

The Cross and the Soul Life 1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, you live either by love of the world or love of God. That's it. And you know, by love of the world I don't mean the normal ideas that we were brought up with maybe in fundamentalist or evangelical circles where we felt well, love of the world is drinking, and smoking, and dancing, and all those terrible things. And it was just an excuse to categorize the things we didn't do and make ourselves feel good.

By love of the world I literally mean love of the world. We either live by the love of our peers, and our friends, and the approval of the people in our office, or the people in our family -- or we live by God's love and approval of us. It's either one or the other. We get our significance either from the world or God. And of course, the one problem about us all getting it from the world is there are maybe conservatively speaking, about 3.5 billion of us. And if we're all asking the other 3.5 billion to give us a sense of significance, we're in real trouble because everybody's doing the same thing. And it's impossible, it's just impossible to get a sense of significance for all of us from the world -- and that in itself would tell us it's wrong.

But it's the same with our security. You either get your security from God and have a basic attitude, "He put me here. He has a place for me. He organized the economies of the world so that I'll have enough food, shelter, and clothing if I obey him." Or you think, he didn't and, "If I can't trust him for that then I better scrape from this place as much as I can get and I better grab all that I can." So you either get your security from the world by grabbing all you can, building up as big bank accounts as you can, hedging your -- bets, hedging against inflation as much as you possibly can -- or you really do trust that the God who made you has security arranged for you.

And it's the same with happiness. You either depend on the world for your happiness -- try to get as many thrills, and kicks, and exhilaration and serenity out of the world as possible -- or you get it from God. So I think we've talked about that for a great while. And you remember that we've talked also how the security that comes from God is what comes through our spirits and that is his plan. That it come through our spirits, through our souls, through our bodies, and out to the world.

And of course the way most of us have been living is the other way entirely. We've been living by getting it from the world. And the beginning of being a Christian, the beginning of the Christian life, the beginning of being born of the Spirit is agreeing that you will no longer live that way and agreeing that that can be crucified with Christ. That is what Romans 6:6 means. It means our old self, the old self that lived that way, has been crucified with Christ and we agree in our wills to that.

Now really loved ones, when a person finally agrees, "Lord, I will no longer live from the love I get from the world. I will live for the love that comes from you. I will no longer depend on the world for my love but I will depend on you alone", then God gives his Holy Spirit to a person. Now, I know you loved ones are sitting there and thinking, "Brother, do you mean no one is born of the spirit until they come to that point?" Loved ones, many of us who have not known of the depth of Calvary have come in on a shallower level, on a more superficial level, on the level of just getting

our sins forgiven. But, sooner or later, we come up against this trouble. We come up against the problem of Romans 7:15 and we realize “the good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate is what I do.” And we realize that we have only entered into part of the work of Calvary.

So you can see that there are many who are just children and they're carnal and fleshly and yet they have something of God's Spirit in them. But his real will for us is that the spirit will become alive when the great “I” is crossed out and is crucified. And when the old self is crucified then God's Spirit comes in. So really when the old self is crucified it's us saying, “Lord, I am willing no longer to live that way. I am willing to live this way. This way.” And then loved ones, the real work begins because then begins the daily work of the cross in Luke 9:23.

Because you see it's one thing to say, “I'm willing for that.” But you've got here a personality that has been for years going the other way. In this soul area you've got a mind, and emotions, and a will that for years have been depending on the body and on the world and now they have to be reoriented, rerouted; that is a work of gradual crucifixion of the independent soul. And that is what we mean by the fact that you can be crucified instantaneously as far as your will is concerned and you can be filled with the Spirit instantaneously, but that direction of the Spirit through you to the world is something that comes gradually and that is where Jesus refers to the daily dying.

I'd point out to you, in other words, that you're in the same situation as you are when you switch from badminton to tennis, or squash to tennis. I don't know if many of you have played badminton or squash but both of them are wristy games. They are wristy games. You use your wrists strongly to get the shots, either in badminton or in squash. It's that kind of movement. In tennis, it's not wristy at all; it's that kind of movement. It's with a fairly straight wrist, fairly straight. It's a fairly straight wrist. And all of us who have switched from one game to the other have found that the wrist had to gradually be taught to stay straight and firm. It always wanted to act as it did in badminton or squash. It has to be taught to stay stiff.

Now, it's the same with any game, those of you who play a lot of golf could say the same thing. It's one thing for somebody to tell you how to stand, it's one thing for somebody to say, “Not that but that.” But boy, you know the old eyes are up there every time because the body is just used to it; it gets used to a bad habit. Now, I know all those of us who love sports say it's as easy to get used to a good habit but yet we know the agony of it.

