

## Salvation Proceeds From Faith

Romans 14:23d

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

God would give us the Holy Spirit if we had faith and we wonder why we have not experienced that. We hear of other people talking about it but we have not experienced it. It comes eventually to the point where you just become skeptical about the whole thing.

I think there's another possible reason why many of us have not experienced the Holy Spirit in our lives. I think it's very easy to fall into salvation by works. I know you think immediately when you hear that that you could not enter into salvation by works because you know what that is. But loved ones most of the world actually depends on salvation by works. It is surprisingly easy for you and me to get involved in it even though we believe in Christianity.

The Muslims certainly believe that if they bow down to Mecca so many times a day and if they observe the dietary and ritual laws of behavior that Mohammad recommended, then they will gain salvation of their own souls. In other words, they believe in salvation by works. They believe that by the things that you do you can get the creator of the world to accept you and to save you. Even Buddhists (though they don't believe in a personal God the same way as the Hindus do), like the Hindus they believe you can come into a oneness with the great spirit behind the universe if you observe certain ethical behavior patterns and do certain things that good Buddhists are supposed to do.

You don't need me to tell you that our western society believes the same way. We believe that if you follow certain business laws, certain principles of personal behavior, that you can be successful and that you can gain salvation from some of the more unpleasant sides of this present life. You know that's why Reader's Digest is so successful. It always has its selection of how-to articles: how to do this and how do to that, how to be successful in your marriage, how to be successful in your family life, how to ski better than anybody else, how to use your money and invest it successfully.

All the bestseller lists have their supplies of Jane Fonda's physical exercise books, somebody else's books on sex, somebody else's book on managing your finances. We in our western society believe that we can be saved from the unpleasant side effects, at least of this present society, by doing the right thing at the right time. The tragedy is that it's very easy for a pragmatic people like us to carry this on into the Christian faith. It's very easy to begin to turn the Christian faith and salvation by faith into a system of salvation by works.

How do you do it? Well, you take the sins that are listed in the Bible -- fornication, adultery, selfishness, sarcasm, hatred -- all those sins, and you say to each other our job is to avoid those. We should avoid them at all costs. The things that the Bible recommends that we should do, let's try to do those.

Let's aim at doing the right things. Let's aim at avoiding the wrong

things. Wherever we fail God will forgive us. For most people in America that is the Christian faith. You do your best to do the good things that you're supposed to do and you do your best to avoid the bad things that you're supposed to avoid. Then you trust God to forgive you for the works of salvation that you have failed to fulfill.

I think as you sit there you're thinking, well, yes, of course that is it. I would push this a little further: is it not true that even the act of asking forgiveness for many of us has long ago lost any personal relationship to God. It in itself has almost become a work of salvation. In other words, you try to do the good works that you're supposed to do, you try to avoid the bad works that you're not supposed to do, and then where you have a falling short, you go for the work of asking forgiveness. Often many of us have reduced that simply to a technique that we repeat in the faith that God will overlook the other works of salvation that we have failed to fulfill.

There's a real tendency for us to regard sins as something almost arbitrary that God has fixed as things we should not do. There's a tendency for us to think of God sitting up in heaven with a stenographer beside him and saying, "Okay Gabriel, eating chocolate chip ice cream -- that's a sin. Put that down. That's a sin. Fornication, that's a sin too. Put that down. That's a sin."

There's a tendency for us to think that sins are just arbitrary things that the creator has decided we should not do and virtues are arbitrary things that the creator has settled we should do. So if you avoid the bad ones and we hit the good ones then we'll somehow please God.

Indeed we often talk about sinning against humanity, as if sinning is just doing a bad thing. So if you sin against the civil laws you're committing crimes. If you sin against the morality of your society, whatever it happens to be, then you're guilty of a vice. There's a tendency for us to actually designate sinners in the light of that. We say big sinners are those who are guilty of committing crimes against the laws of our society. So they are the murderers.

The next one down are the sinners that sin against the morals of our society. They're the people that cheat on their wives, or that take part in prostitution. Then the good people are those who go to church. There's a strong tendency for us to judge it all by a kind of a work system that you have to avoid or works that you have to do. So of course our children tend to be trained in hypocrisy. They tend to be trained to think that sin is something outward. Indeed as they're brought up they more and more think that salvation is pleasing the appropriate authority by doing the right thing at the right time and avoiding the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Now loved ones you can't sin against humanity. You can't sin against humanity. We use that term lightly and casually. But actually there's no such thing as a sin against humanity. There might be a crime against humanity or a vice but you can't sin against humanity. You can't actually sin against your wife. You can't sin against me. You can't sin against society. There is only one that you can sin against and it's there, loved ones, if you'd like to look at it in Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned."

