

Communion with God No. 3

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, what we're talking about is communion, communion with God. I think I could say best that the Holy Spirit is moving among us as we've shared about this subject and you must know by now that I'm a way beyond any script that I ever had and God is just leading us Sunday evening by Sunday evening. And so I ask you to trust him for this evening.

C.S. Lewis, I was surprised, was born in my hometown Belfast. I didn't realize that until I read his biography "Surprised by Joy". And it was interesting you know his thoughts about Belfast because they were so much the thoughts that we had when we were in Belfast and it brings back all our boyhood and the atmosphere to us. And one of the experiences he had when he was about 13 or 14 was a tragic loss of the childlike faith that he had in God.

And if you have read that book "Surprised by Joy" he tells about it coming through a matron in the boarding school that he was at. And she was a very loving and kindly woman but she was a spiritualist. Many loved ones who are in the occult are very kindly, understanding people and so was she. And she gradually drew him over in that direction until he lost what little childlike faith in God he had. Now, here's the interesting comment he makes, he says, "To tell you the truth it was kind of a relief to get away from the Christian faith that I had experienced in some sense because I had by then made it an intolerable burden to myself. I had made it a list of do's and don'ts that included a prayer life that was such a burden to me that I almost hated the idea of bed at night because I knew I'd have to face this prayer time."

And this was of course a little guy of 14 talking, so he's talking about his 11, 12, and 13 year old prayers. But he says this, "Here's how I have made my prayer time a burden, by the need for realizations." He said, "I would pray a prayer to God and then I would wait for a realization of his presence, or I would pray a prayer to God and I would think, 'Have I realized true sincerity in that prayer?'" And that's the way his prayer time began to develop. Unless everything he prayed had a certain, as he called it, realization or in his little boy's mind a certain sense of feeling, a feeling of sincerity about it, then he didn't feel it was a prayer that was real, or sincere, or a prayer that God would hear.

And so his prayer times became burdensome to him because he would get down on his knees, he would start praying and then the thought would come to him, "Did I truly realize sincerity when I prayed that prayer?" And he would go at it again and he would say, "Now, did I have a real realization that God was listening to me? Do I feel that he heard that prayer? Do I feel his presence?" And so his prayer time became just a burden to him.

Why I tell you that I think you can guess. I wonder how many of us have a prayer time that is a real burden to us. Our communion with God is a kind of mixture of introspection, self consciousness, and a constant seeking after a certain feeling. And so our prayer time becomes using a series of techniques. So we hear a dear inspired woman like Joy Dawson talk about real prayer and we set about summarizing her "technique", as we call it, and we then try to do it that way. And then we read George Muller and we read of the way he prayed, and then we try and use his methods. And so our prayer times become a series of magic.

Do you know how magic differs from real Christianity or real religion? Magic was the approach of the pagans whereby they sought to conjure up the presence of the god. By doing various tricky little things they hoped to conjure up the presence of God. Now loved ones, I just wonder how many of us who regard ourselves as children of God involve ourselves in sheer magic. Our prayer times are times of magic where we try to conjure up a realization of God's presence, or we try to conjure up a sense that God has heard us.

And so this is the reason why I started four weeks ago suggesting to you that some of us have real trouble with communion with God because we're not born of God's Spirit. And so our communion times or our prayer times become psychological battles with ourselves, or psychological battles against all the other opinions that everybody else has, or all the feelings we've been having that day. But they become psychological techniques or magic sessions, or times of trying to realize a feeling that we feel we felt before instead of being what the Bible obviously calls them: times of joyful crying of spirit-to-spirit.

Times when the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And the Spirit within us cries out, "Abba! Father! Dad, dear dad, here I am and thank you that you love me." And that's what's real communion is, it's the calling out of a spirit to a spirit. And I would just ask you once more to think again of some of the things we talked about especially last Sunday when I tried to share with you what real conversion was, or what a real New Birth was.

And I'd ask you again, loved ones, to stand back again for a moment and look at the big picture. The big picture is this, that most loved ones I think, like the lady that Marnie had us pray about, most loved ones live depending on the love of other people for their happiness. Most loved ones in the world live depending on the amount of money, or the amount of possessions that they have for a sense of security. Do you see that? Most people do.

