

# **How To Be Led By The Holy Spirit**

**by Eric Neumann**

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## **Introduction**

Being “led by the Spirit” is a goal of most Christians. At the same time, it is a struggle, because they never really know, no matter how hard they try, if they are being led by the Spirit or not. It is also hard to find preachers or others, who will give you specific ways of determining if you are being led by the Spirit or not.

On Wednesday, August 27, 2014, David Platt, senior pastor of the Church at Brook Hills, which has thousands of attendees every week in Birmingham, AL, made the announcement that he had accepted the position to be IMB President, which is the international missionary board for the southern Baptist organization. He said that God made it “abundantly clear” to him that he should take that position. Fortunately for us, on Sunday, August 31, 2014, when David spoke to his congregation, David went through the steps to show how the Lord made it abundantly clear that he should take that position, leaving the pastorate at the Church at Brook Hills.

This paper will look at the steps he mentioned, look at how God’s Word says we should make such decisions, and then analyze how David’s thought process measured up to God’s Word.

### **I. David Platt’s methods for ascertaining the Lord’s leading in his life:**

- 1) 4 years ago he had been approached to be the president of IMB. He got a clear “No” from the Lord at that time. He did not say how it was a clear no.
- 2) Months before getting the offer this time, he said that the Lord was renewing convictions within his heart to be on the front line of the mission field. He wants to reach unreached peoples with the gospel.

- 3) Shortly after that desire in his heart was renewed, the current president of the IMB stepped down.
- 4) David prayed over the next few months. His desire and emotion to reach the unlost just intensified during that time, which told him that the Lord was leading in that direction.
- 5) A friend sent him an article on James Madison. James was 36, like David. The article said that many of the spiritual liberties in America today are thanks to James Madison. The question was, who will be today's spiritual James Madison? This is important in light of the trend today for people to do things outside of institutions, because of the challenges within institutions. Yet, the institution of America would not have been changed if James Madison did not stay within America. Similarly, IMB will not be changed for the better if someone does not work within the institution.
- 6) Nevertheless, the challenges within the IMB seem too great to tackle. At that time, David's wife reminded him of Numbers 13-14 that no challenges are too big for God. Just like God conquered the giants of the land for Israel, he can do the same today.
- 7) A few hours later, he received an e-mail from IMB, saying that they want to discuss David becoming their new president.
- 8) The Sunday before, David had preached on Joshua 1, where Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land. Perhaps this is a sign of God leading David to take the job.
- 9) He met with 800-900 IMB missionaries in a retreat.

- 10) By now, he is teaching through Judges at church. He doesn't want to compare himself with most of the judges, however, he does compare himself with Gideon. Gideon had "reluctant faith" and kept asking for signs from God. Similarly, David kept praying for confirmation from God. David did not say what would signal confirmation for him, nor did he say how God specifically confirmed the decision for him. He just said that God made it abundantly clear to him that he should become the IMB president. The only other thing he could compare it to was the clarity with which he asked Heather to marry him. Both David and Heather had been praying for confirmation in "an Acts 13 way," and David had been praying with the pastors of the church, as well. Somehow, David received that confirmation.
- 11) The day that David announced his decision to the church board, an elder over the board, said that David was destined for the position. He believed the Lord was leading David to take the job.
- 12) David had been memorizing Psalm 131, which is 3 verses. David specifically mentioned verse 2: "As a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child" (Psalm 131:2). David wants to be like a weaned child of the Lord.
- 13) Meanwhile, the IMB search team had prayed. Also, the church at Brook Hills acted in "an Acts 13 fashion," having prayed and said that the Holy Spirit was leading David to the position of IMB president.
- 14) David then met with the IMB trustees. They gave him some tough questions. The trustees prayed about it and concluded that the Holy Spirit is leading in this.

- 15) All of these factors caused David to feel “constrained” by the Spirit to do this.
- 16) David’s goal is to reach all unreached peoples so that we can stop talking about them and start talking about the King’s coming.
- 17) He leaves the church with two words. First, “Surrender.” Surrender to the Lord’s leading. How do you know that the Lord is leading you to do a certain thing? That question leads to the second word “Abide”. If you abide in Christ, then you will be doing what the Lord would have you to do.

Based on all of this, my summary is that David used the past feeling of a clear “no” from God to compare to his feelings in this matter. He used months of prayer and feelings based on that. He continued to pray and continued to have strong feelings that the Lord was leading him. His apprehension about working in an institution was alleviated by reading an article about James Madison. His wife reminded him that God is greater than any institution. He found parallels in Joshua and Judges to his situation, while ignoring things that did not fit his situation. He, Heather, the pastors at church, and the IMB all prayed about it over time. He got word from the IMB search team, their trustees, his wife, and the church’s board that God was leading in this direction. It is based on this feedback that he felt “constrained” by the Spirit to take the position. Thus, he is surrendering to God and will abide in Christ by taking the position.

