

Fear or Trust?

Romans 8:16a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There are two very different worlds that we human beings can live in. Have you ever thought of that?

And really we look as if we're the same kind of being. And yet what we have been finding over the past few weeks is that we really do belong to two different worlds; that we're divided. And it is very important that we see what we have in common. Otherwise, we couldn't be of any use to each other. But it's equally important to see that we're of two different worlds and maybe the person beside you could live in an entirely different world to you, and maybe the person behind you is a very, very different kind of being to you. This is what I mean: some of us are utterly preoccupied with our physical and mental needs, that's the world we live in. It's just good to be honest about it. So it's important if this describes you to be real about it. Don't say, "Oh well, he's describing the bad ones now, let me wait for the good ones." No, let's be real about it so that God can give us some honesty or truth. Maybe some of us who think we belong to the good guys, aren't really with the good guys. And so it is very important to break the old patterns of our thinking, loved ones.

And some of us are utterly preoccupied with, will we get a new stereo, or will we get a new car, or the new coat that we're going to get, or we're all taken up with whether we should buy a new lipstick or not, or we're preoccupied with whether we're fat or whether we're thin, whether we look good or whether we don't look good. And really, that's what governs our life. Those are the reasons we work too -- and loved ones, be real. Many of us are like that. So don't sit there and say, "Oh, no, no. I know you're preparing us for something here. No, that's not me, that's not me." Be real, some of us regard those as the reasons for working. Indeed, if we hadn't those reasons, we would be glad enough not to work. We really just work because we have to work to get money to get these things and if we hadn't these things to think of we'd kind of be pretty bored and we'd wonder what to do with our lives. The hours would just seem to drag on. And so there are many of us who belong to that world. Really, we are not much better, truly, than sophisticated little animals, really we aren't. We're just sophisticated little animals.

We're all taken up with whether we'll have a dry bed the rest of our lives, where our next meal is going to come from and that tends to be our preoccupation. And that's the kind of people that are described in a verse that we've looked at before, it's Ephesians 2:3. And some of us belong to this world and it's better for us to just face it, and be honest about it. "Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh," and the passions doesn't need to be filled with lust and tremendous emotion fervor, passions in the Greek can mean just the desires of the flesh. "Following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." And many of us belong to that world.

Our lives are governed by the desires of our bodies and minds and we keep trying to find distinctions between ourselves and our little dogs, but really we're not very different. Dry bed, shelter, food, and can we play after work and that tends to be it. And we kind of try to make it a little more sophisticated and decorate it a little with a little interest and philosophy, but that is basically what governs our lives.

Now there are others of us here this morning who govern our lives not by the appetites of our body or by the desires of our minds and emotions but, we govern our lives by a spirit that is inside us. We really do believe there is a divine employment service. We believe that. We believe there is a divine labor exchange and we believe that the Creator of the universe put us here to do a particular job and to express a vital part of himself that he couldn't express through anybody else in the universe. And we have begun to know his mind and we have begun to understand how he thinks through this invisible spirit that we received by simply asking him for this spirit and, this spirit has begun to let us sense what the Creator of the world is after.

It doesn't bother us that this spirit is invisible because we know all the most precious things in the world like love and atoms are invisible. So we realize that the things that govern the whole world are invisible things -- so that the fact that this Holy Spirit is invisible does not trouble us. But we have begun to find that he guides and directs what we do day-by-day and that is what governs us and we're governed by that. So, we're really interested in what this Creator wants to do in certain situations that come up in our lives and we're interested in any and every movement we see that tends to be bringing about his order for his world. And we spend our lives interested in how we can forward that whole drive towards order that he is trying to bring about.

Material needs are a marginal thing with us. We know that he is going to give us what we need as long as we do the job he wants us to do and so we spend most of our time preoccupied with him, really interested in what he is trying to do, really interested in what he wants us to do. So a recession comes along and yeah we suffer like everybody else, but we do believe that if we take care of what he has given us to take care of he will take care of our needs and so we live in that kind of a world that is really governed by this spirit of God. And you remember we came across that in the verse we studied last Sunday in Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." So there are some of us here this morning who are that kind of being. We are sons and daughters of God and we believe we belong to that world. We spend most of our time thinking of our loving Father and getting to know him and getting to understand him. Now loved ones, that's the situation and I think most of you would agree that more or less all of us here belong to either one world or the other.

