

Articles and Sermons :: LIFE IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE by Ralph Sutera

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**LIFE IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by Ralph Sutera

The title of this message is "LIFE IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE." For a background Scripture, read Mark 8:31-38. When we come into the family of God we have an option. The tragedy is that many do not choose to walk the Spirit-controlled life, by the Cross of Christ, which is the Calvary road. Rather, many live by the cross of self, a self-controlled life. This kind of life may have a little bit of growth pattern in it. The tragedy is that the devil gives you the impression that you're making real progress because you're making some progress. Even though you're making little progress, still it's a self-controlled life. (NOTE: This message was given as a visual presentation.)

As believers we will live by one of the two crosses: the CROSS of Christ or the CROSS of self. Notice the contrasts:

THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS:                      THE CROSS OF SELF IS:

The Calvary road Gal. 6:14	OR The carnal road I Cor. 3:1-3
A life of substance Jn. 10:10	OR A mere shadow of reality II Pet. 1:9
A life of total victory--not meaning that all the problems are gone, but learning total dependence on God in the midst of all the problems II Cor. 2:14	OR A life of partial victory, literally meaning that victory is always incomplete, or most of the time incomplete, and is very spasmodic Gal. 5:7
Almost constant victory with an occasional defeat Matt. 11:28-30; II Cor. 3:6	OR Almost constant defeat with an occasional victory Jas. 1:8; 4:6; II Cor. 3:6

That's the difference. The Calvary road, the cross of Christ--the Spirit-controlled life is a life of blessing. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me...for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30). This yoke and burden become a blessing.

The cross of self--is a burden, as the problem of a double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways (Jas. 1:8; 4:8). In II Corinthians 3:6 "the letter of the law killeth"; in verse 17 "the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." That's the kind of blessing in contrast to the letter of the law killing, the cold letter of the law, even evangelical terminology of knowing the Scriptures. What a burden that is. When a killing process is taking place in the life of the carnally-minded Christian, all the outward "right" acts may be there, but a killing process is taking place. That's the tragedy of "Mr. Average Christian."

The life at the cross of Christ is one with Christ in control. II Corinthians 3:5 states that the letter of the law kills. But the next verse (6) talks about the tremendous truth that our sufficiency is of Christ. It is a life of obedience, and it is God's way for us to live. That is why the Apostle Paul says, O, "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). This is God's way for us to live. The characteristics of the Spirit-controlled man are clearly seen in the Apostle Paul's philosophy of life in II Corinthians 5:5-21.

The cross of self is characterized by self-ownership, self-deceit, with our lives filled with our own ways. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...and ye are not your own" (I Cor. 6:19). God is saying through St. Paul, "Don't you have enough sense to know that your body is not yours but it's the temple of the Holy Ghost?" The man who lives by the cross of self never recognizes his life is not his own; it's a life of self-deceit because he is a hearer of the Word and not a doer.

The Apostle Paul's testimony settles five issues:

- The issue of Eternity (v:8). It is clearly seen in how he was ready to live or die.
- The issue of Commitment (v:9-10). His whole desire was that "I may be accepted of him"--please his God. He was consciously aware of the judgment seat of Christ, and thus labored diligently.
- The issue of Involvement (v:11). Knowing the terror of the Lord and judgment to come, his urgent desire was to persuade

de men.

- The issue of Motivation (v:14). "The love of Christ constraineth us." He is saying, "It holds me in a vice. He knew that as a personal conviction, because the love of Christ was the motivating force in his life.

- The issue of Calvary (v: 14b-17). He said that Christ died for all, and now he lives because Christ died, no longer for self but unto Him. No wonder he says that even though he knew Christ after the flesh, now he knew Him no more like that. Now he knew Christ in a whole new way, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Here is something about II Corinthians 5:17 that we must understand. It does not say that all things are passed away, and old things become new. It does NOT say that. It says that "old things are passed away" and "all things are become new." Keep those words straight! Keep the words "all" and "old" straight! Because that's the mistake. We've purported the idea that when you become a Christian "all things are passed away." When a new believer does not find that to be so, he gets discouraged and tosses in the towel and says that Christianity doesn't work. He thought "all things are passed away." The old things have passed away, but not all things. Then what does it say? "All things are become new."

