

Knowing The Holy Spirit

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you know which book is a perennial best seller, or which kind of book? Brookes has its day, Jonathon Seagull has its day, Blind Ambition has its day, but there is a kind of book that hooks generation after generation of readers. Do you know what kind? It's the 'How to' book. It's the 'How to'. There are millions of books year after year that do nothing but tell people how to do things. Alex Comfort makes a fortune out of the book, "How to Enjoy Sex", and then as the years past, he makes another fortune out of another book, "How to Grow Old Gracefully". The whole population seems to have an insatiable thirst and hunger for reading books that tell you how to do things. And so the magazines are filled with articles on how to decorate your home, how to enlarge your garden storage, how to raise your children, how to keep your baby from crying during service, how to water-ski, how to build your own closets. All the publishing world lives off these books and articles that tell you how to do things.

Really, a lot of it is very valid, because God did give us these minds to work out how to harness the solar energy, how to turn the deserts into fertile fields by irrigation. He did give us our minds to work out the 'hows' of this life. But where that do-it-yourself mania was meant to stop, was when it came to our relationship with our Creator. That's where the do-it-yourself mania had to stop, because that was the heart of our forefather's rejection of our Creator. Really. The do-it-yourself attitude, the working out how to bring this about, was the heart of that fall. It was what caused us to fall out of God's fellowship.

Now, you see that, loved ones, if you look at Genesis 3:5. And you remember these words are regarded by Jesus as historical and as spoken by Satan. Genesis 3:5, "For God knows when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." In other words, our rejection of God, our losing the sense of God's reality in our life, did not come because of our determination in us to be bad. Do you see that? It wasn't because we were determined to be bad, that God was cut off from us. It was because of a determination to be good. You will be like God; after you've eaten of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. And that's what separated us from God. Why? Because we deliberately misunderstood God's purpose. We interpreted it as wanting us to be good at all costs, by any method, and so we determined we will be good by studying the good things that He and the people who trust Him have done, and studying the bad things that He condemns and that the people that hate Him do, and then we'll avoid the one and we'll do the other. So we'll work out how to be like God by a method of our own, by studying the standards of goodness and the standards of badness and avoiding the one and hitting the other, we will be like God. God wanted us to be like Him, but He wanted us to be like Him by receiving the Spirit of His own life, but we determined we will be like Him by our own independent power and by the exercise of our own wills and by our own knowledge.

One of the marks of a good marriage is that they just think alike. After several years together, they just think the same, just look at each other, they know. You want to go there? Sure, you don't need to say anything, I know. You don't like it, I know. You don't even need to say anything, I see it. So the people who are well married just operate like that. Now, what we did to God, was like the husband saying, "Ok wife, I know all the things you like, all the things you don't like, now I know all the things you want me to do and all the things you don't want me to do, now let's just

separate, and I'll remember all those things and I'll avoid the bad things, and I'll hit the good things, ok? And we'll have a good marriage. We'll just separate but I'll be like that." The whole purpose of the marriage is not to do primarily what the other one wants, but to have fellowship with the other, to be close to them, to think together, to feel together. That was the purpose of God creating us.

What we did was stand back from Him and say, "Alright, alright, we'll do what You want us to do and we'll avoid what You don't want us to do, and You'll be satisfied, won't You?" And all the time the Father is saying, "No, no, no, I'm not concerned with you primarily being good, and not being bad, I'm concerned with you being close to me, feeling what I feel, saying what I want you to say, doing what I want you to do, that's something you can't note down in a set of laws, you can only do it as you have a dynamic, intimate relationship with me."

Now, loved ones, the heart of the fall was our deliberate claim that God's purpose in putting us here was to avoid the bad and do the good, when all the time, the whole purpose of God putting us here was to be closely related to Him in love and to be governed by the closeness of His mind and His Spirit. And so really, the greatest sin or the greatest independence is to try to achieve what God wanted us to achieve by our own methods, by our ways of doing it, by devising our own system. And that is where you carry 'do-it-yourself' to an extreme, when you try to achieve what God wanted us to achieve by our own methods and by our own ways and our own efforts.

How do you relate to God? How do you make God real in your life? I think we on campus are in danger of trying to answer that question. That's what God brought home to me that I should share with you. I think we're in great danger here; those of us who live on campus think in campus ways, because after all, whether there are many of us here who aren't in college but we think in college ways. And, loved ones, one great danger of those of us who think as college people, is that we will try to answer those 'how' questions. That is, we will try to work out by our own methods how to make God real in our lives, how to live above sin, how to make real in our lives the mighty work that God did in Jesus.

