

How To Receive A Clean Heart

Ezekiel 36:26

Sermon Transcript by Ernest O'Neill

I'd like to try to speak on how to get a clean heart this morning. There are Christians and then there are Christians and then there are Christians. That's right. And at different stages of my life I was each of those. And this morning you are one or other of them. And it's important to know which you are. Why? Because the first kind of Christian has the following attitude. So examine your own heart and your life to see if this is your attitude. The first kind of Christian says, "Sure, I'm as good a Christian as anyone. I love my country, I pay my taxes, I believe in God and Jesus Christ, I go to church, I try to live by the Golden Rule, I try to do as much for the next guy as I can. Yeah, I'm a Christian, as much of a Christian as anybody is a Christian." Now, what you're really saying there is "I'm Christian because I'm not Buddhist, I'm not Muslim, I'm not Hindu, I'm Christian. I've been brought up in a Christian country, I've been brought up by Christian parents, I've gone to a Christian church since I was born, I was baptized there, I was confirmed there, I was married there, I hope to be buried there. I have been involved in a Christian society as long as I can remember."

But if you examine your own attitude to Christianity you'll admit that even though Christian principles surround you in this society and surround you in your place of work, even though actually Christian principles are impregnating your very mind so that you're full of Christian ideas, yet your heart, your inner heart, is just the same as the heart of anybody who isn't a Christian. That is, day by day, it's preoccupied with the same things as everybody else is: making money, getting enough food to keep yourself alive and getting by and getting what little bit of happiness you can. And your heart is actually not preoccupied with God and it's not preoccupied with bringing people to Jesus. Your heart is actually just like the heart of any other person who doesn't claim to be a Christian.

Now the theologians call that being a "Natural Man." That's what a Natural Man is, loved ones, or a Natural Woman. You can believe all the Christian principles, you can go to church like all the rest of us, you can live in a Christian society, but the only thing inside you that is Christian is your conscience, which bothers you with guilt every time you disobey God. But actually in your heart there is no Christian spirit. In other words your life is primarily involved in observing external practices and principles and customs that you with your intellect approve of. Now that's what a Natural Man is. Or we have another term, a "Nominal Christian." Why I outline that to you this morning is, I am hoping that sometime in your life you'll look back on these messages and you'll say to yourself, you know, that's where I was faced with reality repeatedly and I've never been faced with reality as continuously as those days. These are unique and precious days, you know. They are. We're kind of a privileged bunch. Not at all because you have me to listen to. But because we're together, and God has for the moment opened your ears so that you can hear some of this stuff and so that you can understand it. And loved ones, I want you to know where you are in relationship to God yourself, you see. Not to kind of make you feel bad or a second-class citizen, but so that you know, now, am I a Christian or am I a CHRISTIAN?

Now the second kind of Christian is one whose conscience has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit so that they stop saying "Oh, I must try to cut down on my drinking. I just have to." They stop saying that. Or "I must clean up my sex life sometime" or "I just have to start reading that Bible that

Pastor talks about." They stop that kind of easy-going attitude to what they know is right and what they know is wrong. And their conscience is enlivened so that it doesn't just bother them, it weighs them down! The conscience, reinforced by the Bible and reinforced by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon it, begins to convict that person deeply of the fact that they are not living the way they were meant to live.

They, in fact, begin to see hell yawning before them. They begin to see that their life is full of sins and that the wages of sin is death and that they are on the way to that death and they are on the way to a hell of selfishness with all the other Nominal Christians. And they begin to sense that and they begin to realize that God is utterly justified in excluding them from Heaven and utterly justified in destroying them before they destroy him and all the other people within their reach. And that Christian begins to come under deep conviction of sin and begins to treat God for the first time with a real sense of fear -- and it's then that he normally hears the gospel that the Jews in the Old Testament heard. I say that because I'm afraid so often in our society that's the gospel that such a person who comes under conviction of sin as a convicted sinner hears.