## **II. What does God’s Word say about this process?**

In this process, a great emphasis is placed on feelings from prayer by the person and others as to what God wants him to do.

## **God's completed Word**

The only example in scripture I can think of where someone prayed to God to show him something like this was in the case of Abraham's eldest servant, asking God to bring a woman to him to be Isaac's wife (Genesis 24:12-14). Things worked out in that case, but the point is that, with only one example in scripture, this method is not the norm, for sure.

David used the example of Gideon from Judges 6-7, which is what most Christians use as justification for asking God for His leading. The problem with this example is that Gideon had already been told by God in an audible voice of what to do. Gideon's "putting out a fleece" was his testing God in unbelief. He was trying to come up with an excuse not to follow what God had told him. Scripture says that it is a sin to tempt the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7), and so Gideon sinned by asking for confirmation from the Lord. He already had God's Word, and he was looking for an excuse not to follow it.

Today, we are in totally different situations than Abraham's eldest servant, Gideon, or anyone else in scripture. We need to recognize that God already "hath abounded toward us in ALL wisdom and prudence" (Ephesians 1:8). God gave a dispensation to Paul "to fulfil the word of God" (Colossians 1:25). This means that, today, the Word of God is complete. If God were to speak to someone today, this would be EXTRA wisdom and prudence outside of the Bible. That would make God a liar, because He said that He has already abounded toward us in ALL wisdom and prudence. Titus 1:2 tells us that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Therefore, it is impossible for God to speak to someone today apart from His Word.

Asking for the Lord's leading, for confirmation in prayer, and for God's guidance means that you are, like Gideon,

not trusting in God's Word to you and are looking for an excuse to justify what you want to do.

### **God's will for you today**

The pages of God's Word already tell us God's will for our lives. I Timothy 2:4 says that God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." With regard to the unsaved, saved individuals have been given the ministry of reconciling others to God (II Corinthians 5:18-19). With regard to the saved, saved individuals are to bear one another's burdens by giving sound doctrine to those who are weak in a certain area (Galatians 6:1-2). Therefore, when we are born, God's will is for us to be saved. Once we are saved, He wants us to come into the knowledge of the truth. Then, in our dealings with others, if we see unsaved people, we are to reconcile them back to God, and, if we see saved people, we are to edify them in the knowledge of the truth.

Now, you may say that this is too broad of a definition. How do I know if God wants me to be a missionary, a pastor, a worship leader, or anything else? Since God does not specifically tell you in scripture and He does not speak to people in audible voices today or even lead them in a certain direction, we must conclude that God leaves the details entirely up to you.

Note from I Timothy 3:1 that God says that, "if any man DESIRE the office of a bishop, he DESIRETH a good work." It does not say, "If you pray and feel inner peace or God's leading through some circumstances or through others, then you should become a bishop. Otherwise, God must not want you to be a bishop." NO! God wants you to be saved, come unto the knowledge of the truth, and then help others to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth. It is then entirely up to you to determine how to do that. If you desire to be a bishop, you should work toward meeting the qualifications of I Timothy 3:2-7 and then get a group of believers to make you their bishop.



## **More wisdom = more responsibility**

Note that I Timothy 3:1 uses the word “bishop” for the leader of the church, which means to “take care of the church of God” (I Timothy 3:5) as a steward over them (Titus 1:7; I Corinthians 4:1-2). The word “pastor” is used with regard to Israel’s program. They are “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24), who, “like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6). They need a pastor to pasture the flock. Jeremiah 23:1-2 says, “Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered My flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.”

Thus, Israel is seen as sheep, while today, in the dispensation of grace, we are seen as full-grown sons. The phrase “children of Israel” appears 603 times in the Bible, yet the nation of Israel is only called “sons of Israel” one time (Deuteronomy 23:17). That is not to say that they were dumb, and we are smart. Rather, because of their unbelief, they were still children, and so God had to treat them like children. Children are told what to do and where to go. Today, however, if you have believed in the blood of Jesus Christ to save you, you have become God’s adopted son (Galatians 4:5-6). “Before faith came, we were kept under the law...wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ...but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:23-25). God no longer treats us like children. We do not have to be told what to do. “Ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

When you are a child, your parents tell you where to go and when to come back. When you are an adult, you do not have to ask your parents if you can go to your friend’s house. It is up to you to make that decision yourself. Similarly, since God has abounded toward us in

all wisdom and prudence (Ephesians 1:8), we now have the tools necessary to make our own decisions. “Ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

### **Led by the Spirit**

Christianity puts a great emphasis on being “led by the Spirit.” They recognize that the Holy Spirit has been given unto us (I Thessalonians 4:8), and they think that being led by the Spirit means that, when they pray to God, they ask Him about something, and the Holy Spirit puts a conviction in their hearts about what they should do. The more they pray about it, the more they have this “conviction.” Then, they look for “signs” that this conviction is true. Signs are usually circumstances that happen that make it seem like their conviction is right or that others pray about it and have the same “conviction” that they have. We saw how David followed this process to come to his conclusion to become the president of IMB.