Most people think, "I have so much saved up in the bank, and I have so much in stocks and shares, and I have so much in real estate, and if I get 8 percent to 10 percent on that after I'm 65, then it should hold me until I die." Most loved ones live their lives as far as security is concerned on that kind of basis. They depend on possessions, or on money for a sense of security. It's the same with a sense of importance. They depend on how many people think they're the greatest for their sense of importance.

If a lot of people vote them Captain or vote them Head then they feel they're important. If a lot of people criticize them or tear them down, then they feel like nothing. Most people in the world depend for their sense of significance or importance on what everybody thinks of them. And of course, that brings real problems, you can see that -- because it's very hard for everyone to be President. It's very hard for everybody to be a Chief; some of us have to be Indians. It's very hard for everybody to be well thought of by everybody.

So what in fact happens with most loved ones in the world is they feel not enough people think they're important, or they begin to feel somebody else thinks somebody else is more important and envy, and jealousy, and pride come in. Do you see you can't avoid it? Do you see with three and a half billion of us we can't all be the most important? In fact, some of us are going to be thought rather unimportant at times -- so jealousy and pride are often found in that situation, they're bound to come.

It's the same with security. When security depends on having so much, you see, we never have enough, especially with inflation, you can never tell when you've got enough. You can never be sure that there'll be enough 10 years from now. And so you're bound to have a sense of discontent, worry, anxiety, and covetousness. Now, those things are bound to come.

Now, that's what happens, loved ones, when we live depending on the world. Now of course, God intended us to get our sense of security from the fact that he loved us. He wanted us to know that he knew us by name, that he had designed us for a specific task here in the world and he knew us by name, and he had counted the hairs of our heads, and every day we go out the door he knows it and he wanted us to sense that. He wanted us to feel, "No, I don't own the cattle on a thousand hills but my Father does. My Father loves me; he will give me as many of them as I need when I need them."

That's the way God wanted us to have our security. He wanted us to have our sense of importance the same way. He wanted us to feel, "God has put me here for a set purpose. He wouldn't have made me if he hadn't had a certain plan for my life and something that I could do that no one else could do in the same way. God knows I'm here, what does it matter if all the rest don't know that I'm here. The Creator of the universe knows I'm here, he knows what importance I have. To him I'm significant." God wanted us to have a sense of significance that way.

Now loved ones, do you see that's what sin is. Sin is living depending on the world and on other people for the things that God wanted to give us. So sin is essentially an offensive kick in God's face. Do you see that? Sin is that. Sin is kicking God in the face and saying, "No, I will get these things from other people, and from the world, and from the other things, and from circumstances but not from you." Now, that's sin.

So you can be sitting there sinning like mad. I mean, sin is not in itself covetousness or jealousy. Those are sinful attitudes. Sin is not adultery or stealing, those are sinful acts. Sin itself is getting from other people and from things here in the world, and from circumstances the things that we were meant to get from God's love of us. So the sin is ignoring God. And of course, what has happened is, part of us has died because of that.

That's the real frustration that we feel when we're growing up. We feel at times like C. S. Lewis, we should get it from somewhere else because our conscience is still alive inside us and we feel, "Life is meant to be more peaceful than this. Life is not meant to be filled with worry, and anxiety about what people think of me. Life is not meant to be a dreary agonizing worry about where my next salary check is coming from. Life is meant to be better than this. When I look at the birds and see their carefree feelings I see that life is meant to be better than that." And our conscience tells us that we are meant to live better than that but somehow we can't. There's a whole side of us towards God that is dead.

Now loved ones, that's our spirits. Because we've ceased to depend on God there's a bit of us that has died. That's right. Now, it falls into the natural law. For example, if I don't use that finger it will eventually wither up and it will die. Anything that you don't use will die. And what has happened to all of us is that we've come into a world that is independent of God and we ourselves have taken on that same attitude and our spirits, the part of us that contacts God, has died so that even though part of us and part of our spirits tells us that we should live differently, we find we cannot.

And so what is needed is for our spirits to come alive and that's why we talk about the New Birth.

And your spirit coming alive is something that God alone can do. That's why Jesus said, "You must be born again." And you remember a dear fellow called Nicodemus said, "Do you mean I should enter again into my mother's womb and be born?" And Jesus said, "Look, unless you're born from above by the Spirit you will in no wise enter the kingdom of God."

