

New Testament Personal Experiences

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

What is really necessary things in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit is to be very clear in our own minds what the New Testament experience of the Holy Spirit is, and to really interpret that carefully and closely. And so that's really what I'd like to spend a little time doing now. I think it's important brothers to see that Jesus himself came to do a two-fold work and you have that pointed out clearly, you remember, in John 1:29 and 33 where John says first that Jesus is the one you remember, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" And John says, "First of all Jesus came to take away the sin of the world," that is to bring forgiveness of sins. And then in Verse 33 the second purpose of his coming, "I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"

So, I think it's important to see that the reason Jesus came was to remove our sins from between us and God so that God would then really be free to replace the tree of life in our lives and to fill us and baptize us with the Holy Spirit. And I think it's vital to see that Jesus' work is not just the work of a savior from the guilt of past sins but his work is also as a Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit from present sinning and from our present powerless lives. And I think it's important to see that really this was what Jesus himself laid emphasis on in John 7:37-39.

You find Jesus emphasizing this truth that the Holy Spirit was someone that we would receive really only from him and Verse 37, "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."'" And then John explains you see, "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

And you see that's the special mark of the new covenant. You see that. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given in a full way because Jesus was not yet glorified. So, not only is the baptism of the Holy Spirit really the real reason Jesus came, but it's the unique mark of the new covenant as opposed to the old covenant because John says plainly, "Until Jesus is glorified." That is until Jesus presents his blood to the Father, God cannot replace the tree of life among us men and so cannot baptize us with the Holy Spirit.

Now, you get that emphasis in Acts 2:17-18. The emphasis that this is the really unique mark of the new covenant, the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:17, "And in the last days it shall be." You remember, Peter quotes Joel, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yeah, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

So, you can see that really the new covenant was to have as its unique mark, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus, you remember, said on one occasion to the disciples, "The Holy Spirit is with you," because in the old covenant in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was with people. I mean, the Holy Spirit was with Saul to be a king. The Holy Spirit was with the prophets to prophesy. The Holy Spirit was often with Moses, but here in the New Testament the Holy Spirit was to be in you and this was a new mark of the new covenant, that the Holy Spirit was going to be

able to become synonymous with us men and with us woman.

In the old days God spoke through Balaam's ass external and independent of people but now with the coming of the Holy Spirit into people then the word was again made flesh and so the mark of the new covenant is the Holy Spirit coming in and filling and making us like Jesus himself. Now you get that clear teaching about the Holy Spirit brothers if you look at the first instruction, you remember, that was given after the first Christian sermon that was preached, Acts 2:37-38. You remember, the response of the people to that first Christian sermon in Act 2:37, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" And then the first instruction you see, includes right in the forefront of it this command to receive the Holy Spirit, "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

And you see it there that the gift of the Holy Spirit was the thing they were told to receive. That is what would make them Christians as opposed to Jews, they were going to receive the Holy Spirit into themselves. Now, the Holy Spirit would do certain things in them and the Holy Spirit, we find does certain things in us. First of all John 16:8, you remember, "When the Holy Spirit comes he will convince the world of sin." It is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin. None of us have moved towards Jesus or towards God except that the Holy Spirit has worked in us and made us realize that we were not right with God.

Then the Holy Spirit will regenerate us in John 3:5, you remember, "Unless you are born of water and of the Spirit, you will in no wise enter the kingdom of God." So, we're born of the Spirit when we become Christians. The Holy Spirit seals us you remember, Ephesians 1:13 that it is the Holy Spirit that seals you as God's own people. So our assurance that we're children of God comes from the Holy Spirit. And then you remember Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." It's the Holy Spirit that brings power.

