

Walking According To The Spirit

Romans 8:4

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

You remember the night that the servants of the high priests arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane -- you remember the scene -- and then coming into the Garden and surrounding him and his disciples. Now there was an incident that took place then. And I'd ask you to look at it with me, loved ones. It's John 18:10-11. So the high priest followers had surrounded the disciples and Jesus. "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?'"

Now what was the cup, which the Father had given him? Well, if you'd see that, you'll find it in Matthew 16:21 where he had explained it carefully to Peter long before that incident took place. "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.'"

So Jesus knew that God had a plan for his life, and he was determined to drink the cup of that plan to the last drop. But Peter rebelled against the whole plan and felt, "No, Jesus, don't die. Stay alive as long as possible and liberate the Jews from the Romans." And so Peter rejected the plan that God had completely, and was determined to ensure that his plan would be executed by the strength of his own strong right arm. And that was the situation in the garden, loved ones -- Gethsemane.

Now loved ones, that is sin in the flesh. That is sin in the flesh: independent action by ourselves on the basis of our own needs for self-preservation, absolutely independent of what God wants, and using our own power to bring it about. That's sin in the flesh. You remember we came across it last Sunday, because in Romans 8:3, it says that God sent Jesus, and he destroyed sin in the flesh in Jesus.

Now sin in the flesh is just Peter's action in the garden. It's action and attitudes within ourselves, that are motivated by priorities of the body's need for self-preservation and self-gratification independent of God -- what God wants.

Now I think some of us who are activists are prone to say, "Oh, that's it. Sin in the flesh is action, and today's study, walking in the Spirit, is doing nothing, leaving it all up to God."

Well no, you know Jesus did plenty. I mean he healed lepers, and he rebuked the religious leaders, and he carried his own Cross, and he turned over the tables of the moneylenders. So walking in the Spirit is certainly action. But sin in the flesh is action that is motivated by our own selfish desire for things, for pleasure, for power and influence. That's what sin in the flesh is. It's action and attitude that is independent of God that is for our own benefit, and is motivated by the old body's need for things, and for pleasure, and for security. That's what sin in the flesh is.

And really that's what God is opposing in Jesus. And going back to last Sunday's verse, some of you may say, "Well, I mean why did he destroy sin in the flesh?" Maybe you should look at that verse because some of us weren't here last Sunday and maybe you should get the continuity for today's study. Romans 8:3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

Some of us may say, "Well, going back to that verse, I mean why did God have to condemn sin to destruction in the flesh?" Well, the answer is that we men and women had been operating that way for so long over so many centuries that we have actually managed to twist our own personalities, so that they only worked that way. That's it. Somebody comes at us with a sword; we take out our sword and cut the ear off.

We've been operating that way so long that our personalities have become twisted and forced into a rut whereby they always work from the body-fear mechanism or the body's 'need for security mechanism' or the body's 'need for comfort and pleasure mechanism', worked from the outside in all the time. It's been going for centuries like that.

You remember what happened with Cain and Abel, way at the beginning. Cain and Abel were two brothers. They brought two sacrifices to God but God judged that Cain's heart was not truly penitent and Abel's was. And so he refused Cain's sacrifice. Old Cain, you know, kind of casual like, "Would you like to come out into the field with me, Abel?" And then, just takes out a sword and kills his brother. And then when God says to him, "Where is your brother?" he says, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

So that was from that early stage. But loved ones, the whole race has been operating that way for generations. So much so that we have developed personalities that are twisted so that that's the way they automatically operate. So that we try to do what God wants us to do, but our whole personalities have been rutted into that kind of activity for so long that they are now hopelessly reversed and perverted. And the only way God can give us any chance to do what he wants is to destroy that old reversed personality completely.

Find the same line again, and you'll see yourself in this one: there with Jacob. You remember Jacob and Esau? You remember Jacob had conned his brother Esau out of his inheritance as an elder brother. Then years later, he heard that Esau was coming with many, many men to meet him. And so look at Jacob's action, if you look at it in Genesis 32:11. And first, you see, he tries to do it the way God wants him to. He prays. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, the mothers with the children." So he did make the effort to do the thing right, to go to God first and say, "Lord, I did the wrong thing in regard to my brother. Will you protect me now?"