Now, it's good to study some of those things, you see that. It's good to study what God actually did in Jesus, how he took our perverse, irrational, stubborn self-centeredness, put it into Jesus and crucified it there. As long as we don't start working out ways of making that real in our own lives. That's when we begin to engage in the kind of activity that brought all the Fall and the consequences of the Fall into our world. Do you see that? It's good to study what God has done for us in Jesus, but as soon as you and I begin to be preoccupied with methods and techniques of making that real in our own lives, we fall into the deepest sin of pride in trying to do in our own lives what God only can do, in trying to establish our own self righteousness, or work out our own salvation.

You may say, "Well, yes, but how do you do those things? How do you make God real?" You see, first of all what I'm saying is, if we become an introverted bunch of little studious people, who are all the time trying to answer, 'how do you pray, how do you read the Bible, how do you make God real, how do you overcome sin, how do you live victoriously' - if we're doing that continually and that is our main concern, we will eventually become a frustrated, closed little universe, that will just chase its own tail instead of being God's liberated, relaxed family who depend on Him. But how do you do those things? Because that keeps on coming back to our minds. "Yeah, alright I agree with you, but how do you do make God real in your life? How do you make real in your life what has happened to us in Jesus on the cross?"

Loved ones, the answer that God gives is not some Gnostic, esoteric method or technique; the answer God gives is a Person. A Person, a dear Person that I got to know 14 years ago, and ever from then, I was delivered from the 'how to' questions. I'll show you who He is. Mary, you remember, received a promise that she would bear a unique Son, and you find her response in Luke 1:34, "And Mary said to the angel, how can this be, since I have no husband?" That's a 'how' question. And the answer that God gave her to that question is the answer He gives to all the 'how' questions. And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The answer to every 'how' question is the Holy Spirit.

That's why when you and I, brothers and sisters, are preoccupied with, "How do I pray, how do I stop sinning, how do I make Jesus' death real in me," the answer that God gives is a person, a dear Person of the Holy Spirit. And every time you and I think we can devise an answer to those questions apart from the Holy Spirit, we are again rejecting our God and we are again falling into a do-it-yourself salvation by works that brought us into our present predicament.

This dear Holy Spirit was the gift that was promised to all of us who recognize Jesus to be God's Son and who believed what He had done on the Cross. Really. The Holy Spirit was the first, precious gift that was offered to the first converts after the first Christian sermon that was ever preached once Jesus had left the earth. Now, you can see that in Acts 2:38.

Peter preached, you remember, and, explained to the people that they had crucified the Son of the Creator of the universe and they came to him and said, "What will we do then?" 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.'

Now, the Holy Spirit, dear ones, was looked upon as the whole purpose and point of believing in Jesus. Jesus Himself gave direct commands that the disciples were not to leave Jerusalem UNTIL they had received the Holy Spirit. That's right. He made a strong point of it, if you look in it; it's in Acts 1, just back one page, Acts 1:4. He had just risen from the dead, you remember, and was staying with them in Jerusalem, and in verse 4, "and while staying with them, He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which He said, "You heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters, will make God real in your life. You can't do it yourself, honestly, you can't. I read all the books and prayed the way they said I should pray, and meditated the way they said I should meditate, and all I got myself into was a kind of passivity such as all meditation brings you to. You see that all religions, all spiritualist practices, are just attempts to bring God into our lives without the person of the Holy Spirit who alone can bring God into our lives.

Brothers and sisters, honestly, it doesn't matter how often you listen to me or listen to any man or any woman, they cannot tell you how to do a thing. You know, "close one eye and wink the other quickly and say the Lord's Prayer backwards." No! It doesn't matter whether it's as dumb as that, or whether it's the most appealing, intellectually rational method or technique that you've ever heard; there is no method or technique that will make real in your life the mighty destruction of self that took place in Jesus on Calvary. There isn't. It doesn't matter what you try to do, you can't make it real.

