

## What Is the Normal Christian Life?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Are you at peace with your maker now? Are you at peace with your maker? Do you know that you'll go to heaven when you die? Do you know that Jesus knows you and you sense, yes, I know he knows me? We are on personal terms with each other. Now last Sunday we talked about the two steps that you need to take if you want to answer yes to those questions. If you want to be able to say, yes I am at peace with my maker. I do know that I will make heaven my home. I do know my sin is forgiven.

We talked about the two steps, you remember, we said first you had to repent. That is, you had to look at the things that you'd been doing in your life up till now that you know disobey God's will and his law for you and you had to repent of those, the acts and the thoughts and the words that you've done. You had to turn from them, stop doing them. That's one part of repentance. Then you remember the other part that we talked about was see that inside you is a whole attitude that is the real heart of sin. It's an attitude of a god, really. You need to see inside you that the reason you have disobeyed God in the past is that you have very much the attitude yourself of a god. You want your own way often and you want people to often treat you in the way that really God wants them to treat Him. So you need to see that. You need to see inside you is a great self-centered, self-gratifying monster that is really opposed to God Himself. You need to turn from that and to turn to God and treat God as God and the center of the universe and not yourself.

Then you remember the second step was believe. Believe that that sinful self inside you is so diametrically opposed to God, that the only thing he can do if he wants to exist in the universe is to destroy it. But the two things can't exist in the one universe. So he's committed to destroy it. Instead of destroying it in you, which would have meant your being wiped out too, he transferred you and it into his son and he destroyed it there. You've to believe that Gospel. You have to believe that the monster in you has been destroyed in Jesus. That's how a person becomes a Christian. When you do that a spirit of peace with God comes into your heart. Just the way when you have tension between you and a friend and you sort the thing out there comes a great relaxation. So it is with your maker. A great spirit of peace with God and a great spirit of love for him and for other people comes into your heart.

Now I want to talk this morning, loved ones, about another tragedy that occurs in the lives of many thousands who take those steps, really. A tragedy that exists at present in many thousands of lives of people who regard themselves as Christians. And it is this: it doesn't last. It doesn't last. I don't know if some of you are here this morning but I know thousands of people that have taken those steps of repenting and believing the Gospel and they've experienced peace for awhile with God. They've experienced a love for other people but as the weeks went by and the months went by they began to be aware again that there was still something evil inside them. They began to realize that there was something inside that had not been touched. That still wanted its own way and still rose up and wanted to attack other people and wanted to be respected and looked up to like God.

There are many thousands of Christians who have struggled those first two steps and then have suddenly begun to realize that there is still something evil inside them that has not been dealt with. What I want to share with you this morning is, the tragedy is that many of them and many of you are in the grip of that thing because of deception. God is allowing that to take place in you to show you why his son really had to die but you and I and thousands of others don't realize that and

so we kind of rationalize it. So we have a measure of victory over outward sin and we kind of hold our tongue when we need to. And we control our temper as much as we can but underneath there is this stuff rising inside us wanting to be angry, wanting to get irritable, wanting to be unclean and we keep holding it down and we think to ourselves, this is it. This is the best that you've got. So we rationalize it and we pretend at times it isn't so bad and we pretend it isn't really sin. Then we make the great pretense of all. We pretend that the Bible teaches that that's the normal Christian life.

Now I'd like to show you why we believe that. I hope loved ones that during these few minutes together I'll show you why that's a misinterpretation of this dear book. So I'll show you the chapter that we all use to defend that miserable defeated Christian life. It is in Romans chapter 7. Most children of God who have taken the first steps to become his children and become born of God know they have within them a conflict that is breaking them up and is destroying their victory. But they say well, I mean Paul had that. And they go to verse 15 and they say, look that's just me. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

They say, now that's Paul an apostle -- he said that and that's him speaking as a Christian isn't he? Now I feel the way he does in verse 16. "Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good." And that's right. I'm for it. I want to be good. So you see it's not really my fault -- and that's what we get ourselves into. It's not my fault you see. It's my sinful nature. The good bit of me that is born of God that doesn't want to do that, you see. That's the bit that will go to heaven. This sinful nature, that's the bit that makes me angry and irritable and bad tempered but you see it's not really me. They go to the next verse in 17 "So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." You know loved ones that's exactly what we say. We say it isn't me, it's sin which dwells within me.

