

þThe Repentance of Believers

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O Neill

Last Sunday we discussed, you remember, in very simple terms the gospel, or what you and I have to do to come into a right relationship with our Creator. And you remember, we said that before the Spirit of Jesus can come into us we have to agree with God about the things that he points out as wrong in our lives and that s just what confession is, agreeing with God about the things that he points out as wrong in our lives and then we have to stop doing those things. And that s what repenting is.

Just stop doing those things and then we need to let Jesus Spirit take over our lives completely and simply say to him, My life is yours Lord. You run it the way you want to. And that is receiving Jesus. And you know that we zeroed in very much on repentance because we pointed out that the Spirit of Jesus will not come into our spirits to be a prisoner in us. He will only come in if he s able to continue to do and say the things that he did and said in Jesus.

And so he cannot speak loving words through us as he did through Jesus if our lives are set on speaking sarcastic words. The two obviously are contradictory and so unless we turn from our sarcasm and stop being sarcastic the Spirit of Jesus cannot come in and fill us with the life of God. And so you remember, we said that it was vital to come into a real repentance. And really that s what that verse means in Revelation 3:20, Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in with him and will sup with him and he with me. And the Spirit of Jesus dear ones, he s a dear gentlemen and he will not break into a life that is not willing to make the arrangements that will enable him to be at home. And so he always knocks at the door and says, Well, will you change this in your life? And if you will I ll come into you and I ll be with you.

So really, the Holy Spirit when he comes in, will drive out all that s wrong. So the glass is certainly filled with air and as water goes in it drives out the air so the Holy Spirit will do that. But loved ones, you have to be willing to be rid of that air. You have to be willing to be rid of those things that he points out as wrong. Now I agree with you, it is the Holy Spirit who will drive them out. The air goes out as the water fills the glass up, but you have to be willing yourself to be rid of the air.

The Holy Spirit says to you, Listen, if I come into you there is an automatic result that will take place, all the air will go out, all the evil will be driven out. Now are you willing to let it go? And if we really show some unwillingness, then he will hold back and will not come in. That s why many of us enter into a purely intellectual conversion. We believe that God is, we believe that Jesus is, we believe that we could receive Jesus into our own lives, but it never actually happens because we never are willing to let go of the things that the Holy Spirit shows us is wrong.

For most of us, it means simply stopping our swearing, stopping our back biting, stopping our promiscuity, stopping our stealing. For most of it, it is just a down to earth business, you stop doing the things that he s showing you are wrong. For many of us it involves making apology for ways in which we ve hurt people in the past. For many of us it involves making restitution of stuff we have stolen, or of things we have taken that weren t really our right to take. For many of us it involves that kind of attitude and action because it shows to the Holy Spirit, Look, I m

not only sorry for what I have done, I m willing to put this as right as I can put it and I m willing to try and cut out as many of the consequences of my wrong doing as I can. But for many of us it involves a willingness for the Holy Spirit to come in and change us.

Now loved ones, not just a willingness to be made willing, because I think some of us use that as a cop out. We say, I m not willing myself. I don t want to stop being a sarcastic rat but I m willing for you to change me. Okay, come in, knock me down, change my sarcasm. Now it s not just a willingness to be made willing, the Holy Spirit will never force your will, but if you mean that phrase in the sense of a willingness to let the Holy Spirit come in and love people through you. A willingness to come in and let the Holy Spirit forgive people within you. A willingness to come in and let the Holy Spirit be pure and clean in your life, then that s right for many of us it involves that.

So it involves a real repentance. Here s the very point at which Christians themselves get into difficulties because repentance is you stop doing a thing. Repentance isn t remorse. It isn t weeping, and crying, and wishing you could stop doing it, it is stopping doing the thing. But many of those of us who are Christians have come to some besetting sin that we couldn t stop doing. And we then get into a real bind because we say, Well, repentance is stopping doing the thing that is wrong and I can t stop doing this, so where am I? And the killer is that many of us not only fail to stop doing the thing but we give up hope that we can stop doing it. In fact, we stop thinking that we can stop doing it.

