

The Spiritual Life #3

The Fall (1 John 1:1-3)

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

What we're talking about on these Sunday evenings is the spiritual life. I came up against a special problem as I began to talk with those of you who were interested in walking after the Spirit. You would say to me, "I've been baptized with the Spirit and I still lose my temper." I find myself in a very awkward position. If I said you weren't baptized with the Spirit, you'd go away in depression. If I said, "Well, you shouldn't lose your temper if you're baptized with the Spirit", then it would get you into confusion of various kinds. Or I had to agree, "Yes, sure, all God's saints lose their temper all the time."

So, I began to realize that one of the problems among us who are interested in the spiritual walk is this: we have certain ideas in our minds of the big crisis experiences in our relationship with God. We have certain ideas of what the New Birth is, and we have certain ideas of what the Baptism of the Spirit is, and we have certain ideas of what crucifixion with Christ is. And we enter into what we think that experience should be. And then we somehow fortify ourselves around with those walls, and we get into a very self-defensive position -- "Well, don't tell me I wasn't baptized with the Spirit. I've spoken in tongues...But I still have trouble with anger, as you can see."

And we would tend to get ourselves into, what came to me, as not a spiritual man or a spiritual woman's position at all. It was certainly not a position of power and strength. I began to realize that many of us have entered into different crisis experiences. Some of us have received, in what we think of as the New Birth experience, we've received the victory of crucifixion with Christ. And some of us who have entered into the Baptism with the Spirit experience have received some power with the gifts. But we still walk in a defeated Christian life as far as obedience is concerned. And some of us have begun to walk in the Spirit in some ways and yet we still seem to be having trouble with obedience or submission in other ways.

And brothers and sisters I saw that what we needed to do was to stop talking about crisis experiences, trying to define them in ways that would satisfy us all, and in ways that would prove to us all that we were all okay. It was time we started to deal with walking in the Spirit. I sensed that as we talked about what walking in the Spirit is, the Holy Spirit would apply the truth to each of us. Wherever you were the Holy Spirit would touch you and would reveal a need to you, and it would get you from behind Satan's technique of always trying to defend yourself.

So, loved ones, it's in connection with that verse in Romans 8, then, that we carry on these studies on Sunday evenings. Romans 8 and verse 13, it is - and if you'll excuse me, I'll put in my own parenthesis. "For whether you're born of the Spirit or not, whether you regard yourself as saved or not, whether you've been converted, whether you've been baptized with the Spirit, whether you say you've been crucified with Christ, whether you say you're filled with the Spirit, **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."

Really, God cuts through all our bluff and says, "Look, it's the way you're living day by day that determines where you are with me." So let's stop all the argument over jargon and over titles of

experiences and let's get down to business and find out what walking after the flesh is, and what walking after the Spirit is, and how to do that -- how to walk after the Spirit. So, that's why we meet here on Sunday evenings, to determine that.

You remember that we began our study in the outline that God gives through His word of our personalities. You remember that we saw that I Thessalonians 5:23 runs like this: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly, and may he keep your spirit and your soul and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus." And we said that though the whole teaching is clearer in the New Testament than in the Old, and though there are other usages for these terms besides these that we are about to outline, yet the consensus of scriptural teaching seems to be that we can exist on three different levels of our personality. In no way can we have a surgical operation and take out our spirit or take out our soul. But still we do live at three different levels of our personality.

The body is the part of us that is conscious of the world through our eyes and our ears and our five senses. Our soul is the part of us that is conscious of ourselves. With our souls we can be conscious of what we do. We can reflect on what we do, which an animal cannot. So, our souls in that way are different from the souls of animals. And with our spirit we are conscious of God.

What we're talking about is this inner part. You remember that we likened it to the Old Testament temple, which has a Holy of Holies. There is absolute darkness in the Holy of Holies because God alone is there and he provides all the light. In the Holy Place there's candlelight, and you can in fact see something. In the Outer Court, where there is daylight, you can see clearly.

And so, with our bodies, I can see my hand rising. You can see it clearly. Even in my soul I can think what I'm thinking at this moment, feel what I'm feeling. But in the Holy of Holies I cannot tell what is going on at all. What goes on there goes on by faith alone -- by my faith in the Holy Spirit working inside my spirit.

