

Chapter 11 - CHRISTIAN WALK:

GOD'S LEADING & FREEDOM

This is quite an important topic as most Christians believe God leads in some manner. However, how He exactly directs us remains controversial.

To discover how God leads, we should again consider the scripture, because this is the source of truth ([2 Timothy 3:16](#); [2 Peter 1:20-21](#); [2 Peter 3:16](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#)). Specifically, we need to consider relevant verses in the epistles because this is the section of the Bible by which God directs Christians during these New Testament times.

Other scriptures speak of God's leadership in the Old Testament and the gospels, but these are from different times, before the church. Now that the revelation is complete ([Hebrews 1:2](#)), and believers are indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's way of leading differs from earlier times.

What is the basis of God's leadership for Christians in the church age?

THE BIBLE

God's basis for His leadership for Christians is through two agents, the Holy Spirit and Christ, through one medium, God's word, the Bible. Let us examine these.

WHY IS GOD'S WORD A BASIS FOR HIS LEADERSHIP?

The Bible is truth to us from God. Therefore, the Bible provides a basis of leadership by the Spirit and Christ. The process of how God gave this truth is important in providing a basis of biblical authority: God gave truth to Christ ([John 8:40-45](#); [John 14:6](#)).

- Christ taught the apostles this truth (John 17:7-8). Christ did this especially through the apostle Paul, by the Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), to complete the knowledge associated with His first coming (Colossians 1:25; Ephesians 3:5).
- The apostles, and especially Paul, then taught the truth to the second-generation Christians under apostolic authority (Titus 1:3; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Peter 3:2).
- During the second generation of the church, this truth was written down to provide our canon of scriptures which is the basis of God speaking to us today.
- Christ and the Spirit use the Bible as the foundation of knowledge and ethics as well as an instrument to help us live a Christian life.

CHRIST - The Bible says in this age God speaks through his Son ([Hebrews 1:2](#)). Otherwise, all the previous means to provide revelation, for example angels, dreams, direct messaging, visions, and prophets, are no longer used. Further, God speaks through Christ by His word, revealed in the scripture, which we discuss below.

HOLY SPIRIT - The Spirit guides us by:

- Being the instrument of revelation, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
- Using His word as a sword to enable us (Ephesians 6:17).

HOW DOES GOD THEN LEAD CHRISTIANS IN PRACTICE?

In short, the Bible does not indicate that God or the Spirit lead us around like a dog on a leash. Importantly, God's leading is evident not by a moment to moment guiding, it is observed as a result!

Scriptural basis of leading

There are two verses in the New Testament that mention being led by the Spirit: (Please see Figure 1 below).

- Romans 8:14 – This verse indicates that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. Being a son (i.e., child) of God is demonstrated by being pure and blameless while living in a sinful world (Philippians 2:13-15). In other words, living a Christlike existence in the world shows you are a son of God and so are led by the Spirit.
- Galatians 5:18 – This verse notes those who are led by the Spirit are benefited by not being under the law (Old Testament law). Further, not being constrained by the law allows the Spirit to produce mature fruit (Galatians 5:23). In other words, Christians who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit show not only they are not constrained by the law (v. 23) but are led by the Spirit (v. 18) to a mature result (vs. 22-23). Therefore, someone who demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit indicates they have been led by the Spirit, as per Romans 8:14.

Not Under the Law¹



**Spirit Free to Produce
Fruit**

³



Shows they are led by the Spirit

Sons of God²



Lives Pure in a Sinful World⁴



Figure 1. Those Led by the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:18, Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:9, Philippians 2:13-15

Functional outworking of 'God's leading'

The details of the biblical principles of God's leading might be summarized as the '5 Fs' (Please see Figure 2):



Foundation (start with the Bible)

Hebrews 1:2 states that in the church age God speaks through his Son. His words are in the Bible. Specifically, for the church, God's guidance for our decision-making is in the epistles. Further, the Spirit uses God's expressed word as His sword, both internally (Hebrews 4:12) and externally, to demonstrate His power (Ephesians 6:17).



Freedom (we possess broad choices in our life's path)

We have relatively few specific commands in scripture, but the ones that exist protect us from going 'out of bounds' from God's playing field. Further, our wonderful freedom in Christ is greater than the world's because we know that we are liberated from sin, have a heavenly home, and have the truth, as revealed in the Bible, to live wise and useful lives (Colossians 2:3). In contrast, the world is bound by cultural norms, fads, jealousies, and a quest for truth. All these efforts are ultimately fruitless in the spiritual sphere as well as costly in time and money. Therefore, when we live within His gracious boundaries we possess wide freedom to serve Him in faith. We can choose to use in this world what we wish filtered through prayer and the Bible (1 Timothy 4:4-5).



Faith (our action)

We are commanded to do everything by faith (Romans 14:23). Importantly, we should not condemn ourselves when stepping out in faith in accordance with scripture as best we can. In other words, do not feel guilty (Romans 14:22)! Knowing scripture leads us to make choices in faith that will please and glorify God (Colossians 3:16-17).



Filling (maturing)

The relevant vital verse, Ephesians 5:18, uses alcohol as a negative example of mental control. The alcohol contrasts to a mature Christian who is controlled by the Spirit. The verse indicates that being controlled by the Spirit is through being 'filled. The word 'fill' in Greek (Gr: pluroo, πληρόω) has a secondary meaning of 'complete' or 'mature'. Maturing (filling) occurs by the Spirit as we live by faith and seek God through the Bible (Galatians 3:3-5, 2 Corinthians 3:18). Importantly, the Spirit uses the Bible to mature us (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12).



