

Spiritual Life Sermon #1

Introduction to Spiritual Life Series

Romans 8:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The sermon begins with a prayer:

Okay, shall we pray. Dear Father, we thank you that you alone can draw us to yourself, so I trust You to do that with all of us, especially with me in these evening services. Lord I pray that you would draw us all into your own heart and you teach from your precious word. And dear Holy Spirit will you work in our consciences so that we are not great students on Sundays evening and bad obeyers during the week. Will You work in us so we actually obey through the week what we hear from You on Sunday? We ask this for Jesus' growth in our lives. Amen.

Loved ones, I would like to start again the series on the Spiritual Life and began tonight and go on through next three years on a spiritual life. I have a verse of scripture that we might look at that describes the spiritual life. It is Romans 8 and verse 13. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live." RSV

I think a lot of us here regard ourselves as Christians but we are virtually dead. I think there are a lot of ideological believers, people who believe that Jesus died for them and they themselves made surrender to him at some meeting or other. But they did not walk according to the Spirit or they did not live according to the Spirit and they are as good as dead! And depending on where you stand on eternal security, if you stand with me you say that they are really alive but they look like dead people. Or if you stand on the other side and you believe that there isn't an eternal security then you say they have died spiritually. But however it is, they have no living relationship with God.

Now that is one of the reasons I think we should deal in detail with the spiritual life and how to walk after the Spirit. I think a lot of you have deadness in your lives not because you were never born in the Spirit but because you don't walk after the Spirit. You stopped walking after the Spirit very soon after you received Jesus.

The spiritual life is a life that is lived by the rule and the direction of the Holy Spirit of the God. It's a moment-by-moment direction and rule and if you are not living that way you're probably dead as far as your relationship with God is concerned. There's another important verse that would tell you what we are about here on Sunday evening and why I am going to try to speak on the spiritual life yet again in another series. That verse is Genesis 2:9. "And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." RSV

There are two trees that you can eat from in order to try to have relationship with God. You can eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil or you can eat from the tree of life. Let me share with you lest anyone here is thinking, "What again?" Do you know how often I have preached this series? This is my fifth time over eleven years. I've talked about these things for four times already taking three years each time to cover them. Now why do I do it again? Because I know that what I need is not knowledge. I understand them fairly well in my head. But I need life from the Holy

Spirit. And what you need these Sunday evenings is not a better knowledge of these things. Loved ones, you need to pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare you and that he will speak to me and get me new light so that you will receive life. That's what you need to walk after the Spirit.

I understand it when some of you say, "Oh!! Sunday evenings again -- spirit, soul, and body -- No! I understand it all." But do you see that you are proving that you live by knowledge and that you think because you understand it you are in it. Loved ones, the greatest truth I saw about dear old saints was they could listen to a simple evangelistic sermon for sinners and they could come out filled with life from Jesus after it. It was then I began to realize that loved ones who are really alive in Jesus are seeking for life. They're not seeking for knowledge. And the people who go out of a service and say, "It's the same thing I heard before" are just trying to live off of increasing knowledge.

One of the reasons I decided to do this again this year was because I saw so many of us running around trying to get more knowledge. It is really interesting if you stand back from even a group like yourselves, it's very interesting to see us all swarm like little bees to the next honey pot that comes into Minneapolis-St Paul airport. It really is! A great Christian speaker or leader comes into the Twin Cities and we are off like a little swarm of bees. And really when you think of it, it must have something to do with the knowledge business because if it's the life business we know we can receive the same life from the same Jesus who is in that person in our own bedroom. But I see so many of us swarming after more and more knowledge. I see us buying yet another book.

I don't know if you've noticed the kind of books that are coming out now and that are preying upon all of us. They are "how to" books. I won't name them but they are all "how to" books even if "how" isn't in the title. The Christian world is filled with books on technique and method, really betting on the thirst for knowledge that so called "children of God" have.