That's really the kind of light that you talk about when you discuss each of those areas of your personality. Here, (in the Holy of Holies) it is God's light alone that enables us to perceive anything. Here (in the Holy Place) it is candlelight; here (in the Outer Court) it is daylight.

And then, brothers and sisters, the piece that I believe will give real light and freedom to many of us here is the activity that it's possible to carry on at each level of our personalities. Here, everything is done by sight. You can see; you can hear. Here, everything is done by introspection. Here, everything goes on by faith.

You remember I suggested to you that many of us allow Satan to deceive us ridiculously because we try to use introspection to see whether God is present in our lives. We look in to see if the Father is present. And the only conclusion you will ever come up with is, He isn't present. That's because the only place you can look at with introspection is your soul -- your mind and emotions. But God does not dwell there. God dwells in your spirit.

If you say to me, "Aren't there ripples? Aren't there expressions of His presence in my spirit at the level of my soul?" There is sometimes, sometimes not. Sometimes you feel a great feeling of God's presence, sometimes you don't. But the important thing to see is that God's presence is continually there through your faith. And your faith is your belief that He is present, and your submission to Him. That's, I think, as far as we got last day.

Now, loved ones, you remember we went a little further and we followed out the verses that talk about the spirit and the soul and the body. And you remember we discovered that when the Bible talks about the spirit, God's word is usually talking about our ability to commune with Him. It's usually talking about our intuition: a sense we have of what God wants us to do without long, logical analysis, or examination of circumstances, or consulting with people. Our conscience is the part of us that judges us and tells whether what we're doing is right, according to what God is telling us, or wrong.

Then our soul, if you follow out the Old and New Testament terms, you find they refer to our wills - the part of us that decides to take action - makes a decision to do this or to do that. Our mind sizes up situations, judges things, evaluates things, and reasons. Our emotions feel affection or desire. Then, the body itself is in a sense, a Trinity.

Now, what was God's plan for the functioning of those personalities? Well, His plan, loved ones, was this: that we would, in communion with Him, sense what He wanted us to do, through our intuition. And then our conscience, in the light of what our intuition was receiving in communion, would constrain our will to decide to do certain things. Our will would direct our minds to think the necessary thoughts, and through our emotions would control our bodies to execute God's will for us.

And that was the plan the Father had for us. And it fitted in, you see, to His overall plan when He created us. Because God's whole plan in creating us is stated in I John, chapter 1, if you'd like to look at it. It's verse 3.

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

So the Father made us for fellowship with Him. That was it. He loves you and He wants your company. That's why He's gone to all this trouble for you. Because our God loves you and He wants your company forever. That's why He made us. That's why He made us like Himself - because unless we're in some ways similar to Him we can't possibly interact with Him at all. And you know that you can only have so much interaction with someone who is unlike you. If someone speaks a different language to you, you can only go so deep in your fellowship. If you have a little dog you can only have so much friendship with him. There comes a time when he can't understand the kinds of things that you're feeling. So in order to have fellowship with a person, or a being, that being must be something like you. That's why God made us in His image. And you see it there in Genesis 1 and verse 26-27. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...'.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

And the image God made us in is outlined, loved ones, in the next chapter, in Genesis 2 and verse 7.

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground." The ground in Hebrew is "adamah", and that's how Adam got his name. And so God took "aphar", the dust, A-P-H-A-R in English -- He took the dust of the ground, and then He breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. And "ruach" is the word for breath. It looks like R-U-A-C-H in English and means breath. And it is also the word used when the Bible says that the Spirit of God brooded on the face of the waters. Because it is spirit as well as breath.

So God took the dust and that formed man's body, and to dust it will return. And he breathed into that body the spirit. And man became a living "nephesh". It looks like N-E-P-H-E-S-H in Hebrew. The King James Version is truer to the Scripture and to the original Hebrew, because it means "soul."

"And man became a living soul." And so God made us with a body and a spirit and a soul as He Himself

has -- a trinity -- so that we could relate to Him. In other words, God gave us capacities like His own that would enable us to think like Him, to feel like Him, and to be like Him. (In some sense God has a spiritual body and a spirit to communicate with).

Now those are the capacities, loved ones. That is what you might call the outer image of God. It is the created image of God. God made us in His image, in this sense, that He gave us the capacity to have body, spirit and soul, so that we could understand and fellowship with Him. But those are all the outer, or the created part of the image. Hitler would not be a great friend for Jesus. Nor would Manson, probably, at this present time.

