

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O Neill

Many of us are Christians who come Sunday-after-Sunday, but I think a number of us are a little uncertain of whether we are Christians or not. And so we listen to a lot of this heavy stuff that we study Sunday morning after Sunday morning and some of us have a feeling at times, Well, we re really not quite at that stage yet and what we need is something just a little plainer and straighter so that we can get into the right position with God ourselves.

So really, God has at different times just told me to stop expounding Romans and just to preach a very simple gospel so that anyone who is not a Christian can settle it with Jesus this morning. And so that s what I d like to do. The gospel dear ones, really is a person, Jesus, who lived in the first century and whose life we have examined and found to be different from every other life.

He has a perfect humanity about him that is just different from Mohammad, or Buddha, or Confucius. There is a seamlessness in his life that is attested to by his enemies, that is utterly different from any of the great religious leaders that we hear about in Hinduism. And above all, he has not only a power over sickness and over nature, which other great religious leaders haven t had, but he himself had the power over death in his own life. So that even though there was no question that it was not a coma, it was not a swoon, but that it was real death, yet he was able to come back alive and to appear alive again over a period of 40 days. Because of this, we believe that this man is really the Son of the Creator of our universe and that He is, at this moment, with our Creator and that he came to earth to do something for us that nobody else could have done.

Now how did he explain it? Very simply, he explained to his followers and they explained to us that the first part of the gospel is bad news for us, because it is that - all of us here, in this place, have sinned. All of us. And we ve fallen short of God s glory. That is, we ve fallen short of what our Creator intended us to be. So all of us have sinned. So there s something inside each one of us that says, That s right pastor, you give it to them. All of them have sinned. And there s something in us that says, That s right, all the Lutherans have sinned, all the Presbyterians have sinned, all the Methodists have sinned. All those people in all those other liberal churches, they have all sinned. All those miserable people lying in their dormitory rooms today, they ve sinned.

But loved ones, don t you see that the only way we can become recipients of God s grace and his forgiveness is if we see it s us. It s all of us who have sinned. All of us. Now sin is not a moral concept so if you look along the row and say, Oh, I m sure they haven t done many immoral things. They may have not done one immoral thing in their life but sin is a concept about our relationship with God. It means we have lived independent of him even though we may have lived very morally independent of him.

So it s not a moral concept. I think many of us say, Oh, we haven t sinned because we are very moral people. You could be a very moral person and still sin because sin is simply living your life independent of God s live and living it apart from the way he wanted you to do it. So it s something between you and him. It s not a legal concept. A lot of us look along the row and say, I m sure they were never in jail. I m sure they never did anything that got them in trouble with the law.

Loved ones, it is not all have committed crimes. It is that all of us have sinned, every one of us here and God states that through his intuitive knowledge of us, not through his empirical objective observation of us. But he states that because he knows it is true, all of us have lived independent of him and that is the basic meaning of sin, you see. All of us have tried to plan our own lives without any worry about how he wanted us to plan them. All of us have tried to plan vacations without any question of how the Creator of the universe wanted us to spend our vacation. All of us have run our own home lives, our own academic lives, our own business lives independent of him. That is the basic meaning of sin.

In other words, you could sit in your chair and sin like mad. That is really it. You don't need to be doing things, sin is just an attitude towards God where you automatically say, "Okay, you don't have anything to do with my life. My life is my life, I decide it my way." Sin is just a tacit attitude to God that he is not to have any right to control your life at all so you can just sit, and sit, because sin is an attitude to God. It is a bit like an attitude to each other, you know when things aren't right with somebody else. You know you can have that attitude and you don't need to say a thing to them. You can just feel utterly distant from them.

Think of the attitude you've often felt to your dad or your mum when they were just getting in on you a bit too much and you just said, "Well, they can do what they like but they're not going to have anything to do with it." Well, that is sin is an attitude and God says all of us have sinned in that sense. All of us have lived independent of him and independent of his Holy Spirit. All of us have sinned in a very obvious way too. We have sinned in act and in word. We have actually done things that his law doesn't allow us to do.

Some of us have fornicated. His law says, "Do not commit fornication." Some of us have slept with people that aren't married to us. Some of us have been adulteress with other people, we have committed adultery. Some of us have not done either in those things in act but we have done them in our thought life. So in so far as we have lusted after a woman in our thought life we have committed adultery with her. All of us have sinned in act or thought in those things.

