

Sin and Death

Romans 5:14

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever found your mental capacities or your emotional capacities or your physical capacities just suddenly failing? You're in an exam and the old mind just fails completely -- you can't remember the fact and it's vital to get it if you're going to write anything. Or, you're at a time when you really need absolute calmness, quietness and concentration but the old emotions become ragged and on the edge. You can't do anything with them. Or, you get up some morning -- you've had eight hours of sleep (so you ought to feel great) but the old body feels weary and worn. And you just feel you can't make it.

Now, why is that? Were you and I made like that? Were we made with bodies that got weary without any reason or with minds that couldn't remember the fact at the right moment or with emotions that just got ragged at any time without our knowing it or being able to control it? Obviously we weren't.

It says in Genesis at the beginning of the creation of the world that God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good. So brothers and sisters God didn't make us like that. God didn't make us with ragged emotions. He didn't make us with minds that couldn't remember facts when we wanted them to remember them. He didn't make us with bodies that were worn and weak physically.

God made us with beautiful, whole, complete bodies and with good minds that were sharp and alert and with emotions that were balanced absolutely. And really what we found last Sunday was that the reason all this deterioration took place, was because the first man and woman refused the one essential factor that would make the mind and the emotions and the body work perfectly. That one factor was God's own uncreated life, the life of the Holy Spirit. Immediately when the first man and woman rejected that life, rejected God's will for them at that time and decided to go it on their own, immediately there took place a great deterioration throughout every part of their personalities.

You remember we saw that the old mind became impaired and the emotions became unbalanced, ragged and on edge, and the old body became weak and worn. Without the Holy Spirit the whole world began to be infested with evil spirits that worked all kinds of lack of harmony in the universe itself -- earthquakes and volcanoes -- and brought about all kinds of strange dreams and nightmares into us men and women. Then, even as that took place, we began to live more and more for ourselves and we found ourselves living in a pro-self, anti-God world.

Really that kind of death spread throughout the universe and that's why many of us experience this kind of death in our minds and emotions today. I had an electric razor when I was in Ireland that ran on 220 volt current. All the current in Britain is 220 volts. But if you go to Europe, as I did one summer on the motorbike, (youth hostelling), you come to all kinds of 110 volt outlets. I had my 220 volt razor and I didn't know anything about the 110 volt. I didn't think that a whole nation would be stupid enough to run on 110 volt. But I went to the first youth hostel in France, stopped, in the morning got up, plugged the Remington shaver in and you should have heard it, it was miserable. It had just a little bit of "burr" but nothing else. So I grew a beard that summer.

Now, that's what it's like. Without the Holy Spirit, everything just runs on half or a third speed.

The blood doesn't flow the way God meant it to flow. The mind doesn't work the way it was meant to work. The emotions aren't peaceful and at ease the way he meant them to be. And that's what we mean by death coming into us. That's really what it means when it says in Romans 5:12. It was the verse we studied last day.

Romans 5:12, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." And it's that death that spreads. It spreads because of sin.

Many of us, as we saw last Sunday, tend to think of sin as just disobedience to the Ten Commandments. What we began to realize last day was that sin is any resistance to God's will for us at that time. You remember, Romans 5:13 says, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given." In other words, sin existed whether the Ten Commandments were there or not. Sin is not just an immorality. It is not disobedience to the Ten Commandments. It is a refusal of that Spirit of life.

Brothers and sisters, every time we refuse that Spirit of life today in our life, we experience death. You remember we saw that last day that you don't have to be disobeying one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not steal" or "Thou shalt not kill" in order to experience death. Sin is not just immorality. It is not just disobedience to the Ten Commandments. Sin is any resistance to the movement of God's Holy Spirit inside us.

Do you see that in a thousand ways this morning, the Holy Spirit is trying to bring life to each one of you? The Holy Spirit is alive in the world today. God made him available to us again because of the death of Jesus and so the Holy Spirit of God is moving in you in a thousand different ways. And when you resist him, you experience more and more of the death that sin brings.

