

Shameful Living Brings Death

Romans 6:21

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

What would you say is the real issue of Watergate? [U.S. political scandal] Not the Sam Irwin's "Eyebrows" anyway, not that, but what would you say was the real issue of Watergate? Is it the presidency? Is that the real issue? Whether Nixon remains president or not? Is it the very continued existence of a two-party system? Is it the constitution? Is it the moral life of the country that is the real issue? What would you say was the real issue? Why would you say that we are so concerned that Ehrlichman [John Ehrlichman was an advisor for President Nixon] can be on nationwide TV and defend and justify the right to burglary? What makes us concerned about that? What makes us concerned about Buchanan [Pat Buchanan was a special advisor to Nixon during Watergate] trying to justify the political dirty tricks? Well, I think most of us would say immediately, "Well, because from our very early days, we were taught these were things that you ought to be ashamed of, things like burglary and things like deceiving people and lying to people."

Well, is that the real issue of Watergate then -- that men have started to do shameful things in politics? Well, I think all of us here in the theater would say, "No, they have always been doing shameful things in politics, that's no change from what has always been the situation." Well, then why are we concerned? Is it not, brothers and sisters, because these men whom we respected and whom at least are elected officials, we felt were responsible men and were men worthy of respect? These men who were in the most influential and respected positions in our nation, not only did things that were wrong but they admit that they did them so blatantly and so bluntly that they suggest that these are things that are no longer to be ashamed of. Is that not what kind of gets us all a bit? It's not that these things have been done for the first time but it's that they admit them so blatantly and bluntly and then attempt to justify them so clearly and in such exaggerated term that the suggestion underlies it all that these are things that now we need no longer be ashamed of.

Is it not that that concerns us? Is it not true that deep down in our hearts -- even the most immoral among us this morning -- deep down in our hearts, we feel that shame is not altogether a bad thing? In fact that shame might be a very healthy thing. We have a kind of feeling that shame can be a guide to us, that just as you go near to a fire and you feel the burning of the fire that somehow keeps you out of the fire and at least keeps your body saved -- we kind of have a feeling that shame does the same kind of thing. Shame may well be keeping us from some dire consequences that would follow on a certain line of action, and therefore we feel shame is kind of a good thing, even though when we've experienced it ourselves, we've been most uncomfortable about it.

For instance all of us know the real problem with leprosy. The real problem with leprosy is not actually the leprosy itself but it's that a person loses the sense of touch in their extremities, their physical extremities. So they can put their finger into a flame if they have leprosy and they don't feel anything and actually what destroys a leper is not so much the disease itself but the injuries that are done to his own body because he has lost the sense of feel. Is it not true that we are just a little concerned about that in regard to shame?

This book [the Bible] always does far better with truths about life than we do. Things that we just vaguely suspect, this book seems to put very, very clearly. It capitalizes that principle there if you look at it, it's Romans 6:21, "But then what return did you get from the things of which you are

now ashamed? The end of those things is death." God puts it pretty clearly. He says, "Look the things that you're ashamed of, the end of those things is death." In other words, shameful things bring death. Shame is a good thing. It's a good guide to you because shameful living brings death eventually and so you should watch it.

That's why I think many of us feel that Hunt's [John Hunt, a former CIA agent] appearance actually reinforces reality -- even though it's just a shame, what so many of the underlings have suffered while so many of those who planned it, seemed to be getting away free. It's why Hunt's appearance -- haggard from jail, his wife dead in a plane crash, his own life utterly destroyed as far as future is concerned -- actually reinforces reality and strangely enough, does more for the nation and the constitution than the blustery and the bombastic performance of a man like Ehrlichman. Because somehow you begin to see, "Yeah, well there, shameful living does bring death. Yeah, your sins do find you out, yeah. There are certain absolutes that if you ignore them, will destroy you eventually."

