

A New Spirit

Romans 8:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Most us here this morning started to live by our wits when we were about 11 years of age. Up until then we lived by trust -- trust in our dad and our mom. Our mom called us in for lunch, we went and assumed lunch would be ready. We never worried about how it was going to be made or how the food was going to be bought. It's the same with our dad. He said we were going to a football game, he put us into the car and we believed he would take us to the football game and bring us back. Then they would both tuck us into bed at night and that would be the way life would go. It seemed to us at one time that it would go like this forever. Those were beautiful days.

They really are days of trust when you're three, four, five, six, seven, eight, or nine years old. It's up until you're getting towards 11 and the whole experience of puberty that you live by trust. Then from 11,12,13,14 years you begin to live by your wits. That is, you begin to look around the world and see that it's pretty big. There are lots of dangerous things in it and lots of things that could kill you. There are lots of things that you need to live that your parents give you like your clothes, your food and your shelter. You begin to think over in your mind, "Now wait a minute, I need this stuff and I have to get hold of it somehow. It seems that some stuff is pretty important." So you begin to count your money, and treasure a little more the dime or the quarter or the dollars that your mom or dad give you.

Gradually, you see that everybody seems to feel that there's a God somewhere but they really live themselves as if He doesn't exist. So they talk a lot about trusting Him, the way you trusted your mom and dad, but none of them seem to trust Him that way. They seem to worry a lot, be anxious and scramble for things. But they don't live at all the way you used to live when you were four or five or six or seven. Of course, very naturally you begin to do the same thing. Do you realize that all of us were in a strange, deep way together in Adam's loins? Have you ever thought about that?

Even the non-Christian biologists accept that the whole human race has come from two people. That means of course that all of us are much closer than we care to admit. All of us were at one time part of one guy or part of one girl. When they were cast out of the presence of God because they disobeyed Him and rebelled against Him, their attitude to God in some way is our base attitude. And in some deep way, we realize that there may be a God but if there is, He doesn't affect the course of our lives very much. So we have to really look after ourselves.

That's what I mean by saying, not long after we're 11 years of age, we begin to live by our wits. We begin to realize you need money to get clothes, to get food, to stay alive, so we'd better get that money. There are ways to get that money. You can work for it or you can steal it or you can get people to give it to you, but there are ways to get it. We begin to thrash around to make that money. We thrash around on a newspaper route and it's just a variation of the way we thrash around when we are a top executive fighting for extra commission.

We have that burden in ourselves that we have to do it. We see how big the world is, we see how many people there are in it, we feel very important and yet they don't think we're important. It's then that we begin to thrash around to make ourselves seem important in other people's eyes. So, we work

at it. Whether it's the football team that we try to get on at school or whether it's the key to the executive washroom that we try to win by promotion later on in life, we try to get people to see how important we are. It becomes somewhat of a rat race.

All the while, we're trying to enjoy ourselves and get all the satisfaction we can from all the different experiences we can possibly get. It's strange but something happens to you in the middle of all that. An English poet wrote a poem about it and he put it this way. He said, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy", when we're little children, trusting our moms and dads. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy. Shades of the prison house begin to close around the growing boy. At length, the man perceives it, dies away and fades into the light of common day."

Something does seem to die inside us, doesn't it? We lose something that we had when we were little children. We lose some trustfulness, something beautiful. There's something that seems to die inside and it's hard to get your finger on it but you know it's gone. It's something that felt close to spring breezes. It's something that felt close to the beauty of summer lakes. It's something that felt light and airy. It's something that was able to trust God or have a dependence upon Him or have the same attitude to Him as you used to have to your dad and mom.

It's some innocence; we call it the loss of innocence. Or we call it entering into realism or being practical or growing up or maturing or being adult. But all of us know that it means something beautiful or tender or gentle or kindly or trusting or believing seems to die inside us. Somewhere around the teenage years to the 20s, something was lost. That's what Jesus gives you back. That's what Jesus gives you back.

