

Death of Life in the Body

Romans 5:17c

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever thought about dying? It used to be popular for people of our generation to say, "Oh, what a morbid thought." But I think we're different now, aren't we? We really do feel that we ought to be able to face that, whether we're Christians or not. I think everybody is beginning to sense, "Yes, I should be able to face the thought of death and think what I would do with death." So really I am pushing you on it. I am asking you, have you ever thought about dying or about death? Have you ever thought about the way you'll meet it?

Some of you will know Dylan Thomas, the English poet. You remember he was watching his father dying and he wrote a poem. It was a raging rebellious poem. He said, "Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rave at close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." And Thomas's whole poem was that -- that everybody should rage against the dying of the light.

Noyes is a psychiatrist from Iowa University. You may have read two weeks ago in "Time" magazine that he interviewed different men and women who had almost died in mountain falls or in parachute jumps where the parachute failed. He said that there seemed to be three stages. In the first stage, the person seemed to rebel against the whole thing and resist it. Then in the second stage, the person tended to have a real review of their own life and to look for a moment at all the things that had happened -- especially the pleasant things. Then in the last stage they really seemed to embrace death and surrender themselves to it.

Now what do you think? If you say to me, "I mean in spite of all that you say, I kind of recoil from the whole idea. I don't like to think of death. I don't feel I need to and I don't like to think of it." I think that that's right, brothers and sisters. We were made not to have to face death originally. Really, God made us to live forever. That's part of the reason we recoil against it. You can see that in Genesis 3:22 that we were really originally made never to die.

Genesis 3:22b -- "...lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." Obviously the Creator had put the tree of life in the world. He had made the Holy Spirit because he is the tree of life. He had made the Holy Spirit alive in the world so that we could receive of that Holy Spirit and live forever. That was God's plan. God planned that our bodies would never grow old, that there would never come wrinkles, that our hair would never go gray. Rather we would live on and on forever and would come into his immediate presence and would just be like that forever.

You remember the whole problem came when the first man refused the tree of life. He refused to live dependent on the Holy Spirit and decided to live his own way by trial and error. That's what it means to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It's to live by trial and error, to do what you thought was right by your own muddled attempt instead of receiving God's Holy Spirit into you by faith and letting that express itself through you.

So the first man refused to receive this uncreated, supernatural life and immediately he did that, his whole body began to experience the effects. The mind began to be impaired, the emotions became unbalanced and the body itself began to be weakened. That's really now why we have weakened bodies.

At that time even the body became temporary. The body was made to be permanent but when the Holy Spirit ceased to flow through it, it began to be temporary also. You'll find that if you like to look at it in James 2:26. "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead." But you see the first statement, "As the body, apart from the spirit, is dead." When the Holy Spirit was no longer flowing through us, our bodies became temporary. They immediately came into a position you remember where at the beginning of Old Testament times they seem to live for about 120 years. Now they live for maybe an average of 70 years, don't they? And even that varies from country to country because there are places where people only live on average 45 years. The whole body suffered because of the lack of the Holy Spirit.

That happened to even good men, men who were walking in obedience to God. Even their bodies (that they inherited from the first man that came into the world), were temporary. But worse things happened as men began to behave like Cain and Abel. You remember the way Cain behaved if you like to look at it. It's in Genesis 4:6-8. As men began to try to prove that they were worth something, because they lacked God's approval on their lives, so they began to compete with each other. That of course, brought a death of its own.

Genesis 4:6-8: "The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.' 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 as man began to share Cain's sense of insecurity and began to try to establish their security by driving everybody else away from them and putting everybody else under their feet, so of course, men and women began to hurt each other. Not only did the body become temporary but we began to injure each other. In a real way brothers and sisters, every automobile accident is connected up with if not anger, that sense of insecurity or impatience or lack of love and concern for our brothers and sisters.

In other words, it is God's will that there should never be an accident. This is another way in which death came into the world. As men and women began to be selfish, angry and irritated with each other like Cain, they began to commit injuries against each other. That of course, brought death as well.

There was another way that death was brought. As men and women lacked love for each other, so they began to be careless about their own habits, their own habits of hygiene. As they began to be careless about those, so germs began to be created in the world. That was not God's original plan at all. But germs began to be created and they began to transmit disease. You get that kind of teaching if you look at Leviticus 11: 31-34. Even back in Old Testament days, God was trying to teach them what in fact we only learned in the 18th or 19th century in New York. That is, the way to stop plagues was really to be clean in your own habits and to be clean about washing. Even in these days, maybe 1500-1600 BC, God was trying to stop the spread of germs.

