

## The Holy Spirit Brings A Clean Heart

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

If you ask a little child who has been at Sunday school what the purpose of life is, every little child will answer, "Well, the purpose of life is to live according to God's will." That appeals to common sense. It is just common sense that the creator of the world, who made it and made us, knows how best we will be fulfilled. So it appeals to common sense to say that we should live our lives according to God's will. It appeals also to the truth revealed in this book, the Bible, which contains the clearest expression of our creator that we have in our earth. This book from the very first chapter to the very last chapter urges us to obey God. That's right. From the very first chapter to the very last chapter you will find that we are urged to obey God, to live according to His will. Indeed, that is the mark and the great privilege of any of us who are born again -- any of us who claim to have a real relationship that is personal with our God through the experience of the new birth.

Our great privilege is that described in 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever -- anybody -- born of God does not commit sin." Of course sin is explained and defined clearly in James 4:17 where it says, "Anybody who knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." So outward sin is conscious disobedience to God's will. The great mark and privilege for those of us who are born of God is that we do not commit sin. The emphasis here from the Greek word is 'do'. We do not do any act or speak any word that is disobedient to God's will and that we know is disobedient to Him. Many of us who are born of God have experienced that. When we first met Jesus we saw that certain things we did were wrong. We stopped swearing, we stopped having adulterous thoughts and we stopped being sarcastic. We stopped boasting, we stopped drinking, we stopped gambling, and we stopped certain outward actions that we knew displeased God. Many of us who have been born of God have come to that place.

We have been freed from outward sin. However, great numbers of us have been troubled, not so much by outward sin, which we managed to keep away from for the first few months or years of our relationship with God. Most of us are troubled by the subject we talked about last Sunday. We are troubled about inward sin, about stuff that nobody sees, and indeed, few people know about but ourselves. That, loved ones, is what I would like us to talk about together this morning, because inward sin is what causes many of us heartache and defeat. Many of us, in other words, are really not unlike good Jews. Many of us are not very unlike good humanists. We outwardly conform to what we know is true. That is not surprising, because even the Greek and Roman philosophers did that. They expected in themselves outward conformity to known precepts. So many of us who are born of God are in that position. Outwardly we conform our lives to the things that people expect and that the Bible describes of children of God. In that way we are like all good Jews and all good humanists and all pagan philosophers and all noble pagans.

Many of us are like them in another way, that we do that at the expense of an unbelievable inner conflict. We do what is right outwardly but we do it only because we manage to keep down incredibly monstrous and savage urges inside us that want to break out and that are constantly contradicting what we are doing outwardly. In other words, many of us have been in the position where a friend has got a good job or been promoted instead of us or has come into a lot of money. We have stuck out our hand and said, "Congratulations," and inside in our hearts is rising envy and jealousy of their good fortune. Indeed, a creeping sort of suspicion is rising that really we ought to have experienced

that because we deserve it as much as they do!

Many of us in job situations have been in the position where in the midst of some duty that we have been doing, we have suddenly had adulterous and unclean thoughts that are so utterly removed from the outward expression of what we are doing that we cannot believe that it is coming from us. Of course, it utterly spoils the particular interaction with the person or the colleague that we are working with at that moment. Or in the midst of some philanthropic action or some religious service where we are wholly taken up apparently with helping somebody else or with loving God, we suddenly find within us a desire for self glory and prominence and praise that almost bursts out of us. We see that we are actually vying for attention from people with the very Godhead himself.

So that is the realm where many of us have our troubles. It is really the realm of the motive life. It isn't normally the realm of the outward actions or the outward words. It is the area of motives, the area of responses and reactions. It is those responses that come up from within us when our conscious guard is down. Of course, what troubles many of us is the sneaking suspicion that if this stuff seems to come up so naturally from within us and seems to come so freely and spontaneously as a reaction to what people do to us, which is the real us? Is the real us the calm, civilized, self-controlled exterior that everybody sees, or is the real us this savage lion inside that seems to want to paw and beat everybody down in order that it should be prominent and pre-eminent? That's what troubles us, I think. Isn't it?

The Mr. Hyde used to break out just a little and spoil the Dr. Jekyll civilized exterior. But it seems the longer we have gone on with God, or the longer we have gone on coming to religious services, the more that Mr. Hyde seems to be breaking out and the stronger he seems to be becoming. That is what concerns us. We are troubled because we see resentment coming up inside us more than it seemed to when we were younger. We see jealousy occupying more of our internal thinking than it used to. We see irritability spoiling our relationship with more people because that's what is happening. The inward sin isn't staying in now. It is beginning to break out at times and we can't keep it down. At the beginning it was a kind of schizophrenia. We thought, there is part of me that just wants to do this and there is part of me that just wants to do that. But now it seems to be sheer hypocrisy. More and more the people that we live with see our irritability and they see our impatience, however much we try to hold it down. More and more the people at work are realizing the kind of people we are deep down as we lose our temper, or as we get angry over something. More and more we can only witness far from home and far from work where nobody really knows us.

