

## **On Being Led by the Spirit Part V - The Place of Counsel**

*If one is being led by the Spirit, what need is there for counsel?*

Because we are not alone. God guaranteed this at the Garden of Eden. After each of His creative fiats, He said, “*It is good*”—except one—man. “*It is not good—that he is in His aloneness*” (Hebrew). That is, that he should be complete in himself. In his original state, man was really “co-personal.” That is, he possessed qualities of both male and female. (Probably, so also God, Himself). But God was not satisfied with this condition of aloneness, and so He divided man, and took from him certain elements, from which He fashioned the female. Never again would the man be complete in himself. Ideally, the man and the woman make the perfect team, with the complementary qualities each possesses. (The modern “feminist” movement ignores this factor completely). But, of course, in the distorted state of fallen man, the ideal is not often attainable. So, marriage cannot be the universal standard.

*But what then is the alternative?*

Ultimately, the alternative is provided through Christ, since we are all considered His bride. He completes our intended quality of being. Meanwhile, on the earth, we have His Spirit within. We also have the fellowship of believers—the *camaraderie* of the body of Christ. Given the realities of our earthly circumstance, we need each other. We are none of us complete within ourselves.

It is on this basis that guidance, or counsel, through the body of believers, becomes an important part of our fulfillment. It is not that God could not, if He chose, send a direct message in the form of angels, or “words-on-the-wall,” but that He wants to cultivate in us that sense of our dependence on one another.

Thus, He has set within the church a full complement of gifts, for the edifying of one another. Through these gifts, we have a Divinely ordered system of checks and balances. On the one hand we have a spirit-oriented interaction with God. That is, via the energy of His Holy Spirit, we have a “receiving set” within us that is tuned to God. He is able to communicate with us beyond our human mental capacities, which include both reason and emotion. In guidance, there is a sense beyond reason, beyond feeling, of that which God really wants. On the other hand, we have a process of interaction with our fellow believers that is energized by the Holy Spirit—also beyond feeling and reason. Such an interaction takes place when believers come together in the Spirit to worship and be nourished in the Word. Gathering together with our fellow believers helps keep our perspective sound. Further, the Holy Spirit seems to energize the believers through one another, as they join in fellowship. This fortifies one to resist human reason and emotion, in the decision-making process.

In addition to the fellowship of believers, there is also the assistance of believers, in helping one to make sound decisions. The use of special personal revelations is limited in these days of a universal Biblical revelation, so that believers may not become too self-oriented, and self-sufficient. It is well to

share one's ideas and plans with a trustworthy fellow-believer, who is able to pray with one and provide a check against deceptive thinking. It is so easy for human beings to be self deceived.

Relating effectively to the body of believers is crucial to our well-being on earth, as well as to the cultivating of our sense of the unity of the Spirit, which will mark our eternal destiny with God. Guidance is one of the areas in which this relationship is crucial. In the matter of guidance there are two levels of involvement. First, there is the level of the mutual assistance in daily living, afforded by our fellow believers. In gathering together with the members of the body, our spirits are nourished, and our sensitivity to Christ, strengthened, so that our perspective is clear in determining the desire and purposes of Christ for us, in a general way. Without such fellowship, we tend to drift toward the interests and ideas characterized by the world. We then find it difficult to keep our focus on what Christ wants. And then there is the need of sharing with someone our ideas and plans, not for specific guidance, but for prayer fellowship and the checks and balances of another view outside of ourselves.

The *second* category is the need for special guidance—matters beyond the capacity of one who is untrained. Perhaps a good analogy is the difference between sharing ideas about health care, versus getting medical advice. Believers can profit from exchanging ideas about daily living, but need the help of specially prepared teachers and counselors for the more crucial issues. Altogether, however, whether fellow-believers, or leaders in the body, one finds one's well-being closely tied to fellowship with the body of Christ.