All of us have had other Gods before God. A God is somebody that you spend your whole life trying to fulfill and trying to satisfy. Many of us have had Gods that we set up that haven't been the Father of Jesus. Many of us have determined, "We are going to be famous," and that has been our God. Many of us have determined, "We are going to be rich," and that has been our God. Many of us have determined, "We are going to be better than everybody else at this particular subject," and that has been our God.

That is what having a God is and all of us have sinned in that at some time or other we put something before God. All of us have stolen. We've stolen little things, we've stolen paperclips at times. It didn't matter about the paperclip but we have an attitude in our mind that we knew we were stealing it. But worse, we've stolen people's reputations. We've run people down. We've said, "Yeah, yeah, they're good singers but you should see the way they dress." And we've just with one stroke of a word stolen from their reputation.

Now that is what it means loved ones. All of us have sinned. There is nobody here this morning that can say, "No, no, all the others have sinned but I myself have not sinned." God says we have all sinned and we've fallen short of his glory. And the second part of the bad news is this, that the wages of sin is death. I think some of us have the feeling, "No, the wages of sin is only death if you sinned big, real big." And we say, "Well, well, you know, if I smoke 50 a day and it

gets the lung, okay I die young. Alright that I can see the wages of sin is death. Or we say, Alright I've been promiscuous sexually so I've caught venereal disease so I'm going to die. Alright, I can see that. Or, A fella that drinks a lot and destroys the inside of his body, alright the wage of sin is death.

Loved ones, that's not true. The wages of all sin is death. That's what God says. It doesn't matter whether you have sinned a little bit or a big bit, the wages of sin is still death. And I remember reading an illustration just very clear about this, two great 500 foot high cliffs, 35 feet between them, and you're going to cross them in a rocket. No, no, but 35 feet between them and 500 foot high cliffs. And so an old, old, broken sinner, an alcoholic, he totters up, his body is destroyed with sin, and he totters up and he decided he's going to try and jump so he totters back and takes a few steps and jumps down to the bottom and is dashed on the rocks and dies.

But one of us noble young sinners, who have sinned just a little and whose bodies are in good shape, we decided we're going to jump that gap and we take a massive run and we leap and it's 32 feet, and it's a world record but it's three feet short and we're dashed. And it doesn't matter because we've fallen short and we've fallen short of God's glory loved ones. None of us are what God meant us to be. We're all pretty much messes compared with what the Creator intended.

And of course, he looks down on us and he sees us all living our own lives, and doing what we want and he sees 3.5 billion people going in all kinds of different directions and he realizes, If these people ever live forever they'll destroy and desecrate the whole universe. They'll fill it completely with their rebellion and their garbage. And the Father is committed to destroying us. That's what it means the wages of sin is death.

And loved ones, if you have not at all dealt with Jesus, there is just no question you're going to die physical, you know that but you know that already the signs of spiritual death are inside you. Already you have real trouble finding peace, already you have experienced some of the desperate loneliness that will come when we go into outer darkness apart from God. Already you've sensed some of those things. Already in prayer times you've sensed, I can't get through, I can't get through. The wages of sin is death and death begins to operate in us not only physically now as our bodies grow older but inside spiritually.

And so there will come a time loved ones, and you just have to face it, that Jesus who is our best authority on it, he's the only one who went through death and came back to tell us what it was like, and his best words to us are that there is an outer darkness, there is a terrible loneliness. Oh you remember, Sartre's play No Exit, maybe something like that. Maybe something like that where you remember, two perverts and another person lived together in a room and the light bulb never went out, never went out. And the whole play that Sartre writes is bent on showing us that they just pick each other to death, pick each other to death, criticize, criticize.

Now loved ones, outer darkness will be something like that. Hell will be something like that. It will be something like a place where we wear each other down, where we consume each other continually, where God, and gentleness, and love is absent and God says, The wages of sin is death. There is a place where all of you who refuse to live the way God wants you to live will have to go and that's the bad news of the gospel. And that's it.

I think one thing we don't realize is the penalty of sin is death. We keep thinking in our sophisticated western way that we can substitute something else for that penalty. We don't really

look at it in those terms, but really that's what we're doing. A lot of us feel, Yeah, yeah, but if I pray a lot, or maybe if I go to church, or if I give to the united fund, or if I maybe go to The Peace Corps, or I'll do something to work out these things. Loved ones, God is a God of justice, when he says, The wages of sin is death, that's the wages you get for sin.