So this morning, we are either responding to life and developing the inner spiritual body that will, at the last day, break through this physical body and transform it and take us up to the Father's right hand -- or today, we are responding to death inside us and accelerating the death that is already taking place in our mind and our emotions and our bodies.

Brothers and sisters, that was where we got to in our study last day. Sin is resisting God's will for you at this moment. Sin is resisting the moving of God's Holy Spirit inside you at this moment. An example of it is this: you get up in the morning, the Holy Spirit comes to you and applies the truth that is written in the Bible, "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on those things." The Holy Spirit is in all of us reinforcing the will of God for us that first moment when we reach out, hit the alarm, fall down to the floor and we're awake. At that moment, the Holy Spirit in all of us is saying, "Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, think on those things."

At that moment, you can resist the Holy Spirit -- in which case you move into death. Or you can respond to the Holy Spirit -- in which case you move into life. You can either accept his prompting at that moment or you can go on and think about the day ahead. "Three assignments not done -- I have to get them done before 10 o'clock. What am I going to do tonight? I am not ready for tonight and what about tomorrow?" Satan never leaves them one-by-one, he throws the whole lot at you. Before you know it, you're thinking ahead a month, two-months and then -- who will I marry?

But dear ones, do you see the Holy Spirit does not prompt you that way. The Holy Spirit is prompting

you, "Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, think on these things. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is a good day. It's your Father's world. He knows what you're going to do today and he has his arms right under you. Now bless him and praise him and thank him."

But do you see you can go either way. You can go into the depths of self and of degradation and before you know it, the emotions are unbalanced, the body is being abused, and everything is falling apart. Do you see that's what we mean by sin being in the world before even the law was given?

Sin is resistance to God's will for us at this moment, whether it's written in the Ten Commandments or not. Whether it actually says it or not, if you're resisting God's Spirit within you, then that's sin and sin brings death into your personality. That's one way in which many of us fall into death. Many of us fall into death because we have too narrow a view of sin. We think that sin is just immorality or sin is just disobeying the Ten Commandments. We think we can disobey that secret voice within without incurring any death, but you can't. So many of us fall into death because we have too narrow a view of sin.

Now, here's the strange thing, the opposite is true. Many of us fall into death because we have too broad a view of sin. Many of us define sin like this, "Sin is any lack of conformity to absolute perfection." Many of us have that definition of sin. Sin is any lack of conformity to absolute perfection. Sin is any deviation at all from the absolute mental and emotional and spiritual perfection of the one God of the whole universe.

So, dear ones, many of us move in continual sense of condemnation by God because of that definition. We all know we're imperfect in many ways. There are many ways in which our mind makes mistakes. There are many ways in which our emotions are on edge, there are thousands of ways in which we are not like God. We know we're imperfect, so we come into this terrible bondage where we say, "Oh well, I sin in act, word, and thought every day in life because I am imperfect in so many ways."

The result of all this is two-fold. One, there comes a dreadful lack of any motivation to be like God. All motivation to be like Jesus is drained from us. We reckon to ourselves "I'm imperfect and that's sin. I am sinning every day. I can't do anything about it. If God holds me responsible even for things that I don't know about, then I have no hope." So we fall into a pattern of, "We're doing our best."

The second result is that we fall into such hypocritical lives that the only difference between Christians and non-Christians is that Christians think they can continue to sin with impunity because of Jesus' death. Whereas non-Christians think every time they sin, they feel real guilt. Do you see those two results come about if you ever fall into the unscriptural trap of defining sin as any deviation from absolute perfection or any lack of conformity to the absolute perfection of God?