So you could have mind and emotions and body and spirit, and not be in any way good company for Jesus. And so you can see there was need for an inner image. Or there was need for a nature, for us to have a nature like God Himself. It wasn't enough for us to have capacities like Him; we had to be like Him ourselves inside. We had to have an inner nature like Him. We had to have an inner image that was like His. We had to have an uncreated image that was like His. We had to have attributes and qualities that were like His.

Now loved ones, here was the big question that the Father faced. Was He going to make us with these attributes whether we wanted them or not? Or was He going to make those available to us so that we could receive them if we wished? That question was already answered when God resolved to make us in His own image because He Himself is a self-determining being. He has a free will. He can do what He wants. He made us out of free will just because He loves.

Now if He were going to make us as His friends forever, He had to make us with free wills. And so the Father gave us all these capacities. Whether you hate Jesus or love him, everybody has these capacities. But these inner attributes the Father resolved simply to make them available to us, because He wanted us to have the free will to choose to receive these inner attributes or to choose to be without them.

And that's what it means, loved ones, when you look at Genesis chapter 2 and verse 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." And then if you look a little later in verse 16 you see God giving us free will. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying," (there's no point in commanding man if he hadn't had free will. You only command someone who has free will to obey or to disobey.) "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Which obviously implied that you have the freedom to eat of it if you want.

But God's will was that we would eat of the Tree of Life. And through eating of it we would receive into our own beings the very nature that He Himself has.

Now loved ones, what is the tree of life? Well it seems easy to follow it if you follow the word "life" in the New Testament. And you can find it in John chapter 10 and verse 10 - and you remember Jesus uses it: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Now the Father doesn't have all kinds of sources of life. In Britain gas is four stars or three stars; here it's regular or premium gas pumps. When He provides life, he provides life from the one source all the time. And when Jesus says, "I am come so that they might have life," it shows us that

the tree is really the same source as what is mentioned in John 10:10.

It's the same source as is mentioned if you look at Romans chapter 8 and verse 2. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." You see the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. In other words, when you talk about the tree of life, you're really talking about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

It was the Father's will that you and I would fellowship so closely with Him that Jesus would begin to give us the same spirit that moved in His own heart. And just as two dear friends get to know one another's mind very well, so we would walk closely with our God. We would walk in fellowship with Jesus, and He, through the Holy Spirit, would impart to us all of God's own mind on different issues.

That was His will -- that our personalities would work then like that. Everything that He Himself sensed, he would pass on to us. And so the spirituality and the blessedness and the liberty that the Father had would come to us in communion with Him. Through intuition we would know what to do and our conscience would constrain our will to direct our mind and emotions so that our body did it. That was the freedom and the blessedness into which God called us.

It would work out in deductive detail in every occupation, because God has put every one of us here for a certain purpose in His world. As a plumber did that, so he would know the kind of business God wanted him to operate. He would sense what kind of work he should do. When he would go to an actual job he would go with a great peace in his mind, a great sense of being sent by his father to do this bit of work on these pipes. He would come in there with a real sense of security - no shakiness, no nervousness, no uncertainty about whether he could do it or not. He would have an absolute confidence that the Father, the creator of the whole universe, had put him here on this earth to do this job. Therefore, He would not be looking at the other fellow that's going past in a shiny new car. He would not be looking at the boy that sits behind a banker's desk. He would be utterly content with his job, because he knew that his creator had given it to him. In his prayer times with his Father, the Father would direct him as to what jobs he should take, what jobs he shouldn't take. And the Father would always give him the jobs that he was capable of at that time with just a little stretch forward that would require him to trust the Father for some supernatural energy.

And so the plumber would go about his task with that spirit. As a result of that God would work the economics of the situation so that the plumber would have all he needed to eat. He would have all the food, shelter and clothing that he needed. So he'd have all the security he needed. He'd have a great sense of happiness because of his relationship with his creator, and knowing he was being used by his creator to redeem the world and bring it into God's order. He would, as a result, have all the sense of importance and recognition and acknowledgment that he needed. He wouldn't care whether the woman whose pipes he fixed appreciated him or just threw him out the door after the job was done. He wouldn't care whether he got little money for that or a lot of money for another job, because he would have absolute confidence that he was doing what his God wanted him to.

