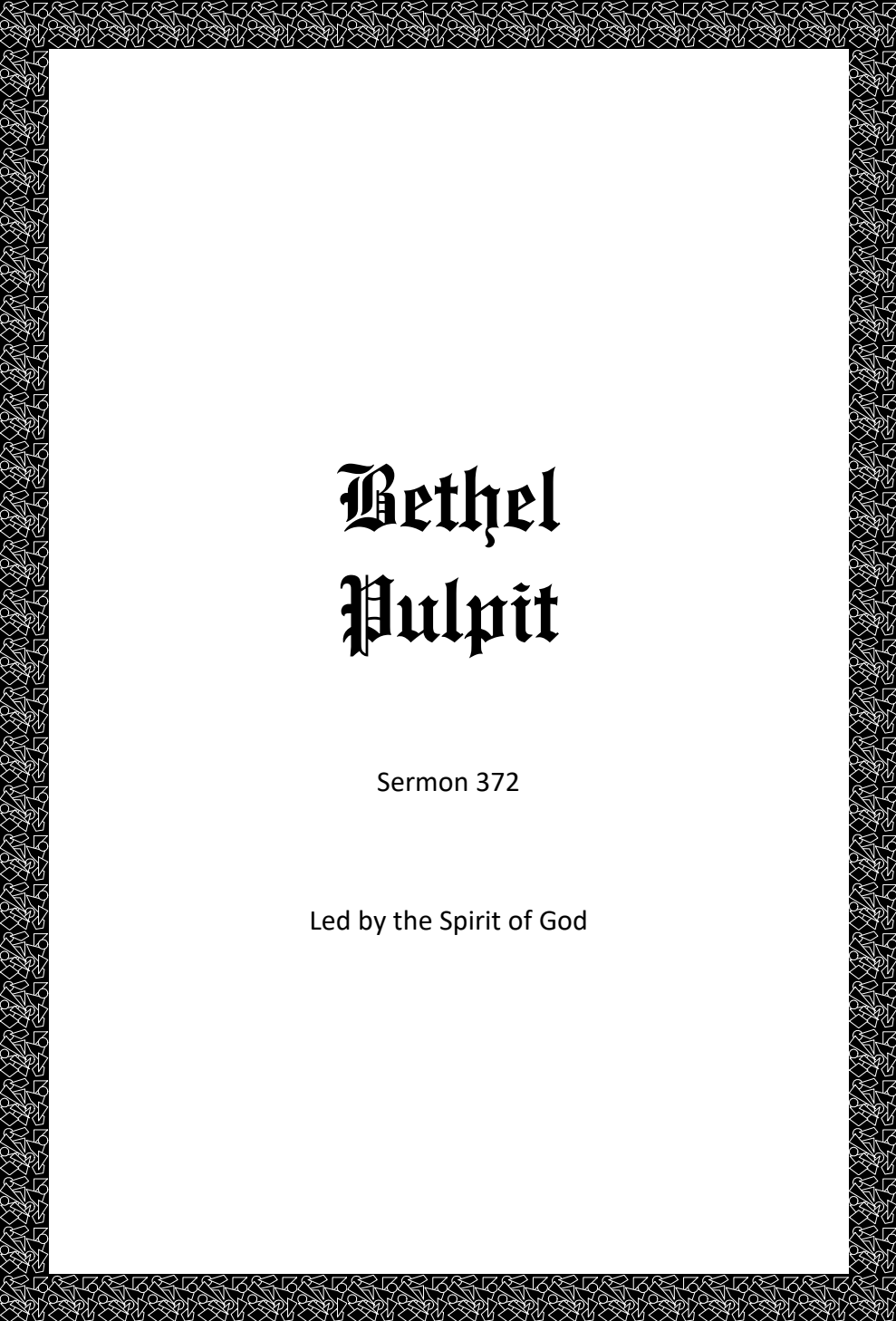




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 372

Led by the Spirit of God

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 25th September, 2005**

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

This is a gracious equation. What do I mean? That what there is on the one side completely equals what we have on the other side. On the one side we have “the sons of God”; on the other side, “led by the Spirit of God.” It means this: if you and I are led by the Spirit of God, then we are the sons of God. If we are among the Lord’s dear children by adoption and grace, if we are among the sons of God, then we shall be led by the Spirit of God. If we know nothing of the leading of the Spirit of God, then we are most certainly not among the sons of God. There is a complete equation here, a complete balance between one side and the other. “*As many*” – not one more, not one less – “*As many* as are led by the Spirit of God, *they*” – and no others – “*They* are the sons of God.”

