

Is Your Faith Weak?

Romans 14:1e

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Did you notice that Andropov's son Igor, when the Politburo, Chernenko and the other members of the Politburo, were passing Andropov's body to express their sympathy to his widow and his daughter, Igor the son, was standing there and of course Chernenko came up you remember, and then it just surprised you, didn't it, that Igor burst into tears right there, at that moment? And it's always seemed to us that there is nothing as cold and hopeless as those communist state funerals? Seems so absolutely hopeless, it seems that they have nothing to say at that moment.

It seems that the very essence of the failure of communism is laid bare there at that moment for everybody to see. And people like ourselves are just bewildered, we wonder how could Andropov -- a man like him -- or Brezhnev, or Khrushchev, how could they believe something that they find is a total deception, a moment after they die? How could they? And yet it's possible for us here in America to be in the same situation, it is. It's possible for us to be living in a deception that we find out about, only a moment after we die.

In other words it's possible for you or me to think we have faith, when we haven't faith. That's why we are studying that verse, you remember. It tells us that we should, those of us who are strong in faith, should welcome anybody who is weak in faith, but not to disputes over opinions. Then in connection with that verse, I asked you the question, "Is your faith weak? Or what is weak faith?" Then you remember what I asked you, "Is your faith even faith? Is your faith, faith?" Because I think many of us are like John Wesley. He was the founder of the Methodist Church and after 34 years of life here on earth, he was an Anglican minister, he had come to America as a missionary to the Indians and then he returned to England and was met on the dock by a Moravian, called Peter Bowler. And this Peter Bowler said to Wesley, "Do you trust that Jesus is your own Savior?" And Wesley was an intellectual from Oxford and thought about it and then said, "I believe that He is the Savior of the world."

And I think many of us can have that kind of faith. Not faith at all, not faith at all, it's belief. I believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world, I believe that God is the creator of the world, I believe that he is our Father, I believe that he answers prayer, I believe that he forgives sins, I believe that he will take all to him at the end to Heaven who trust him in this life, I believe these things. But it's only belief. It's a belief such as I believe $E=mc^2$ -- I believe it. It doesn't have any effect on my life, it doesn't change me at all, but I give mental assent to that truth. I give mental assent to the truths and the concepts of Christianity; I believe these things. Who wouldn't? You see that's the subtle thing, loved ones. Who wouldn't believe these? I mean, you can't get away from it; the history is so powerful, the manuscript evidence is so unanswerable, you can't avoid believing these things -- of course they are true. You have to be twisted in your thinking to disbelieve them or to disprove them.

But the danger of that is, that many of us will say, "Of course I believe those things, isn't that what faith is?" And of course that isn't what faith is. Belief is part of faith but belief itself is not faith. Belief in that sense of a mental assent, of a grasping of an idea in your head, that itself is not faith. And of course some of us say, "Well yes, but my faith is a bit more than that, I mean, I do believe that you should in fact try to get the world to accept that." Yes, but do you

feel any burden for yourself personally to fulfill the great commission? Do you feel any burden in your own heart for the people in your office who don't believe it? And so, many of us say, "Well no, I don't, but that's just because my faith is a little weak. It's not quite as emotional as other people's faith is."

Could it be, that it's because it isn't faith at all? That's why you don't feel any burden for souls, that's why you don't feel any desire to fulfill the great commission even though Jesus has told us to go and preach the Gospel to all nations. Could it be that what you have is belief, mental assent but not faith? And some of us of course are like Wesley in another way, we say, "Well, we have something more than that. I understand what you said last Sunday. You said that faith is not just belief but it's belief plus action. Well, I believe that, I believe that. I believe that if my belief is real then I should have action in my life that goes along with that belief. Well I do have, I come to church, that's because I believe. I read the Bible at times, that's because I believe. I pray at times, that's because I believe. I give money to other ministries, that's because I believe. I try to be a good father, a good mother; I try to be a good son, a good daughter, that's because I believe. I have belief plus action. Now, isn't that what faith is?"

Well that was Wesley's situation. He knew that faith was not just belief, that it was belief plus action. That David, little David believed that God wanted him to slay Goliath. So he took the little stones, got out of his bedroom, took the little sling, went out into the middle of the plain, refused to have the heavy armor that they offered him and slung a stone at Goliath's head. And he had faith that God would bring Goliath down. And many of us say, "Well, I know that's what faith is, that's what I have in my life." Except that so often our actions do not stem spontaneously from our faith. They are something that we add to our belief because we know there should be action along with belief.