Now loved ones, that is not sin. That is just the creature in us. There are many ways you can't fly up to that roof, God can. You can't go to Mars this second, God can. You can't do a mathematical complicated sum being sure that you won't make a mistake, God can. You can't judge everybody in this theater perfectly, God can. You and I will make a thousand different mistakes. We will again and again fall short of God in many ways that we don't know about, but that is not sin. Sin is knowingly, consciously, disobeying God's will for you at that moment. Now that's why it's important to look at the second half of that verse, from last day.

Romans 5:13, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given." So Paul says that. Sin, resistance to God's will and refusal of his Spirit, existed in the world before the Ten Commandments were given. But, sin is not counted where there is no law. Now, do you see that? Unless a person knows they have disobeyed God, God does not count that as sin. Now that's what that means, you see. Sin is not counted where there is no law.

In other words, if you don't know that you've disobeyed God, then God does not count that as sin for you. Now you remember that's stated very plainly and maybe it would be good to look at it because I think a lot of us have labored under this false condemnation in our lives. If you look at, it's very plainly put in James 4:17. It's a fact that sin is resistance to God's Spirit, but it is a KNOWING resistance to the Spirit, it is conscious resisting to the Spirit.

James 4:17, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Now, do you see that? Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. But God will never witness guilt to your heart through the Holy Spirit unless you know that he has willed something for you and you have resisted that will. The only one that will witness guilt to you in that situation is Satan who will impart to you all vague senses of guilt. You'll get up and you'll feel, "Oh, I have a vague sense of guilt. I don't know what I have done wrong but I know I am wrong, I know I am wrong, I know I am wrong."

Now brothers and sisters, that is of Satan, it is not of God. When God witnesses a sense of conviction to your conscience, it is definite and plain. He says, "This is wrong or that is wrong." The guilt brought by the Holy Spirit always leads us to life. The guilt brought by false condemnation and Satan always brings more death.

Now do you see that many of us experience death in our own Christian lives because we have a too narrow view of sin? We think sin is just disobedience to the Ten Commandments that it is not also resistance to God's Spirit inside us. But many of us also live in death because we think God has condemned us when he hasn't. We have too broad a view of sin. We think, "Oh, I have a false, vague sense of guilt so God must have condemned me."

Brothers and sisters, there is all kinds of false guilt that we come upon but the guilt that the Holy Spirit brings is always about something definite. It is always a conscious disobedience to God that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. You'll find that clearly if you look at just a couple of instances in the New Testament. It's there in Acts 5:3. You remember we read it last Sunday.

Acts 5:3; "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?'" That's pretty definite. Now loved ones, that is sin. Sin is knowing conscious resistance to God's will. It's something you know you've done. It's not that the Holy Spirit comes and says, "Now you've done something wrong. I want you to try to guess, I'll give you three guesses what it was."

I used to teach in a kind of "Good Bye Mister Chips" school. It was a kind of public school in Ireland – a boarding school. We wore robes and gowns and all the members of the faculty sat at a big dining table in front of a massive dining hall. It was that kind of place. We used to have one master who had great trouble with discipline with the boys because he never tied them down. He would catch them running in the corridor. (That was a heinous sin in that school, to run in the corridor). He would catch them running in the corridor and then would say, "You did something wrong. What did you do?" Of course, they would never confess what they did.

So he never got anywhere with discipline. Now brothers and sisters, God's Spirit does not deal that way with us, do you see that? The Holy Spirit doesn't play games. When you have a vague sense of guilt, what you need to do is say, "Holy Spirit is there some way in which I have resisted you and haven't known about it? If there is, will you show me?" He will show you it and expect you to apologize or to repent or to make restitution and to receive him again to command your life.

But sin, real sin is resistance to God's will inside you and it is a knowing resistance. Now loved ones, would you look with me at an empirical fact that is stated in the verse that we're studying today, that brings up a problem in the light of what we've shared. Now the empirical fact is this one stated in Romans 5:14, you remember that Paul has just said, "Sin existed in the world before the law was given, (before the Ten Commandments were given), but sin is not counted where there is no law." So here's the problem.

