

Spiritual Life #18

Development of the Spiritual Life

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Now loved ones, what I thought I would do is just very quickly mention what we had covered over the past winter in these Sunday evening services. And then I would really keep my promise this time and stop in about 10 minutes. And my wife is here, and I have to stop in 10 minutes and then you would ask questions. So maybe all I'm doing is giving you the opportunity to gather the questions together so that you can put them to me.

Loved ones, may I just share with you the heart of the gospel which is in 1 Corinthians 1:17-18.

"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." And no one can say more than that at the end of the day, loved ones. The heart of the gospel is the cross of Christ. And Paul stresses it again in Chapter 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The death of Jesus is everything. The death of Jesus is everything.

You don't need anything more than the death of Jesus. There's nothing else you need but the death of Jesus. And there's nothing else you need to enter into but the death of Jesus. If you entered into the death of Jesus you will enter into the resurrection of Jesus and into the ascension of Jesus. Everything that will come to you that you need in this life comes in Christ. In Christ is everything and you need nothing more than Jesus, and nothing more than the death of Jesus. And however far you may get away in your own spiritual experience from what God wants for you, if you always come back to that you'll be right at the door into victory: the death of Jesus, the death of Jesus.

Wherever you go, whatever you think, whatever you feel, however many books you read, however many preachers you listen to: the death of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the cross of Christ, that's it.

Loved ones, I never thought I'd be standing here preaching this because I believed the other way, that there were all kinds of other issues that were important. But now I know you need to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. He is the key to everything.

And what we've been sharing in these Sunday evening is that the great bulk of Christendom has entered no more into the death of Jesus than the Jews had. The Jews were baptized into the name of him who was to come. They believed that there was some mighty work that their great God had done in pre eternity that enabled them to become related to him and they didn't know what it was but they sensed it was something to do with a great sacrifice and in virtue of that they sacrificed their lambs and their cattle. And the blood that was spilled on the alters was never meant by them to placate God the way the pagans tried to placate the evil spirits. To them it always stood for a great sacrifice that they couldn't fully understand but that they knew had taken place in the heart of God.

That somewhere there were some lambs slain before the foundation of the world that provided all they needed for deliverance from their sin. And what we've been saying is that many evangelicals, many Christians have gone no further than that. Many Christians can go no further than to say, "Well, I know it's something to do with the death of Christ. I know that because of the death of Christ God will forgive me and receive me as his own child. I don't know why that happens. I don't know how

it affects my life but I believe it.” And so there are millions, and millions of sons and daughters of God who are really stillborn in a sense because they believe with their head that God has done something in Jesus to deliver them from their sin but they don’t really know what it is and so they settle back down into that vague belief that the Jews had. “Well, I don’t know what the death of Christ has to do with my Father’s acceptance of me but I believe he accepts me because of the death of Christ. I believe that.”

Of course, they don’t realize even the demons believe and shudder. And so they go on living a life that is filled with sin, filled with sin. Not a life that is delivered from sin. They don’t experience the Jesus who was called Jesus you remember, “Yehoshua” in Hebrew, “Because he shall save his people from their sins.” They don’t experience the Savior who saves from sin; they are still living in the middle of their sins.

And so it’s really, I think it was Dave who prayed that loved ones would gain release. They have no sense of release, they have no sense of the spirit of God rising up within them and loving others and praising God. They have no sense of that. They walk as heavily as their counterparts do who don’t believe anything about God or Jesus. They walk heavily because they walk in the midst of their sin.

And what we have been saying of course is that the cross of Christ is the key to being saved from our sins. And when we are first born of God we experience the Holy Spirit coming into our spirits. Because we believe Romans 5:8, that God has commended his love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ has died for us. And we are urged therefore to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of our sins and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And we just go in on that level and we believe and the Holy Spirit comes in and we’re born again, we’re born of God. But our lives are still governed from the outside.

We still live from the body in. We still live from this body. We still live by what we receive from other people and from the world. We still live by the approval that other people give us, we still live by pleasing other people, we are still carnal people. And it’s then that we begin to see the reality of the cross in a new way, Romans 6:6 that our old self was crucified with Christ. And yet, the answer is still that song, “trust and obey for there is no other way”. Because, we’re called upon, you remember in Romans 6:11 to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. And we’re called to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

And by doing that we enter into a deliverance from that old self that is talked about in Romans 6:6. And we enter into the victory over sin that that brings. Many of us are delivered then from the domination of the body but we find that we still have a soul that is much, you remember, like Peter’s soul. It still operates by the habits it learned from the body so he finds himself in the middle of the group when Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and he sees the men coming at him and it’s not that he hates the high priest’s servant, it’s not that he wants his own way but, for his Lord, he wants to save his Lord. And so his soul knows only one way to save and that’s to strike out -- and he strikes out and cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant.

