

Criterion of a Child of God

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It's really important for us as a family to be led by Jesus' Spirit. So that's what I'd like to try to do now, loved ones, and bring home to all of us this morning what God showed us through Judy's little personal experience.

I think many of us come Sunday after Sunday and probably believe most of the things that the rest of us here believe. I would be surprised if most of us here do not believe more or less the same things despite the fact that many of us are from different denominations and some of us are from no denominational background at all. I would think that after meeting together Sunday after Sunday for now 12 years, many of us think the same way about things.

I think that can bring a real confusion to your own heart and mind because you can think to yourself, "I believe all that Pastor says and I like him and think he respects me and I think all of us here have a real affection for each other and I agree with everything. So I think I am one of the body and I think that I am a Christian. I think I am a child of God. I certainly regard myself as a Christian." And it's very easy for you to base your assurance on that kind of reasoning, isn't it?

I thought that I should take the opportunity of pointing out to you, one very, very clear criterion of a child of God; one that will let you know whether you are born of God or whether you are not born of God. It's plain and clean and clear. If it hits you hard, it will hit you not half as hard as it has hit me over the years, but it is what has helped to keep me, in my own experience somewhat sane and balanced and undeceived. I do believe that it'll do the same for you if you'll rise to it.

It comes from Judy's little testimony. It is the fact that she kept on regarding as sin and as wrong the anger that boiled up inside her when the guy with the four-wheel backed up and came back to tell her where to get off; now that's the criteria for a child of God that will keep you away from mistaking your state for that of a born again person when it isn't really. I'll point it out to you – it's in I John 3:9, "No one born of God commits sin, for God's nature abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God." Now I know that sounds hard, loved ones, but it's there in that dear word and you and I have to either rip the page out or we have to find some tricky little translation that will get around that but that thing is right there sitting in that verse.

Then, if you are tempted to think, "Well, it's out on it's own there, you've been on this one before", but loved ones, it's throughout this dear Bible if you'll turn back one page and look at I John 2:1: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin."

So even the verse that so many of us use "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the expiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" -- so that if we do sin, Jesus is the expiation for our sins --that is written as follow-on from the primary statement, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin."

Loved ones, the normal state of a child of God is that you live above sin. You do not sin and you do not sin in word; you don't swear back at the guy in the four-wheel-drive. But it's even deeper than that as Judy brought out; you don't even feel anger against him. But while you sense that anger coming up, maybe you've been born of God but God's nature is not abiding in you. You're not allowing

him to abide in you. You're not allowing the Holy Spirit to remain in you and govern every action of your life.

Many of us here are in one state or the other. This might help you: if you do something or some things in your life that you know are wrong -- maybe you're continually lying, you're continually dishonest, maybe you are at this moment involved in fornication, that is, you're having intercourse with a man or woman to whom you're not married, you're doing that or in your own mind, inside; you're buying the Playboy or whatever else it is, or you're playing around with some of the box office stuff or some of the movies.

If you're doing something, loved ones, like that and you see what I mean, it's just something that you do, maybe not every week but you do it every three months, or you do it four times a year. You do something; you're involved in doing something that you know is wrong. Now hear this and take it as the beginning of salvation for you and not as condemnation: if that's the case, you're not born of God, do you see that? You're not born of God. Now I say that to you as a hope for you and a help. The situation would be neurotic and crazy and insane if you were born of God and you were doing that. Then you're in real trouble because this Book doesn't work and Jesus does not save us from our sins.

Loved ones, the truth is, if you're involved in some act of sin, doing sin and that is, "Whosoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him that is sin", (that's a normal, simple definition of sin in James 4:17) anybody who knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Now loved ones, if you do that, then you're not born of God and it may cast you into terrible fear and despair but there's hope there. Jesus has come to save sinners. Jesus is able to deal with you if you once will step off that high and mighty pharisaical pedestal where you're pretending that you're a child of God despite the fact that your life has sin in it.

So loved ones, there's hope and I plead with you to see that there's hope and you can see what kind of fellow I am; I am not here to make your life miserable, I love you. I want you to be happy. I tell you this because it leads you out of that area of self-deception that so many are in today.

