

# Comparing Evangelical Religion With Spiritual Reality

Evangelical religion is rooted in the Word of God. It believes in and preaches the Gospel and belief in Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. That is good and as it should be. The difficulty comes when the believer attempts to live a Christian life through self-effort. I grew up under that teaching: God is in heaven, Jesus is seated at His right hand and He sent the Holy Spirit to help you live a Christian life. It was often stated that you needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but no one seemed to know how to make that happen. So for my experience it seemed necessary to settle for studying the Bible to learn how a Christian life should look, begging the Holy Spirit to somehow help, trying real hard, failing and then developing a Church face to make everything look OK. All the time that awful sense of guilt and emptiness lurked about just about the way Paul described it in *Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.* That could accurately be called "The Imaginary Christian Life" — with my mind I dream about doing it, but in reality I go on bound by the Law of Sin and Death.

The outcomes and frustrations of this misguided life include bondage to sin, a lack of joy, a lack of love, no or weak soul-winning ability, failed relationships, minimal sense of purpose and difficulty in worship. This is all a big problem, but when an entire Church is struggling this way it becomes tragic. I was born again at the age of five, but I did not know how to live an authentic Christian Life until I was 38. I started preaching just before turning 18 and quickly learned to emulate what I heard from well meaning preachers with the consequence of presenting a "striving" message. You know: "You should", "you failed", "I challenge you", "just do it", "work harder, longer", "discipline yourself", "apply this to your life".

Remember that all of this is anchored in the Word of God and that's great. Is it ever possible to mishandle the Word and thus miss the truth? Look at Jesus' words to the religionists of His day:

*John 5:39 "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;  
40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."*

The Word of God is powerful, it's alive, it does innumerable things, but the life is in Jesus. As important as Bible Study is it should never be an end in itself. The Bible — logos — is the exhaling of God. So is Jesus, the Eternal Word of God. He said this about the words that He

spoke: John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." That is, He intends His Word to produce life, not just knowledge. He wants His printed Word to bring us to Jesus the personal Word who is the life.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Word of God is spiritual, not natural, and is to be handled by the Holy Spirit who can bring it to life in any surrendered believer.

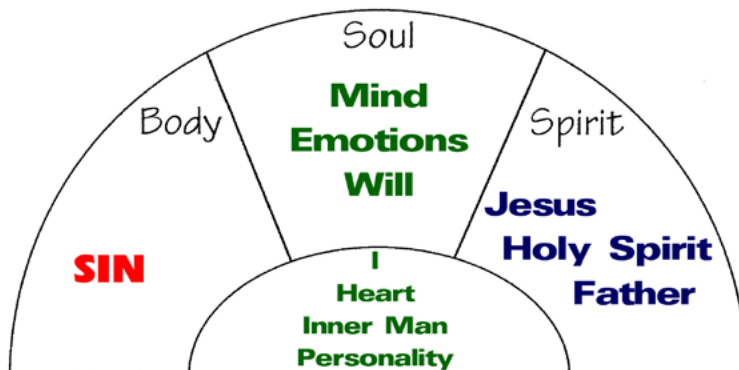
*1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

In his second letter he shared more insight into ministry and the adequacy to fulfill it:

*2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?*

The point of tension here is between the natural and the spiritual. They are mutually exclusive and until the handler of the Word of God comes into the fullness of the Spirit while laying down natural (soulish) tools and methods, death will be the result. Moses ministered death because God gave the Law through him. He was obedient and faithful as he delivered a heavy load of rules that no one but Jesus has ever kept. The rules weren't meant to impart life, rather to impose a sense of guilt and inability that would ultimately bring people to Jesus. That being true, his face still glowed from being in the presence of God.

We are under a new covenant and it's not about letters of the alphabet and words, rather the teaching of the Spirit of God. The glory comes when the preacher lays down his self-reliance, receives the Holy Spirit in fullness and ministers not from the soul, but from the Spirit. Let me use a diagram to help explain:



This is a picture of a born again Christian. Jesus is joined to his spirit **1 Corinthians 6:17**, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit **1 Corinthians 12:13**, and the Father dwells in him as well **John 14:23**. Sin lives in his body, specifically in the blood and it constantly tries to rule him. He was born with natural (soul) life and until he learns to live in the Spirit he tries to do everything out of his soul (heart or inner man). That natural life is the soul life that Jesus said must be laid down if a person wants to be a disciple **Matthew 16:24,25**. When soul life is renounced and Jesus becomes the Life everything is different.

This was the part I had never heard of in thirty some years of being a believer and wanting desperately to live for God. God used a number of people and circumstances to bring me to the morning when John 14:6 suddenly stated it all in total clarity.

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*

I was good with the "way" and "truth" parts, but that "life" thing had never made sense. God touched me with a spirit of revealing and I suddenly saw that just as Jesus is the way to heaven He **IS** the life. By that time I had known so many lost people I had tried to lead to faith in Christ who just couldn't see how Jesus could be the way. They wanted to acknowledge that but go on in their best efforts to get to heaven. I realized that all of my efforts to apply the Bible to my life and put together a Christian life were the same prideful, natural behavior that kept people from the Savior.

The Book of Galatians was first written to believers who were confused in the same way — they trusted Jesus for salvation from sin and eternal life, but tried everything to keep the law as a means of growth in Christ. Paul called them foolish and bewitched:

*Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

He went on to explain:

*Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

Paul said, "I (my soul life) have been crucified with Christ (that means I'm dead), it's no longer I who live, but Christ now lives in and through me and as I continue to live on earth it is Christ's life manifesting in and through me so that I can live by the faith of the Son of God."

You don't have to strive and stress and struggle, rather declare yourself dead with Jesus and resurrected into His brand new life. Absolutely surrender to Him and He will come into your heart and begin to live the Christ life through you. Suddenly you will experience spiritual reality — no more faking it, no more trying to force yourself to do things that you haven't had the capacity to do. No, you are now in the place of freedom and success with the old hypocrisy thrown

away as the life you are now living matches the teaching of Scripture. Remember, only the Christ can live the Christian life.

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