

The Spiritual Life

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let us pray. Dear Holy Spirit we will just make fools of ourselves and lead each other astray unless you are here among us Sunday-by-Sunday. And oh Holy Spirit, we would ask you to overrule all men's poor words and all our poor thoughts, and give us life from Jesus himself in a way that we would understand. So we would ask you to break the bread of life to us Holy Spirit so that we will grow into the fullness of the stature of Christ. We ask this for his glory. Amen.

We'll be talking, loved ones, about the spiritual life and I ought first therefore, to try to define clearly what we mean by the spiritual life. Next Sunday evening we will deal with a good conscience. That's a vital part of the human spirit, so next Sunday evening we'll get into the middle of the series again and that would be the human spirit we're talking about. You remember, we left off there last May, talking about the human spirit. We did talk about conscience but next Sunday evening we'll take about a good conscience and the importance of a good conscience.

Now loved ones, this is the subject, the spiritual life. And to find out what the spiritual life is, maybe you would just turn to Romans 8:4, "In order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." So the spiritual life is walking according to the spirit, or I think the King James Version might say walking after the spirit. And you see the opposite of that is walking according to the flesh.

And rather than go immediately into that diagram [Body, Soul, Spirit] I'd just point out to you that you fall into sin and I fall into sin -- that is, we fall into disobedience of God -- because we're walking after the flesh. That is because we're depending on other people and other things, and other experiences for the things we should get from God alone. I could illustrate that easily.

You get irritated when somebody whom you love and who you believe loves you does not appreciate you. Isn't that right? You get irritated when they don't say an appreciated word to you in some certain situation where you think you deserve appreciation. And you fall into irritability, and irritability is of course sin. When do you covet? Well, you covet because you really depend on the things you own for your security. You do. You depend on how many stocks and shares you have, how many coats you have, how many pairs of shoes, how much money in the bank -- and the moment you feel your security threatened you very naturally wish you had some other things that would give you greater security and you begin to covet.

But do you see, that the coveting or the feeling irritable are almost unavoidable automatic results of a whole attitude inside you that depends on other people for your sense of identity, or appreciation; it depends on other things for your sense of security. It's the same with our happiness, really when you think of it. So often our happiness depends on whether we actually get to go water skiing, or whether we're the poor miserable creatures that have to drive the boat and we don't get to water ski. Or, half a dozen other little examples like that where we don't get experiencing the part of the event that we think is really most exciting and most satisfying.

And that's why we get depressed. If we're left at home on a rainy Saturday afternoon while everybody else is out doing something, that's when we sink into the midst of self love and

depression and we think, "Poor us, we're left behind all the time and on such a rotten miserable day." And then we begin to cry inside and to feel that we are the most mistreated people in the universe. But it's again, because we look to events and experiences for the happiness that we should have got from somewhere else.

Now loved ones, that's what walking after the flesh is, you see. I'm sure that walking after the flesh is fornication, and adultery, and all that kind of thing too -- but that's only part of what walking after the flesh is. Walking after the flesh is depending on the things that come through this flesh, through these eyes, through these ears, through these hands; depending on the experiences, and the things, and the words that people say to us, depending on those things for our sense of security, our sense of importance, and our sense of happiness.

And the truth is that God's plan was that we would depend on only him for those things. And that may seem strange to us who have been brought up in this sex conscious, experience conscious existential world filled with all kinds of material things and very exciting events. But loved ones, the truth is that our dear Father who made us expected us to get all that from him himself.

Now you may just feel that's the creepiest thing in the world, to think that you could get happiness just from God, or you could get a sense of security just from the sense of his love, and the fact that he owned the cattle on a thousand hills, and that he knew your name and would look after you every moment. It may be incredible to you to think that you could get a sense of identity even if all you do is brush floors all day, that you could get a sense of identity from sensing that your Maker had put you in this world for a special purpose and that you were at that moment in his perfect will for you and that that made you important to him. And it didn't matter what anybody else thought of you; if you were important in his eyes, that gave you identity.

