

A Heart Cleansed By Faith

Acts 15:9

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Two of the most tragic words in many of the lives of those who are sitting beside you this morning and probably of your own life, two of the most tragic words are these, "I can't. I can't. I can't stop being angry. I can't stop taking tranquilizers. I can't stop losing my temper. I can't stop these lustful, unclean thoughts. I can't stop being critical. I can't, I want to but I can't", and then many of us who have been in that position begin to understand a little about God and what has been up to then just a personal problem of "I can't do what I know I should do", assumes utterly different proportions because we begin to realize that if you know what to do and you don't do it, that's sin.

That's what James 4:27 says, "Whosoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin", and then the Holy Spirit begins to bear in upon us and convict us and show us, "Look, this isn't just a little personal difficulty you're having, this is sin against your maker. This is rebellion against your God. This is the reason why you will spend eternity in lonely dark hell of selfishness."

And we begin to realize that the wages of sin is death and it's then that we start to try other remedies and we start trying to go to church or we start reading our Bible or we start trying to be better people and we try to substitute all kinds of other cures besides the one that God said is the only cure, "The wages of sin is death", and we try to substitute other wages. "No, we'll do our best", or, "We'll try harder", or, "We'll try the power of positive thinking", or, "We'll try to be better people", or, "We'll attend church", or, "We'll give money to missions", and somehow none of those cures take away the guilt that is lying on our hearts.

And then God's Spirit lights up different words of scripture to us and we see why we're getting no relief. We see that, "By the works of the law shall no man be justified." Doesn't matter how hard you try, doesn't matter how much you work at it, "By the works of the law shall no man be justified", -- or that verse you remember in the Old Testament, "All your righteousness," all the things you think as so good about you, you try to tot up the good things and weigh them against the bad things, "all your righteousness is as filthy rags", and its then that most of us sink into despair and helplessness and we see this thing is too big for me. There is no way in which I can make things right with God. There's no way in which I can make Him accept me. He has every right to destroy me eternally. There is no way in which I can help myself. And it's in that position of helpless despair that the Holy Spirit then brings home the truths of the Gospel to us.

"God commended His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" and, "To Him that worketh not but believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly, His faith is counted as righteousness", and we sink in relaxation and peace at last into the arms of Jesus and we see that God has made it right, that Jesus has died for us, and that God accepts us as His own children and we sink in faith into Jesus.

Most of us at that point in the evangelical atmosphere in which we now live, most of us at that point enter into the Gospel that was preached by a Jewish preacher called John the Baptist and you

remember how it's described. "John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" and that's the Old Covenant. That's before Jesus ever died. That's the Old Covenant, but most of us in that situation and in this evangelical atmosphere enter into -- believe it or not -- the Old Covenant. That's right love ones.

You know that is true. You know that the primary truth that you grabbed hold of when you became a Christian was "repentance for the forgiveness of my sins" and that's the Old Covenant. If you say to me, "Now Pastor, that's what's preached throughout the churches in America. Now that isn't the Old Covenant. Why do you say it's the Old Covenant", I'll tell you why, because you still, six months or two years after you're born again, you still cry the original cry of frustration that was expressed not by a Christian but by a Jew trying to live under the law and up to the law, Paul himself. You still cry out his cry in Romans 7:15, "I don't understand my own actions because I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate", and for many of us who are born of God, that's still the cry of frustration, the cry of frustration that every Jew cried under the Old Covenant.

And maybe you say, "That's insane". It's insane. That's right what you say but it's insane. That's where I started. That's where I started, that's why I first felt guilt because I couldn't do what I knew I should do. That's when I first sought Jesus as my Savior because I was unable to deal with this power of evil within me. Do you mean I am back where I started?"

Well, actually you know you're not. You know you're not back where you started. You know that you have experienced God's gracious acceptance of you because of Jesus. You know that you have sensed a relief from guilt and you know that you've experienced forgiveness of sins. Moreover, even though you often resist God's Spirit in your life yet you know too that at times you're able to obey His Spirit and you know that there is at times within you a sense of Jesus' Spirit urging you to obey God and to love Him and to want to serve Him.

So you know you're not in the position you used to be in. You know you're aware of God in a way that you weren't before you first gave your life to Jesus or received His Spirit and yet loved ones you know fine well that there is also coming up from deep deep down inside you, a fountain of filth and dirt and sarcasm and anger and bad temper that you are not able to control.

