

Galatians 5:18

Now, in [Galatians 5:18](#), Paul says,

Gal 5:18 (NKJV) **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

So far, Paul has only used the term in v16 to “**walk in the Spirit**”, so this idea to be “**led by the Spirit**” is his second term to describe the work of the Spirit in the believer’s life. We have already studied this phrase in much detail several studies ago, so I am not going to teach much on it at this point in the study. The word “**led**” is the Greek word “*ago*” and simply means to lead and to guide.¹ I like to think of it as someone showing me the way, of going in front and leading me. It is the idea that the Holy Spirit is to be the guiding influence in the believer’s life.² He is the One who is compelling and constraining us in a godly direction. Please remember that He is never trying to force or coerce the believer to follow His leading, but His persuasion is a gentle persuasion, a peaceful encouragement. The word “**led**” means that the Holy Spirit is exerting both a moral and spiritual influence on the believer’s heart.³ The idea is a very positive one in which the Holy Spirit is leading believers into the perfect will of God for their life, leading them towards a specific goal or target and way of life that God has chosen for them. This idea of being “**led**” is very crucial to the Christian life, and it is something in which the believer should be able to recognize the work and hand of the Holy Spirit in that leading. However, 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.

Now, we want to notice that the verse begins with the phrase “**But if**”. This is called a logical contrastive conjunction or an adversative conjunction which simply means that it is a word that is used to express a contrast between the immediate clause and the one preceding it.⁴ We might say “this is a very fast car, **but** that one is very slow”. It always creates a contrast, what we would call an oppositional contrast, something that is often times the exact opposite. So, why even mention this? Well, it is because the contrast is the point. The contrast is what creates the content and subject of these verses. Paul is creating the contrast to provide clarity as to what we as believers are to be doing. The preceding clauses in v16-17 deal with what happens to the believer when he or she begins to allow the ongoing impulses of the flesh to dictate the direction of their life. When we do that, ultimately we will not be doing what the Holy Spirit desires for our life. This is a very normal and very regular dilemma for every believer, and no believer is exempt from the influence and urgings of the flesh in their life. What v17 indicates is that when the believer yields to the flesh that they simply are not going to do what they know they should do – “**you do not do the things that you wish**”.

Now, it is very crucial to remember that the Holy Spirit is not going to force any believer to do what they need to do. His compulsions are gentle and gracious, but never demanding. If I can say it in a different way, He will never be yelling at you or be angry with you about what you are doing. He may

¹ Zodhiates, 77.

² Harris, *ago*, ep.

³ Logos, *ago*, *Galatians 5:18*, ep.

⁴ Wallace, 657, 671-672.

be deeply grieved over what we are doing, but even in that case He is not going to be yelling and screaming at us. That will not happen. The point is that He leaves it up to us to choose to follow His leading. It is not coercive in any way. The deeper definition of the word “**led**” in this context clearly means to willingly undergo the particular course of action into which the Holy Spirit is guiding us.⁵ We must appreciate that His leading is not passive, but very active in our life. If I can say it this way, my life is never on spiritual auto-pilot. To the contrary, the Holy Spirit is always actively engaged in persuading believers to follow His leading. He is prompting us in the big areas and the major decisions that we make, as well as what some may even consider the more mundane decisions that we have to make. How do we know that? Well, it is because the verb “**led**” is in the present tense, indicative mood, and passive voice. What that means is that He is the One who is presently, persistently, and continually leading. I.e., the leading is constantly being done to us and for us. So, the point that we want to glean from this, and this is really a very important point relative to “how” we live out our Christian life, is that being “**led by the Spirit**” is a very voluntary choice on our part. The problem that many Christians have is that they are not very conscious of how the Holy Spirit leads, so His leading is somewhat muted to them. They are not listening, they are not seeking, and they are not hearing. This is a very voluntary and deliberate effort. The believer has to make a very conscious choice to seek out the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The point that I want to re-establish and reiterate regarding this word is that this is not some kind of mystical leading – not at all. This is not someone going into a room, meditating and practicing yoga and having the Holy Spirit provide them some kind of transcendent direction for their life. Unfortunately, there are a lot of teachings in the charismatic movement that seem to indicate that what happens is that someone just “hears” something mystical and spiritual from God in their Spirit. That sounds pretty cool (and I might add, very spiritually dangerous), but I do not believe that is at all what this word is indicating. In fact, it is not even close to what this word means and implies. One of the elements that we identified earlier was that this word has a very cooperative element to it. I.e., the believer, through the Word of God (which was written by the Holy Spirit), determines what a passage means and he or she must decide that they are willing to submit their life to what they know that passage is asking them to do. They willingly and consciously choose to be led by the truth. We saw earlier that this particular word specifically implies the idea of the Holy Spirit leading and the believer following. He leads, we follow. That is the idea.

It really is very simple. Once I know what God wants me to do as clearly identified in His Word, I simply follow that instruction. It is a choice on my part, a willingness to be led by the Spirit of God as He reveals His will to us in His Word. He teaches us His will in His Word, and we willingly subject ourselves to that reality and begin to implement it in our life. Now, I want to make one very simple observation at this point. Very often the result and consequence created in a believer’s life when they are not willing to do what they know God wants them to do is that they become anxious. Most often anxiety is a direct result of not trusting God in various areas of our life. For some strange reason, we generally think that our ideas and our solutions are adequate, and so we choose to ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit in that area in which He was speaking to us.