That's why, for instance, old Westerns actually do more for true reality than many of their modern counterparts. Even though Westerns fantasize like mad about the old West, yet they repeatedly bring home the truth that you can tell the difference between good and bad and that good pays off and bad doesn't pay off or that shameful living brings death. Who are the good guys? The boys with the black hats, no problem, they're not the fellows that were supposed to be good and weren't really good, they are the boys with the black hats. Who rides off into the sunset with the girl? We all know the good guy. So the old Westerns really do a lot for this principle that shame actually does act as a guide to what is destroying us, that's why the old late night movies on TV do more for the teaching of absolutes in morality than many of the modern so-called realistic, existential movies -- because the old late-night movies always show that the honest, unselfish underdog comes out right in the end and the one who is evil suffers for his evil.

Really brothers and sisters, I think that's why many of us are just more than a little concerned about the whole of the Watergate mess because we feel it's somehow suggesting that this principle does not operate: that shameful living brings death. I think of course some of us here today would say, "Yeah, but brother isn't that true that that principle is often contradicted? Isn't that the real problem?" Many of us think the Haldemans and Ehrlichmans will continue to live in their massive houses while the poor little civil servant, who had been loyal over the years, will continue to pay heavier and heavier taxes and they'll continue to get off scot free. I think many of us would say, "That's the very problem. The mafias live in wealth while the poor little businessman, who has to pay his extortion money month after month, simply grinds a living out of the ground." Is it not true that this principle does not obtain any longer? Is it not true that often living that is regarded as shameful living actually seems to bring success and prosperity?

Now, you know that that problem was dealt with maybe 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 years ago in one of the oldest books in the Bible. It's the book of Job and maybe you'd look at it there. Job 21:7, "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?" Why does that happen? Why does it appear that the wicked do live and reach old age and grow mighty in power if shameful living brings death? "Their children are established in their presence, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them." And God answered that problem in the book of Job and Jesus answered it in the New Testament.

The answer was this: that it appears to pay off but at times they're able to gain superficial material benefits that don't actually give them any satisfaction deep down.

At times they're able to gain some kind of superficial respect from people who actually don't respect them and whom they cannot actually trust. At times, they seem to get some temporary, emotional exhilaration -- but it is superficial and it is not a deep satisfaction, deep down that is real -- and in fact, shameful living still does bring death inside and eventually, death outside. In fact, John pointed out that the whole world is in the power of the evil one and that there is a power of evil that tries to manipulate circumstances so that wicked people appear to be gaining but in fact he cannot provide them with a deep satisfaction such as the Creator of the world gives when we talk about real life and that shameful living itself actually does bring death.

Now maybe we should go on to that, the obvious question that you'd ask at that statement. All right, in what sense does it bring death? If they can get temporary superficial benefits, if they can get temporary respect from their peers, if they can get temporary emotional exhilaration, then in what sense does shameful living bring death? Maybe it's good to define both the terms that we're using. What is shameful living? Is shameful living immoral living? Is shameful living unconventional living? Is shameful living doing things that aren't nice? Well, I think society has tried to make the whole deal very dull by defining those things as shameful living. Those aren't necessarily shameful living though some of them may be.

You can see what shameful living is, brothers and sisters, if you look back to where the verse occurs in Romans. Romans 6:21, "But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death." Now, of which, of what are you ashamed? Well, it's in the previous verse. Romans 6:20, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." When you were slaves of sin, you did things of which you were ashamed. So shameful living or shameful acts and thoughts and words come from being a slave of sin.

Now, what is sin? Well, if you look at Romans 1:21 you'll see it defined clearly. "For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." Shameful living is sin and sin is living as if there's no God, that's it. Shameful living is living as if you have to get whatever you want in joy, whatever you desire, and manipulate whomever you please because there is nobody to look after you but yourself -- that's shameful living.