That's the way we were meant to live and that's what the spiritual life is. The spiritual life is a life lived above sin -- because of course sin is that life that is independent of God. Sin is looking to your wife, and this may sound terrible, but sin is looking to your wife for the appreciation she ought to give you, you big baby. But that's it, that's it. It's us big babies looking to our wives for a sense of approval and appreciation because we managed to get the screw into the handle of the door at last. And that, even though we think it's just a little thing, that is the heart of sin.

Because of course the tragedy is it gets into worse things because then when she won't do certain other things then we get very resentful and very bitter, and then there grows up a whole cold war between us that is a barrier that no one can overcome. But loved ones, that is sin. Sinful acts are stealing and coveting but the sinful acts only occur when the damage has already been done. The sin is the problem and the sin is an attitude of independence of God and dependence on the world, and people, and events for our security, significance, and happiness. That's what sin is.

And the spiritual life is living above sin. It's living in total dependence upon God. Now, of course, the problem that most of us find is that once we've decided that that is the situation and we begin to try to live above sin, we find that we cannot. We do. We cry out with Saint Paul, "The good that I would" -- that is, I don't want to lose my temper with my wife. I don't want to covet other people's motorbikes, or cars, or clothes. I don't want to be irritable or impatient with people. But, the good that I want I cannot do. I don't know why it is but there seems to be a law inside me that makes me want to do the very thing that I hate." (Romans 7:15-20) And that's, I think, the experience of all mankind, that the moment we realize we are meant to live depending upon

God, that moment we suddenly realize that we can't do it.

Now loved ones, there's no mystery in it at all. In fact, you can get a clue as to why that is so if you have at any time been in the habit of drinking a lot of Coke, or a lot of coffee, or smoking. You know fine well that the nerve endings get used to the kind of quieting soothing effect of the nicotine. And when you stop smoking you actually do sense some jitteriness and some nervousness because your personality has got used to operating the wrong way.

Indeed, many of us have found we suddenly put on weight when we stop smoking because we've so arranged the smoking habit that we actually have come to terms with it and it has helped us with some other parts of indiscipline in our life. In other words, the incredible thing is that the personality has been perverted to get used to the nicotine but in the midst of that perversion it has helped us to continue in another indiscipline in regard to our eating habits. And so the perverted personality is in fact operating in some sense though it's the wrong way around.

Now do you see loved ones, that you can decide to quit smoking today but the old nerve endings have been used to that drug for years. Not only the nerve endings but the whole appetite has got used to its effect and so all the personality parts that are connected with appetite and with peace of mind have to be rerouted. Indeed, not only have to be rerouted but need an operation done upon them that is beyond the ability of any human surgeon.

Now, it's the same with Coca-Cola, or with any coffee, or with any stimulant that we've got used to. Many of us have managed to face the wildest mornings at work with the aid of some stimulant like Coke or coffee. And so we down a cup of coffee, or we down a few Cokes and we're able to go with the stimulation that the old caffeine produces. Then we see that this is ridiculous, that we are becoming drug addicts and we determine we'll stop it and you know the agony of that.

You know how it's almost impossible to keep awake. The whole body has got used to that artificial stimulant and when it doesn't have it any longer the body doesn't work normally. It works abnormally because your norm is really abnormality. And when you try to go back to normality itself, your body is so used to abnormality that it can't adjust to what is the norm. And in fact, something has to be done to that body that really is beyond the ability of any psychologists.

Now, think what happens when you get into deeper things, when you get into the business of looking to your teachers, your parents, your peers for your sense of importance. Not only that but when you think that you've been encouraged to do that from when you were a little baby. Not only that, but when you think our fathers and forefathers have been doing that for centuries, do you see that the human personality has become utterly twisted and perverted?