Fruit (the results)

This is the outcome of God's maturing us, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9). There are other signs of maturity (undoubtedly caused by the Spirit) in Scripture but these are the ones directly related to the Spirit by the Bible (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-10; 1 John 2-4; Hebrews 5:13-14).

Our Tools: Foundation (the Bible), Faith, Freedom



Filing (Spirit's Action in Maturing Us)



Fruit (the Results)

Figure 2. The 'Five Fs' visualized: Functional Outworking of 'God's Leading'

As an example, biblical leading is more like living in a democracy than a socialist or communist regime. In the latter two cases, the state typically plans a person's life and leads them by a very visible method. The person's own choices are very restricted.

In contrast, in a democracy, a person has the freedom to choose within the broad confines of the law to make individual life choices. Despite the uncertainty, they can have faith that there is a generally healthy societal structure to support them. Further, the personal character that is formed by the culture in a democracy encourages self-determination and responsibility. This process itself matures the individual and their ability to make even better life choices.

A person on the outside sees the results of the culture encouraging self-determination and responsibility (e.g., the successful start-up of a business or a fruitful professional or parental career), but they do not see their individual method that produces the results.

So it is also in seeing the results of faith.

In summary, God's leading in scripture is by His word applied in faith and freedom (individual choice). By this method of knowing the Bible, applied in faith and freedom, we learn to make better choices in life. Over time we show the results of our faithful lives by a pure and fruitful individual character. His leading then is observed by the results of the Spirit maturing us.

LEGALISM VERSUS FREEDOM

Benefits of Freedom in Christ

We have noted in these chapters on the Christian life that we have great freedom as Christians as follows:

- We can live our lives in faith to serve God as we believe best within the broad confines of His commandments in the epistles. All that we do should be by faith ([Romans 14:23](#)).
- We are free to use whatever is available to us in this world filtered through prayer and God's word ([1 Timothy 4:4-5](#)).
- We should not condemn ourselves for what we choose to do in faith ([Romans 4:22](#)).

The problem of legalism ([Colossians 2:16-23](#))

Oxford defines legalism in theology as *'dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith.'*

Although extra laws added to scripture such as: do not drink, do not smoke, go to parties etc. are not in scripture, may sound holy but have several problems.

We have noted in these chapters on the Christian life that we have great freedom as Christians as follows:

- They are superficial in nature and do not produce true righteousness.
- They teach lies about God regarding the things over which He really is not concerned.
- They limit faith because a person is following a set of rules.
- They limit joy as we restrict our lives and do not produce the fruit of the Spirit in our life through faith.
- They produce an overconfident self-righteousness, which is false.

Those outside the body of Christ often recognize the hypocritical nature of legalism because such Christians may not demonstrate true love or purity. Further, instead of adorning the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10) to those outside the church, the extra rules may make Christianity seem unappealing and restrictive.

INTERACTION BETWEEN LEGALISM AND FREEDOM

The Bible warns that a mature believer might use their freedom to cause a legalistic Christian to stumble in their faith. Paul states not to hurt the faith of the legalistic believer. This may occur when the mature Christian, knowing their freedom, engages in an activity that an immature Christian, although acting by faith, restricts themselves from doing despite the Bible not stating it is necessary. The legalistic believer is not yet mature enough to understand the full measure of freedom available in the scriptures (Romans 14:1-6).

An example might be that a Christian who realizes they possess the ability to drink without getting drunk should not consume alcohol before a believer who thinks that this is wrong so as not to discourage them in their faith. *Therefore, despite our freedom, our priority as Christians is to strengthen and to love one another and so voluntarily limit our freedom when necessary to help the young believer (Romans 14:13-21).*

INTERACTION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FREEDOM AND SOCIETAL ORDER

The Bible emphasizes the importance of an organized society wherein each of us is responsible to government officials (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-20), our workplace bosses, our position within the family structure (Colossians 3:1-4:2; Ephesians 6:1-9) and the leaders of our church (Hebrews 13:7).

Order is an important biblical design for our lives. Historically, the gospel was brought forth in the Roman Empire. The Romans, while ruthless and despotic, maintained an order that promoted peace (Pax Romana) and community works such as roads and postal service. These advantages help disseminate Christianity.

Order still is needed in today's society to allow for good government, prosperity, courtesies, social help, and the spread of the Gospel. Such attributes exist only with difficulty in anarchy, dictatorships, or socialist as well as communist states where citizens are tethered to the government by design to be provided a simple existence while having no perceived responsibility to each other (society, community, or family).

Countries that historically have adhered most closely to biblical Christianity (Northern Europe, the UK, and the countries derived from its original colonies) generally have been the most successful economically, enjoyed functional non-corrupt government, lived in free, organized, and efficient societies, promote science and innovation, and fought for justice for those who could not fend for themselves or who were impoverished, both inside and outside their own country.

Further, the government benefits from a society based on biblical Christianity because it promotes honest, hardworking, law-abiding individuals who minimize the need for government action to maintain order, as well as provide a population with individuals of strong character to serve in the armed forces and administration.

In summary, God proscribes order in society at all levels, starting from family members up to the church, as well as professional and governmental relationships, ending ultimately with our obligations to God. This societal order allows us to spread the gospel and love others as God instructs.

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