Brothers and sisters, every time you live with that attitude deep down, God has planned that there will come into you a sense of shame. He is so good to us, you know. Even when we're wheeling against him like mad, he still puts certain guides inside us that will let us know, "Look, you're on the wrong track, you're moving towards death." And whenever you live as if there's no loving Father to think of you at all, whenever you live as if you ought to get whatever you want, whatever anybody else thinks and certainly whatever He thinks -- when you live as if you have to grab all the emotional excitement and satisfaction you can get because He won't provide it for you, when you live as if you have to manipulate and dominate everybody else in order to stay alive and at the top of the heap -- in other words, if you live as if there is no loving Father who knows everything that happens to you and takes care of you, then a sense of shame comes into you and that sense of shame is good because it lets you know that you're moving towards death.

Now what is death? Well, the dictionary defines it as the cessation of life and what is life? The dictionary defines life as interaction with your environment. So death is the cessation of a full interaction with your environment. And the most real environment in which we live here in this world is the environment that was created by the supernatural power of life that God put around the earth. That is, there's a life of the Holy Spirit that is the only life that makes any light. There would

be no sunlight if the Holy Spirit was not there to keep the sun in the position it's in. There would be no winds if the Holy Spirit was not there sustaining the whole operation. There is a power, an invisible power that keeps the world in the place in gravity that it is. There is a Holy Spirit that gives the ability to smile, that gives the ability to laugh, that gives the ability for eyes to light up. If there were no Holy Spirit, none of that would take place.

Now death is the cessation of interaction between you and this life of the supernatural power of God. Once you cease to interact with that life of the Holy Spirit, your mind begins to be impaired through its lack, your emotions begin to be unbalanced, your bodies begin to become weakened and as well as that your sense of shame begins to alienate you from other people so you begin to find yourself pushed off from others. You no longer have that open relationship with other friends that you had before, when you do something that brings shame. Then eventually that works to put you into a life of darkness and loneliness in the ultra super spatial, super time life that will go on after this world ends. So it separates you finally from any source of life forever. That's what death is.

It's an immediate experience that you have through the limiting of your own psychological being, it's an immediate experience you have of a break in relationship between yourself and other people and it's a final experience of separation from the Creator of life Himself. And so forever you live in darkness and loneliness. Now that's what we mean, dear ones, when we say that shameful living brings death.

Could we take just two instances of it so that you see it in particular terms? God was good in giving Judas that sense of shame when he decided to betray his friend. Now you can see it if you look at it in John 13:26-30 and immediately Judas set out toward death. God gave him the sense of shame as a warning that he was beginning this great journey into death in his own experience. John 13:26, "Jesus answered", you remember he was trying to explain that one of them would betray him, they said Lord who is it? "Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas," which was Judas's first warning "the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him." So obviously, the morsel was not given in such an obvious way that they had all seen it. "Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the feast'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night."

Old Judas felt immediately, "Boy, I have to get out of this. I can't stay with this man. He knows what I am going to do. I can't stay," and the shame drove him out into the night and you know the night so often in New Testament means darkness and loneliness because that's what night so often is, where there is no light. And Judas was driven into separation on his own and shame drove him into that. The purpose of it was to try to keep him, to try to keep him from going further into death. In fact he went further and you remember the result in Matthew 27:3-5. "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself." So that's a very obvious proof of the truth.

Here is the way it operates in you and me in regard to betrayal of friends. You have a roommate who isn't perfect because no roommate is. Who knows, you might not even be perfect yourself! So, you have a roommate and you have a real friendship with the roommate. You're not terribly close but you

have a friendship and you are sharing some things together that you really need so you're a real benefit to each other however close you are. You get together with another person who is equally close to you and that person says something about your roommate. And you, because you want as much respect from as great a number of people as possible and you can gain that through having many many confidences with people -- and mind you, that comes because you really don't feel that the Creator of the universe is the only confidence and the only approval that you need and that's why you do this kind of thing.

So really because you live as if there is no loving Father who thinks the world of you and therefore, what does it matter what anybody else thinks of you, because you don't believe that, at that moment even though you don't think it out and make it explicit, you join in. You say, "Yeah, you're right. Yeah, his socks do smell, they really do" or, "Yeah, he really does talk loud. Oh yeah, she doesn't dress very well," and you say something about the roommate with this other person and you know fine well that immediately you do that, there is a little tiny sense of shame.