I'll show you that gospel and I think you'll agree with me. It's in Mark 1:4. It's the gospel that the Jewish prophets preached and among them John the Baptist. "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And that's the gospel they hear. They hear that God is willing to forgive them their sins and First John 1:9 reinforces it, which says, "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" and such a person goes to God and says "Lord, I confess my sins and I repent of them. I ask you now to forgive me." And because such a person lives in a world that has already seen Jesus and knows that it's because of Jesus that they can have their sins forgiven, they do what they're told. They believe on Jesus and they receive His Spirit. And God acts upon their spirit and makes their spirit alive. And they become aware of God, but actually they're still Old Testament Christians. They're still Old Testament Christians. God's Spirit has acted upon their spirit and made it alive and enabled them to be born again so that they're aware of God. But they're aware of Him VAGUELY. They don't, for instance, have that vivid awareness of Jesus and the Holy Spirit that the disciples had and they know that.

And they don't quite know what's wrong. Moreover, the experience they testify to will be the one that the Jews testified to, the forgiveness of their sins. That's what such an Old Testament Christian is preoccupied with: the forgiveness of their sins. That's all they know to testify to. That's the primary experience they have. So they are strange hybrid creatures, because they are really in the same position as the Old Testament Jews. They know the forgiveness of their sins and yet they do know of Jesus, which the Old Testament people could only suspect, do you remember, "The One that was to come". But they haven't actually got into the whole of the New Covenant.

And so you find they are preoccupied with their sins and they are very loathe to testify to the distinction that John the Baptist pointed out between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. You remember what that was if you have the page open where you looked at Mark 1:4. Just look down to Mark 1:8 and John the Baptist points out the difference between the Old Covenant and the New. He says, "I'm preaching repentance for the forgiveness of the sins", but then in verse 8, "I have baptized you in water," -- because all I can do is wash you clean from the guilt of your sin -- "but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

And these, loved ones, aren't very aware of that baptism of the Holy Spirit. Indeed they live primarily on the basis of First John 1:9: "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive

our sins" and the basis of the truth of First John 1:7, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin". They walk primarily preoccupied with sins actually. It's interesting. They testify that their sins are forgiven, but yet they walk primarily preoccupied with sin; either with getting free from the guilt of it by continual confession and repentance or fighting it with all their hearts to try to overcome it, but somehow or other, all they know is the forgiveness of their sins -- little of the power over sin and little of that whole beautiful life that is above sin completely. So they actually live in the world of the Old Testament Jew, where they cry, "I don't understand my own actions! I do not do the good that I want, but I do the evil that I hate!"

Now what is the problem with the Christian who is in that position -- with the Carnal Christian? Because that's what such a person is. They're no longer Nominal Christians, they're no longer Natural Men. They have got His Spirit acting upon their spirit and their spirit is alive and knows God, and the Holy Spirit at times works within them, but yet they live in this life of defeat as far as sin in their lives is concerned. What is the problem? Their heart. Their heart, that's the problem. It's their heart is the problem. Jesus explained that. He said, "It's not what you eat. It's not the food that comes through your mouth that defiles you. It's what comes out of your mouth, because what comes out of your mouth is what comes out from your heart. Because from your heart comes fornication. From your heart comes slander and false witness. From your heart comes murder and adultery. It's your heart that sends those things up."

And loved ones, that's the situation. So many of us who are Carnal Christians have a very lively conscience, and reinforced by the Bible and reinforced by fellowship in the body of Jesus, it becomes intensely powerful and it's constantly constraining our wills to obey God. So we find our wills are trying with all their heart to obey God, but the heart is sending up such a stream of evil to the will that the will cannot handle it and it cannot overcome it and it cannot repress it and it cannot hold it down and at times it has to let it through and break out into the outward life. Because even though your spirit has been renewed and made alive, your heart is still the old miserable heart that you had before you repented of your sins originally.

In other words your nature actually hasn't changed, because the heart is what we mean by saying "the heart of the matter." Your heart is the real you. It's the heart of you, it's the very essence of you, it's your very own deep self, it's you as you really are. You may want to say "No, no it isn't! I can't be as bad as that!" That's it. That stuff is coming from what you really are deep down inside and it's your heart that is the problem. That's, you remember, what Jesus said. He said it's out of a person's heart that come all those things that they can't control. That's why you're in the same position as the Jews in the Old Testament. They felt "everything's clean. Why can't I obey?" And you tend to feel the same way. You say, "But look, I've been made clean. Everything is clean. Why can't I obey?" And, loved ones, the reason is in that statement you remember in Ezekiel if you look at it just again, because some of you may not have read it last Sunday.