And New Birth is your spirit coming alive inside. And I'd just like to point out to you that it's not something that you can bring about. Would you please see that, it's not something you can bring about. Jean Dixon [a spiritualist] and the other loved ones that get involved in spiritualism, they're not bringing their spirit alive to God, they're bringing it alive to the elemental spirits of the universe, to Satan and his angels, to the occult. But your spirit can only come alive to God when God himself graciously decides to touch it into life.

Now loved ones, that's the vital thing for us to see if we ever want to be born of God. It's God who must touch us. He must touch us into life. Now, you may say, "Brother, is there not a technique that can bring this about?" Loved ones, there isn't. Even what I shared last Sunday about the way my wife was born of God, there is no technique. It is essentially you going to the God who has made you and saying, "Lord, I live dependent on other people, on things, on circumstances, I don't live dependent on you. My prayer times are often a charade. I sense little or no real living contact with you. Lord God, will you regenerate my spirit? Will you make it alive to you? Will you touch me into life?"

And loved ones, that's the first vital step. You need to want that and you need to be aware of what the difficulty is, that what you need is not another technique, what you need is not more effort on your own part, what you need is for God to touch your spirit into life and to make you aware of him. And you remember I shared with you about my silly little dog. You can't make that little creature capable of doing simultaneous equations. You can't unless you take Einstein's brain and transplant it into a little dog's head.

It has to be something as miraculous as that to make him capable of simultaneous equations. He can't appreciate Chopin; he can't appreciate Beethoven's Fifth unless you can take Beethoven's heart, and his emotions, and plant them into the little dog. Unless a transplant takes place the little dog cannot rise to that level of life. But do you see, it's the same with us? Do you see we're left forever to our magic in our prayer times, we're left forever to our little mind games, our little emotional attempts to realize God's presence, unless the dear God who made us touches our spirit into life.

That's why in Psalm 51 the psalmist said, "Against thee, and thee only have I sinned and done this evil." Against thee, and thee only have I sinned. So loved ones, don't let's get caught up in some idea of social sin. I agree with you, our sin has hurt other people, our relatives, our friends but the heart of the sin is that it's been against God. It's been a kick in his face and a determination to use his very own gifts instead of his love. To use his very own gifts to make us independent of his love. That's what sin is.

And the first move of the Holy Spirit within any of us who says we want to be born of the Spirit is that the Holy Spirit begins to show us the things that are in our lives because we aren't born of the Spirit. That's the interesting thing, you see. The Holy Spirit begins to bring God's law to us and say to us, "Now, the law says that envy is a work of the flesh. Now, you envy." The interesting thing is, God isn't all wrought up over the envy. I mean, it's a bad thing and it continues to work havoc among the rest of the friends that we have, but envy is not the big problem.

The Holy Spirit is simply touching our conscience and making us aware that envy is wrong and there's something under that wrong that is the real problem. So loved ones, that's the way the Holy Spirit works. And I'd just remind you of this old outline that we often use, [pointing to diagram of Body, Soul and Spirit] -- that that's our spirit, you see, and that is dead. It's dead and to be touched into life the Holy Spirit alone can touch it. And what the Holy Spirit begins to do first of all is to deal with the part of our spirit that is still partially alive, our conscience. And begins to touch our conscience and say, "Anger is a sin."

Now, God isn't all wrought up over the anger but he's all wrought up over the fact that we get angry because we think things are getting out of our control. And we feel that our security depends on keeping everything under our control. Keep the children under our control, keep the people who work under us, our subordinates under our control, keep the people who work on top of us under our control, keep everybody under our control. If we once let it get out of control we'll lose our security. And it's that sense of insecurity that comes from failing to trust God to keep the whole thing organized, that's the sin.

That's what the Holy Spirit is really after. But he tackles first of all the thing that you recognize in your own life. You recognize anger is there and God's law says, "Anger is sin." So the Holy Spirit convicts your conscience first. That's why, loved ones, the first step in the New Birth is always a conviction of the conscience that there's something in your life that should not be there. That's why it's so important for you to receive that.

And why I share this again tonight is, do you know that we are a society that will brook no conviction of sin. We will not, loved ones. We are a permissive self society that will not tolerate any authority telling us we are wrong. Now, I share that with you lovingly that it's a fact of life. That you and I are part of that society and therefore we will tend to have a wholly outlandish, and unbalanced, an inappropriate response to conviction when the Holy Spirit brings it to us.