I mean there is a wee feeling inside you, "Well, I am not really being honest here and if this other person were here, if my roommate was here, I wouldn't say these things. I just would be too ashamed and embarrassed to say them in front of them like this", and there does come a little sense of shame and that kind of guides you that you're moving into death and then you know what it's like when you go back to the roommate. Wordsworth has poignant line in a poem, "There hath past away a glory from the earth", and it's strange -- it doesn't matter how shallow or superficial the relationship with the roommate is, yeah when you go back to them after talking about them, "there hath past away a glory from the earth". It's not just the same it was.

Oh, maybe they are open with you but you know what's in your heart. You know you talked about them behind their back and the beginnings of separation begin to come between you and there just isn't that open relationship. There isn't the enjoyment, even on a superficial level, the enjoyment of open love, the feeling that you're absolutely honest with each other as far as you've gone in your relationship. Now that's death, loved ones, that's the separation of death beginning to set in. And that's what happens, that's how it operates and actually if you continue to behave that way you eventually behave that way with other people in regard to God and so you actually separate yourself from him, you separate yourself actually from the Holy Spirit. The reason you can't love the roommate the way you used to, is because you've turned yourself off from the Holy Spirit and there is not the love of the Holy Spirit pouring through you to the roommate, that's it.

That's why you're always in trouble when you say, "Oh, I just have to psyche myself into it again. I am sure I can love them. Ah, hello, hello" -- and you give them a big hello and there's just nothing, you know. It's because you cut yourself off from the Holy Spirit in regard to that relationship and so there isn't love coming out from you to that other person. It's the same with parents, same with anyone, loved ones, that you break a confidence with. You are actually moving into death and the shame is a warning to you that that had happened.

Let's take the other example to almost at the other end of the scale though actually it's the same problem in a deep way. It's in I Corinthians if you look at it. I Corinthians 5:1-2 and Paul is dealing with some problems that the Corinthian church was having and this is one of the more obvious ones. I Corinthians 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you." And Paul reinforces the whole sense of shame in regard to this piece of sexual promiscuity and incest.

He reinforces this sense of shame. Now why does he do it, loved ones? The next few verses show you.

"For thou absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Paul delivered the man to Satan in the sense that he disciplined him out of the church. He said get him out of the church. It must be brought home to him that the shame that he presumably felt at the beginning of the relationship actually does show that he is on dangerous ground and to emphasize that, to emphasize so that he does not become deceived and think that a child of God can live that way, get him out of the church. And get him out for one purpose, not because we can't do anything about him but because this will bring home to him that he is living in the midst of his own flesh -- not his body, not sexual sin -- but living in the flesh is living as if you cannot get the emotional exhilaration and satisfaction from God that you need and therefore you go to anybody for it.

You'll go to sexual intercourse for it, you'll go to some kind of incestuous relationship for it because you do not really believe nor do you experience the emotional satisfaction of a real relationship with your Maker. And you just don't believe that you can get all from him that you need, nor do you believe that he is giving you all that you need and you want more and that's the reason you go into this kind of relationship. So Paul said to destroy the flesh, to destroy that independent attitude to your right to emotional satisfaction, discipline the man right out of the church because only this way, only by reinforcing the sense of shame, have we any chance of doing anything with him or for him and of course that's what happened. That was the result of it if you look at the second letter of Corinthians, because obviously the man came into a spirit of penitence and repentance.

II Corinthians 2:6-11, "For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough; so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." So obviously if he needed comfort, he at last came into repentance. "So I beg you to affirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs." Now brothers and sisters, that's the purpose of shame -- good shame, not imaginary shame that society produces -- but there is a good, healthy sense of shame that is there to keep us from falling into death without knowing it.