Loved ones, there is not sin, there is no habit that we cannot stop once we find God s way of deliverance. But the only way to find his way of deliverance is to hold onto your absolute determination to stop the thing. In other words, if you ever give up the idea that you might be able to stop it, then you spoil the very condition that God requires to be able to lead you into his way of deliverance. But that s really what many of us do so that s why I d like us to share for a moment or two this morning, the whole question of repentance of believers.

The repentance that even Christians need to enter into. Could we take some of the besetting sins? Lust, boasting, pride, bad temper, getting irritable with our friends that we live with, boiling with anger, being resentful of others. I think those, you would agree, are some of the sins that we here all have difficulty with at different times. We determine to stop them, we say, Lord, I repent of this, but the next time we come into the situation the thing crops up again.

One of the English poets, John Donne, some of you have probably read him in literature courses and he puts it this way, Will thou forgive the sin where I begun which is my sin though it were done before? Will thou forgive those sins through which I run and do them still though still I do deplore? When thou has done thou hast done for I have more. Will thou forgive that sin by which I have won others to sin and made my sin their door? Will thou forgive that sin which I did shun a year or two but wallowed in a score. When thou has done thou hasn t not done for I have more. That kind of feeling.

Where you just don t know what to do with it, do you? You repent, and repent, and repent, but you begin to get the feeling, Well, repentance is not repentance unless I stop it so I m repenting but I m not stopping it. What on earth will I do? And so we back loved ones, into one of two positions. We back away from a heart of repentance into one of two positions. One, we rationalize the sin. We can t abide the contradiction of that in our minds so we have to do something with it so we rationalize the sin. We say, Well, a person of my background, with my upbringing, can t do

other than this. And so we try to rationalize the sin.

We try to say, Yeah, but it's not really a sin for us, it's a shortcoming or it's a failure for us, or it's a personality defect. For others it may be a sin but for me with my background, what else could I do? With a mother like I had, what else could I be like? And we begin to rationalize the sin. And so all the artists, we say, Well now, the artistic temperament is fiery let's face it. It's not bad temper it's just fiery. That's it. And those of us who are Swedes we say, We're not unloving, we're just a little incommunicative. That's us, we're not unloving it's just our temperament. And the old married say, Well, we're not stingy with our giving money to God, we're just a little prudent. And the young married say, Well, we're not stingy because we don't tithe but you know, we're just starting out in life and we just have to get a lot of necessities at this point. And those of us who are students say, Well, I'm not uncommitted but I'm just transient. You know, I'm just passing through. So we all have special little ways in which we rationalize the sin and we kind of step back from it.

Now loved ones, that's the tragedy. It's strange but the tragedy is not that you don't stop doing the thing, though that is bad and that is a pain in Jesus. But the real tragedy is that you give up any hope of stopping doing it and you in fact rationalize the thing as something that is reasonable to accept in your life. Here's what happens, you begin to sear your conscience. Your conscience confirms God's word. God's word says, You shouldn't even think unclean thoughts. God's word says, You are not to be angry with each other. God's word says, You are not to be angry or jealous. Your conscience is God's gyrocompass. It confirms that immediately and convicts you and says, Yeah, that's wrong.

Now as soon as you begin to rationalize the sin, you begin to refuse the voice of your conscience and your conscience begins to be seared. The next step is your spirit begins to harden against the Spirit of God. See, that's the real problem. That's what Hebrews says you know. Hebrews actually says, It is impossible to renew again to repentance those who have once tasted. It's the repentant spirit that gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to continue working in your life.

Well, the other thing we do is we justify. We justify a life of sin. We can't get rid of the sin so we say, Yeah well, I mean, even the Bible says if we say we have no sin and some of us look at that, maybe you'd like to look at it loved ones, because it's good to see God's word and stop resting it to our own devices.