Now, loved ones, that was the Father's will for us. That was His plan for each one of us. You could work it out in detail in your position. Really, that was God's will. Of course, you know what we did. We rejected the whole plan. We rejected it because of pride. And you get it mentioned there directly to Eve in Genesis 3 and verse 5. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

God made us in His image -- that was part of God's plan. But he wanted us to be in His image so that he could fellowship with us - so it was only a secondary purpose. The primary purpose was so that we could fellowship with Him. But we grabbed onto His image, and we said, "That's right. We want to be like God. We want to have the control that He has. We want to be able to do what we want when we want." And we determined in pride, we will be like God. We will be like Him as an end in itself. That will be the ultimate purpose in our lives: to control and to rule. And to do whatever we want.

So in pride we determined to reject God's plan. Now, loved ones, it affected something else in us if you'd like to look at Genesis 3 and verse 6. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate."

The moment we decided that we would live in order to be like God ourselves, we cut ourselves off from all the security and significance and the happiness that we have in God. We had to start getting that from somewhere else. And so our whole personality, which was planned to operate that way, (from our spirits out to our bodies) began instead to operate the other way (from our bodies into our spirits). If we didn't get the security and significance and happiness from God and from His Spirit through doing what He wanted us to do with our lives, we had to get it from somewhere else and we turned to the world. Our whole personality began to try to use a knowledge of good and evil to get from the world the security and the significance and the happiness that we had got from God - or that He meant us to get from Him.

Brothers and sisters, if you'd like to look at it this way, in a sense God intended our minds to understand the directions that He was giving us through His Spirit. When we determined to be like God and to be independent of Him, our mind began to concentrate on manipulating the world so that we would end up with the same kind of security as we originally had from the Father Himself.

And so many of us spend our days using our minds to try to manipulate some more security from the stocks and shares. We try to manipulate our degree into a little more dollar return per year. Our mind has ceased to concentrate on understanding God and it has begun instead to manipulate. And so our universities are losing the joy of pursuing truth for its own sake. The mind instead tries to manipulate truth in order to establish the teacher's significance among his peers. We all know the phrase, "You publish or perish." None of us have any doubt that it doesn't mean, "publish" in order to enlighten the poor millions that need your teaching. We know that it means, "publish" or your salary will not be increased next year.

And so the mind, which was meant to concentrate on understanding what God was giving to us in our spirits, began to manipulate. The emotions, which were meant to express the joy that we had with our Father and in our friendship with Him, our emotions lack that joy. They concentrate now on trying to get joy; to try to get joy from the world and other people; to somehow get the happiness that we were originally experiencing with our Father and were meant to experience. And then our wills, which were meant to obey the conscience, our wills, in order to establish the significance we would have had if we'd done that, our wills began to dominate others. And many of us today use our wills in our offices to try and bring others under our control so in some way we'll feel some sense of importance or some sense of significance.

Loved ones, the Fall at least meant those things. It meant that our whole personality became perverted. It reversed the whole direction of our personalities. That was one great consequence of the Fall - that all of us here have personalities that for years have been operating in reverse, in

perversion. And so one of the real difficulties you have even when you want to obey God is, the old mind for years has been working angles. For years it has been a Jacob - manipulating this way and that way, looking out for the best chance. Like a little animal defending itself, trying to get into a corner from which you can dominate and manipulate others or manipulate circumstances.

It's the same with our emotions. Our emotions are so used to trying to get another kick, get another little high, that whenever we first hear of Jesus giving us all that, our emotions have got so used to this rut that we can't possibly see how to change them. And so it is with our wills. They are so used to dominating and ruling and trying to get their own way over other people, that we have almost no idea of what it means for the will to obey.

Now when that happened, the Father saw that he had monsters on his hands - absolute monsters. If you ever let the monsters loose they would, and you know the suggestion was made just a few years ago, they would eventually fill the universe with their garbage. That's the very thing we plan to do, you know, shoot it out into space and get rid of it. And the Father knew, "No, if I let these little monsters now live forever they will destroy the whole universe." And so you remember the consequence of the rebellion against God in Genesis 3 and verse 22-24. "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever' -- therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." And the Father withdrew from us the Holy Spirit, and our spirits died.

