

Doctrine: The Holy Spirit

What the Holy Spirit Does in Us: 7, Guides Us

Have you ever wanted God's guidance in your life? I think we often do. Should I go to school or should I start this job? Is it God's will that I marry this person, or that person, or no person at all? How should I spend my money… my time (… and so on)? The Bible reveals that the daily guidance of God, in even small things, comes to us by the Holy Spirit.

The foundation of all the Spirit's guidance is that **he leads (or governs) us,** once he takes up residence in us. The Bible states, *"…because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"* (Romans 8:14). What Paul teaches in Romans 8 is that both Christians and non-Christians are prompted in what they desire and choose by quite different sources. The non-Christian is led by promptings coming from a sin nature that does not want to put God first. We once made our decisions that way, Paul tells us, but no longer (Ephesians 2:3). The Christian experiences new spiritual desires and motivations that lead him or her into God's will. Christians who listen consistently to the Holy Spirit's leading – his word, the pang of conscience, the urge to do what is right -- will find themselves led by the Spirit into God's best plans for them. The second way the Spirit guides us is **by teaching us**. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26. Cp. 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:11-14; 1 John 2:27). The Spirit builds truths and principles into us that become our guideposts in life. Think of it this way:
One day your child sees another child unknowingly drop a candy. He eagerly picks it up to put it into his mouth when you say, "Son, if someone loses something you have to return it to them." Now he knows what he should do in similar situations. As a child matures, he no longer needs mom's direct revelation. Likewise, we do not need a direct revelation from God in most decisions. He expects us to learn and mature in our understanding of his will. A third way the Spirit guides us is through **our capacity to reason**. "*Come, let us reason together, says the LORD"* (Isaiah 1:18). There is a tendency in some circles to reject the use of reason. The feeling is that using reason is unspiritual, whereas discerning God's will by sensing it is spiritual. However, God is interested in the mind. *"For who has known **the mind** of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the **mind** of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:15- 16). It is not the devil but God who gives us minds, and he expects us to use them. It is valid to consider the pros and cons, the risks and advantages.

