

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been discussing, loved ones, the question the past few weeks: Why are we alive? The real problem, in trying to answer that question, is, that none of us know anything more about the answer than what we can discover in our own minds, and from our own experience from our life here on earth. In other words, none of us can tell why there is any reason for us to be alive, outside this world, because none of us have ever been outside it, and that's the case with every human being on the earth except one. And there is one human being who was able to leave the earth, and tell us that He was coming back, and then come back to it, and live on it for about 30 or 40 days, and then lift off it again so that His body was never discovered. In other words, there is only one person who has really convinced us that He knows something about the reason why we are here, from outside, from beyond. There's only one person who has ever convinced us that He actually knows the maker who created us all, and that one is Jesus.

He gives a startling answer to the question: Why are we alive? He says, "You're alive so that you'll fall in love with your maker. So, that you'll love Him, your God. So, that you'll love Him with all your heart, and so that you'll enjoy the family life that He and I have together." That's what Jesus said. That's why we're all alive here. Of course, none of us live like that. We love ourselves, and most of us are always busy trying to exalt ourselves, or make ourselves look good. We're not living every moment trying to make God look good. We're usually preoccupied with ourselves, and so most of us here have been running just a long love affair with ourselves for years. I mean, it really has brought us more misery than it has happiness, but it's become so much a way of life for us, that most of us in the world can't do anything else but that. In fact, it hasn't really brought us a lot of brightness, it's normally thrown most of us into a long dark tunnel of preoccupation with ourselves, preoccupation with our jobs, preoccupation with the way people treat us, preoccupation with what we're going to do next year. Most of us live our lives in a long dark tunnel preoccupied with all kinds of burdens, of how we can protect this self that we love so much.

What we have of course found is that it seems very difficult to change that. We have moments, interludes of brightness when we produce some unselfish action at a Thanksgiving Day, or at somebody's birthday. Or, we produce something that looks like love at times, but normally we find that it is actually a subtle variation of self love, and normally most of us live our lives like that. We're not loving God with all our hearts, because we find it's almost impossible to do it. We find that when we try to do that, we fall back into loving ourselves, and being preoccupied with ourselves. It's wild, but at the greatest moments of our desire to be unselfish, we find that we're most selfish. We say we shouldn't hurt the ones we love. Well, we're always hurting the ones we love. The moments when we ought to be considering someone else's feelings more than our own, we find we're wrought up with how we're feeling, or how they're affecting us. So that it's very difficult to know how to change that, and how to live the way we were meant to, loving God with all our hearts. And yet that is what we were made to do.

It might help you to see how incredibly perverted that has made us. If you would look with me for a moment, at what is the scriptural model for our personalities. Many of you who have been to the evening services know it, and some of you who were here maybe a year ago saw it once, but I think it does help us to see the real problem in changing ourselves. If we look at it from the same point of

view as God's Word does. Now, the verse, loved ones that gives the scriptural model for the personality, or outlines what really a scriptural psychology, is in First Thessalonians. It's 1 Thessalonians 5:23. I think we'd all have to say that theology in scripture is way beyond any other academic discipline, be it psychology, or philosophy. So, probably one can never really talk about Biblical psychology, but one can certainly say, this is the kind of outline that God has given us of our personalities in relationship to Him, and I think that you'll agree, that it gives some light on psychology too. 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That's the way God tells us we have been made. We have a spirit and a soul and a body, and some of us have at times thought of it in the same way as you think of the Old Testament Temple you know. We've thought of the spirit as kind of the "inside of the temple", and you see it as really the Holy Place in a way, or the Holy of Holies right inside in the center, and that's our spirit. That's the part of us that relates to God, and then round that is the Holy Place, or our souls -- or the part of us that relates to ourselves. And then round that is our bodies. And if you follow these words here through the Bible, you find that they each designate different functions that we're all familiar with.

The body certainly includes those three: the blood and the bone and the flesh. But it is interesting that when you look at the word for "spirit", you find that it includes three separate functions, that we all know by experience: The ability to commune with God. The ability to know what God wants you to do, without working it out by deductive reasoning in your mind, or even inductive reasoning -- intuition. And conscience, which judges our actions in the light of our intuition, and constrains us to live up to the best that we know.

