

# The Leading of the Spirit

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Romans 8:14

The sweet and happy sounds of children can be heard around the corner in verses 15-17.

But there is such a pivotal phrase between the battle ground of the flesh in 12-14 and the joy-filled playground in what is just ahead.

That phrase is: “led by the Spirit of God.”

We have seen what great debtors we are to live for Christ, to feel how much we owe to him rather than the old life. We cannot live according to the flesh anymore if we are new in the Spirit. If we live for the flesh, it shows we are not Christians yet. A Christian is enabled by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body and live more and more for Jesus.

It is that more and more for Jesus that we come to in these lines – led by the Spirit.

This precious phrase is found only twice in the Bible – here and in Gal. 5:18 – near the fruit of the Spirit.

How we need to understand and appreciate better the leading of the Holy Spirit; to rely upon him more, act by him more and walk in him more.

So let us **BEGIN** with the necessity and nature of the Spirit’s leading.

How you need the lead of the Spirit in your life – why? Because everybody is being led by someone or something. And apart from the Spirit of God, man is lost.

Jer. 10:23 says the way of man is not in himself to direct his steps; all are following themselves, not recognizing that this is what Paul calls the spirit of this age, the spirit of the flesh the spirit of the god of this world!

What a privilege then to have a new leader, a new guide, this new helper who is just like Jesus.

So here is the character of the Spirit as that of Leader. To walk according to the Spirit; under obligation to the Spirit; put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit; the Spirit of adoption and not slavery; the Spirit of prayer; the Spirit who testifies of sonship; the firstfruits of the Spirit; and the Spirit who helps our weaknesses, interceding for us in the deepest way possible – through God who searches the heart.

What is this leading then? What is the leading of the Spirit? We are being led, from the verb, ‘to lead, bring, carry’. And yet we are active under the Spirit’s leading, as we put to death the deeds of the body in verse 13.

The same is found in the Galatians passage – we are the subjects of the Spirit’s leading, but that means we actively walk in the Spirit.

He leads, and we walk!

This word chosen by Paul is something more and above teaching, guiding, directing, although it includes these elements.

Warfield is very good here, saying guide is too tame a word. There is a *determining* quality to this lead. Not merely teaching or commanding but holding and controlling. This word is used of leading animals, conveying the sick, guiding the blind, and of prisoners being led.

When we compare the other terms surrounding this leading, it is clear the nature of the Spirit's work is gentle, coming alongside of us as the Comforter, like Jesus was and continues to be.

The leading of the Spirit is constant in us; it is parallel with having the Spirit in verse 9. Many sound teachers like the term 'governing'. Hendriksen defines it: "The constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts and lives of God's children enabling them more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and walk in the way of God's commands freely and cheerfully."

This reflects Psalm 32: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, *otherwise* they will not come near to you." (Psa 32:8-9)

So this is the rich idea of who and what the Spirit is to us as our Governor/Leader/Enabler/Keeper.

This brings us then **SECONDLY** to see the context and contours of his leading. The Spirit's leading is not simple but complex.

We have to think in a broader way of the Spirit's leading placed in the full field of God's purpose, plans and providence. This is a purposeful leading. Later the same Spirit prays in us and moves us to prayer,

flowing through the knowledge Spirit has of the deep things of God and of God's knowledge of the Spirit's mind. Eventually, we read: God causes all things to work together for our good.

He leads us in the freedoms we have found in Romans 5-8 – free from Adam, free from sin's dominion, free from sin's ultimate power, free from the law as a covenant of works, free from the guilt of sin, and here in Romans 8 – free from death.

So here is the battlefield mentioned earlier.

On the one hand, the leading of the Spirit is against all ungodliness. Brooks wrote: "The first work of the Spirit is to make a man look upon sin as an enemy and to deal with sin as an enemy, to hate it as an enemy, to loathe it as an enemy and to arm against it as an enemy."

This is part of leading by the Spirit. But is that all? No.

Hear another Puritan, John Owen "The Holy Spirit is the great *beautifier* of the soul."

Right here then we find more than battling to be holy; we find fearless, Spirit-given liberty and comfort; we find childlike faith and prayer; we find the hope and the beginnings of eternal life shining through in the Spirit-led soul!

See how complex this is – not one thing but many!

The Spirit arms us for the battle with the flesh, using the whole armor of God.

He is the Spirit of liberty and of grace, making us run the race set before us, casting aside every obstacle.

He is the Spirit of adoption - “There is more sweetness in this word ‘Father’ than if we had ten thousand worlds!” said Thomas Watson.