But it's like ourselves, you know. We say a prayer, and then we think, "Well, we'd better stack the deck the right way anyway, just in case the prayer doesn't work." And you get it in Genesis 32:13. "So he lodged there that night, and took from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau, two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten he-asses. These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants..." As usual you know, our own system becomes highly complicated. "'Pass on before me, and put a space between drove and drove.' He instructed the foremost, 'When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, "To whom do you belong?"'" We can get our old system in it, you know. We're always manipulating. And every time we

manipulate, everybody has to say just the right word. "Don't tell them it this way. Tell it them that way."

""To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these before you?" then you shall say, "They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my Lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us." He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, 'You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him, and you shall say, "Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, 'I may appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.'"

That's 'sin in the flesh'. Not necessarily doing anything wrong. 'Sin in the flesh' is not necessarily murdering people or committing adultery or committing fornication. 'Sin in the flesh' is just acting independent of whether there's a Creator or whether there is not a Creator, independent of what he wants from our life or what he doesn't want, but acting on the basis of the old body desires for pleasure, security and power over other people. That's, loved ones, what sin in the flesh is. And the truth is that we, as a human race, have been acting that way so long that our personalities are hopelessly twisted into that direction.

So for God to get us to operate the other way, he has to first of all deal with this miserable, twisted, perverted personality. You know -- some of you know the diagram. But it's a fast way, I think, of reminding you of it. But that was the way our personalities were supposed to work there [shows 3 concentric rectangles with the innermost labeled "spirit" and the next level out labeled "soul" and the outer labeled "body" and shows an arrow from God to our spirit and then out to our soul and then out to our body and then out to the world].

And it was God's plan that we would always operate that way. We would operate by praying to him as Jacob tried to at the beginning, and asking God what he wanted. Then he would give us the life of his Holy Spirit in communion with him and would, through the intuition of our spirits, guide us as to what we should do. And then our conscience [in our spirit] would constrain our will [in our soul] on the basis of that guidance, and direct our mind and emotions [also in the soul] so that they would understand God's will for us. Our emotions would experience the joy of doing it. And we would pass it on through our bodies to the world, and express it through our bodies to the world. And that was God's plan for us that we operate that way.

Now of course, we kept rejecting that. We kept acting as Cain did on the basis of security or jealousy or pride, on the basis of Jacob, his fear of his brother, on the basis of Peter, let's get our own way -- the way it's our own judgment is right in this instance. And we began to operate the personalities the other way completely [shows arrows from the world outside in to our bodies, in to our souls and in to our spirits]. And so we began to be dominated by our minds and emotions and they in turn were dominated, of course from here [indicates the body], by the needs of the body. And we began to concentrate on doing things that would give us enjoyment, that would give us control of other people, that would exploit our flesh, and give us a sense of thrill in that area. So our whole personalities have been reversed and perverted.

Now that's why God destroyed sin in the flesh. He took our whole personalities, put them into Jesus, and destroyed that old personality there. And that's really what that means, that that was the way we operated. And God took that personality that operated from the outside in, from the body and its desires and its needs and its necessities, and put it on the cross and destroyed it, and raised us up as a new personality. And that's what God has done.

What we shared last day was that God had done that with every one of us. He has destroyed sin in the flesh. He has destroyed that old personality that worked the wrong way around. In other words really, he took Peter's old desire to retaliate, immediately somebody attacked him, and he put it into Jesus. And even though Jesus could have, at any time, called millions of angels to his aid, yet when the Roman soldier put the spear into his side, he accepted it and refused to retaliate, on the basis of the needs of his own body, and the desire of his own mind and emotions to protect himself. And in doing that, he destroyed Peter's powerful, retaliate, brave force inside his personality.

So he made it possible for Peter to receive a new personality. And that's what he has done with each one of us. He has taken out old personality of yours that has been used to operating the other way for years. He has put it in Jesus, and destroyed it there.

Loved ones, here is a question, if Peter just believed that, would he fulfill God's will for his life? That is, if Peter said, "Well, I believe that my old desire to retaliate was crucified with Jesus. I believe that. Okay, now Lord, does that satisfy you?" God would have to say, "No. I destroyed your old contorted, perverted personality so that you would be able to obey me. It's not enough for you just to believe that I removed this old personality that prevented you obeying me, out of the way. I have done that so that you will obey me -- so that you will take advantage of the new personality I have given you -- so that you will take advantage of the death of your old self and old flesh, in Jesus, and you'll begin to obey me."