Then, if you follow "soul" through in scripture, you'll find a clue of course in the fact that the Greek word for soul is "pseuche" -- or psyche it becomes in English, and it becomes the word that we find in psychology. Which is really the knowledge of the understanding of the soul, and you find that when you follow the word through in the Bible, you find that it refers to what we normally think of as psychological functions of our personality; our mind's ability to judge, and to understand things. The will's ability to make decisions. The emotion's ability to feel -- to feel love, or to feel happiness or sadness. So, loved ones, that's normally the way God has taught us to think of our own personalities.

Now, it might help you a little to look at what His plan for us was in the light of that. His plan was that we would live by love of Him. In other words, that through communion of our spirits, we would love God with all our hearts. We would just think of Him all the time. You know what loving is? I mean loving is when you're in love with a dear one, you can just sit there, and look into her eyes, and that's just it. That's just enough to be with her, and it's then wanting to please her, wanting to do things for her, wanting to understand her, putting yourself in her shoes and trying to think what she thinks, and feel what she feels. That's what loving is you see.

Loving God is not going into a big temple, with big sacrifices, and big organs, and all that stuff. Loving God is wanting to please Him, wanting to understand Him, thinking, "What is God doing at this moment?" That kind of thing. It's a warm personal thing, and God's will was that we would love Him, and then of course as we would love Him, He would in turn allow His life (which is called His Holy Spirit) -- it's the life that makes Him what He is -- it's the life that gives Him the character that he has. His Holy Spirit then, would come into us, and through us. And his love in fact would come through our communion with Him into our spirits. And that communion with Him would let us know

what to do day by day in our jobs. We would know by intuition.

You ladies, we talk about your intuition. Well, really what that is, is a shadow of what the original live intuition was that we once had with God, whereby we would know how to drill the oil wells. We would know what to do in our jobs. We would know what to do in our financial plans, by intuition. Not just by reading the Wall Street Journal, or talking to other people. Then, our conscience of course, would constrain our wills to obey that, and so, our wills would direct our mind, and our mind would understand God's will. Would understand His plans. So, really most of you who know a little about the philosophy of science, realize that most inventions come actually through the limited operation of this kind of activity. Einstein would say himself, "Most movements in science come from leaps of faith. Setting up hypotheses that you then have to prove, but the leap comes somewhere within." That was especially true, you remember, of his theory of relativity. So, intuition was the way that God originally meant us to operate in our lives. So that we wouldn't be at the mercy of just our mind's ability to understand the world. Our conscience would constrain our will to direct our mind in the light of that, and our emotions would express the joy of our friendship with God to the world. And so loved ones, we would fill the world with really what God was giving us. With the sense of happiness that we had with Him. With the sense of importance that we had in His eyes, and the sense of tremendous security that we had when we knew that He was in charge of our lives. That was the way God intended us to live. That's what it means to love God. That's why we were made.

You know what we did. We decided we don't want to love God, we want to love ourselves. We want to look after ourselves, and take care of ourselves. And so, we began to try to live the other way round. We put the world in place of God. That's what we've done. Now we're involved in trying to get from the world, the things that would have come naturally from God's love. Some of us have a wild idea about marriage you know. We kind of think, well, the reason for marrying is you'll have somebody to keep you company in your old age. Or, you'll have somebody to keep you going when you can't work any longer. Or, you'll have somebody to give you thrills every night, and really if you go for that in marriage, it ends up hell. But still, if you do love somebody, and somebody else loves you truly, it is interesting, isn't it? You'd certainly have no trouble with whether you're valued or not. I mean, you do have a great sense of value don't you? Somebody loves you, you really feel, "boy, I'm valuable to them." And you've no trouble thinking that you're important to somebody, because you know that that person is thinking of you often during the day, and you've no trouble with thinking that you're a nobody. You really know that somebody cares about you -- at least one person thinks that you're valuable. You have little trouble with the sense of fearfulness, or insecurity, because you know that loved one will be right by your side.

Now loved ones, those are the things we missed when we stopped loving God. Those are the things that we had to start trying to get from the world, and that's the way most of us live. Most of us live trying to get from the world the security, and the significance, and the happiness that we were meant to receive from God. And so, our personalities operate exactly the opposite way to the way that God intended. Now, that's what we mean when we say, our personalities are perverted. They're operating the wrong way. You can see it, there are many instances that you can think of yourselves, but you know that if God loves you, what does it matter who else thinks you're important? And normally that's the way we were meant to live -- with the sense of God's love coming down into us, so that we had a real sense of our position in the world, our identity, and a real sense of importance. But what now happens is if we ever receive that love, our personalities are working the other way, trying to get significance from other people.