Now, that's the same situation we're in, loved ones. Here is us saying to the Father, “Lord I am willing,” and that's when the real birth and the real crucifixion with Christ takes place. “Lord I am willing to live no longer on people. I'm willing no longer to depend on the world. I'm willing to depend only on you.” And that moment you're born of the Spirit, you're crucified with Christ; you're filled with the Holy Spirit. And then comes about the long trail of rerouting this whole personality so that is possible.

What I'd love to deal with this evening briefly are four of the instances where Jesus says we are to deny our soul life. We are to deny our soul life. Four different times when he says we've to bear the cross daily and we've to reroute the soul life and allow the Holy Spirit to begin to reroute it this way. You'll see them plainly loved ones if you'd like to look at Matthew 10:38. “And he who does not take his cross and follow me,” so it is the cross you see, but here it is gradually the daily cross. “And he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it,” the word is “psuche”, or in English letters it's p-s-u-c-h-e; it's the word for soul. And so Jesus is saying, “He who finds his soul life will lose it and he who loses his

soul life for my sake will find it.”

Now, what particular part of the soul life is Jesus talking of? Well, Verse 34, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against a mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Loved ones, those hard words refer to our natural affections.

In other words, we, most of us, have souls that are absolutely dominated by every smile that comes from our friends. Most of us here, love a smile from our friends. And most of us who have mums or dads have lived for years on their approval and on their reinforcement and their reassurance. And Jesus is saying, “Your life can never be a channel of my love and my spirit to your nearest relatives and your best friends until you finally stop depending on them for your affection and for your sense of significance and for your sense of reassurance.”

It’s interesting, if you think of it there’s something beautiful about family love and yet there is something very binding about it too. Every one of you who have suffered the agonies of breaking away from mums and dads in regard to your career, or your future, or in regard to your marriage, or in regard to your relocating somewhere, have found that family affection has two sides to it. One side seems beautiful but the other side is filled with possessiveness and with a desire to dominate. You see, you and I always like to think, “Yeah, yeah, it’s those rotten parents -- they’re the people who feel that. If their love for us was as pure as our love for them we’d be okay.” But it’s not so.

Our love for them is even more selfish and even more dependent, and it draws even more from them than we probably will ever know. And so family affections are very binding and especially in a husband wife situation, if you have not really come to the end of whether that loved ones pleases you or displeases you, you are at their mercy and they are at your mercy. Really. And those of you who are not long married know that so well; that if you’re not freed from each other and freed from the need of each other’s affection you can just go up and down, up and down, all the time.

You are just absolutely at the mercy of the smile that the other person gives you, or the thing that the other person does for you and it doesn’t matter how much at peace you are with Jesus in your spirit, your soul is continually trying to draw in from the world still. And so of course, it can’t draw from two places and what it actually does is it begins to live off the body again, it begins to live off the world. And so you’re back in the old situation you used to be in where you had something of the Spirit in you but you weren’t living by the Spirit.

It’s the same in regard to your ministry, to relatives or friends. I don’t know what you are all like in your attitude to what people think of you but I remember being very concerned that people would like me and would approve of me. And I remember, I used to watch the response in their faces during conversations to see if I said something that they really liked or that really made sense to them, or that they really agreed with. And of course, when you have your eyes on somebody else’s face and you’re being guided in your conversation by what another human being is thinking there’s one thing very certain, you have no time to be concerned with what God wants you to say. You’re utterly taken up with saying the thing that will get the right response from your friend.

And so loved ones, the soul continually wants to drag you back into the affections of other people

and being concerned with their approval. And while the soul succeeds in doing that you will not be able to say what you've to say to them. There was, in the Old Testament, a group of people that were designated false prophets. And one of the old prophets in the Old Testament said these false prophets had itching ears. The prophet said that the people had gathered to themselves prophets with itching ears. In other words, these prophets who were supposed to speak God's word to the people had ears that were itching to hear what the people wanted to hear and then they would speak that to the people so that they could be popular prophets.

And do you see that while your soul is straining after other people's approval and straining to see if you're pleasing the person you're speaking to, there's one thing certain, that you are a prophet with itching ears and you will never say anything that offends them, and you'll never say anything that would seem a reproof or a rebuke to them. I don't want to draw it out but I would imagine there is not one of us here in this room that does not fall into this temptation or opportunity for sin through the week in our offices. You know it. You know it.

