

The Spirit and the Flesh

Romans 6:6

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We have been talking these past few Sundays about how easy it is to become a prisoner of the world or of this society in which we live. The world is meant to be the place where we enjoy ourselves and which we use to make life enjoyable. But it's very easy to become a prisoner of that world. It's illustrated by that picture of the little monkey that gets its paw into the narrow mouth cookie jar. It gets it in but then it opens its paw out to put round the cookies and when it tries to get the paw out of the jar and it won't come. It won't come unless it lets go of the cookies -- and it won't let go of the cookies. So, the monkey is caught and imprisoned there by its addiction or its desire for cookies. And that's really what we mean; that it's very easy for us in this life to become imprisoned by the things that we want to have, but we can't have them unless we go (in a sense) into prison.

And you remember, we mentioned how when we were little children, it was so easy to live a life of trust and have a light spirit about life. Our moms and dads supplied all we needed. After we came to be 11 or 13 we began to look around and see all these adults who were strained and worried and anxious. They all said they believed in God, but they didn't really believe he had any effect on their lives. So they had come to the conclusion that the things they used to get from their moms and dads, they now had to get for themselves; and we saw them doing that. We saw the striving and the straining to try to get the food and the clothing and the homes that before, they and we had got from our moms and dads. And lo and behold, it wasn't long before we ourselves fell into the same kind of striving and straining. We began to see how important money is, and how important jobs are to get money. And it wasn't long before, as that song says, "We sold our soul to the company store." You begin to see how important it is to have a job and how important it is to have a position and how important it is to please those who give you those things so that you can actually survive. And it's amazing how soon we become prisoners of the jobs and the money and the debts and all the things that we use -- to provide us with the things that we used to get from our dads and moms.

And somehow, life begins to be a bit of a prison. I suppose it becomes more intense because one of the things we find when we were very young is, we think we are important. We think we are pretty unique. And actually the truth is, we are unique. But we think we are the only unique ones. The only problem is, nobody else seems to realize that. And they all seem to think that they are unique too. And we begin to realize that they're all trying to get us to see how unique they are, and we are trying to get them to see how unique we are. And it's not long before that becomes a prison too. You begin to see, they think you are unique if you do something different. So maybe if you have a different coat or a different hat or if you have a different car or a different house then they will think you are unique. And it's surprising how quickly we begin to get into prison about those things too. It's amazing how many debts we will go into, and how many difficulties and how many embarrassing situations we'll get into just to get things that will impress others with our uniqueness. And so, that's what we mean that many of us find after a number of years that life has become a kind of prison for us. We are a prisoner of the things that we think we have to do to get the security or the sense of self-esteem or self worth that we ought to have from everybody else.

And really loved ones, that is what so often steals from us the nostalgia that we used to feel when we look back to our lives as children. We look back and we see how light-hearted we used to be and

how we used to live by just trust and simple dependence on our moms and dads. Now suddenly life has become complicated. You begin to wonder even who you are. That's why many of us say, "I am not really sure who I am." We become whatever is needed to get these things from society and in the process we've often become monsters, we've often become people that we didn't want to become at all. We hardly can recognize ourselves any longer. We look inside and wonder, is there any me inside there? I wonder what I used to be when I was a little guy or a little girl? I wonder what I would have been like, had I developed like that? And we wonder where the self is, that we seem to have lost completely; because we have become such a man pleasing, society pleasing kind of individual. And of course what we said several Sundays ago you remember was, that's why Jesus came.

Jesus came to give us back that spirit -- to give us back that spirit of simple trust and joy and delight that we used to have when we were little children. And that's why Christianity is unique. Buddhism doesn't do it and Islam doesn't do it and Judaism doesn't do it and spiritualism doesn't do it and transcendental meditation doesn't do it. Only Christianity restores to us that spirit of simple trust and joy and delight that we used to have as children. And that you get, loved ones, in one of the first promises that were ever made by Christians to people who had heard about Jesus for the first time.

It's Acts 2 and verse 38. Peter had preached the first Christian sermon and the people, who listened to him, came up and said, "What shall we do?" And then in verse 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." And that's what changes you. That's what renews in you again that simple trust that you had as little children.