Then verse 18 "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh." Some of us call it our flesh you see so we divide ourselves into a good nature and a sinful nature. We divide ourselves into spirit and flesh. We divide ourselves into the bit that's born of God and the bit that's not born of God and we plant all on the old Mr. Hyde. We say all right the bad temper, the anger, the jealousy comes from Mr. Hyde that monster within me that will not be touched by God and can not be touched until I get to heaven. That sinful nature, my flesh, that's the stuff that's making me sin. I myself am Dr. Jekyll. I am born of God and the real me wants to be good and wants to obey and that bit is good.

Of course one of the tragedies is the poor wee souls outside the church, they haven't learned that kind of tricky logic. They don't distinguish between you and yourself. They don't make any distinction between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When you lose your temper in the office or you indulge in gossip and criticism, they know it's you, it's you the Christian.

Loved ones, you know that we tend to align ourselves with old Paul here and we say now that's right, verse 19, boy that is me. "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." We all get back to that it's sin that is doing this it's not me. I myself am born of God but sin is still evil and that still dwells within me and it will dwell within me until we meet God face to face. Then we can describe it of course in great detail in 21; "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand." So I want to love somebody but I find another kind of spirit rising up inside me. "Well, what's so precious about them?" You find another kind of critical spirit rising up.

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self" and inside I want to love them. "But I see in my members," in my personality, in my mind, in my emotions, in my arms, in my legs, in my whole personality, I see "another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members." It's as if I'm trying to work from inside from God, but my own personality is still working from outside. Still looking at the other people, still trying to get satisfaction from them, trying to get pleasure from them and trying to get them to look up to me.

I know it doesn't really matter what they think of me. I believe that. I believe it from my inside heart that it's only what God thinks is important. But I find another law at work in my members. Even my little eye is kind of looking out to see, are they praising me? Are they approving me? So I see in my members, in my eyes, in my head, and my arms, and my legs, they seem to act without my direction and they're always acting on their own plan where I used to treat the world as God and other people's opinions as God. That's what he means you see and I think many of us say that. I find a law at work in my members that is at war with the law of my mind.

Then in verse 24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Loved ones there are thousands of children of God that say -- there it is in black and white -- that's my life. Oh sure I will get to heaven and I have my sins forgiven and I have a measure of victory outside but I so often feel with Paul "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" So many of us believe that's it. That is it. That's the best the Christian life has to offer. It's what Paul experienced. It's what I experienced. It's what everybody that I ever talked to who know Jesus; it's what they experienced. "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" There's no way out of this except death itself. That will take the body away and then I'll be clear of it.

Nobody ever seems to see that that's verse 24 and that there is in fact a verse 25. There is something in our hearts loved ones that wants to pretend that verse 24 is the end -- you know there is. It's not just an intellectual misunderstanding. Really it isn't we misunderstand what we want to misunderstand. It's not the end of the chapter loved ones. Verse 25, who shall deliver me from this body of death? "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" But if you say that to anybody, especially if you say it to yourself, yourself will come back and say yeah, yeah but you see that's 25A and look at 25B. "So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

So, most of us say, you see when he said, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" he didn't mean that you were saved and delivered from this power of sin inside you. He just meant that you see I'm still in the same situation. I myself have served the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin but because Jesus died for me, God forgives the whole lot. That's it. So it doesn't actually change the situation it just means I keep on being bound by the sin within me but I'm forgiven because of Jesus so that's why I say "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Now it doesn't seem to occur to us too much that his question actually is, who will deliver me from this body of death? It's not who will forgive me for being in this body of death. Or who will accept me despite the fact that I'm bearing the agony of this body of death. He is asking the question, who will deliver me from this body of death? He replies "Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ" but because of 25B so many of us say, well you see it's just saying I'm in the same boat. It's just that God forgives me because of Jesus.

Loved ones if 25B is the normal Christian life, now look at it "So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." If that's the normal Christian life then all such Christians will die according to what Paul says a few verses later in Romans 8. Now look at Romans 8:13 "for if you live according to the flesh you will die." And there you see in 25B of the previous chapter he says; "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." And he says in Romans 8:13 "for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live."