Even if you go into Dayton's department store to deal with someone in there, you know how easy it is to fall into that small talk, that superficial conversation -- that instead of concentrating on Jesus and ministering something constructive and creative, even if it doesn't mention Jesus' name at all -- instead of that we're utterly preoccupied with whether we're getting on well with this person, with whether we're relating to them, with whether they're responding to our jokes, or our smile, or our comments. And of course, in that situation you cannot minister anything of Jesus' life. In fact, all you're doing is dancing around each other, really. You're just taking part in the great charade that most of the world is engaged in.

And that's why Jesus said, "You have to come to the place where in comparison to your love for me and my Father, you hate your own father and mother." You see, that's what it means there. It doesn't mean you have to hate them and stick pins in their effigy and try and poison them with poison mushrooms and all that kind of stuff, no. But, he's saying, "Every time the Bible uses the word hate it's using it in comparison with love." It's saying, "Look, you have to love God and Jesus way beyond any love that you have for your father and mother. Then, you will truly love your father and mother." And that's it.

See, what we say is love for our parents, or love for our wives, or love for our friends is not love, it's lust. Not even necessarily sexual lust, just emotional lust. We need them, we need them, we want them, we can't do without them and that's what brings such insecurity into friendship. Do you realize that? Because so many of us know we're friends of the other person because the other person needs us and they don't really love us, we just fulfill a need in them. And then they think the same about us and so we talk about friends but really we're not friends. We're not friends who would die for each other, we're friends who simply use each other and that's what Jesus means. When you at last die to that affection that comes from other people then the Holy Spirit begets in you the love of God. That's what the Bible says.

The Holy Spirit sheds abroad in your heart the love of God. A love that Jesus had for the leper even though he didn't need the leper. It was a disinterested, unselfish, constant love. And so loved ones, there's only one way to deal with this and this is day-by-day the Holy Spirit will give you revelation about some way in which you're still the plaything of other people's responses to you. And he'll bring you up against that again, and again, and again and you'll come into situations where you'll walk away from the conversation sick, sick at heart because you realize, "All I did was live off that person. All I did was waste time. I gave nothing of Jesus to them."

And that's what the Holy Spirit will do. He gives you revelation, that's what the Bible says.

The Holy Spirit will enable you to distinguish between soul and spirit. He'll enable you to distinguish between when you're responding to a person from your spirit and when you're responding purely from your soul and then he will bring you into breaking experiences. Breaking experiences that will sicken you with your own parasitism and your own selfishness and so we should watch for that and yearn for it. And I think we can all only do one thing, we can say, "Holy Spirit, will you bring me into that more and more? Will you bring me into that in regard to my affections?"

Then loved ones, if you would look at another verse. Jesus does talk about another part of soulfulness and it's in Matthew 16:24-25. "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" And then the famous words you see, "For whoever would save his life," "psuche", his soul life, "shall lose it, and whoever loses his soul life for my sake will find it." Now, what element of the soul life? Well, in Verse 21 and it follows this paragraph, Verse 21, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.'"

And there is a natural self concern that the soul has. You see, the soul attitude is, "I have to protect myself." The Spirit attitude is, "God will protect me. He'll take care of me. He'll call "uncle" when "uncle" has to be called. He'll call a halt to the thing whenever a halt has to be called." But the soul attitude is, "No, no, I don't want to get hurt. I have to protect myself, I have to watch myself." And that's an attitude that continues to operate just the way the wrist wants to continually break even though it's playing tennis. Just the ways the eyes continually want to follow the ball up there instead of concentrating on it here, so the soul continually wants to look out for itself.

And so you'll sense in your own self repeated situations where you're trying to protect yourself. And we use all kinds of excuses. We should respect our bodies, there's no question, we should respect our bodies and the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should eat properly and we should get enough rest, but you'll find that the soul is often always sinking back into taking more care of itself than God wants you to take. So you'll find yourself in many situations where the Holy Spirit directs you to go out and visit somebody or go out and do something and the soul will say, "What about a little folding of the hands to rest?" And you'll say, "Yes, yes, I think so. I would be much better equipped for this task of ministry if I had a sleep." And it will happen continually.

And loved ones, especially I think, we ought to watch in these days because most of us here are much, much better off than we were when we all started as a family together seven years ago. Many of us are much better off than we were. Most of us have enough clothes, we have enough shelter, some of us have even wheels under us and we can do what we want. And it's these times that you'll find self concern beginning to rise more and more.

One of the sisters in the body shared with me last week, isn't it really important that as we all begin to marry and as we begin to think of having children and families that we don't end up all searching for houses and deciding to settle down in Minneapolis. Well, I think that's true. I think there are many of us for whom that will be God's will and we ought to obey him. God will want

a group of us here who will continue to maintain the headquarters of the whole missionary operation throughout the world. But, we better watch that that is God's will for us and we better see that there is a natural tendency of the soul to sink back into a love of material possessions and a love of comfort, and sink back into a protection of self.