Romans 5:14; "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses", (that was the time during which there was no law), "even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." So that you don't get lost in it all, I'll try to make the point clearly so that you can all see it.

Paul has just said sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet he says, "During that time when there was no law and when sin was not counted, death reigned from Adam to Moses." Now how can that be? If God did not count their sin as sin in those days, because there was no law, how then could death ever reign from Adam to Moses? You remember death did reign increasingly as the years went by. Death spread throughout the world and it became more and more chaotic as we read in the lesson this morning earlier on in the service.

Now how does death reign from Adam to Moses if sin is not counted when there is no law and there was no law in those days? Well, there are two ways, brothers and sisters. One is that death is passed on from father to son even if the son does not sin. There's a sense in which the effects of death are passed on to us even if we haven't sinned.

Now you may say that's utterly unfair but let's take an instance of it. Adam, you remember, set a poor example to his son Cain. He lived a life independent of God, Cain began to live the same kind of life and you find the result there in Genesis 4:8-9. You find that the death that existed in Adam was passed on to Cain just through the simple fact of his father's example.

Genesis 4:8-9; "Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him."

Now you get the same death being passed on in Genesis 6:5. It's a summary of the way that the effects of the father's sins were passed on to the children even though they themselves had not sinned. Genesis 6:5; "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Do you see that there are three deaths? There is a physical death that we are even now experiencing today. There is an eternal death that is forever separation from God. And there is a second death that is being cast into that lake of fire where we burn in our own selfish lusts.

Now do you see that the death that we experience today can be passed on to us even by our parents?

The strange thing is that, far from God being unfair in that, he is actually being fair. In other words, if one of us is promiscuous and we develop venereal disease, it is a very strong chance that the child that the mother bears will have deformities of some kind.

Now the death is passed on. The effects of the death are passed on. Do you see that God cannot step in there without destroying our free will? Do you see that? God cannot keep intervening every time one of us goes wrong in order to prevent the effects of that being passed on to our children or to our friends. If God did that, he would be just a God who came down from the sky every now and again to deliver us from the consequences of our own free will.

Now do you see that in a real way, death is passed on even though the children haven't sinned? Nevertheless it is true that the only way we can experience the second death or final death is by knowingly resisting God's will ourselves. Now how did the people from Adam to Moses do that if there was no law? How did they knowingly resist God's Spirit and his will if there was no law? Well, the answer is in Romans 2.

Romans 2:14-16; "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

Really we are back to the first thing that Jesus taught us last Sunday. Even though they didn't have the Ten Commandments available, men have within them the moral law of conscience that is continually prompting them to respond to God's Spirit of life. The men and women from Adam to Moses had that law.

They had a law written in their conscience as have every primitive tribe that we have not even touched with our civilization. They have a conscience inside them that is continually reinforcing in them the ancient racial memory that has been passed down through the years of God's judgment through the flood, his judgment through the catastrophe of the tower of Babel and all the other judgments that he had brought about down through history. The conscience of every man is reinforcing that sense inside that there is a Creator who wants him to go a certain way and that is ready to forgive him if he will turn to him and come to him.

Now loved ones, the people from Adam to Moses had that kind of law inside them. It was in resistance to that that they brought death upon themselves. Even though there was no law in those days, the conscience inside was a law that they could recognize. If they don't respond to it, then death comes about.

Now you may say, "Oh, could you prove that that law was there?" Yes, there were people who followed it. Even though there was no law, there were people who followed it. Genesis 4:26 outlines one of them. In other words, there was life. There was the life of the Holy Spirit available even in those chaotic, savage days and there were people that were responding to that voice within.

Genesis 4:26; "To Seth also a son was born, (Seth you remember was Adam's son) and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD." So there were men even in those days who responded to that conscience within.