The truth is, the trust and confidence and the joy that you and I used to have with our moms and dads, that was meant to develop into an attitude that we would have towards our real Father. That attitude of trust in our dads and moms and confidence and freedom from care and freedom from worry that we had in them was meant to develop into an attitude of faith and trust in our real Father, our Creator. But instead of that happening, we followed the crowd and started to depend on this outside world, on this society, on our jobs, and on our positions for these things. This was instead of depending on the love, the care, the certainty and the reinforcement that our Father in Heaven wanted to give us. And so, instead of receiving it from him, we began to receive it from the world. We began to turn away more and more from him and turn away more and more toward the world of people and things and events. And that's where everything tightened up.

Now what Jesus promised is, that if we come to Him, He will restore that spirit to us because that's the spirit that He has always had to His Father. He always had a complete confidence that God his Father would supply whatever He needed. Whenever He was in difficulties with people, whenever He was in problems with disease or sickness, He just looked up to His Father and asked His Father to bring the answer. And His Father did it. So much so, that even when He died, He said, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit." He was in no doubt that He was going to continue alive because his Father had him in his arms. Now that Spirit that Jesus had towards God our Creator, He is able to give to us, loved ones. He is able to put that Spirit into our hearts so that we can begin to feel that again ourselves. And that's the promise that's made.

You remember it's mentioned again in Romans 8:15 and it's expressed even more clearly as, the spirit that children have towards their dear father. It's Romans 8:15. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, -- (a slavery to the things that we depend on here in this world for our security and our confidence) but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry,

'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

And it's possible for that Spirit of Jesus to come into us and to begin to cry out to God our Creator -- "Father!" -- so that you will actually feel He is your Father. You will feel it inside and you will know that He has you in his arms. And you remember, we talked last Sunday about how you know that; because the Spirit Himself that comes into you bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. That is, that Spirit lets you know that God your Creator knows you personally. And doesn't have you just as a number or doesn't have you just as a cipher in this world or as another one of the millions of us that live here, but God your Creator lets you know that He knows you personally by your own name.

And this Spirit will do that loved ones. You can't imagine it, but you know He said He has counted the hairs of my head but how can I believe that? It's the Spirit that comes within you that lets you know that from the inside, so that suddenly you begin to naturally and easily believe that God is your dear Father. And then you remembered we said last Sunday that the Spirit bears witness with your spirit. Because He actually changes your spirit, your inside spirit that is so bent on looking after itself and looking out for itself suddenly begins to be the spirit of a child of God. And your inside spirit wants to please God and wants to obey Him, and wants to trust Him. And so, you will begin to know that you are a child of God because your own spirit begins to take a different attitude towards God. No longer is He a far-off distant God, but He is now a close, dear, loving Father. And that's the way you begin to live almost all the time -- almost all the time. And that's what most of us have found. It works almost all of the time.

But in a way, many of us who have made that commitment and asked Jesus to come into our lives and to enable us to be born again and become His little children; most of us who have done that have had the same experience, as so many of us have had with honeymoons. You know the way it goes -- on a honeymoon, there seems to be a special grace that God gives; so that you just think of each other all the time, and you want to please the other person above everything else. And you don't think of yourself. That seems to last through the honeymoon. And then when the honeymoon is over, God seems to withdraw that grace; strangely enough, not so that you will do what the cynics do. They say, "Well it's back to porridge. The honeymoon is over. Let's get down to real life." It's not for that reason. God withdraws that grace so that you will actually begin to express deliberately and willfully in obedience to Him, the beautiful feelings of spontaneous love that He gave to you during the honeymoon -- that's why He gave you the honeymoon. He gave it as a picture of what your marriage is meant to be throughout your life together.