What does this mean? It literally means that many old things in our life pass away; the things we once loved, now we hate; the things we hate, now we begin to love. But it does not happen overnight that old things are passed away. When God begins to change our attitude toward many old things in our life, they also pass away.

Then it says, "all things are become new." Does it mean that everything is changed? No! It means that we have a whole new perspective on everything in our life. We see things from a totally different viewpoint. On the basis of the fact that we have different eyeglasses on, our judgments now are from a totally different perspective. We see things from a different vantage point, the viewpoint of eternity. The Christian life is the process of working that out one step at a time.

In the rest of that chapter the Apostle Paul talks about having a new ministry--it's a ministry of reconciliation, it's a word of reconciliation. Then he talks about being an ambassador for Christ, with the realization that it's all because of the finished work of the cross. That's the philosophy of a Spirit-controlled man seen right through that entire chapter, and that's beautiful!

The Bible compares and contrasts THREE CLASSES of people. They are the NATURAL MAN, the CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN, and the SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER.

The FIRST SET OF CHARACTERISTICS for THE NATURAL MAN is that he has the predicament of uncontrollable sin. He sins and can't stop, with no ability to control sin on a rampage in his life. Man by nature has this predicament of uncontrollable sin. If you've never been born again of God's Spirit, that's some predicament--wishing things could be different but there's the problem of uncontrollable sin because of your sinful nature.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN has the predicament of uncontrollable sin, THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has the plague of instability--that means that the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (Jas 1:8; 4:8). The self-controlled man, or the man living by "self" is dominated by self and yet gives agreement to the cross of Christ. He makes profession of one thing but actually lives another life-style, and that's why he's double-minded. So the carnally-minded Christian has the plague of instability with no way to improve it in himself.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN has the predicament of uncontrollable sin, and the CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has the plague of instability, THE SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER enjoys the practice of the presence of God, and that is beauty, stability, and having learned how to enjoy God's presence in his daily experience.

The SECOND SET OF CHARACTERISTICS for each group follows.

THE NATURAL MAN has the plight of personal identity; as an unconverted man he has the plight of really finding out who he is. Do you know why? If he's not willing to accept the Bible account of who he is, he MUST look for humanistic philosophies to tell him who he is. And when he looks he clearly sees that the philosophies of men include the way man by nature seems to be living. Like what? He sees people around him living a very base kind of life-style, and that gives him a worse problem. Not willing to accept God's own terms, and seeing people living such sinful, sensual base lives, he is not sure of whether or not he himself came from an animal as evolution would have him believe.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN has the plight of personal identity, THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has the problem of self-acceptance. He lives wrapped up in carnality and has the problem of personal identity to find out who he is. It is the problem of self-acceptance. He really does not know how to accept himself because of his double-mindedness. And there's constantly an inner turmoil of wondering why God ever saved him to have such a problem. Do you know why? Th

the spirit is willing and the flesh is weak, and he loves to quote that verse but never deals with that carnal nature. Therefore the problem of a right acceptance and a full appreciation of who he really is will never be his. Nobody will ever understand and how to truly accept himself on God's terms until he comes to the end of himself. Man, by carnal nature, is too self-centered to give of himself to others, and it's when you come to the end of yourself that the war within comes to an end.

It is then for the first time in the Christian experience that you begin to have a full appreciation of who you really are in Christ, as the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit begins to function. So the carnally-minded Christian will always have a problem of self-acceptance; he'll never be able to put that together because of that duplicity of his life-style and the instability that it produces.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN has the plight of personal identity, and the CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has the problem of self-acceptance, THE SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER is the one who enjoys the pleasure of personal fulfillment. He finds the real meaning for which God Almighty created him. He's no longer wrapped up in himself; therefore he has the pleasure of fulfillment in giving of himself to others. He's the only man who can love his neighbor as himself, because he now knows who he really is in the fullness of Christ. There's a whole new appreciation for who we really are when we understand the deliverance that is ours through living a life in the Spirit-- there's a whole new release.

The THIRD SET OF CHARACTERISTICS for each group follows.