You can go and ask him to allow you to pay some other wages, but the wages of sin is death and that you have to pay. You can't pay anything else. So I think I shared with some of you, I've been here 12 or 13 years but about two months after I came here I was trying to learn to drive on the right hand side of the road. And eventually I realized I couldn't persuade all of you and so I started driving on the right hand side. But you know, you have those magnificent signs in Minneapolis where you cannot turn right between four and six o'clock. And at one of those signs, I turned right and it was five o'clock and one of the gallant police officers came up beside me and said to me, Do you know what you did? And I said, No. And he said, Well, you turned right here and you're not supposed to turn right. And I said, Well officer you can tell, I mean, I'm just new here, I'm just getting to find my way around. He said, Yeah, well that's good you need to do it fast because it'll save you money. And I said, But listen, I'm doing my driver's test next week and I've been training, and I'll be careful next time. He said, Well, that's good that'll save you the money next time. And I could offer all kinds of other substitute penalties but eventually I had to pay that miserable fine.

Now do you see loved ones, it's the same with us. So Confucianism, and Hinduism, and Mohammadism, and Mormonism, and all the other -isms try to substitute doing better yourself, or trying harder, or adding more works that will kind of overcome the mass of bad works that you've had in the past. But loved ones, that is not what God demands, he demands your death. He either demanded the policeman that I pay the fine or that my wife, or somebody else pay that fine, but the fine had to be paid because of the law, and the statement and declaration had been made, and it is the same with God. That's the first part of the good news.

God has commanded his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So Christ has died for you. Somebody has to die for you but none of the rest of us can, because we have all our own sins to die for and we cannot die continually for them because we cannot go through death and keep coming back. This Jesus has died for you. And you can argue with the Creator, but I think if we're sensible we'll realize that the one who is offended has the right to set the conditions for forgiveness and our Creator has said, I am prepared to regard my Son's death as yours and I will not ask you any longer for your death. I am satisfied with his death. But now, if you want really to live forever, you need to do what you refused to do at the beginning of your life. You need to receive the life of my Holy Spirit into you.

And so really, the ones who become children of God and live forever are not those who simply believe that Jesus has died for them. Now do you see that loved ones? Because I think a lot of us are mistaken about that. Those of us who will live forever, and will become sons and daughters of the Creator, are not those who simply believe that Jesus has died for us because there's a piece in the Bible that says, Even the devil believes and trembles. You can believe that Jesus died for you, most of us probably have a fair idea that he did. But the only ones who become the children of God are those that are mentioned in a verse of the Bible John 1:12, To as many as received Him, to them, He gave the right to become the sons of God.

So you have to receive Jesus or receive the Holy Spirit of Jesus in order to receive that supernatural life within you that will enable you to live forever and will begin to drive out that

loneliness and that forsakenness, and that rebellion, and that terrible sense that you're on your own. But unless you receive that Spirit of Jesus loved ones, you cannot call yourself a Christian.

Now you may say, Well, I come to Campus Church and I believe it all, and it's true, and I agree with what he says, but until you receive the Spirit of Jesus, you are no different from someone who had never heard anything except maybe that you are more responsible for refusing because you know more. But it is to as many as received Jesus, to them, He gave the right to become the children of God. So being born of God's Spirit means receiving Jesus Spirit into you.

So you may have agreed with me up to now. You may have agreed, I have sinned. You may have agreed, I know that death is the penalty I have to pay and I feel the angst about it day-after-day in my life. I know that Jesus has died for me. But loved ones, nothing will become real inside you until you receive the Spirit of Jesus into yourself.

Now you don't need to get all worked up over all kinds of deep philosophical questions about what the Spirit of Jesus is. The Spirit of Jesus is Jesus alive here without a physical body. And the fact is that that Spirit will come into you if you will ask him. Here's how you ask, the first time you show any interest in the Spirit of Jesus he will start pointing out in your life some things that are sin. Some of the things that made it necessary for him to die for you, he will begin to point those out. And that's pretty fair, if those very sins made his death necessary, obviously he cannot come into a person who still practices those things, otherwise there'll be a new crucifixion inside you of Jesus.

