

**Introduction:**

Many people claim to be led by the Holy Spirit. When saying this, they may mean anything from having an inner feeling to direct their steps up to having outright visions and revelations from the Holy Spirit telling them how to live and behave. Because of these misuses, we don't like to talk about being led by the Holy Spirit. However, **Romans 8:14** and **Galatians 5:18** say we are supposed to be led by the Spirit of God. But what does that mean?

**Discussion:**

- I. Being led by the Spirit means allowing the Spirit to dwell in us.
  - A. Just like the phrase "led by the Spirit," we don't like to talk about the Holy Spirit that dwells within us because we fear we will sound Pentecostal. However, if we are going to use Biblical language, we need to become comfortable with speaking of the Spirit who dwells in us. Consider passages such as **Romans 8:9, 11; I Corinthians 3:16; II Timothy 1:14; James 4:5**. If we will speak where the Bible speaks, we will proclaim that the Spirit dwells within us, or, at least, He is supposed to. Of course, if we are going to speak as the Bible speaks there is more to it than using this phrase. We also have to use it the way the Scripture uses it. That leads to a great debate. Is the indwelling Spirit a personal and literal indwelling? Or is it metaphorical, as God's dwelling in the Old Testament temple was metaphorical? I doubt there is anything I can say in this lesson to bring the two sides of this debate together into one. However, for the purpose of our lesson, we do not have to. Therefore, instead of getting bogged down in the esoteric discussion of how the Spirit dwells within us, let us focus on what this means for us practically. What do we have to actually do for the Spirit to dwell within us and lead us?
  - B. **Ephesians 5:18-19** and **Colossians 3:16** provide our answer. These passages demonstrate being filled with the Spirit is parallel to being filled with the word of Christ. Whatever anyone believes about the Spirit dwelling within us, we all have to get to this point pragmatically. If I want the Spirit to dwell within me as the Bible teaches, I must allow the word of Christ to dwell within me. **John 15:4, 7, 10** demonstrate a similar point. If we wish the Spirit to dwell in us, we have to open ourselves to the Spirit's revelation (**II Peter 1:20-21**).
  - C. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says the Scriptures are God-breathed and equip us for every good work. The Scriptures teach us, reprove us, correct us and train us in righteousness. They provide us with guidance. They provide us with leading. Remember **Psalms 119:105**. Personally, I believe the indwelling of the Spirit is a reference to the Spirit's influence in our lives through the Word. However, if I am wrong, does that change anything on a pragmatic level? If the Holy Spirit is somehow literally inside my body, how does He lead me? Even if I claimed some kind of inner promptings or feelings, how can I tell which feelings or promptings come from the Holy Spirit and not merely from my own desires and spirit? Remember, there is a way that seems right to a man, but it ends in death (**Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**). How can I tell the difference between the way that seems right in my spirit and the supposed promptings of the Holy Spirit? I have to go to the Word of God, testing the spirits, even my own (cf. **I John 4:1**), to learn which way I am to walk. Thus, no matter what our view of how the Spirit indwells us, we get back to the same point about the Spirit leading us. He does so through the Word of God. I cannot be led by the Spirit without opening the Book and following it.
- II. Being led by the Spirit means crucifying the flesh.
  - A. **Galatians 5:24** says those who belong to Jesus "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (ESV). **Romans 8:13** says we must "put to death the deeds of the body" (ESV). Back in **Galatians 5:17**, Paul explains the flesh is at war with the spirit. If we wish to be led by the Spirit, we have to destroy the flesh, that is, destroy its desires and passions. **Colossians 3:5** explains

we need to put death what is earthly within us and lists a few examples: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness. **Romans 6:6-14** explains we must die to sin and no longer present our members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.