And that's why, you remember, in Galatians it says, "Men and women now live by the passions of the body and the mind." Because once our spirits died, our souls themselves were not strong enough. That's because they were made only to be the servant of the spirit. They weren't strong enough to dominate our lives except in a few cases of very intellectual men like Albert Einstein. Most of us do not have a soul that is strong enough to dominate our lives. In fact, most of us live like little animals. Our bodies govern what our souls do. We are ruled by our needs for security, significance and happiness, which we try to supply somehow from each other and from the world, through the mind and emotions and wills of our souls.

Now some of us, when we do come alive in the spirit, find that we do get free a little from the bodily needs and the bodily domination, and we do come under a soulish domination. Most of us, I think, are still under the control of our bodies. Most of us here, if it comes to losing money, or it comes to doing without food, or doing without clothing or doing without shelter, those tend to be overwhelming considerations for us. We find great difficulty in reacting against those. We find it almost impossible to act apart from those dictates.

And that is what the Fall involved. It involved the death of our spirits and involved the absolute perversion and reversal of our personalities. That's what Jesus had to deal with on the cross. And so even though we end on that kind of a note tonight, I'd ask you to let the Holy Spirit show you if you still live this way today. Because brothers and sisters of this I am sure, (and I want to say it so it comes home to you) that there are hundreds and thousands of us who call ourselves Christians who are not at all living as Christians. We are absolutely living like little animals - dominated by our bodies and utterly ruled and domineered by the needs for security, significance and happiness, which we continue to try to get from the people in church or from our associates or from our relatives or our friends. Loved ones, to the extent that you're doing that, it doesn't matter what crisis experience you say you've come through. It really doesn't.

And could I bring some things home to us? Some of us do have special problems in regard to food, but none of us can claim we have special problems in regard to clothes, in regard to our possessions, our cars and in regard to our trying to ensure our futures. In so far as we're dominated and dictated to by those needs, we really can in no way call ourselves Christians. We ought to face that and be honest about it and say we know all the language of Zion, and we've gone through all kinds of experiences, but we do not live by the Spirit. We still live by the body. To the extent that you and I do, (i.e. live by the body) we ought to just repent tonight. We ought to say, "Holy Spirit, I want to start right now, the right way round. Will you begin to work this redemption in me?" I know that He will. He'll begin to work it right now.

So, are you facing morning prayer time and failing repeatedly? Do you see that that is the domination of the body? Do you see that? There's no other way to talk about that. That's the domination of the body. Now, will you reject that tonight by faith and tomorrow morning by action? Are you having trouble with food, either way, eating too much or eating too little? God wants us to eat moderately and sensibly. But if you're getting all preoccupied with fasts and all preoccupied with what you're eating, then you see you're like the poor man who is as preoccupied with his lack of money as the rich man may be with his plentiful supply of money. You're still preoccupied with the body. Will you repent of that? Will you say, "Lord, I'm sorry? I've spent so much time thinking about whether I'm eating too much or eating too little, or whether I shouldn't eat as much or whether I shouldn't eat as little. I'm stopping all that circus, that foolishness, and I'm just going to eat moderately - what other people regard as moderate - day by day."

It's the same with the car or the clothes. If at this moment you are in one of those mesmerizing hypnotism fits over the car or over the coat you're going to buy for the winter, just stop it now. Repent this moment and say, "Lord, I'm stopping. Whether I get it or whether I don't get it, I'm stopping this preoccupation with this fad, and I'm going to look to you."

Loved ones, that's what it means. Walking in the Spirit is very practical. You don't have to be spooky; you don't have to ask yourself, "Do I speak in a tongue as beautifully as John Shank does?" It's not that. It's just very down to earth. Are you at this moment running your life by the dominating needs of your body, or are you running your life by the dictation of your spirit? I pray that God will give you light.

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, thank you for your goodness to us and for your plain truth taught so clearly in your Word. I personally would thank you, Father, that this is not an obscure, confusing way to walk. Lord, it's plain, so that even the wayfaring man can understand. I thank you for that. We pray together that you will now make it plain to each one of us if we are walking according to the dictates of our body in any way. If we are preoccupied in any way with the security and significance and happiness that we are trying to get from the world, we repent of it this very moment. Tomorrow morning and this week we intend to act in accordance with our repentance this night, so that you will be able to pour again your Holy Spirit into our lives and make us alive in our relationship to you. We ask this in your name and for your sake. Amen.