Loved ones, do not get mad with conviction. Don't get mad with conviction. Conviction of the Holy Spirit is always the first vital step in bringing you into a New Birth. You see why, because it's showing you how absolutely reversed, and perverted, and wrong your whole attitude to God is and that if you are willing to change it then he is willing to make you alive in your spirit and to give you all of himself. But God will not give you himself if you want everything else as well. He won't.

See, you can't have it that way. You can't have everything else and, "I'll take you as well, God." No. It's either God or everything else. But, he won't take both and he won't give you both. That's why he wants you to be absolutely clear where you're treating other things as God because that's what's happening. When you look upon circumstances, or things, or people as the source of what God alone can give you it's because you're treating those as God and God is really saying, "Which is it going to be? Is it going to be them or is it going to be me?" And so the Holy Spirit convicts your conscience and loved ones, that's always the first step.

I'd love you to see that because I do think that there's an almost neurotic response in us who have been brought up in these years. It really is. It's almost a neurotic response and I'll tell you what it is, "Oh I have so much false condemnation." Really, when you think about it, it is the height of presumption and pride. But it is; we're full of that stuff. "Oh, I have so much false

condemnation.” Well, I feel like saying, “How can you be sure it’s all false? Are you so saintly and perfect that it’s bound to be false condemnation?”

And loved ones, if I could just share with you I don’t know how – I’m forty-five, I don’t know how the other forties, and fifties, and sixties are here, but I know that when God’s Spirit came to me and convicted me of my sin I knew I had no reality in my relationship with God. That was a good start he had on me, I knew that, I knew I had no sense of reality in my relationship with him. But when his Holy Spirit came and he said, “You’re wrong,” I didn’t fight it. I said immediately, “Lord, okay if I’m wrong show me in your dear law where it says I’m wrong and I’m going to admit it and face it.”

But loved ones, you must admit there has developed in our present society a tendency to think, “Everybody’s wrong but me and if I ever think for a moment I am wrong it must be a false condemnation or a false guilt.” And yet it’s very interesting, do you realize there is a movement in the psychology schools and in psychiatry now to believe that the right response to guilt is to stop doing what causes the guilt. Really. And you know our dear old churches, they’re always centuries behind the other academic disciplines instead of, as they ought to be and are meant to be, centuries ahead. And so we’re still trailing behind the idea of false guilt when the psychiatrists and psychologists are moving away from that and are moving more and more towards –

Karl Menninger, for instance, who has written a whole book on the fact that the only right response to guilt is to stop doing the things that causes the guilt. [“Whatever Became of Sin” by Karl Menninger] But we are so prone in our society to say, “Oh, feeling you’re wrong in any way is bad for my self esteem. It will make me neurotic. That must be false condemnation.” And we try to manipulate our thoughts in some way that will make us feel that it’s okay. And you remember old Tiny Tim [an entertainer] and you remember his comment, “If it feels good, do it.”

And you know that that’s what has driven so many of us into drugs. We felt “experience is everything”. And really if you could give this generation of ours a name it is “seeking after experience”. We want another experience. We want a new high. And really what the Bible is saying is that at times it’s good to look at a new low and to see why it’s there and not to reject it just because it feels bad. Maybe feeling bad is good at a certain point in your sickness because then you know you’re sick and you can take some action towards it.

Now, I remember in the old revivals that they had in America years ago, there was a saying and I’ve repeated it to you before, “People first get sad, then they get mad, then they get glad.” And that’s really the classic progress in any of us when we’re dealt with by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And so I do ask you not only to welcome the conviction of the Holy Spirit, not only to refuse to rebel against it and call it false condemnation or false guilt, but yearn for it and want it. Ask him, “Holy Spirit show me, show me in what way I am not depending on God in my life.”

Now loved ones, I’d like you to see that that’s the way the apostles preached and that was the way people responded. Now, maybe you’d look at some of these early records that we have of the first Christian preaching. And you see one of the earliest of course, the first Christian sermon in that the first Christian sermon could only be preached after Jesus rose from the dead you remember, that was the end of the Jewish dispensation and the beginning of the New Testament or the new covenant.

And the first Christian sermon was preached on the day of Pentecost, you remember. And Acts 2:37, and so Peter finishes his sermon and then Verse 37, “Now when they were thoroughly uplifted, now

when they felt absolutely happy and ecstatic, now when they felt that the preacher had made them really feel happy and feel that everything was right with them. Now, when they had had a good sing and a good worship of God and felt that they were absolutely right with everybody else.”