Loved ones, there are thousands of us who live that kind of defeated, carnal life. Many of us have come to that place where we just use the words of that old hymn, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is that soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His word?" You begin to wonder, "Is this all there is?" Of course we have taken various methods of trying to live with it. Some of us try to justify it. There are great numbers of silly people; just silly ostriches that try to justify sinning Christianity. All of the dear, happy, sensible, non-Christians outside don't dream of justifying sinning Christianity. They have no doubt in their minds that Christians are supposed to be people like Jesus. But there are huge numbers of us inside Christendom who try to justify sin in Christianity. We say, "Remember Jesus? He really lost His temper there in the temple. That is what I do, I just lose my temper a few times." We try to compare His unselfish, controlled expression of God's wrath against hypocrisy in the temple, with our selfish, uncontrolled bursts of temper which we let out when somebody is not opposing God but opposing us.

So thousands of us try to justify sinning Christianity. We say, "That is what it's about. Whoever is

born of God doesn't commit sin? Well, the Greek probably means something else." So we try to justify ourselves sinning and being disobedient. There are others of us who try to rationalize our sins. We say, "Oh, all artistic types are fairly highly strung and I am artistic. I lose my temper at any moment. There is the possibility of great evil, and the possibility of great good. So it is just my temperament." So we try to rationalize this stuff and make it, not traits of the self-life, but traits of our "artistic temperament."

Loved ones, is this all that is possible? Is this what God has called us to, to try to force our rebellious heart to obey precepts that do not come naturally to it, to try to constantly get a rebellious heart by sheer willpower to obey certain things that it is utterly opposed to? Loved ones, the whole Bible says that is not true. Right from the days of Jeremiah God said, "Look, I am going to make a new covenant with you. It's not like the covenant I made with your fathers. I am going to make a new covenant with you, and I am going to write my laws, not on tablets of stone. I am going to write my laws on your heart so you will have no need for anyone to tell you to do this or do that, but you will all do it naturally from within." In other words, God said, "I will do a work in you that will make it more natural for you to obey than to sin." I think that is what concerns many of us. We feel it has become more natural to lose our temper than to keep it. It has become more natural to criticize than to love. It has become more natural to be sarcastic than to praise. What God promised us back in the time of Jeremiah was that He would write His laws on our inward hearts. In other words, our hearts would want to do what was right.

It is not natural to be angry. It is carnal to be angry. It is natural to be kind. It is not natural to hate. It is carnal to hate. It's natural to love. It's not natural to be selfish. It is carnal to be selfish, it is natural to be unselfish. That's right, loved ones, it really is. What God has done for us in Jesus makes it natural for us to obey Him. That is what Ezekiel said. Ezekiel said, "God is going to take away your heart of stone and He is going to give you a new heart, a soft heart and He is going to put a new spirit within you. He is going to take away from you this evil spirit." That is the whole purpose of the New Covenant, loved ones.

I don't know if you have ever wondered what is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, or the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It is not just Jesus. It is that the old covenant could simply offer forgiveness; the new covenant offers a deliverance from sin. That is what Jesus did on Calvary. That is what happened. That is what Romans 6:6 means, "Our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." It is a change inside in our hearts. That is what Peter said in Acts 15:9, "God made no distinction between the Gentiles and us, but He gave them the Holy Spirit and He cleansed their hearts by faith."

Loved ones, it is possible to have your heart cleansed. It is, honestly. Indeed it is not only possible but it is the whole purpose of Jesus coming to earth and it is the whole purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit. That is why they call Him a "Holy" Spirit. It's not to make Him spooky or make us afraid of Him. It's to make us realize this is a dear, "Holy" Spirit. He makes you, not holy in the sense of different and far out, but holy in the sense of like Jesus -- kind, loving, pure, understanding, gentle, tender. The Holy Spirit has come to this earth to make us like that. Now He can do that in you. He can do that in you. There are thousands of us that will testify to the fact that years after we were born of God, we became aware of a need for a deeper work in our hearts, and we began to seek it.