Now how do you know which you belong to? Do you just keep hoping and then find out when you die which one you belong to, or is there any way by which you can know for sure what kind of being you are? Because loved ones, some of us here are just going to die out at the end of this life. Or, we're going to go into the kind of "No Exit" self-torture that Sartre talks about in that play. But we're either going to go into that kind of self-torturing experience forever or we're going to go on and live with this Being who started the whole thing that we have around us. And so it is important to know which way you're heading if only so you can do something about it.

How do you know the difference? Well, loved ones, Romans 8:16 really makes it very clear. It is possible to know whether you are a son or daughter of God or not, "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we're children of God." That's how you know. It's important that he's given us that clear direction because a lot of us are anxious to persuade ourselves that we are children of God. We think if we have some holy aspirations or come to church now and again, or even come to church regularly, that we probably are children of God. We think when we have an odd generous loving feeling toward somebody else, "Ah, we must be a child of God." We think when we believe that Jesus died for the whole world therefore we must be children of God. We'll even believe that if we think at times that he might have died for us, we must be children of God. We're

always anxious loved ones, we human beings are incorrigibly proud, presumptuous things. And we're always anxious to persuade ourselves that we are better than we really are and that is why it is so important to face the ground of Christian assurance here very plainly so that you won't persuade yourself.

You know how persuaded we are that we're a Christian nation and how ridiculous the very concept is. You know how easily we want to look at the good side of ourselves. So would you look with me just at these signs -- clear signs -- that give you an assurance that you're a child of God. Do you see in the verse? There are two spirits mentioned dear ones. One has a capital "S", you see that, it is the Spirit. It's "Hanuman" in Greek. "Ha" is the article in Greek and when you get the article, it is always translated in English by a capital "S" you see. Whereas the next word "spirit" did not have an article and it's translated as small "s". So you see there are two spirits mentioned and it is the witness of both these spirits that assure us that we are children of God, that enable us to know that if we die this moment we go straight to be with the Creator of the universe and live in a more beautiful world than this. And that first spirit is God's Spirit, capital S -- and the second spirit is the human spirit.

So you see we have human spirits, otherwise we couldn't receive God's spirit into us at all. God's spirit can't come into your mind because it is not intellectual life. It can't come into your emotions because it is not emotional life. It can't come into your body because it is not physical life. It has to come into a part of you that is spiritual itself and you have a human spirit. When dear ones contact evil spirits they are using their spirit to contact evil spirits. Or when you begin to play along with ESP, you're getting into that level where the psyche is being raised to the nth degree where it is just about to be involved with mediums and with the spiritual world, the evil spiritual world. So all of us have spirits and it's that human spirit that provides part of the witness and the Spirit of God provides the rest of the witness that you're a child of God.

Now what is the witness of God's spirit? Well, it is really very easy to understand it. If you keep in mind that the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the third person of the Trinity, so the spirit of God is a person. He's a person. So you can have the relationship with him that you can have with an ordinary person and you can have the awareness and the consciousness of what he knows about you that an ordinary person can have. Do you know Leighton Carlson? Some of us say, "Nah, no, never heard of him." And, some people in the New Testament you remember said, "No, I never even heard that there was a Holy Spirit." And so, some of us would take that attitude to that name Leighton Carlson, or I could mention and you could mention a dozen other names and you would all say, "No, no, I don't know him at all."

Now it is possible to have that consciousness of your relationship or your lack of relationship with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. It isn't a whole lot of mumbo jumbo, it's just, "Do I know the Holy Spirit? Do I know Jesus?" Now you either know him or don't know him. Now some of you may answer, "Well, no I don't know Leighton Carlson, but I've heard about him. I've heard about him through other people. But I don't really know him myself." So, some of you this morning may say, "Well, I've heard you talking about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit and so I know a lot about them. Yeah, I kind of know about them but I really don't know them myself."

And then, some of you can go a little further and say, "Well, yeah I know Leighton Carlson, but he doesn't know me." And I'd put it to you loved ones -- wouldn't you know that he doesn't know you, isn't that true? It means you don't sit there and say, "Well, I know Leighton Carlson but I don't know whether he knows me or not." You know that. You sit there and you're all taking the attitude,

yeah, I know him or I don't know him but the one thing you do know is whether he knows you or not. So you either sit there and say, "Well, I know him but he doesn't know me." Or, you sit there and say, "I know him and I know that he knows me."