He leads us as the Spirit of prayer and worship – indwelling and sanctifying the holy temples of God, which we are!

And all along He is taking us to heaven – he is the first-fruits, you see, and fills our hearts with hope of eternal inheritance.

The contours and context are varied, and very wide.

Think of the four characters in the The Wizard of Oz.

You need knowledge and understanding like the Scarecrow, for your heads are stuffed with hay. He is the Spirit of truth, who does lead us by the Word of God.

We need the oil of joy for the Tin Man; the heart of man is frozen, rusted in each joint. The Spirit mightily but gently fills our souls with power, filled with love, joy and peace in believing.

We need courage, conviction in the Cowardly Lion. The Spirit strengthens and fortifies your life to go bravely where the flesh could not, would not.

And above all – we need to be brought home, from which a most terrible storm has tossed us off course!

The Spirit’s leading does all this and more; and He is not for some special class of Christians. “The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for his people.” (Tozer) The Spirit is given to us and indwells us at our new birth, and he fills and leads us.

So avail yourselves of these ruby slippers! Consider where your greatest need is, and lean on the grace of God for that very spot! “Lead me, Spirit of God, in my thinking, my feelings, my will, my outlook for time and for eternity!”

This brings us to our **THIRD** point – the how we are then led, or the practical and personal side. How does the Spirit govern us? Does he lead with means, without means? How are his directives communicated?

And we need to begin with the place of the Word of God. For whatever reason – or lack of reason – we want to separate the Word and the Spirit when it comes to being led or governed. Some hyper-spiritual people have even taught that the Word is for babies, and we graduate from the Word to the Spirit when we mature.

So the Spirit is made to go contrary to the Word of God.

But the Word and the Spirit are not to be divorced. Why? Two things:

**First:** the Word of God is the *product* of the Spirit, and not contrary to him. Your Bible is the Sword of the Spirit! Jesus said: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; (John 16:13)

Your NT's are the product of the Spirit poured out in these last days. The Bible is a book of Pentecost, the Spirit of the risen, exalted Lord!

**Secondly**, we must believe the rock hard parallel Paul makes in his ‘be filled’ passages, in Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16. In the one, we must be filled with the Spirit to walk with God; where in the other, we must be filled with the Word. Which is it? **BOTH!**

If the Word is not filling me with the Spirit, or the Spirit is not filling me with the Word, then something is wrong!

Take it as firmest truth, says Thomas Brooks: “The Spirit never loosens where the Word binds; the Spirit never justifies where the Word condemns; the Spirit never approves where the Word disapproves; and the Spirit never blesses where the Word curses.”

So the Word of God is the standard and rule of our lives. It is with the Word, by the Word, in the Word, and from the Word, that the Spirit governs the kingdom of Christ in his church. The Spirit always speaks through the lips of the Bible! And wherever we have turned from the Word, we have turned from God and His Spirit.

Now, this is not the be all and end all of the Spirit’s governing in our lives. The Spirit governs outwardly as we saw earlier. All this in Romans 8 is funneling toward all things working together for good in the life of the believer. That includes the Spirit connecting the full purpose of God inwardly and outwardly in us.

The providence of God around us is part of the Spirit’s governing us. He sovereignly rules and overrules.

And He works and you work; he wills and you will; he strives and you strive.

*Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Phi 2:12-13)*

What kind of working in you is this? <sup>29</sup> *I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Col 1:29)*

His power mightily works within me; I am engaged in this Spirit's leading me as a son of God.

This leadership in his Word does not tell us where to go to school, what career choice to make, who to marry, or where to live. These are taught us by the use of wisdom from the Spirit.

But what the Spirit does lay out for us, in which he would govern our lives, is in itself a very tall order! Take care of this and the rest of the lesser parts will fall into place!

How are we led and walk in the Spirit? Briefly, twelve things as we wrap up.

1. To be led by the Spirit is to walk in the opposite direction to the flesh. It is to walk in *humility*; to walk as Christ walked. Take up your cross and follow Me.
2. It is walking in *knowledge* and *understanding* – walk in the Word, to find that straight path. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly” – believe his living word rather than your own thoughts and feelings.
3. Walking *obediently*, in the whole person. Walk under His authority. We have seen we are obligated to God – verse 12. The man in the flesh could not submit to the law, but by the Spirit, we fulfill the law now.
4. Walking in the *power* of God – walk in grace, not in our own strength. This is to walk in faith.
5. Walking in personal *fellowship* with the Lord – walk in worship, in devotion; here see Ps. 25! Look at the richness there in 1-10.