THE NATURAL MAN, as an unconverted man, is always pondering for a philosophy of life. God made him with something inside that will outlast the course of the sun, moon and stars. There is something within that reminds him that he is an eternal being, but because of the predicament of uncontrollable sin and the plight of personal identity, he'll spend a lifetime pondering what should be his philosophy of life. Not willing to accept God's analysis on God's terms, and looking to humanism for human wisdom for a philosophy of life, and seeing the shipwrecks on the side of the road who have gone the way of humanism, he'll spend his lifetime pondering what life is all about anyhow. And that's a tragedy to be in.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN is pondering for a philosophy of life, THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has a problem with the pressure of gratifying his ego. He is the one who claims to know Christ but lives a self-centered, defeated life. The Bible says that no man has ever hated his own flesh but he nourishes it and cherishes it (Eph. 5:29). The carnally-minded, self-centered Christian must find something in his life to gratify that self-ego. He has to feed the ego, because that self-nature has not been crucified; that is, he has not agreed with God about death to the self life at the cross. And if he has not agreed to do that, then his ego has to be fed. Oh, the pressure! Do you know who he is? He or she is the person who gets hurt when the pastor doesn't recognize the flowers brought to the church; or when singing a solo nobody said, "My, wasn't that a lovely solo"; or cleaning the church or some other work, and nobody even recognized it. What a struggle for the ego of a carnally-minded believer! The pressure of gratifying self is vital to the carnal Christian who has never agreed with God about that self-life being crucified with Christ on the cross.

Whereas the NATURAL MAN is pondering for a philosophy of life, and the CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN has the problem with the pressure of gratifying his ego, THE SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER has learned that the purpose of life is to glorify God. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). And he's learned that the glory of God is the ultimate purpose for which man is on the earth. He now lives in that ultimate purpose as a fulfilled believer.

When talking about the Spirit-controlled believer, you may say, "It's God's Spirit controlling the believer." That's true, but do you know what else is true? It's a believer who lives with his own spirit alive! His spirit not only serves God by the letter or the law, but by his "spirit" quickened and in the Holy Spirit. He is vibrantly alive. There is a spirit about that man because of the difference the Holy Spirit has made in his life.

With all this as a frame of reference, let's go a step further and talk about "Life In Biblical Perspective" by looking at more specific portions of Scripture.

THE NATURAL MAN seen in John 8:34,42-44 reminds us that "ye are of your father the devil." The natural man has the devil as his father. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us about the natural man, that "the heart is deceitful above all things..." This is unconverted man by nature, with Satan as his father. Now if the devil is your father, what do you think are going to be the characteristics of your life? Certainly nothing spiritual. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" These traits came from the devil himself.

Romans 3:10-18 talks about every part of our body being defiled: our feet, hands, throat an open sepulcher, and it ends

by saying there is no fear of God before our eyes. So if you've never been converted, that's the condition of your life--living with no fear of God before your eyes. You can come to church every Sunday and have no fear of God. Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that we've all gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way. Man by nature, unsaved, turns to his own way.

Then Isaiah 57:20-21 speaks of the wicked, or the unconverted man is like a troubled sea, no peace; his waters cast up both dirt and mire, no peace for the wicked. Look at the digression: the devil is your father, your heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, almost every part of your being is defiled in Romans 3; now there's no peace and no rest for the wicked, like a troubled sea, and in the midst of it you've turned to your own ways, not God's way. And Proverbs 14:12 reminds us that "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." That's a biblical perspective of the natural man, certainly not complete, but enough to give us an idea of what God thinks of anyone who has never opened his heart and never has been genuinely converted to Christ.

THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN is one who is taking the road of self, which is a shadow, a burden, a road that has partial victory. Notice the description of his life in Romans 7:21--"when I would do good, evil is present with me." This is the Christian who lives a self-centered life. He says, "When I want to do good, evil is present with me." I want to do right but I end up doing wrong. I have a desire to do right, but I always end up doing wrong. The spirit is willing and I really desire God in my heart, but the flesh is weak." What a picture of the struggle to do right, ending in the last line of verse 24 as a testimony in defeat saying, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" What a precise picture of a carnally-minded believer who will not surrender the rights of his life to God. He wishes it were different, wanting it to be different, but finding when he tries to do right he ends up doing wrong, being bound and frustrated. This life-style is also found in I John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." He is a self-deceived man who says, "I have no need, I don't have any sin." The biggest deception is to the man who does it to himself, who does not live in the truth because he thinks he's alright and has no sin.