⁵ Logos, *Galatians 5:18*, ago, Sense, ep.

For example, if we know that there is an area of our behavior or personality that is not aligned with the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit reveals that to us, then at that moment that is an area of our life that He wants us to address. We fail, He leads, and we follow. It really is very simple. He is only leading us and prompting us to help us overcome those areas that will ultimately create both anxiety and harm in our life. We have to be willing to choose to follow His leading in order to become successful in that area of our life. Always being anxious about various things is simply an indication that we have not yet learned how to trust God with a particular area of our life. It really is a very simply reality. One of my life verses is [Philippians 4:6-7](#) which says,

Php 4:6 (NKJV) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So, the antidote for anxiety as defined in this verse is “**prayer and supplication**”. This is the leading of the Holy Spirit, this is His specific direction and instruction. There is nothing mystical about any of this. When you become anxious, just go pray. That is what God wants us to do. If I want to have God’s peace in my life about things that make me anxious, and they will certainly raise their ugly head, then spend time in prayer and God’s peace will begin to overcome my anxiety. Most of these kinds of truths that God wants us to implement in our life come in the form of the imperative mood verbs in the present tense. This verb for “**Be anxious for nothing**” is an imperative mood verb in the present tense and active voice simply meaning that it is something that I as a believer have to constantly implement in my life. The point is that I have to see this as being “**led by the Spirit**”. Just for instance, [Galatians 6:1](#) says,

Gal 6:1 (NKJV) Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

The word “**restore**” is in the imperative mood and present tense. It is a definitive command to the believer as to exactly how the Holy Spirit wants the believer to handle a particular situation. When someone is overtaken in a particular sin in their life, a bad habit, or some kind of demeaning behavior unbecoming of Christ, then someone who is spiritual is to “**restore**” that person in a “**spirit of gentleness**”. If we do that, we are being “**led by the Spirit**”. There is absolutely not one mystical thing about this. That is His specific will for our life. Just do it that way. Do not deviate from this instruction, and God will use you. [Galatians 6:2](#) says,

Gal 6:2 (NKJV) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The word “**bear**” is in the imperative mood and present tense. It is a definitive command to the believer as to exactly what the Holy Spirit wants the believer to do. Just do it. When someone has a need, has a burden, go help them with that burden, with that weight, with that load on their life. There is absolutely nothing mystical, subjective, or mysterious about any of this at all. This is exactly how the Holy Spirit leads.

In the past I have heard people say things like this – “*The Lord told me...*” or “*The Lord showed me...*”, and everytime that I hear those kinds of words, I just cringe. What I want to say and what I should say to them is this – “*Well, where in His Word did He show that to you?*” For them, it is this very subjective

experience, this kind of mystical voice that they hear deep somewhere in their spirit. If that was the primary way that the Holy Spirit led people, then we would never have any way of validating and substantiating if someone was right or wrong. A phrase like “*the Lord told me...*” personally leaves me no options as to how to authenticate the actual reality of what the person supposedly was told. Now someone is going to ask as to whether or not the Holy Spirit may actually lead someone in a kind of subjective way that is not able to be validated by His Word. The answer to that is yes He can in what I want to call “non-spiritual” issues. For instance, He may very well lead you in choosing a new house you are considering to buy. There is nothing in the Bible that addresses that issue. However, His leading may be through your finances and what you can afford. It may be through the wise counsel of several godly friends. It may be advice given through your parents. That is how the Holy Spirit often leads. I call it divine common sense.

However, it could be through His still voice in your inner man or inner woman. I do not know “how” to tell you to recognize this because it is somewhat mystical in nature. You just have to be in the Word, connected to the Word of God in your heart and mind so that you can know what His voice sounds like. The more time that you spend with someone, the easier you will recognize their voice. There may be a few places in the New Testament where this kind of subjective scenario happened in the Book of Acts to some of the apostles, but it certainly is not the primary and fundamental teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Being led by the Holy Spirit in a mystical, subjective way is not normative for spiritual guidance in any way as defined by the New Testament – not at all. I am very grateful for this simply because it takes the subjectivity out of what someone says out of the equation. I am not going to tell someone that they did not hear God, but unless I can validate it in the Word of God I certainly am not going to follow their subjective instruction – which is exactly what they invariably want you to do. Some of these crude television gurus are constantly claiming that God has told them something as if they have some special spiritual connection to God that no one else has. Listen very carefully. **Your direct connection to God is His Word**, and it, and it alone, will protect you from spiritual error and false guidance.

The last point that Paul seems to be making in the phrase “**you are not under the law**” is that when we find ourselves trying to live out the Christian life in a very legalistic way that that kind of approach will offer us no protection against the lusts of the flesh. The law has no power to overcome the flesh. In [2 Corinthians 3:17](#) Paul said this after his discussion on the differences between the law and the Spirit,

2Co 3:17 (NKJV) Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

In [2 Corinthians 3:7 and 9](#), Paul referred to the law as the “**ministry of death**” and the “**ministry of condemnation**”. In v11 he said that it was “**passing away**”. The point is that when we are yielded to the leading of the Holy Spirit, what we will find is great spiritual freedom and great spiritual liberty simply because the Holy Spirit is a life giving and a life transforming Spirit. So, in conclusion, being “**led by the Spirit**” brings simultaneous deliverance and freedom from three things – (1) the desire of the flesh, (2) the bondage of the law, and (3) the power of sin. I love Romans 6:14 which says,

Ro 6:14 (NKJV) For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

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