It's so different you know, it's so different. “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart,” they were cut to the heart and they were stabbed in the very depth of their being. “And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” And Peter said to them, “Now this is false condemnation you people are under here. This is guilt that you shouldn't take to yourself at all. God loves you, that's the big thing.”

Now loved ones, the issue is not that God doesn't love you. Do you see God loves the loved one in New York who at this moment is murdering somebody? Do you know that, God loves that person? We would find it hard to love them but God loves that person, God loves the person who is putting a knife into somebody in New York at this very moment. God loves them even as they're destroying part of his beautiful creation and a loved one that he loves with all his heart. He loves that murderer at this moment.

The issue is not that God doesn't love us. That's never been the issue. The issue is whether we are willing to receive God's love and to allow his Spirit to change us and make us like himself. The issue is whether we're willing to be reconciled to God. And so when they ask, “What shall we do?” Peter doesn't try to reassure them that God loves them, he knows that God loves them. He knows that isn't the issue. He knows the issue is their attitude to God. That's why they're in any trouble at all. That's why the Holy Spirit has convicted them of their sin.

And so when they ask that he answers clear and simple, “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.’” So he says, “Alright, repent. You're meant to live that way from the inside out, from God, depending on him and giving out to people. You're living from the outside in, depending on people, and things, and circumstances for your security, significance and happiness. Repent, turn around. “Metanoia” “Noia” is mind, “meta” is back, or turn, or change. Change your mind completely, turn round, go the other direction. Turn from depending on people, and circumstances, and things and depend on God. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's a guaranteed. That's sure. You don't need to feel it, you don't need to be in meetings where they lay their hands upon you, though that can be done too. But you don't need a certain experience in a song, you don't need a sense of a holy feeling in a meeting. Believe me, you repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It will come, you can depend upon it. Now, that was the declaration. That was the way the apostles preached. That was the way the people responded and that was the advice that the apostles gave them.

Now, would you look again loved ones at Acts 4:4, “But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” Now, why did they believe? Well, look at the last verse there of the sermon, it's the last verse of 3:26, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.” But that's always the apostolic call, “Turn round, repent, change the way you're living and God will give you the Holy Spirit.”

Loved ones, do you see there's none of this psychological warfare stuff. There's none of this reassuring people, "Now, listen -- God loves you." It's a straight shot, "You have crucified the Son of God." You ask, "What shall we do?" "Repent. Be baptized in his name and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It's a clear dealing with the conscience and a response of the will.

Look again, if you will, at Acts 5:3. You remember Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of ground and gave only part of it to the apostles for God's work. Acts 5:3, "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?" It's as if in the early church the worse thing in the world was to lie to the Holy Spirit, or to reject the Holy Spirit's guidance, or in some way to disobey the Holy Spirit. But that was what was emphasized, loved ones; always the attitude of our will or our conscience to the Holy Spirit.

And the same, you remember, took place when Ananias' wife came in because if you look down to Verse 9 there, "But Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' Immediately she fell down at his feet and died."

Now loved ones, do you see we in our society would like to maybe avoid that chapter. We'd maybe like to wipe it out and say, "Oh, no, no the body of Christ is not severe like that." But that is the body of Christ. Why? Because the blessed Holy Spirit knows if we don't turn now from our sins in this life there will no longer be an opportunity to turn when we die. And the Holy Spirit knows that unless he can get us here in this room to see the seriousness of the way we're living, he will never get us to turn to God.

And so it goes on, loved ones, I'd just show you one more, if you'd look at Acts 7:54. This is another sermon you remember, that I think in this case Stephen preached and that's why the people responded, you see. They weren't coming up and saying, "Oh, that was a great sermon. Oh, you really gave us an uplift this evening." It's interesting, isn't it? It's so ironic that our hearts are filled with that kind of stuff and if we don't get it we're kind of mad. We get mad when it doesn't come. We feel, "Oh you talk so much obedience, you talk so much dying to ourselves, you talk so much repenting. Oh, don't talk that way."

Acts 7:45, "Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him." And really you brothers and sisters who are going to be preachers, oh I pray that all of you will in some way share with others in this world the truth of the gospel. I pray that you'll be preachers like that. I pray that you'll be men and woman who will speak truth that the Holy Spirit can use. Now, what was the truth that they were enraged at? Well, look at the reassurance he gives them in Verse 51. He was always reassuring them that God loved them. "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

But loved ones, that's the preaching that God used to create the miracle of our world.