6. Walking in *assurance* – knowing you are a child of God, redeemed!  
1 John 3.1.
7. Walking is *progressive* – walk in increased conformity to Christ; growth in godliness, from little children, to young men, to fathers; keep up the good fight! Where is your area of weakness – your brain, your heart, your will, your direction homeward? Are you Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion or Dorothy?
8. Walking with fellow believers – walk in the Spirit’s *unity*; you don’t walk alone! The Spirit calls you to all the ‘one anothers’ of the Bible! Serve one another, love one another, encourage one another...
9. You will need to be walking in *love* – the fruit of the Spirit; never is love to be absent from us; as God is love, who indwells us, so does he animate us with his love to be creatures of love.
10. Walking *perseveringly* – walk in victory; which is to continue to walk in faith, which is the victory.
11. Walking *evangelistically* – walk in hope; infectious with the gospel; an attractive light; a bold light. Our words should have a startling effect at times. “What we say may put people off, says William Still; yes they may, but they may also provoke people to respond! If we are not prepared to put people off, it is doubtful whether we ever startle any into questing for the Lord.”
12. Walking with the *goal* before us – keep your eye on the prize! This is the walk of an everlasting reward; you are meant for things above.

Charles Hodge wrote: “If God by His Spirit condescends to dwell in us, it is our highest duty to allow ourselves to be governed or led by him.”

Surely it is the Spirit's work by whom we yield ourselves to Him. Pray the Lord would make and mold you in this trusting, surrendered way.

Count it such a privilege to be led as part of the greater privilege of being a son of God. What a contrast with those who follow themselves; chasing their tails.

What a night and day difference between those who know God and those who do not; those who have the Lord abiding in them, their sins pardoned, their lives enveloped in arms of everlasting grace and glory!

A Christian's worst day – taken all together, is light years above the unbeliever's best day, without the Lord and Savior, Jesus.

Make one of your chief delights the Lord leading you, governing you.

“Lead me” is the cry of the child of God! As Solomon, “I am but a little child and know not how to go out or to come in!”

Or his father, David: <sup>23</sup> *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;* <sup>24</sup> *And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psa 139:23-24)*

Jesus says he is the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name and leads them - <sup>4</sup> *"When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. (Joh 10:4)*

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Psa 23:1-4)*

# The Leading of the Spirit

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Romans 8:14

## 1. The Necessity and Nature of the Spirit's Leading

- a. Everybody led by someone or something
- b. To be led by the Spirit into life a great privilege
- c. The Spirit's living stronger than teaching; has the idea of governing
- d. But it is both gentle (like Christ) and constant

## 2. The Context and Contours of the Spirit's Leading

- a. This is not a simple matter
- b. The Spirit leads us in relationship to the comprehensive plan of God
- c. The Spirit's lead is deconstructive – away from sin – as well as construction – beautifying the soul
- d. He leads as the Spirit of battle, freedom, adoption, worship and heaven
- e. He addresses our weaknesses: four characters in Wizard of Oz
- f. Every Christian has this leadership, every Christian thoroughly needs his leadership

## 3. The Practical and Personal Nature of the Spirit's Leading

- a. Of first order, the Spirit's leading and the Word of God
  - i. The Word and Spirit are not to be divorced.
  - ii. The Word of God is the product of the Spirit of God, and not contrary to him. (Joh 16:13-14)
  - iii. The parallel in the 'be filled' passages in Eph. 5:18-19 and Col. 3:16.

“The Spirit never loosens where the Word binds; the Spirit never justifies where the Word condemns; the Spirit never approves where the Word disapproves; the Spirit never blesses where the Word curses.” Brooks

- b. The Spirit's lead personally:
  - i. He leads both inwardly and outwardly
  - ii. He leads and we walk / our cooperation
  - iii. He leads in wisdom in areas not addressed specifically in the Bible – jobs, marriage, where to live...
- c. Dimensions of the Spirit's practical living
  - i. To be led by the Spirit is to walk in the opposite direction to the flesh – to walk in humility
  - ii. It is walking in knowledge and understanding
  - iii. Walking obediently, in the whole person
  - iv. Walking in the power of God
  - v. Walking in personal fellowship with the Lord
  - vi. Walking in assurance
  - vii. Walking is progressive
  - viii. Walking with fellow believers
  - ix. Walking in love – fruit of the Spirit
  - x. Walking perseveringly
  - xi. Walking evangelistically
  - xii. Walking with the goal in sight

“If God by His Spirit condescends to dwell in us, it is our highest duty to allow ourselves to be governed or led by him.” Charles Hodge