Ezekiel 36 and it's one of those great Old Testament pieces that foresee what the New Covenant is going to be like and outlines the New Covenant, and, of course, because it's God's Word says it in some ways better than even pieces in the New Testament say it. It's Ezekiel 36:26. God is describing what He's going to do in the New Covenant. "A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you." Now a Carnal Christian has a new spirit. Their spirit is made alive by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon it. But the new heart they do not have. Do you see the way that goes on? "And I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." And that's what hasn't happened with the Carnal Christian. They still have a heart of stone. "And I will put my

spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances."

Three things will happen in the New Covenant. God will renew your spirit. He'll make you alive, He'll regenerate you and He'll enable you to be born of Him, He'll enable you to become aware of Him. Secondly, He will give you a new heart and a clean heart and then, thirdly, He will put into that new heart His own Holy Spirit. Loved ones, the problem with a person who lives in defeat in their own lives regarding sin is that their heart is still under the control of their own will. The will still retains control of the heart and still maintains the right to have in that heart whatever it wants. It keeps that little part of itself private from God.

It surrenders all the other kinds of things to God, but it will not surrender the very heart of its own being and the will retains control over that heart. And it's that heart that spews up the evil and the uncleanness that you find coming into your mind repeatedly in the day-to-day life that you live. And do you see it's because you surrendered as much as doesn't matter, that's it. You said you gave your life to Jesus. Well, actually you give as much as doesn't matter. You've retained a little piece inside you where you retain the right to think what you want when you want. You retain the right to disobey when you please. Indeed you're treating Jesus the way the Jews treated Him when He was on earth. They did what they pleased with Him and they ignored Him and they lived the way they wanted and pretended that He had never come upon the scene. You have a little piece in your heart where you live that way.

There's a little piece inside you over which Jesus is not Lord, the very heart, the very inner part of you. Now while such a Carnal Christian confesses and repents of their sin day after day and while they fight sin with all their heart or all their strength and while they try to obey as best they can, God will continue to give them His Spirit. But the Spirit will not be able to stay with them. God will not be able to put his Spirit in as a permanent resident in the heart because it's not clean, but every time they confess God will regenerate them, will keep them alive. But they know the effect of that because their life goes up and then it goes down, then it goes up and then it goes down, so it's life and death, life and death, life and death year after year, life and death, confess and repent. God gives us the Spirit, we sin again, we resist the Spirit, the Holy Spirit witnesses that He's grieved, you go down in the guilt, up, up down... there is no constant life. But yet while a Carnal Christian will walk that way, they can remain alive in God, however defeated and inconsistent and sporadic their life is.

If they ever begin to rationalize their sins and say, "No, that is not sin for me. Fornication is not sin for me. Adultery is not sin for me" they begin to rationalize God's word. They begin to say "Well, who knows? Who knows whether that's right or not right?" They begin to rationalize what is obedience and disobedience. If they once start to do that and then they begin to justify this unequal battle against the power of sin in their life as the normal Christian life and they begin to try to treat that disease with a mixture of positive thinking and Christian technique literature and kind of reinforcement from fellowship, then they will lose everything and their last state will be worse than the first.

Now how do you get into the normal Christian life? How do you get a clean heart? By entering fully into what God has done for us in Jesus in the New Covenant. That's it. It's not something extra you need. In a sense you're right, if you're born of God you have everything, but you have to enter it into it all, enter fully into what God has done for you in the New Covenant in Jesus.

What has He done? Well, Mark 1:8: John the Baptist says "I baptized you with water, but He will

baptize you with the Holy Spirit." You need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now you may say now "Wait a minute. I'm talking about my anger and my bad temper. I'm talking about my moral impotence. I'm talking about the fact that I can't overcome sin in my life. What has the baptism with the Holy Spirit got to do with that?" Loved ones, look at this verse Acts 15:8. You remember Peter is telling them of an event that took place when Cornelius and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit. "And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us and He made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith."