"In other words, the reason I took your old perverted personality and put it into Jesus and destroyed it, was to stop you cutting off people's ears. That was why I did it. It wasn't so that you carry on saying, as you took the 25th ear off a 25th high priest guard, 'Oh well, I believe my old personality has been destroyed in Jesus.' No, I did it so that you would stop cutting off ears and so that you would take advantage of the new personality that I have given you."

Now loved ones, many of us I think, have a misapprehension about this. I think many of us think, "Oh no, you've got it wrong. Jesus died to his desire to retaliate against the Roman soldiers. Jesus destroyed my old selfish personality in himself and the perverted drive of my psyche and of my spirit, so that I would not have to do it myself. So, Jesus fulfilled the law so that I do not have to fulfill it."

And loved ones there are people down through the centuries who have been called antinomians. An antinomian -- 'anti' and 'nomos' is Greek for law and 'anti' against the law -- and there have been people down through the years who have been antinomians and have said, "No, no. Jesus destroyed the selfish drive in himself and obeyed God's law so that I wouldn't have to do it any longer." And they will say, "You don't need to do anything. You just need to believe that your old personality has been crucified with Jesus and that's enough. And you can do what you like then. You can live how you please, because the important thing is, Jesus has fulfilled the law for you."

And of course it just contradicts the ideas of our own logic. But it contradicts also this verse, loved ones, that we're studying today. So maybe you'd look at it and if you'd just take it word-by-word. Romans 8:3-4, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." For what purpose? So that we would not have to do anything else but believe? No! "In order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us."

That's why God did it. God destroyed the old carnal, reversed personality that we have, that has made it impossible for us to obey him. He destroyed that in Jesus in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. Now an antinomian will read that verse you see, and say, "Ah, no! It's the verse is wrong. The Greek is wrong. The word is not 'en' [Greek for] 'in'. It is in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled 'for' us." No! It's that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled 'in' us.

You can't go home and lose your temper with your wife; you can't go home and tell lies about the missed assignment and say, "Okay, Jesus has fulfilled that law for me so I don't need to fulfill it." The fact is, loved ones, Jesus wants to fulfill the law 'in' you, not 'for' you.

What Jesus did 'for' you was to die for you, so that God could take your miserable, perverted personality, put it into Jesus and destroy it there, and make a new beautiful personality available to you, that was adapted for God's original purpose, of working according to 'his' judgment and by 'his' power. But that is what Jesus did 'for' you. But he did that 'for' you so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled 'in' you.

I think some of us who have been brought up maybe under a 'kind' of antinomian teaching -- we will react and say, "Oh that's works righteousness. You're saying, 'We have to do something! We have to do something!'" Well no, not really loved ones! It's the passive voice you see -- the verb is in the passive voice there in Romans 8:4. "...In order that the just requirement of the law might 'be' fulfilled in us."

In other words, I am right with you. You have no more power to obey God's law after your old self has been destroyed in Jesus than before it was destroyed. You can't obey God's law yourself; it has to be fulfilled 'in' you by the Holy Spirit of Jesus. So it's the Holy Spirit of Jesus that obeys the law, but he does obey it in you.

So, you can't afford to say to your mom or your dad, "Yeah, yeah. Well I know I lost my temper, but it's okay. Jesus -- in some ephemeral place in the seventh heaven -- is obeying the law for me. And it doesn't matter what I am doing down here," because your mom or dad have every right to say, "No, no. No, the teaching is that Jesus is obeying it 'in' you. And if he is obeying it in you, it's probable that I'll be able to perceive it!"

And so, Jesus' Spirit fulfills the law in us. But that's the purpose of it loved ones, that we would express and let Jesus express, his obedience to the law 'through' us. And that's why God destroyed that old perverted self, so that the law might be fulfilled 'in' us.

Really what we've to do is let him. It's a wee bit like somebody buying you a new electric carving knife for Christmas. And you put it up on the shelf. And you have the old knife, and you take it, and you just throw it out into the garbage bin. And you realize 'no more sawing.' And then you sit there and you say, "Well, I believe that old knife has been thrown out. And I believe I have a perfectly new knife that will enable me to cut just efficiently, and just with absolute freedom and relaxation. I believe it." And you just look at the old roast sitting there. And you expect any minute to see it falling into slices. And it doesn't matter how 'much' you believe! It doesn't matter how much you believe the old knife has been thrown away, and you've got a new knife. If you just keep believing and sitting there, that meat will never be cut.