But many of us experience that same kind of honeymoon problem after we have turned from this world as the source of our happiness and turned to Jesus. We begin to feel some of the feelings that we used to feel before. On the whole we trust God, but there are moments when we find some of the old feelings that we used to have rising up inside us. We don't know what it is. We thought they were all gone. But somehow along with the Spirit of Jesus within us, there is another attitude that begins to express itself. And I don't know if you remember the famous verse, but it's Romans 7:15. So many of us have begun to feel that attitude after we are born of God that it's maybe good to look at it plainly and say, "Yes, I have felt that, or I do feel that." It's Romans 7:15. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

We determine that we will go home and be the kindest, most saintly friend, or partner, our roommate

has ever had that evening. We determine we will go home and love them to death. And we enter the door, and they point to a piece of paper on the table and say, "Look at that!" It's a bill that we should have paid a month before. Or they point to something on the table and say, "Look at that!" And it's an assignment that we forgot to do. And for the rest of the evening we are just at each other's throats arguing about why the thing wasn't done and why we didn't do it and what trouble we have caused by not doing it. Now why? Why, when we want to be kind to them and loving and thoughtful and we wanted it to be a good evening, why does it suddenly turn around over a thing like that?

Well, God has given us some kind of clue, loved ones; in the next few verses, they are in Roman 7, if you look at them -- and verse 18. "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."

Nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh -- and the Greek word for flesh is "sarx". Actually it isn't just a physical body. It's not just our physical body that prevents us from doing what we want to do. "Sooma" is the word for physical body; you get that in "psychosomatic diseases". "Sooma" is the Greek word for just physical body but "sarx" is flesh in the sense of the whole fleshly way our personality works. That's what flesh is. It's the whole way our personality works. And that's what prevents us being what the Spirit of Jesus wants us to be at each moment of our practical life.

Now how does our personality operate? If you think about it, it's from the outside in. Our eyes see the bill, the unpaid bills sitting on the table or see the assignment on the table that we should have done; and they send feelings of panic and fear and concern and worry into our emotions, which have been used for years to receiving all their stimulation from our eyes and our ears; and then our emotions in turn, send thoughts of resentment and criticism and antagonism to our mind, which for years have been used to being dominated by our feelings; and then our mind sends out reflex responses to the vocal chords of harshness and criticism and hard words; while our will lies kind of breathless on the ground doing nothing but watching in dismay. And that's the way our personalities have worked for years. They have worked from the outside in. Whatever we have heard through our ears or seen through our eyes has dominated what our emotions have felt. And our emotions have dominated what our minds have thought and our minds have not even referred to our wills, to see what thoughts they could send to which parts of our body, they just automatically respond in reflex reactions. And so the vicious circle of the personality is set in motion and it just begins to turn like that. The more that comes in through your eyes and ears, the more it feeds what is in your emotions, the more it dominates your thoughts and the more it utterly oppresses your will and you become like a little animal that just responds to stimuli outside.

That's, loved ones. what prevents us doing what we know is right. And that's what spoils so many of our lives - that flesh. That's how the Bible puts it. Remember, its in Galatians 5:17. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would."

The Spirit of Jesus wants to continue to trust His Father for all that is needed and wants to look to Him and believes that the Father is in charge whatever bills are lying on the table, whatever assignments are undone. God is in charge and in control and He is governing the whole situation. And the Spirit of Jesus, which is within you, wants to believe that. But the flesh has been used to being governed by what appears on the outside to be true and it acts strongly against the desires of the Spirit to prevent you from doing what you would do.

And the mistake that you and I often make is: we think that it's just a matter of training. I have

to start training myself to look not at the outward things. I have to start training myself to look at what I believe to be true -- and so we try that. We try some of the books that teach you to renew your mind or adjust your temperament and we try to train ourselves to do those things. And yet somehow, it doesn't work and we fall again and again and again. And the reason is, that what we have inherited with this personality of ours is as old as creation. It's as old as creation. And the way your personality works is something that you have inherited from Eve and Adam. It's as old as Adam. It's as old as the race itself and it's been operating that way for generations. That's why when you try to act against it, it's virtually impossible. You find yourself opposing something that will not do what you want it to. In fact, that's what the Bible says about it. It says "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; it is not subject to God's will neither indeed can it be." And that's what we find. We try to make it subject to God's will, but it will not be. We struggle against it and many of us say that it's an eternal struggle that you can never win. That's the battle of a Christian life -- you struggle against the flesh forever until you die, and you never get complete victory over it.

And yet you remember that the Bible says, "In Christ, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." We are not just conquerors but more than conquerors. Indeed loved ones, there is an even more serious verse, if you would look at it, in Romans chapter 8 and verse 12. "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - 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."