And when you think of how for hundreds and thousands of years we little human animals have depended on our own ability to grab as much of the oil, and as much of the dollars, and as much of the wood in the world as possible to make ourselves secure, and you realize all the hidden urges to accumulate, and to be acquisitive, and all the human urges to be shrewd and to be able to psych out the other guys so you could get what you wanted, when you realize that we as a human race have been doing that for centuries you can begin to see the incredible perversion that has taken place in our personalities.

Loved ones, is it any wonder that the good that we want to do we cannot do and the evil that we hate is the very thing we do? In other words, walking after the flesh, living the life of sin has become

the norm for us human beings. We're brought up to it, we're born to it. For centuries our forefathers have practiced it so that our very personalities have become incapable of living the way that God intended us to live. And of course, unless you replace them completely, there is really no hope. Unless you can remake those absolutely and completely from the start, there is no hope for us.

And of course loved ones, that's what God did in Jesus. And that's the purpose of Jesus' death. God took all of us with all our perverted personalities, put them into his son, destroyed them there and remade us as a new race as he raised Jesus from the dead. And that is why it's possible for us to walk after the spirit. Now you know of course, I don't need to tell you that that is not the normal interpretation today of Jesus' death, you know that.

And yet that is the clear teaching of scripture. Now, maybe you'd look at it in that same chapter in Romans 8, and you just have to go back one verse for the sake of the context to see why Jesus died and why he was sent to earth. Romans 8:3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do." And we know that, we try to obey the law but because of the weakness of our flesh or the perversion in our old personalities we could not do it. "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." NOT you see, he just said, "Bad sin, you bad boy. Don't do that again, I condemn you." But "condemn" in the Greek means "condemn to death"; destroyed it, destroyed the sinful flesh that we had in Jesus. "And for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." Why? So that we could get into heaven.

See that is the gospel that's presented so often to us today -- but that isn't the gospel of the Bible. God did not send his own son so that we could just get into heaven. We will in fact get into heaven but God sent his own son in Verse 4, "In order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." And so God sent Jesus and he put you and me into Jesus and destroyed us there and remade us so that we would be able to walk according to the spirit.

Now of course, the dear Jews did not know that at all because Jesus had not died in their time. And so they didn't realize that that was why they were being dealt with by God at all. And so all they knew was that some great event had taken place in eternity somewhere that enabled their Maker to forgive them and so all the Jews could talk about was the forgiveness of sins, you remember. That was their gospel. All the Jews could talk about was not the taking away of sin, not the wiping out of sin, not the cleansing and the remaking us. All they could talk about was that for some reason which we do not know -- which Isaiah you remember felt towards the times in Isaiah 53 -- but for some great reason we do not understand God, our God, is willing to forgive us our sins.

And so you remember, oh it's Psalm 32, "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered whose iniquity is forgiven." But that's as much as they could have; the sin was covered, it wasn't remitted. "Remitary" in Latin was "to send away". It wasn't sin that was sent away because they didn't know of Jesus' death; it was just sins that were forgiven. And you remember how one of the preachers explains it in Acts 17, where he says, "In those times of ignorance, God winked at their ignorance." Because of course, Jesus had not yet been set forth on Calvary and so God allowed that to be.

He forgives the Jews their sin and that was as much as they could know: pardon for sin. But again, and again, you remember God would point out to them a further hope. If you look at Jeremiah 31:31. God would point out to them that that's the old covenant but I'm going to make a new covenant with you. Jeremiah 31:31, "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant

with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive them their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

And then you remember, it's elaborated there in Ezekiel 36:24, "For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you," no longer you see just covering up your sins but, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit," the Holy Spirit, "I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." And loved ones, that's the new covenant that we live under.

But do you see that's on the whole not the new covenant that we think of. Most of us are good Jews, that's it. Most of us are just good Jews. We believe that God has forgiven us our sins and that's all we believe. And most of us who call ourselves Christians go on sinning day-after-day, week-after-week, and the world of course despises us, it does. You may think, "Oh, no the world thinks we're great." The world doesn't, the world thinks we're a bunch of hypocrites because it's tired of us talking and preaching about holiness and about God and living like the rest of mankind.