I Corinthians 3:1-6 suggests the carnally-minded Christian is like a baby. He should have been grown up a long time ago but is still a baby. Why does it say he is like a baby? Because he should have been grown up but still is on the milk bottle spiritually. Paul suggests he would have loved to feed those Christians with meat, but they are still using a nipple, still drinking milk. And why, Paul? They should have been grown up, but were still fussing and fuming about petty differences. One is saying, I'm of this one, another says of this one, another of this one. They were all wrapped up in people, personalities, all kinds of problems, strife, envy, etc. Paul uses the word "carnal," and it is interesting to note that he's saying those words to the Corinthian church--the church came behind in no spiritual gifts. It excelled in all gifts, and yet that was the church that had to be indicted for its carnality. Do you know what he is saying? It's possible to exercise all kinds of spiritual gifts, be involved in all kinds of ministries and religious activities, and yet live by that cross of self and never walk in the Spirit.

II Corinthians 3:1-6 also talks about the letter of the law killing. Do you know what that is saying? You have the CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN wanting to do right and continually doing wrong, not willing to recognize his sin and deceiving himself, the truth not being in him, nor finding lodging in his heart, all wrapped up in church activity, using the letter of the law, but it is a "killing" effect. That's the Sunday school teacher who's a killer on the loose in his class. I don't mean because he has a poor personality or does not communicate effectively. But it's the Sunday school teacher handling the Word of God in the classroom, or the deacon who is supposed to be a godly example walking in the Spirit but is not involved in the prayer and intercession ministry of the church. Because of a carnal life-style, it is not surprising a Sunday school class cannot find dynamic spiritual life with a teacher handling the Word of Life and yet sowing seeds of death. These are killers on the loose in the church, killing by example. What a tragedy to live a carnal Christian life when you're supposed to be something else.

In I Corinthians 10:3-24 God reminds us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. It says in verse 3, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" Though we walk in the flesh you better not war in the flesh! It sounds like some church board meetings--warring in the flesh. It sounds like too many churches and professing Christians demanding their rights warring in the flesh. And then he says, "Don't you know, don't you have enough sense to know that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal?" There's the word "carnal." He's saying, "When you're warring in the flesh, you're nothing but carnal." So the carnally-minded Christian seeks to solve everything in the energy of the flesh, and that is one way he is recognized by others.

And then, Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." There's the picture of the war between the flesh and the Spirit. That's why when you begin to talk about a Spirit-controlled life, carnally-minded Christians won't relate to the

message. There are so many who are just saying "Amen" with their lips to the verse that the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and the two are contrary the one to the other. If you put on a big religious entertainment program that caters to the flesh in the church, these people would be present, and the place would be packed. But when you call for a prayer and intercession gathering, they are no where to be found.

As we read that long list of the works of the flesh in verses 19-21, you say, "I am left out, I didn't fit into any of those categories." But in verse 21 there are three words that include everyone who thinks he was left out on everything specifically mentioned. The words are: "and such like." If you think you've been left out, the words "and such like" literally mean "etc., etc., etc." The Apostle Paul is saying for you to name the areas of the works of the flesh in your own life that He did not take the space to mention. No one is left out when it comes to the necessity of dealing with the works of the flesh. And that is done at the cross of Christ, when we come in full agreement with Him about being crucified in death-union with our Lord.

And now let us relate to the SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER. Look at the differences: The natural man by nature whose father is the devil cannot please God. The carnally-minded Christian would love to do right, but ends up doing wrong. But Paul describes the Spirit-controlled believer at the end of Romans 7:24-25 where he says, "...who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." From Romans 7:25 to 8:39 the Apostle Paul relates to the released life where now there's a whole new freedom to serve God.