However, as we have already seen, such leading would be God treating you like a child, still under the law, who does not have the wisdom to make decisions for yourself. The phrase “led by the Spirit” is found in two scriptures—Luke 4:1 and Romans 8:14. The Luke reference is a special kind of leading for Jesus, as He was led into temptation.

The one reference that is to us today is Romans 8:14. The context of being led by the Spirit in Romans 8:14 is that we are not to live after the flesh. According to Romans 8:13, being led by the Spirit means putting to death the deeds of the body, which leads to our suffering in the flesh (Romans 8:18), which is why II Timothy 3:12 says that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” That is not to say that we will suffer physical persecution, but our souls will suffer persecution from our flesh as we put to death the flesh, when the flesh is lusting after the things of the spirit (Galatians 5:17). Similarly, walking in the Spirit is

mentioned in Galatians 5:16,25, and the context there is also putting to death the works of the flesh.

Therefore, being led by the Spirit has nothing to do with an inner feeling or circumstantial evidence to lead you in some direction. Rather, it means allowing the Spirit within you to overcome the flesh so that you serve Christ, rather than doing the works of the flesh.

Therefore, not only is the idea of inner impressions and feelings leading you into God's will completely against the truth that God has revealed today through the apostle Paul, but it also does not line up with the terms "led by the Spirit" and "walk in the Spirit" as defined in scripture.

### **Spirit, soul, and body**

The fundamental problem that Christianity has is that it does not understand how God works through you.

Everyone has a spirit, soul, and body. According to Ephesians 2:1,5, before we are saved, our spirits are dead in our sins. Once we are saved, God makes our spirits alive and places us into Christ, seated together with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

"God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). Since your spirit is dead before you are saved, it is impossible for you to have a relationship with God. All you are doing is carrying out the motions of the flesh, living in sin. Romans 7:5-6 says, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

So, how do we "serve in newness of spirit?" I Corinthians 2 tells us. Since the Holy Spirit is given to us when we are saved, our spirits are made alive by God. Since God is a Spirit, once we are saved, God can communicate the things of God to us so that we may know Him intimately.

The flesh cannot know these things. That is why I Corinthians 2:9 says, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” The eye, the ear, and the heart are all things of the flesh. “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Corinthians 2:10).

Therefore, once we are saved, God communicates the things of God to us by the Holy Spirit communicating to our spirit. That is what I Corinthians 2:13-14 says. It says that we learn the things “which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

So, we get saved, we have the Holy Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit teaches us the things of God as we READ HIS WORD AND BELIEVE IT. The more we read and believe God’s Word, the more we are “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). We can then make the choice to yield our souls to this strengthening process, “as those that are alive from the dead, and your members [your flesh] as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13). Thus, being led by the Spirit is not some mystical thing. Rather, it is reading God’s Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to teach the deep things of God to us, so that we are strengthened in the inner man so that we make the decision to “mortify therefore your members [your flesh] which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

In summary, when we are saved, our spirits are made alive by God. God then communicates sound doctrine to us through His Word. If we believe it, our souls are strengthened with might, and we naturally yield our flesh over to God to serve Him. Thus, our flesh is being “led by

the Spirit.” So, the spirit is alive, the soul is strengthened, and the flesh is counted as dead. Romans 6:11-12 sums this up: “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” Thus, we see that our spirit strengthens our soul and the soul chooses not to follow the works of the flesh but to be led by the Spirit, i.e., be led by the sound doctrine of God’s Word. This is why I Thessalonians 5:23 says, “and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are all three-part beings. All unsaved people, and almost all saved people, say that those three parts are body, soul, and spirit. Yet, God says we are spirit, soul, and body. The reason is because God reverses the order. Before you are saved, “the god of this world” (II Corinthians 4:4), i.e., Satan, controls you through his course, “the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2). Your spirit is dead (Ephesians 2:1), and so all you can do are the works of the flesh.

Because the deep things of God cannot be understood by the natural man and the Holy Spirit teaches your spirit the things of God as you read and believe His Word, the ONLY way you can “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16) is by reading and believing God’s Word. After you are saved, your flesh is still vile (Philippians 3:21). Your flesh looks exactly the same in the moments before and after you believed.

### **What God does when you are saved**

When you believe, you are spiritually circumcised, cutting off the control of the flesh so that you may walk in the Spirit. We learn this in Colossians 2:11: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

You are also regenerated, meaning that your spirit is alive to serve Christ. We learn this from Titus 3:5: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

You also receive the indwelling Holy Spirit to teach you the things of God so that you may walk in God’s works (Ephesians 2:10). We know this from Romans 5:5: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

You are also baptized into Christ’s death so that you can walk in the Spirit in newness of life. We know this from Romans 6:4: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” This is not water baptism, because I Corinthians 12:13 says “for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..., and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” So, it is the Spirit’s work that baptizes us. Paul could not make such a statement about all of the Corinthians if baptism was by water, because Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius..., and I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (I Corinthians 1:14,16-17). If water baptism makes us drink into one Spirit, Paul would not thank God that he did not baptize many of the Corinthians. In fact, water baptism is not even recognized by God today, because Ephesians 4:5 says that there is only “one baptism,” which would be the Spirit’s baptizing us into the death of Christ.