So you have a problem. Paul says the normal Christian life is you live in the flesh and then a few verses later he says anybody who lives in the flesh will die. But not only loved ones have you problems with Romans 8 but also you have gross problems with Romans 6. Now look at Romans 7 for instance verse 23 see the description there, verse 23 or Romans 7, "but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin, which dwells in my members." Now that's a description of captivity of enslavement to sin. Now look back at Romans 6 and look at verse 15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, as captives, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" Then verse 17; "but thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

Now loved ones that's a direct contradiction to what he says in Romans 7. I see a law at work making me captive to the law of sin and in Romans 6 he says you've become free from sin. So this poor guy he's drunk! He does not know what he's talking about. In Romans 6, he says you are free from sin but in Romans 7, he says you're a slave from sin. In Romans 8, he says if you're a slave to sin you'll die. The man inspired by God? You don't need to be inspired by God to write that stuff, you just need to be schizophrenic insane.

So loved ones do you see there is a difficulty. There's a difficulty. If you're going to say that in Romans 6 Paul teaches freedom from this monster of sin within us and then Romans 7 he says no you're not really free you are back in it and that's the best that I've got. Then Romans 8 he says if that's the best you've got, you're going to die. It doesn't make sense. There's no sense to it at all. I mean you look at Romans 6 and it's an entirely different story.

Look at Romans 6:1. Here there is, you know I do not understand my own actions, I do not do the good I want. Here is completely the opposite. Verse 1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin."

He says that's the whole purpose of Jesus dying -- that we would be freed from sin. Now watch the explanation. How do you explain those contradictions? Well if this book of Romans is a chronological autobiography of Paul's own experience it makes no sense. It doesn't. Because in Romans 6 he says, I was freed from this power of anger and irritability within me. Then Romans 7 he says, now I live

right in the middle of it. Then Romans 8 he says, if I do that I'm going to die. It doesn't make any sense if it's a chronological autobiography of Paul's life. That's where many of us get caught -- we say that. No theologian says that the book of Romans is an autobiography of Paul, none. Everybody that you speak to will say Romans is the most logical presentation of reality that exists in this world. It's the best theological treatise you can get your hands on. Nobody will say it's an autobiography of Paul's own personal experience.

Well then why does he talk of freedom from this power within us in 6 and then in Romans 7 he seems to give us all the reinforcement for remaining under the sin in our own lives? Well it's easy. It's simple. In Romans 6 Paul is talking about how Jesus died for us. And how we died with him. And how through that death we were freed from the power of the old self. That's what he says. We know that our old self was crucified with Christ. Those little eyes that go out looking for the boss's favor. That little eye on that trend, that little eye was crucified with Christ and we can experience freedom from it in a moment by faith. That little bit of you that wants to go out and enjoy mischievous thoughts and lustful feelings -- that bit was crucified with Christ and you can have victory over it by believing that in a moment. That's what he says in Romans 6.

Then you see who he turns to in Romans 7 in verse 1. "Do you not know, brethren -- for I am speaking to those who know the law." Now who were those? Well they were Christians who had been Jews. "Do you not know, brethren -- for I am speaking to those who know the law" (you Jews)- "that the law is binding on a person only during his life?" In Romans 7 he proceeds to show them how Jesus' death delivered them from the power of evil within them but now in Romans 7 he shows them how it delivers them from the power of the law to show them how to do good. He says you're delivered from the old power of self. You are also now that you are dead with Christ delivered from the law as the primary guide in your life because God is going to put his Spirit inside you as he promised in Ezekiel.

I'm going to make a new covenant, he said in Jeremiah. I'm going to make a covenant, not like the covenant I had with your fathers. I'm going to write my law in your hearts. Paul is saying in Romans 6, God through Jesus' death and our death with Christ has delivered us from the power of evil self. And now in Romans 7 he says, you don't have to now keep looking at the laws to see how to be good. God has put the Spirit of his Son inside of you and you're going to find that your heart wants to do certain things that will please God and you're free now from the law of sin. Then he says now don't say all the law was useless then. He moves then into what we call in English writing, you remember in literature, a parenthesis. He says no, no don't say the law was useless. You don't need it now that the spirit of God is inside you but I'm putting a parenthesis now, don't say that was useless.