Now brothers and sisters, really I'd preach a good sermon if all I did was keep repeating that to you for the next half hour. Because, I know you think you've got it, but you haven't! There are some of you sitting there and saying, "Ah yes, Holy Spirit, that's right, yeah, yeah. Well how do I pray better than I'm doing?" And you fall back into methods and techniques until you see there is something wriggling and wriggling inside us, that wants to do it on our own, that thinks, "Yes, but." I say to you, only the Holy Spirit can answer the 'how' questions in your life, and you say, "Yes, yes, I respect you and I agree with you but I can do something, surely, to help Him a little."

Loved ones, you can't perform any work or follow any method or practice any technique that will make the mighty work of Calvary real in your life. Only the Holy Spirit can. The Holy Spirit. That's why God gave us the Holy Spirit. Now, maybe you're like me. I used to think, "But is there not a danger of making the Holy Spirit more important than Jesus, if you lay emphasis on Him like this?" Well, brothers and sisters, you have to follow Jesus' own advice to us. And He advised us this way, that's incredible, you know! He advised us, He said, "Look, don't look to me, look to the Holy Spirit. It's for this very purpose that I'm leaving the earth. You think it's bad that I'm leaving the earth, but the only reason I'm leaving the earth, is so that this dear person can come to you. I want you to look to Him. He is the key to everything that I have done for you in my life and in my death, becoming real in you."

Now, loved ones, you see that, if you look at John 16:7, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you." Now, those are the words that a person uses about someone who is to be his successor, and that's what the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' successor here on earth. Jesus has achieved certain things for you. That anger that boils up inside you, that bad temper that you cannot control, that irritability, all comes from the old self that wants its own way, and wants to establish its own security, its own significance and its own happiness. All that was crucified in Jesus but only the Holy Spirit can make that real in your life. You cannot make it real by all the prayers and all the self effort that you ever produce. Only the Holy Spirit can make that real. That's His job, that's why Jesus sent Him. In other words, He's like the executor of Jesus' last Will and Testament. Jesus in His last Will and Testament has left to us His life, the power of His life, the ways of His own character, but the Holy Spirit is the only one who can make that real in all of us. He is that Executor of Jesus' Will and Testament.

So it doesn't matter, all that Jesus has done for us, all that is useless if the Holy Spirit were not here to make it real. It's like filling this whole room with the masterpieces that you could find in the Louvre in Paris and in all the great museums and art galleries, and then switching out all the lights and bringing you all in here and me saying to you, "Aren't they beautiful paintings?" And you say, "They may be here but I can see nothing!" And then I switch the light on and you see the magnificence of the paintings around you. Now, it is so with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has wrought mighty things for you, things that can change your life completely, things that can make you an entirely different person but only the Holy Spirit can reveal all that to you, and make it all alive and real in your own life. And, loved ones, that's why the Holy Spirit came.

You see, some of us have a tendency to say, "Ah, but won't we end up worshipping the Holy Spirit, won't we end up with all our eyes upon Him?" Well it's interesting, Jesus said, "Don't be afraid of that. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity; He is part of my family." Don't worry, you need never fear, you do not need to stand back and self-righteously think of doling out a little bit of love to Jesus the Son, a little bit of love to the Holy Spirit, a little bit of love to God.

Jesus is saying, "No, don't you see, you're still involved in managing your own life, in managing your own salvation? You can trust the Holy Spirit."

And here's where He said it. It's that same chapter, John 16:13. Just over the page a little, from where we were reading, Jesus describes what the Holy Spirit will do. John 16:13 "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Jesus says the Holy Spirit can be trusted, He won't glorify Himself, He won't draw your eyes to Himself, He will glorify me. He will not bear witness to Himself, but He will bear witness to me.

Brothers and sisters, you can trust this dear Holy Spirit. You can treat him as a real Person, just as the disciples walked cautiously and carefully with Jesus while He was on earth, so Jesus intends you and me to walk carefully and cautiously with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a dear Person. You see, Jesus is at the right hand of God at this moment. He's not here, do you know that? The only sense in which Jesus is here in this room at the moment is as so far as the Holy Spirit is taking the things of Jesus and making them real to us. He's making Jesus' presence real to us, but it is the Holy Spirit who does that. He beams the Presence of Jesus from the right hand of God down into our lives and down into this room at this moment. But it's the Holy Spirit who does that, and you can trust Him, you can lean on Him.

