

Traits of the Self Life

Mark 1:18

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

God wants you to feel like Him inside and we're all so preoccupied with outside and with the way we appear that we forget that. But the whole purpose of Jesus Christ is that you and I would be like God on the inside and that's, loved ones, the whole difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament and unfortunately here in our society, we have all entered into an Old Testament experience very readily. Outwardly we are God's people and outwardly we come to church. We may not offer our sacrifices but we come to our temples and we look on the outside like godly religious people.

But we are just Old Testament people. We may not have been circumcised, but many of us are just Jews. We live under the old covenant. Many of us here this morning believe that our sins are forgiven. Many of us here can sleep at night because we believe we will go to heaven but our hearts are not converted and we are not New Testament Christians. We use the term 'Christian' in a generic way. We are Christian in that we're not Hindu or we're not Mohammedan or we're not Buddhist, but we aren't really Christian in the sense that Jesus came to make us Christian. He came to make us Christian by changing our hearts and many of us -- we men of course, are the class examples of it, but you ladies are in the same boat often -- but we men, we do things that are outwardly Christian but our hearts are unchanged and untouched.

We talk about the spirit of God but our hearts are really unaffected by that spirit and we're moved by the same things as our brothers in business are moved by. We are moved by the same ambitions, the same selfishness, often the same greed and often the same defensiveness and certainly the same jealousy and pride and lust that they are moved by. It's simply that outwardly we come to church. Many of us read the Bible; many of us believe the right things. Many of us do believe that God has forgiven us our sins, but our hearts are really unchanged.

We have odd moments such as perhaps a Mother's Day, or a Memorial Day or a day when we remember our dad's death or some moments when tragedy hits our home or we go to the funeral of someone whom we care deeply for and then our hearts are a little softened. But on the whole, our hearts remain untouched and unchanged by God's spirit and indeed the term 'spirit' is strange to us. We regard it primarily as a kind of an influence or an atmosphere that supposedly we feel at certain times when Al would sing a song like that or Carmen would sing or someone else would sing or maybe at the end of a sermon here there's a certain atmosphere that God seems to bring about among us and we think of that as God's spirit but we ourselves are unacquainted with the spirit of God.

Our day-to-day lives are largely uninfluenced by that spirit. Our heart's movements are what we were born with as children and they haven't been changed very much since then. Our hearts really are like the hearts that are described in this little tract that has been on this table for some Sundays.

"Are you ever conscious of a secret spirit of pride, an exalted feeling in view of your success or position because of your good training or appearance, because of your natural gifts and abilities? Are you ever conscious of an important, independent spirit? Are you ever conscious of a love of human praise, a secret fondness to be noticed, a love of supremacy, and a drawing attention to self

in conversation, a swelling out of self when you have had a free time in speaking or praying? Are you ever conscious of the stirrings of anger or impatience which, worst of all, you call nervousness or holy indignation; a touchy sensitive spirit, a disposition to resent or to retaliate when disapproved of or contradicted, a desire to throw sharp heated flings at another?"

Many of us who call ourselves Christians are conscious of those things but of course, we have encouraged each other for years to believe that that is the normal Christian life.

If you read the classics written by Plato and Socrates, you would find that that isn't even a normal life for heathen philosophers. Even they taught that there should be enough control over our inner heart attitudes that we would not feel those things. But certainly the God who has said that he desires truth in the inward part, the God who has said that the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and long suffering and gentleness, goodness, the God who has said that strife and jealousy and pride do not belong to the kingdom of God, he certainly says there is no place for these things in our hearts, but loved ones, we have got used to these things, you see?

We have got used to these things and these are the things that bring tragedy to our homes, you know they are. None of us have murdered anybody. Few of us here steal, few of us here probably even swear, few of us here probably drink to excess. In fact, we are among the noblest of sinners. We're moral people, probably most of us here are outwardly very respectable people and yet we know that in our relationships at home, in our relationships with those who are closest to us, we are monsters. All domestic strife comes from hearts that are not clean and pure, they do.

Actually even your outward feelings come from that. Why do you resent people? Because they are not giving you the praise that you think you deserve or because someone else is getting praise that you don't think they deserve as much as you do. That's why you get resentful about people. That's why we get all kinds of complexes about people, because they're not giving us what we believe we ought to have. Why do you lose your temper? Because of the stirrings of anger, that's why. You can't hold the thing down, it just bursts out, you can't control it. It's because your heart is rising up.

That's the explanation you remember, in Romans 7, "I do not understand my own actions because when I want to do good, I cannot. The good that I would I cannot do, and the evil I hate is the very thing I do." That is, you set your will to do good but there rises up from inside you, something that you can't control and that bursts out upon the other person. You know the illustration that we've shared before.

