

TEMPTATION VS SIN

Transcript of a clip from the talk A CLEAN HEART by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'm going to swear so get ready, ok? It's just a mild swear because I wasn't good at swearing at all. Ok, are you ready? Damn! All right? Now, that wasn't hard, was it? It wasn't hard for you, but still, apart from an illustration, it's still wrong. Doesn't matter whether it was hard or not, it's just as wrong as committing adultery, because Jesus said you shouldn't swear by anything in heaven or anything on earth -- and you shouldn't commit adultery -- so it's still wrong, apart from using it as an illustration.

But still why, even apart from that, did you feel "yeah, it wasn't too bad!"? I mean why did all of us feel "well, yes, it's kind of a surprise for you to say 'damn', but it didn't seem too evil, really!" Now, why did it not seem too evil? Why? Why did it not, especially to you who didn't even say it, why did it not seem too evil? And would you not say, "well, I mean, your heart wasn't in it, your heart wasn't in it! You were just saying it because you wanted to illustrate something to us, and your heart really wasn't in it!" And that is right, isn't it? My heart wasn't in it and your heart wasn't in it. Now that still doesn't make it right, it's still wrong, even if your heart isn't in it, apart from using it, as we did, as an illustration, it's still wrong! It's still something that God has commanded us not to do! Still, it is helpful to make a distinction between temptation and sin.

Because that is part of the distinction between temptation and sin. You see, just the way that word that I spoke came to you and you weren't worked up about it at all, it just came to you -- it didn't find any response in your heart, you just heard it and you said "oh, that's interesting! Surprising, but interesting!" --but it just came to you -- so all through the day you are in situations where thoughts from the mental atmosphere around you insert themselves into your head. Where emotions, from the emotional atmosphere around you, inject themselves at times into your feelings. And as long as your response to them is as detached as your response to my 'damn' was, then there is no sin. You see that? As long as those thoughts can come in, or those feelings come in from outside and you are as utterly detached from them as you were to my swear this morning, then there is no sin. As long as you can say "well, that's interesting, I've no interest in it but yeah, well there it is. Well, that's a thought I know where it's come from, but I don't want to think it myself, I don't want to dwell on it another second; well that's an interesting feeling that's passing through our office. I'm observing it academically, it has no answer in my own heart, no responsive chord in my own heart, but that's a feeling that obviously is present in our office or in our family." Then as long as that's the attitude, you're dealing with temptation and not with sin.

But if I tell you, "you know the vacation you are arranging? Well, your travel agent made the reservation on the wrong date, so you can't go on vacation", or if I say to you, "You know your car? Well, there's a drunk driver just totaled it a moment ago." Or if I say to you, "You're fired! The company is closing down" and then there's a "damn!" rising out of your heart, then that's sin! So, do you see, there is a distinction in the two things? A sin is what comes from the heart of a person, what comes from the very innermost being of a person, that's what sin is.