Loved ones, if you have sin in your life, if you're doing something or you're saying something that you know is wrong, then you're not born of God because when you're born of God, the Spirit of Jesus comes in to you and changes your spirit inside and enables you to walk in what you know is right. Do you see that? It enables you to walk in what is right. So it's like me saying to you, "Do you know why you have trouble falling all the time? Because you haven't the right shoes on; now get the right shoes on and you'll be able to walk right." That's what it is. Now don't you go on stumbling and saying, "No, no, I have the right shoes on, I have the right shoes on", that's stupid. That means you'll go on into hell deceived and deceiving others.

No, if you have known sin in your life, you're not born of God. What you need to do is come humbly to Jesus and confess your sins and I would really fight you to the wall on this, loved ones. Confess in Greek means putting up your hand and agreeing with God. It means, "Lord, I agree that whatever I am bluffing about -- the fornication or the adultery -- I agree it is sin and is what put you on the Cross and destroyed you. It is what tore your heart apart and is what will throw me into hell." That's confession, loved ones.

Confession is not this bluff sophistication that goes on lying in bed with another person that you're not married to and still says, "Oh I am born of God." But you're not born of God; you're born of Satan and of the devil. God's wrath is upon you and will continue to be upon you until you put up your hand and agree with God that that is sin. Now the rest of us who are nicey, nicey and goody goodies, it's the same with us. Maybe we're not fornicating, maybe we're not jumping into bed with other people, maybe it's just the unclean thoughts but it's something that we rationalize away and we refuse to put up our hand and agree with God.

Loved ones, there's a great beginning of relief that comes even when you do that. I don't know if you were ever in the spot that I was in, but at school I could get myself into a spot where, being a deceiver myself, something would be done wrong and I would be part of it. The teacher would ask, "Who did it", and I just kept quiet. Then you know it -- what a relief it is when you decide, "I'd rather get the thing out in the open and get the thing finished than continue to bear the guilt in my heart." So you'd raise your hand and even though that was only the beginning of punishment yet it brought relief to you.

Loved ones, it's the beginning of relief if you'll confess your sins. Now, could I push you a little more on that? Do you see the dangerous position we're in if you won't do that? Do you see the agonizing?

You know what kind of approach I take Sunday by Sunday; if I could lift you into heaven with my own arms, I'd lift you into heaven. Now do you see that that's a dangerous situation because we all want the best for each other and if you won't be honest about your sin, we can all help to deceive you for the rest of your life?

Loved ones, I plead with you for your sake and for my sake but most of all, for Jesus sake who died for these things -- be honest about your sin. Confess it and then repent. Now repent doesn't mean crying for it or being sorry for your self. It may certainly involve tears, it may certainly involve sorrow, but repentance is stopping doing the thing; stopping it, loved ones.

It doesn't matter confessing it if you jump into bed tonight with a guy who isn't your husband, doesn't matter. It doesn't matter confessing that you're dishonest in your business, if tomorrow morning you go in and you're dishonest again. It's like saying to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, I know this is a sword in your heart. I know it is and I confess it and I know it and I know it and yet I keep thrusting it into your heart."

Loved ones, you're mocking God. You're making fun of your Creator and you're eventually searing your conscience to the point where nobody will be able to touch it. It does not matter if you get the strongest, most powerful preacher in this world, there'll come a time when nobody can get through to your seared conscience unless you stop the sins that are in your life and then you ask Jesus to send his Spirit to you. His Spirit will come and make your spirit alive if you've confessed and if you've repented. Now if you haven't confessed and repented truly, the Spirit will not come to you, that's it.

It's a straight deal. But too many of us here are involved in saying we have confessed and repented, yet we're sitting on a heap of garbage and manure -- all the sins that we will not confess and repent of, and we're trying to stretch out and have faith that Jesus' Spirit has come to us. It's impossible.

You can't receive the Spirit of Jesus over un-confessed or un-repenting of sin. You can't, loved ones, it's not possible. God is a holy God. He walks in light. You can't walk in darkness and walk with Him. So unless you truly agree with God about the things that are in your life, unless you truly turn from them, you will not be able to receive Jesus' Spirit to make your spirit alive and that's where all kinds of us are having ridiculous troubles. Do you see that?

I think all kinds of us here are reading the books. We're reading Oswald Chambers, we do our devotionals, we read our little Bible study, we go to our Bible study groups, we're gung-ho for the moral majority and gung-ho for Campus Church or we're for everything that's good but we're children of hell because we're not born of God, because we're not walking above the sins that we know we have in our lives so loved ones, that's the first step.