Loved ones, we don't need more knowledge of good and evil. We don't need more ways of being saved apart from God's life. We need God's life. I would point out to you that the spiritual life is a quality of life or a level of life. It is not a technique or a method of keeping close to God. What we are eating from on these Sunday evenings is not the tree of knowledge. If it is, you are just going to be bored to tears and you had just better stop coming. But it's the tree of life. I know in my own life over these past eleven years, every time I have talked about these things Jesus has grown and grown in my own spirit. Just talking about these holy things of God enables the Holy Spirit to make them more and more real to you. So I ask you to come Sunday evenings, yearning and hungry for food and for life.

There are two kinds of people really that should not be here on Sunday evenings. You'll find the basis for those two groups in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14. "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

RSV

Now there are two groups that should not be here on Sunday evening. The first is non-Christians. That's because the truths we're sharing are for those that are spiritually alive. They won't mean anything to loved ones who haven't committed their lives to Jesus and received his Spirit into them and allowed his Spirit to rule their lives. They won't understand them and stuff will come over as legalism. They'll just go from bad to worse. So loved ones I would encourage you not to bring

non-Christian friends on Sunday evening. You should bring them on Sunday mornings. I feel there's a dearth, even in these Twin Cities, of deep teaching on the spiritual life. That's what we are going to involve ourselves in, in these services. So non-Christians should not be present.

The other kind of person that shouldn't be present is in verse 14. "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the spirit of God." Some of you know what that Greek word is. It looks like PSYKIKOS. It is the soulish person.

That's the person who is looking for more knowledge. If you are just collecting deeper knowledge, so you somehow think that you'll grow in Jesus the more you understand the thing, then you shouldn't come. You won't get that kind of truth here. It'll be life, spiritual life to you. You need to come each Sunday evening not saying, "What is this guy going to tell me that I don't know? What new thing is he going to tell me? What new illustration is he going to use?" You need to come and say, "Lord Jesus, I'm coming to you for food and for water of life. I'm looking forward to receiving it from you." If you come that way and pray for me then the Holy Spirit will feed us all. We'll grow together in Jesus. But will you really accept this? Don't you see that it is beyond any man? We are poor little creatures, poor little finite men and women. It is beyond any man to give you something deeper than what you have, least of all this preacher here. But Jesus can give us all food and water of life on these Sunday evenings. So I ask you to seriously think of all of that as we begin the study of the spiritual life.

Maybe you would notice that the basis of our studies will again and again be scripture and so I would just point out to you God's plan for our own personal lives and personalities. It's one that most of you know very well - a very famous verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:23. I would really ask those of you who know some of the facts to pray for the loved ones who don't know these facts and realize that there are some of us here this evening that actually have never seen this and don't yet know it. Pray that it will come home as new and fresh and real to them.

Here's the outline of the personality that God has given us in his word - 1 Thessalonians 5:23. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." God says we live on three levels. We have a spirit, and a soul and a body. Now that is called "trichotomy" for those of you that have done a little study in psychology or even philosophy.

That is called trichotomy because it is three. The normal distinction in secular psychology that is made is dichotomy - two. There is the visible body here and the invisible. The mind, or sometimes they say the spirit, meaning the mental part of us. Now, God says that there is a three-fold life within us. I don't know that it's a big deal to argue over spirit, soul and body or spirit and body. I don't know that it's important to argue two against three. It is important to see that you can live on three levels of life. Your life can be dictated by either the outside or the inside. I think in some ways it is important to make the Biblical distinction.

The Biblical distinction is that outside there is the body and inside that there is the soul, which is the psychological part of us. Then, inside the soul there is the spirit. One of the values I have seen of looking at our personalities as God does is that many loved ones have trouble with self-image. They have trouble with a good self-concept. And so often if they don't make a three-fold distinction and only think of the body and soul, they will try to correct that self-image or bad self-concept by juggling their thoughts around or by working on their feelings.