You are also sealed with the Holy Spirit until the rapture comes. We know this from Ephesians 1:13-14: “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until

the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.”

In summary, the moment that you trust in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection as atonement for your sins, you instantly receive eternal life, are spiritually circumcised, regenerated, receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, are spiritually baptized, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Since all of these things happen spiritually, you have no idea that God did any of those things to you, unless you read it in His Word and believed it.

The vast majority of believers, for their entire Christian lives, are unaware of the spiritual circumcision and baptism, because they never choose to read and believe what God tells them about this. This tells us that we must read God’s Word, believe it, and let the Holy Spirit teach it to us, in order to be led by the Spirit.

### **What Satan does when you are saved**

Of course, Satan does not want believers to be led by the Spirit. That is why he has corrupted God’s Word with many modern versions. He has gotten most Christians to ignore the Bible, opting for man’s philosophies, “Christian” books, scholarly commentaries, feel-good worship services, pastoral blasphemies, and feelings from prayer and from other Christians they trust.

Satan does this by the same method that he used before you were saved. Since you still have vile flesh after you are saved, he uses “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (I John 2:16) to get you to live in sin, just as if you were never saved in the first place.

The difference is that, since you are now part of a church, he has to get you to do church things to follow the flesh, rather than doing worldly things. So, instead of getting physically drunk at a bar on Saturday night, he

gets you spiritually drunk at a church on Sunday morning.

The church sings songs that make you feel good, instead of giving you sound doctrine. The preacher then makes you feel bad so that you will give a lot of money in the offering. It's the classic 1-2 punch. Then, you live your life the rest of the week. Instead of cheating, lying, and cursing, you condemn others. After all, they are not good church goin' folks like you are. You make yourself sound godly by listening to preachers on the radio and reading "Christian" books, all the while avoiding reading and believing the truth of God's Word. You pray to God every day, but the prayers are for physical things, such as physical healing for someone, wanting to have a good day, or asking for traveling mercies with a hedge of protection around you.

The point is that all of these things are just works of the flesh. All you have done is gone from human evil to human good. You are not being led by the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit, then, is redefined. Instead of reading God's Word, believing it, and letting the Holy Spirit teach it to you, "being led by the Spirit," means praying about something that you want until you get an inner feeling that God wants you to have it. You can then proclaim to others that "God has called me to be in the worship team at church. God wants me to go into children's ministries. God wants me to be a missionary. etc."

### **How prayer really works**

One common prayer is over who God would lead me to marry. Since God only speaks to us through His Word, let's look at how God's Word addresses this situation. I Corinthians 7 tells us all we need to know about making the decision to marry or to stay single. First, we are told it is best not to get married (vs. 1, 7). However, if sexual sin is going to be a problem for you if you stay single, then you should get married (vs. 2, 8). However, since God treats us like adults, God does not command us one



way or the other on the issue (v. 25). You can stay single or get married (v. 28). If you do get married, there will be trouble in the flesh (v. 28), but, compared with eternity, our life on earth is not long, so, a little trouble now, in the view of eternity, is no big deal (vs. 29-31). The only commands given by God are that, if you do get married, make sure you marry a fellow Christian (v. 39), and, in this day and age, I also must mention the command to marry someone of the opposite sex (Genesis 2:23-24; Ephesians 5:22,25).

So, if you want to get married, consider all of these factors. If, after considering these factors, you decide to get married, make sure the other person is a Christian, and you are okay. You may say, “That person is too short, too skinny, too old, too young, has a different personality, likes different things, etc. I need someone compatible.” The truth is that God made men and women different. Because of this, ALL married couples “SHALL have trouble in the flesh” (v. 28). No man and woman are compatible, because God made them different. Also, if you do not pick the perfect spouse, that’s okay, because life on this earth is a drop in the bucket compared to eternity in heaven. If you want to apply other factors to your decision in marrying someone, that is fine, but do not drag God into this!

All of this means that God has already given you His view on marriage and singleness. Since His Word is complete, He will say no more to you on the subject, even though you pray to Him until your knees are sore and you have laryngitis.

Prayer, then, is NOT talking to God about circumstances, and waiting for some “burning in the bosom” or an inner peace that will tell you what to do. If you go by that, you are going by your flesh and your emotions, because God is not speaking to you that way today. Therefore, you are just following the works of the flesh, as unbelievers do. Rather, Ephesians 6:17-18 tells us to take “the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in

the Spirit.” Thus, we pray the Word of God to God as a way of talking out what God has said on a subject to make a good decision. We do not wait for God to tell us something, because He has already given us all of the information that we need in His Word. He has already “abounded toward us in ALL wisdom and prudence” (Ephesians 1:8). ALL means ALL. God is not going to tell you any more than He already has in His Word.

