In the period of time where most of the principles of harmony were summed up (roughly 1600–1900), voice-leading was definitely one of the most important considerations for composers, improvisers, etc. Certain types of similar motion (especially, the similar motion of any 2 parts in octaves, 5ths, or unisons) were pretty much avoided.

To understand this it would help to know a little something about the music that existed before 1600. Here is an extremely simplified résumé: (By the way, the period of 1600-1900 is generally referred to as the Common Practice Period).

1) Harmony, on the idea of more than one note being sounded at the same time, did not come along until the 9th century. Up until then, music was Monophonic, that is only one melody line at a time was heard. Even if 40 people were singing (early music was primarily vocal music), they would all be singing the same note. Much of the music of this type that survives are in the category known as Gregorian chant(s) (also known as Plain Chant(s) or Plain Song(s)).

Example: (a simplified imitation of one) A later development was the singing in octaves of these chants.

![Example of Gregorian chant](image1)

2) In the 9th century, experiments were begun with what is known as Organum (or-gan-um), which was the beginning of Harmony. Organum consisted of adding a 2nd melody a perfect 4th below (or perfect 5th above) the original melody.

![Example of Organum](image2)

Sometimes the new melody and/or the original would be doubled an octave away. Also, experiments were done with drone basses.

![Example of Organum with drone bass](image3)

More experiments were tried with intervals of 4ths and 5ths (like putting 4ths above the original and 5ths below). Then two or three hundred years later, the element of Contrary Motion of the different parts was experimented with in the 2nd main kind of harmonic writing which is sometimes called Free Organum. The same intervals were mainly used (that is unisons, octaves, 4ths, 5ths) but now sometimes in contrary motion:

Example: (Also notice the different time values.)

![Example of Free Organum](image4)
There were quite a few other subtle developments before the 17th century, and when one compares the music of say Bach, which all this was eventually going to lead up to, with these earlier types of sounds, an immediate difference to be noticed is that all these bare, open-sounding 4th and 5th intervals and parallel lines have been replaced with triads, 7th chords, and totally independent melodic lines (these features actually were pretty well established by about the end of the 15th century, except for 7th chords).

Apparently, there was a gradual displeasure with the sound of so much parallelism and limited use of intervals, so that musicians kept growing farther and farther away from these sounds until finally rules were established that said: No two parts may move in parallel octaves, 5ths, or unisons; which brings us to the main reason for this page: Whether or not to utilize parallel octaves, 5ths, and unisons on guitar when working with harmony of the Common Practice Period.

It is really up to each individual as to how much, if any, he wishes to use these sounds – some may like these sounds more than others. However, I humbly offer this suggestion: at least be aware of how to avoid these sounds. The reason? You will have more choices in any situation where parallels would normally occur and also, the avoidance of parallels can produce some very attractive sounds that would not occur to one who always has used parallels without further investigation.

Observe:

![Musical notation](image)

Much experimenting and study will be necessary if you want to always avoid the old parallels, because the guitar is a very parallel-oriented instrument in its physical layout. But if you are like most people, you won’t mind an occasional parallel octave or 5th.

As an interesting sidelight, ever since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the advent of the music of Claude Debussy, most music has gone back to lots of parallel everything. Debussy, in a style coined Impressionism, brought out many beautiful effects through various parallel devices using pentatonic scales, exotic chords, chord streams, and other fresh approaches; but all this is another story and will have to be saved for a later time.
In the period of time where most of the principles of harmony were
worked out (roughly 1600-1700), voice leading was definitely
one of the most important considerations for composers, improvisers, etc.
Certain types of similar motion (especially, the similar motion of any
2 parts in octaves, 5ths, or unisons) were pretty much avoided.

To understand this it would help to know a little something
about the music that existed before 1600. Here is an extremely simplified
resume of that period (the period 1600-1700 is generally referred to as the COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD).

(1) Harmony, or the idea of more than one note being sounded at the
same time, did not come along until the 9th century. Up until then,
the music was MONOPHONIC, that is only one melody line at a time was heard.
Even if 40 people were singing (early music was primarily vocal music),
they would all be singing the same note. Much of the music of this type
that survives is in the category known as Gregorian chant (also known as
Plain Chant or Plainsong). Example: (a simplified imitation of one)

A later development was the singing in
octaves of these chants.

(2) In the 9th century, experiments were begun with what is known as ORGANUM (or-kan-um),
which was the beginning of HARMONY. Organum consisted of adding a second melody
a perfect 4th below the original melody,
or perfect 5th above:

Sometimes the new melody
and for the original
would be doubled
an octave away:

More experiments were
tried with intervals of 4ths & 5ths (like putting 4ths above the
original & 5ths below). Then two or three hundred years
later, the element of CONTRARY MOTION of the different parts was
experimented with in the 2nd and main kind of harmonic writing
which is sometimes called FREE ORGANUM. The same intervals were mainly used (that
of unisons, octaves, 4ths, 5ths) but now sometimes in contrary motion:

(Also notice the
different time values
and duration)

There were quite a few other subtle developments before
the 17th century, and when one compares the music of
this period, one will see how much of these concepts were
already in place:

(3) In the 15th century, parallel lines (the features actually were pretty well established by about the end of
the 15th century, except for 7th chords). Apparently, there was a gradual disappearance with the
appearance of so much parallelism and limited use of intervals, so that musicians kept
moving further and further away from those sounds until finally rules were established
that said: no two parts may move in parallel octaves, 5ths or unisons, which brings us
up to the main reason for this page: whether or not to utilize parallel octaves, 5ths, unisons
or parallel major or minor thirds, 6ths on chorus in a manner:

(4) Much experimenting & study will be of
necessity if you want to avoid the old parallel lines because the guitar
is a very parallel-oriented instrument
in its typical layout. But if you were
like most people, using mind an
occasional parallel octaves or 5ths

As an interesting sidetrack, even since the late 19th & early 20th centuries, with the
advent of the music of CLAUDE DEBUSSY, most music has gone back to lots of
parallel everything. by using, in a style coined IMPRESSIONISM, not only many
beauties effects, through various parallel devices, using pentatonic scales, etc.
will have to be used for a later time.