And so we, most of us, go on living that way again, and again saying, "Oh, but our sins are forgiven. Our sins are forgiven." Well, even the Jews knew that. But do you see the beauty of the new covenant is that God will not only forgive us our sins but he'll put a new spirit within us and a clean heart within us, and he'll sprinkle clean water upon us, and we'll be able to live above sin. We'll be able to live above this independence of God. Why? Because, we'll know that we were crucified with Jesus, we were utterly destroyed in him and remade in him so that there isn't one of us here that can say we have the old perverted, twisted, personality, and body, and emotions, and mind that we were born with or that we've developed since we were born. There isn't one of us here that can say that -- because we're directly contradicting God's statement.

Our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed, might be rendered inoperative -- and we might no longer be enslaved to sin -- so that we might walk after the spirit. Now loved ones, that's true of every one of us here -- that every one of us has been destroyed by our Maker in Jesus and recreated in him. Now, if you say, "When?" Well, I'll give you the shattering news, it's in Revelation and you'll have to be an Einstein to see it. But with the help he's given us we should be able to see it.

Revelation 13:8, "And all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of the life of the Lamb that was slain." Now the RSV is wrong there, the Greek testament reads, "Whose name has not been written in the book of the life of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world." In other words the adverbial phrase of time "before the foundation of the world" follows the verb "slain" and it modifies the verb "slain". So the verse reads, "Every one whose name has not been written in the book of the life of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world." That's it.

The Lamb was slain in God's heart before the foundation of the world. Sure, the Father is able to foresee everything, he is. And he foresaw what we would do with his world, how we would look to it instead of him. He foresaw the way we would pervert our personalities. He foresaw that unless he remade us completely that there'd be no hope for us. And in Jesus his son, in eternity, in that extra spacial, extra temporal world of eternity, God put the whole race of mankind that has ever lived and will ever live into his son and destroyed them there and then he manifested that in Calvary.

Do you see that was the only reason he was willing to forgive the Israelites? Do you see that? He was always forgiving them because he knew he had provided the antidote in his son Jesus but could not yet manifest it to the world because it wasn't ready for it. So during the times of ignorance God therefore winked at the lack of absolute purity and absolute walking in the spirit the Israelites practiced. But nevertheless, because he had provided the antidote and whenever they responded to what little shadow of that antidote they were told of, he forgave them their sins.

But then when they manifested it in 29 AD for all of us to see and understand the fullness of the mystery, then he was able and willing to pour out the fullness of his spirit because of course until we were changed, until our personalities were transformed and they were transformed from in-flowing personalities that lived off the world to outgoing personalities that could share with the world, God would not dream of and could not give us his Holy Spirit -- because we would have used the Holy Spirit to bring the world under our control.

And so loved ones, the whole fullness of the Holy Spirit, the whole baptism of the Holy Spirit, the whole possibility of walking after the Holy Spirit, the whole possibility of being freed from sin, the whole possibility of living above sin, the whole possibility of power to perform miracles, all of that is wrapped up in the great death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior. And there's a fullness in that death and resurrection that too often we so called conservative evangelicals have never touched. The least of it is an admission ticket into heaven, the least of it.

And indeed, can you begin to see that if that's all it means to you -- if all it means to you is the forgiveness of your sins and you have never begun to enter into a dynamic experience of that recreation that took place in you and Jesus -- then do you see that you're in grave danger of rejecting the new covenant and of trying to live on the old covenant. And of course, for that you're responsible. You could not say the Jews were responsible for not following the new because they didn't know about the new but you know about the new covenant.

You know that the purpose of Jesus' death is so that we might experience the fulfillment of the law in us and we might walk according to the spirit and not according to the flesh. So loved ones, if we don't walk that way, now that God has assured us that we have the power and the ability to do it, do you see our blood is upon our own heads? So when we talk about the spiritual life on these Sunday evenings, we're not talking about trying to do something, that's not it. I'm not going to stand up here and tell you all kinds of things you should do, or give you all kinds of little tricks, and techniques, and gimmicks for living in God's will. I'm not.