A little Christian church that has outlived the Roman state, the Greek state, and countless other nations. And God used that kind of honest truth to bring people into a real New Birth. And loved ones, it's the same with us. The beginning of the New Birth is a deep conviction that we are living independent of our God, that we are rebels against him, that the reason we get angry and are

jealous, and proud, and lose our temper is that we are still in some sense depending on an alternative God for our security, and our significance, and our happiness. And the Holy Spirit convicts us and that kind of conviction is blessed healing. It's the faithful wound of a friend and that is the beginning of the New Birth. And then of course you come in honest confession, in honest repentance, and in an honest giving of your life to Jesus.

Now, if you'd just bear with me for just a few moments. There is a birth in the soul that has nothing to do with that at all. There is a soulish so called "new birth" that has nothing to do with that new birth in the spirit. Part of it is an intellectual reassurance. Trying to reassure people that they are born of God. So a person comes to you and you have no conviction of sin upon your conscience at all. You don't feel tremendously that you're going to hell or that you've sinned against God at all.

But a person comes to you and explains the gospel and says, "Would you like to pray to receive Christ?" And you say, "Yes, I would." There's no terrible conviction of sin, your teeth aren't grinding against anybody, you're not enraged, you're not troubled, you're not overwhelmed with your sin. You just see, "Yes, that gospel it's sensible. Yes, I see that our sin has set us apart from God. I understand that and I see that Jesus has become the bridge between us and God. Yes, I would like to pray to receive Christ."

And so they turn up Revelation 3:20 and they say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Now, do you believe that? And you say, "Yes, I believe that." And they say, "Well, Jesus is knocking at your door. Do you agree with that?" "Yes." "Are you willing to open the door?" "Yes, I am." "Alright, then what has happened?" "Well, then he has come in." "Well, do you believe he has come in?" "Well, I – well, yes."

And you kind of feel they've got you logically, so what can you do? They've said he'd come in if you'd open the door and you've admitted that you have opened the door so, "Yes, I believe he's come in." Now loved ones, I know, I understand that God has used that very often to bring a person into a real New Birth. I understand that. But, I do believe too that many loved ones have entered into a purely soulish imitation New Birth.

I say soulish because it has taken place up here, you see -- in our heads, in the soul. It has been a mind game. It has been an intellectual piece of trickery about a verse of scripture that has not been connected with a deep dealing with God about their life. It has not been connected in any sense with a real repentance and a real turning from the sins in their life. It has just been a change of mind. Not a whole change of attitude, not a whole change of life, but just a change of mind. And many loved ones have entered into what is just a soulish New Birth experience and that's why they have trouble with communion with God because what they've had is a soulish imitation of a birth in the spirit.

And of course, if you're in that situation I plead with you, it's very simple -- go back to God's good law. Oh, I remember sensing again what Charles Finney once said, "The law is a hammer" -- that is, to hammer you into brokenness until you realize that only God can put you together again. And I remember taking the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount and I don't care whether you say I'm a masochist or not, I lashed myself with them. I lined my life up against them and looked hard and clear at every point where I disagreed with those laws in my life.

So if you want conviction of sin, it's not hard to get. Just look up God's good word and you'll get it. So if you're in that situation then go back to real conviction. Now, there is another counterpart of that soulish so-called New Birth that corresponds to the emotions. These are the loved ones who love us, but it's a human love. And they see that we're troubled, or we've lost our sense of meaning in life, or we have no purpose in life, or we feel in some sense a little bit of guilt, and they feel what you need to realize is that God loves you. And so they make that their total aim.

So you may be beginning to feel a sense of conviction, you may be beginning to sense, "I am going to hell. Unless my life is changed I am going to hell. I am doing the very things that Jesus said. Jesus said, 'You have heard how it was said of old time you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that anyone who lusts after a woman in his heart has committed adultery and is guilty of the judgment. You have heard how it was said of old time, thou shalt not kill and whosoever kills is guilty of the judgment. But I say to you if you're angry with your brother you're guilty of a judgment.'" And the law speaks to our conscience and we are troubled, and we're convicted, and we sense, "No, I am not what God wants me to be and I am going into judgment if I continue like this."