Well, you go home at night, husbands, wives; we're all in the same boat. We go home at night and we are determined that this will be a beautiful evening. We are determined that this will be a blessed evening for our partners. We are going to make them happy tonight and then she cooks the wrong meal or it's late or it's a little burned or he is a little late or he doesn't say the right thing to us and there bursts out from our innermost hearts, attitudes and feelings that we didn't believe existed within us and the end of the evening is worse than the beginning. It ends up in a disaster area. It ends up in a full-scale battle. That's what this is about.

It doesn't matter how good you are outwardly. If your heart is not changed, if your heart is not cleansed, you won't be able to live as you want to live and that was the problem with the Jews. You understand that Romans 7 is a Jew talking, he's a loved one from the Hebrews that is saying, "I am under the law, I cannot do the thing that I want to do. I cannot do it because there is something inside me that won't let me", and loved ones, so many of us are Christian in name only. We really

are Jewish. We live under the old covenant -- trying to obey outwardly but unable to do it because this monstrosity within us keeps rising up.

"Are you ever conscious of self-will, a stubborn un-teachable spirit, an arguing talkative spirit, harsh sarcastic expressions, an unyielding headstrong disposition, a driving commanding spirit, a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed, a peevish fretful spirit, a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored?"

I don't know about you men or you ladies, but when the other person feels you don't understand them, it's usually because of this stuff. It's because our hearts are not tender. The problem is not in the sarcastic expression, there's enough problem in that, but the problem is not in the sarcastic expression. It's the absolute indifference and cynical, almost hatred for the other person that produces the sarcastic expression. Your friends, your children, your husbands, your wives -- it's not the outward word that cuts them -- it's what it says to them about your inward heart, that's what cuts them.

No, they're no sillier than you are, they can interpret outward things but it's the heart that it comes from, that's what's wrong. That's why you see at times you can say something that isn't right, but it isn't so cutting because it doesn't come from your heart. It's a mistake. It's something you didn't intend to say but it's the things that come from your heart that cut into another person's heart.

For some of us who are at work in business: "Are you ever conscious of a carnal fear? A man-fearing spirit, a shrinking from reproach and duty, a reasoning around your cross, a shrinking from doing your whole duty by those of wealth or position, be it your boss or someone else, are you ever conscious of a fearfulness that someone will offend and drive some prominent person away? Are you ever conscious of a compromising spirit?"

"Are you ever conscious of a jealous disposition, a secret spirit of envy shut up in your heart, an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another, a disposition to speak of the faults and failings rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself? Are you ever conscious of a dishonest, deceitful disposition?"

"The evading and covering of the truth; the covering up of your real faults, leaving a better impression of yourself than is strictly true, false humility, exaggeration, straining the truth."

Those are all the things that come from a heart that is not really at peace with God. It's a heart that is not really content to receive all it needs from God. It's a heart that is expecting things from other people, that's it.

The real reason why your heart and mine are not filled with the Holy Spirit is because you and I still look to other people or other things and we expect things from them, we do loved ones. We're wearing each other out, we're expecting things from each other, we sons and daughters are expecting things from our parents. We parents are expecting things from our children. We husbands are expecting things from our wives. We wives are expecting things from our husbands. We friends are expecting things from each other.

We are looking to each other for all kinds of things that we cannot supply each other with and only God, our Father can supply us with all that we need. And every time we look to each other for these

things, there's a spirit of dissatisfaction and discontentment that takes hold of us and makes us demand more. That's where this heart comes rising up; we demand more from the other person and the other poor soul is already worn out and already feels that you are demanding too much from them. But we demand more and more and that's what fills a home with demand, demand, demand, and no offer, offer, offer. That's what fills a home with empty hearts that are desiring love, love, love and there's short supply of love. It's because we're expecting things from each other and so our hearts become filled with all kinds of dissatisfactions, all kinds of uncleanness, and all kinds of resentment against other people.

Loved ones, there is a way to be free from that. Jesus looked down at the disciples from whom I think you'll agree he had a right to expect loyalty. He looked down at his mom from whom he probably had a right to expect understanding of what he was trying to do in his life, especially at that moment of death. And he looked down at the crowds who had come and gathered around him when he was healing and had thrown down palm branches in front of him as he came into Jerusalem. And he saw all of them with blank looks on their faces, maybe worry and anxiety and despair but not primarily about him but primarily about themselves and what was going to happen afterwards and yet, he died in absolute peace because he had, once and for all, died to what they could give him.

He had died to expecting anything from them and he had looked up to his Father for everything that he needed so that -- who of us can imagine what it was like in his own dear heart on the Cross? I mean it's impossible but it was certainly desolate and lonely and yet he was absolutely content that his Father was looking upon him and loving him and was going to give him all that he needed.

Loved ones, that's the place of peace for you and me. And God is able to change your heart so that your heart becomes like Jesus' heart but he does ask you to join his son on the cross. Now could I just point out to you in a very commonsensical, practical way that every one of you has seen anybody die, know fine well that you, and each one of us here, will come to a time in our lives when it won't matter who knows us. It won't matter how many of us are outside your bedroom, it won't. It won't matter how many nurses are gathered around you and putting all kinds of tubes into you to try to keep you alive. It won't matter if your pastor is by your side, it won't matter if your dearest mother or your husband is holding your hand. There will come a time loved ones. We need to face this firmly.

