

Being Led By The Holy Spirit

Introduction. We have only scratched the surface of the new year, and this time lends itself to personal goal setting. These “goals” are typically called resolutions. The top five resolutions are: Spend more quality time with family; get into “shape” (diet/exercise); kick a habit; save money; and, pursue education/read more.

Studies done on New Year’s resolutions reveal that 60 percent of them never get past the words they are formed by. A poll from 2012 declares that only about 23 percent of resolutions are kept. What is odd about this situation is that resolutions are intended to bring us to success but almost always seem to be bound up in failure. Perhaps we are too focused on unimportant or unrealistic goals.

There is one great resolution that will affect every part of your life in a positive way: “In 2016, I resolve to be led by the Spirit!” But what exactly does this mean?

I. Being Led By The Spirit Is Walking A Different Way

- A. There are essentially two ways to direct one’s life.
 - 1. There is following the dictates of our flesh, with its passions and desires: The direction of lusts (1 John 2:15-17); of corruption (Galatians 6:8a); and, the direction of those without God (1 Peter 4:3).
 - 2. There is following directions of our Creator’s will — this is “walking by the Spirit”. This is the direction of discernment (Hebrews 4:15); of goodness, righteousness, and truth (Ephesians 5:9); and, the direction of God.
- B. “Walking by the Spirit” is submitting to a better way of life and living (Romans 8:12-14). It is a way of life. The Spirit’s way is the way of love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22-25). It is also the way to life (Matthew 7:13-14; John 12:25-26).

II. Being Led By The Spirit Is Not Magical Or A Possession

- A. Because of the supposed mystery of the Holy Spirit and His work, many false conclusions have been embraced.
 - 1. Some want to believe that the Spirit’s influence is an emotional or physical sensation. There are others who basically declare that God possesses people by His Spirit — He dictates our every thought and every move.
 - 2. Not everyone who claims to be led by the Spirit is actually led by Him (1 John 4:1). If every claimant were led by the Spirit, why would the Spirit tell us not to believe every spirit? Why would the Spirit commend those who tested the spirits and found some to be “liars” if all are led by Him (Revelation 2:2)?
- B. Common errors of “Spirit-led” claimants.
 - 1. They claim they “cannot resist the Spirit’s leading.” Paul received a “heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). However, he said, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” But, he could have been! He could have chosen not to do the bidding of God. One can control himself (and is expected to do so) while under the influence of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:27, 28, 32, 33, 40).
 - 2. They claim God is leading them to do His work in ways they never imagined. If that be so, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 cannot be true. In that text, the Holy Spirit said the scriptures completely equip the man of God. Did the Spirit

- tell the truth? Or, are claimants of direct Spirit guidance telling the truth? One of them is lying (Romans 3:4).
3. They cease to work and worship as the Spirit-led disciples of the New Testament. We know first century Christians were led by the Spirit to perform specific acts and to oppose all human traditions (Acts 2:42; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 4:6, 17; 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:16; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:13). The “Spirit of truth” does not lead men to worship in ways He severely condemned in His revealed Word (Colossians 2:8, 18-23; 2 John 9; Revelation 22:18-19).
 4. They claim that the Spirit gives them contradictory doctrines. For example, charismatic Catholic claimants “feel led by the Spirit” to sprinkle water on infants. Certain Protestant claimants “don’t feel it is right” for them to do so. Does the Spirit tell the two groups two different doctrines? Which “Spirit” will we believe? What of the babies of the Protestant claimants who die without “baptism”? If both are okay, then it appears that God is “the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33).
 5. They claim a special joy others cannot know or appreciate. The apostles never claimed such an exclusive privilege. Is it possible for every Christian to have such joy as John had (3 John 4)? Yes! Since John, too, could have “no greater joy,” then those who say they have a joy above that of others are in error on that point. What the apostles had, others could share, if they were obedient to the gospel (Philippians 4:9; 1 John 1:3-4; 2:3-5). If God gives them a select, restricted bliss, He is a respecter of persons, for He gives them something He does not give to other obedient children (Acts 10:34-35).
 6. They claim their leading by the Spirit tells them not to discuss the scriptures with those who disagree with them. If so, this reverses the order given those led by the Spirit in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3). It condemns the practice of the apostles (Acts 17:2, 3, 16, 17). The apostle Paul allowed and encouraged others to search the scriptures to see whether or not he was teaching the truth (Acts 17:11-12). However, if the Spirit now forbids such discussions, what will Bible students do with Proverbs 28:4 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, which urge us to “earnestly contend” with those with whom we disagree (cp. 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 2:1, 15; 1 John 4:1; Jude 3; Revelation 2:2-5, 12-16)?
- C. Even when the Holy Spirit was working directly on those who were teaching; and those who were following Christ, it was not magically-transformative or a taking over of their beings. The work of the Holy Spirit was to provide needed gifts of revelation, confirmation, communication, and understanding. He led the apostles into “all truth” (John 14:25-26). He revealed the scriptures to them (2 Peter 1:19-21). He provided the knowledge of God’s will along with the ability to communicate, confirm, and understand it (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). This part of His work was necessary then, because they did not yet have the completed word (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). In the first century, the disciples were blessed with what they needed, but what we no longer need because we have the Word to read, study, and know (1 Timothy 4:13, 15-16).

III. Being Led By The Spirit Is Being Led By The Word

- A. No one denies that we are led of the Spirit. Indeed, all Christians are so led (Galatians 5:16-26). However, this leading is through the Word revealed by the Spirit in the Bible (1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Timothy 4:1; cp. Hebrews 3:7; 4:7; Revelation 1:19; 2:1, 7). The Holy Spirit witnesses to us through the scriptures — the Hebrew writer said so (Hebrews 10:15-17). When we read the Bible, we hear the Spirit. When we are obedient to what we read, we are led by the Spirit.
- B. There are exacting limitations to being led by the Spirit. Many have somehow come to believe they have achieved divine insight to God's will, beyond His Word. All too often people make statements like, "It doesn't say it in the Bible, but I believe with all my heart ..." or "I don't care what it says, I think (or feel) ..."
- C. The will of God, for our life's direction, is limited to the Word. The Word is the mind of God revealed to us (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). The Word is what we are instructed to "be doing" (James 1:17-22). The Word is the limit of our knowledge of the will of God (1 Corinthians 4:6).
- D. The Word is our guide so let it guide you. Read the Word and know it (Colossians 4:16; 1 Timothy 4:13). Study the Word and get it right (2 Timothy 2:15). Embrace the Word as the good and perfect gift it is: apply its instruction, respects its guidance, and be blessed in what you do (James 1:17-25).

Conclusion. What do you hope for in the days ahead? The new year usually demands some planning, maybe even some personal goal setting. There is, however, one great resolution that will affect every part of your life in the most positive way: "In 2016, I resolve to be led by the Spirit!" The journey begins with a desire for a better future. Seek that future through obedience to God, as led by His Spirit-inspired Word. The opportunity to begin is yours right now!