So what a wonderful thing this is, the children of God, to be found amongst them! Why, this whole chapter speaks of wonderful things, eternal blessings, soul-establishing truths. It begins, *no condemnation*; it ends, *no separation*, and then all the way through we have everlasting love and the blessings of everlasting love, and this is one of them: to be the sons of God. O what an unspeakable mercy that guilty sinners should be chosen, redeemed, called, forgiven! But this is greater than that. Not just pardoned, not just forgiven, but made the children of God. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” That is, to have God for our Father.

He is not the Father of everyone. The Word of God is so clear on this. That doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God is one of the devil’s deceptions. Only God’s people, only His children, have God for their Father. The Lord Jesus spoke of some and said, “Ye are of your father the devil.” That was strong language, but it was the language of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Sinners saved by grace have God for their Father, their Father who loves them with an everlasting love, their Father who watches over them, cares for them, their Father who supplies all their

needs, their Father who will never leave them nor forsake them. It is a wonderful truth, sons of God, God His people's Father in Christ.

“Your heavenly Father ever lives,
And all His choicest treasure gives
To you, the favourites of His heart,
Nor will He ever with you part.”

Now it is nothing to do with *deserving*. You cannot deserve to be born a child. These are children by the new birth and they have “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,” and that inheritance comes to them because they *are* children, because they *are* born again into the family, and they *are* made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” So you see the wonder of it – sons of God, daughters of the Most High, children by adoption and grace, loved with an everlasting love, heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus.

“Behold what wondrous grace
The Father has bestowed
On sinners of a mortal race,
To call them sons of God.”

This is one of the soul-establishing truths of Romans chapter 8.

But beloved friends, as we read through the chapter, no doubt you noticed that right from the beginning this kept coming in: the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. It is only those who are led by the Spirit, only those who are taught by the Spirit, who possess these wonderful blessings, whether it is *no condemnation*, whether it is *everlasting love*, whether it is *no separation*. “No condemnation to them ... who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” And it keeps coming in all through the chapter, that these who possess these wonderful blessings, they know the Spirit, they are led by the Spirit.

And so here: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” There are a few different ways in which this text could be opened up. One would be to set out these leadings and say, if you have them, you are a child of God, and if you do not have them, you are not. Another, to set forth the privileges of sonship, and then to show how the leading of the Spirit is the evidence of it. But the way it has laid upon my heart to bring it before you this evening: this is vital, the leading of the

Spirit. It is vital, and it is made very, very clear that it belongs to all the people of God, every one of them. Now I would like to say a few things on the leading of the Spirit, how important, how vital it is. O but that longing desire, that prayer: may it be ours, may it be mine, may I be led of the Spirit, and so may I be sweetly assured that I am a child of God!

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” So the first thing in the Holy Spirit’s work is *the new birth*. There cannot be any leading and there cannot be any teaching of those who are still dead, dead in trespasses and sins. The first thing with the Holy Spirit’s work is to quicken a dead sinner into life, to find him loathsome in his sins and blood and say unto him, “Live.” And then there is the moving, and then there are the marks of life. “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” And now as these sinners, eternally loved, are made alive, so there is this leading of the Spirit. There must be this leading of the Spirit in all of them.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The sons of God are led *in a way of repentance*. The Lord Jesus insisted on the necessity of it. He began His ministry, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” – the vital need of repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. All the apostles preached repentance. And the Holy Spirit leads the sons of God in that way of repentance. It is inward and outward. As one of the old preachers said: “What is repentance?” And he turned right round in the pulpit with his back to the congregation. It is a complete turning round. The things you once loved, you esteem them no more. The things you once despised, now they are the things that really matter. It is a turning away from your past life, a bringing out of your past life. It is a turning from sin to God. It is asking your way to Zion with your faces thitherward. It is forsaking the world, forsaking the world forever. But inwardly, in greater or less measure that heart made soft, that heart made tender in the Lord’s fear, that contrition, that confession, that sorrow for sin, that seeking forgiveness, that desire to be prepared for heaven.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” So He leads them in that way of repentance, and Christ is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, “to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of