That's what happens, you remember, when you want to be interested in somebody else in a conversation. You really want to, you want to love them. You want to give all the attention to them, but you find something inside you that is creepingly trying to get a sense of your own significance, or importance from them. You know the way you drop those little words about some subject that you know a lot about, hoping to guide the conversation around to that, so that they'll see how quite brilliant you are. Loved ones, we're always at that. It's so much part of us, that we can't change it. You know it, you've felt it yourself. You want to be kind to the other person, you want to praise them, you want to lift them up, but you find this other thing working inside you. Loved ones, it's because we have perverted our personalities. They are hopelessly perverted.

It's the same with the business of worry. Do you see why it's so difficult to avoid worry? You can see. Because we for years, and our forefathers before us, have been trying to get from the world the security that we were meant to get from God. And so, of course, in order to do that we have to pervert the normal function of the mind, which was to understand God. We perverted it in order to manipulate the stocks and shares. Manipulate other people. Manipulate jobs. Manipulate our degrees into the right kind of job, so that we would have security. So, our mind now is hopelessly perverted, so that it is always involved in manipulating. Do you know that's what happens? You find the bank balance is down, and you know your mind is off, trying to manipulate: how'd I vary this? How'd I swing this? How do I work that? It's the same when you find someone criticizing you. Your mind immediately goes to work: How can I manipulate my position in this office so that they will not criticize me, but will respect me? Loved ones, that is how deep the personality perversion is. That's what we mean when we say that for years we've been living, putting the world and society in place of God, and our personalities have become so utterly perverted that they can't even work the right way when they ought to.

You see the same problem with the will. The will was meant to obey the conscience. It was meant to be in charge of our mind and emotions. Do you realize that your will has hardly any strength at all? Your will is normally under the absolute domination of your emotions, and your mind. So, that you rarely actually exercise your will. Normally your poor little will just follows what your emotions feel like doing. And of course, maybe the most tragic situation is in this life of affection. The life of friendship. We were meant to get all the love that we needed from God. Then we were meant to share that, and express the joy of that love with others. When we turned from God of course, we were empty inside. So now we prostitute every relationship to try to get joy from it. Of course, that's why our marriages are often so unhappy, because we're trying to get joy from a human being, that only God can give us. So we're always demanding something more from them than they can give. That's why we hear about all the divorces. That's why we're always praying for loved ones who are going to get divorces. Because we're all involved in trying to get more out of marriage, than marriage was ever meant to give. We're all trying to get more out of friendships, than friendship was ever meant to give. Because really we were meant to get these things from our relationship with God.

Well loved ones, what has happened, of course, is that our spirits have really died. That's why. That's the sense in which we're dead. We're dead towards God, because our spirits have ceased to operate. There are some spirits in the evil spirit world that do operate. Some people have very live spirits. They're not live to God, but they're live to the evil spiritual world, but most of us have spirits that are absolutely dead. And all of us have spirits that are dead to God, so that we exist only on the level of the soul and the body. You must admit, isn't that where most of us live? In fact, wouldn't you agree that most of our friends live not even at this level? A few very active intellectuals may live in the soul level. A few very emotional people may live in the emotions, but most of live at this level of the body. Most of us try to satisfy our need for security, and

significance, and happiness purely on the physical level. We do, don't we?

I mean, how many of us think, "Oh, I'm just so happy today, because I'm looking forward to such a dinner, or such a supper, or such a lunch, or I have something nice in the refrigerator that I'm really looking forward to eating." You know, we are often not far above the poor little dogs you know, really. Who kind of wag their tails, because they're getting treats, and it's amazing how many of us live for our happiness even on the physical level, but certainly, probably all of us live for our security on the physical level. And depending on how many possessions we have, and how many clothes we have, and how big of house we have, we feel substantially secure. That's why when a time like a recession comes, we all begin to shake, because our security is built not on anything to do with this dear Father who put us here, and therefore is responsible for us you know. He is. Have you ever thought of that? He really feels as responsible, and more responsible, than any other father, because He put us here, but our security which should rest on that, in fact rests on all kinds of very questionable stocks and shares and money markets, that nobody can guarantee.