That's the difference between becoming a Hindu and becoming a Christian or becoming a Buddhist and becoming a Christian or becoming a Jew and becoming a Christian. Becoming a Christian is receiving again from God by faith the spirit that you sensed was within you years and years ago when you were a little child. It's a spirit of trust and a spirit of innocence and a spirit of joy and delight and peace. That's what becoming a Christian is, loved ones.

Becoming a Christian isn't adopting a certain set of beliefs. It isn't starting to attend church. It isn't even reading the Bible and praying. Becoming a Christian is receiving the Spirit -- the Spirit that enables you to live again as a joyful, trusting child of your Father in Heaven. That's what it means to become a Christian. It means to receive the Spirit of God that makes you a child of His, a trusting child.

Now that's why I asked you about a month ago, if you had become a Christian and had never consciously received the Spirit, the Holy Spirit by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you should come forward and I would lay my hands on you as the apostles did in New Testament days and you ought to receive that Spirit and be sure that He is within you. Many of you came up because becoming a Christian is receiving that Spirit of Jesus into yourself again that makes you new inside.

Now, how do you know you have received that Spirit? Some of you may have come up a month ago and thought, "Well, yes I did receive that Spirit. But how do I really know that I have received the Spirit of God, that I am born again, that I am regenerated, that my spirit has been made alive inside, and that I have become a little child again?" Loved ones the Bible is very clear about it and you'll find it in Romans 8. It's in the passage that we read as the New Testament lesson.

Romans 8:16, "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Would you look at that verse carefully and do you see that the first spirit has a capital 'S' whereas you see the other spirit in the middle of the verse 'our spirit' has a small 's'. Now that's how the Revised Standard Version translators indicated that there's a difference in the Greek. The difference in the Greek loved ones is that the first spirit has what we call the article, the word for "the" before it. They have indicated that by putting a capital 'S' at spirit. Whereas the second "spirit" has no article in the Greek.

In other words, God was indicating through the Greek language that the first "Spirit" is different from the second "spirit". The first "Spirit" has a capital 'S' because that's God's own Spirit. That's the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. That's how you know you have received the Spirit. That's how you know you're a child of God and you've been regenerated. I'm not talking about baptism of the Spirit or fullness of the Spirit or speaking in tongues at this moment. We will talk about that in later Sundays but we're talking just about becoming a Christian.

Becoming a Christian means receiving the Spirit of Jesus into yourself. That Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit with a capital 'S', will bear witness with your own spirit that you are a child of God. That's how you'll know. There are two witnesses, the witness of God's Spirit and the witness of your own spirit. There's a witness in your own spirit (that had got so old and worn out with worry and anxiety over the rat race), but there's a witness first of God's Spirit that comes within you. When you receive the Spirit of Jesus, Jesus comes into you. Jesus, with all His brightness, all the freshness of the great barrier reef in Australia (because He made that), all the beauty of the winds that blow across the prairies (because He made those), all the beauty that is in the whole world comes into you when Jesus' Spirit comes into you. And how do you know that?

Well, that Spirit witnesses to you. That Spirit witnesses to you that God knows you and that Jesus knows you. Some of you will say, "Well, I know Jesus. Yes, I know Jesus. Yes I know Him, the way I know Reagan." Now if I said to you, "But does Reagan know you?" You would have to say, "Well, no, not personally but I know him." Some of us say that about Jesus. We say, "Oh yes. I know Jesus. Am I a child of God? Yes, I know Jesus." But do you know that Jesus knows you? I don't mean just intellectually. Plenty of us say, "Oh yes, He must know me because He knows all things." But do you know inside yourself that He knows you?

Do you know that Jesus knows you? Now, the Spirit, when He comes inside you, witnesses to that fact. He lets you know that Jesus knows you. He makes you know that Jesus died for you on Calvary and that God has forgiven you your sins and has received you into His own family personally. The Spirit of God witnesses that to you. He bears witness to that fact inside you. So that's one way you'll know that you've received the Spirit of God. You'll have a sense inside that God knows you and that Jesus knows you.