sins.” Now may that repentance be ours. May we seek it. We come to chapel; we go home; but may we be under the leading, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and may He lead us in this way of repentance, feeling our need as a sinner, seeking mercy, seeking salvation.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Then the sons of God, led by the Spirit of God, are led *to the throne of grace*, all of them. They are led to the mercy seat sprinkled with blood, and there they are led in the way of prayer, taught to pray, led to pray for mercy, divinely led, praying to be forgiven, divinely led, praying to be prepared for heaven, to be prepared when time shall be no more, prepared to stand before God’s face. The Holy Spirit leads sinners to God in that way of prayer. “Out of self to Jesus lead.” He leads them to the throne of grace. It is a throne of grace. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” He leads them to the mercy seat sprinkled with blood, and that is what they want. They make their wants and wishes known. “Mercy, through blood, they make their plea.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” And then the Spirit of God leads the sons of God *in God’s holy Word*. As they read it, He directs their thoughts. As they read the Word of God, He draws out their affections to the Saviour. As they read it, at times He speaks to their hearts through it. As they read it, at times He makes the Word personal to them. Philip said to the eunuch, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” How do you and I read? Is it ever as led by the Spirit, or do we always read formally? Do we want to find something there? Does the Lord ever speak through His Word? Does He ever apply it to our hearts? Does it ever find us out? Does it ever reprove us? Does it ever correct us? Does it ever comfort us? I heard a preacher say in my early days – and I knew what he meant – if your religion is real, you will love the Word of God, and there will be some pieces of it you will love more than others.

But the sons of God will be led by the Spirit of God in the Word of God. That is our prayer: “Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day.”

“Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,
Be Thou for ever near;

Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And view my Saviour there.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” And then the sons of God, *when they meet for worship*, are led by the Spirit of God. It is Sunday; it is half past ten, or it is six o’clock; it is chapel time. We come. Is that all? Has there been any prayer before? Is there any prayer as the service goes on? Do you pray for the preacher on the Saturday, and do you pray for him on the Lord’s day? Do you pray for this leading of the Spirit, that in public worship you might be divinely led? I often say at the beginning, may we meet under the influence of grace, or may we meet under the influence of the Holy Spirit. What a difference that makes! Do you ever come to chapel and everything seems dead? Do you ever come to chapel and everything seems alive?

O but the leading of the Spirit, a soft heart, and a spirit of true worship. It is a wonderful thing. It will not always be a clear word, a clear blessing, but it is a wonderful thing if there is a spirit of worship, that leading of the Spirit that our souls might be fed with the bread of everlasting life, and that leading of the Spirit – you have a need, and the Lord knows what it is. The preacher does not, but if there is the leading of the Spirit, then the Word will touch your case and it will enter into your heart.

O in our public worship, we do need this leading of the Spirit. We do not want it to be dry and dead and formal. We want the sweet savour of Christ. We want the heavenly dew descending upon the mountains of Zion. “For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” It is “where two or three are gathered together in My name” – we need the Holy Spirit to gather us together in the name of Jesus – “there am I in the midst.” To be true worshippers.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Then you see, the sons of God are led by the Spirit in *their Christian behaviour*. “Our conversation is in heaven.” A child of God is saved by grace alone, but that grace which saves, it sanctifies. That grace which saves, it frees from the yoke of sin and death. The grace that saves, it keeps. The grace that saves, it affects your behaviour. Now if you are among the sons of God and led by the Spirit of God, it will affect your behaviour. Cowper says,

“But none shall reach that happy place,
Or God’s unclouded glory see;
Who talks of free and sovereign grace,
Unless that grace has made him free.”

We do want to know the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our behaviour, what the New Testament calls our walk. The closing chapters of all the epistles tell the sons of God how they are to walk, how they are to behave. “I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” “As dear children ... walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.”

Well, how can the sons of God walk worthy? They can never *be* worthy, but how can they *walk* worthy? As dear children, as led by the Spirit of God, sweetly constrained by love, led in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake, in the whole of Christian behaviour to seek to be under the sweet and solemn and sacred influence of the Holy Spirit of God.

“Lead me, Lord, lead me in Thy righteousness,
Make Thy way plain before my face.”