It's as if your spirit is alive to God and you're regenerate and your spirit is born again. It's as if even your conscience is alive to God and knows what it ought to do. It's as if even your will wants to do it and your conscience tries to constrain your will to do what you know you should but there's this stream of evil that comes up from deep deep down inside you, a stream that opposes both your conscience and your will and feeds your will such a powerful stream of filth that the will finds itself unable at times to hold it in and even when it does hold it in, it holds it in by dint of powerful repression and great strain in your own life but often it's not able to hold it in and against your conscience, the will has to let that stream forth and you lose your temper or you're sarcastic with somebody or you tell a lie to somebody or you're absolutely dishonest to somebody or you give a wrong impression to somebody else or you get proud of something you've done and you know that there's something inside you that is not Jesus.

Loved ones the truth is that stuff comes from your heart and your heart is still as unclean as it was when you were first born of God, that's what's wrong. Your spirit is alive to God, even your mind and your will and your conscience, but your heart, the deepest part of you, the place where you really live, your own deepest self, is still as unclean as it was when you first heard of Jesus, and that's the problem. The heart needs to be cleansed.

Now how do you get your heart cleansed? Same way, you got your sins forgiven, same way. Same way, you got your sins forgiven, by faith. That's it. And that's the way it happened in the New Testament. Cornelius, you remember, asked one of the apostles to come and preach at his house. The people in that house had never heard the Gospel before and the apostle came and preached it and as they were listening, the Holy Spirit came upon them and the apostle, looking back to that day said, "God gave the Holy Spirit to them as He did to us and made no distinction between them and us but cleansed their hearts by faith", that's the way it happened in the New Testament.

People would hear of Jesus and they would believe and they would give themselves all or nothing to Him and the Holy Spirit would cleanse their hearts by faith and they'd walk in an ever increasing victory in their own life until they met Jesus face-to-face. Now if you say, "Well, why did it not happen that way with me when I became a Christian? That didn't happen with me. I am in a situation that you're talking about. I do the very thing I hate and I can't do the things that I want. I don't understand my own actions anymore. Why did that not happen with me?"

Well, first because on the whole, the Gospel that you and I listen to, here in our society, is an Old Testament Gospel. It's not a New Testament Gospel. On the whole, that's the situation loved ones. People preach at us the same things the Jews listened to, the forgiveness of sins and that's on the whole, the Gospel that we hear so you can't enter into anything more than you believe and so that's one reason. We were told that Jesus died for us so that God could forgive us our sins and could take away our guilt but the power of sin we had to deal with ourselves by works of law. And that's one reason why many of us are in the situation we're in today.

Another reason is that many of us do not see how exceedingly sinful and powerful sin is until the Spirit of Jesus begins to influence part of our lives, that's true. Many of us don't really see how absolutely intractable the power of sin is until we can set it against something pure and beautiful like the Spirit of Jesus. But the third reason is the most important, the reason you did not enter into a clean heart by faith and the reason you haven't entered into a clean heart by faith since, is because you don't want a clean heart, that's right.

I mean you may say, "Don't want a clean heart? That's what I want! That's what I want! I want to be rid of this stream of filth that comes from inside me. I want to be able to look a friend in the eyes and think all the way through loving thoughts about them, not have those kind of critical thoughts inside me that I don't let them see. I want to be able to look my wife or my husband or my children in the eyes and them to see outwardly all that is inside me. I want to be real. I want to be rid of this. I want to be rid of this unclean heart, all this sarcasm that spews up from inside me, this envy and jealousy that makes me feel a creep, I want to be rid of it. I want the stream of Jesus' pure and gentle sentiments coming up from inside my heart. That's what I want more than anything in the world."

Well loved ones, you want it, that's true. You want it in the sense that you desire it. For all kinds of motives you desire it but you're not willing to face the consequences and implications of having a clean heart, that's it. That's true. That's what it was with me and that's what it is with all of us who haven't a clean heart. God gives us readily, is more anxious to give it to us than we are to receive it, but we cannot receive it because we're not willing to face the implications and consequences of having a clean heart like Jesus.

Look at it like this: you remember last Sunday, I said to you, we at times notice somebody of whom

we say, "He has a very generous heart", you remember that and if you ever say to that person, he has a very generous heart, you know you see that he hasn't the attitude of possessiveness that you have about your possessions and your property. He just seems to be free and gives it away whenever anybody needs it and you see he is different and you maybe say to him sometime, "Boy, you have a generous heart", and you know that the person will look and say, "No, no I haven't", and you know why he says that. He is virtually unconscious of his generosity and he is unconscious of it because he either has an endless supply of possessions and property and so he doesn't miss what he gives away or he has an absolute confidence that he'll always have what he needs.