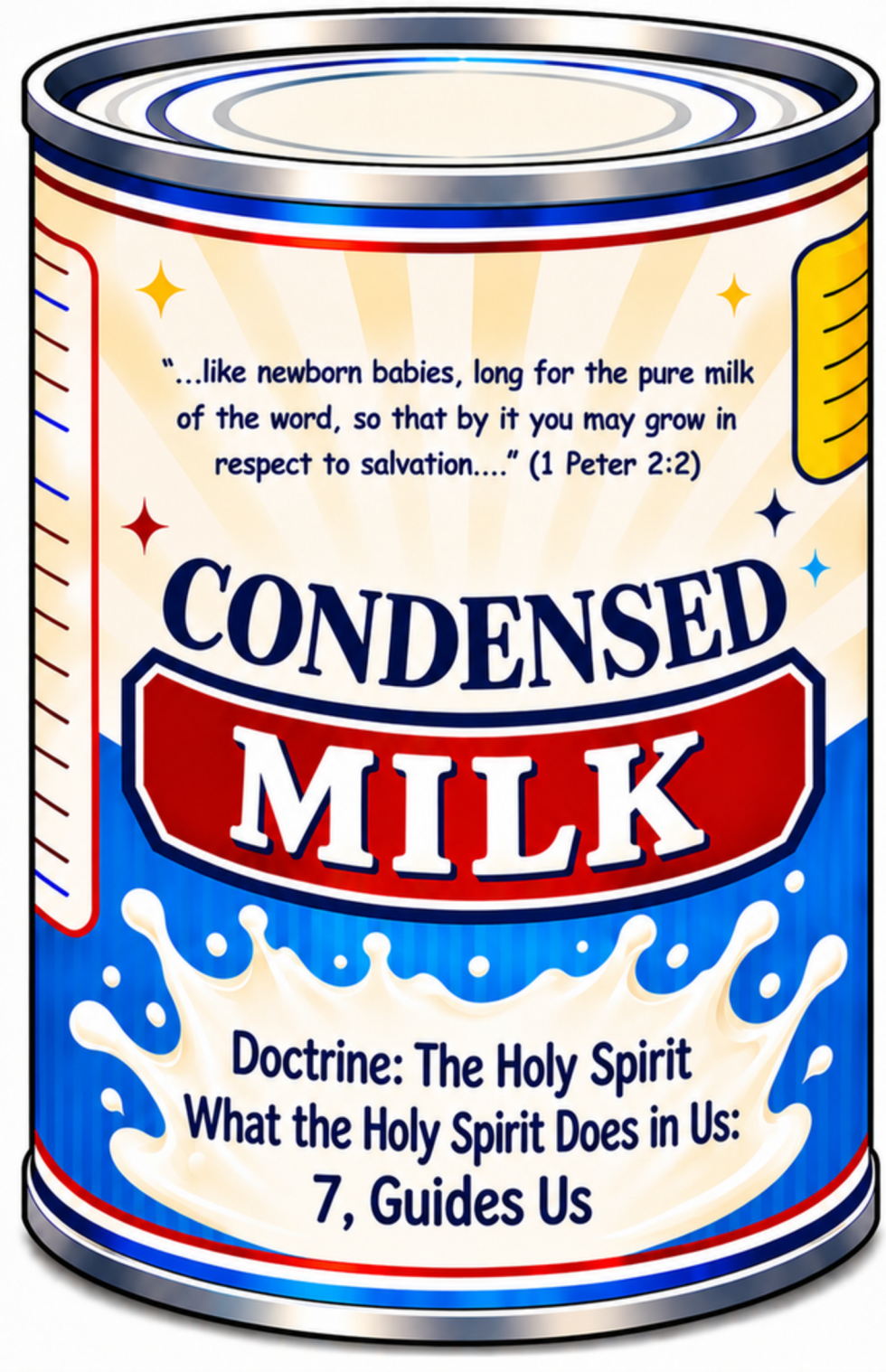
A fourth way the Spirit guides us is by helping us **trust God's providence** as an indication, at times, of God's will. For example, under God's sovereign hand Elsie married me, and so God's will is that she stay married to me, even if other options become available. Joseph is a model of seeing God's will for his life by recognizing that all circumstances are determined by God. Though his brothers had sold him into slavery he came to see he was led into God's will in that way. "*And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*" (Genesis 45:5). Just because a marriage or job or church becomes difficult does not mean we are out of God's will. (We are not, however, required to stay in a seriously abusive marriage, job, or church.)

A fifth way the Spirit guides us is **through our desires**. "*May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed"* (Psalm 20:4). Many Christians assume that God's will is always towards sacrifice and suffering. "I want to get married but celibacy would be a greater sacrifice, so…." "I am really good at making money but God likely wants me to be a missionary." While the harder option may be God's will, it is not always so. It is valid in our quest to find God's will to consider what we really want. If, for example, I don't enjoy working with children but love music, a ministry in worship may be God's will even if the Sunday School is begging for helpers. We have to believe that our wiring comes from God and that he has made us in certain ways for certain ends. The person who finds it easy to make lots of money may not be called to be a missionary but to support several of them.

A sixth way, the Spirit of God will often guide us is through **an inner conviction**, or, if you will, a strong feeling. In Acts 3:1-8 Peter is on his way into the temple when he sees a lame man begging. No doubt the temple entry was a popular spot for beggars but Peter speaks words of healing over him and no one else. Peter did not have a specific text pointing him to this man. He did not reason his way to this decision. It seems he simply had an inner prompting, powerful enough to give him faith to do such a thing. Every Christian will experience these promptings, though normally in less dramatic ways. "You should go greet that person." "You should turn off your screen." "You should cancel your golf plans and make your family a priority."

Finally, God puts us into a church family so that **the advice of Spirit-filled people** can help us. "Make plans by seeking advice," (Proverbs 20:18).

We cannot have God's best in life outside of God's will. That is simply impossible. Thankfully the Spirit of God is our willing guide into God's will.


"...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...." (1 Peter 2:2)
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