That's it. The gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with the clean heart and the clean heart is cleansed by faith. So God gives the Holy Spirit and He cleanses your heart by faith. Just to remind you, some of you may still say "Oh, but didn't I receive the Holy Spirit when I was born of God?" Loved ones, you receive what we've shared. Yes, you received as much of Him as you were willing to allow to control your life. But the fact is that He has not been able to DWELL in your life and you will testify to that, you will testify to the in out, up and down existence. The fact is that He has to operate upon you from outside as He did with the Old Testament people. He has not been able to ABIDE in you as a continuing presence in your life, as a resident within you. And the only way to have him abide in you is to allow Jesus to baptize you with Him.

Now you may say "Does that mean that my heart then will begin to send up Jesus' loving attitudes and sentiments?" Yeah, it does. That's right. Your heart, instead of spewing up all the dirt that you have to put up with, will begin miraculously to send up the life and the love of Jesus Himself. That's what that passage in Galatians means, you remember, in Galatians 5, it says "The works of the flesh are anger, adultery, fornication, murder, selfishness, strife, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness". The works of the flesh over there, the desires of the flesh strive against the desires of the Spirit. And loved ones, your heart doesn't have both. You see, that's the mistake you make. You and I think, "Well, it's just a matter of my heart edging over a little. I mean, instead of edging over this way it has to edge over that way. I mean my heart has good things in it, hasn't it? It's just that there are some bad things as well." No. Face it. Your heart is dirty. Your heart is unclean all the way. The only reason that you have anything good in your life is because the Holy Spirit manages at times to get His life through to you. But your heart basically, if you just sat for 5 or 10 years, your heart is just filled with evil. It's not filled with good. And loved ones, that's part of Satan's trick with you saying, "Now, look, it's not as bad as he says. Your heart has some good things. Look at what you did yesterday." Loved ones, the fact is that even that is tainted with evil and dirt and selfishness, if you see it as it really is. And of course, that's the issue really, isn't it? With a clean heart? And with a heart of any kind, you can actually go under the uncleanness of the heart and there's a problem beyond the uncleanness of the heart. I will explain to you what I mean.

You may say somebody has a generous heart. Somebody who maybe just seems to be generous with his possessions and giving them to other people. Now you know, if you talk to that guy or that girl and you say that, they'll almost be unconscious of it. They'll say, "No, I'm not." And you'll know why that is, you'll know that their heart has an attitude of confidence about their security, either confidence in God or confidence in what they own themselves, but their heart will be filled with generosity because the heart's attitude itself has a whole big attitude to life or to the world or to their security that is different from yours. That's why they're even unconscious of it. Or somebody has a magnanimous heart. If you find a woman who has magnanimity toward her critics and you say "How do you manage to keep away from spite or resentment?" and the person will say, "I never thought of it."

And you'll know why that is. Because their heart no longer trusts in peer approval for its self worth and so she doesn't have a dependence on people's opinions and that's why her heart can be so magnanimous. Now it's the same with our unclean hearts. Our hearts are unclean because basically our heart has a wrong attitude to all of life. Our heart has a wrong attitude to life as a whole. It has a wrong attitude about what it depends on. It has a wrong attitude to what its resources in this world are. Jesus, you remember said, "Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also." And that's the problem with an unclean heart. Its treasure is in the wrong place.

And in Jesus, on the cross, all of us were placed with our unclean hearts and the whole attitude of our heart which was wrong was changed and made right. In other words, our hearts, for years and years, have been trained to depend on the world and not on God. That's actually the basic problem with the whole thing. Our heart is unclean because it actually depends on the world and not on God. Even though you're born of the Spirit, even though you like God (Pastor said here: Even though you like God (change needed underlined)), even though you try to obey him, your own inner heart still depends on the world. It depends on the world of things for your food, for your clothing and for your shelter. It depends on the world of circumstances turning out right for your own happiness. It depends on the world of people for your self esteem and your self worth. Now in Jesus on the cross your heart was changed and you were crucified to the world. And Jesus on the cross turns His own heart away from the world of things and away from the world of people and away from the world of circumstances and turned your heart as well and changed it. And in that moment, you remember, when there was darkness upon the whole earth until the ninth hour, Jesus looked to God alone for all that He needed and your heart also was changed to look to God alone.