That is just a personal relationship that we have with each other. You know that dear ones, because a lot of you know me and I see your dear faces and I know you to see you but I really don't know you personally. And, if someone came to me and mentioned your name and said, "Do you know so and so?" I would have to say, "Well, no I don't know them." And they would say, "Well, they know you." But, do you see that a deep relationship means you know the other person and you know that they know you. So some of you will say, "Yeah I know Leighton Carlson and I know that he knows me." Now you can know that, loved ones.

It's the same with the dear Holy Spirit and with Jesus. If I ask you, "Do you know Jesus and do you know the Holy Spirit, and do you know that they know you?" You have a deep sense inside of whether that's so or not. Yes, you do. Now that's part of the witness of God's spirit -- when you can say, "Yes, I know Jesus, and I know the Holy Spirit and I know that this Jesus knows me." Now loved ones you can say that or you can fail to say that but that's part of the witness of God's spirit. The Holy Spirit witnesses inside you whether he is satisfied with you and whether he knows you and whether his son, the Lord Jesus knows you or not. The Holy Spirit's task is to give you that sense inside. So do you see that, loved ones? It's no use, you kind of sitting there and saying, "Oh well, I mean I kind of know Jesus. I mean, I kind of do. Yeah, I know him." But do you know that he knows you? That's it.

You can kind of say, "Oh well, intellectually I conclude that he's the son of God and he knows all things so he must know me." Yes, but you know that's not my question. I am asking you, do you know personally in your own heart that Jesus knows you, that he's met you, that he's encountered you, that he understands you, that he's talked with you, that you and he have discussed things together in prayer or walking along the road. Now that's part of the witness of God's spirit. That's part of how the Holy Spirit lets you know if Jesus is really satisfied with you.

Now, you can say, "In what way satisfied?" Well you know the way any personal relationship goes. It goes like that, doesn't it, I mean, whether it is husband and wife here this morning, or whether it's roommates, or whether it's old school friends, or whether it's business colleagues, that's the way it goes. You know one person gets a wee bit ahead of the other, maybe about Christianity, or maybe about opera, or about politics, and they're a little apart from each other and then the other one kind of catches up and they're at one. And then the other, gets a little further in insight on some other subject and then the other one kind of catches up. And I suppose a divorce comes, doesn't it, when they don't wait for each other, when they don't love each other another enough to let the other person catch up. But that's the way any relationship goes, whether it's marital or whether it's business. The one person is moving at different speeds but they keep catching up. You certainly know when you are together on something, don't you? If you're a husband and wife here, you certainly know when you are together, yeah, you can almost list them, "Yeah I'm together with him on that, I'm not together on that." And, it's the same with roommates, "Yeah, we can get along well together on this area but, don't take us on to that area." And, "Don't touch Vietnam, but we're okay on Latin America." And so we can kind of list the things and we know when in our relationship we're one with each other and that's the way it works.

Now, you certainly know when you are not at one, don't you? Have you ever had the experience of meeting an old school friend with whom were very, very, close when you were at school and you so

look forward to getting together again. And you start off with some superficial things, “Oh you remember so, and so”. And you remember and it looks great and it feels as if you’re just taking up where you left off and you just sense that, “Oh, we’re back where we were.” And then you begin to talk about some other things, and you begin to find that their life has gone a way out in that direction and your life is way out there in the other direction. There comes a time when the conversation kind of stops and you don’t have anything more to say. So you certainly know when you are not together with a person.

Loved ones, that’s the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can witness to you when he has moved into a new piece of light that you have not moved into yourself and you’ll sense a feeling of being apart from him. You’ll lose the sense of his witness in your life. So the Holy Spirit, you see, is always moving one step ahead and then waiting for you to catch up. Now, if you don’t catch up with what he’s showing you, then you’ll miss that sense of oneness with the Holy Spirit, you’ll miss the witness of God’s spirit. So, he initially you remember, shows us that we’re living for ourselves; that that’s all we care about. We just live for ourselves. We live for our own satisfaction, for our own fame, for our own comfort. And he shows us that it is that drive to live for self that God destroyed when he destroyed us in Jesus on the cross.