Leviticus 11:31-34; "These are unclean to you among all that swarm;" these certain insects and animals - "whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening. And anything upon which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any vessel that is used for any purpose; it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. And if any of them falls

into any earthen vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. Any food in it which may be eaten, upon which water may come, shall be unclean; and all drink which may be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean.”

Now of course, the reason God said that was because men weren't behaving that way. Men and women were becoming careless about themselves, about their friends, about their neighbors and so germs and disease began to spread in the world. Sickness came into the world as a direct result of man's lack of love for God and lack of love for his neighbors.

Then men and women began to hate each other yet pretend that they loved each other. That's how sexual intercourse, as we know it apart from Jesus and apart from his Spirit of unselfish love, that's how that began to be treated in the world. That brought its own problems. You remember you have it outlined in Romans 1:26-27. The whole question of birth defects did not begin simply with Thalidomide [a drug prescribed to pregnant women in the 1950's] and that kind of problem which you know is another example of man's lack of love and selfishness. Birth defects began to come because of men and women's dealings with each other.

Romans 1:26; “For this reason (because they rejected God) God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.” And of course this was not only in their persons but in the persons of the people that they bore.

So the illegitimate child received some of the sin of the father or mother. The illegitimate child, with a sense of insecurity and a feeling that nobody wants them, often passed this on to other people unless they had really dealt with God. That is part of receiving in your person the due penalty of your error. Or the child that is born with a deformity on its face because of VD [venereal disease] in the parent -- that kind of thing comes directly from man's sin.

So brothers and sisters, God had to watch as men did without the Holy Spirit. As they lacked the Holy Spirit, their own bodies began to produce not only the anger that injured others, not only the selfishness that destroyed others' bodies -- but also disease through their habit and then deformities that they passed on in birth defects. Then you see another set of diseases altogether. It's the set of diseases that we call psychosomatic.

If you go into any psych ward, most of the people suffering there are suffering from guilt or from the high cost of retaliation. People in psych wards are normally suffering either from guilt or from a terrible, burning, deep sense of resentment. And really all psychosomatic diseases can be traced back to the work that God purposely calls “the works of the flesh”. That's one of the reasons he calls them the works of the flesh.

It's not only that they come from preoccupation with your own body, but that they actually produce results in your body that are disease and sickness. You see those in Galatians 5:19-21. As men and women lacked the Holy Spirit in their own lives so they began to produce these feelings and attitudes in themselves. Each one of these produces a tension in the muscle that begins to produce diseases or certain secretions in the glands that begin to produce disease. Or it affects the flow of blood which produces disease.

You can see how close these things are. If you are embarrassed, you know what happens, you blush.

It's because the embarrassment can affect the flow of the blood to your face. Or you are nervous when you are standing up in front of a crowd of people and you find that you could drink a gallon of water. Your mouth is all dry because the nervousness and the fear of men affect the secretion of the liquids and the fluids in your mouth.

Now you can see that the psychosomatic diseases all come from this fact -- that these works of the flesh: resentment, hatred, fear, worry, nervousness -- always affect either the flow of your blood to different parts of your body, or the secretions of your glands or it affects the tension in your muscles. And those are all the things that begin to produce sickness and tension in your body. Now you can see them there in Galatians 5:19.

Galatians 5:19- "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." And this is really why William Penn explained to a person who asked him, "You never get angry with anybody. Why not? Is it just for their sake?" He said, "No. I am my own worst enemy when I get angry with anybody." Even he, in those days, realized that anger destroyed the person who is angry far more effectively than it destroyed the people against whom it was aimed.

So dear ones, this is part of what we mean when you read Romans 5:17 and it says, "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man..." That's part of what we mean by that. Death really did begin to reign in our body. And the body that you have received is a body that has been acted upon in thousands of those ways that we've just discussed this morning. Part of the body that you have received, you received from a mom that has in some way, at some time or other, had some of those works of the flesh in her life.

The body that you've received has come from a dad that in some way has not dwelt completely in the peace of God. And you, yourself will multiply that and compound it if you live the same way. Now you know that when God looked down upon us, we must have looked like such a bundle of poor cripples who were determined to spread our hatred and our sickness throughout the universe. He must have felt tempted just to destroy the whole lot of us and start all over again.