Now, I mention all those because I think we often have an idea that the Holy Spirit only comes upon a person when that person is baptized with the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that the Holy Spirit has dealt with many of us even before we're children of God. He has convicted us of sin. It's him that brings real repentance to us. It's him really that enables us to believe on God. It's the Holy Spirit that works the grace in us. We have to say yes or no to him, but it's the Holy Spirit that brings about the miracle of the new birth. It's the Holy Spirit that brings about the miracle of assurance that we're children of God, and it's the Holy Spirit that fills us with power.

So, maybe it's good to see that the Holy Spirit is not just to be identified with what we have so often called the baptism of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit does many things in our lives down through the years. Maybe it's important to see at this stage that he's the basis of our assurance. A lot of people in these days really aren't sure whether they're Christians or not and they aren't sure because they don't know the real basis of the assurance that they're children of God. Some of them get caught in that trap that Jesus outlined you remember, in John 1:12 and they say, "Oh, we're born of blood and we're born of Christian parents so we must be Christians." Or, "We're born by the will of man. The Baptist pastor or the Presbyterian pastor, or the Methodist pastor gives us the hand of fellowship, welcomed us into the church, we're members of the church so we know we're children of God." Or, some have a belief in the will of the flesh, born of the will of the flesh.

They say at a Billy Graham meeting or an evangelist service, "I'm going to believe in Jesus," and

they say, “Just the sheer determination to believe, that makes me a Christian.” And they try and look back and say, “Do I really feel determined? Then I must be a Christian.” Now, assurance of salvation is not based on any of those things. Assurance of salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit within us and it can be clearly discerned. It’s outlined there in Romans 8:16 and you remember Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit moving within us and he says in Verse 16, “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

Now, the Holy Spirit gives us an assurance of salvation because he, you see the Spirit capital S in Verse 16 of Romans 8, the Spirit himself and the capital S signifies a definite article in Greek and it always refers to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit and that’s a small s that we are children of God. So the way you tell you’re a child of God is because of the combination of the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of your own spirit.

Now you know, if you say, “Well, what is the witness of God’s Spirit?” Well, it’s there outlined in Verse 15 of Romans 8, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” So, the witness of God’s Spirit inside us is that we feel he is our Father, we sense he’s our Father. When we go to him in prayer we sense we want to call Abba! Father! And Abba is the Greek word for dad, and we feel that God is our Father. We sense inside, “He is our Father, he loves me.” There’s a spirit inside of God that calls up to God and regards him as our Father, no longer as a great Creator or as a mighty Lord God but it’s Jesus inside us calling up to his Father and saying, “Dad, I love you.”

Now, it seems to me the first witness is the witness of God’s Spirit inside us that makes us feel about God the way Jesus does. We just sense we love him. We sense he is our Father. However much we fail him, however much we’ve disobeyed, there’s a spirit inside us that makes us keep on coming back to him saying, “Father forgive me.” It’s not a spirit of fear of the mighty judge but it’s a spirit of a child coming back to his father and saying, “Father I’ve messed it all up again. Will you forgive me?” But it’s a spirit inside, it’s a spirit you know, that assures you that because Jesus has died for you, God no longer has anything against you. It’s an absolute recumbency upon Jesus as your only hope of salvation. It’s an absolute confidence inside that you have nothing to offer God, that only the blood of Jesus will enable you to be accepted by him and it’s therefore a rest in Jesus as your redemption and sanctification. It’s a complete trust in Jesus because of his blood.

But it seems to me that’s the witness of the Holy Spirit you see, and that’s something that goes below feelings, and below intellectual convictions. It’s something that you sense deep down, it’s an attitude of heart. And then what is the witness of our own spirit? Well, the witness of our own spirit is outlined in several places but Romans 5:5 is one place. Romans 5:5, love is part of the witness of our own spirit, when the Holy Spirit comes inside us he dwells with us and he also influences our spirit and he fills it with love, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit which has been given to us.”