When the Apostle goes into all of the eighth chapter, the trust of walking in the Spirit explodes. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." He talks about the "Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (8:1-2). The whole chapter goes on and no wonder he could say, "All things work together for good to them that love God" (8:28). No wonder he could say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (8:35) Why? Because the power of the Spirit was functioning in his life.

Romans 6:6 and 6:11 relate to this truth of self surrendered at the Cross and being alive to God through the Spirit. The chapter continues the truth of yielding our members unto God, yielding ourselves, being made free from sin, and servants of God. Now you have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. In verses 17-22 the believer has his fruit unto holiness -- the product of holy living.

Then in Romans 11:36-12:2, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Isn't that beautiful? "Of Him, for Him, through Him, and to Him"--all in Him. To Him be glory forever, Amen! And that's what goes right into chapter 12, verse 1: "I beg of you please, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." Notice why? Because "all things are of Him, through Him, for Him." When that truth becomes a reality then no wonder he could say to us, "Please, make yourself a living sacrifice--surrender yourself to Him." That's the picture of a Spirit-controlled believer not being conformed to this world.

John 3:30 is what is typical of the Spirit-controlled believer, and a recognition of what the self-life really is. "He must increase, but I must decrease." Spirit-controlled believers recognize the principle that Christ must increase, and we must decrease. That's the process.

John 5:30, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." Here the Spirit-controlled believer recognizes that self must decrease. He understands that self cannot produce spiritually, and that of himself he can do nothing. The carnally-minded Christian will never admit that; he's trying to do everything in himself. The Spirit-controlled believer recognizes this truth about himself.

John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Notice that it's from decreasing in 3:30, to doing nothing in 5:30, to profiting nothing in 6:63. The Spirit-filled believer clearly understands this and is determined not to live his Christian life in the energy of the flesh. In 6:63 the statement about "profiting nothing" is preceded and ended by an interesting statement. The first part says, "it's the 'spirit that quickeneth.'" The Word of God is quick to remind us what gives life. "The Spirit quickeneth," and then what is the last statement of that verse? "the words which I speak unto you are spirit and life." Notice both the power in the Word and the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit-controlled believer understands both of those principles--that self must

ust decrease, self can do nothing, self profits nothing, but it's the Spirit that quickens or brings life, and the Word that He has spoken to us.

Galatians 5:13-16, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." Do you know what I put in my Bible next to Gal. 5:15 where it says to love one another rather than biting and devouring one another? I call that verse, "Christian cannibalism."

The Spirit-controlled believer understands the only way he can live a life without fulfilling the lust of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit, and that the only way the carnal nature will not overcome him is by walking in the Spirit. Otherwise you're going to fight and devour one another, but by love we are to serve one another. And you can only do that by the Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc. That's it.

Let's look now at the difference in the basic condition of each one of these three groups.

**THE NATURAL MAN:** his basic condition is lost in sin. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." If you are living this kind of life with the devil as your father, your condition is lost in your sin, eternal damnation.

**THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN:** Whereas the basic condition of the NATURAL MAN is lost in sin, the carnally-minded Christian's basic condition is limited by self. Too many professing believers are bound by self-centeredness in all its limitations. But how do we limit ourselves? Some of us are limited by our self-centeredness because it's produced a pattern of sinning, and we're in bondage to our habitual sinning; we're in a net, caught in a snare, limiting ourselves. Romans 8:5-6, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." There it is, those who live after the flesh can only mind the things of the flesh. Can you see how limited they are? The only thing they are capable of minding are the things of the flesh. And only that which comes from the self-life are the things that will come out of their life. They are limited.

What does it mean when it says "To be carnally minded is death?" When I say "death", I'm talking about death to every high, noble intention, that God has for you. It causes every divine plan of God for your life to be aborted. It cuts short, cuts off, and annihilates the fulfillment of God's plan for your life. The self-life has all kinds of ways of manifesting itself. There may be physical habits, fleshly habits, sensual habits that you wish you could get rid of, and it will never happen. You keep saying, "O wretched man that I am! who can deliver me...?" Oh what a tragedy.