But you know that he didn't do that. Instead, he took us all and put us into Jesus, his Son. He destroyed us all there on the Cross. It's a miracle that you and I don't understand, but he did that. In God's own eyes, as far as he is concerned, he has destroyed us all in Jesus. He has destroyed all our weakness in Jesus, all our sickness in Jesus, all our impaired minds and our unbalanced emotions. He has destroyed them all in Jesus.

That is why Jesus was able to tell us that he could give us the Holy Spirit again. Because God has worked out his justice on Jesus and so he was free to make the Holy Spirit available to us. That's really what we need in order to reverse the terrible effects of this lack of the Holy Spirit in our bodies. We need the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, in your bodies this morning, you don't need more medicine and more drugs. You don't need more hospitals. You really need the Holy Spirit of God's uncreated spiritual life. That's the only one really who will make a permanent change in not only your mind and your emotions but in your body. This is why Jesus laid such emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

He knew that he had died in our place so that God was satisfied as far as his justice and his

holiness was concerned. He could now make available to us the Holy Spirit again. That's why Jesus said that, you remember, in Acts 1, where he is talking to the disciples. We often think, "Oh, after Jesus died that was all he had to do. Why does he make such a big deal of this commandment?" But you can see why the whole purpose of Jesus' death was so that God could make the Holy Spirit available to us again.

Acts 1:4-5 "And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Now dear ones, we were never meant to live without the Holy Spirit. We weren't made to live in these bodies without this supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. This is God's oxygen and without it, you will not breathe and you will not be healthy. Without it, you'll always be doing a patch-up work on your own body.

Now you can see that immediately Jesus came into the world with this Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit began to reverse the effects of that death. For instance, men then who died with the Holy Spirit available were actually sleeping. And that's what happened. When you receive the Holy Spirit into you, though to us you'll look as if you've died, you'll actually be sleeping.

Now that's true if you'd like to look at it in Matthew 9:24. We often like to interpret this allegorically and say, "Oh, Jesus was just being nice and kindly. He was trying to comfort the rest by saying, 'Don't worry, he is just sleeping.'" But Jesus doesn't tell lies just to comfort people.

In Matthew 9:24 you remember they all said the girl's dead. "He said, 'Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose." This kind of proved that she was sleeping. So when the Holy Spirit comes death, physical death, is not death. It is a passing from this existence into a new spiritual existence and we actually are just sleeping.

So the Holy Spirit when he comes into you, so makes your body alive that when you come to the time of death that God has allowed to continue to come to us for his own plan, then it is a sleep, it's not a death. You get that you see, in even our own language. Cemetery comes from the Greek word "koimeterion" which is a sleeping chamber. The old Christians who were able to influence our English language way at the beginning, they purposely called the place where we put people after they died, a sleeping chamber. That's because in their eyes, it was just sleeping until they would rise up the next day. That's why when people who have received the Holy Spirit die, it is a great time -- it is a real rejoicing time.

I remember when my dad died in Belfast. Oh, it was great. We sang that lovely hymn,

"In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear.
And safe is such confiding for nothing changes here.
Green pastures are before me which yet I have not seen.
Blue skies will soon be over me where the dark clouds have been."

It was great to sing it and I know that he was singing it too, up there while we were looking at the old dead body.

I remember my wife, touching the old body and saying, "It's not him at all." And right enough, I could see it. It wasn't him. It was the body that he used while he was here but it obviously wasn't

him. I didn't sense at all that he was there and it's that kind of experience that you have when you begin to receive the Holy Spirit into yourself.

Death itself, you see, is transformed into just a sleeping. It becomes something that you do not fear at all and something that you only accept when it is God's good permissive time to let it come to you. But God will keep you from it until you achieve what he wants you to achieve. That's why God said in Isaiah 53:4-5, that when Jesus died, he actually destroyed sickness and pain. And as far as God is concerned, he only lets those (sickness and pain) continue within us as far as they will serve his purposes to bring us closer to Himself.

Isaiah 53:4-5 – “Surely he has borne our griefs (in Hebrew the word “grief” means “sicknesses”) and carried our sorrows; (“sorrows” in Hebrew can be translated “pains”). So that verse is, “Surely he had borne our sicknesses and carried our pains.” And so it is with our sins. If he has carried them we don't both need to carry them. We don't need to carry our sicknesses and our pains if Jesus has borne them for us.