So, there is a love inside us of God and a desire to love other people. Now brothers and sisters, I’m not saying that it dwells unmixed in the heart until really you have been filled with the Holy Spirit completely, but it is there. It’s a desire to love people and it’s a desire to love God, and it is a sense inside, “I want to love you Lord. I want to go your way.” In other words, the real mark of God’s Spirit within a person is that they have a desire deep down that they want to go his way. When sin comes up, it’s an alien thing to them. You know, they don’t embrace sin. Sin may be

there but they don't embrace it. They say, "No, I want to go God's way." Whatever the sin is like they reject it as something alien and external to them.

Now, it's important maybe brothers and sisters to just note those clearly and to see that really Galatians 5:22-23, you know, the fruit of the Spirit is an indication that our own spirit has been changed by God and the absolute confidence that we have that God will receive us for Jesus' sake, that's the witness of God's own Spirit and the Holy Spirit brings that about.

Now, what about the whole business of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? And it seems to me here it's important really to look carefully at the New Testament and to analyze it as carefully, and coolly, and calmly as we can. Would you like to look at the whole problem of the time sequence? And this is where a great deal of the problem lies. The time sequence in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at Acts 2:38. Here's the norm you see, here is the norm. Acts 2:38, "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Probably what happened was this, Peter preached, said, "You have murdered the son of God and this Jesus has been raised to the right hand of the Father and he has poured out this power which you now see. You murdered him by ruthless and cruel hands." And the people said, "What do we do about it?" And Peter said, "Repent. Be sorry, stop doing it. Turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and then you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And they probably that very day believed on Jesus and said, "We're sorry. We're sorry. Now we've seen what we've done, we're turning from it and we'll turn and we'll live for this Jesus."

And then Peter would say, "Alright, now next day you're going to be baptized. I'm going to baptize you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins." And he would gather them around the next day and he would repeat probably something of what Paul wrote down for us, you remember, on Romans 6:3-4. He would say, "Do you not know that all of us who have been 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." And they would say, "Well, yeah, yeah, but what does that mean?" And Peter would outline what it meant. He would say, "Now listen, I could be arrested any day. I could be killed tomorrow. I can't live for tomorrow. I can't hope for my family to grow up. I can't hope to be wealthy. I can't hope to look to the future. As far as I'm concerned there is no future. Now, that's what being baptized into Jesus' death is going to mean for you."

And then he would go through the possessions you know, this is what it's going to mean for you and he would explain fully what full surrender meant. And then he would say, "Now, are you willing not only to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, but are you willing to be baptized 'ice' is the Greek word, into Jesus? Are you willing to be identified absolutely with Jesus in his death so that you can be identified with him in his resurrection?" And then if they were willing they would go down into the water and as they came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit would baptize them with himself.

And so brothers, I honestly believe that in New Testament days the norm was really the whole experience taking place either in one day or in two days. But, I honestly question you know, if the norm in those days was you were born of the spirit and then a long while after, maybe two or three years, or in my miserable experience, you know, 17 years later, you're filled with the Spirit or

you're baptized with the Spirit. I honestly believe that was the norm in those days and that they were baptized with the spirit in two ways. They were filled with the Spirit for purity and from that day on the nine fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 began to appear in their lives and they were anointed with the Holy Spirit for power so that the nine gifts of the spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:3-4 were made available to them.

But that really, that was the New Testament experience. And, really that is the work of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant and in that way reproduced the image of Jesus, reproduced the purity of Jesus in the converts and reproduced the power of Jesus in the converts which was really why the people in the ancient world saw immediately Jesus in what were apparently very new converts. Now, Satan has tried to upset our whole attitude to the Holy Spirit by preoccupying us with distractions in regard to this experience. And I really think he has done his best to eliminate this precious unique work of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant by getting us all to disagree in all kinds of ways with the way you were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

And so I'd like really to try and tackle some of those. First of all you know, that he has tried to preoccupy us with this whole business of the time sequence of the works of the new birth and the filling and the anointing by the Holy Spirit. And you know there are plenty of people in all kinds of churches and all kinds of groups that spend their time disagreeing with each other about the time sequence in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit. So, there are people who say, "Oh, you must be born of the Spirit before you can be filled with the Spirit." There are people who say, "You have to be baptized with the Spirit before you can be filled with the Spirit." There are others who say, "No, it has to be the other way around."