And loved ones, there is a sense in which, you remember, Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence." That's interesting. The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence. And of course, if you take the inner meaning of kingdom, it's the domain of the king and the kingdom of God is within us. That's the truth. The kingdom of heaven is within us. And it's true that the rule of Christ in your heart is a thing that will require violence at times. It's a thing that will require a turning from comfort, a turning from all the security that everybody else in society is going after and a going after Jesus whatever the cost.

And really, if that kind of violence and self denial ever disappears from your life or mine, we're finished. We've saved our soul lives and therefore we actually lose our soul lives because we come under complete domination of the soul instead of it being an instrument of Jesus' Spirit within us. And so you'll find the Holy Spirit will be good to you. He'll bring you into situations on a cold, cold night where you'll have a choice of either going out to a hospital to visit somebody or staying at home. He'll give you an opportunity either to stay at home or to go out to a class. Either to stay at home or go out after something of his will and you'll have that choice repeatedly. The Holy Spirit will repeatedly bring that to your conscience as long as your conscience is alive.

And I would urge you to see that there's only one right attitude to self concern and that is the same attitude that Jesus expressed to Peter. He said, "Get the behind me, Satan!" And he, when he faced the cross, had no concern for himself at all and saw nothing bad in nails piercing his dear hands, and nothing terrible in the spear piercing his side. He saw that as his Father's will for him and as the most desirable thing for him to do in the whole world. I would urge you to see that the best way, the victorious way, the good way, will probably most times be the uncomfortable way. From time-to-time God will allow it to be a comfortable way but rarely, rarely.

The whole benefit of the cross is that the Calvary road should always be a Calvary road. Whenever you begin to pad the cross so it doesn't hurt your shoulder, you begin to pay a few guys at the back to hold the other end of the cross, and then you begin to carpet it with shag carpet so you won't feel the stones on the Via Dolorosa. Whenever you begin to find yourself comfortable with the Calvary road you should ask yourself, "Am I on it? Am I on it? Or, have I made what God planned good for me, have I made it evil for me?"

And it's always what the Holy Spirit wants. Don't get into the business of masochism or trying to make things hard. You won't have to make things hard, the Holy Spirit will be good to you and he'll keep you coming up against enough trials and enough difficulties so that if you just face them and walk steadfastly towards them he will work the cross in your soul life. But loved ones, the soul is always something that we have to stand against.

Now, if you say to me, "Will the powers of the soul ever be broken?" Oh, certainly. Certainly there comes a time when you have that straight wrist in tennis. Not quite as good as the boys in Wimbledon, but still you're good. And there comes a time in golfing when the old head will stay on the ball and you don't have to find the head going up all the time. Yes, the soul will gradually come under the control of your Spirit but only as you bear that cross daily. And it requires you to set your will to it.

I'd just point out then loved ones, just to finish this evening, the two ways in which the Holy Spirit works this breaking of the soul powers or the disciplining of the soul in you. And the first way is in 2 Corinthians. Two ways we already talked about 2 Corinthians 4 and it's especially Verse 11 but Verse 7 on states it. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." Paul says, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus." That's that continual bearing of Jesus' body and his death.

"So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake." Why? "So, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature," -- our soul-- "is wasting away, our inner nature," -- our spirit -- "is being renewed every day." And that's what's happening.

And so don't reject and resent the hard things that God lovingly brings into your path. If I could share what I do, when I see something rubbing me, or when I see something that I'm rejecting or reacting against -- I immediately look up to Jesus' Spirit and say, "Thank you. I don't quite see what you're doing here but I know you're doing something because I know if Jesus' Spirit alone was in me then there would be no resenting, there'd be no sense of rubbing or abrasiveness here. There'd be just a gentle, loving, willing acceptance of this for God's sake." So do that.

If things rub you the wrong way, or things are hard, look up immediately to Jesus' Spirit and say, "Holy Spirit, show me what you're getting at here. There's something of my soul that is reacting in the old way. Show me, I want this broken. I want to come to the place where I can accept everything as you did, Lord Jesus. Even the worst, even the spitting, and the blows, and the insults, I want to be able to receive it with joy." And then what happens loved ones is what is said in Hebrews 4. And this is the second factor that God uses in breaking these soulish powers and this wrong direction in our souls.

It's Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit." You see, you'll never see it yourself. If you look inside all you're doing is looking inside with the power of your soul and you'll see just your soul -- so introspection gets you nowhere in this. It has to be revelation from God. "Piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." So it will be the word of God that will reveal to you the meaning of the breaking experience that you're passing through.