I'm going to try to the best of the ability that God gives me to share the magnificent things that God has achieved in Jesus for all of us, and in all of us. And I'm going to pray that night-by-night, some of you will see a glimpse of light. "You mean that's mine? Oh, I can be free from that. Thank you Lord, I accept that." That evening after evening, that loved ones here in

this room will begin to be freed by the realization of what God has done in Jesus for them and to them. And so loved ones it's an exciting study that we're involved in but the spiritual life is a dynamic power filled experience of the heart of the gospel which is Jesus' death and resurrection.

Just one last thing that God, I believe, showed me. I think many of us have a disease and the doctor has said, "Take two of these white pills every day." And he sees us taking the white pills out of the bottle and weeks later we're no better and the disease is still as rampant within us. And he says to us, "Didn't you take two of those white pills every day?" You reach into your pocket and you bring out all the pills you have taken from this bottle and say, "Oh yeah, I have. Yeah, I took them every day, put them into my pocket and I've been carrying them around with me."

And I think that a lot of us are doing that with Jesus' death. We have the antidote for sin in the very heart of the gospel that we say we believe but we're carrying it around as if it's only an admission ticket into heaven and we don't realize that in the heart of that dear death and resurrection is deliverance for us from all our inadequacies and all our sin, and all our selfishness, and our defeated life. And loved ones, it's for you, you know. And I'll just keep telling this old story for the next eight months in all kinds of different ways and I'll pray that some of you here will glimpse it through the light of the Holy Spirit and will lift into victory and will begin to live off God.

And your wives, and your roommates, and your colleagues at work will sigh a great sigh of relief and will begin to wonder by what power have you done this. And that you then will be able to explain as they did at the Gate Beautiful of the Temple, that it was by the power of the Son of God that can do it for them too.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for the real deliverance that you wrought for us in Jesus, and we thank you that it is no mere idea to save our conscience, or to enable us to deal with our guilt, thank you. Thank you that it is no mere event in history to which we are to give mental assent in order to be admitted into your heaven. Lord thank you, thank you that it is a great eternal act in precreation life whereby you remade each one of us completely and absolutely and gave us new hearts, and new minds, and new spirits, and that we are able to experience those new lives and new spirits in one moment by committing ourselves to that dear death with Jesus.

Just as he was crucified to the world and the world was crucified to him, so we can be crucified to the world and the world can be crucified to us and we can accept what he accepted; nothing necessary from any man or woman, expected no comfort from any friend, depended on no one else for his security but looked to you for everything. Lord we know that that's what it is to be born again and we ask you now to forgive us for any partial dealing with little sinful acts that we have involved ourselves in. Forgive us Lord for thinking that becoming a child of God is such a paltry petty thing as that. And thank you for showing us that it is nothing less than changing the whole orientation of our lives and turning completely from people, and things, and events for our happiness, and our security, and our significance, and turning to you and you only.

And then Lord we thank you as we do that, that new beautiful personality that was raised in Jesus will begin to manifest itself miraculously in us. Lord thank you, thank you that as we align ourselves with what you have done in Jesus on Calvary the whole thing will be made real in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord, we would do that; we would turn from the world. We would turn from our dependence on the world for our little sense of identity, for our little sense of security and happiness and we would look to you our Father and thank you that you will give us all we need. And

that you can provide everything we will need not only tonight but every night in our lives.

So Lord we would turn from self and turn from other people and things, and we would turn to you now and Lord tell you we're serious, we want to live a spiritual life. We want to live in the reality that you brought to us in Jesus' death and resurrection, and we give ourselves to you to make this real in us this very night. Blessed Holy Spirit, we know we can't do it, we know we can't do it by all kinds of prayer and thought but we ask you to make this real to us during these coming days and months for Jesus' sake.

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 ever more. Amen.