In other words, his heart has a different attitude to his resources for life than your heart has. Your heart kind of gets them and feels that it has to hold on to them to ensure that you have them tomorrow or the next year. He has just a different attitude to the resources for his life than you have. That's why your heart is unclean. It has a different attitude about the resources for life that you need.

You still look to money and to a good house and to nice clothes for feeling safe and secure. Your heart really looks to those things. Your heart still looks to people's opinions of you for your sense of self-worth or your sense of self-esteem or value. You still look to favorable circumstances, nice looking friends, fast boats, fast cars for happiness. Now Jesus' heart doesn't look to any of those things, He looks to God. That's why your heart's unclean.

That's why you're kind of only half converted. You want to obey God but you want to depend on the world and not on God. You want to depend on the world of people and things and circumstances for all that you need, not God -- and so your heart sends up pride when somebody cuts you down, you see it. Somebody cuts you down in front of other people, your heart sense up pride. Why? Because your heart looks to those people's opinions for your self-image. That's why your heart sense up anxiety and worry when you lose your job because your heart, your own inner being, your own inner self, the real you doesn't look to God for its security, it actually looks to its job and to the company and to the economy of the nation.

So you're kind of half converted. Your nature is still that of a child of Satan actually, because your heart looks to those things and those things draw your whole being out so your mind is running that way. I mean you hit the checkbook, the bank balance is wrong, the mind connects right up with a heart that depends utterly on the bankbook and depends utterly on your ability to have money and sends up anxiety.

So your heart now has rearranged your whole nature, really not rearranged it, it always had control of it and your nature, your mind and emotions in the way they work in your body and your will, it still the nature of a child of wrath. It's still actually an unchanged nature, that's the incredible thing, part of why God says He does not deal with us according to our sins or reward us according to our iniquities because if He did, none of us would ever find Him.

You may sit there and say, "Oh brother look, that isn't true. I mean I do have the nature of Christ don't I?" Stop that silliness loved ones. You can't have two natures. Nature is the deepest part of what you are, it's what you really are, that's what we mean by your nature. It's what you really are. You can't really be deep down two things. You can really only be one thing and at times another and the truth is, you're basically a child of wrath that depends on the world of people and things and circumstances and from time to time, because of the gracious influence of Jesus' Spirit upon you, you want what He wants.

You're really like the disciples. You remember Jesus said to them, "The Holy Spirit is with you", that's the situation with us. The Holy Spirit is with you and then Jesus said you remember, "He will be in you", and we're not at that place. We're not at the place where the Holy Spirit is a permanent, abiding residence within us. He is just a visitor.

He is the one who said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to Him", and we've reached that stage. He has come in. He is our guest. We sit Him down. We say, "Oh, we'll obey You now. Now we don't obey You. Now leave the room please. We want to do this. Oh come in again now, we want to obey You. Oh no, leave the room. I want to do this."

He is our guest but we haven't reached the second stage. "I will sup with Him and He with me." I will become the host and He will sup with me. The Holy Spirit is not the host. The abiding ruler and master of our hearts and lives, He is a guest. Now if you say, "How do I change? How do I get changed? What do I do?" Enter into the New Covenant. Enter fully into the New Covenant, that's it.

What's the New Covenant? Well, you remember, John the Baptist pointed that out, he said, "I am preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of your sins but the one who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit", that's it. That's the New Covenant. The New Covenant is not the forgiveness of sins. The New Covenant is the baptism with the Holy Spirit that changes your nature, that does what the law was not able to do for the Jews over thousands of years. The Holy Spirit changes your nature.

If you say to me, "Oh, what do you mean baptized in the Holy Spirit?" The Greek word has the meaning of 'immersed' in it and don't sit you know, and say, "Oh well, you mean water immersion", it doesn't matter about water immersion or not but it's immersion. It means being immersed in the Holy Spirit, being washed inside and outside by the Holy Spirit. Being saturated by the Holy Spirit, being permanently surrounded by the Holy Spirit and supported by the Holy Spirit like water as if you were swimming in the Holy Spirit, utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit, that's what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Looking to Him alone for all your real needs. Your heart, utterly dependent on Him and you know in your heart it's dependent on Him, that's what entering into the New Covenant is about.

If you say, "Well, what is it? How do you get baptized with the Holy Spirit?" Well, Paul explained it to those who would come for baptism at the side of the river in the first century. He would gather them around and he would say, "Now, do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life".