1 John 1:8, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And so we look at that and say, There, there it is in black and white. Every Christian has sin, you can't avoid it. That's it. And so I have sin, and I'm justified in having sin. That's what the Christian life is all about, you sin and then you ask forgiveness and God forgives you for the sake of Jesus and that's it. In the process of course, we destroy any meaning repentance has.

Now loved ones, what's important to see is that the Bible distinguishes clearly between conscious and unconscious sin. And there's no doubt that all of us have some unconscious sin in our lives, sin that we're not aware of. Now, that's mentioned in Leviticus 4:13-14, If the whole congregation of Israel commits a sin unwittingly and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done and are guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer, and then they go into the sacrifices.

But do you see that there is a time when the congregation does not know it's sinning and God does not hold it responsible for dealing with that which it does not know. And so in the Bible it says, If we say we have no sin, it's obviously stating all of us have some sins of which we're unconscious, but God holds us responsible only for the ones which we're conscious. So you cannot use that verse loved ones and say, There the Bible justifies conscious sin. No, God's word says, All of us have some unconscious sin in our lives but there are none of us that should accept and get used to conscious sin.

Once you become aware that you're getting angry, once you become aware that you're irritable with your roommate, once you become aware that your thoughts are unclean, then you're responsible for repenting of those things. Now do you see dear ones, that the heart of repentance is actually deeper than the simple act of stopping doing the thing? The heart of repentance is your attitude towards the sin and the real danger in this whole business of repentance is our growing tolerance of the necessity of sin in our lives. That is what is unrepentant in us.

In other words, it's us beginning to regard sin as natural in our lives instead of unnatural. Beginning to regard sin as normal in our lives instead of abnormal. Beginning to regard sin in our lives as the thing we ought to expect rather than a something that is alien to us. That's what prevents the Holy Spirit dealing in us and living in us. And so if we would keep on setting our whole heart against the sin and saying, Lord, this thing is wrong and I've fallen again, but Father, I am determined to come through to this. If we could continue to set our heart against the sin and refuse to accommodate ourselves to it, then God looks down and sees that as a repentant heart and he sees a heart that will not accept this as natural in the life. A heart that is striving against it with all your being, and a heart most of all, that is finally coming to the place where it says, Lord, why can I not stop this?

Loved ones, that's the secret of the repentance of a believer. Coming to the point where after they've striven and striven, they continue to repent but they continue to ask, Lord, why can I not stop this? Now brothers and sisters do you see that you are not asking that question when you say, I've tried, and I've tried, and I've tried, and I've tried, and I can't stop it. You're not, that's a silly little child crying against the whole God of the universe and saying, I've done my bit and you haven't done yours. Nor is it beginning to ask everybody else, Can you tell me how to overcome this thing? The only real repentance of a believer is when that believer begins to turn to the Holy Spirit inside and says, Holy Spirit, why can I not stop this? Why can't I stop being angry? Why can't I stop being irritable? And that's the beginning really of deliverance.

What the Holy Spirit begins to show us is that there's a whole lot in our hearts that we have never allowed God to deal with. So it's really like a house in a sense. It's really as if the Holy Spirit comes into the porch and deals with the guilty conscience and we receive Jesus into our lives. We accept that God has forgiven us and we're born of the Spirit. And then we begin to come up against some actions, or some attitudes, or some words that we speak that we can't stop speaking or doing and we ask the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit why can't I do this? And he begins to take us into the entrance hall and he shows us that in our hearts there is just a lot of selfishness still that never shows, but it's there.

There's a great fear of people inside us that we never express but it's there all the time and he begins to show, Look, you're fearful of people because you think you are responsible for defending yourself against those who would destroy you. You think you're the one that's

responsible for seeing your reputation right and guarding it. The Holy Spirit begins to show you, in a lot of ways your heart is not resting in God at all. And he begins to take us, you know, into the chapel and begins to show the deadness that is there, and the dryness at times that exists in our prayers. And he begins to show, Look, I'm always loving my Father. I'm always loving Jesus, my Savior and if you let me have my way in your heart you'll find yourself always doing the same thing. But there are times in your life that you shut me out and that's what causes the dryness, and that's what causes the lack of power when you're communicating Jesus to other people.

