

"PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF LIVING IN THE SPIRIT"

(Romans 8:12-17)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul had focused on the negative (telling what not to do) long enough. He quickly turned to the positive. In each of the next four verses, we find a practical benefit of living in the Spirit.

The first benefit: *practical, everyday leading from God (8:14)*. This is frequently used as a proof text to support the notion that believers receive either verbal or nonverbal messages from the Holy Spirit telling them what decisions to make or what to do next. This is not Paul's teaching here. This actually shortchanges the promises of the new covenant. As we will learn by the end of this chapter, the Lord will do something far more profound, far more useful, than merely whispering commands in our spirit's ear. In fact, Paul's very next statement assures us that the Holy Spirit is a gift, not a dictator.

Note how Paul phrased the sentence: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Many turn it around to support their predetermined conclusion: "The sons of God are led by the Spirit." But this would not be a true statement. While the Lord is certainly faithful to lead genuine believers, most are either too distracted or too stubborn to follow, so they aren't really going anywhere. Paul's teaching in other portions of Scripture makes it clear that the Spirit does lead, but the believer may elect to go his or her own way, thus "grieving" Him (Eph. 4:30).

This verse is both a promise and a practical means of assurance. Those who are actively following the Spirit will bear the unmistakable evidence of that leading (see Gal. 5:18-25). When that evidence—or "fruit," as Paul liked to call it—is visible, it assures the believer that he or she is indeed a "son of God."

By the way, we shouldn't replace the word "son" with "child," even for women. Paul could have chosen the neutral Greek term for "child," but he deliberately chose "son" to indicate that believers stand to inherit something. In this sense, women are "sons of God" because they, no less than men, are a part of God's estate.

The second benefit: *fearless intimacy with God (8:15)*. Paul again reinforced the good news that believers have been emancipated. They no longer serve a master who tells them what to do, when to do it, how long, how often, and where. We have been freed and therefore we are free indeed. God purchased us. The payment was His Son's death. While He had every right to own us as slaves, He tore the bill of sale into shreds and drafted a new document: adoption papers! He is not merely a kinder, gentler Master; He is our "Abba." That's the Aramaic term of endearment for one's father. The closest word we have to it is the name Daddy.

Intimacy with the almighty Creator of the universe!
What an awesome thought.

We have an obligation, not as slaves repaying a debt, but as sons, who have a genuine stake in our daddy's estate. The obligation doesn't come as orders from a harsh slave owner, but as an invitation to become



a contributing member of a family. If we do good, it is not for His sake alone, but for ours and everyone else in God's household.

The third benefit: *assurance of belonging to God (8:16)*. This is the only place in the New Testament that seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit speaks to individual believers as a general practice. After Jesus inaugurated the new covenant (which we will examine later), the Lord spoke through designated people. He spoke prophetically through apostles and prophets until the last of the New Testament books, Revelation, was written by the last remaining apostle, John.

Some critics object to this, pointing to the fact that the Bible is replete with stories of God speaking to, and through, people, and that He still has the power to do so. This is true. The Lord specifically chose some to be His spokespeople for a given time and for a defined purpose. But, as one insightful commentator stated, what is narrative is not necessarily normative. Just because someone in the Bible experienced something, that doesn't mean we should expect it will become a common occurrence.

Balaam's donkey, under the supernatural direction of God, rebuked his master (Num. 22:28-30). The event took place in the Bible, the Lord still has the ability to speak through anything He chooses, and there's nothing to prevent Him from doing it again. Nevertheless, I recommend we keep to our Bibles instead of visiting barnyards to hear the voice of God.

We need no other prophetic utterance until the end-time events begin to unfold. We have all the information we need. Truth be told, we have more than we can handle in a lifetime as it is! This is not to say that we're on our own or that the Spirit does not lead. He is with us and He leads us. (We will soon learn from the apostle how the Spirit leads.) However, at this stage in the timeline of redemption, God does not speak prophetically to, or through, people. That is one of the major tenets of the Reformation—*sola scriptura*—and what, in part, defines us as Protestant. We have no need of popes, neither in Rome nor next door, nor do we need night visions. We have God's Word in black print on white paper, accessible in multiple languages, and understandable to all. I suggest we keep our focus there. If the Holy Spirit speaks into the souls of His beloved children, it's only to say this: "You are my precious child."

The fourth benefit: *a continual reminder of our value before God (8:17)*. Adoption was a common practice in Roman law. Much of Roman society depended upon a system called "patronage," in which one person became a benefactor to less powerful people. He, in turn, owed allegiance to his patron. Very frequently, a patron would adopt a favorite unrelated client to inherit his estate. When Paul spoke of "adoption as sons," his Roman readers would have immediately recalled that Caesar Augustus had received much of his power through adoption by his patron, Julius Caesar, the founding father of the Roman Empire.

Through adoption, believers have become coheirs with God's one and only Son. And through our identification with Him, we stand to inherit everything that is due Him. Fast-forward to Revelation 5:12 to see what that entails. He will share everything with His adopted brothers and sisters—all, that is, except worship. That is His alone.