That's one mistake I think some of us make. We say, "Oh it's enough just to believe that my old

personality has gone." It's not enough. You have to take advantage of the new personality that is there.

On the other hand, there's no point either in getting the carving knife down, sticking the knife in and going to it, just sawing back and forward the way you used to, in the old days with the old knife, because it's just going to be as hard as ever. There's no point in doing what you used to do to get the meat cut, and yet you do have to do something. You don't have to do what you used to do with the old knife, but you do have to do something. You have to flick the switch.

So it's not right to say, "We don't have to do anything." It is right to say, "We don't have to do what we used to do. We don't have to saw that old meat the way we used to, but we do have to flick the knife. Otherwise the power that is available there will never do its work as it was meant to.

Loved ones, it's the same with us. You're dead right if you're having trouble obeying God. You're dead right when you say, "I can't. I can't." You're right. Your old personality has been so used to acting from the outside and from the needs of the body inside that unless you get rid of that old selfish, reversed personality, you won't be able to obey God's law at all. But the important thing to see is, once you believe that it has been destroyed and that there is a new personality available to you in Jesus, then you do have to flick the switch. You do have to let the Spirit of Jesus begin to run your life.

So it's right, you don't have the old legalistic concentration on every jot and tittle of the law to make sure, "I don't go wrong here. I don't go wrong there." You don't have to legalistically try to fulfill the law like that, but you do have to do something. You have to let the Holy Spirit of Jesus begin to operate in your life. And that of course, often means letting him express love through your body to somebody else, instead of exploiting somebody else's body for the sake of your own.

It does mean that you have to often be content with experiencing just the joy of letting Jesus life flow through you, and stop looking for more and more enjoyment from circumstances and situations and other people. It does mean you'll have to be content for your mind to concentrate on understanding God's will and God's plan for you, instead of using your mind to control and manipulate other people for your own purposes.

So it does mean letting the Spirit of Jesus flow through you. And that means rejecting once and for all, the old reversed personality that has been crucified with him. And loved ones, do you see how you do that in Romans 8:4? "In order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." That's how you flick the switch, by walking not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, by walking not according to this direction from the outside in, but according to this direction from the inside out, beginning at last, to give up concentrating on the law and obeying it, and avoiding sin, and begin instead, to pay attention to this dear new friend that is inside you, called the Holy Spirit. And [you begin] when he tells you to speak, to speak; when he tells you to turn, to turn; when he tells you to be silent, to be silent and to start listening to him and running your life by this Holy Spirit. And then one day, you'll glance around and you'll suddenly find to your surprise that the just requirements of the law are being fulfilled in your life, and you never thought about fulfilling them. You've just been so busy concentrating on this Holy Spirit.

Now that's God's plan for us. What I'd like to spend the next seven weeks doing, is talking about how to walk after the Spirit, and not walk after the flesh. But that's the secret, walking after the

Spirit. That's how to come into victory and deliverance.

So, will you think loved ones, of some of those things, and just see if there has been some misunderstanding in your own mind or some deception that Satan has brought, and just get it straight in your own heart so that we can really get down to business these next couple of months, and talk about how to walk after the Spirit, and not walk after the flesh? Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that you have done all in Jesus' death that needs to be done. But we thank you Lord that you did it so that you would be able to see your law fulfilled in our lives, so that our friends would be able to meet people who are kind and gentle and loving and understanding, people who are free from that jealousy and anger, critical resentment.

So Father we trust you now to make it clear to us that you have done everything that was needed to change our personalities, and we can afford to trade that old personality in now for the new one that you have given us in Jesus. And Father we know that old personality has been crucified and done away with forever. And we know that this new one will work only as we follow this dear Holy Spirit that you've given us.

So, Holy Spirit, we would give ourselves to following you and walking after you in these coming days. And we know that incidentally, as a result of that, we will end up fulfilling the law. Dear Father, we trust you to make all these truths real in each one of us in these coming days, for Jesus glory. Amen.