And it’s a soulish response because the soul has been used for years to striking out that way. Many of us find that we don’t any longer want to cut people apart in our office but we’ve got used to sarcasm and the soulishness is there and we hardly even know it’s there. We cut out and we speak a harsh word; we don’t even know it. So often in our homes, the people that we live with in our Christian houses, or the partners that we have at home, we cut out and we hurt them without even

knowing that we're hurting them. It's that kind of soulishness that we find within us.

And it's soulishness that we have to be delivered from. It's there that we experience the daily cross of Christ, you remember, bearing our cross daily. And yet it's the same trust and obey, it's the same matter of believing what the word of God shows us. The word of God is sharper than a two edge sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit and then it's a matter of submitting to the breaking experiences -- bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus that brings an end to that soulishness. Then finally, we find ourselves free to some great extent from the soulishness and then we find that this little spirit in here is still passive. He just sits there and it has to learn to go out.

And we find again then that there is a glorious position in Jesus where we have been raised up with him and made to sit at the right hand of the Father. And we begin to have an active spirit and we begin again. It's the same believing; believing that we were raised with Christ and then resisting Satan (James 4:7). And so it's always trust and obey, for there's no other way. Trust and obey, for there's no other way. And it's the same trust and obey for there's no other way as at the very beginning when we were called upon to believe that Jesus had died for our sins and we were called upon to repent and turn our lives over to him.

And so here loved ones, we are freed from a guilty conscience. And the tragedy is that so many loved ones in Christendom have gone no further than that. Here we are saved from the old selfish will that wants its own way and insists on its own rights because we're still living inwards -- and here we're saved from the independent soul that has got used to certain habits and keeps on doing them and has to be broken of those habits -- and here we're saved from a passive spirit.

And what we'll be doing, especially during the next two years, is of course talking about the details of the soul and the details of the spirit. But those could be regarded as at least four of the steps through which we pass in our Christian experience and it's what people would call spiritual theology. But all of it is entering fully into the cross of Christ. And so many of us have found our lives going down and then we were born of the spirit and that was the New Birth. And we entered into the sense that Christ had died for our sins. Then we began to try and grow in grace and we went into this up and down existence. And then we entered into the freedom from our selfish wills where we were crucified with Christ. And then began the real growth in grace as we walked in the spirit and came gradually free from that independent soul and came into a place where we could at last take our ascended position with Jesus in Ephesians 2:6.

And all this of course, is so that God's great plan for us would come true. That instead of being people that lived from the world in, we would live by the power of his Spirit coming into our lives and flowing out to others. And that was all achieved by the great cross of Christ by which God destroyed that interned reverse personality and renewed it in Jesus. And really the move from there to there is all brought about by the Holy Spirit and is often, for many of us, brought about in those four stages and the stages aren't important at all.

I just realized that when I began the Christian walk nobody explained to me what was possible. And I was so anxious that all of you would know that full salvation is God's will for us and it is all found in Jesus' death. And if you say to me, "What happened in the New Testament?" I would imagine they just entered into everything. Entered into certainly stages one and two when they were baptized and then began to grow through the experiences of having this soulish power broken -- and then came into this position where they could really be used to war against Satan.

I will keep quiet loved ones. Are there any questions?

QUESTION INAUDIBLE

Emma is asking about a very important verse because it's the first Christian instruction ever given to seekers after the first Christian sermon. So it is a key and a pivotal verse and it's Acts 2:38.

And you remember, Peter had just finished preaching the first Christian sermon, that's because there was no real Christianity until after Jesus was raised from the dead, you see, and ascended to the Father. And you remember, he said, "The spirit could not be given until I have ascended to the Father." So Christianity began after Jesus ascended to his father.

Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this," (the sermon where Peter said, "You have crucified the son of God.") "they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Then they're saying is that water baptism, and I honestly think loved ones, that our dear Father has always explained things easily and simply and not in any complicated fashion to us.

And really, when the Father talks about baptism he's talking about that word "baptizo" for those of you who know Greek. Or for those of us who don't, "baptizo" means "immerse". I am a Methodist so I am not pushing this from the point of the old water baptism. I am pushing it from this angle: God implies to us repeatedly throughout the gospel that unless you're immersed in Jesus there is no salvation. Unless you are absolutely identified with Christ, unless you reckon yourself to be dead indeed with Christ unto sin and alive to God, there is no salvation.