- B. Very interestingly, Paul ties this to being under law. In **Galatians 5:18**, he wrote, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (ESV). **Romans 7:4-6** explains we are released from the law, but also explains while we were living in the flesh the law aroused us to sin. As Christians, because we have crucified the flesh by dying with Christ in baptism, we are now released from the law. But what does this mean? How does law focus us on flesh? How can we be freed from law if we are walking according to the Spirit?
- C. Notice **I Timothy 1:8-11**. Law is for the unjust, lawless and disobedient. Law is not actually meant to be the guide for those who would be righteous. Rather, it is that which condemns those who are unrighteous. Don't misunderstand. This does not mean the righteous are not subject to laws such as "Don't commit adultery, don't lie, don't steal." There is no sense in which the just are allowed to violate the law of God. Rather, this system of law is not meant to be our guide. That is, we do not act the way we do because there is a legal code that prohibits certain things, rather we act the way we do because the Spirit wants us to act a certain way. The difference is subtle, but important. The problem demonstrated in these passages with law is that using it as a guide actually focuses us more on the flesh. Allow me to illustrate.
1. When I was a boy, I played catcher in baseball. My dad always told me, "If you have to give advice to the pitcher, always tell him where you want him to pitch the ball. Never tell him where you don't want him to throw it." In other words, don't say to the pitcher, "Look, whatever you do, don't pitch it low and outside." Why? Because the pitcher will be thinking, "Not low and outside, not low and outside, not low and outside." What is running through his mind? "Low and outside." Guess where he is likely to pitch it. Low and outside. Instead say, "Pitch it high and inside." Now he is thinking about how he should act. His mind is focused on what he should be doing, not what he shouldn't.
  2. I think this is a great illustration about the law, the flesh and being led by the Spirit. Paul's illustration was covetousness (**Romans 7:7-8**). When I am focused on law, I am thinking, "The law says don't covet, don't covet, don't covet." What am I thinking about? Coveting. Add to that the forbidden fruit syndrome that says the more I think about what I'm not supposed to do, the more enticed I am by doing it. Voila, focusing on law attunes our mind to the flesh which heightens the passions which leads to sin.
- D. So, to put the passions and deeds of the flesh to death, I have to be free from law by the blood of Christ. I have to quit viewing my life as a series of don'ts to keep from breaking the law and start thinking of it as a series of dos to follow the Spirit, which leads into our next point.

### III. Being led by the Spirit means setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.

- A. **Romans 8:4-6** explains that instead of setting our minds on the things of the flesh, since, of course, we have put the flesh and its passions to death, we must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. This means we need to think about spiritual things. **Philippians 3:18-19** talks about those who are enemies of Christ setting their minds on earthly things. Then as we read on into **Philippians 4:8** we learn our minds must be set on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable and excellent.
- B. **Colossians 3:2** says we must have our mind set on heavenly things, not on earthly things. This reminds us of Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 6:19-21**. If we place our value on the material things of the earth, our heart will be bound on the earth. Instead, we need to value, esteem and treasure the spiritual things of God in heaven so our heart will be firmly protected in heaven.
- C. We also can't help but think of Jesus' rebuke against Peter in **Matthew 16:21-23**. When Peter rebuked Jesus for speaking of His impending death, Jesus said he was setting his mind on the things of man, not those of God. Setting our mind on the things of the Spirit, then, means striving to view situations from the Spirit's standpoint. The natural man viewed the death of Jesus as an awful thing. The spiritual man, however, would have seen it as part of God's plan to save man and would have welcomed it. We must learn to view our circumstances through the eyes of the Spirit and not based on natural inclinations and feelings.

IV. Being led by the Spirit means bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

- A. **Galatians 5:19-21** describes the works of the flesh. We walked in these when we allowed the flesh to reign. However, now that we have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts and put to death the deeds of the body, setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, we must then produce the fruit of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. **II Peter 1:5-8** gives a similar list explaining that as Christians we must grow in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. **John 15:8** says we prove we are Jesus' disciples when we glorify God by bearing fruit. This is the fruit we must bear.
- B. No doubt, these are things that we do and strive for. However, Paul's point is these are actually indicators of whether or not we are being led by the Spirit. That is, he is not saying, "Do these things to be led by the Spirit," but rather, "If you are being led by the Spirit, you will see these things in your life." If you are allowing the Spirit to dwell in you, being open to His word, if you are crucifying the flesh with its lusts and passions, if you are setting your mind on the things of the Spirit, this is the fruit you will bear. In other words, if you are struggling with love, joy, peace, patience..., the problem is not that you need to white-knuckle your way with these particular fruits. Instead, you need to back up and see where your mind is set. You need to back up and see if you are focusing on the flesh. You need to back up and see how open you are to the Spirit dwelling within you and being open to His word. As **Galatians 6:8** explains, if you are sowing to the flesh, you will reap corruption. If you are sowing to the spirit, you will reap life.
- C. Thus, if you are not seeing the fruit of the Spirit in your life, don't start by working on trying to produce some semblance of those fruits. Back up and look at what seed you are sowing. If you are sowing the right seeds, you will produce the right fruit. If you have the wrong fruit, you are sowing the wrong seeds.

**Conclusion:**

Being led by the Spirit is not mystical guidance. It certainly doesn't mean doing everything that pops into your head as being right or good. Rather, it means being open to the Spirit through His word. It means crucifying the flesh with its passions and instead setting your mind on the things of the Spirit. Finally, it means bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Are you led by the Spirit?