

The Holy Spirit Brings Purity

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We have often talked together here in the past years about mankind's biggest problem. You all know what it is without me even going over it again. It's moral impotence -- moral impotence. The real meaning of impotence from the Latin word 'impotens' is 'not able, inability'. The greatest problem that all of us know fine well in our personal lives is that moral inability. That inability to do consistently what we know we should do. That feeling that is expressed in those timeless words in Roman 7:15. It doesn't matter how often you and I hear them does it. We still feel yes, I can identify with those words. They may be old and they may be worn and they may seem boring at times but I can certainly agree with Paul, "The good that I would I cannot do." That's my experience so often. "And the evil that I hate that's the very thing I do." I think all of us know that.

That's our experience because up from deep down within us somewhere rise urges and drives and passions and feelings that we cannot control. And it's as is if deep, deep down somewhere in our personalities there is a heart of darkness that we have never ever fully explored. Outwardly we try to be reasonably unselfish, moderately respectable members of the human family -- attempting to live day by day in peaceful coexistence with the other three and a half billion people in the world. But there do come moments when that entire civilized exterior is shattered and there is a savage rising up with in us that shows there is a deep conviction inside that we really believe we are the important people in this world and that all the rest of you are here for our convenience.

That savagery rises up so violently and vehemently that many of us wonder, is it us at all? Probably that's why the Iran situation is so frightening to us. We feel that what we see there, the shattering of the little tenuous framework of international law and understanding that holds us all together in diplomatic immunity, that same framework is very, very tenuous in us here.

That's what shatters us and scares us in a 'Son of Sam' situation or a 'Jack the Ripper' situation. Suddenly that very tenuous, thin ice of sophistication and civilization and peaceful coexistence is broken and we see placarded in a news media, that savage heart of darkness that we know fine well resides deep down inside us. So probably there isn't one of us who doesn't understand that story of Dr. Jekyll and how he used to suddenly become a different person entirely and Mr. Hyde who could do all kinds of murderous things. Yet during the day he would be the quite, thoughtful, philanthropic doctor trying to help people. I think many of us know that there lie deep down within us, in an area that we have never been able completely to plumb, attitudes and desires that we cannot control. No one else knows about these attitudes and desires but we know about them.

That area of our lives is often called the self-life. It's easily the most impure part of us; it's easily the most unclean part of us. It's the part that we don't want anybody to see, even our dearest friends. That self-life seems to hold within it all kinds of savage anti-social attitudes that we manage to suppress or we come to repress them after a long period of time. Someone has written down some of them and I will read some of them to you. Maybe it will help you to realize that there are others who have this kind of feeling. I think one reason many of us have never been able to do anything about it is, we felt we alone feel this way and so we've decided to live with it.

Here's the description of some of what is down there in that heart of darkness. There is a secret spirit of pride, an exulted feeling in view of your success or position, because of your good

training or appearance, because of your natural gifts and abilities, an important independent spirit. There is a love of human praise, a secret fondness to be noticed, a love of supremacy, a drawing attention to self in conversation, a swelling out of self when you have had a free time in speaking or praying. There are the stirrings of anger or impatience which worst of all you call nervousness or holy indignation. There is a touchy, sensitive spirit, a disposition to resent and retaliate when disapproved of or contradicted, a desire to throw sharp heated flings at another. There is self-will, a stubborn un-teachable spirit, an arguing talkative spirit, harsh sarcastic expressions, an unyielding headstrong disposition, and a driving commanding spirit. There is a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed, a peevish, fretful spirit, a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored.

There is carnal fear, a man fearing spirit, a shrinking from reproach and duty, reasoning around your cross, a shrinking from doing your whole duty by those of wealth or position, a fearfulness that will someone will offend and drive some prominent person away, a compromising spirit. There is a jealous disposition, a secret spirit of envy shut up in your heart, an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another, a disposition to speak of the faults and failings rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself. There is a dishonest, deceitful disposition, the evading and covering of the truth, the covering up of your real faults, leaving a better impression of yourself than is strictly true, false humility, exaggeration, straining the truth. There is unbelief and a spirit of discouragement in times of pressure and opposition, lack of quietness and confidence in God, lack of faith and trust in God. There is a disposition to worry and complain in the midst of pain and poverty, an overanxious feeling whether everything will come out all right. There is formality and deadness, dryness and indifference, selfishness, love of ease, and love of money.