Genesis 6:8 talks about another of those men. Genesis 6:8-9; "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." So there was the life of the Holy Spirit available. And you'll find it again in Genesis 12:1-2; "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'"

So there were men in those days that were responding to the inward law in their hearts. Now dear ones, do you see it gets back to the central point that real sin is not disobeying all the "don'ts" of evangelical Christianity. Real sin is not just murdering, it's not just killing, and it's not just committing adultery. Real sin, the very heart of sin, is resisting God's will for you at this moment today.

You see, it's because of the failure to see that that our churches are filled with very respectable moral people who are very unlike Jesus. Really loved ones, the only hope for you and me to avoid that kind of hypocrisy ourselves, is to really treasure this little voice of the Holy Spirit within us. He may ask us to do things that the Bible apparently does not ask us to do, but that is in line with the picture of Jesus that we get there. It's up to us to respond to that. If you don't respond to it, death begins to move and expand inside your own personality. If you do respond to it, life begins to flow and increase inside you.

So brothers and sisters, it is really true that all of us in the theater this morning are moving in one way or the other. You really are. You are moving into more of those old wrinkles, because it all shows up in your body. God is so good, he lets it show. With worry, if you're not responding to the Holy Spirit and you're really not trusting Jesus for the exams and for the future, the old worry begins to show up in wrinkles on the forehead. The body begins to weaken and to wear out.

On the other hand if you move in the other direction towards life, each time you sense the movement of God's Spirit within you to trust your dear Father in heaven, you'll move towards life. Loved ones, it's not chance that some of us can look young for many years. It isn't chance. It isn't chance that some of us appear to be always sick and always worn out, it isn't.

If you're moving towards life, there is a life developing and growing inside you. If you're moving towards death, there's a death growing and developing inside you. It's utterly down-to-earth -- not just one of going to hell but the mind becoming more and more impaired, the emotions becoming more and more shattered, and the body becoming weaker and weaker. Or is it the mind becoming renewed every day and the emotions experiencing the peace of Christ ruling them and the body being completely transformed into his image?

Well, dear ones, I really trust Jesus will show you the truth of it. I think a lot of us are tied up with psychiatrists and the power of positive thinking, when we should just listen to the voice inside -- just listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings and begin to respond to him. So would you think about it this week? Especially at those crucial moments when you know there are two ways to go and Satan gets in and says, "Well, there's nothing in the Bible that says, don't take five minutes more in the morning. Oh there's nothing in the Bible that says don't think another moment about that thing." Reject that and say, "No, but the Spirit of God within me is telling me what to do." Let's begin to move towards life.

If you have real problems with some area in your own life and would like to talk, stay behind

afterwards. A number of us gather in the front here. You can talk to me or there are some other brothers and sisters who have at last begun to move away from death and move towards life and some of them could probably help you. So you should, if you want to talk about things, don't go out and struggle for another week. You should just stay around and talk about it. Or if you want to come during the week and see me or see some of us, that would be good. But it is God's will that we should move in life in the midst of life and not in death. Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, we have often sensed the movements that you have prompted inside us. We have often sensed those little impressions that you're making on us. But we've grown so used to ignoring them as old fashioned inhibitions or as remnants of a past that we've had, that we have not responded. Now Holy Spirit we tell you, we want to be people who walk sensitively with you. We want to be people who do not resist you but respond to you.

Holy Spirit, we want to move into life. We trust you now for this coming week. We tell you now Holy Spirit whether we're Christians or not Christians, if you move inside us, we're going to move with you. We're going to respond to you whatever it costs us; we're going to move in your direction. Lord Jesus, we trust you that you'll be able to transform our lives with your life, that we will begin to be those radiant people that walk as princes and princesses on God's earth and begin to have the dignity and the beauty and the royalty of the Son of God and King of kings.

Dear Father, we know we weren't made to crawl and to scabble in the dust and the dirt with Satan. We know we were made to fly and we trust you to bring us into that experience during this week in every area of our lives. We ask this for your glory, Lord Jesus. Amen.