And often the poor self-image is the result of something being wrong inside in their spirit. It's a

result of a wrong relationship between them and God. But they go to a psychiatrist or they go to a friend or a counselor and they try to work up good self-image and good thoughts. You'll find them often talking about themselves in these terms. They'll say "I don't love myself enough." And they get into all kinds of contortions trying to love themselves without loving themselves. They are trying to think of themselves as right and yet trying not to think of themselves too much. It is really an impossible task because the problem of a wrong self-image or self-concept is not in the soul. It is in fact in the spirit. But if you don't make that distinction you'll have real trouble continually with that.

If you don't make a distinction between spirit, soul and body you'll often come up against personal difficulties in your own life that you cannot solve and that you'll deal with on the wrong level.

I think we have seen difficulties in loved ones who are mentally disturbed and some of us are demon-casting mad. We cast out demons at the first glint of insanity and we're all for casting out a demon. Sometimes loved ones who are emotionally disturbed or mentally confused have problems in the soul. They have a disordered soul. They have a soul that has been so used to being dominated by the body that it is working the wrong way in all kinds of areas. What they need is for somebody to carefully and lovingly deal with each one of those areas. As the soul comes into order they themselves come into sanity and balance.

There are other loved ones who are willfully disobeying God and they are willfully entertaining a demon that brings error into their lives or brings some overwhelming lust into their lives. Their problem then is one that has to be dealt with by casting out the demon. But if you don't make a distinction between spirit and soul, often you can try to apply the same apparent solution to both cases and that's why many of us have seen a failure in those situations.

I think another problem you get into if you don't make a three-fold distinction (but think only of body and mind, emotions) is that you have real problems with the difference between faith and feeling. Because you say, "Yes, I live by faith and not by feeling" yet you keep on thinking "Isn't faith feeling God's presence? Isn't faith feeling the warm glow of God's love in my heart or feeling His joy as I pray to him?" If you don't make a distinction in what the spirit can perceive and what the soul can perceive and you don't know the difference you will never be able to make a distinction between faith and feeling.

So there are many reasons why it is important to accept God's outline of Biblical psychology. I would not fight to the death on spirit, soul and body. That's the terms. What I would fight to the death on is that whatever terms you use you do live on three levels. There are three levels of life that all of us experience and that is important to preserve the reality of those if we are going to make a distinction between spiritual healing and psychological healing, both of which are needed under God's guidance.

This is the outline that God gives of the personality. He says "May the spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus." I point out to you that that is a real prayer. God expects our spirits, souls and bodies to be healthy and to be blameless and to be in good shape. Only if all of them are in good shape can he really be fully glorified. It is his will in Jesus to bring all of them into order and into complete health. So that is the first point we need to be clear on: that God regards us as spirit and soul and body.

Now maybe it is good for you to see that you, yourself cannot make a distinction there (between the

soul and spirit). You can't. Brothers and sisters you will become absolute, introspective nuts if you try to divide the soul from the spirit. That's where I think at times after evening service you ask me questions that cannot be answered. They are all around the level of trying to make a distinction "Am I doing this in my spirit, or am I doing this in my soul?" Brothers and sisters, it will get you absolutely nowhere. You cannot make the distinction yourself between the spirit and soul.

The dear fellow [Watchman Nee] that is an older brother to us just puts it very strongly in his introduction to this whole thing. He talks about the whole difficulty that comes about when you begin to look inward. It is of the utmost importance that we never try to analyze ourselves. "Upon reading such a treatise as this we may quite unconsciously become overactive in self analysis. In observing the condition of our inward life we tend to overanalyze our thoughts and feelings and the movements of the inner man. This may result in much apparent progress, yet actually renders treatment of the self-life much more difficult. If we persistently turn within ourselves we shall lose our peace completely. We shall soon discover the discrepancy that exists between our expectation and our actual condition. We expect to be filled with holiness but we are found wanting in holiness. This makes us uncomfortable. God never asks us to be so introspective. To do so constitutes one of the main reasons for spiritual stagnation. Our rest lies in looking to the Lord, not to ourselves. In the degree that we look off unto him, to that degree are we delivered from self. We rest on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and not on our own shifting experience. True spiritual life depends not on probing our feelings and thoughts from dawn to dusk, but in looking off to the Savior."