God's Word says that the blessing of God makes a man rich and He has no sorrow with it. By our carnal life-style we actually limit God from doing what He longs to do in blessing us. Because we live that life we are totally void of understanding the ministry of the Spirit and all the fulfillment of blessing that comes at the level of the Spirit. That's a tragedy when a man limits himself like that. Because of that we need the liberating Spirit of God to free us from the devastation of that carnal nature.

**THE SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER:** Whereas the NATURAL MAN'S basic condition is lost in sin, and the carnally-minded Christian's basic condition is limited by self, the Spirit-controlled believer's basic condition is one who has been liberated through the Spirit. He is spiritual, walking in full communion with God. Thank God for the potential of walking in the Spirit.

II Corinthians 3:17, "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." That's it, that's what happens to people. We come to grips with the truth of the Lordship of Jesus Christ as those who have lived lives so limited, and so much in defeat because of self being in control, and only capable of the things of the flesh. Now because we have agreed with God and surrendered the rights of our life to God, our spirit has been liberated through the Holy Spirit as Christ becomes Lord. "The Lord is that Spirit." It didn't say Jesus is that Spirit, but it says "the Lord is that Spirit." The word Lord means King, Ruler, Guide, Overseer. It is Jesus Christ the Lord. But it's interesting how the word Lord is used. And only as the Holy Spirit is in control will He enthrone Jesus Christ to the throne room as Lord of our lives. And only as we allow Jesus Christ to be King, Ruler, Overseer, the One in command, do we understand the ministry of that Holy Spirit. And there is no deliverance until you understand that the Lord is that Spirit, and until you're willing to come to the end of your self-striving and the self-struggle, and are willing for Jesus Christ to become Lord of your life, you will never be able to be liberated, because liberation is through the Spirit. That's where the ministry of the Holy Spirit must become func

tional in your heart and life. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. That's what God wants for every believer.

And now as we tie this message together, I ask, "What then is real life?" I said that the title of the message is "Life in Biblical Perspective." Let's just put it this way: life is a question of rights. If so, then what are the differences in "rights" for each of these groups?

THE NATURAL MAN is the unconverted man with the devil as his father, with a wicked heart, with every part of his existence being defiled, with his life as a troubled sea, with no rest, going his own way, and his own way producing his condition as lost in sin, the wages of that sin being death. He has rights, and this is what he says: "My personal rights I demand exclusively." He's the person who says, "Nobody will tell me what to do; I'm master of my fate, the captain of my own ship. I have my own rights and nobody gets in my way. I will use my rights in every way possible for me to be fulfilled." That's the sinner who doesn't care who he hurts, how he hurts them, and he will go to any degree to be satisfied because he's a god unto himself. He says, "I'm the exclusive owner of my rights." That's the tragedy of the unsaved man.

What happens to THE CARNALLY-MINDED CHRISTIAN? He is the one who says, "No, I don't demand my rights exclusively because after all, I'm a Christian. I go to church every Sunday, I profess to be saved; but I've worked out a bargain with God." The natural man says, "My personal rights I demand exclusively," but the carnally-minded Christian who wants to hold onto parts of his life and not give them to God, says, "My personal rights, I desire equally." Do you know what that is? He's the one who says, "God, I give you 50% of my life, and I run 50%. I'll let You control some areas, and I'll control the others. That's pretty good, God; in fact, that's better than average for my church. No, I won't demand my rights exclusively, because after all, I'm a Christian. And as a Christian I ought to give God some of my life so I look like one, and I somewhat act like one. I'll work out a compromise of equal rights with God."

The tragedy is that many professing believers don't even want God to have "equal rights." Some would rather elect which parts of our life we want to give to God, saying, "God, I'll give you control of some areas, and I'll control others." So really "50--50" equal rights is not even a consideration. It seems more realistic to say we hold on to 70-80%, and we elect to give God possibly 20-30% of the rights of our life, choosing selectively what we'll keep for ourselves and what God will have. Brothers and sisters, all of this is traits of the self-life in full bloom through the carnal nature.

Look now at THE SPIRIT-CONTROLLED BELIEVER: He says, "My personal rights I deny, emphatically"; no strings attached, no bargains, no demanding. You say, "What do you mean?" The Spirit-controlled believer has generally prayed, "Lord, don't give me the desires of my heart; give me the desires of Thy heart." And he's willing to deny emphatically every single right of his life.