The Holy Spirit takes us in, you know, to where we live, into the lounge and begins to show, Oh, outwardly, outwardly you're happy and joyous, and outwardly you seem to be loving the people around you, but really your heart has an awful lot of jealousy in it that never shows. And that jealousy is there because you're all taken up with how you are in relationship to the rest of the people whether you're as good as them or not as good. And of course, what I want is a willingness in you to be like Jesus who was willing to be nothing and willing to be less than everybody else.

And he begins to show, you know, how we exaggerate in our conversation, and we want to make an impression on somebody so we exaggerate a little to do it. We exaggerate the truth. And the Holy Spirit begins to show, You see, you're really not in ease inside your heart. You're always trying to make a bigger impression on people. That is strictly true. You're always trying to make yourself look a little better. Don't you use that you're not at ease with me. You're not really ready to be whatever I want to be in you. And begins to show that lack of love in you for other people.

He says, You know, I love people the same way as I loved them in Jesus. But really, the attitude you have to people that won't let me love them through you. Begins to show that lack of ease inside. You're not really content with your life. There's all kinds of strivings and strains, things that you want to change, things that you want to be different but there's a strain and a striving in them. It's good to see things that need to be changed but God will change these through me in your life at the right time. And the Holy Spirit begins to show loved ones, that there is still sin in our hearts, you see.

We've got rid of a lot of the sins in our outward lives, but there's still a lack of contentment with God's will for us at this very moment inside in our hearts. And he takes in, you know, to the family room where we live and spend our time with other people and shows all those things, you know. Just that anger that is in the heart. It doesn't show itself outwardly but there's anger in your heart at times. There's a desire to draw attention to yourself. Now if you were really willing to accept your place with Jesus on the cross you wouldn't want to draw attention to yourself, you'd be dead. Who wants to draw attention to a corpse? But there is a sense in which you're wanting people to notice you, how brilliant that last remark was that you made, or how clever the last joke was that you made, or you want other people to see you and if conversation is going and they're not taking you into consideration you feel left out. You feel that you're one down. There's impatience in your attitude. There's a touchiness in your spirit. Somebody says something that doesn't apply to you at all and it sparks anew and you think you're paranoid, you feel they're getting at you. And there's a criticism in your attitude to other people.

And loved ones, the Holy Spirit just takes you down bit-by-bit. And really, the only thing you can do in each of these situations is to deal with him. Deal with him with each of them. Say, Holy Spirit, I see the selfishness. Alright, will you show me why I'm selfish and will you show me what

I have to do for you to free me from that? Will you show me why I m afraid of people? Will you show me Holy Spirit, in what way I need to take my place on the cross with Jesus so that you can free me from that? Will you show me why I want to draw attention to myself? Do I think I m wroth drawing attention to? Yeah, I really do think I m pretty good, yeah, and you say that I m no good. Well, I m some good. Well, you say I m no good. Well, well, that s agree to differ.

But sooner or later loved ones, you have to come to agreement with the Holy Spirit and what he s showing you and all you can do is deal with each one of the things in the office where you work, with the pride that you have in the way you do things, with the envy of somebody else because they re getting a better position than you are. With the dishonesty that you have when you make a mistake on the typewriter, or you make a mistake with the accounts and you were dishonest. Why were you dishonest? Because I want to show them I m absolutely infallible. You re not infallible. I know but I want to show - Well, you re not being honest, you re not being real.

