

Galatians 5:16-18

In the last study we studied the idea of the Christian “walk”. Nearly half of the times that it is used in the New Testament, it is speaking specifically of the believer’s behavior. We saw that there is one thing of which every believer can be sure. It is that the Holy Spirit will never lead them into sin, and that part of our understanding of this subject will come from [Galatians 5:18](#) and the idea of being “**led by the Spirit**”. I think that it is important as we talk about this idea of being led to look at [Romans 8:14](#) which reiterates the same idea when it says,

Ro 8:14 (NKJV) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The “sense” of the word “**led**” and not the actual technical definition means to willingly, cooperatively, and voluntarily be directed to a particular course of action due to the influence of a spiritual influence - which in this case is specifically the Holy Spirit. The point is that it is not just “walking” that is involved, but rather walking specifically in accordance to the spiritual influence of the Holy Spirit. The last thing that needs to happen is to somehow make all of this mystical or difficult because it is not something difficult. It is something that should become very normal and very natural for the believer. This is the Christian life, this is the way we are to live, and this is how the Christian life works the best – by being “**led**” by the Holy Spirit. If a believer never asks the Holy Spirit for His guidance, if he never seeks His direction, and if he never spends any time in His Word, then there is absolutely no reason why that individual should ever think that he will be directed by the Holy Spirit. The more time that a believer spends in the Word of God listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying, the more that believer will be “**led**” by the Holy Spirit. Because I spend time with you on a regular basis, when you call me on the phone, I almost know immediately who is calling simply because I know your voice. I know exactly what you sound like. If we were in a dark room where no one could see anyone at all, and someone spoke, we would all recognize that person’s voice. Why? It is because we have spent time with them and we know their voice. Well, it is no different when it comes to hearing the Holy Spirit speak to us and lead us. His voice is distinctive and is readily recognizable to the believer who is spending quality time with Him. This should be very normal and very natural for every believer – that they can hear the Holy Spirit as He helps them to walk in a manner and live in a manner that is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

What these two verses on being “**led**” are identifying is that those who “**are led...are sons**”. This is fabulous and deeply encouraging for the believer who knows that their life has been led by the Holy Spirit in many different ways. Being led by the Holy Spirit is a **confirmation of sonship** and to which family the believer belongs. I.e., being led by the Holy Spirit is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit actually confirms the believer’s adoption and in so doing confirms their salvation. In fact, the phrase “**these are sons of God**” in [Romans 8:14](#) is emphatic because of the word “**these**”. It literally means “**these and none but these are sons of God**”.

The technical definition of the word “**led**” is the Greek word “*ago*” and means to lead, to guide, and it specifically carries the idea of following someone who is guiding, or being led. I.e., to be led by someone implies to follow them. W.E. Vines says it this way,

“To lead is almost always used in the New Testament of persons, and implies cooperation on their part with the one who is leading....”

So, it is not just the idea of leading, but just as much implies the idea of following. The Greek lexicon defines it as “*to lead by laying hold of, to lead by accompanying, to lead through, to guide, to direct, to exercise an influence on the mind*”. So, once again, the idea of being led means that the individual is submitting themselves to the influence and direction of the one who is leading them.

The word “**led**” is a very personal word. It often means to be led by the hand or to be personally escorted by a tour guide. I assume that every genuine believer can look back on different times in their life and say that “*if it had not been for the Lord and His guidance in a very difficult time, I do not know how I could have made it.*” He was leading and they were following. It is such an incredible privilege and function in the believer’s life, but not just for the benefit of being led. That is a wonderful by-product of the Holy Spirit’s work within them. However, the incredible privilege is that this leading confirms, substantiates, authenticates, and verifies that the believer is one of God’s children, a son, a daughter, and that they have truly been adopted and made a genuine part of God’s family.

The word “**led**” is a present tense verb in the passive voice. What that means is that being “**led**” by the Holy Spirit is a constant, continuous activity that the Holy Spirit is initiating within the believer’s life. I.e., it is not just a hit and miss kind of thing, but rather a continual process in their life. He is **always** leading the believer. It is a constant and effectual influence that He is exerting. The present tense could be translated as “**for as many as are being constantly and continually led by the Holy Spirit, these are sons of God.**” Because of the passive voice it is something that is being done to the believer. This is something that the Holy Spirit is doing to the believer and for the believer – He is leading each believer into the things of God. It is not that He leads them twice a year in some important decision, but that He is constantly, continually, frequently, persistently, and repeatedly leading them into the things of God. It is part and parcel of spiritual life. This is why Christians are growing spiritually, and it is this leading that is one of the strong and validating confirmations of their salvation. It is a defining marker and indicator of genuine salvation. It is very similar to what we read in [Romans 8:13b](#) which says,

but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

I.e., stated another way, if you can see in your life that you are actually putting “**to death the deeds of the body**”, then it is evidence that you are one of God’s children. Why? It is because that is something that is accomplished solely “**by the Spirit**”. As a Christian, do you ever have victory over the flesh and over temptations and over trials? Sure you do, and the Holy Spirit is the One doing that in you and for you, and all of that is proof of your sonship, of your adoption, and of your eternal salvation. From our verse in Galatians 5, it is evidence that you are actually “**walking in the Spirit**”.

In simple terms, what these two verses on being “led” state is that the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in the Christian’s life. It is very intentional on His part. That is why in [Romans 8:14](#) it is in the passive voice - to accentuate and emphasize that it is actually an intentional work of the Holy Spirit towards the believer. He is continually and persistently leading them in such a way as to mold them into the very image of Christ. In the context of the verses in Romans, it needs to be appreciated that v14 is directly linked to v13.

¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

It is “**by the Spirit**” that the believer is able to “**put to death the deeds of the body**”, and that is evidence of their being “**led by the Spirit of God**” and evidence that they are one of His children, or “**sons of God**”. In v14, the word “**for**” is a word that gives the basis and explanation for v13. It could actually be translated as “**because**”. So, the reason in v13 that the believer can put to death the deeds of the body is **BECAUSE** they are being led, guided, and directed by the Holy Spirit. The reason in v13 that “**you will live**” is simply **BECAUSE** in v14 they are “**sons of God**”. That is the connection between these two verses. I.e., doing something “by the Spirit” means that the believer is being “**led by the Spirit**”. We are an instrument in His hands. We are not leading Him, but He is leading us. We are being moved and led by Him, constrained and encouraged by Him to do what pleases Him.

So, taking these two verses together, they teach that the primary leading of the Holy Spirit is to help believers to kill sin, or as Paul says, to “**put to death the deeds of the body**”, or everything that we will study in [Galatians 5:19-21](#). It needs to be appreciated that these two verses are saying much more than just that the Holy Spirit will lead someone to the right church, or that the Holy Spirit will lead someone to the right college, or that the Holy Spirit will lead someone to the right job, or that the Holy Spirit will help someone to make some kind of decision that they need to make. Those things are good and may be true, but they are not the focus of the idea of being “**led by the Spirit**”. The real emphasis here that confirms the believer’s sonship, that confirms their adoption into God’s family, and that confirms that they are truly one of God’s children is the incredible work of the Holy Spirit leading the believer in such a way that they are able to overcome sin in their lives. This is so incredible, because every single one of us should be able to identify that we have and that we are being enabled by God to overcome sin in our life.