But actually the Spirit-controlled believer does have one right. You say, "That sounds different because you just said his personal rights he denied emphatically, but now you say he has ONE." What one right does he have? It is the right to renounce ALL the rights of his life and give them all to God. You say that seems like a hard bargain. Well, it does if you have not looked at the glory side of it all, the blessings, the joy, and the release from personal bondages. The biggest release now is that your life is no more your own; you are merely a steward and no longer the owner. Now you can go to sleep at night while your Owner (God) stays awake and handles matters. It's the Owner (God) who now has the responsibility for your life. And, in the light of Calvary and all that Jesus paid for us, what could possibly be "too hard" to give back to Him!

How wonderful to know that we give all the rights to the God of the universe, the King of Glory, the One who spoke the Word in the dawn of creation and planets were flung into space, the One who holds the breath of every living being in the palm of His hand, the One who is more concerned for our good than we are, the One who is obsessed about blessing us. When we see that kind of a God, then we say, "God, forgive us for allowing self to control, demanding to work out our own bargains. And God, we thank You for bringing this truth into our lives so that our spirits can be liberated by Thy Spirit, so that we can deny emphatically all our personal rights, and we do it by saying, 'God, we exercise the right to give Thee every single right of our life.' "

And in summary, a reminder that there is a high price to self-ownership. The unconverted, natural man has all of his rights, and will not give any of them away. He demands them exclusively. The carnally-minded Christian says he wants some rights, and bargains with God as to which he will keep, but the Spirit-controlled believer has the privilege of giving up all his rights and walking in the power and fullness of God.

Which is it for YOU? Have you come to that place yet? Every single right, my personal rights I deny emphatically. Have you come to the place where it is "no more I, but Christ?" DO IT NOW!

MY PRAYER FOR THE "NATURAL" MAN: "Dear Lord, I pray for anyone who is living as a natural man--unconverted, never entered into the life of Christ, still is of his father the devil, and the lusts and the works of his father he will do. I recognize that from within himself he can do nothing to change it. Your Word says that he has a wicked vile heart that is deceitful, with contamination in every part of his being, living as troubled sea, going his own way that produces death. Lord, I pray that this unconverted man will ask God for mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing through genuine repentance, recognizing that there is a way that seemeth right unto man, and the end thereof are the ways of death. Remind him of the blessed invitation of our Saviour saying: 'I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. I am come that you might have life. I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the father but by me.' Lord, I pray for any unconverted person who reads this message and relates to this prayer, might come to the end of himself and allow Christ to become his salvation." (Jn. 10:9-10; 5:24; I Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 10:13)

MY PRAYER FOR THE "CARNALLY-MINDED" CHRISTIAN: "Dear Lord, I pray for that believer who has accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord, but has not allowed the Lord Jesus Christ to be in full control of his life. May he not be content with a half-hearted commitment to Thee, but show him the devastating results of not allowing the King of Glory to be in charge of his entire life. I pray that he will agree with Thy Word about being crucified with Christ and will allow that death-union to take place. Deliver him from the tragedy of trying to live the Christian life in the energy of the flesh. Remind him of the utter inadequacy of trying to make the Christian life work by his own efforts. Bring him to the place that it will be 'no more I but Christ' who will be in complete control. And, Lord, reveal to him the full blessing of that full surrender to the King of Glory." (Jn. 3:30; 5:30; 6:63; 12:24-26; Rom. 6:1-13; Gal. 2:20)

MY THANKSGIVING PRAYER FOR THE "SPIRIT-CONTROLLED" BELIEVER: "Dear Lord, I pray that Thou wilt make us so hungry to know Thee in the fullness of Thy Spirit and that we will all come to grips with Thy truth in such a way that we will not be the same again. I want to express my thanks for that believer who has not only opened His heart for salvation, but also has come to that place of complete surrender of all the rights of his life at the foot of the cross. I want to rejoice in the release and blessing in his life as a result of being filled with the Spirit of God. I rejoice in what will yet result because of this choice to allow the Holy Spirit to be in control. Bless him abundantly and may he never look back but continue to walk in the Spirit one moment at a time."