There'll come a time in your life when you are on your own truly and you actually know it yourselves. You have seen dads or moms die. You know there comes a moment when it doesn't matter how close everybody else seems to you, you are on your own. So do you see what I am saying? There's going to come a time when you can look only to God, that actually all of us are limited in what we can do for you anyway, that if you get anything from any of us during this lifetime, it's purely temporarily and actually it ill-fits you for the great moment in your life -- which is the moment when you enter into true life?

In other words, will you not die today and enter into reality? That's it. Will you not die today to the world and to your husband and your wife and to your friends and to living in dependence upon them and living in expectancy of what they can give you and expecting them to give you love and expecting them to give you care and thoughtfulness. They may do it and they may not but if you die to that with Jesus, today, then you're free, free from what they can give you and free from what they fail to give you. And you'll find that instead of your heart rising up in resentment, your heart will experience a strange new spirit, because that's the amazing truth.

If you will take your place with Jesus, which sooner or later you will have to take, sooner or later you're going to face that moment when you've got only God. If you will take your place with Jesus today on the cross and will at last give up looking to people and to others for what God alone can give you in the way of love and attention and affection and care and protection, God will send the spirit of his son Jesus into your heart, into your innermost heart and you will experience a new freshness coming into you.

You'll sense there is something beautiful inside you that wasn't there before. You'll sense a tenderness in your heart. You'll sense actually a peace and a contentment and a satisfaction in your heart but most of all, you'll sense a love for all of the rest of us. You'll sense a new love for your father and your mother, for your friends. You'll sense something beautiful coming out from inside you. It's a miracle. That's God's Spirit.

That's what he gives, that's what those converts in the lesson that was read for us, did not have. They had been baptized in John's baptism, but they had never received the Holy Spirit. Many of us have been baptized into a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of our sins but we have never had any experience of the beautiful and fragrant spirit of Jesus coming in and cleansing and filling our hearts.

Loved ones, that's what becoming a Christian is. But it does mean that we have to stop depending upon each other for all this attention and all this affection. We have to stop insisting on the rights that we have to this person's friendship or this person's attention or this person's love or this person's care and it's amazing when you enter into that death and God sends the spirit of his son's heart into your heart, suddenly you discover the love in everybody else, it's amazing. Suddenly you're amazed that people care about you. You're amazed that people do love you that much because the little bit that they're able to love you, seems great to you because you already have this sense of love from your Father.

I don't know where you are, you know in all this but I would encourage you to see that today, that spirit can change your heart if you are willing to die to demanding things from the rest of us. If you're willing to look to God as your God instead of looking to all of us, if you will do that, your Father will give you a great assurance of his love for you and he'll give you a great sense and heart feeling of his love for others. Needless to say to the husbands and wives, we know above everybody else don't we? We have to have something like this, you have to, otherwise we are finished, we know it.

Marriage deteriorates badly unless there is this kind of love. It's divine love, I suppose that's all you can call it but unless you have this kind of divine love, you're tearing each other apart after four years and you've torn each other apart after ten years and you have buried each other after fifteen years, it just does not work. But the fact is it's the same with all of life, the only way it will work, is by us receiving this spirit and allowing our hearts to be changed. Let us pray.

Father, we know our own hearts, we know that we have been outwardly Christian and many people regard us as Christian except that our hearts aren't converted and our hearts aren't born again, our hearts haven't received your spirit, our hearts haven't been filled with your spirit. We find that our wills are often set towards you but our heart rises up and contradicts our will. Father, we ask you to look down upon us now, each one of us, and deal with us now individually and reveal to each of us what dying with Jesus to other people and to other things means for us today.

Show us Father, where our hearts are filled with impurity and resentment because of wrong attitudes to you, because of looking to people or to things for the things that we ought to trust you alone for. Father we ask you to give us light this day and then Lord, we come to you now, we know this is right, we know these things are true that witnesses with us deep down that this is reality. We see clearly that sooner or later in our life, we will come to this point so Father, we now look to you and we want to thank you for everything you've given us and Father we want to acknowledge you now as our God, as the supplier of all that we need.

We want to tell you that we believe you that you will supply every need of ours from your riches in glory in Christ Jesus. We want to tell you Father, that what love you don't give us, we're content to be without, what possessions you withhold from us, we are content to lack, what affection and attention and approval and praise you decide to give us, we are content to receive. Lord, we give ourselves now to you and we tell you that you are our God and we will look to you now. And Lord Jesus, we thank you that you did include us in yourself on Calvary and we accept that position Lord in you on Calvary, dead to what our mothers think, dead to what our friends think, dead to what all the people around this cross on which we are, can give us. And Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have taken us into yourself and Savior, we ask you to fill our hearts now with your own spirit, with your own attitude to things.