Now I think many of you have even taken that and you're asking me, "But brother, what about the besetting sin", and you're saying, "Look, I have dealt with those sins that you talk about and I walk pretty free of those known sins but I find a continual inclination in myself to want to keep on sinning and it is a struggle. Now, is that the best that I can expect, victory over sin and yet at the expense of a great struggle over this continual inclination to sin?"

Loved ones, that's what the fullness of the Holy Spirit is about. It is possible to come to a place through being filled with the Holy Spirit and through actualizing your death with Jesus in your own life where even the inclination to sin does not rise up in your heart and where you can walk inwardly and outwardly free from conflict and that's what that dear word says: "He cannot sin because God's nature abides in him." That's what happens when a person is baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit; God's nature abides. You remember Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit is with you and will be in you" (John 14:17), and that was the great difference between being born of God and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being born of God, the Spirit worked in you periodically but at times you worked and it was a back and forward experience. When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell there because you deal with all the areas of your life, especially your self-life, that have opposed the Holy Spirit in the past.

So it is possible loved ones, to come to a place where there's deliverance from even the inclination to sin within us but I would push you on the elementary first principles. Let's be clear about this: the Bible says, "No one born of God commits sin", and that loved ones, is not a condemnation for us, that is salvation for any man or woman who will be honest here this morning.

You see why it is? Because it takes us right out of our introspection, see that? It gives you something objective to hang on to. You can think of yourself as a great writer but if some guy says, "Look, here are the number of books that you've written", and he gives you an empty tray then you know you're not a great writer. Now it's the objective fact that saves us from inner deception and that's the importance of that verse, "No one born of God commits sin because God's nature abides in him."

If you say to me, "Oh brother, that's startling. I do sin." Then let's deal with it this morning. Let's confess it and turn from it and let's ask Jesus to come into your heart and if you say to me, "Well, what happens if tomorrow...", faith is believing that he is going to keep what you've committed to him but, if it happens tomorrow, you come right back to the same thing and you do it until it takes; you keep dealing with Jesus until you get this dirt and this garbage out of your own life.

Loved ones, it is not bluff when Matthew says, "You'll call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), not save them in their sins.

The world is filled with people who have their lives filled with sins and claim they're religious but Jesus will save his people from their sins. Brothers and sisters, it is not some kind of mental game, it just isn't and I tell you that with gladness, you know. It is not a mental game. It is not a power of mind over matter. It is not your will power winning out. It is not. It is the Spirit of Jesus coming into your life and changing you in response to your honesty about the way you're living your life, namely in regard to your sins.

Now if you're sitting there saying, "Oh brother, I don't hear that too often", no, you don't. The whole of Christendom is filled with easy believism, isn't it? A dear brother said to me last week, "I prayed to receive Jesus. Did nothing happen?" Well, loved ones, just "I prayed to receive Jesus" is easy believism. When you receive Christ, he comes in because the thing that was in your life that prevented him being there has been put away, that's it.

The whole of the Old Testament is filled with that, "Put the evil thing far from you and I will be your God. I won't be your God unless you do that." Now when he comes in, he gives you grace and strength to walk in what you've done but it's vital for you to declare your readiness to do it even without the strength that he gives you, knowing that he will give you the strength to walk in that. But brothers and sisters, you have to put the evil thing from you.

So don't say, "Oh I thought I was just receiving Jesus." No; it's getting rid of the stuff that crucified Christ. Otherwise if you receive Jesus in and the anger of the Roman soldiers is in your heart and the dishonesty of Judas is in your life and the lies and uncleanness of the mob is in your heart and your actions, will Christ not be crucified all over again inside you? Well of course he will if he is the same yesterday, today and forever; the same things that killed him in 29 A.D. will kill him now in your heart and in your life.

Brothers and sisters, that's why many of us are weak and some are sick, and some have died. It's not because you haven't attended enough Bible study groups or enough church services or because you need another church. It's because you have downright sin in your life that you will not stop and so Jesus has witnessed his grief over that and he is withdrawing from your life and that's why you have a lack of life within and a sense of his presence. Now please don't sit there and say, "Oh well, I know, I know but I am going to hold on to it", don't say that.