You can really only sin against God. Sins are not just arbitrary things that God has decided are wrong. They are not just things that he has decided that we'll regard as a sin. Sin is something deeper than just a thing.

You remember that Paul brought that out when he talked about some people drinking wine and others didn't drink wine, some people eating meat and others not eating meat, some people regarding one day as holy and others regarding another day as holy. He said the important thing is not actually who is right and who is wrong. So he took sin out of the realm strictly speaking of right and wrong.

He lifted it above that and he said actually it's not a big deal whether you do this or whether you do that as long as it's consistent with scripture. Of course what he's talking about here are things that can be interpreted either way. He says the important thing is that you are doing what God has witnessed to you and your conscience that you should do.

The important thing about salvation is that it's your relationship directly with God and not your relationship with a set of do's and don'ts that you have to avoid or that you have to practice. It's your relationship to God in a personal sense of responsibility. In other words, salvation is connected with your will being governed by your conscience -- not being governed by all these rights and wrongs that everybody thinks about -- but governed by your own conscience. It's what you do according to what God has shown you in your conscience that begins to govern your salvation.

It might be good to mention that that is your conscience informed by this dear word of God. Obviously the Cannibals who think it's all right to eat people are still outside the revelation that God has given in his book. As your conscience is informed by this word of God, God governs his salvation of you and the giving of his Holy Spirit to you by your own inner response to what he is guiding you to do.

That's why, you remember, Paul said it that way at the end of Romans 14:23. "But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith." In other words, if you have doubts about something and you do it then that is sin because you are not acting from faith.

In fact, sin proceeds from a lack of faith. Actually God through Paul goes a bit further in the rest of that verse. He expands the definition. He says, "for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

Sin is not doing this or not doing that. Sin is not having faith. That's it. It's not having faith in God. It's seeing these trees that we can't reproduce ourselves. All we can do is plant seeds of them and see them grow. It's seeing these bodies that we cannot produce. All we can do is take something of life and put it in a test tube and then fertilize that. It's seeing the mountains and the sky and sun and everything round about us. It's looking at the number of times in our own lives when we have been in grave danger and somehow we have been delivered. It's seeing the many, many times that some apparently loving power has been overseeing us and yet still not having faith in that dear Father. That's what sin is.

Sin isn't Sir Han Sir Han killing Kennedy. Sin isn't even those guys killing that dear guy in the plane. Sin is not a thing done. You can have sinful acts that stem from sin, but sin itself is lack of faith in our dear Father.

Buying a car could be sin if it does not stem from faith in your dear Father. If it stems from faith in the good deal or it stems from faith in your own ability to make the payments, or it stems from faith in your feeling that the salesman is trustworthy then the actual buying of a car, even though it's strictly speaking an amoral act (neither right nor wrong), if it's done other than in faith of

your dear Father, that you're satisfied he wants you to have that car, then that act will bring the same distance from God, the same lack of feeling of his favor upon your life, the same coldness in your own experience of prayer as a sin such as we would call murder.

It's the same in changing your job. If you change your job because of faith in the economy or you change your job because of faith in the other company, or you change your job because of faith in your own ability to improve your own situation, or even worse if you change your job because of fear of the economy, or because of fear of the situation in your own company, or because of fear of some of the responsibilities that you're entering into, then you are not changing your job by faith in your dear Father in heaven who knows you better than you know yourself. He remembers your frame, he knows that you're dust, he has counted every hair of your head and he knows exactly what he has put you here to do on earth. He has the right next step organized for you. He will open it out gently and easily to you in such a plain way that you will not be able to miss it. If you change your job in faith in anything other than your dear father's care, providence and love for you then you'll experience all the worry, all the anxiety, and all the uncertainty of a person that has actually sinned. Sin is lack of faith. It's lack of faith.

Brothers and sisters, if you're like me you'll have a tendency to think, we can't live like that. But that's why we're missing so much that God has for us. We've listed our little sins. We've listed the good things to do. We're just like Muslims. We're just like Buddhists. We're just like Hindus. We avoid the bad ones, try to hit the good ones, and where we miss we ask God for forgiveness. That's just the situation the Jews were in, in the Old Testament days.

God wants us to live by absolute confidence in him every moment. He says I sent you my son and my son has said to you, "Look at the lilies of the field. They do not toil or reap; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Which of you by thinking, can add one cubit to your stature or can add one year to your life? Consider the birds of the air. They don't sow or reap or gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

Our Father says, "I've sent my son to assure you of the kind of attitude I have towards you. I want you to trust me. I want you to rest in me. I want you to have faith in me."

Worry and anxiety are filled with doubt, aren't they? Worry and anxiety are filled with doubt. What's going to happen next week? What's going to happen to our house? What's going to happen to the car? What's going to happen to the children? What's going to happen to my job? What's going to happen to the money? What's going to happen to the interest rates?