And he introduces us to the whole principle of dying to ourselves and dying to living for ourselves. Now the Holy Spirit at that point, with most of us, is a little bit ahead. He’s just a little bit ahead of us. Now, if you don’t move up with him into that light, you will not have his witness that you are a child of God. And then, you remember, he moves on another step and he begins to show you how this applies to different areas of your life. And he shows you that your clothes are not your own to do, or to buy, or to repair as you want. Your career is not your own. That you’re not here to live to eat, but to eat to live; that your eating habits are not in your own control. That your relationships with other people are not your own to govern as you want and he gets a little ahead of you. Now loved ones, if you don’t move up with him into that area, you lack the witness of God’s spirit that you’re a child of God.

In other words, the witness of God’s spirit depends on you keeping an up-to-date relationship with him and moving into the new light that he’s showing you. Really it comes to this, that the witness of God’s spirit depends on your up to the moment submission to him. That’s why some of you have doubts at times. Some of you wonder, “Am I a Christian or am I not a Christian?” Well, it’s because at that point the Holy Spirit is probably showing you something new and you are holding back on it and God is so good, you know, he’s built us so like himself that we know inside ourselves there’s something not right. There’s something rotten in the state of Denmark, there’s something not right inside. And we know it, and we know that yeah, we’re pulling, we’re pulling, yeah we’re dragging our heels and we know he is showing us new light, but we’re dragging back and yet we’re keeping on saying, “Yeah, praise the lord, hallelujah. I’m a child of God.” And yet it hangs heavy on our heart.

Now loved ones, the only way to experience the witness of God’s spirit that you are his child is to keep that up-to-date relationship with the new light you’re walking into. But that’s part of the witness of God’s spirit. God’s spirit gives you a sense of whether he knows you or not, whether Jesus knows you or not, and whether they’re both satisfied and pleased with you or not. You can know that inside. Of course, that’s the kind of assurance that can carry you through hideous situations. That’s why, you remember, Jesus said, “If you do the will of my father, you’ll know that what I say is true.” See, if you do the will of my father, you’ll know that what I say is true. If you do the will of my father you’ll know, you’ll sense that this is right. But if you don’t do the

will of my father you'll begin to doubt even the things that you were sure of before. So the witness of God's spirit moves like that.

Now what's the witness of our own spirit, dear ones? Because that's what really the second part of the verse is talking about. It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we're children of God. Because there are deceptive spirits that will try to imitate the witness of God's spirit and that's why God's word joins the witness of his own Spirit with the witness of our own spirits. Now what is the witness of our own spirit? Well, the witness of our own spirit is a more empirical kind of thing; it's not such an inner thing. The witness of our own spirit comes because our own spirit is touched by Jesus' spirit and our own spirit becomes like Jesus. So the witness of our own spirit is simply seeing what comes out of our own spirit. It's simply looking at the kind of attitude that comes out of our own spirit. So there are certain marks, and you can find one of them in Psalm 51:17. And this is part of the miracle that God's spirit works in a human spirit that is willing to submit to God and believe that he can give you an uncreated life inside you. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

So if your spirit is touched by Jesus' spirit, you will have a contrite, penitent heart towards God. That's one of the ways you can tell you are a child of God. If you come to a situation where God shows you something and you say, "No, I don't want to do that and you've no right to ask me and I am not going to do it." Then that's not the sign of a child of God. The sign of a person who is God's child is that his spirit or her spirit is penitent, and soft, and yielding. It is not a stubborn, rebellious spirit that says, "No, I don't want to take that. I don't need to take it from anybody." The spirit of a child of God is penitent, and soft, and yielding. That's one of the marks.

Another one, dear ones, is Ephesians 2:1, "And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." And you he made alive. Your own spirit just senses an aliveness, it comes into a service like this and it enjoys the singing, enjoys everybody else being so friendly, and all that kind of thing and it looks forward to the lunch, but really it enjoys most of all the sense of God's presence and the sense of aliveness that there is. And you have a sense of aliveness yourself when you get down to prayer. You have a sense of a whole spiritual world that is going on behind this physical façade. And part of the witness of a child of God's spirit is that sense of aliveness inside and so you have it whether you are on your own or whether you're with other people.