So loved ones, that's the situation we're in. So, our personality works the wrong way. Now, what do we do with it? Well, some of us try to use it. "Win by Intimidation", that kind of book, they try to use it. They go with it. A book like "Win by Intimidation" says, "Ok, the personality normally operates that way. We don't care whether it's operating right, or whether it's operating wrong, but let's face it, we're all manipulating in order to establish our significance with other people. So, I write a book on how to win by intimidating other people." It seems so wrong to us you know, and yet it seems to be what everybody is doing. So, some of us in our society decide, if you can't beat them join them. Ok, the personality is going this way, let's use it. So, a lot of books are based on that.

Now, some other books strangely enough, still hark back to the way our personalities used to operate. So, there are books on "The Power of Positive Thinking." There are books like, "I'm Okay, You're Okay", which hark back to the old days of beauty before the fall, and they pretend that there was no fall. They pretend that we never turned from God, and they pretend that we're living in God's love today. Therefore, "we're ok, and you're ok", and they pretend that things are right. They try to reinforce the little bit of memory our personality had, of the way it used to operate from the inside out. So, there are books like that. That's why those books sell so well, loved ones. Really, because we all know the problem in our life is not what is right, and what is wrong. We all have a fair idea what is right, and what is wrong -- but how to live that way? How do we get the power to live right? Most of those books zero in on the purely psychological dynamic that is still in our personalities. Either the perverted one, that operates from the world in. Or, the original godly one, that operated from the spirit out. But all they do, of course, is operate from that level down. So, those books solve nothing. That's why they're always temporary adjustments. They're always temporary improvements you get from power of positive thinking books, because all they're doing is dealing from the psychological and the physical level down. They're not changing this heart of the personality at all.

Some religions, you remember, go on the same kind of plan. Monasticism is based on that. Monastics say, "You're right. The problem is we're living off the world. Ok, blot the world out." So, monastics try to shut the world out, make the world go away, and loved ones have tried that. They've said, "We'll cut ourselves off from the world, and that will at least cut us off from this false source of security and happiness". Other ones say, "Well, Asceticism is the answer. Let's cut out the body. Let's pretend that we have no body. Since we're trying to answer all our needs through our bodies, let's eliminate the body, and maltreat it, and abuse it, and ignore it." Of course it's no

answer at all , because it's just cutting off another part of your personality.

Loved one, that's the problem that we're in. That's what we mean when we say our personalities are perverted. I think most of you have studied a little psychology, or sociology can see a hundred other applications that we haven't time to mention this morning. But that is the problem that mankind faces. What do you do with a personality that has become so utterly perverted, and reversed, that it can no longer work the way it was meant to do? That's why loved ones, it says in Romans 6:6 that God did the only thing. That our old self (that is, our old personality) was crucified with Christ. So that the body of sin, this body that was used by sin, or independent life of God, might be rendered inoperative. And we might no longer be enslaved to sin, or enslaved to this whole society as the source of our needs, and the fulfillment of those needs. God did a cosmic miracle in Jesus whereby He destroyed our old selves. He destroyed that personality, and changed it completely.

How do you make it real? How do you actualize that? Because, that is true. Our old self was crucified with Christ. But, how do you actualize it today? Well, the evangelical world says, "Believe it, and do what's right." That's what they say. They say believe that you were crucified with Christ in your head, and do what's right. In other words, try a little power of positive thinking. Discipline yourself. That's why much of the evangelical world gets involved in power positive thinking books. Or, even "I'm ok you're ok" books, because a great deal of the evangelical world does not know how to actualize this miracle in our present day to day lives. So, all they do is follow what the psychologists say. They behave as if they were only psychologists, because psychologists are good in their field, but they aren't meant to deal primarily with the spirit. So, great parts of the evangelical world say, "Well believe that it's true, keep believing it, and do your best. Try your best."

Different parts of the so-called charismatic world say, "Oh well, believe it, and then try to renew your mind." Really all they are doing too is using the same dynamics (which are all human, and therefore limited) that the power of positive thinking people use. "Renew your mind. Or, you have to be healed in your emotions. That's what you need." So, you believe it, but we have to spend a little time healing your emotions, and renewing your mind. Then, you should exercise your will by dint of concentrating a lot on scripture. Loved ones, none of those will make the miracle of your crucifixion with Christ, and therefore the transformation of your personality real, because God has provided a way.