They are a bit like John Wesley's actions. He said, "Oh, I believe that God is real, so I should go to church. I don't feel I want to go to church, I don't feel the need of church, but I believe I should go to church. I believe I should attend Communion, I believe I should pray." But those things did not stem or spring from a living dynamic faith in a dynamic cause effect relationship; they were something that he added on.

So many of us say, "Well, I know my faith should have actions, so my faith does have actions. I go to midweek services, I go to Bible study groups." But all those things we do as good works, not as faith works. We do them because we believe they will help us prove the authenticity of our faith. But they do not actually, if we are honest about them, spring from our faith, they don't. They are more logical conclusions that we draw from our belief. We say we believe this, therefore we should do that. It's evident for instance in regards to worry. Worry? We say to ourselves, if we trust God, we shouldn't worry and then here is the step we take. Therefore I must not worry. That's what we do.

I believe in God, I trust in him, therefore I should not worry. Therefore I must not worry. Stop worrying, you dupe, stop worrying! And dear love us, we then labor under that law, we labor under that law, now I am worrying, I am worrying, I have to stop worrying, I have to stop worrying. Pastor said I shouldn't worry, I won't worry. I won't. It's a work of law. It's a good work that we try to do. It doesn't spring from our trust in God. It doesn't spring from a real living faith. It is a work that we believe we ought to do, because we say we believe certain things. We believe in God, so we have to obey his law. That's the way it operates. And so, our life has not a fresh, springing spontaneous quality about it, it has a heavy set of beliefs and an equally heavy set of "do's and don'ts" and we try to say that that is belief plus action. Well, it is. But it's a belief that is

purely cerebral or intellectual or mental plus an action that is a set of laws, as heavy as the laws that the Jews had to bear up under.

It's the same experience Wesley had. On the way to America, there was a tremendous storm that broke out. The journey of course at that time in the 18th century took weeks and weeks. A great storm broke out. The ship seemed almost to be sinking. There were Moravian Christians in the holds, men and women and children, in absolute and utter peace, absolute and utter peace. Wesley was an Anglican minister, had his collar on and all his regalia and he was terrified, but he knew he ought to try to keep calm to show how faith affected your practical life. But his heart was filled with fear and when he saw these Moravian men, women and children in absolute peace, he knew that what he had was belief and not faith.

Loved ones, what is the difference between authentic faith, which marries belief with action, and this counterfeit faith, that has a set of beliefs there and a set of actions there, that we observe because we want to try to make ourselves consistent with our belief? What makes the difference between those two things? What brings you out of that counterfeit faith, into real faith? Personal trust in Jesus, personal trust in Jesus, that's it. Believing first, that you are like the rest of us, that as God said, "Every one of us here, have sinned and we've fallen short of the glory of God."

That you are exactly like that, that inside in your heart, the bit that I can't see, or none of us can see, you want to be your own God. You want to control your own life and in many ways we are all rather inconveniences to you and you often see us like that. And indeed that you believe that God in some way exists for your benefit and that you have every right to have your own way and that you really are constantly trying to get that way, whoever of us may be hurt in the doing of it.

First, you need to believe that. You need to believe that you are no different from the rest of us here on earth. You are a sinner like the rest of us and a sinner is not necessarily a terribly immoral person, most of us here are not terribly immoral. It's not necessarily a criminal person, few of us here are criminals, but it is a person who wants to be his own God, who wants to run her own life and to have her own way whatever it costs anybody else. You need to believe that first, if you are going to come through to a personal trust in Jesus.

And loved ones, if you are going to play that old psychological game saying, "Oh well, you are really good people," you are just believing a lie, you are not really good, you are not really good. God is true and honest and he says you have sinned and you've fallen far short of the glory that he had in mind for you. And primarily you have fallen short because you challenged him at being God; you want to be God, inside you want to be God.

And then it's vital secondly to see that's why you can't obey his laws. That's why you can't obey his laws. That's why you can't do what you want to do. What you think you should do, you can't do. That's why you so often try and you so often fail; you try to stop worrying and you can't stop worrying. It's because inside, you yourself want to be God and you don't want him to be God, therefore you don't really want to obey his law. You say you want to obey his law on the outside because we are all supposed to want to do that. But inside you don't want to obey it and actually you don't do it, you get your own way and you have to see that. That is why he found the only solution possible and he stated it very plainly in the Bible. He said "The wages of sin is death." The only thing God can do with a group of creatures as perverted and as self-deifying as ourselves is to kill us all and start all over again, and that's what God says. He says, "The wages of sin is

death," not the wages of sin is a little slap on the hand called death, but the only cure for people who want to be God is to kill them, so that there is only one God.