A few guideposts, or criteria are in order. First of all, in regard to sharing with another believer—

1. Limit the extent of sharing. If you talk to too many, you will get confused, and you will give Satan opportunities to stir up trouble.
2. Share in a prayerful spirit. Merely talking in the flesh can be, at best, unprofitable; at worst, misleading. So pray together about the matters you are discussing.
3. Share with ones who are like-minded in devotion to Christ, and open to Him in their desire to follow Him. (There is nothing like an unsubmissive Christian, to throw one off the track).
4. Share with ones who are willing and faithful in praying for you. Such ones will be most likely to be of help in your particular needs.
5. Share with ones who are faithful in getting together with the believers for fellowship and instruction. The book of Hebrews says, "*Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is*" (Hebrews 10:25).
6. Be faithful, yourself, in fellowship. Not only will you receive valuable instruction for sound living, but you will be strengthened in spirit.
7. Avoid sharing with "self-appointed" guides and "gurus." The more anxious

one is to give advice, the less likely one is to be qualified. Conversely, the more one understands about life, the less anxious to assume responsibility for other people's lives.

8. Avoid also self-appointed prophets. The one who has a "special message" for you from Christ. There is, of course, a difference between the one who merely offers a suggestion, based upon a prayerful consideration of your need, and the one who is presumptuous enough to assume the role of "special agent" of the Deity. This of course, does not include those who are recognized by the body to be anointed servants of Christ. (It is not enough for one to judge oneself to be so anointed. There must be the concurrence of the body.) "*The prophet is subject to the prophets*" (I Corinthians 14:32).
9. Ask the Lord to direct you in finding someone to share with. And, ask the Lord to direct you to the fellowship that can most nourish your spirit.

Then, there is the second level of guidance—"special counseling," in regard to major issues, such as marriage, career, personality problems, etc. This is quite another thing from "sharing" and requires great care in the selection of the right counselor "Spirituality, does not qualify one to be a counselor," just as it does not qualify one to be a surgeon. There are some guidelines as to when and who.

1. Seek help any time a problem is "too much." Don't try to bear it alone on the ill-advised assumption that if you really trusted Christ, you could handle it. Don't let the matter "get away from you." That is why the Lord has given "gifts" to the body. If everyone could bear one's own problems, there would be no need for the "gifts."
2. Obviously one should always seek help in checking out major moves—marriage, career, job, cities, family problems.
3. Let the level of the problem determine the level of assistance. A competent pastor, with basic training in psychology, as well as theology, should be able to handle most routine matters. This presupposes that the pastor is a true servant of Christ, and not just a "professional."
4. Look for the "voice of the Shepherd" coming through, in any pastor you talk to. Beware of anyone you do not feel comfortable with, or that "has all the answers," or that is harsh and censorious.
5. If there are strong personality problems, a psychologist may be in order, but do not, under any circumstances, seek guidance from a non-Christian psychologist, or a Christian who leans more toward the controversial methods of psychotherapy, rather than toward the work of Christ in consonance with sound principles of therapy. A non-Christian psychologist, not recognizing the place of the spirit, is as inadequate to help, as a physician who would not recognize the place of the mind in illness.
6. If there is significant evidence of psychosis, it may be necessary to seek psychiatric help in order to protect the individual and those involved.

(Psychosis is a form of mental illness that is severe enough to render the individual non-functional). The difference between a psychiatrist and a psychologist is that the psychiatrist is an M.D., with a license to prescribe medication. A psychologist is a Ph.D., without medical training or the right to prescribe medication. Both have their place.

7. In all cases, whether pastor, psychologist or psychiatrist, the same criterion applies. Be sure the counselor in question is oriented to the Holy Spirit. Don't assume that the label is a guarantee of the package.
8. Do not assume that because one has a physical or psychological problem one is substandard, spiritually. There are many problems in our natural selves—mind and body—that are the products of factors beyond our control—hereditary and environmental. What we conceive to be a spiritual problem—depression, anxiety, lethargy, for example—is most likely rooted in a physical condition that has nothing to do with faith, or spirituality. Don't let Satan get the advantage by putting you under the bondage of guilt.
9. Don't trust amateurs. Many people try, brazenly, to give advice. Some matters are too serious for such untrained opinions. Would you let an untrained friend take out your appendix?
10. Above all, pray that the Lord will guide you to the right source of help. He knows exactly what you need, and who can best help you.

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*Next month "Part VI - The Place of Circumstances"*

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