

Led by the Lord

Some thoughts on Romans 8:14

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Romans 8:14, KJV

“The Lord led me to . . .” You fill in the particulars. During the course of my life I have heard this phrase repeated by hundreds of well-intentioned and sincere Christians. I have even uttered the assessment myself! Yet I admit that I’m not entirely certain what I meant when I made the statement, all of which begs the question, what do we mean when we say, “The Lord led me”?

Does it mean that God gives us some esoteric and personalized guidance that He gives to nobody else (the emphasis being upon, “me”)? Can the Lord lead me to do, what in the eyes of others, are some rather “odd” things? Can I confuse my wants with His will and leading? Does He lead me by answering prayer? When I state, “the Lord led me,” am I simply stating I am comfortable with my decision and its benefits? Did the Lord really lead me, or did I lead myself? How many of us have first confessed that the Lord led us . . . only to wish later, because of the difficult situation “His leading” put us in, that He hadn’t led us!? Frankly, I’ve seen some pretty bizarre things attributed to the “leading” of the Lord.

That’s why Paul’s statements about God’s leading in the Christian life are outstanding. In one instance he wrote, **“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law”** (Galatians 6:18). In another he wrote, **“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”** (Romans 8:14). Given the unity of the Trinity, I think it’s safe to assume that to be “led by the Spirit” is to be led by the Lord. But in this divine guidance, one consequence of being led stands out. It is this: Those who are **“led by the Spirit . . . are sons of God.”** If we can discern the implications of what it means to be God’s sons, then we can know what it means to be led of the Lord. So just who is a “son” of God?

We see in Romans 8 that Paul uses many “family” terms. After addressing believers as brothers (Romans 8:12, 23), Paul heaps up a series of “family” words—**“sons (4x),” “children (3x),” “heirs (1x),” “adoption (2x),”** and **“first-born (1x).”** Our interest concerns a distinction between the first two family words, **“sons”** and **“children.”** To be God’s sons means we belong to Him, that the divine life of the Spirit courses about in our spirit/souls (Romans 8:9-10). It’s a life believers share together with God in union with Christ. But to determine what it means to be led by the Spirit we need to know the difference between being a “son” of God and a “child” of God. If we understand this distinction, then we will, it seems to me, understand what it means to be “led” by the Lord.

Though there is some similarity in that both children and sons possess life from the same source, there’s a difference between being a child of God (Greek, *teknon*) and a son of God (Greek, *huios*). Christian believers are children of God for reason their spiritual conception. As John puts it, **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children**

of God . . . who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). For reason of being born of God, believers are children of God (John 3:3, 5-8). However, being sons of God carries a different meaning. While children characteristically do their own thing, sons are led. In contrast to being conceived and born, sons of God exhibit their son-ship by their conduct and behavior. As noted by Vine, “Their conduct gives evidence of the dignity of their relationship and their likeness to His character.” **[1]** Sons walk according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and not the dictates of the flesh. In their lifestyles, sons do not indulge their flesh. They bear fruit (See Galatians 5:13-25.). This is how God leads His sons.

God’s sons will confidently confess that the Lord has “led” them to be more gentle, submissive, loving, self-controlled, and so forth (See Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:18-22.). But, when, may I ask, is the last time you have ever heard any believer say, “The Lord led me to be meeker”? We don’t like to say things like that because to do so is to confess our deficiency of character, something spiritual pride works against admitting. Yet in such admission, therein lies the evidence that the Lord is truly leading. It’s like the teenage boy who was caught doing something wrong by his loving father, and the appropriate discipline, which to the boy seemed harsh, was meted out. The boy protested, “But you’re my father!” to which the boy’s father replied, “Well, if you claim to be my son, then act like it!” So those who are led by the Lord will live like the Lord. That’s how the Lord leads.

ENDNOTE

[1] W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984): 1061.