The man here this morning who is living with a woman outside marriage had a sense of shame the first time they ever had intercourse. You remember it so often described in books if some of you have not had the unfortunate experience, the sense of shame comes upon you and you're forced to say, "I love you", after the act, to try to kind of make yourselves feel that, "Well, it was all right. I mean there's love in it anyway." But the sense of shame that that man first felt was from God and was a good gift of God to guide him to the truth that he was moving toward death, that he was demanding some kind of emotional and physical exhilaration and satisfaction that God did not feel he had to have at that moment and that he did not actually have to have and that God was well able to provide him this emotional satisfaction and exhilaration inside the bounds of his own will and that man felt that sense of shame.

If there's a girl here who has at anytime had intercourse with someone or closeness to someone outside the bounds of marriage, the first time it happened, there was shame. Now brothers and

sisters, what I am saying to you is, this shame is a good gift of God. It's a good gift of God. It's right. It is not foolishness. That old shame that your parents feel because you're living with someone outside the marriage bond, it's not old Victorian goody goodness, it is not old-fashioned inhibitions. That shame is not the middle-class morality of the bourgeoisie. It is not. That shame is a dear gift of God, which is as useful to you as the feeling of burning is when you put your hand near a fire. It's a good guide to you that the Creator is giving you. Brothers and sisters, you are moving towards death and if you keep going this way, you'll eventually lose the sense of touch like the leper until you have no sense of shame and you'll go into death without knowing it.

Now brothers and sisters, that's really what I think God wants to share with us this morning. That shameful living does bring death and shame is a good thing. If you say to me, the shame that society gave us, the shame that you're breaking society's conventions? No, not that at all. The shame that you're doing something that's very baddy bad and that people like you wouldn't do? No, no. But the shame that God gives, the shame that he gives that you're beginning to live independent of him and demand things that he does not want you to have at that moment.

Loved ones, if you don't respond to that shame, you'll move more and more into death in our own life. So dear ones, I don't want you to get neurotic about it or afraid to do everything, but do you see that there is in each one of us, a good healthy thing called shame and it's a good guy. I am with you, if you say to me, "Brother, aren't there a hundred false senses of guilt that we have?" Yes, yes. I am not talking about those. There are plenty of false senses of guilt but there's a shame that comes when you disobey the lines that God has laid down for our lives.

You know if you want to check, is it the false sense of shame, just look up the book [the Bible], that's it. Just look up the book. If you feel a terrible shame that you washed your hand five times that day, look up the book and see is it wrong to wash my hands five times? It's not. Okay, so that's a false sense of shame but if you have a sense of shame after sexual promiscuity, if you have a sense of shame after unclean thoughts then look up the book. Does it say if you have unclean thoughts in your mind then you're disobeying God and you're living independent of Him? Yes, it does.

If you have had a sense of shame over the way you're dealing with your money, look up the book. Okay, am I giving a tenth of it to Him? Am I not? All right, that's shame. But loved ones, God is good, you know. He is so good to us. Even when we're moving away from him and away from warmth and life and light and we're moving into our own solar system of darkness and loneliness and coldness, even then God is giving us that gift of shame inside to let us know. So it's really good.

So, I am all with you. Let's keep away from middle class morality and all that stuff but let's see that there is a good shame that guides us about what brings death and what brings life. I pray that this quarter that really we'll live free from shame. Just live free from shame, whether it's the roommate and betraying them or whether it's the sexual business and destroying our own bodies, but we live free from shame. There's a good place to live, way in the light, above the tree line, above the tree line, above the shadows and the shades and the darkness, there's a good place where you can live in real peace and real happiness. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that you don't leave us in vague uncertainties about life and death. So Father, we thank you for these feelings that we've had at times and Father we want to nourish these feelings inside us. We don't want to become insensitive like a leper. Father, we don't want that moral leprosy that brings us into absolute death. Father, we trust you that by your Holy Spirit you will show each of us that there is a healthy shame that is a good gift from you and that tells us

which way we should move.

We trust you our Father for any brother or sister here this morning who has sensed that shame. We trust you Father for good grace and strength for them to get up on their two feet and walk the right way towards life and light and you for your glory. Amen.