Now that's what faith is. It is looking off to Jesus. And so most of the things we share on Sunday evenings are not to be taken by your mind and applied and hammered into your heart. They are to be given to the Holy Spirit who alone can apply them. He alone can make that division and it is important to make it. You'll see other reasons why it's important to make it. It's important for the spirit to gradually be divided from the soul and then for them to be rejoined in the right relationship. Because one of the problems you'll see in later Sunday evenings is that they are wrongly related. But there is only One that can do that and that One is mentioned in Hebrews 4:12.

No doubt many of those in psyche wards are there because really the body of Jesus has not realized or practiced this truth. So, they themselves are utterly in chaos because of the disorder of the relationship of their soul to their spirit. It's verse 12 of Hebrews 4. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit." Now do you see that? And that helps anyone who might be tempted to say, " Oh I thought anytime the Bible mentioned spirit it meant soul and anytime it mentioned soul it meant spirit. I thought spirit and soul were the same."

No, do you see that there is a clear distinction there. "...Piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The word of God alone, (who is really the sword of the Spirit) can give you revelation in certain moments when you may not be expecting it. He can give you revelation of times when your soul is out of order with your spirit. Even then it's been my experience that once I have received it, it was very important for me to not try and apply it by my mental memory. But to thank the Holy Spirit and to say, "Holy Spirit will you keep me clear of this in the future? Now you have revealed it to me will you keep me clear of it?" He knew fine well that it was not just a matter of my perception, but that my soul had become over strong in certain areas and he had to break that strength in me.

So that's the way it operates. The Holy Spirit, through the word of God, pierces you and reveals the intentions and desires of your heart so that you can say, "Oh, what soulfulness! How much was I involved with just my mind and emotions or with myself?" And the Holy Spirit reveals that to you. But then in subsequent weeks and months he breaks that in you. We love to think it's just a matter of perceiving and we can do it. It's not. Usually the soul has grown overly in some area and needs to be broken of some strength. But that's the way it works. It doesn't work through us doing it ourselves.

May I just point out to you the way that God created us in the beginning? You find it in Genesis 2:7.

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Maybe I could just show you some of the important words in that verse that we have read so often. "Then the Lord God formed man from dust from the ground." Actually the word for dust is "aphar" and the word for ground is "adamah". (It becomes Adam). But God made us of the ground and that is the "body" part of us. He took dust and made our bodies. Then he breathed into man's nostrils "the breath of lives". Because actually the Hebrew is "chay" and it always means the plural. So it is not "life" in the singular but "the breath of lives". And the word for "breath" in that verse is the word "ruah". That is the same word for "spirit".

You can see what the Father did. He took our bodies and he breathed into them the spirit and then man became a living being and the King James is right there rather than the Revised Standard Version (RSV) because the word is "nephesh" and that means "soul". So God took dust of the ground and made man's body. He breathed into it his "ruah", his spirit, and man became a living soul. That's why often the Bible uses soul in two ways. Often it refers to man as a soul. You remember in Revelation for instance they talk about the souls of the dead. Soul is what makes man unique. Animals have bodies. Angels have spirits. But man is unique in that he has a soul. The soul is the unique part of man. It is actually the part that gives him his individuality and gives woman her personality. It's the part where the two mix. It's like taking water and putting powder into it and the result is instant coffee.

And so the two are blended perfectly together. That was the way it was at the beginning of the garden of Eden. All three were blended perfectly. It is interesting as you read some of the books by Andrew Murray and William Law and books like "God's Life in the Soul of Man", you'll find that they attach all our problems to a disorder in the relationship to these three things inside us. Salvation is those three things coming into the right order.