I would like simply to tell you how to do it, and then it is really up to you what you do. The first

step is to acknowledge the Holy Spirit in your life. That is the first thing. The reason for that, loved ones, is that you, with all your introspection, and me, with all my self-examination, cannot get to the heart of our evil being. We can't. You have tried it and you go as deep as doesn't matter and so do I. In the process we all get depressed and discouraged. Jesus said the Holy Spirit is a Counselor. He knows you. In other words, why you are surprised at the anger that pops up inside you, why you are surprised about the irritability and the bad temper is, you don't know yourself. You don't. You don't know yourself. At least in this span of life you should at least get to know yourself. The only way you will get to know yourself is if you have this dear counselor beginning to reveal yourself to you. Honestly, you need Him because you don't want to look at certain things. You don't. You are in the grip of a selfish heart, and you don't want to look at certain things inside yourself. You don't. Some of us have even tried counseling and tried the analyst's office but there are certain things we don't want to see. Only the Holy Spirit can take you to the depth of your heart.

Loved ones, if you are not prepared to see that depth, God can never save you from it. Do you see that? He cannot save you by default. He will not put you on an operating table and put you to sleep and do the operation without you knowing. He won't. You have to know what you are, and the first step is to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as your counselor. I am not going to argue about whether you pray to Him or not. I talk to Him, but I think He is the Spirit of Jesus. I think He is a dear person of the trinity. I don't exalt the Holy Spirit. He always glorifies Jesus. That is what Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit will not bear witness to Himself, and He will always bear witness to me." So you are safe in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

So the first thing is, believe that the Holy Spirit is a person in your life. Ask Him, "Holy Spirit, will you begin to counsel me about this? Will you begin to take me down to the depths of my inner self so that I, at last, know myself?" Loved ones, it will take a long time, because do you know what you have done? (We have all done the same thing.) We have come to a time when we knew we should do something and we didn't do it. We quietly disobeyed God, that piece of ice bedded down in our hearts. That resistance to God's will hardened inside our hearts.

A few weeks later it came to another little thing, a dirty joke told in the office. We snigger so that we will be thought of like the rest. We know we disobeyed Him and sidestepped the issue. That beds down in our hearts and another piece of ice hardens. Now loved ones, you have layers and layers of that past resistances to God's will that have built up a hard, hard heart. It is from that mess that all this stuff comes. So it takes a while. You will often think you have gotten to the bottom of your heart when the Holy Spirit will show you the next day, no, there is something more.

So the first step is, acknowledge the Holy Spirit as your counselor. The second step is, see how sinful that old self of yours is. Here is the way the Bible talks about it. The Bible says in Romans 8:7, "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be." Now, loved ones, you need to see that.

I don't know if you know this, but in many countries when loved ones find out they have a sickness, they don't go back to the hospital because they are afraid. They are afraid especially if it is an incurable sickness. They just pretend it is not there. Now do you see, you and I haven't that excuse. We have been crucified with Christ. Our forgiveness is assured because of God's attitude to us. We don't need to hide this evil self, we don't need to defend it and think that unless we prove that we haven't this inside us we won't get into Heaven. We will get into Heaven because of what God has done for us in Jesus and what God has done to us in Jesus. The antidote for this disease is

present in Jesus' death. So look at self and see the sinfulness of self.

Here is the mistake we make. We see a little bit of impatience -- the person doesn't get into the car fast enough, so we say, "Hurry up. Get in." We bluff ourselves and say, "Just a little bit of impatience, I must pray about that sometime." Or we say, "Well, they deserve that." But we say just a little impatience and we don't realize that it is just like an iceberg. Do you know what you see of an iceberg? You see a tenth of the iceberg above the water. Then if you go down underneath you find the iceberg goes out like that. That is what it is with your impatience. That is what it is with your irritability or with your bad temper.

You and I need to see that that old self wants to be God and that is why it gets impatient. "I know exactly the number of seconds it should take to close that car door. I know exactly the number of minutes it should take you to get ready for us to go out shopping. I know it. I have it built in my heart deep down. I am God! I know the way these things should happen." But we think, "Oh no, it is just a little impatience." It is not, loved ones. Underneath that little iceberg tip, there is a self that wants to be God, and it is determined to have its own way, and determined to stand up for its own rights and it is that carnal heart that spews up those raging tempers. You must admit you are amazed at times how strong they are. We are amazed. We almost think it is an evil spirit or something in me. It can't be me. But loved ones, it is you.

The second step is to see the sinfulness of that old self and to see that there is no possibility of improving it or taming it or training it or autosuggesting to it that it ought to be a better self. There is only one thing to do, and that's the remedy that God wrought on Calvary. He destroyed that self. But you need to see how sinful that self is. I know we are all fighting this healthy-minded stuff. I know that. I know we are all having whispers given to us, "Oh, you are really good. You are really good."