Because God is a Spirit (John 4:24), we have been given the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), and the Holy Spirit teaches us the spiritual things of God (I Corinthians 2:11-13); therefore, our prayers should also be about spiritual things. Pray for God to enlighten your understanding, to know the things of God found in Paul’s epistles (Ephesians 1:18). Pray that you may be strengthened in the inner man and know the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:16-21).

God is not going to manipulate circumstances to bless you materially. In fact, if God were to manipulate circumstances, He would make you suffer materially. Romans 8:26 says, “the Spirit also HELPETH our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” If you do not have a spiritual perspective, you need to suffer in the flesh in order to gain that perspective. Paul is an example. He had a “thorn in the flesh.” He prayed 3 times for God to remove it, and every time, God said, “No” (II Corinthians 12:7-9). The reason is so “that the power of Christ may rest upon” him (II Corinthians 12:9). Thus, physical suffering makes us weak in the flesh, so that Christ can be strong through us (II Corinthians 12:10). So, if you insist on praying about physical ailments, pray for those ailments to increase so that you will place your hope in the things of God, rather than the things of this world!

### **The “unreached” peoples**

In reaching his decision to become president of the missionary organization, David Platt emphasized that his

goal is to reach the “unreached peoples.” The scripture he uses to support this is Romans 15:20-21, which says, “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation: But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.”

### **Different foundations**

First, there is nothing wrong with building upon another man’s foundation. The reason Paul did not do it was because he was specifically called as “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) to bear the Lord’s “name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul was given a different gospel than the other apostles. Paul had the gospel of the uncircumcision, and the 12 apostles had the gospel of the circumcision (Galatians 2:7). Recognizing God’s special call to Paul, the 12 apostles agreed to only go to the circumcision, while Paul would go to everyone else, i.e., the heathen (Galatians 2:9). Because two, different gospels were being preached, Paul was careful not to go where one of the 12 apostles had built a foundation, because their foundation was different from Paul’s foundation, since Paul was given a different gospel, to reconcile man to God in heavenly places, while the 12 apostles preached a gospel to reconcile Israel to God in earthly places. We see this, just two verses before David’s quote, in Romans 15:18, where Paul says, “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me.” Why? Because they were not part of his program. Therefore, when he says he would go “not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20), he means he does not want to take a foundation of Israel in God’s earthly kingdom and build upon that foundation the information relating to the church, the body of Christ, in God’s heavenly kingdom.

Paul's job was to lay the foundation of the gospel of grace for the body of Christ (Acts 20:24). If a different foundation had been laid, it was a different building, i.e., Israel's building for God's earthly kingdom, and so he did not try to build upon it. If you are building a skyscraper, you need a different foundation than if you are building a garden home. A garden-home builder would not build a house on a skyscraper foundation. Similarly, Paul would not build the house of the church, the body of Christ, upon the foundation of Israel's earthly house.

Paul was given his gospel by revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). He was commissioned to go to the unsaved, i.e., the heathen, with that gospel. He says, "that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (I Timothy 1:16). Therefore, we see Paul saying, "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon" (I Corinthians 3:10). So, there was nothing wrong with someone else building upon another man's foundation, because Paul had no problem with others building upon his foundation. It was just that Paul was specifically commissioned to lay the foundation of salvation in today's mystery program for the church, the body of Christ. Because he was careful to fulfill that commission, he went only to places where Christ had not yet been named. He would "not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by" him (Romans 15:18).

Now, with regard to the different foundations, Paul says that, in regard to today's dispensation of grace, "the household of God...[is] "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20). These would be the apostles and prophets that God gave to the church (Ephesians 4:11) until God's Word was completed (Ephesians 4:13). Their job was to identify which of Paul's writings were of the Lord and, therefore, should be included in scripture (I Corinthians 14:37). Thus, the foundation that Paul built was God's Word to him for the

church, the body of Christ. The foundation that Peter built was Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter, "That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." The "rock" is Christ, according to I Corinthians 10:4. Therefore, Christ is the foundation for Israel's program, while God's Word, with Christ being the chief cornerstone, is the foundation for today's mystery program for the body of Christ.

Therefore, what Paul said in Romans 15:20-21 related specifically to the ministry the Lord had given to him as the pattern for the dispensation of grace, and he was careful not to mix his program with Israel's program, since both were going on at the same time. As such, these verses should not be used today.

### **Unreached peoples?**

Moreover, Paul does not say he would go to "unreached peoples." He said he would not go to "where Christ was named" (Romans 15:20), meaning that he would not go to people, who had already heard the gospel of the kingdom that relates to Israel's program.