Now brothers, I think the first thing you have to face is that it's very hard to tie down a time sequence. After you've looked at the normal pattern in Acts 2:38 you have to accept that the Holy Spirit in Jesus' words is a free spirit and the wind bloweth where it listeth and the Holy Spirit will often do things backwards and in different ways. And you get that you remember, in Acts 10:44-48 the experience of Cornelius. Acts 10:44-48, and you remember Peter had hardly finished preaching and it says, "While Peter was still saying this," still preaching, still preaching the gospel, "The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." Who had apparently not even believed on Jesus or just about and no more, "For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'"

So the first thing I think is to see that it's hard to tie down and say, "No, Larry you can't have been baptized with the Holy Spirit because you haven't experienced this or you haven't experienced that." I think finally we have to be very humble about the time sequence of the works of the Holy Spirit and be open to God doing them in a new way. So brothers, I don't think you can afford to say to a person, "You couldn't be born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit at the same time." You can say with old John Wesley that, "I have interviewed hundreds of people in the midst of revival in the 18th century and I have not found one in whom both works have taken place instantaneously."

So, you can take the empirical evidence and historical report but you have to finally say that there is nothing in the scripture that says it should be so. And you certainly cannot afford to say to a person purely on the basis of time sequence that you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit because you haven't been born of the Spirit. You have to accept that a person could be born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit the same day as far as God is concerned. There is no difficulty as far

as faith is concerned.

Now then I think, people have tried to confuse us and Satan has tried to confuse people on the issue of tongues. Tried to get people all wrapped up with the whole business of tongues. Not with the gift of the Holy Spirit, not with being baptized with the Holy Spirit but with the whole business that you have to speak in tongues otherwise you haven't been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now brothers, it's just not true you see. 1 Corinthians 12: 29-30 run like this, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?" And the form of the Greek question obviously expects the answer, "No." And you could guess even from the English that the answer is, "No, all aren't prophets, all aren't teachers, all don't work miracles." And then, "Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" And obviously, Paul is saying everybody doesn't speak with tongues. There are many people who are baptized with the Holy Spirit who don't speak with tongues.

Now, I think many people get caught up in the kind of scholastic argument, "Oh, but maybe that was the gift of tongues, but everybody speaks with a tongue when they're first baptized." But then brothers you'd have to deal with the fact that only three instances in Acts, only in three instances in Acts is it recorded that they spoke with tongues. In all the other instances where they were baptized with the Holy Spirit there's no mention of tongues. And I'd just mention, you know, Acts 2:41, and Acts 8:17, and Acts 9:18 and Acts 2:41 is just a plain one where it just says clearly that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and that was it.

Acts 2:41, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." It just says they were baptized into Jesus and there were added three thousand souls. Or, if you like to look at Acts 8:17, you remember, the case of Philip's converts, "Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." But there's no mention of tongues. So it's wrong, I think, for us to be preoccupied with the question of tongues. Tongues is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit is separate from his manifestations and the baptism with the Holy Spirit is not signified simply by speaking on tongues.

But Satan, I think, has preoccupied us with this you know. I think he has tried to preoccupy us with what many of us will claim is a very cool, and intellectual, and middle of the way, and maybe a British attitude to take. And the alternative many people say to these is, "That's right, you're right brother. That's madness talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work. It isn't a second work, it's one complete work and when we're born of the Spirit we're baptized with the Spirit and there's no question about it. And it doesn't matter what my life is like, it doesn't matter whether I have the fruit of the Spirit in my life or not, it doesn't matter whether I minister in the gifts of the Spirit or not, I've been baptized with the Spirit because what you say is right. In the New Testament it was to be one experience and even though it seems to me, I haven't experienced the whole one experience yet I know I've been born of the Spirit so I must have been baptized with the Spirit."