Those are not God's normal plan for our lives. They aren't. I agree with all of you that probably the great majority of us here can say part of that describes part of me. But despite that loved ones, that is not God's normal plan. That is not normal humanity, it isn't. Normal humanity is the kind of heart that we saw in that dear man of Nazareth. That's normal humanity. Everything else is parapsychology. Everything else is sub-normal. Now we have taken different attitudes to that stuff. Most of us in the church have said, "No one is perfect." So we have concentrated on an external conformity to certain behavior norms. You don't drink too much, you don't swear too much, you attend church on Sunday, you try to be fairly honest in your business and you try to be a good family person. But our attitude to all that other stuff is, "Nobody is perfect, we are all the same." The price of that hands off attitude to inner impurity is that we have thousands of churches that are absolutely torn apart by conflict, that are spoiled by sarcasm, that are fouled up by criticism.

We have churches all over the place that spend more time fighting than they do loving. The other price of ignoring this internal impurity is our family lives. How many loved ones are outwardly so wonderful on Sundays and their family life is a mess. I remember when my mom first said to me, "Ernest, if your friends at church could see you now!" How many of us are in that situation? How many of us are big men and great women and very noble Christians on Sunday but our family lives are in bits and pieces? The people who know us best could not give our testimony. Why? Because they don't see the outward conformity to certain behavior norms, they see the self-life. It's in the home; it's in the family that the self-life manifests itself. You can even cover it up pretty well at the office. But at home they see you, day in day out, night in night out and it comes out. Yet loved ones, you must admit that the great majority of us in churches have that attitude. We say, "Oh well, nobody is perfect", as if internal impurity is the norm for God's people and is the norm for God's plan. It isn't.

Now some of us do some other things. There are some religious counselors, healthy minded religious counselors and some psychologists who say, "The trouble is simply with the mind and emotions. You have certain habits of thinking and feeling, that you outlined, that are wrong. All you have to do is retrain those. You have to reroute them. You have to renew your mind. You have to think good thoughts as the lady says on television. You have to rewrite and re-stimulate the right emotional responses. That's all you need."

The problem that psychologists and healthy minded religious counselors, who take that attitude, the trouble they run up against is regression. It is incredible how regression takes place every time the external stimulus of either the counselor or the group is removed. In other words it's unbelievable how quickly the mind that has been retrained falls back into the old pattern of thoughts, or how quickly the emotions that have been renewed and re-stimulated fall back into their old habits. There is a regression there that no one seems able to understand. Most of Christendom just continues to try to keep reprogramming itself.

That's why they are such wrong emphasis on fellowship. Fellowship is not for our sake, it's so that we can minister to the world. But so often there is an attitude to fellowship that you need the group reinforcement. That's why so many loved ones are so skeptical of Christianity. They think we are nothing but a bunch of psychological reinforcement people who exists just by help of their herd instinct. That's so often the case because of our attitude to internal impurity. We think it's just a matter of renewing the mind, thinking the good thoughts, renewing the emotions, feeling the right things and then get a group together that will keep you doing that. Well there comes a time when eventually you are on your own at night, or you are on your own at the end of this life. Then there is nobody to keep reprogramming the mind and emotions.

There are other psychologists, who are not very popular in these days, who have been so concerned with this tendency to regression after you have reprogrammed the mind and emotions that they have posited another level underneath that is the subconscious or the unconscious. They say, "This regression, this tendency to fall back into the old patterns is so strong that we don't believe the mind and emotions are simply a neutral thing. We don't believe they are just a slate on which you write things. We believe that what they are is just a receptacle for some things that are coming from deeper down. All we are seeing in this sense of pride or this jealous attitude or this critical spirit or this sarcastic feeling -- all we are seeing is that there are symptoms of a disease that actually exists deeper down."

You remember those psychologists said that our job is to get to the bottom of that subconscious, the bottom of that unconscious area and to clean that out. Well, of course part of the reason they are not in vogue at the moment is that time and ability were just not there to do that. Human beings do not have the time to be able to get to the bottom of that heart of darkness. They don't even have the ability to do it and so we are left back on that other level.