And so the first thing Jesus Spirit does is to point out to you some of the things that are wrong in your life. That's the first step in becoming a Christian, agreeing with Jesus Spirit that those things are wrong. That's what confession is. Confession really, in the Greek meaning of the word, is not primarily speaking out to a priest, or speaking out to somebody else. Confession is raising your hand and agreeing with God that those things are wrong. That's the first step.

Now loved ones, you don't go any further until you do that honestly. You just cannot experience any supernatural new birth until you start at that point. So you know, if you're sitting in your seat and you're saying, Yeah, yeah, well I agree stealing is wrong. I agree adultery is wrong. But masturbation is not wrong, and bad thoughts aren't wrong, and the Playboy Magazine isn't wrong. But yeah, that's wrong. And you start refusing what God is saying on some issues, you can't go any further with him.

The basis for any reconciliation between two people who are alienated from one another is that they both agree about the things they've done wrong to each other. So do you see loved ones, how important honest confession is and how you cannot go any further except into a bluff kind of auto suggestion Christianity unless you agree with God about the things he's pointing out are wrong in your life. And it doesn't matter, they'll be different for all of us you know. No point in you looking at everybody else and say, Oh well, it will be like him, it will be like him. It's not, there are certain things in your life that the Holy Spirit of Jesus sees he is not prepared to abide with and they'll be different for all of us.

For some of us it will be a critical spirit towards our neighbors. For others it will be, Will you stop bluffing on the assignments even if you fail the degree completely. For others of us, it will be, Will you stop evading honesty in your business? Will you stop walking along that fine

line between truth and untruth. It will be different for all of us, but the first step is to agree with God. That's what real confession is. Confessing your sins is agreeing with God that the things he tells you are wrong, are wrong. That's a basic first step.

The second step is stop doing them. That's it. Repentance loved ones, is not weeping. Too many of us can weep and keep on doing the things. In fact, we're really weeping because we don't want to stop doing the things. And we're crying just in despair that we cannot get into heaven and keep doing these things. So repentance is not weeping necessarily, it can include crying but crying itself is not repentance. Repentance is not saying, I'm sorry. Repentance is not even feeling great remorse. A lot of us feel, Oh repentance is feeling terrible remorse. The more remorse I feel the more I'm forgiven.

Loved ones, it's not. That's trying to substitute another penalty other than death for your sins. You're trying to substitute remorse. You're trying to say to God, Look, I've endured three weeks of remorse so surely you are justified in forgiving me. But repentance is stop doing the thing. In other words if sin is putting a sword into Jesus' side, repentance is pulling that sword out and not putting it in again. Repentance is just stop doing it. Satan says to you, You can't stop doing it. God says, I have crucified you with Christ, you can stop doing it.

I don't want to knock the psychologists here too much because I think many of you do not believe this way but I think the main school in psychology in these years have encouraged us to feel, You can't do it. You can't do it. You can't stop it. You know how in school we were encouraged to blame everybody else, the teacher and everybody, make everybody accountable but us, but it certainly wasn't us, I'm a B student how could I get a C? Well, you got a C because you didn't do well. Oh, no, no. And we were encouraged to put the blame on everyone else but ourselves.

Loved ones, you can stop doing the things. I can stop talking. You can stop doing other things if you really are determined to stop destroying Jesus in your own lives and repentance is you stop doing the thing. If you say to me, What if I do it tomorrow again? You repent again and you repent again, and as often as you repent God will forgive you if you'll seek all the time the deliverance on the cross that he can give to provide permanent deliverance. But repentance is you keep on stop doing the thing, but really there's no reason why you have to keep on loved ones, you can stop doing it.

You know it, and you know it in your own life. We've seen the dear ones who couldn't stop smoking until their friend died of cancer. They stopped smoking. You know how often we have finally stopped the thing when we've seen where it was leading us. Repentance is stop doing those things. Stop being critical to your wife, stop being sarcastic to your husband, stop being dishonest about the assignments, stop bluffing in the business, stop thinking wrong thoughts. Repentance is just stop sinning.

And the last step in becoming a Christian is asking Jesus to come in and takeover your life. And just ask him, Lord Jesus, I give my life to you. You've given my life for me, I give you my life. You gave your life up at 33, 35 for me I give you my life. I want you to take it and do whatever you want with it. And from that moment on treat Jesus as the boss in your life, treat him as a real person who is the Lord in your life. That's what becoming a Christian is loved ones.