This is a time when Jesus can woo you to himself. Next week? It may be a car crash or something else or you are beyond hearing this. The following week, you may not be here. This is the time when the Lord Jesus has presented it once again to your heart and mind and it's an opportunity for us to do something about it.

So I would ask you loved ones, would you be honest and stop the bluff? This bluff is ridiculous; fornicating like mad and pretending you're a child of God, it's dumb. You're putting yourself into hell. Or the nicey nice ones, the goody goods among us that don't do that kind of thing, we're doing the same if we have sin in our lives that we know is wrong and we're continuing to do it.

Now, if anybody says, "Oh, but what if I fall?" The Father knows that. You know that, you know that's an old bluff thing. The Father knows that fine well. A small girl decided to warm her mother's boots and put them in the oven and of course, there wasn't much boot left after she put

them in there, but the mom knew the little girl's intention, you know she knew. She didn't judge the thing on the outward failure; she judged on the little girl's heart and you know that fine well.

We're not concerned here with your fall because you would suddenly realize, "Oh that's a sin. I shouldn't have done that." Your heart immediately witnesses that your heart is sorry and you prove it by not repeating it day after day and of course, if we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. But do you see that Jesus' death only obtains for sins that you put away?

It's a mistake loved ones, to think that the Savior's blood comes in gallons for us to drown our sins so that we can sin again and then we drown them with more blood. That's so far from reality that it is pitiful and blasphemous. Loved ones, Jesus' blood covers only what we uncover. But what you cover, Jesus' blood cannot cover nor can it cleanse and that very thing will take you to hell on the last day, that's true.

So brothers and sisters, would you think seriously about it? Really, think seriously about where your own life is at this present time and look at the sins if there are any in it and confess them this day and turn from them. Then ask the Savior to come back into your life and walk with him. Seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that even the inner struggle will cease. I would plead with you to do it loved ones and I point out to every honest man and woman here that today, I will plead, there will come a day when no one will plead with you. You will be facing your Maker and you will see him as he is. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, I'd pray for my brothers and sisters here. Lord we would pray to you ourselves. We would be honest and look at the things in our lives that we know are wrong. Lord we realize we cannot make our own little salvation plan here. We cannot make the world in our image. We cannot make heaven suit ourselves. We cannot make the Gospel suit what we think.

Lord we do have to accept that the things that you have said are sins and accept that they bring death and deception wherever they exist. Lord we would look at our own lives and know Father; you already see these things so why should we try to bluff you? We cannot bluff you, Thou my God, seest me. Lord we would confess these sins to you now at this moment. Each of us who has been covering over something or rationalizing something for years; we want to step out into light. We're tired of darkness and twilight and grayness.

Lord, we want to step out of darkness and grayness and step into light this morning. We want to put ourselves in line with your thoughts and in line with the saints down through the ages and give up the strain of trying to run our own little world. Lord we would confess our sins to you one by one. Some of us have done this before but we haven't stopped the sins and Lord you've said, except you repent, you will have no wise into the kingdom of God.

So Lord, we'd now count the cost of repenting of these sins. We'd count the cost of stopping them. Lord help us to be honest and to see if we are prepared to pay that cost whether it means the loss of a relationship or the loss of a good friend or making a great hole in our lives by taking away a great satisfaction and source of comfort and pleasure. Lord we see that you gave up far more than all of that for us. Lord we would count the cost of repenting of our sins this morning.

We know that when the last sin has been repented of with a whole heart and a full will that you will come right in, we won't even have to ask you. We will sense the witness of the Spirit that we have

dealt honestly with God this morning and we will know, Lord Jesus, that you have sent your Spirit into our hearts.

Lord we thank you for such a blessing as the witness of the Spirit. We thank you that we can easily know if we've truly repented by the entry of your Spirit into our hearts and his witness that he is there. And if we do not have that witness, we know that we have not been honest about our sins this day. Lord we thank you that it is so plain and simple that even a child can follow.

Lord Jesus, those of us who have dealt with you this morning would thank you for coming into our hearts. You are able to be there now and to rise up within us and you will be able to take care of the anger and the things that make life unbearable for us.

Lord we receive you in here, in our hearts, where you can see everything is white, where you can see that we've put all darkness away from us. We receive you in to be the Savior of our lives, by expressing your own love in place of our anger and to be the Lord of our lives by having the right to run our life from this day forward.

Lord Jesus we thank you for coming in. And now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.