Then the third mark is 1 John 5:1-2. "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."

Your own spirit that used to be so independent and so brash, that used to rub up like sandpaper against everybody else, your own spirit that had great difficulty even loving your mom and dad, your own spirit begins to experience a great love coming out from inside it. And you begin to sense that the other people in this auditorium are your brothers and sisters and you begin to find a love going out for them that you cannot explain yourself. And you are conscious that there has been a change in the direction of your whole life because there was once a time when you didn't feel like this towards other people at all. One of the marks of a child of God is that you have this love that is deeper than human empathy.

I was once a liberal theologian and I used to think, "Oh yeah, human empathy, that's it, human

empathy.” Well, loved ones there’s lots of human empathy around, there’s lot of philanthropy around, but this love is a love that really personally respects and wants the best for the people that you meet. And it is a love that is patient and kind, that is not jealous or boastful, that is not arrogant or rude, that is not irritable or resentful, that does not insist on its own way, that is not eager to believe the worst but is eager to believe the best. It’s a love that keeps on going and that’s one of the marks of the witness of your own spirit, that you experience that kind of love for other people.

And the fourth mark is the way it expresses itself. It expresses itself in obedience to God’s commandments. That’s why old John says, “You’ll know how to tell whether you love people or not by whether you love God or not. And the way you’ll know whether you love God or not is if you keep his commandments.” And you’ll find another thing that he mentions in the next verse, in verse three, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” And then -- that’s the big thing you know, for every kid that respects his father, -- “and his commandments are not burdensome.” And a person who is child of God has that clear sense inside their spirit, “Your commandments are not burdensome, Lord. They’re a delight. They’re things that I want to do and even if some of them I’m having trouble with at this time, I want to do them. I want to obey you.” And, there is a joy inside that makes you rejoice to obey.

Now loved ones that’s some of the way that you can tell which world you belong to. Because God’s spirit inside witnesses that Jesus and he know you personally and then that joins together with your own spirit, your own spirit that you simply observe by looking at the way you affect other people. You don’t need to look in a lot, you don’t need to sit there and say, “Oh I’m going to look in and introspect.” No, because you’ll probably persuade yourself that you’re a saint, but just look, just look at what effect you have on other people. Look at how other people respond to you. Just from time-to-time as you’re speaking to someone think, “Do I really love that person?” And if there’s that kind of Jesus’ love coming from you then that’s part of the sign that you are a child of God. So the beauty of this is, you can know. You don’t need to sit here Sunday after Sunday wondering, “Well, am I or am I not?” Probably if you’re not sure, you’re not.

Some of you may say, “Well, does everybody have this assurance?” Well I can see how a brother or sister who’s maybe having a bit of trouble over the old eating thing or having a bit of trouble over some new light that God’s spirit was showing them, I can see that maybe temporarily you’ll be having trouble with assurance. But loved ones, the mark -- the general mark and tenor of our lives -- should be an absolute assurance that we are related to the Creator of the universe, that he is our loving Father and that we’re a son or daughter that he knows and that he has a place marked out for when this life is over. And that’s God’s will for us. So I pray that all of you will approach him yourself and it seems to me the important thing is that personal relationship, isn’t it? Do you know Him? But do you know that He knows you? You can’t afford to be a name dropper; I suppose that’s it. You can’t afford to be a name dropper in a serious thing like this. You can’t afford to say, “Oh yeah, I know him” if you really are not sure whether he knows you or not.

Let us pray. Dear Father, I would pray for each of my brothers and sisters and pray for myself that you would give us a great honesty. And Father you would enable us to be real about all these things.

Our Father we have all so despised the hypocrites, we have so hated those who used to go to our churches and pretend. Father we have so sensed that you want to bring a new generation of real people into existence. Father we want to be some of those real people. Father I pray for a brother or sister here who may see that he or she just does belong to that other world. I pray Holy Spirit that you would show them how to stop living in that other world, how to stop living for themselves,

getting frustrated with themselves and fed up with life and how to turn to you and really believe that you are what you say you are: our loving father who cares for us and who has put all our selfishness into Jesus and destroyed it on the cross and who is now willing to give us of yourself and your own life. Father I pray that some of us will be able to receive that life today by faith and to start banking on it throughout this week and the coming years for Jesus' sake. Amen.