That's what happens when you begin to receive the Holy Spirit into your own life. The Holy Spirit begins to remove your sicknesses and pain. He begins to take the health of Jesus' body and imparts it to your body. That's what those verses mean in Romans 8:10-11. Many of us I think have not really entered into this normal state of those of us who have received the Holy Spirit. I think we need to see that God expects us to enter into this.

Romans 8:9-11: “But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, (now your body may still have some of the symptoms of disease) your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.” That Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your body.

Brothers and sisters, I really mean that it works today. If you're sitting there and saying, “Do you mean it works sometime in the future -- maybe when I die?” No, it works today. It is not God's will for us to live in sickness. It is not God's will for us to live in pain and ill health. It is God's will for us to learn how to receive his Spirit into our bodies for real health. That is the Father's plan.

Now, how do you do it? Well, first sickness is a work of Satan. It's not God's work. God only allows sickness to continue in you as long as he can achieve something through it. So if ever sickness comes upon you, what you need to do is go to God and ask him, “Lord, do you want me to see something that I haven't seen before, either about myself or about you?” Then let God show you what that is and simply receive God's health by faith.

In other words, it's true that you have not sickness today because of your sins. Say, you have the flu today. You haven't the flu because of sin. Right enough, your resistance has probably been lowered by all kinds of things. You have sickness because a germ has come to you. Or you haven't trouble with your appendix because of your sin. We have trouble with those things because of the corporate sin of mankind. But it is true brothers and sisters that God can keep sickness from you, if he wishes. The only reason he lets sickness come to any of us, is to bring us into a new place in our relationship with him.

So the first thing we should do when sickness comes is not try to believe. “I believe Lord, I

believe. You bore my sickness. You bore my pains” and kind of auto-suggest yourself into health. No, our first job is to say, "Lord, why have you allowed this to come? Is there something you want to teach me about yourself or about me? I know once you have taught me it and once you have seen that I have realized it, you'll remove the sickness." And that's true, dear ones -- that will happen.

Now, the teaching for that is in First Corinthians 11. It's the teaching that sickness does need to be dealt with first by confession and by allowing God to show you. I think there's a lot of foolish talk among us where we say, "You haven't enough faith if you're not healed." Well that's not true. God has plans and purposes for allowing sickness to continue as you can see with the Apostle Paul. He sought the Lord three times but the thorn remained there in his flesh. But it is connected in some sense with a readiness to confess.

1 Corinthians 11:30: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged." Paul says that there's a place for asking God to show you if there's any way in which you are bringing this sickness upon yourself -- if there's any real sin that you're walking in or if there's any way in which you have not entered into the beauty and the Christ-likeness of Jesus.

I think a lot of us say, "I know God put me into Christ and he destroyed me there", but we are not actually willing to be destroyed in Jesus. We're not really willing to die to ourselves. Often God allows a sickness to come to show you that you're not really willing to die to yourself. He wants to show you that there's anger in your life that should not be there. There's resentment against a friend that should not be there. There's a grudge that you've been bearing for years that should not be there. There's retaliation and a desire to payback that should not be there. So God will often allow this sickness to come in so that you'll see that you have not really died to self.

There is a good book that you may want to get from the bookshop called "None of these diseases". McMillan is a medical doctor and wrote the book to show how our own inner attitude again and again affects our outer attitude and brings disease upon us. He talks about this business of dying to self's right to get your own back, have your own way and dying to self's right to resent and retaliate.

He said this, "At the beginning of each day, consider yourself a sheep that is going to be abused even to the extreme of being slaughtered. If you take that attitude of mind then nothing that comes up should frustrate or disturb you. A man awaiting death is not disturbed by many stress factors that upset people. He is not upset because his neighbor's chickens are scratching up his flowerbed. His arthritis is not worsened because the taxes on his house have been raised. His blood pressure is not raised because his employer discharged him. He doesn't get a migraine headache because his wife burned his toast. His ulcerative colitis doesn't flare up because the stock market goes down 10 points. The crucified soul is not frustrated. The man who willingly, cheerfully and daily presents himself as a living sacrifice can excellently adapt to the severest situations and with Paul be more than conquerors." Dear ones, it is true you see.