It doesn't matter how much you and I think about this. It doesn't matter how many diagrams I put up about it. It doesn't matter how logical it all seems to be. Loved one, you cannot make this thing real in yourself. There is only one who can make it real in you, and Jesus explained to us, "It's to your advantage that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counsellor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you, and when the Holy Spirit comes, He will take of the things that are mine, the victory that I brought about on the cross in eternity for you (over your personality) He will take that, and He will make it real in your life." Jesus says, "He will announce it to you, and He will show it to you, and He will share it with you, and communicate it to you."

Loved ones, the reason none of the books can enable us to live the way we were meant to live, is that God Himself sent Jesus first. Then, He sent us Jesus' successor, the dear third person of the trinity who is here in this world, and lives inside you this very moment for the specific purpose of making real in you this transformation, which took place on Calvary. Loved ones, that's how important the Holy Spirit is. Without the Holy Spirit, this will all just be good sense to you and me. Without the Holy Spirit, this will just appear a very clever little insight into psychology.

Without the Holy Spirit, this will just be an endless struggle in your life; to make these things real, by a mixture of positive thinking, and of will power. But loved ones, with the Holy Spirit this miracle of your crucifixion, and resurrection with Jesus, this miracle that changes your personality, and moves it right back to the place where it operates the way it was meant to operate, can come only through this dear Holy Spirit. Who was originally intended to come into our personalities, and give us the very character, and quality of God Himself.

That's why to me it seems such a dignified plan that God has for us. Far from being at the mercy of a Jim Jones, we're not even at the mercy of a Schuller, or at the mercy of an O'Neill, or at the mercy of a Graham, or at the mercy of anybody. We're not at any man's mercy. We're not dependant on any man to bring these things about. We're independent, because each of us can go only to one dear person, to have this miracle made real in us, and that person is the Holy Spirit. Loved ones, He is real in you today. He knows you better than you know yourself. And He will counsel you about these things. That's honestly why I dare to tell you about them, because they're mysteries. There comes a time when our minds cannot tackle any further, the subject. And why I tell you, and bring you to this point with such confidence is, because there is someone that takes you on from here. There is someone who you can meet when you go home today, in your own room there is a dear Person that for years has been giving you the good thoughts that you have had, and the good yearnings that you've experienced. He's the Person actually that prompted you to come here this morning, and that dear Person is the Holy Spirit. The Counselor that Jesus has sent us -- to make real in us this victory that took place in Christ.

We'll be talking about Him for the next number of weeks. I would ask you: would you begin to acknowledge him in your own life? Would you begin to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as a real person, and begin even to speak to Him? What moved me on in my own life, was when I stopped introspecting, and I saw that I could only introspect as deep as didn't matter, (which is of course what you do. You introspect into your soul, but you can't introspect into your spirit) and I began to see, that only the Holy Spirit can give me insight into what I have to do for Him to make this miracle real in me. Would you begin to counsel with the Holy Spirit? Ask Him to help you, to begin to sort out your motive life, and your attitudes, and to begin to show you what you've to do so that He can make this victory real in your life today.

Loved ones, it may take a little time, and it may take a little time for Him to counsel you through, but He is a better counselor than anybody else. He'll take you deeper than any man or woman can take you, and deeper than you can take yourself. He is sent here to make real in us, our crucifixion, and resurrection in Jesus. And He can do it, if you will trust Him. Let us pray.

Dear Father, it doesn't take great cleverness to see that we are involved in an insuperable task. Father, we do see the signs of perversion in our own personalities. We don't need convincing of that. We've often felt ourselves: our mind doesn't work right, our emotions aren't working right. We've often felt it Lord, and now we see our Father that, can a man enter again into his mother's womb, and be born? We see how hopeless the task is, to try to remake our personalities. Lord, we've tried. We've tried with the books, and with the autosuggestion, but it all seems patchwork. And now Father, we see why, because it's only a weak counterfeit for the work of the person that you sent us specifically to do this task, and that is the Holy Spirit. We thank you for Him. Lord Jesus we thank you for the Holy Spirit. We apologize for regarding Him as a force, as an influence, and not as a real person. We apologize to you Holy Spirit for ignoring you for so many years. We would ask now to begin to work with us, and counsel us, and will you bring us into this victory and transformation that God wrought for us in Jesus. We ask you to begin to show us, what we are to do

in our lives. So that you can transform and change us, and make us like Jesus, and enable us to love our God. And then, at last, to love other people as ourselves. We ask this in Jesus' name, and for His sake. Amen.