There's another way in which you'll know. You'll sense that there's another person in you. You'll sense at times that there's another set of thoughts being expressed to you besides your own, and that's beside your conscience. You know how all of us experience the working of our conscience, even before we are Christians. We experience the conscience saying, "Don't do this, don't do that." J.B. Phillips describes it often as a resident policeman inside us who keeps saying, "Stop, stop."

Now many of us have that experience but it is primarily a negative one telling you what not to do. But the Spirit of God is another set of thoughts inside you that are positive, that often tell you things to do, things that you wouldn't know to do just from the Bible itself or things that actually

you ought not to do that aren't necessarily in the Bible. So you'll know that the Spirit of God is within you because it is like another person inside you expressing different thoughts.

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit is a person. He is a real person. He has thoughts and feelings. He has desires for you and for your life every day. And when you receive Him into yourself, you will sense those. At times you will sense them through your own thoughts, but you'll know. You'll say to yourself, "Now, wait a minute, I didn't think that thought. That thought came from another. That thought is like the thought that Jesus would give me as opposed to evil thoughts that come from Satan." You'll know that the Spirit of God is within you because it's like having another person inside you.

There's another way you'll know. The Spirit of God always enjoys being with God and with Jesus. So the Spirit of God within you will want to be with God in prayer and will want to be with God in the Bible. So you'll find within yourself a desire that you didn't have before. You'll have a desire to read the Bible and a desire to pray and be with other people who are praying. And that's a way to tell. It really is. Don't be put off by some people who'll say, "Well, you'll know you're Christian because you'll love to go to prayer meetings." And you've thought, "Oh, the prayer meetings are so dull and dreary. I don't want to go to the prayer meetings."

Loved ones, forget all that and all the people that pray the long prayers that put you to sleep when you're a little one. The truth is, when the Holy Spirit of God comes into you, He loves to pray. He does. He loves to be at prayer meetings and He loves to be with others who are praying to God. So yes, it is possible to know you're a Christian by the witness of God's Spirit within you.

Now you remember the verse, that says, "The Spirit of God, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." You see there's another witness, the witness of our own spirit. In other words, when God's Spirit comes into you, He changes your own spirit. He makes your own spirit different. Now, in what way does it make it different?

Well, you'll see it if you look at it in the Bible in 1 John 2:3. "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments." God gives you a spirit of obedience. A spirit that loves to obey Him and that rejoices to obey Him. It's the Holy Spirit that wrote this book - the Bible. So He loves to do those things. You can know that you're child of God because your own spirit begins to want to obey God.

Now this might help some of you who are a bit bewildered about the versions of Christianity that exist in our nation at the present time. I think a lot of you have heard a lot of things about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, becoming a Christian, being regenerated, having your sins forgiven and being converted. And there are all kinds of ideas about what that means. Some people think that it just means you begin to get interested in God and in the Bible, but it doesn't make any difference to your life. You just go on fornicating as you always did. You go on committing adultery as you always did. You go on swearing as you normally do. You go on keeping bad company as you normally do. No loved ones, no!

When the Holy Spirit comes into you, He changes your own spirit. He makes you want to obey God. He makes you rejoice to obey Him. He makes you want to be with God's people every Sunday. He makes you want to read the Bible. He makes you want to pray. He makes you want to avoid stealing. He makes you want to be honest with people. He makes you want to be gentle, kindly and humble with people. He makes you want to obey God.

There is a spirit inside you that wants to go its own way and wants to do what you want but when the Spirit of God comes inside you, you find you have a different power inside. There may still be some remnants of that old desire but the main thrust you feel in your life is a desire to obey God and to obey His commandments - not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to have other gods before God, not to swear at people or take advantage of other people. You find your own spirit wants to obey God and rejoices to obey Him. So you can tell if you're a Christian by that.