O you want to be led by the right way, to be led in the things you do and the things you do not do, the way you act, the way you speak, the way you behave. We are so weak, so helpless, so foolish, we need the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God to lead us, to keep us, to draw us, to constrain us, to help us, to be with us, to uphold us – all these things. But O to be led by the Spirit of God in our daily life and our conversation. “Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” And then *trouble*. You say, What, “trouble like a gloomy cloudy”? Well, as the Lord leads His people, as the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God, as the great Shepherd leads His flock, there are the green pastures, there are the still waters, but there is the valley of the shadow of death when all seems dark and all seems wrong. But then to be divinely led, for your spirit to be kept, to know something of submission. “He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” But then there is *providence*. We need leading there. You have a

problem at work. You have something tomorrow. You have a letter you need to write, or you have a letter that needs answering, or there is an unexpected telephone call, or you have a very important decision to make; you have a choice. Do you think you can do it of yourself? Well, we have tried, and we have failed. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God.” We want this sweet, gentle leading of the Spirit of God in all these decisions, in all these choices, in these great things and in these small things.

“Show me what I have to do;
Every hour my strength renew.”

To be led by the Spirit of God. Sometimes there are things *in the church of God*. O they need dealing with so carefully. “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” To be led by the Spirit of God. You have things in your family; there will always be things in your family. To be led by the Spirit of God. And your relationships with other people. They can easily go wrong. To be led by the Spirit of God. They will not be wrong then.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Now may there be that burden and exercise with you and me that we might know these leadings. If we are among the children of God, may we know these leadings. May we know them as a sweet evidence that we are the children of God. If we have a sweet hope that we are, then on mercy’s ground we can expect them. We do need them. They are so important, so vital.

The great point in the Holy Spirit’s leading is *leading a sinner to Christ*. Now that is the great need; that is the vital need. I know some of you get a bit troubled and tried. You feel you know a little about the wonderful love of God; even you feel you know a precious Jesus; but O what do I know of the Holy Spirit? Every movement of your soul after Christ is the leading of the Holy Spirit. Do not let Satan cheat you out of that, rob you of it. You young ones, how many in the beginning, Satan will try you and tempt you that you do not know much of the Holy Spirit’s work. His work always glorifies the Saviour. His work always makes the Saviour attractive. His work always leads you to Christ. “Out of self to Jesus lead!”

So our hymnwriter prays that beautiful prayer: “Lead us to Christ, our only rest.” “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” It is in Christ, and in Christ alone. But I am weary, and I am seeking it, but I am not finding it. I have not attained. I have not found that resting place. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Then that blessed work, leading a sinner in his need and helplessness and weariness to Him who has kindly said, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” O, “lead us to Christ, our only rest.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The psalmist puts it very, very beautifully, this leading to Christ. “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” Is there anybody this evening with your spirit overwhelmed within you because of your sins, or because of your circumstances, because of what you are passing through, because of the unknown way? “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” To find a refuge from the storm, to find a hiding place there, to be sheltering in the clefts of the rock, to find a sure foundation there, the Rock of Ages. “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” That is what the Holy Spirit does. He leads a sinner to Christ, the Rock of Ages.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Especially are the sons of God led *to the blood of Christ*, the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. That is it, led by the Spirit of God, unworthy, sinful, defiled. O the fountain open stands, the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin. But lead me there. O may the Holy Spirit lead me there, bring me there, draw me there, and

“Plunge me in that crimson ocean,
Thy atonement made for sin;
Freed from trusting empty notion,
May I feel Thy power within.”

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” And then *the love of Christ*, the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.” We hear of it; we read of it; we sing of it. O but sweetly to be led into it!

“The love of Christ is rich and free,
Fixed on His own eternally;
Nor earth, nor hell, can it remove;
Long as He lives, His own He’ll love.”

Then may the blessed Spirit of God lead me to Christ, to know His precious blood, to know His amazing love, to feel my interest in it.

Beloved friends, these are real things, solid things, soul-establishing things, vital things. The sons of God, loved with an everlasting love, heaven their eternal portion, but here on earth, led by the Spirit of God. It is a wonderful word: “He led them on *safely*,” and there is this safety in the leading of the Holy Spirit as they pass from death to life, as they pass from earth to heaven, led by the Spirit of God. O may these blessed leadings be mine, and so may there be those clear marks that despite my sin, I am a child of God.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”