To show you how important the attention to Him is, Jesus said, "That is the only sin, it's the only independence that cannot be forgiven." That's right. Ignorance and indifference and neglect of the Holy Spirit is the only sin that cannot be forgiven. Now, that's in Matthew 12:31, "Therefore I tell you every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit, will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

See, all of you have heard the Holy Spirit. You may sit there and say, "Ah, I don't know what you are talking about," but all of you have. Every one of us here has heard the Holy Spirit speak in our consciences. At some point in our lives, we've heard the voice of the Holy Spirit. And, loved ones, Jesus says that if you resolutely and deliberately turn your back on that voice of the Holy Spirit within you, and keep turning your back and keep neglecting Him, you will come to the point where you will not be able to repent, because the Holy Spirit is the One who creates real repentance in us, and He can only create real repentance in a will that submits to Him. So if you keep on neglecting the voice of the Holy Spirit, even listening to other men and other women, or reading other books, but not listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you, then you will eventually come to the point when your conscience will be so hardened against Him, that you will no longer be able to hear that voice, and therefore, you will never be able to be brought to repentance. And unless you repent, God is not able to make real His forgiveness.

So the Holy Spirit is important and you've heard His voice. Even those of us who may be here and don't believe anything about God or anything about Jesus, you've heard His voice. The Spirit that speaks in your conscience is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes He can only speak very faintly, because of the way we've manipulated His commands in the past. But He has spoken to all of us, and, loved ones, listening to that dear Holy Spirit is the secret of having God real in your life. Because you see, He's a gentleman. He does not blast in. He will not come where He is not welcomed. So if you keep shrugging Him off, just gently, manipulating whatever command you sense in your conscience He speaks to you - "now, you know your mind is not clean, you know it's not clean, it's not clean. Yes, it's

not clean," and keeps on saying that. "You are being harsh with that person at home, you know you are. You are being unkind." Keeps saying it, keeps saying it. If you keep neglecting, neglecting, or start rationalizing it or diluting it or watering it down, eventually you will no longer be able to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and you will live out in your own life, an apparently good life, but not the life of God.

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit is a gentleman. You find it in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and eat with him and he with me." See verse 22. It's not Jesus who is speaking there, "But he who is near, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The Holy Spirit will not obtrude upon your conscience. He will not ontrude into your consciousness. He will wait for you to ask Him in and to listen to Him and to be interested in what He has to say. Really. I know it sounds strange, loved ones, but do you see, He is a Person, that's why in Ephesians, God says, "Don't grieve the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit can feel sorrow and pain. He can feel a person being indifferent to Him. He can feel a person's anger and irritability. The Holy Spirit is a real Person, and unless you treat Him gently and kindly and treat Him as a real Person, you're actually blaspheming against Him.

You see how gross and crass is the emphasis in so many of our religious circles. I mean, it's not talking about a person at all. I know it's just a phrase, but we carry it on. "Have you got the baptism?" It's so crass, it's so gross, it's so inappropriate to the blessed person that has taken such time with each one of us and showed such patience to us, and is so gentle. It's a caricature. "Have you got the baptism? Can you speak in tongues?" Don't you see what a pain it must be to Him? As we're all preoccupied with, "Has He given you tongues, has He given you this gift or has He given you that gift?" It's just using a person. These endless arguments about whether tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And the blessed Holy Spirit must often stand outside the door in the midst of those arguments and realize, "One thing they're not interested in, and that is me. They may be interested in the spiritual parlor games they can have, they may be interested in the great miracles that bring fame to themselves but me they obviously aren't interested in."

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit is more precious than all the gifts He gives. He is more precious than all the fruit that He bears in our lives. And the strange thing is, He gives those gifts, He bears those fruits, as we need them. If we will be preoccupied with Him Himself, if we will get to know the Holy Spirit, Jesus' special Counselor, to whom will God give the Holy Spirit?

It's the last verse I'll ask you to look up, but I want you to look it up, because it's so clean and clear. Acts 5:32, "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." And I know some of you are just wriggling in your seats and saying, "No, no, no! God gives the Holy Spirit to help us obey." Well, loved ones, you have to find a manuscript that says that. You have to get one out of our 4,000 great manuscripts that says that, but the 4,000 that back up this reading say, "And so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey, that's it. You see, we're always saying, "No, no, no, obedience is the final height and the final peak of fellowship with God." No. Obedience is the minimal condition that enables God to give the Holy Spirit to a person, so that they'll no longer have to be preoccupied with techniques for making God real in their lives.