And a loved one then sees you like that and, bless their hearts, they feel that that's not the way things should be and it's not. But, they are not prepared for you to come in God's good and solid way and so they think you're missing the fact that God loves you. Well, that's not what you're missing. What you're missing is an honest dealing with the things in your life that you still want to do even though you want God and what you have to do is come to a place where your will gives up those things and chooses God even if you have to lose out on those things.

But they don't see that, they just feel you need to be reassured that God loves you. And so they say, "Now do you know that God loves you? Do you know that Jesus has died for you so you won't go to hell so that you'll go to heaven? Now, that's all you have to do you just have to believe that."

And so you try to believe it and then they give you verses and they say, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow." And they don't bring home to your heart that you've to repent and turn from your sins. They just bring home to your heart those words of reassurance, to reassure you that God loves you.

Well, there's no question -- do you know that God will love you right to the end? Do you know that even if you persecute his church he loves you? Do you know that the magnificent thing is that God has already done everything in Jesus for you to be his child? Do you know that your place in heaven is waiting for you? God has that place waiting for you right to the last breath you take in this life. But loved ones, that isn't the problem, the problem is that the dear Holy Spirit is witnessing in your conscience that you don't love God and that you're not submitting to him, and you're not obeying him, and you're not taking advantage of the things that he's provided for you.

But these loved ones want to bring you into some sense of the reassurance that they have and so they pile upon you assurances of God's love. Loved ones, they're false prophets. Now, I know that's hard. They're false prophets. And I know you may think that's strong language but that's what the Bible calls them. They're false prophets. I'll show you the words, it's in Jeremiah 6:14. "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." And you see the previous verse, "For from the least to the greatest of them, every one is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, every one deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."

Loved ones, the peace that the Holy Spirit can give you is a peace that no man can shake. The peace that the Holy Spirit gives to your conscience is a peace that comes when you've dealt honestly with your sins before God and when your God knows you have turned from those things and you're giving your whole life to him. Then there is a peace that he begets in you by the Holy Spirit that no man can shake. And maybe that's part of the guidance, loved ones.

There's a verse in Hebrews 12:25, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain."

Do you see that verse? "This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made." You see the kind of assurance that has been made is the soulish assurance that has come through intellectual reinforcement or the emotional assurance that has come through emotional reinforcement. That's the kind of assurance that is made. And God's word says, "The removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

Loved ones, the assurance of salvation that comes when a man or woman has dealt honestly with God about their life is an assurance that cannot be shaken and it is available to every one of us. And if you say to me, "Why does God preach such a hard gospel?" Because we are hardened in our sins and God knows it takes something desperate to turn us in order to save us. God knows that, loved ones, and so he directs strong words to us to make sure that we see the need to turn and then that we do.

Now, the old preachers would not ask, "Are there any questions?" but would just say, "Get home and deal with your God." But -- are there any questions?

No? Well, I say it all, to hold out to you that there is real New Birth. There is real New Birth possible and it's available to you tonight. Really.

Let us pray. Dear Father, I would pray for my brothers and sisters, Lord you know how we have been brought up in this permissive society and you know Lord how we've been brought up to believe that things should come easily and that there should be no hardship to be borne, and that we should never be unhappy or sad. Lord, but know that to some extent we're the victim of our circumstances.

Lord, we've been taught for years that we can get on without any discipline, or without exercising any will at all. So Lord, I would pray for my brothers and sisters, especially the younger ones here tonight, I pray Lord that you will minister your truth to them with such power and such conviction that they will be able to overturn so many lies, and so much false doctrine that they have inherited.

And Lord I pray especially for any loved one tonight who may find themselves in the same position as C. S. Lewis, with a prayer life that is very unsatisfactory. Lord, I pray that by the Holy Spirit you may convict them of their sin and lead them through a real confession of their sin, and a real personal repentance to you. Lord, thank you that it is possible to say, "Lord God, Lord Jesus, I'm sorry to both of you for the things that I have done against you."

Lord, bring them to a real personal repentance, a real personal apology to you both. And then Lord, to an absolutely confident commitment of their lives to you. Lord, help them to see that it cannot be some of self and some of thee. It has to be nothing of self and all of thee. And Lord we would pray for each other that tonight as we go home, or maybe at the end of this service, you would enable us to settle things once and for all with you and to be born of the Spirit, born from above. We ask this in your name and for your glory.

And 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.