about me?" "Why, no one," she answered, "what do you mean?" "Why," said he, "Some one must have told you; did you not know that only last week I was rescued from shipwreck?" It was the arrow of the Infinite One whose wisdom never fails, and the humble worker, waiting His bidding, had not been suffered to err. The message reached his heart, and ere they parted he was saved. This is the true secret of effectual service, and when He becomes to us the Wonderful Counselor, we shall always find Him also the Mighty God.