If you were drinking madly before you became a Christian, and you are drinking madly after you became a Christian then you can know, NO, you're not a Christian. You're just a believer. You believe intellectually these things but you haven't come into any kind of moderation in your life. The Holy Spirit is one who is moderate. That's why He said, "Be moderate in all things." And when He comes into you, He makes you like that. He makes you want to be like Jesus. So you can tell by that.

You can tell also by another change He makes in you. It's in 1 John 3:14. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

So you'll know by the Spirit of love that begins to rise up from your heart. You'll begin to love people. You'll begin to want them to be happy and want them to do well. You'll begin to want to help them. You'll feel a love rising in your heart for other people. It might be good loved ones especially in our generation just to clarify what the dear Word of God clarifies a few verses later.

It's in 1 John 3:18. "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." The Spirit of Jesus within you makes your spirit want to love in deed and in truth and not just in word or speech. Here's why I say that. I think in our society, with all our big talk about love, love, love, (that's what makes the world go around), in our society, we have a real danger of entering into George Orwell's 1984 'double speak'.

You remember what that was? Or it's 'double think' you remember. You could say a thing and do exactly the opposite at the same moment. Or you could love and hate at the same time. It's what we say the Communists do. They say, "Oh yes, we ought to have liberty. We ought to have freedom and human rights." But at the same time they are crushing people to death in Siberia. We call that double speak or double think or hypocrisy because it's saying one thing and doing another.

Now, loved ones, the Spirit of God when He comes within you, enables you to love people in word and in deed and not just in word and speech. So it's important not to get into this false love where you say, "Oh I love you brother. I love you", but when the guy's back is turned, you knife him. Don't do that. Many of you are involved these days, in the cities generally, where you can be drawn into criticism. Now you can't love a person and criticize him at the same time. That isn't possible. So don't get into that hypocrisy.

When the Spirit of God comes into you, He fills your spirit with a love for the brethren and gives you a desire to do everything you can to improve their life and make their life good. You would die for them. You would die for them to protect them. When the Spirit of God comes within you, He makes your spirit a loving spirit like that. So loved ones, it is possible to know if you have received the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God does those things within you.

He Himself witnesses that Jesus knows you. He also gives you a desire to be with God and to pray to Him and to read His Word. Then the Spirit of God makes your spirit new inside so that your own

spirit rejoices to obey God and wants to obey Him. Your own spirit feels a love for other people and a desire to do the best for them that you possibly can.

So you can know that you're a child of God because the Spirit of God bears witness with your spirit that you're a child of God. If you have that witness, then just thank God for it. And if you haven't, I would really love us to get used to coming up to this altar at the end of service to pray a prayer to Him and give some things over to Him in a new way.

I won't bother you if you want to be praying there after the benediction. I'll just let you pray. But if you do want me to help you, I'll gladly help you. If God's Spirit has spoken to you and said, "Now listen, you have not really received Me into yourself because those marks are not in your life", well then loved ones, I would just come up and quietly make my peace with God and receive His Spirit into you. Be born of God and have that delight of going out of here this morning with the sense that God's own Spirit is within you.

Loved ones, that gives you a direction in your life and gives you a comfort in all kinds of situations that you can never have any other way. So I would encourage you to do that. Be real with God because becoming a Christian is receiving God's Spirit into you and He will let you know He has come. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that becoming your child means receiving a precious gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. We thank You Lord for those words on the day of Pentecost, "Be Baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Oh Lord, we thank you that we are able to receive that dear Spirit from You this very moment. Holy Spirit, you will come in and change us and make us new and make us like Jesus. We would thank You that you've come and we would trust you to abide within us and live within us this day and through the days of this coming week. Holy Spirit, we will yield to you and allow you to change us and make us the innocent, free, joyous children that we remember being at the beginning of this life.

Lord, we thank you that that's your will for us. 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.