Notice in verse 13: "if you live according to the flesh you will die." So, you know, those dear ones who say to us, "Look, you can't avoid living by the flesh." They are committing us to death because the Bible says, if you live according to the flesh you will die. But if through the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. And so, the Bible implies to us that it's vital to come free of that power of the flesh. If you don't, you will eventually die under its power because it will eventually take back all that you gave to Jesus. Now, how on earth do you get out of that bondage of the flesh? How do you get free from it?

Well, loved ones there is no way in which you and I who live at the most 70 or 80 years here on this earth can overcome something that has taken generations to develop down through the human race. If God has not done something about that old personality of ours, we certainly will have to live under its power for the rest of our lives.

And yet, that's what God did on Calvary. That's what God did in Jesus. God knew after receiving His Spirit you would eventually come up against this problem in your personality. You had a personality that was operating the wrong way and that would not yield to the Spirit of Jesus within. He knew that you would have to be made like Jesus himself. You would have to be given a personality like Jesus' personality that operates not from the outside but operates from the inside. It operates from what you believe, so that your mind is governed by what you believe, and your will directs your emotions and your thoughts, and they direct your actions so that you begin to move from the inside out in every situation. You begin to have control over outward things instead of being dominated by them. You begin to have control over this world instead of being imprisoned by it. God knew that that would be needed. And loved ones that why there is that verse that so many of us know in Romans 6 and verse 6. I suppose those of us who have come into Romans 6:6 are never tired of looking at it again, because it's life.

Romans 6:6: "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." We know that our old self was crucified with

him -- and that's what was destroyed in Jesus. So often you and I talk as if it was just our sins that were destroyed in Jesus -- the things that we've done, the words that we've spoken, and the dishonest actions that we've performed. But the truth is, our old self -- that old personality, the flesh that operates the wrong way round, that operates from the outside in -- that self was destroyed in Jesus on Calvary by God. God took not only all our sins, but He took all of us, our carnal natures, our attitudes that are so hanging and so dependent on our jobs and our positions and our outward things, He took that and He put it into His son Jesus and He destroyed it forever. And when He recreated Jesus, He recreated a new personality for you, a new personality that works free and fresh.

How do you enter into that? It's the same way you entered into receiving His Spirit to be born of God; the same way you entered into the forgiveness of your sins -- by faith. By believing that God has done that to you in Jesus and by being willing for that to be made real in your life today. That's it.

The key is for me to ask you, "do you want really to live that way?" That's the important thing. God has done it for you, but do you want to live that way? And as many of us say "Oh, yes, I don't want to have fear and panic flowing through me every time I see a bill that I think throws the bank balance off. I don't want to have envy and resentment thrown into me every time I see somebody else praised instead of me. No, I don't want that." I know you don't want that and I know you would like to be better than that. But the thing is, do you not want to depend on the world of people and things anymore for the security and for the sense of importance that you have? Are you willing to depend only on God for that? Now, if you say to me, "Brother, that's not a big thing." Loved ones it is. Are you willing to have only the sense of importance that God is willing to give you whenever He chooses? Are you willing to have the amount of security that God chooses to give you when He pleases? Are you willing to have just the amount of happiness that God chooses to give you or sees best to give you when He pleases? Are you willing to die to your rights to demanding as much security and as much happiness and as much importance as you want when you want? Are you willing to die to that? That's what Jesus did. He died to any rights He had as the King and Lord of the universe to be respected and worshipped by everybody. He died to His right to have an easy life or an easy death. He died to His right to have happiness; He submitted all that into His Father's hands and said, "Lord, whatever you want me to have, that's what I am content to have."