In other words, being baptized into Jesus is seeing that what happened to Jesus on Calvary, happened to us. That Jesus did not die just for the forgiveness of our sins, He did not just die to bear the punishment for our sins. In fact, you have all died with Christ and our old self was crucified with Christ and you all died to the elemental spirits of the universe that have enslaved you for so long, those chains and fetters of greed and anger and desire for position and desire for approval, those all were broken and shattered on Calvary in your life in Jesus because you were in Christ when He died. Your nature was changed in Jesus on Calvary, that's what the Gospel is.

It's in that sense that Jesus died for us -- not that God took it out on His Son like some madman who couldn't discern who was the real evil person, not that God took it out on His Son -- but He put us in His Son and His Son bore the pain that would otherwise have destroyed us utterly and yet at the same time God with His wrath burned out that old nature of yours and when He raised Jesus from the dead, He raised you up a new creation.

Now how do you enter into that? Believe it, believe it! That's it. Believe that, believe that; reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin -- that is to getting anything from the world of people and things and circumstances, to getting anything good or bad from them. Die to that, reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin, that's what sin is. It's not just crime, it's not just immorality, it's the whole power of life that operates independent of God.

It's the world of things and people and events, die to that, reject that and look to God as you did when you were in Jesus and say "into thy hands I commit my spirit. I receive what You wish to give me in this life and what You don't wish to give me, I don't want. I depend on You utterly, Father, and now I turn away from this world of people and things and circumstances for anything that I need and I look to You."

Then loved ones, God will fill you with His Holy Spirit and cleanse your heart by faith and you simply put off the old nature because it has already been crucified. So you're actually doing something that has already been done in the spiritual realm, you simply stop doing and stop thinking and stop feeling the things that have burdened you for years.

If you say to me, "Brother, if I have difficulty putting off the old nature what do I do?" Loved ones, the problem is always impartial or a partial surrender, a controlled surrender, an incomplete consecration, an incomplete commitment --that's always the problem. Just go to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to reveal to you what you're still depending on the world of people and things and circumstances for instead of God, He will show you that.

Yours may be the situation like the dear souls in Los Angeles 50 years ago. You may have to seek God in this prayer room, you may have to seek Him for hours, you may have to weep before Him -- but the Holy Spirit will show you because that's the only reason He's here on earth, to reveal to you the things that you have in Jesus and the most precious thing that you have in Jesus is a clean heart that the Holy Spirit is able to give you. And so when you come to the very bottom of your heart at last, there'll be a witness of the Holy Spirit that you're looking only to Him for all that you need and you'll have that witness in yourself and your faith will rise up and your heart will be cleansed by faith and you'll be a different person inside, out as well, but inside -- and so that you understand fully, there will no longer be evil rising up from inside, that's right.

This may seem miraculous to you and it is, it may seem incredible to you but loved ones, there will be no evil rising up from inside. You remember I said once before that's why I say, after you've got a clean heart, it's just your own fault if you sin. It means you're choosing to; you're not sinning because you have to, you're just choosing to. The clean heart produces the very sentiments of Jesus, the very fragrance of His own heart within you and it's easy to be a Christian because you are one inside and you feel like one.

I would say to you that you should get down to dealing with God and I would do it whatever way you think it is best for you. The prayer room is open right through the week, during the business hours, there are always some of us here. As revival comes, I believe that it will be open all the time,

night and day, but it is open through the business hours, Monday thru Friday and it's open all day today, then loved ones, this building, you can take yourself anywhere in any of the rooms and just get alone with God and get down to business with Him and find out why He is not able to baptize you with the Holy Spirit this very minute and He will deal with you and He will show you.

Now take time, take time to be holy, you know it takes time because you have been listening to everybody else for years and so it takes a while to get on to the same wavelength as God's Spirit. But if I were you I'd do that. Or go home and do it, but sooner or later, loved ones, sooner or later you'll have to settle this. Sooner or later you have to settle it.

I mean there'll never be a convenient time. There'll never be a time that's better than now, there won't often be time that it's as clearly presented to you as now. So you'll have to do it sooner or later or live a life of constant defeat that can easily end up, if you get tired of the confessing and repenting over the years, can easily end up in hell despite what God has already done in your life.

So loved ones, it'll never be easy, you know. It'll never be easy to take time from going out this afternoon or going out tomorrow. It'll never be easy. It'll take you to give yourself to God and to at least give Him time. Yes, there will be a day you know, very real, there will be a day when each one of us will have to face it. We'll have to face the unclean heart but on that day, the judgment day, everybody in the world will see it and we will see that then we cannot change it.

So I would encourage you and encourage your dear hearts to get down to business with God, loved ones, and to come through to the New Covenant and into real Christianity you know, and let's leave this Jewish Covenant, this Old Covenant behind and let's go on to what God has given us in Jesus.