A lot of us live in constant strain and tension. Dear ones, even as you're sitting in your seat this morning you probably have strain and tension in a thousand different places in your body and your face that you do not realize. And do you see it's that that predisposes your body to accept the germ when it comes? But there is a place where you can rest in absolute peace. It's the place where you're willing to be crucified with Jesus. You're willing to accept that God has destroyed you in Jesus and that you don't have rights.

You don't have rights to tell your mom where to get off. You don't have rights to be treated by the professor in a different way. You don't have rights to have your own way rather than your roommate have her way. You don't have those rights. It's beautiful, brothers and sisters, when you come into that kind of death to self. It's beautiful, the freedom from strain that you can live in. You are free from blood flow being restricted, free from the muscles being tensed, free from glands putting out secretions or failing to put out the secretions that God wants. It is possible then to begin to live in real peace.

One of the beautiful things that McMillan shows on medical evidence is that the healthiest attitudes of all are those described just a few verses from the sick attitudes in Galatians 5. It's the attitudes that the Holy Spirit brings about in a person. McMillan says, "If a person was to try to live the healthiest psychological and physical life they could live, this is the way they ought to live."

And this is the kind of fruit you see that the Holy Spirit brings about. This is how he brings health. Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." Brothers and sisters, those are the attitudes that the Holy Spirit produces inside you when you really begin to receive him into yourself. That's why we have weakened bodies -- because we lack the Holy Spirit. But as soon as we begin to receive the Holy Spirit into us, these bodies begin to be strong.

Loved ones, there are a lot of details in the teaching on healing that I would urge you to follow up on. There must be 3 hours of teaching on health and sickness in our library. I do urge you to go and listen to those tapes rather than just take this morning's brief presentation. There are many details that have to be filled in. Nevertheless, it is the Father's will for us to live in health and it is possible to live in health.

I remember A.B. Simpson describing this way in his own experience. "Then the body broke away in every sort of way. I had always worked hard and from the age of 14 I studied and labored and spared no strength. I took charge of a large congregation at the age of 21. I broke down utterly half a dozen times. At my last, my constitution was worn out completely. Many times I feared I should drop dead in my pulpit. I could not ascend any height without a sense of suffocation. This was because of a broken-down heart and exhausted nervous system."

"I heard of the Lord's healing, but I struggled against it. I was afraid of it. I had been taught in theological seminaries that the age of the supernatural was past. I could not go back from my early training. My head was in my way. But at last, when I was brought to attend 'the funeral of my dogmatics', the Lord whispered to me the little secret, 'Christ in you'. From that hour I received him for my body as I had done for my soul. I was made so strong and well that work has been a perfect delight."

"For years, I have spent my summer holiday in the hot city of New York, preaching and working amongst crowds as I never did before (besides the work of our home, college, an immense mass of library work and much besides). But the Lord did not merely remove my sufferings. It was more than simple healing. He so gave me Himself that I lost the painful consciousness of physical organs. That is the best of the health he gives. I thank the Lord that he keeps me from all morbid, physical consciousness and a body that is the object of anxious care. Instead he gives a simple life that is a delight and a service for the Master that is a rest and joy." Maybe that's the secret.

Health is received by faith, not by sight. "Have you healed me? I don't feel healed. Have you healed my headache? No, you haven't." Health is not received by sight, it's received by faith. God's health and strength is made perfect in the presence of your own weakness. But brothers and sisters, it is not God's will that we should live in sickness. If you don't catch any of the other nuances besides that truth, it would be good to hold on to that this morning. Satan has persuaded so many of us that we're just a sick kind of people. We have three colds every winter and we need to rest a lot after a hard day's work. Dear ones, Satan just pre-disposes us to sickness.

Loved ones, that's not God's will. God's will is health, so would you let Jesus come into your body for health and strength? Don't just keep him to the spiritual things but ask him, "Lord Jesus, I believe your Holy Spirit is here to bring health to my body. I want to die old and well." And that is God's will, for us to die well. It's not to die of sickness or disease, but to die of healthy old age after we've done what God planned for us to do.

So will you think about it over Christmas and asked yourself, "Am I giving ground to the whole lie that I am just a sickly person? Am I really living in all the health that God has for me?" I know that many of you are sitting there with pains and sicknesses of all kinds so I think we should be serious and pray for a time. Let us pray.