And so the deep meaning of baptism and of the word baptized is to be immersed in Jesus. That's why so often in the Bible the word used for "believe in Jesus" is this word, "eis". In Greek that isn't "in" at all, that is "into". And in the gospel, in the first entry they always exhorted people to believe into Jesus, to believe into Jesus. Even if you take the makeup of the English word "believe", and we've done this often, and break it into it's two Anglo Saxon counter parts and see that "be" means "to be" and "lefan" means "in accordance with".

Then you see it even more fully because believing in Jesus means to be into Jesus in accordance with what happened in Jesus where the whole of the human race was turned around and reversed and rectified into what God wanted it to be. So I think first and foremost the word baptized means to be immersed in Jesus. And then what the apostles did is they said, "Alright, you have to be baptized in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And then the loved ones would say, "Well, we are willing to be baptized." And then Peter would say, "Come to the river this afternoon." And then he would stand on the river bank and the water would be there and he would say to them, "Now listen, as you go into the water here, as you go under this water, so you are being immersed into Jesus."

And actually, don't you know that all of us here who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death. We've been buried with him so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. So when you go down here into this water, under this water, then you die to all the world. You have no longer any contact with the world. The water covers over your head so you're buried. You're a buried man, you're a buried woman, you no longer have any connection with the world. You can receive nothing from it. Anything

you receive you must receive from what is under the water.

So it is you are being buried into Jesus and from now on anything you receive you must receive from that womb that is around you now as you have entered into Christ. And so when you come up and you break this water with your head and you stand up, then the Holy Spirit will come upon you just as the dove of the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism. Everything that Jesus experienced you will experience and so the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you'll be a new person because the old has passed away down here and you're a new creation and so we're going to give you a Christian name.

And that is what the first name was that we received in those days. It was a Christian name. You are no longer Simon; your old name has gone with your old creation. You are Peter, a new person. And that's where we got the terms Christian names, you know. We were a new generation, a generation of Jesus Christ. And so I think in the old days it wasn't a whole complex situation such as we emphasize; first you're baptized by water and then you're baptized with the spirit and then you're baptized into the body of Christ. I do believe that people were simple and straightforward in those days with God.

And God identified baptism with the water, with the fullness of the Spirit, with baptism into the body of Jesus. Now, on the other hand, it's very important to point out that even in the New Testament times, not everybody entered into all of it. And so if you look at Acts 8, you'll see a plain example there of people to whom, you remember Philip, had preached. Acts 8:4, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city."

And then in Verse 12, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." So they were baptized in water and they were baptized into Jesus. And then in Verse 14, "Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."

They completed what should have taken place at their baptism. And so it is today, that there are many loved ones, many of you, myself certainly, who believe that Jesus had died for my sins. And I believed for that reason that God had forgiven me. But I cried out, "The good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate is the very thing I do." And that was my cry. I led a defeated Christian life. Why? Well, I think for one thing I didn't know that there was deliverance. For another thing, I had an easy gospel preached to me. I didn't really know that you were called upon to die with Jesus. I thought that he had died so I didn't have to die.

And that was true physically but I didn't know I had to die with him by faith. So partly, I didn't know. But, I have to be honest, there was a time in my life, sometime after 17 when I received Jesus as savior, there was a little voice that whispered, "What would it be like to live your whole life only for Jesus? Irrespective of what it meant to you professionally, or what it meant to you socially." And I looked around at the other friends I had in church and I said, "But, none of the

rest are living that way.”

And so I believe that it wasn't just ignorance on my part. It was something of what was true in the Corinthian church, Paul couldn't preach to them because they were still carnal. He couldn't preach certain things because they were still behaving like ordinary men, because they were willfully rejecting the voice of the Spirit within them. And so I think many people in the New Testament times failed to enter into all the fullness of the Spirit at their baptism one, because they didn't know about it; two, because they weren't willing to submit to the Holy Spirit.

And loved ones, you have to be very honest with yourselves. If you still get angry, if you still get irritable with people, if you still experience envy or jealousy, or you bicker -- then you're not cleansed by the Holy Spirit. And that's either because you don't know about it -- which I'm not sure of now -- or because you're not willing to submit to the consequences of not having envy, jealousy, and anger as weapons you can use. And so, that's what I would think.

Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what has made sense to me both in scripture and in personal experience. And so what we all have to do is encourage all of us to enter into all the fullness of Jesus but then be honest with each other and help each other to see what we've entered into and what we haven't entered into.