The Bible tells us that there are no unreached peoples. In referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, John 1:9 says, "That was the true Light, which lighteth EVERY man that cometh into the world." Romans 1:19-21 gives more detail. It says, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." Therefore, on judgment day, those, who have never heard to believe in Jesus' death as atonement for their sins, cannot use the excuse that they should receive eternal life based on their ignorance. Rather, they can still receive eternal life by recognizing God and worshipping Him. Therefore, God has reached every single man with a gospel that will save

them, even if man has not come along and shared Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection with them.

In fact, Matthew 23:15 says that the religious people of Jesus' day would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." So, actually, so-called "unreached peoples" are better off not hearing about Christianity, if that Christianity does not proclaim a clear, saving gospel to them. Therefore, if anything, missionary work should be decreased or eliminated, rather than trying to increase it, especially work done by David Platt, since his best-selling book "Radical," mentions the word "gospel" many times, but never tells anyone what the gospel is.

### **Numbers 13-14**

David mentioned that his wife told him of Numbers 13-14 to remind him that nothing is too big for God. Therefore, God can work through the bureaucracy of a large organization.

We must note that this example does not apply today. When God called Abraham and started the nation of Israel, God said: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Genesis 13:15). Later on, God told Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Genesis 15:14). Therefore, God had specifically told Israel what land was theirs, and they would come out of Egypt after 400 years with great substance. This was fulfilled before Numbers 13-14.

Then, when God told Moses to send spies out to look at the Promised Land in Numbers 13-14, He specifically told them, "Go up and possess the land which I have given you" (Deuteronomy 9:23). So, we see that God

promised to give Israel the land, they had to wait 400 years, and then God commanded them to possess the land, once those 400 years had ended. Israel was to rely upon God's promise to them and go into the land.

David Platt, however, received no such promise from God. God did not speak to his ancestors 400 years prior and tell them that, 400 years later, one of their descendents is to become president of the IMB to reach the "unreached peoples" for Jesus. God did not speak anything outside of his word. Therefore, the example of Numbers 13-14 does not apply, in this case.

People will say, "Numbers 13-14 just shows that nothing is too big for God. God can save millions of unreached peoples through David taking the position as president of IMB." That is true. Nothing is too big for God, which means that that reasoning can be used for any argument. I could say, "I am going to fly to the Iraqi president's mansion and proclaim the gospel to him. He may believe and then abolish the Muslim religion. After all, nothing is too big for God. God can do it!" Or, I could say, "I am going to contact the president of the United States and convince him to divert all tax dollars to my church, and then we will use the money to reach the world for Jesus. After all, nothing is too big for God. Would you dare to limit God by saying this cannot be done?" As you can see, "nothing is too big for God" is not valid reasoning to use in following a specific course of action, because that argument can be used for anything. God gave His Word and the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16), and He expects us to use both of them!

### **The Gideon example**

The Gideon example, that David Platt used, is even worse than the Numbers 13-14 example. The Lord specifically said to Gideon: "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (Judges 6:14). Thus, like Israel in the

wilderness, Gideon was specifically told by God to do a specific task.

Gideon responded in unbelief. He came up with any excuse he could find not to follow God's command. First, he asked for a sign that the Lord talked with him (Judges 6:17). Second, he set out a fleece and asked God to have dew fall only on the fleece (Judges 6:37). Third, he set out a fleece and asked God to have dew fall everywhere except on the fleece (Judges 6:39). Deuteronomy 6:16 commanded him not to tempt the Lord, and he did so 3 times. Why would ANYONE use a tempter of God as an example to follow, especially since God never specifically told David Platt to become president of the IMB, and David never asked for or received specific signs to confirm that he should go there?

### **III. How did David do?**

What we can conclude is that, since God does not speak outside of His Word and His Word has been completed, God did not call David Platt to become the president of IMB.

Let us now comment on each step that David took:

- 1) God could not have given David a clear "no" 4 years ago, because God does not speak to anyone outside of His Word.
- 2) Any convictions in his heart to be on the mission field came from his feelings. Since God works in your spirit through the Holy Spirit to change your soul and cause you to walk in the Spirit through your flesh, God was not using feelings to convict David of anything. If he was using feelings as his guide, then he was being controlled by Satan's forces, not by God.



- 3) If Satan is using feelings to get David to go to the IMB, it is not unreasonable to believe that Satan was behind the decision of the current president to step down. Even if Satan was not behind that decision, the fact that he was leaving made no difference to God, as long as his decision was in line with God's will for salvation and sanctification of believers.
- 4) Intensified emotion regarding a decision just means that, the more David contemplated the job, the more he liked the idea and the more he wanted to take it. This is following feelings to lead him, when he should be allowing the Holy Spirit to lead him through His Word, instead.
- 5) We do not know David's friend's motivation in sending him the article on James Madison. However, it is reasonable to conclude that David had discussed the possibility of the new job with his friend, and his friend's reading of the article reminded him of David's situation, since David's situation was on his mind. Plus, if God does not speak to man outside of His Word, He certainly does not speak to man through another man's article on an American patriot.
- 6) As we already concluded, Numbers 13-14 applies to a specific situation of God fulfilling a promise to Israel. God had made no such promise to David about missions or the IMB.
- 7) Given that the IMB wanted David to become their president 4 years earlier, it should come as no surprise that they are still interested in him. This shows they think he would be a good man for the job. It does not show that God is leading David to take the job.