You are really bad but you can be good. God has done a work in Jesus that will make you good, but first of all you have to see how bad you are. Don't be afraid of that, don't pretend, and don't think that it is something you can get rid of by a little autosuggestion. It isn't, loved ones. See the sinfulness of self. See that it is enmity with God, that it is not subject to God's law and indeed it cannot be, whatever you do with it. That is the second step.

The third step is to see that our old self was crucified with Christ, to see that you actually have been crucified with Jesus. That all that internal personality that depends on people and gets irritable with them when they don't give you what you want; all that internal self that depends on things for its security and therefore gets worried when the things aren't there; all that internal self that depends on other people's opinions and other people's fellowship and friendship for its enjoyment and gets mad when it doesn't get the enjoyment it wants: that has been crucified with Christ. That is a fact. Don't get caught in this business, "Oh, but that is not my experience." Don't look at the experience of this case -- look at the fact. There is a time to look at your inner self, but then there is a time to look at the fact that your old self was crucified with Christ and to hold onto that fact. That has happened whatever you feel like or whatever you have experienced. The Bible says we are crucified with Christ. If Christ died for all, then all died. Colossians says, "You are dead with Christ." We have been crucified with Jesus, and there is a resurrected you that is new and clean and pure and perfect. See that.

The fourth and last step is consecration. Are you willing for whatever the Holy Spirit asks you to do in your life? If the Holy Spirit asked you to be crucified with Jesus are you willing for that?

If the Holy Spirit asked you to have the only friends in your life jeer at you and jibe at you or turn away in disappointment, as happened with Jesus, are you ready for that? If the Holy Spirit asked you to have only one friend, and that one friend was God only, with no other friends that you could depend on, would you be willing for that? If the Holy Spirit asked you to be a failure in your life or career, as Jesus appeared to be a failure to everybody, would you be willing to do that? (Forget about arguing whether He would or not. Obviously He is kind and He wants the best for you.) Would you be willing to do whatever the Holy Spirit asks you to do in this life?

Now loved ones, when at last you come to the ground of your heart and you say, "I would," you will have no trouble with believing for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Faith will spring up in your heart to receive the Holy Spirit in to cleanse your heart by faith and to fill you with the fruit of the Spirit -- with love and joy and peace. But that can only happen in a person who is willing to be Jesus. That's it. The Holy Spirit will only come in and cleanse your heart if you are willing to face the things that Jesus faced. You can see how it works out. You can see so many instances. You get irritable because you want that thing finished to give to the boss. What if you were willing for the boss to think you a useless fool? You can see how the Holy Spirit then could bear in you patience with the loved one that had to give you the paper. But the Holy Spirit cannot do that. He cannot express the beauty and the love of Jesus through you unless you are willing to face the same consequences as He Himself faced. That is the secret, loved ones. Are you willing to consecrate yourself fully to Jesus for His glory only and to die with Him to all that people and things can give you? When that moment comes, you will know it.

Many of you have said, "How will I know? How will I know I have come to the place where He can cleanse my heart? How will I know when I have come to the place where I can be baptized with the Holy Spirit?" The Holy Spirit will witness it. You will know. A dozen times I thought I was there but the Holy Spirit is good. The next day there was something in my life that showed me very plainly I was not there. The Holy Spirit will witness when you've come to the ground of your heart, when you've totted up all that you're worth and you've given it to God for whatever He wants.

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit then will cleanse your heart and your heart will become a delight to you. It will be a garden of spices and of fragrant smells. It will be a place of beauty and of love. It will be a heart that you are glad to look at, and it will take away all fear of responding the wrong way to somebody or reacting the wrong way. Suddenly you'll be a child of God because you feel like a child of God. You will smile outwardly because you are smiling inwardly. You'll love because you are loving right from the inside right out the whole way. That is God's plan. That is the way we were meant to live. That is the way we were meant to live and that is what the Holy Spirit can do for you. I should say to the loved ones on television that He can do that for you, too. Let's pray.

Dear Father, I would pray that You would help my brothers and sisters who want to come to the grace of a clean heart, whatever the cost. I pray, Father, that you will enable them to begin this pilgrimage this very day with you, dear Holy Spirit, as their guide. Lead them through to the place where they are prepared to side with You against self, where they see step-by-step the things that they are to be willing for in their life if You are going to give them this great grace. Holy Spirit, I trust you to make saints among us in these days, men and women who will be consistent the whole way through. If we cut each other open at any place, we will see exactly the same beauty and the same love the whole way through.

Father, we know that is what heaven will be like, and we know that is what you want for us here on earth and for our loved ones. We give ourselves to you, Holy Spirit, for this definite work of grace

for Jesus' glory. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.