Question from audience:

Many people say, “Well, this may be true what you're saying about dying with Christ but, if I don't die with Christ, will I go to hell? Will I lose even the salvation I have?”

Well, loved ones, I think you have to go to scripture all the time on questions like that. A scripture that has helped me is John 15 and it's very plain. John 15:6, “If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.” And it seems to be a question of whether they are willing to stay in Jesus or not.

If you're going to stay in Jesus you have to go with Jesus the whole way. You can't say, “Lord, I'll stay with you to get my sins forgiven but I'm not going to stay in you as you now show me more of what your Father did to me in you. I don't want that.” It seems in other words you have to start grieving the spirit of Jesus if you said, “I'll go for the forgiveness of my sins and the freedom from guilt, and a place in heaven. But, I will not deal with this selfish will that gets angry, and bad tempered, and envious. I don't want to go that far.” It seems that then they have to step out of Christ.

It seems to me that's what they're doing. You can't be in Christ unless you're submissive to Christ and his Spirit. And it seems that this verse is suggesting that if you don't abide -- abide means stay in Me -- “If you don't stay in me than you will be cast forth as a branch and you'll wither and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned.” And even Watchman Nee, who is a man who really believes (I would differ from him in this) in eternal security, even Nee says, “A man like that certainly lives as if he's dead, lives as if he's dead. He has all the appearance in his life of death, of physical, of spiritual death.”

But the truth is if a loved one is at that argumentative stage, it seems to me they're already probably grieving the Spirit's conviction in their hearts and they need to be prayed for and loved rather than argued with. The beauty about this whole deliverance is we can't argue each other into

it. We can only pray, and love, and live each other into it. And that's the great call that I think we have. We should not be urging, "In order to avoid hell you must go this way." We should be saying, "In order to be all that your Father planned you to be when he first created you he is offering you this great salvation, this great deliverance."

Question from audience:

Why is it that a person may agree with Romans 7 and realize their need for identification with Christ on the cross. And then for whatever reason, seems to again come into an unvictorious life, perhaps in the same area, perhaps a different. Would you say that that person never really entered into it, or was deceived?

Yes, it could be, brother. That could be the case -- that they did not truly enter into a real death to self and a real cleansing of the Holy Spirit in their hearts but it's not necessarily so. Fletcher of Madeley is a famous saintly man in the 18th century who said, "I entered into this experience and I lost it because I failed to testify to it." And he then, through God's grace, came into freedom again. And so you can lose the cleansing of the Holy Spirit if you begin to grieve the spirit.

See, I think what Jesus is teaching us is your connection to the life of God is dependent on your connection to me. "I am the vine you are the branches. Without me you can do nothing. If you separate from me you'll dry up and die. Everything is dependent on you breathing in my life and breathing it up to my Father." And it's the movement of life. Sometimes loved ones, I think we have an idea that the life of God is static but it isn't, you see. It is God here and it is his beloved son Jesus here, and it is us all down here in the world and Jesus is loving his Father and through the Holy Spirit that love is expressed, if we are willing, through us to each other and back up to God and he gives it to Jesus.

It is the flow of life, it is the flow of love, it is the flow of the Spirit that makes us part of the trinity family; it is not a static presence of the Spirit within us. And so the moment you reject that love that Jesus is trying to pour through you to someone -- either because your soul will not let it go through or because you aren't willing to pay the price of loving somebody in your office who really is continually irritating to you -- then you'll break that chain. And once you stop the flow of the Spirit in you you'll begin to lose the sense of cleansing and lose the sense of life. And that's what happens when Christians behave as if they're dead. There's just no life in them. They're a heavy weight dominated by themselves.

So it's a beautiful plan, and it's so natural and so easy but I'm afraid we've massacred the thing so often with a truncated gospel. A partially true gospel, a gospel that has encouraged us to sin with impunity because of the death of Jesus. And really, if you only enter into that first experience, that's where you're left sinning day after day, continually confessing your sins, continually repenting, continually going over the same sins again, and again, forever seeking forgiveness. Ever struggling with an inner conflict, never victorious.

So continually overwhelmed by your own concerns that you have no time to help anybody else and that's the truncated gospel that preaches only forgiveness of sins which honestly is very little different from the Jewish gospel. The Jews knew a covering of sins; what they knew nothing about was a remission of sins. You remember, one of the psalms said, "Blessed is he whose sin is covered." So they knew a covering of sins -- but a remission of sins, in the sense that McDonald,

you remember who led C. S. Lewis to Jesus, McDonald says, "The remission of sins is remittal." "Mittere" in Latin is "to send", "mission" is "to send people"; "remission" is "to send away sins" and essential to the sins being sent away from the life, the Jews knew none of that.