That has happened loved ones. Your heart has been changed and it can be changed in you if you are willing to be baptized with the Holy Spirit because He alone can take that new clean heart that exists in Jesus and make it real in you. Baptism with the Holy Spirit means being immersed in the Holy Spirit, means being immersed utterly in Him, looking to Him alone for all that you need. Just as a fish is immersed in the ocean and looks even to the ocean for the oxygen that it needs, so in Jesus, you and I were immersed in the Holy Spirit and were separated from the world as the source of our resources. And we died to that world and we came alive to all the resources that God alone can give us.

Now to enter into that, you enter into it by faith. Not by masochism, not by asceticism, not by trying to make it real in yourself, not by brainwashing, not by reading more books. That's what the Bible says: "Your heart is cleansed by faith." Faith is belief plus obedience. In the case of this full experience of the New Covenant, belief plus the obedience expresses itself in full consecration. Belief. Do you believe that that happened to your heart in Jesus on Calvary? Do you? Do you believe Romans 6:6 "our old self was crucified with Christ"? That's the first part of faith. Do you believe that? Secondly, do you want that? Do you want a clean heart? That's right. Do you want a clean heart? You know, not want in the sense of desire, emotional desire, but want in the sense of willing. Are you willing to have a clean heart?

Are you willing to go before God and cry to Him, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit along with my dear Savior. What You give me is all I want and what You do not give me I will not take. I depend on you utterly and I give myself to you only. And whatever You want me to have that I will receive, whatever You do not want me to have I gladly do without. I consecrate myself wholly into your hands." That's it, loved ones.

Now the truth is that your heart is filled with resistances to God's will that had been built up

over the years through many unsundered attitudes and many disobedient acts. Now all those resistances are inside you, but as you open yourself to the Holy Spirit, He will reveal those to you. Then as He reveals them bow your head and your will to Him. And then the Holy Spirit will witness when you come to the place of full consecration where He knows there are no more of those down deep, that you cannot see that He wants you to see. He'll witness that you are in a place of full consecration and then you'll exercise faith that your heart has been cleansed by the Holy Spirit and your faith will rise up on wings of obedience. And God's Spirit will come in and dwell in your heart permanently and take up His residence. And that's it -- God will do that with you.

As I see, my brothers --I know life more from our angle because such am I, but as I see you sisters too -- loved ones, stop living that hellish life where where you're between stools! You're neither a Jew nor are you a Christian. Stop that! Stop torturing yourselves and stop crucifying Jesus afresh. Will you not give to the Savior all that He died to bring you? Will you not? If I said to you, "This is fresh air. In here there's fresh air -- you can breathe it" and you wouldn't believe me. Wouldn't that be a disaster? Wouldn't it? "No, I'm not going to breathe it! I'm not! I don't believe you! I'm not going to breathe it! I'd rather die than breathe it!" Wouldn't that be a disaster? Isn't it a disaster to live with an unclean heart when all the time Jesus has a clean one that He can give you the moment you have faith? Now that can be this moment or it can be after some prayer when you go home today, or a prayer in the prayer room, if you want to pray there, or anywhere around this building. It's all open, all this day. If you want to get down to business and get your heart cleansed by faith then you can take action, loved ones. Or we'll sing a closing hymn, and if you want to come here, you can seek God here, but you can do it whatever way you want.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for your dear Word that makes all things so clear and, Lord, we do not want to live under the Old Covenant, we want to live under the New Covenant. Father, what we have needed for years, has been a clean heart. Lord, we thank you that it can be received by faith. Father we thank you for showing us that faith is belief, that our old heart has been crucified with you and that a clean heart is ours and then being willing to have that clean heart, being willing to have no part of our lives that is outside your control. Lord we thank you, thank you that that can be ours this very day for your glory. Amen.