Christendom is divided into skiers and snow bunnies. That's right! The skiers obey and they ski and they receive the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit makes God gloriously real in their lives, makes the victory in Jesus' death real in them and they are just bubbling over with God's life, they are the

skiers. The snow bunnies look beautiful, and they are at all the meetings and they are at all the churches and they study, oh boy, do they study! Because they don't have the Holy Spirit, because they don't obey, and so there's an emptiness in their life, but they agree with all the skiing activity, they like it, they like to be around it, they like to be on the slopes, they like the whole atmosphere that's on the slopes. And they read all the books and they study the kind of gear you should wear. They never ski themselves. They just study how to ski. And they wonder why they don't have the exhilaration of skiing, because they're always trying to think, "How do I do it, how do I do it? You know it's funny; I don't feel the excitement of going down the slopes. Now why, why, why?" And, it's easy, it's because they never ski! They never obey, they never obey. They pretend to ski, they pretend to ski, they maybe slide down a tiny little baby slope, now and again. But they don't ever commit themselves wholly and completely to the activity. No, really that's it.

Christendom is divided into those who obey and those who study how. That's it. Into those who obey and those who try. Into those who obey and those who have endless counseling about how to make God real in their lives. Now, really loved ones, honestly, the body of Jesus consists of some people who have finally got down to the point where they are so desperate for God that they at last obey. They obey. They cannot make themselves like Jesus, only the Holy Spirit can do that, but they do obey. They stop doing the things that God has told them to stop doing, and they do the things that He has told them to do, and then the Holy Spirit comes in and brings in a whole lot of other blessed virtues that they cannot create themselves, a whole lot of supernatural qualities that they cannot make themselves. But the ones that they can do, they do.

And then over here in the body of Christ is a great group of camp followers that like to be around the kind of aura that is created by these people. And they want it, they honestly do. Really they do. They really want God to be real in their lives and they want to find out how to do it without obeying and without ever having to have their life governed moment by moment by a person called the Holy Spirit. Because deep down they feel they'll lose their freedom, if they ever come into that kind of slavery and they don't realize that that slavery is the only real freedom, that the Holy Spirit will never treat them as a robot, but will always treat them as a dear friend.

Now brothers and sisters, that's it, and you will find it true, honestly, I know this is from God, you'll find it true throughout your lives. Whatever groups of religious people you'll ever get into, you'll find those two great groups. The group that obey and have actually received the Holy Spirit into their lives, and therefore have a dynamic source of God's reality in them, so that they don't have to be always preoccupied with the religious happenings that are going on around them, they don't always have to be fed by new preachers or new speakers or new books. And you have the other group who don't want to obey and don't want to submit themselves to the Holy Spirit, and are repeating the fall that took place in the Garden of Eden daily. That is, they are always preoccupied with methods and techniques for making God real in them.

What I know the Father wanted me to say this morning was the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He's real, He's a dear person that changed my life 14 years ago, and changed me from one of those try-ers, and one of those 'studiers how' into a person who knew God as real in my own life. Loved ones, the Holy Spirit: pay attention to Him, pay attention. You don't need me, you don't need anybody, you don't need any book, you only need the dear Holy Spirit. Pay attention to Him, He'll lead you into the place Himself, where he can make Jesus' victory on Calvary real to you.

So, do you understand? Really, just in your own room, today when you go home, make the acquaintance

of the Holy Spirit by faith, by believing that Jesus has kept His promise when He sent Him to you, and by obeying Him. And the Holy Spirit's voice will grow louder and louder, as the days pass and you'll find what I found, that miraculously God became real in my own life, and I stopped the eternal counseling and the eternal questioning to find out 'how', because I found the only answer to the 'how' is the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray. Dear Holy Spirit, I thank You that You are real, I thank You that You led me out of my endless, vicious circles. I trust You, Holy Spirit, to do the same for my brothers and sisters. I ask You now to break through all our misunderstandings, even of this message this morning. I ask You, Holy Spirit, to convince us all that You are real, and that we can actually treat You as a dear friend, and if we obey You, even when we don't understand what You're telling us to do, when we don't understand why You're telling us to do it, if we obey You, You will make real in us the particular victory of Jesus that we need at this time. Thank you, thank you that You alone have the right to distribute the benefits of the atonement on Calvary, and we cannot grab them for ourselves, or make them real by any method or technique, but only by honoring You and respecting You and walking softly and carefully with You. Thank you. Thank you, blessed Spirit, thank you. Amen.