In the beginning they were perfectly blended. God put his Spirit into man and man became a living soul. He was then capable of union with God. It is good for us to see too that God's Spirit is separate from our spirit. Do you see that? When God gave us his Spirit that spirit remained. It didn't always remain in contact with God or related to God or was alive to God. But that spirit remains and we all have spirits. Jean Dixon has a spirit. Hitler had a spirit. The dangerous thing about the loved ones in the Mormon church is that they have spirits. It is the spirit in them that is dangerous. Their doctrine is dangerous but the most dangerous thing is the demon of error that operates in them. That's why when we talk about people who are in willful disobedience and in willful error in the sects we say to keep clear of them. Don't even talk with them. It's not that you might be overcome by their arguments. It's because they have entertained an evil spirit of error within them. Their spirit is possessed by that and you can actually come away with some of that attached to your spirit if you are not resisting and standing in Jesus against it. So, all of us have spirits but our spirit is separate from God's Spirit.

It might be good to look at a verse that teaches that plainly. It's Romans 8:16. It's one of the assurance verses. You get the distinction there. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." You see the capital "S" in Spirit with the article - the Spirit.

But then where it says "our spirit" there is no article. It is just the word spirit. The first Spirit is always the Holy Spirit of God whenever the Greek word has the article [the] in front of it. Whenever it hasn't the article it means our spirit.

It's good for you to see that there is the Holy Spirit of God who is unique and then all of us who have spirits. When we are not children of God our spirits are dead to Him. Of course the real danger is that they can be alive to all kinds of other things. That's why there is such a plethora of spiritism and spiritualism in our day. The materialism has become so oppressive that our spirits feel more and more squashed to death and crushed. So, there is a great hunger in even the spirits of absolute pagans here in our western world. There is a great hunger. There is in fact even in them a rejection and reaction against materialism. They find that it doesn't matter how much they own they still have an emptiness inside and their spirits demand some kind of life. Then they go to the kind of life that Satan and his angels produce in spiritualism and séances. There is a great deal of bad and evil spiritual life in our world as well as the spiritual life that comes from the Holy Spirit. It's important for us to see that.

Let's go right to the final comments and finish there. One of the beautiful analogies to our personality that the Bible gives is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? " In other words the body is really just an enclosure for the spirit within. It is interesting just to look at the whole idea of your personality as the temple of God. It does provide some light on the different parts of our personality.

The temple in the Old Testament had a "Holy of Holies" and it had an Outer Court. Then it had thirdly a place that was designated the Holy Place. The Outer Court was a public place there you could see plainly because it was daylight. It was really like your body. You have no trouble seeing what the hand is doing or the fingers are doing or the feet are doing. You can see what your body is doing. It's a plain and open thing that you can see with your own eyes and observe or hear or taste.

The Holy Place was within and yet there was the light of the candles. And there were some other things in that Holy Place, so that you could see it. The priests were allowed to go in and out of there. You couldn't see quite so plainly because it wasn't daylight but you could still see. And it is interesting that your soul is a place that you can look into and see. You can look into the soul where the mind is and you can perceive thoughts. I can reflect on my thoughts. You can look into your feelings and see what you are feeling. So, the Holy Place is a place that you can see, not quite so clear as seeing your body, but you can still see.

The Holy of Holies was absolutely dark because it was the place where God dwelt. There was no light there because he provided all the light that was needed. Any everything that went on in there went on by faith. The people simply believed that God was there. They simply believed that God was there in the Holy of Holies. And everything that went on in the Holy Place and in the Outer Court was directed by what went on in the Holy of Holies. Yet what went on there no one actually knew. They believed God to be working there and operating.

If you would grasp that with all of your being you would stop this business of trying to look in to see how you are doing with God. Because the answer is you cannot. The priest alone went in here once a year. No one else went in and only the priest. Only the Holy Spirit can go into your Holy of Holies. That's why you are absolutely dependent on what he says to you when He comes out. You are. That's why it is so important when the Holy Spirit speaks to you and says, "Do this", that you should do it. He knows fine well that from what he has seen in here with your relationship with God, if you do this thing that he tells you, God will be able to fill a new place in your life.

All you can do is obey blindly the directions of the Holy Spirit. You can always check those directions against his Word that he has written. You can always check that your directions are consistent with his Word. You can always confirm it with other brothers and sisters who also have contact with the Holy Spirit. But you yourself cannot see in there. If you are going to have God working in your life it has to be by faith. You have to exercise faith that God has done what he said he'd do.