I'll tell you what it did. The parenthesis begins in verse 7 of Romans 7; "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!" And it's a flashback to his days as a Jew living under the law. It's not the report of an account of a Christian at all. It's a flashback to when he was a Jew. "That the law is sin, by no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law," that's the proof perfect, that's the past, "if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin." As a Jew it was the law that brought the hideousness of that monster sin inside me, home to my heart. I should not have known sin, I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, and "You shall not covet." "But sin," he then goes on in the parenthesis to describe the hideous situation that a Jew under the law finds himself in "but sin finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness." Because of course what the old covenant had, it had no power to enable people to live the way God wanted them to. It had only a law that brought home to them their own hideous hopeless situation without God.

"Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law," before I was aware of the law in many of us as natural men, "but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment deceived me and by it killed me. So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good." Don't say it's useless. The law is essential and here's how it's essential. Verse 13 "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me," when I was a Jew, "through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure." That's all the law can do. It can make you realize this is beyond me. I cannot control this evil self inside me. "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." He goes on to describe the hideous situation of a Jew under the law. Then he says, "who will deliver me from this body of death?" That's what I thought as a Jew. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Then he summarizes the thing, "So then, I of myself", I on my own, uncrucified, "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Then he ends the parenthesis and he goes on in Romans 8 and it continues right on from verse 6 of Romans 7, you don't need the law to tell you what is good because "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." He goes on to describe the life of the spirit. Loved ones it is a trick of Satan reinforced by so many of our dear churches that has persuaded you and me that Romans 7 is the normal Christian life. It isn't.

The last part of Romans 7 is a great parenthesis describing the situation of a Jew struggling under the law and if you say to me well how come so many of us who are children of God identify with it because we're often living under the old covenant. We respect the law we try to obey it but we cannot obey it. We have had our sins forgiven but we have not been delivered from these sinful natures. We haven't been delivered from our sinful nature because we have never really seen that that's what Christ did for us. When we came to God at the beginning, He said I have given my Son to die for you. We said we don't know why but we believe that and we thank you for your forgiveness. Now God allows these things to come up in our lives so that we'll see why Jesus died for us. He died to deliver us from that old self inside you and me that make us get irritable and angry. That makes us disobey God. That makes us eventually fall from our own best ideals.

Loved ones, the glory of the Gospel is that not only are our sins forgiven by faith but our hearts are cleansed by faith. Not only are we free from the guilt of sin by faith. We are saved from the power of sin by faith. The error that you and I make is we think we are saved from the guilt of sin by faith but we're saved from the power of sin by reading good books. Or by exercising our will power. Or by getting into more Bible study groups. Or by getting into a better church. The fact is we're delivered from the power of sin by the same simple method, by which we received the forgiveness of our sins, by faith. By faith that we were crucified with Christ and completely remade. Loved ones you don't have to labor under that sinful nature. That is not the normal Christian life and it is not a right interpretation of scripture.

If you say, brother why do so many believe it? Loved ones there are thousands down through the centuries that have never believed it. To be honest with you, those of us believe it who want to believe it. If we want to stay with the right to lose our temper or to get angry or to do our own thing or to do what we want with our lives, well even Satan will wrest scripture for his own purposes. So I would encourage your dear hearts to look over all this again very carefully. I don't

want you to believe me, I want you to look over it and study the Bible. Get it for your own self and your own heart so that you're on solid ground when you come before God and say Lord, I want to be delivered from this self inside me and I believe that it was crucified with Jesus through your Holy Spirit. Will you bring me into this by your own power? God will, you know, He will. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters and we pray for each other here because we've been under the burden of these misinterpretations for years. It takes a long while to just get it straight in our minds. Then Lord we don't want it to take a long time to get it straight in our own hearts. Lord we believe that whatever can be received by faith can be received in a moment. Oh Father, if you destroyed this old self inside me, that gives me so much trouble, and enables the power of sin to work through my life as if I wasn't born at all of God, then Lord will you by your Holy Spirit begin to bring me into this, this very day? Lord if all that I have been up to this moment was crucified with Christ then thank you. I accept that. I regard it as dead now and buried and no self for me to look after, but just this body and this mind of which I am a custodian. Lord I intend to treat it like that for your glory. Amen.