Worry and anxiety are filled with doubt and they are sin. They're lack of faith in our dear Father. They're lack of faith in our Father's ability. How many of you have been in impossible situations? How many of you lived through the recession and you thought you would never make it out to the other side? How many of you have come through unbelievable physical difficulties yet God has dragged you through? How many of you have had the worst things happen, the things you feared most, and somehow your Creator has still brought you through and you're here today?

Our Father says to us, "I want you to trust me. I want you to start having faith in me. Believe me I have this whole thing organized. In my son's death I acted upon the elemental forces and spiritual powers that affect the financial powers that influence your life. I

acted on them. I have it all organized. That person that you have your loan with, I have that organized. I have the cash flow organized for those bills that are on their way. I have it exactly arranged so that you'll make it through. All I expect you to do is trust me, rest in me and not to be anxious, not to worry, and therefore not to sin."

The Father says, "I knew you from before you were born. The girl you need, the guy you need, I have it all arranged. It's exactly the best for you so just leave it in my hands. Just trust me and relax. Enjoy the ride that I've given you on this dear sphere called earth."

Our dear Father is saying to us, "Sin is not doing wrong things. Sin is an inside thing." It's a lack of faith in our dear Father. You and I know that's where the sinful acts come from. You cut down other people to try and build yourself up because you don't rest in your Father's ability to protect your reputation.

You tear into another person because you're afraid of what they'll do to your business because you don't trust your father to overrule whatever wrong things they might do. You're dishonest in income taxes and finances because you don't trust the father who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and to whom your money is a silly nothing. You don't trust him to be able to overrule and guide.

In other words, the reason we don't have faith is because we either doubt God's love for us and his desire to help us, or, we doubt his ability to help us if he wishes. We question whether he can judge the right moment to do whatever we need. Loved ones, that's sin and apart from being anything else it's stupid. It's just stupid.

Our dear Father has brought us this far. He has made the whole universe. He controls it all. To him our little space shots are nothings. He is looking after millions of planets. Then through his son he has assured you and me that he has numbered the hairs of your head. He knows exactly where you are. He's saying to you, "Relax, trust me, live in faith in me and you'll begin to experience my Holy Spirit filling you with joy, peace, love, gentleness and with goodness. I ask you to stop sinning. Stop questioning my faithfulness and start having faith in me." Sin is lack of faith, and salvation is having faith in God.

If you're like me you know exactly the areas where you have to start exercising faith this moment. I'd ask you if you want to begin to experience the Holy Spirit and real salvation stop sinning this moment. Stop being anxious and worried and stop questioning and insulting your dear Father in heaven. This morning turn around to your God and say, "Father, I'm sorry. I trust you with this thing and I will not give this another worried thought -- not one more moment. I will trust you especially when I see it seems to be going differently to what I thought it should go. I will trust you Lord."

Loved ones, will you do it now if we just had a moment of prayer? You do have to take a stand. Take a definite stand. Satan will get in on this realm and say this is just a general kind of thing where we are going to try and trust the Lord more than we have in the past. No, take a definite stand on the things that God has shown you where you do not trust him and determine, "I am going to trust you now."

If you say to me, oh I can't do that. Oh you can, you know you can. You can determine to worry about a thing or not to worry. You can determine to commit a thing into the

Father's hands or not. He has said, "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust in him and he will act." So let's each one do it now while we pray. Let us pray.

Father we have often got caught in morality and immortality instead of in sin and freedom from sin. Lord we know our actions are important and the things we do matter but we see that those all come from sin or from faith. We see Lord that the opposite of sin is not goodness. The opposite of sin is faith.

Father we pray now in regard to these things that we've been anxious, worried and doubtful about, where we've been walking in grey areas. Lord we're going to forget whether they're bad or not bad. If you have caused any doubt to be in our minds about these things, if you have caused any lack of faith about these things we're going to now step out into a broad place. We are going to step into a place where we can have full faith that you do want us to do this thing or you want us to stop doing that thing. Then Lord we're going to trust you personally.

Father we believe that you do care about us or that your judgment is better than ours about what we need. We believe that you have complete ability to do whatever is needed in our situation. So Father from this day on we turn from worrying or being anxious about this thing and we commit it into your hands.

Father in regard to those things that we were considering acting upon because of our faith in man or the economy or something else, we turn from that. That's not high enough for us. We ask you Lord to gradually give us your mind on this thing. When we have your mind we're going to act in complete faith in you because you're bigger than economies. You're bigger than companies. You're bigger than interest rates. You're bigger than everything else in this universe. We intend to live our lives having faith in you from this day forward, in Jesus' name. Amen.