And it's the word of God in the sense "rhema". The word of God coming to us through the Holy Spirit. It's not the sense of word of God "logos" -- the written word of God. Many of us say, "Oh yes, we just have to look up this word and we'll find out what's happening here." Well no, it's the word of God in the sense of God speaking to you through his Spirit. That's why it requires you to be so dependent on the Holy Spirit. So you come into a breaking experience and then you look up to

the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit show me what's happening here."

Loved ones, any questions?

Question from Audience.

Have you ever thought that the attitude of disinterest could be something that shows we're moving beyond the soulish characteristics or attitudes? I wondered if it was something that could help a person move towards purity and unity, because the person that is looking for purity and unity it seems to me is not concerned about anything above him, anything below him, anything next to him, anything around him. So therefore, if he is doing that it seems to me he is attempting to "dwell in the house of the Lord." Therefore, when the Lord sees an individual that has a mind that is trying to being disinterested, it almost compels God to move towards that person as opposed to allowing us to, or propelling us to move towards God.

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

I'll be frank, and just come straight back at you. I think what you've stated is the best that human beings can do. I think that what you stated is excellent because it is the best that human beings can do to bring about the love of God in their hearts, you know. And I think, I honestly do believe that that is what Buddha was after with really an honest heart and a real desire, a desire to come to the place where he negated self, where he was disinterested in either the suffering that came to him or in any desires that he had. And I do think that there are many religious leaders and all kinds of cults, and all kinds of mind control systems that see that somehow we should rise above self and they try to bring this about. It's just impossible to escape from self by self's effort. It ends up in some degree of self righteousness or some sense that self is bringing this about.

And all I would say to try to summarize it is the Holy Spirit, it seems, is the only one who can shed abroad in our heart the love of God that is truly disinterested and yet is filled with a positive preoccupation with the Father and therefore has his love for people instead of our own love. And I would say that the Holy Spirit fills us miraculously by its super natural power with the love of God and we cannot produce that ourselves. But, I agree with you, that our human part is to be willing to be emptied of love for ourselves and emptied of interest in self. And we have to be willing to be that. All I'm saying is that without the miracle of Jesus' cross we could never be freed from self. But actually, we have to come to the point where we're willing to be. There I agree with you. All I'm saying is we can't bring it about by our own concentration even, or attempt to produce disinterested love.

Question from Audience:

Regarding the nature of the spirit and Christ, there is a section I think in Luke 8, where he pointed to the girl and he said, "Arise." This was the daughter of the ruler, and she arose from the dead. And it says there in the scripture that her spirit returned unto her and she was able to arise. Now that seems to be maybe possible because it seems to me if she arose there must have been within her a principle or within her spirit some sort of life giving principle. In other words her mind must have been functioning in a matter that had allowed the rest of her anatomy to get up and to move. So she must have had thought process, thinking, etc. So that tells me that perhaps the spirit of man is closely connected with his mind also.

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

Yes, I agree with you. All I would say is that where I wouldn't be prepared to follow you is on the logic of connecting of the mind. I think there's a verse in the scripture that says, "It's the law that kills us but it's the Spirit that gives life." And I think there is no life without the Spirit of God inside us. And I think that's the sense in which her human spirit enlivened, at least given life for this world, returned to her. Shall we pray?

Dear Lord, thank you for your goodness and thank you for your generosity to us. And Lord Jesus thank you above all for your Holy Spirit that enables us to see things that no man or woman can see without your enabling. And therefore, Holy Spirit, we thank you for giving us eyes to see and opening eyes that were blind and could not understand these things before. We thank you Lord that it is true, that it is only by your Spirit that we can understand and sound the deep things of God. But we do appreciate that dear Father, that in these evenings we're not just seeing and understanding principles with our mind but we're sounding the depths of your person and your being and you in graciousness are revealing those depths to us.

And oh Lord Jesus, we thank you that it is our personal love for you and our dear Father that is the key to insight and is the entrance in to knowledge and truth. And we thank you that the more we love you the more we understand, and the more we love you the more we can give life to others. We pray Holy Spirit that you'll use us this coming week not to live off our dear friends and colleagues but in fact, to give them something of you because we live off you and not them.

We trust you Holy Spirit, for breaking experiences this week. We would not resent them, we would welcome them, we would greet it as pure joy when we enter in to various trials because we know that you're beginning to deepen us and to bring this wayward independent soul into a submissive service of our spirits so that you can begin to manifest yourself to our colleagues and our friends. So we give ourselves to you for this purpose. That we may live truly unselfish, outgoing lives this week for your glory.

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.