And that that's what has to be done with you and me: that we have to be destroyed utterly and absolutely, destroyed completely. And if we're ever to live again, it has to be because God chooses to create us again, to enable us to be born again, to enable us to start all over again. And loved ones, you have to believe those things. If you believe, "No, no, I can train myself to be like God. I can train myself through Bible study and prayer, I can train myself through going to church, I can train myself to be like Jesus." Loved ones, you are not believing God and there will be no cure for your situation and you will finally go to hell and you will burn in your own selfishness and your own pride forever.

It's vital to see that you are so incorrigibly evil and selfish and self-deifying that you have to be destroyed and that's why God says, "The wages of sin is death." He says, "Those are the wages that sin pays. The only thing I can do with sin is to destroy it and that means destroy the person in whom it dwells." That's the two things you have to believe about yourself, if you are going to come into real faith. One, that you are a sinner like the rest of us. That you want to be God. You are very nice and respectable, very moral, but inside you want to be God and that there's only one thing to do with that desire and that's have it destroyed, because it will not die on its own.

And then the second thing is something that Jesus has done for you. That God commends his love towards us, and that while we were yet sinners, even when you didn't care a bit for God, Christ died for you. God took you and put you into his Son with all your selfishness and all your sin and all your pride and all those rotten things inside you, particularly your rotten self centered self. And he put that into Jesus, his Son, even before the foundation of the world, when God first foresaw that you would ever live. He miraculously was able to foresee what would happen to you and he put you with that old perverted, twisted self into his Son Jesus and he burned you out of existence in his Son with his wrath.

That is what Jesus suffered on Calvary. And we see a little of the pain that he bore on Calvary. We see a little of that pain there that he bore in eternity when God put you into Jesus, and destroyed you and burned you out of existence and re-created Christ and with Christ created a whole new world, so that this whole world here, is already condemned to death and is dead and destroyed in God's eyes in Christ and there is no existence outside Jesus.

Then if you believe that, you will cleave to the Savior. You will cleave to the Savior. You say, "I believe that God, I believe that what your word says is true, I have no existence outside him, that's why this pitiful existence that I have is so sad and so sorrowful and so disappointing. I see that. Lord Jesus, I have no existence outside you, I grab at your feet, I embrace you, I hug you to myself. Savior, I have no existence or no life outside you. Come, come and live inside me and make me alive." That's a personal trust in Jesus.

It has nothing to do with the proud intellectual examining of a thing and deciding, will I, won't I; "comme ci comme ça" -- it has nothing to do with that. It is a desperate condemned hopeless sinner grasping at the feet of Jesus, and in that miraculous desperate desire to hug Jesus, blasting through the gates of eternity, beating H.G. Wells' "Time Machine", lifting out of time and into eternity, that's what happens when you grasp around Jesus like that. And it's like any personal encounter. It will only be real if you don't blink. It will only be real if you don't evade Jesus' glance. In other words at this very moment, this moment of truth in your life, in personal encounter

with Christ, he comes through to you, and he points to his personal wounds, and he points to the personal sin in your life that caused that wound. And if you don't blink and you don't evade his glance, your immediate reaction is, "Lord, if you bore it for me, then it's dead, it's gone-- I walk free from it, thank you." That's it.

But if you blink, or you avoid his glance for a moment and you say, "Well, there's this other sin that somebody else told me is in my life." Or, "Yeah, well that may be, that may have caused that wound in your side, but I am not ready to deal with that yet." If you blink or you evade his glance, all is lost, all is lost. And you sink back into that cerebral belief and that religious good works stuff. The moment of encounter demands that you do not blink and you do not evade his glance and when the Savior points to his personal wounds in his side, and points to the personal sins in your life that brought those and that caused that pain, that you at that moment say, "Lord, thank you. That sin no longer exists because you bore the pain of it. Lord, thank you, I walk free of it, not simply because I don't want to pain you again, but because I know it's destroyed and I walk free of it."