Are you willing to come into that place? Not just do you want to be free from the bondage of the flesh, but are you willing to enter into Jesus this morning and into His death on Calvary in such a real way that only what comes from God will be from this day on, what governs your life and what gives you peace and joy and happiness? If you are willing, you can this morning. During the last hymn you can come up and take by faith what God has done to that old personality of yours in Jesus. And the Holy Spirit of Jesus who is in you will sweetly fill your whole life instead of just the parts that you are allowing him to fill at this moment. You will begin to move in a life that is above that cry, "The good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate is the very thing I do." You will begin to move above that. You will begin to live a victorious life where the Spirit of Jesus within you is able spontaneously to be Himself throughout your whole personality. That's because your old personality has been replaced by the new one that was raised in Jesus. And loved ones that's the only way; it has to be faith. Faith believes that God has done this for you in Jesus, and there is a willingness on your part to enter into it in whatever way God reveals it to you through His Spirit. So it's different for all of us.

Some of us here have great trouble with what people think of us and we are concerned about that. We

demand that people think the right things about us and that they think a lot of us. So, we are enslaved to their opinions. And what God destroyed in Jesus in your personality was that little eye that goes out and looks to see if somebody approves of you -- that listens for somebody's praise. God destroyed that in Jesus on Calvary and He is asking you this morning, "Are you willing to enter into the destruction of that today by faith?" If you are, it can free you from that slavery to men's opinions.

Others of us are under the bondage of money and of dependence on our jobs and our positions for the security that we need. And God took that, which is such a lie and deception because everything finally comes from the Father. It doesn't come from your boss, it doesn't come from the payroll, it comes from God, our Father. And God took that perversion in your personality and He put it into his Son Jesus. He destroyed it there and wiped it out. He did something that no psychiatrist or psychologist can ever do. You can have that manifested in you this very day through coming into that place of full consecration in Jesus.

Loved ones, I would encourage your hearts if you have thought about these things in the past or you have struggled with them and feel you are born of God but you don't feel like you have victory in your life. You don't feel that you have a victory over the feelings of envy, jealousy, greed, selfishness and all those attitudes that nobody else can see but you know they are there. If you feel you are in that position and you see this morning that God has already brought the answer in Jesus, and you want that answer, then I would just come to the altar during the last hymn and make my commitment anew to God. I would consecrate all -- every part of my being. I would deal especially with those areas where you've had strain and trouble and where you see God is convicting you. I'd deal with Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, if you were willing to die to these things for me, I am willing to die with you. I take my place now on the cross with you, and I die to everything but God. He will be my father from this day forward as He has been yours for years. I will depend on Him only and nothing else." As you come to that place of full consecration, Jesus will fill you with his Spirit, and He will sanctify your heart and your soul and He will bring you into a life of victory. Loved ones, that's the way many of us came in and it's the way you can come in this very day. So maybe we should just sing that hymn, "Have Thine Own Way Lord! Have Thine Own Way." Let us stand as we sing loved ones. Just come forward if God has spoken to your heart and make your consecration complete to Jesus. Settle things once and for all.

"Dear father, we thank You for showing us the way our lives can be, and the way they are at this moment in Jesus if we would but enter in by faith. And Lord, we thank you for the loved ones that You have called up to Yourself here at this altar to lay their all on the altar. Father, we pray now by your Holy Spirit that you will reveal to them and to us everything that we need to lay on the altar if there is anything that we are holding onto -- be it reputation or be it happiness or peace of mind, whatever we desire. Lord, we would lay that on the altar now. We would say, Father, what you give us, that we will be satisfied with and nothing more, just as Jesus was satisfied with all that you gave Him. So Father, we would now enter into the joy of our Lord by entering into His dear death on Calvary.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for dying for us, but we thank you for dying with us. We thank you for allowing us to die with you to this world and to all that it can give us. Lord, we now hereby set our wills along with your will. Whatever you have, that is what we will be content with. Whatever you have not, that is what we will be content to be without. Lord Jesus, whatever you depend on in your Father's love we will depend on. Whatever of the world you refuse to depend on, we will no longer depend upon it.

And now Lord Jesus we thank you that you took us into yourself on Calvary and you slew us there. You remade our personalities the way that we are meant to be. Lord, as we make our full consecration during the minutes of this service and after the benediction, will you fill us with your dear Holy Spirit? Baptize us with him and anoint us with him so that we may depend utterly and absolutely on the Holy Spirit alone for all that we need in this life. Lord, we thank you that you will go with the rest of us as we go out this morning. Move in our hearts too and bring us into the same victory as we come to the place of full consecration ourselves. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and ever more. Amen.