They knew only a continual offering of sacrifices. A continual and never ending confessing and repenting. Now, that's what a great part of Christendom is involved in. And really loved ones, the normal Christian life is coming into a freedom from the power of sin in your life so that you can live obedient to God and then a moving on to the daily bearing of the cross and the disciplining of the soulish powers so that they're able to express the beauty of Jesus' Spirit. And on into an active spirit life where you're dwelling at the right hand of God in a place of ascension and you're able to war against the powers of the enemy and that's the position that God wants us in as soldiers. That's it. And that's for all of us.

Question from audience:

Is it possible that this identification with the crucifixion could be experienced as very painful? And yet still be positive?

Yeah. I'd go with that. I remember the dear brother that taught me about it. He said, "This will be worse than death. This will be worse than death." Because we love so much the approval of our friends, we do. We're so used to the approval of our friends, we're so used to getting our own way, we're so used to establishing our own rights --asserting and defending ourselves -- that it means dying -- to die with Jesus. It means regarding your name as wiped out. Seeing a grave stone with your name on it and regarding your old self as dead, your life as ended and from now on you're only an agent of the Holy Spirit.

Question from audience:

If we are all meant to be crucified in Christ and all meant therefore to share God's great desire that all men should come to him, shouldn't we be fully occupied ourselves in that and that only, bringing people to him?

And I would say that when we're crucified in Jesus and we're raised with him, the same Spirit that Jesus has runs through us. And so it's not a manic fanatic, "Are you saved? Are you saved?" But it's a beautiful enjoying of loving our Father will all our hearts. A beautiful enjoying of being in our Father's world, and touching our Father's flowers, and eating our Father's food, and sharing that joy with everybody that we meet. And then it seems to me that brings in others an honest conviction that there is something better because it isn't something that we put on. It's something that is there even if nobody is watching us. It's something that is joyous and real.

I do think loved ones, the mark of the saints was joy and when we're at last free from ourselves we're able to be filled with Joy. Not that superficial joy that we religious people so often put on to impress others, that we have something to give them that they need, but it's a deep joy that just bubbles up from inside.

Question from audience:

Is it a moment by moment reckoning yourself dead indeed unto sin or is it a once for all?

And of course, it's both -- because you receive Jesus and you receive him day-by-day. You obey him first and you continue to obey him. But, I would say there is a crisis event. I would say that all of us who have come into any experience from deliverance of sin have had to say with George Muller, "There came a day when I died to self and died to sin." And there comes a day when at last you feel that you're free so that you don't need to be angry. And you recognize that and you're freed from self and you can say, "I'm free from self."

You never say, "I'll never sin again." But you'll say, "There's no reason I should ever sin again." But obviously what you do is go on into the daily bearing of the cross. This is, "Whosoever will not deny himself and bear his cross daily cannot follow me." And so there's a daily bearing. But many of us try to bear the cross daily without ever coming to a deep crisis end of ourselves and we try to substitute the daily bearing for the once for all crisis bearing. So it is a crisis and a process. The process cannot take place unless the crisis has taken place.

And yes, if you press me and say, "Should you be able to say that you've accepted your death with Jesus?" Yes, I think you should. I think that's what baptism meant; you were baptized and buried with Jesus. You were willing at a deep, deep level no longer to look after yourself or your own reputation but Jesus only.

We'll continue not next Sunday but the following Sunday. So would you put your questions down, and we'll have some sessions like this just as we come to the end of the year's study, loved ones. So note down questions and I'll try and give a little introduction again in two weeks' time and then the questions. Okay?

Let us pray. Lord Jesus we thank you that you have done all that is needed to bring us into deliverance from self, deliverance from sin, freedom from ourselves and victory in your Father. Thank you Lord, thank you. Thank you that wherever you go we are able to go. And thank you that you have gone down into the tomb and had the world crucified to you and then you were raised up and now you're ascended at the right hand of our Father. And Lord Jesus thank you that if our spirits are really willing we are able to live there with you in heaven at the right hand of God, far above every rule and authority, and dominion, and power.

And Lord thank you that that is for us now in this present life, not just when we get to heaven, but now in this present life. It is possible to live in two worlds: to have our foot here on earth and the other foot in heaven with you in that place of victory and power. Thank you Lord. Thank you that it is from that position that flows all the gifts of the Spirit and all the fruit of the Spirit. We ask you to bring us into that, whatever it costs, for your glory. 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 ever more. Amen.