And then, as you go on in your life, faith begins to spring up in your heart at that moment. It springs up in your heart, so that you know that Jesus is your Savior and you know that he knows you. And then as you go on and he points more wounds out that he bore for you and more sins in your life, you continue to walk free of those sins. And as you walk free of more and more of them, so faith continues to spring up in your heart and life and takes you on into the fullness of the Spirit and on into more and more experience of all that God has done for you in Jesus on the Cross. But that's it, loved ones, that's what personal faith is. Faith is something that springs up in your heart, when you accept what God has done to your sins in Jesus and walk free of them. But, you cannot have faith over unconfessed or unforsaken sin. You can't, it's impossible.

You can't exercise saving faith over unconfessed or unforsaken sin, it doesn't work. The truth of the God of the universe will not let it work. He will not let his Son stand here with the bleeding holes in his side and you stand there and the Savior point to you the wounds, and point the sins to you and then you continue the sins and yet have a real relationship with the Savior. That makes sins insane; that's madness, that is not honesty. That would pervert and contort all possibilities of personal relationships in this universe for the rest of eternity, and it does not work.

And that's why when you blink, or you evade his glance, or you refuse to confess a sin, or you refuse to forsake it, you lack saving faith and you end up with that belief game, plus the religious actions -- instead of a dynamic saving faith that comes from personal trust in Jesus as your own Savior. Because the truth is, Jesus bore pain for you that he bore for none of the rest of us. He bore sins for you that he bore for none of the rest of us, that's it. That's why you have to make your personal peace with Jesus. That's why saving faith springs up in the heart from anyone that personally embraces Jesus and deals honestly with him.

And you can do that today, but if you have never done that, do it. If you have wanted to know, where do you come from? That's where I come from, that's where I come from, that's the key to it all. That's why you are born of God. See that's what New Birth is. Faith springs up in your heart when you forsake the sins that Jesus reveals to you personally, he has borne for you. Faith springs up in your heart, so that you know that Jesus knows you. That's the beginning. Then as he continues to do that as the years pass, he leads you on into the fullness of the Spirit. But that's the start, that's the New Birth in the Spirit. Have you faith, have you real faith? If you've thought that you have faith up to this moment, and find you haven't, exercise faith now. Do it now in this time of

quietness, just begin. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know you lived, we are convinced of that. We know you died and rose from the dead and that you're the Son of God, but Lord Jesus we have not really faced the evil in our own hearts. We have been taught almost by our society to think that we are not too bad. We see Lord Jesus that we are going to get nowhere with you or your Father, our Creator, unless we believe what you both said. And we see that he has said we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So Lord Jesus, we believe that. We seem to ourselves pretty good people, compared with the majority of people in our society. We seem very respectable and moral. But we do know that we have a desire inside to get our own way and we would never have called that a desire to be God of our own lives, but now that we think of it, we see how we resent things when they go in a way that's different from what we planned.

So, Lord Jesus, we confess that we are sinners. And we can see how that prevents us obeying God or his laws. And Lord we have always tried to plead that we really wanted to obey his laws, but there was something in us that didn't. We do what we want and we actually don't want to obey you, Lord God, we want to regard ourselves. So, we do see that your penalty is justified; if we were you, we'd do the same. There can be only one God. We see that we have to be destroyed and changed. And Lord Jesus, how can we thank you? That you have died for all, therefore all have died. How can we thank you that while we were yet sinners, you died for us? That you took all our desire to be God into your own heart and allowed your Father to destroy it with his wrath and bore the pain that we could never have borne.

Then Lord will you now personally show us, the wounds caused by our sins, the sins that caused those wounds? Because Lord, if they caused those wounds we know that you bore them, and you bore them to death and destroyed them. So, Lord, we aim to forsake them now, because they don't exist anywhere except in the fantasy person that Satan has created and called by our name, but we know that we are now crucified and dead and condemned to death with you. So we know that those don't exist.

So we walk clear of them now this very day. We intend to get up and walk free of those things, because they are now mirages, they are not real, they were destroyed in your death in Calvary. Lord Jesus, we thank you and we walk free of them. And we embrace you and Lord, we have no life now, it is all destroyed. So Lord Jesus will you come into us now? Will you come in to us and bring the new life that you've made for us? We want to find out what it's like because we don't know it, but you have it within yourself. So will you come inside us and show us that life and begin to lead us forward in it, as new creations? We receive you now Lord Jesus as our own personal Savior and thank you. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God be with us now and evermore. Amen.