So I really would urge those of you who have had perhaps been coming Sunday-after-Sunday and I think

a lot of us have been in this position, haven't we? Many of us have been turned off church. I know I was turned off church and fed up with just a whole lot of the hypocrisy and I think many of us have come with that kind of experience. And yet we know we have never really taken a definite step ourselves.

Now loved ones, it is necessary, Billy Graham is right in that, that it's necessary to make a decision, to make a definition decision, a definite change. A definite time when you put a stake in the ground and say, Here, I'm starving Lord Jesus, to regard you as the Lord of my life. And loved ones, it is necessary to make that start, you know. So I would encourage you if you really are convinced of these facts, and you really do want to be born of God's Spirit, and to become a Christian, and become a child of his, and as a matter of interest really, not only live forever but have eternal life here and now, most of all if you want to do what your Creator wants you to do because that's the real reason for doing these things, then would you honestly confess and honestly repent of the things in your life that God has shown you are wrong? And honestly receive Jesus by faith.

Not by feeling, but just by faith and from tomorrow on, consult him about everything and begin to have Bible study each day, and begin to pray to Jesus each day. Really, that's it. And you can do it in your seat at this moment, or when the prayer room clears after the service you can go in there and pray, and somebody can help you if you need help, or come and see me sometime during the week and we can pray through together in the office. But really, it's important to be realistic about it, you know. It's important to be just down to earth and practical.

But loved ones, there is an immense difference between coming, and looking at the apples in the window every Sunday and actually taking one of those apples and eating it. There is an immense difference between believing all these things and actually receiving Jesus. Dear ones, is anybody any questions so that everybody knows how they can do what God wants them to do?

If you ask forgiveness for a specific sin, is it enough to ask once?

It seems to me there is just no question of God's readiness to forgive us. The whole issue that the Spirit deals with us about is, is there any attitude that produced that sin still alive in you and are you prepared to let that go? And so there's just no question, yes all one has to do is you do have to deal with each sin loved ones, because each sin expresses some different attitude of resistance or rebellion to God's will in your heart and that's what the Holy Spirit is after and so you have to deal with that.

But you deal with it once. Now it seems to me if that thing continues day-after-day then God is showing you, Look, there's something deeper that you have not dealt with, yet he still extends his grace and forgiveness to you because he knows your heart is bent on discovering what that is.

Do you believe you can reach a state of sinless perfection?

No, no. There's a good deal of perfection you can have before you come to sinless perfection. That's what I think.

Can you live so you never sin again?

I think that's tricky too because as a plane goes up into a sound barrier it begins to shake just

before it goes through. And I think many of us as we approach that come to a lot of awareness how we're not through. But loved ones, you know that we've shared often I do believe that you can live and obey God. The Bible is full of obeying God from beginning to end and I believe you can live in perfect obedience in that sense. You can't live free from mistakes in your mind or involuntary sins. But you can live free from deliberately disobeying God.

Shall we pray? Dear Father, we would deal honestly with you this morning, each of us, those of us who are Christians and those of us who aren't. And Lord God, we don't really know what miracle happens when we do this but we know that you have said if we confess our sins you're faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And you said Lord Jesus, that we were to repent and believe the gospel and then you said that to as many of us as received you, you would give the right to become the sons of God.

So Lord God, we would deal with you simply and honestly in the quietness of our own hearts this morning. And we would go over those sins one-by-one and wherever we feel the probe catching, wherever we feel that there is some resistance there, we would look deeper and see if we're really willing to agree that that thing is wrong. And then Lord, we would commit ourselves to stopping this thing with no provisos and no qualifications. Lord, we want to have done with this thing once and for all. We set our whole being against it now.

Now Holy Spirit, you can look in and you can see whether we're honest there, to what extent we are really setting our whole beings against this thing. And Holy Spirit, if you see everything as clear in our attitude, we ask you to come into us now. Lord Jesus, we ask you to come in now and take possession of what you have already bought with your own blood.

Dear Lord, come into my heart, into my heart. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Now Lord, as you've come in we would allow you to be the Lord of our lives. And Lord Jesus - to begin this first day of the rest of our lives in you pleasing your Father through us, and at last fulfilling the purpose for which we were created. Lord Jesus, we give ourselves to you and know that you are inside now and that we can communicate with you as friend-to-friend. Amen.