He stood at the door and knocked. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into Him and sup with him and he with me." You have to accept by faith that he has come in and that he is working there. As the High Priest, the Holy Spirit will go in and out of your spirit. He'll check out how the works are and then he'll come out and tell you what you need to do. You see the chaos that you and I get into when we treat the words of the Holy Spirit lightly. That's where we get into problems. If you say, "I have trouble with the presence of God in my life", the only thing you can do about it is to obey what the Holy Spirit is telling you to do in your outward life. Then if you do that you can trust and believe absolutely that God is completely at home inside your spirit. You can trust him to send out from your spirit whatever kind of love, or joy or peace that you need.

Remember the picture of the temple. No one could see what went on there. Only God's Spirit could and God himself. You can't see what is in your spirit. So when you get worried about God's presence in your life because you can't feel him it's ridiculous. If you get worried because you can't feel God in your life it's like you are asking me, "What is a square circle?" You can't feel God in your life and everybody knows that. You can feel God in your soul if he is sending up some happy feelings or if he isn't. But often he doesn't send up happy feelings. Often he knows that it's time for you to walk a bit by faith.

Sometimes he does grant you consolations - great joy and great peace. But very often as you move on deeper with him in your life together he sends up no happy feelings. He develops more and more your absolute faith. So that, for instance, if a time should ever come where you would be in a prison and tortured beyond the point of physical endurance, your spirit would remain strong in God. You might not even know it was strong but it would be strong. The Holy Spirit would be able to keep it strong through the years that you had exercised.

So loved ones it's that kind of situation that you are going to come into if you are going to be used by God. It's not necessarily torture or prison camp. But you are going to come into situations where your spirit has to have absolute rock-like stability -- untouched by your body and soul. The only way that that can be wrought in you is by the work of the Holy Spirit. And he can only work if every time he comes outside that door and says to you, "One glass of Coke is enough," or he says, "That's enough looking, that's enough", you stop.

Or he says to you, "Tomorrow morning, 6 AM, pray." Or he says to you, "You give this money to this

person." Or he says to you, "You fill in your income tax completely this time." Whatever the Holy Spirit says to you, you have to do it exactly. It's not even in my hands to mellow it for you. I can't even make it easier for you. I know that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him. The Holy Spirit alone can make God real in your spirit and keep your spirit alive if you will obey him every time he comes out and gives you directions and commands.

So that's the kind of outline of our personality that God gives us in the Bible. That's the kind of plan that he has for the relationship between them. Next Sunday I'd like to deal in detail with the difference between our spirits and our souls and the different functions of our spirits and the different functions of our souls. I would ask you to pray and ask the Holy Spirit. "What is there in this for me tonight?" Not - "Holy Spirit what was Pastor trying to say?" but "Holy Spirit what is there in this for me tonight?" I'm sure as I gave some of those illustrations the Holy Spirit spoke to you about something. Commit yourself this moment to obedience and you'll have no trouble with what is going on in there. That is not your business. Your business is obeying the High Priest who will keep things right in your spirit. Because he alone can touch your spirit and he'll touch it on one condition, that you'll obey him. It's a beautiful, simple life. It never gets much deeper than "Trust and obey for there's no other way." Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you that however deep we may go in the understanding of your truths they all come down to a very simple gospel – "trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." And Lord thank you that we don't need to understand the world of theology in order to do that. We know your voice, Holy Spirit. We've heard your voice in our consciences a thousand times and we know you know you've spoken to us about some things even now. We know that if we obey you on those that you will take care of that part of us that we cannot touch - our spirits - the part of us that contacts our God. Holy Spirit we see that our soul can deal with "ourselves" and our body can deal with the world but only our spirits perceive God. You alone can make those spirits alive so that they can be rightly related to our Father. We would commit ourselves to obeying you so that you will keep us rightly related to God in Jesus our Savior. 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.