The Holy Spirit, that love of praise you know, so the boss praises you and you re up in the air all that day. But he doesn t praise you the next day so you re down. The Holy Spirit begins to show you, Alright, are you content with what my Father gives you or do you want all this from other people? And bit-by-bit you deal with each one. And in the bedroom with the laziness and with the self-indulgence, and with the self-pity when you waken up in the morning and you ve that terrible pain, and what a poor, poor creature you are. You re just hard done by and hard dealt with, really and you feel that old self-pity coming up. Or, you lay in bed not wanting to get up you re so busy worrying about the day ahead. You re worrying about it because the whole day depends on you.

Now if there was a God in the universe, it would be different. He could maybe take care of some of those things. But you have this whole assignment to take care of yourself, or that situation in work that isn t running right. And the Holy Spirit bit-by-bit deals with each one. And we are such subtle people, we deal with all these things and we say, Okay Holy Spirit, you want this cleared? Okay, I ll clear this. Okay, I ll clear this out of this room. Alright, I ll clear out of this room. I ll clear out of this one. I ll clear, clear, clear. And then we say, There Holy Spirit, the whole house is yours. And then he says, Yeah, but where did you clear it all too? And we have a closet back here and we clear it in there and this is just a mess because we ve said, Yeah, Holy Spirit, we ll give it up. Yeah, we ll give it up here, we ll give it up there. But inside in our hearts in the deepest part of our beings we say, But we ll take it back when we want too. And we have the right to take it back. I don t mind giving it up because this Holy Spirit has told me it s wrong, but I have the right to it. I have the right to be angry. I have the right to have self-pity at times. I have the right to worry. And loved ones, that s what the Holy Spirit wants to get to.

And the deepest part of repentance of believers is when you begin to deal with that closet and begin to deal with the Holy Spirit over your own rights, and your right to your own way in your life. And the Holy Spirit takes you down to that and loved ones, there s where the cross of Jesus has to take place. The cross of Jesus can t really occur up here.

These are things that give you a clue to where the trouble lays. These things, you ll get victory over this one at times, over this one at times, over this one at other times. But there will be no absolute deliverance until you deal with this old self - back here. And that s really the heart of the repentance of believers. And I would testify loved ones, that I was not able to walk in repentance as a believer and stop short of dealing with that because I would keep on repenting,

doing the thing again, repenting, doing the thing again, because deep down I felt I had the right to. Only the Holy Spirit can take you to that place.

But that's the answer, real repentance is only possible if you go right to the heart of self and let the Holy Spirit deal with that. The only way to get to it loved ones, I think is by taking the symptoms, you know. You'll know, the Holy Spirit has already spoken to you about some of these symptoms so that's where you start. That's where I started. I started with that one. Started to ask him, Holy Spirit, why, why am I proud? What am I proud of? In what way is my being proud not consistent with me being on the cross dead with Jesus? And bit-by-bit over weeks and months, he at last showed me. And when you see it loved ones, then you say, Yes, I'm willing to die in that way with Christ. And the Holy Spirit fills you with himself and fills the whole house with a fragrance, and a beauty and you don't need, you know, to maneuver him just into that room so he doesn't get back into this closet and see what's really there. Then at last you're free to have him all over the place. And that's what gives you that sense of freedom because there's nothing to hide.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we want to walk in clear repentance. Father, we do not want to rationalize or justify our sins any longer. We want to deal with them. So Father, we see that you will forgive us until 70 times seven, forgive even the same sin until 70 times seven. As long as we keep getting up each time we fall and walk towards you asking with desperation and hunger, Holy Spirit, why can I not stop? And oh Father, we know that if we have that repentant heart, then you will continue to forgive us until you are able to deliver us.

So Father, we would now take a definite position against the sins in our lives no longer accommodating ourselves to them or accepting them, but declaring outright war against them and saying, Father, we hate these sins and we intend to keep on stopping doing them as long as we need to until you bring us to the heart of our old selves and deliver us from our rights.

Lord Jesus, we would trust you to explain to each one of us what it means for us to be crucified with you and raised with you to the right hand of our Father. We would trust you to explain that to us during these days so that we may be delivered, and freed to love you and to obey you for your glory. Amen