- 8) Comparing yourself to leading 2 million people into God's Promised Land is a very egotistical thing to do. The truth is that the Bible is full of verses that point to life in Christ, because the whole Bible is about Christ. So, David could have preached on pretty much anything the week before and made a parallel between what he preached on and how becoming the new IMB president presents him with the opportunity to lead others to Christ.
- 9) David has already said that he is very passionate about being on the front lines of the missionary field. He met with 800-900 people, who share that same passion. Naturally, they will hit it off. If I were a race car owner and I met with 800-900 NASCAR fans, everything would mesh together. It is not that God is leading David to become president. It is that he had a good time together with 800-900 likeminded people.
- 10) This is the funniest "sign" of them all. The book of Judges is all about Israel straying from God, God sending a deliverer, the people getting right with God, and then Israel straying from God again and repeating the cycle. Each time, it is harder and harder to find a deliverer, Israel strays farther and farther from God, and the book ends, telling us that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Gideon is someone who almost had to be knocked on the side of the head before he would obey God. To get a good confirmation to become president of IMB out of the book of Judges shows that David is searching for "spiritual" reasons to accept the position, rather than rationally thinking of what is the best way to accomplish God's will of getting people saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4).
- 11) A man, in the church, certainly does not speak for God. He is giving his opinion on what David

should do. If he were to think through things logically and give scripture to support his conclusions, David should definitely listen to him. However, the fact, that he said that David is “destined” for the position, shows that he is just following the same, crazy superstitions that David is following. As Paul says in Acts 17:22, “I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.” Destiny is a philosophy of the unsaved. It belongs nowhere in the thought process of Christians.

12) David quotes Psalm 131:2, saying he wants to be a weaned child of the Lord. This shows his lack of maturity and trying to hang on to any scripture he can find to support his decision. Galatians 4 says that “a child, differeth nothing from a servant,” but we have received the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:1,5). “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). Therefore, today, God views us as full-grown adults, rather than as weaned children, which is why He has given us the Holy Spirit to point us to the things of the Father (Galatians 4:6). God expects us to read His Word and allow the Holy Spirit to teach sound doctrine to us so that we can make our own decisions (I Corinthians 2:10-13). If we do this, I Corinthians 2:15 says that we judge ALL things ourselves. We use the principles in Paul’s epistles to make decisions, rather than asking for God to give us an inner feeling and outer confirmation of a specific decision to make. Psalm 131 says that the weaned child, that David wants to be like, does not exercise himself “in great matters, or in things too high for me” (Psalm 131:1). Yet, as adult sons of God, there are no things too high for us, because we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21). There is

no position higher than that! Therefore, no things are too high for the full-grown heirs of God. God does not want you to be a child. He wants you to “watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (I Corinthians 16:13). The fact that David is going back to being a weaned child, shows he is completely discarding who he is in Christ and acting like Israel, when they were Satan’s lawful captive (Isaiah 49:24-25). In fact, the verse just before I Corinthians 16:13 says that Paul greatly desired for Apollos to come to the Corinthians “but HIS will was not at all to come at this time” (I Corinthians 16:12). Paul does not go into a scathing rebuke of Apollos for going against what Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), wanted him to do. Rather, he recognizes Apollos’ liberty in Christ and simply says, “He will come when he shall have convenient time” (I Corinthians 16:12).

13) Since David looked for an inner feeling from God in prayer, no doubt the rest of the “elders” at the Church at Brook Hills did the same thing. Since David mentioned to the IMB search team some of the reasons, here, for him to become their president and they still put him in the position, it shows that they were praying in a similar manner, too. Therefore, the only result that would come out of these prayers is what they themselves want to do. Now, the elders at Brook Hills probably do not want David to leave. Nevertheless, to stand up and say, “The Lord told me that David should stay here,” would be met with great opposition. The person would be accused of going against the will of God and may even be kicked out of the church. Considering that \$4.7 million annually is spent on personnel at Brook Hills, I am sure none of the high-paid elders would want to lose their jobs, especially when all they have to do is agree with their boss that he should take a different job. Someone would have to be very sure that the Lord

told David to stay as pastor, in order to stand out in opposition. Since God does not speak outside of His Word, the Lord would not tell anyone that. Therefore, all agreed that David should take the position as president of IMB.