Now brothers, do you see that's an utterly blind attitude today where you say because the norm in the New Testament was one great experience then you say you're a Christian and yet you haven't the fruit of the Spirit in your life, you have no experience of the gifts of the Spirit but you keep on saying, "Ah, no but I'm baptized with the Spirit." Now dear ones, do you see that's contradicted by the New Testament examples of people who had entered into only part of the work of the Holy Spirit and it's contradicted also by those of us who know we're Christians but know we're not moving in the fullness of the Spirit.

So really, what we need to see is that the norm in the New Testament is one complete experience but there are several indications in the New Testament itself that many people entered into only half of the experience. Some were born of the Spirit and not filled with the Spirit. Some were anointed with the Spirit and not filled with the Spirit. Some experienced victory and not power. Some experienced power and not victory. Some experienced forgiveness of sins and neither power nor victory.

Now I know that there are some brothers who say, "Well, you should accept the teaching of the work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the didactic passages alone in the New Testament and you shouldn't bother with the descriptive passages. But do you see from the didactic passages you get the norm and the normal doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but from the descriptive passages you find how that worked out in human experience and how it often worked out only partially in some people's experience.

Now, that's brothers what I'd like to look at a little now. Would you look with me at some of the impartial experiences of the work of the Holy Spirit? First of all, you get Acts 19:1-6, and you remember those were Apollos' converts at Corinth. And you read in Verse 2, and Paul said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, 'No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

Now, here was a group of people who believed on the one who was to come. Now, old Apollos obviously hadn't even told them about Jesus but they believed on the Messiah who was to come and through whose holy servant of God they were to receive the forgiveness of their sins. In other words, they were baptized as good Jews. Now, they obviously received the forgiveness of their sins for Jesus' sake but they did not believe for the Holy Spirit. And it is unto you according to your faith. Now it seems that many people can be born of the Spirit and have their sins forgiven and yet not be baptized with the Holy Spirit because it is unto them according to their faith.

There's another situation in Acts 8, you remember, Philip converted some people in Samaria and in Acts 8:5-8 you read this, that Philip asked them then to come forward and then explained to them what was going to happen. Acts 8:5, "Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did." And then it says, you know, to be clear in Verse 12, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

Now here was an instance where people believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and so they actually were born of the Spirit. They were not just good Jews, they were born of the Spirit and they became children of God. And yet, "When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."

Now, it seems that some people can actually be baptized in the name of Jesus and become Christians, not just be good Jews who know the forgiveness of their sins but really know Jesus himself and be born of his Spirit and yet not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And it seems to me that there are some people that we come across that are in that position.

Then there's another example, you remember, in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ." These are the people in whom the spiritual gifts were manifest. The Corinthian church had the spiritual gifts in complete fullness. You could see it from the details Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 12 about spiritual gifts and yet he says, "I could only address you as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh." And he says, "You are still carnal." "For where there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?"

Now here was an instance of men who had been baptized with the Spirit and experienced the gifts of the Spirit but had not experienced the inner purifying work of the Holy Spirit. And so it seems to me you can come into that situation where people have entered into the power of the work of the Holy Spirit but not into the purity.

Now really brothers, these are some of the instances in the New Testament that suggests that though the work of the birth and the baptism of the Holy Spirit should probably and is planned by God to be one great work, yet there are examples in the New Testament that it was only a partial work. What I would like us to talk about probably in the next tape or the next time we meet is what should be our practical attitude then to our own lives and our own experiences in the light of this fact that the norm in the New Testament is one great experience but there are instances of people entering into only partial experiences. And I would trust God, that he would at least begin to guide you in your outworking of it in your own life during these days. Amen.