Now loved ones, Jesus has explained to us the problem and strangely enough it has some similarities to the beliefs of those psychoanalysts. Jesus says, "Underneath your mind and emotions is a spirit and it's out of your spirit that these things come. It's out of your spirit that all the trouble comes. When your spirit is wrong then you begin to experience these feelings of jealousy and anger in your emotions. You begin to manipulate other people with your mind and you begin to criticize other people to try to build yourself up. When your spirit is wrongly related to my Father that's the kind of stuff that fills your mind and emotions. Some of it comes from your body's desire for

other people just to applaud you, acknowledge you or recognize you and some of that filters into your soul. Some of the anger and irritability that you feel in your soul at times is because there is a general attitude of that in the office. Some of us experience that. You go into the office where there is a whole critical attitude and it's not long before you're beginning to feel it too.

But Jesus said that a lot of the other emotions, feelings and thoughts that are wrong that come into your soul come from your spirit -- a spirit that is not clean, a spirit that is alienated from your Maker. He said in that passage we read in the New Testament, "It's not what comes into a man's mouth that defiles him, it's what comes out of a man's heart." Jesus meant by "heart" the innermost part of our beings. He said, out of the heart come adultery and anger and jealousy and hostility. That was Jesus' diagnosis. The reason the power of positive thinking books don't work, the reason the group reinforcement stuff doesn't work is because there is a power underneath your mind and emotions that sends up twice as much volcanic eruption as you can ever handle in any group psychology experience. As soon as you get rid of some of the stuff the spirit sends up more. Have you not found that out?

Have you not discovered that you can take an attitude to jealousy and say, "I am going to master jealousy, and this is jealousy week"? You start to pray about jealousy. You start to read books about 'How Not To Be Jealous' and you concentrate on jealousy. So you are in good shape regarding jealousy. You've got that under control; no jealousy. You have no jealousy for a week or two and then you decide, "I did so well with that I'll have a shot at anger." So you make a big deal on anger. You campaign against anger, you pray about anger and you read books about 'How Not To Be Angry', and practice self-control and you get anger under control. You are just beginning to get on your feet and jealousy pops up. Isn't that it? You hold it down, and you hold it down and you hold it down and you hold it down and then you run out of hands, because they are bouncing up all over the place.

And Jesus said, "Do you see it's not those individual things that are the problem, those aren't the problem. It's the spirit inside you that is not clean. Of course that's the frustration of psychologists who aren't Christians. They can't get out the spirit, they can't. By their own terms of reference they can't accept that there is a spirit outside a Christian faith. And by their own ability, with mind and emotions, they cannot get at the spirit even if they believed in it.

That's why Jesus gave us a precious gift. I'd like you to look at the verse where it is mentioned. It's Acts 15:9. Beginning at verse 8, Peter is speaking and he says, "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." Loved ones, God cleanses your heart or your spirit through your faith by the power of His Holy Spirit. That's the only way, honestly. That's the only way.

We are all exactly the same. We are little, selfish children who want our own way and are angry when we don't get it. And that's why we get irritable. That's why we get jealous. That's why we experience all these symptoms of inward sin. The victory we talk about that many of us have which is just an outward victory managed by continual suppression of all the stuff inside is a shallow victory. It isn't the victory that God has for us at all. God's plan is that we should be pure through and through. That's true. God's plan is that we can be cleansed inside. Our spirits that are unclean can be cleansed by His Holy Spirit, so that you would not feel anger rising within you.

Now that's very important to make clear to you because you have heard me share this before. You have

thought all He means is that the Holy Spirit gives you a power to suppress anger, gives you power to keep it down, gives you power to keep jealousy under control when it rises up from within. Loved ones, that's not the meaning of that verse. The meaning of the verse is that the Holy Spirit cleanses our hearts and the fruit of the spirit -- love, joy, peace, longsuffering, (which is directly opposed to irritability and impatience), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, begin to rise up from within us. In other words, where you once experienced anger rising up from within you, you now experience patience, positive patience rising up within you or positive love. That's what it is loved ones. That's what victory is, that's what being saved is all about or being filled with the Holy Spirit is all about. It isn't a toe-to-toe battle with Satan and with inner feelings that are constantly rising up and trying to prevent you doing what you would. It is an experience of cleanness inside you, positive dynamic cleanness.