- 14)The IMB trustees seem like the only people in this process that used as least some sound reasoning, yet they still relied upon inner feelings, which are not from God, to reach their final decision. They were probably motivated with getting someone in there with connections to the mission field so the organization could be more effective, and David Platt has those connections, making him a good choice.
- 15)By saying he felt “constrained” by the Spirit, David is using a term of a child, under the law, rather than a full-grown son under grace (Romans 6:14). Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bonadage.” II Corinthians 3:17 says, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Since we have liberty in the Spirit, we should never feel “constrained” by the Spirit to do anything! The only “constraint” we should have is the love of Christ (II Corinthians 5:14), not a constraining by the Spirit to go to a certain place or do a specific job.
- 16)As we have already mentioned, there are no “unreached people” groups in the world, since all know God. David is probably referring to Matthew 24:14, which says, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” This refers to the end of the tribulation period, which is part of Israel’s program. It does NOT refer to us today or the rapture. If David wants to follow Israel’s program, he should “go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans

enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). And, God will take care of all nations hearing the gospel of the kingdom, because the little flock will go only to Israel, and they “shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” (Matthew 10:23). Therefore, if Jesus’ instructions in Matthew apply to us today, David should confine his missionary efforts to the cities of Israel. Rather, if David’s goal is to hasten the rapture, the event that brings about the rapture is “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25). This takes place by getting Christians to learn “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hid in Christ (Colossians 2:3) so that they may occupy the heavenly positions that Satan and his forces will be kicked out of.

- 17) The practical application that David leaves the church with is for them to pray for what God would have them to do, look for circumstances to confirm this, and let your feelings be your guide, surrendering to whatever it is that they come up with. Then, if they abide in that, they will be doing God’s will. This is NOT being led by the Spirit. Rather, it is being led by your own flesh, which is a no-no, since, “in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). This means it is impossible to serve the Lord using the methods that David used to figure out what God wants him to do.

## **Conclusion**

The tragic thing is that David’s view is not in the minority. Most Christians would agree with David’s method, even though scripture shows that every step is out of line in how the Holy Spirit leads you to serve Christ. So, you may ask, how could most Christians, and, especially the leader of a mega church, get this wrong? The answer is “the flesh.”

Becoming a missionary, a worship pastor, a senior pastor, helping around the church, and helping out charities are some of the most popular things that Christians do to “serve the Lord.” All of these involve pride. If you want to reach unsaved people, read Paul’s epistles, and allow the doctrine to strengthen you in the inner man to control the flesh, so that people will notice a change in you, giving you an opportunity to share the gospel. Becoming a missionary involves taking vacation from your job, paying for a plane ticket and other expenses, and learning a little bit of a foreign language. Then, you end up talking to complete strangers in a language you do not know well, and they have no idea whether or not the gospel works, because they have not seen it worked out through your life. You could reach many more people and have greater success if you use that money to share the gospel locally.

But, becoming a missionary feeds into pride, because you get to stand in front of the church after it is all over, talk about the sacrifices you made, and talk about the great things God did, while you were there. The same holds true for other popular ways of serving Christ. Pastors are in front of the church. Those helping out the church or helping out other organizations can brag about the great things they are doing for God. If you truly are being led by the Spirit by reading Paul’s epistles and allowing the doctrine to change your behavior, although unsaved people will notice, the people in your church will not notice, because they are too busy trying to outdo you with their works of the flesh. As Paul says in Galatians 5:25-26, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Since their goal is to outdo each other, Christians act as David did to show their spirituality. It sounds like he is much more spiritual and godly if he bases a decision on fervent prayer and seeking God’s will, as opposed to

making logical, rational decisions by using the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16).

Contrast the two ways of announcing his decision to take the job:

- 1) “God made it abundantly clear to me through prayer, discussion with godly people, and circumstances that He has constrained me to take the job as president of IMB. I will surrender and abide in God’s will.”
- 2) “I thought about it. I could make some pretty good money, sitting behind a desk, if I took the job. Plus, I would not have to deal with all of the problems of people attending the church. And, people are still being reached with the gospel in other countries. That eases my conscience so that it seems like I am serving God. So, I think I’ll take the job.”

Of course, the first scenario sounds much more godly than the second scenario, and the first scenario is a summary of what David Platt said to the church, two weeks before he left. Therefore, Christians have devised methods to appear godly to others in order to do what they want to do. After all, if the Lord directly spoke to you about something, who am I to question the Lord? Colossians 2:23 says these “things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility and neglecting of the body; not in any honour,” but the real result is “the satisfying of the flesh.”

We see this in how Christians cloak their fleshly actions in Christianese to make their actions appear godly. Colossians 2:20-22 shows the Colossians following a bunch of rules, which are really “the commandments and doctrines of men.” As such, they are “vainly puffed up by [their] fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:18).



So, if you want to really do the Lord's will, don't get "vainly puffed up by [your] fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18) by following what the Christian religion says is the godly way. Rather, use the mind of Christ, given to you by God (I Corinthians 2:16), to read God's Word, rightly divided, recognizing that only Paul's epistles are specifically written to you. Doing so will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the deep things of God to you (I Corinthians 2:9-13) so that you make the "reasonable" decision to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Romans 12:1) so that you walk in the "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Forget about a burning in the bosom, an inner voice, and confirming circumstances, and simply read God's Word and believe it. That is how you walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). The specifics are up to you, based on your talents and desires.