I remember one friend putting it: where it was natural for him to sin, now it's natural for him to obey. Where it was as natural before for him to hate and to criticize, now it's natural for him to love and to build others up. Now loved ones that's the meaning of that verse -- that the Holy Spirit is able to cleanse your heart by faith. He is able to make you pure inside. That's what Christianity is about. I sympathize with all of you who think that it isn't that, no it can't be exactly that. It is. That's what being filled with the Holy Spirit is about -- where you feel right inside. And of course you can see the benefits of that. You can see that.

If I asked you, what I have asked you before -- would you let me take a picture of your heart, of your self life, where all those secret things are, all the things that you alone know -- would you let me take a picture of your heart? Then we'd have Bob show it as a slide on the projector and we'd all look at it there. Would you? Well do you see that's why so many of us feel furtive? That's why we aren't great witnesses. That's why there isn't much joy in our lives. Do you see that? We know that deep down we are carrying a can of gasoline and as soon as a fiery dart from the wicked one hits it, it will blow up. And then everybody will see what we are really like. That's why we walk pretty tight. We are a Christian, yes, but just managing it on a razor's edge. And that's why other loved ones aren't seeing the joy of God's children and the joy of God's people. But you have seen so often that the chief mark of the old saints is joy. It's because at last they don't need to hold things in. They don't need to hold things down. They don't need to pretend. Isn't that the heart of it? I think that's really the heart of it. I know that's what got to me from my mom, when she said you are a hypocrite. That what really gets to you, doesn't that? When you feel, yes you are hypocrite. You remember the Greek actors who wore masks. That's what a hypocrite is, a person who wears a mask.

Isn't that what spoils everything in the office? When the person gets the promotion and you put out your hand and say congratulations but you don't mean it? Or you mean a lot of it but deep down there is a jealousy. Or someone enters into some good fortune and you say, "Oh! I am really glad for you." But inside there is a little voice that says, "But I am sorry for me or I wish it were me." Isn't it interesting that we always think that's a very human thing to say, I wish it were me, isn't it? We think we are very justified in saying that. We say that's a very human thing to say, I wish it were me.

The deepest love that we ever experienced from our dad or mom was when we were sick, do you remember? Your dad said, "Oh! I wish I could be sick instead of you." Isn't that right? We thought that's the deepest expression of love and indeed that's what we sense in Jesus. We sense here's a man who would rather bear the thing instead of us. And so many of what we call human feelings - "I wish it were me", are just downright carnal. They are evil. What's the problem, loved ones?

Well the problem is that outwardly we all recognize God but inwardly we ourselves want to be God. That's it. We have never settled that and that's the problem with most of us. We have never finally settled that. We have never dealt with that heart of darkness. That's why Joseph Conrad wrote that book, you remember? He likened the heart of darkness to a journey into a dark, dark jungle where unbelievably savage and uncivilized things took place. That's why he wrote the book because there are many of us here in this life who have never made that journey because we are afraid of what we will find in there.

Loved ones, that's what the Holy Spirit can do for us. The Holy Spirit is able to lead us to the deepest part of that heart of darkness. And then when we are really willing, He is able to cleanse that and to fill it with Himself. And that's why Peter said, "God made no distinction between them and us but He gave them the Holy Spirit and He cleansed their hearts by faith." Loved ones, that's what every one of us need. And that's what this Holy Spirit is able to do in your life. He is able to cleanse your heart by faith.

I think the first step is you recognizing the problem down there and then beginning to talk to Him about it. He alone can do it. No psychologist, none of us counselors can ever take you to that inner heart of darkness within you. There is only one that can take you there and that's the Counselor that Jesus has sent.

Our time is up and I think we all need to talk about this just one more Sunday. I need to share with you how God worked in our different lives and revealed to different ones of us how to be free, but you loved ones can begin yourselves, the Holy Spirit will listen to you.

Let us pray.

Dear Holy Spirit, we certainly know the reality of what we have discussed this morning and our dear friends and relatives, we are sorry to say they know it too because they have seen the savage under the civilized exterior. Holy Spirit, we would ask you to begin -- begin and show us. However difficult it may be, will You begin to take us into this inner part of our lives that we have never touched before, that is dominating our life and is making our life so partial in its fulfillment. Holy Spirit, we ask you, will you begin to give us a revelation of why we are like this deep down? And reveal to us what we have to do so that you can cleanse us from this. Holy Spirit we do believe that you are able to cleanse us and we would give ourselves to you for that purpose, for Jesus' Glory. Amen.