

What is Our Sinful Nature? #2

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Some of you know of Malcolm Muggeridge and he writes in some of his diaries that have just been published that when George Orwell died, a colleague of Muggeridge's wrote an obituary. And Muggeridge says it was a good example of how human beings become legends because a lot of stuff that was written there wasn't true at all. One of the things the writer said was, "One thing that Orwell was free from was self pity." Muggeridge makes the comment, "This was the trademark of Orwell's life -- self pity."

It reminded me that a lot of us who are children of God are caught up in that, too, in different ways. Indeed, one young lady said to me this morning and it just confirmed it that an amazing number of us who are children of God and who are supposedly living victoriously and above sin, have these sulky fits when we kind of go into a time when we have private crying over ourselves and we think what a way we are treated and how unfair people are to us. We think, well, it's just quite courageous of us to bear it and bear it with such a valiant smile on our faces.

But, all the time, our hearts are really filled with self pity. Of course, self pity is just self concern, as you know. It's just self love and it's just worshiping yourself. Loved ones, it's that kind of thing that we're talking about on these Sunday evenings. Most of us are pretty much the same here. I think probably most of us call ourselves Christians and think of ourselves as born of God. Most of us probably don't run around fornicating or committing adultery. Most of us here probably don't beat up policemen or get drunk or steal people's TV sets. Most of us are probably outwardly pretty nice people and fairly ethical people.

It's not the outward sins that we're greatly troubled by. Though I think, as Ted explained, at times, we have trouble with those. I think most of us probably would say, well, yeah, temper is a problem with me. I do find myself involved in critical comments about people and I do find myself biting back at somebody in conversation. Most of us would say we don't live in constant outward sin but it bursts out from time to time. We have a feeling that it's there underneath the surface all the time.

A funny kind of illustration is that it is really like having a huge Alsatian dog, I've only a little Yorkshire like that, but like having a huge Alsatian dog or a German Shepherd at home, and your friend comes in and he does not like dogs, he is allergic to dogs. So, you assure him, no, I don't have a dog, and you put the big German Shepherd in a wooden box that is a seat in your living room. You kind of plunk it down and put the seat down and you're sitting there when he comes in. He says, "How are you?" And, you say, "Okay." [as you are bouncing up and down because the dog in the box is trying to get out.] He says, "What's wrong?" You say, "Nothing." The old dog is bumping up, until eventually it just bursts out there. A lot of us are like that with our impatience or our irritability or our anger.

We try to pretend it isn't there but all the time it's kind of pushing up inside us. And we're afraid somebody will notice it. Of course, really, as you've said, I think we keep on bluffing that nobody sees, nobody sees, but, of course, they see.

Whether they see or not, life becomes such a strain for us holding all that stuff down that we've learned to smile rather cynically at verses like, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." As far as verses such as the one we read this morning, spoken by Jesus, you remember, "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." [Matthew 5:48] We forget that! We need every commentator we can get our hands on to blow that out of the water because we are nowhere near that kind of thing.

That's what we're talking about, loved ones. That many of us are in that situation and many of us are in it because we do believe it's very, very intellectual, spiritual, democratic, red blooded and fair to say, "Well, I mean, let's face it, we all live in Romans 7, don't we?" Everybody lives in Romans 7.

I think many of us have been caught in that. We have felt, well, yes, that's, of course, everybody lives in Romans 7. Paul is one of the greatest apostles and he lived in Romans 7 so, of course, everybody lives in Romans 7. Romans 7, for those of you who don't know it, you should look it up because it's a great help to you when you're living in hell like that. It just is hell. Romans 7:15, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." That's Romans 7.

Many of us have felt that's where everybody lives. You want to be kind, you want to be understanding to someone, you want to be patient but you can't be. You try but you can't be. That's the battle of faith. Then, we prove that by going to Romans 7:24, and say, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Then, we say, there, that's Paul, that's me, that's all Christians. We all live like that and that's why we have bumper stickers that run, 'Christians aren't perfect, They're only forgiven.' We get a bumper sticker like that because, at least, we can claim we're forgiven and we just aren't perfect. What we mean by that is, of course, we're miserably imperfect, but we're forgiven.

Now, loved ones, the heresy in that whole thing is that that is not the last verse of Romans 7. The last verse is the next verse, verse 25. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Paul says, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Then, he answers, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord," for the victory that I've just outlined in Romans 6.

If you go back to Romans 6, it's just plain what the victory is. Romans 6:1-7, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin."

Of course, he just emphasizes it again, in verses 15-18. "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourself to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

That's why Paul says in Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord," for that victory! Then, he summarizes the situation before that victory. He says, "So then, I of myself," on my own, "I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin," but thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord, I have been delivered from myself.

If you say, oh, well, then why does Romans 7 follow Romans 6? Oh, because in Romans 6, he's talking about deliverance from the power of inward sin and then, in Romans 7, he's saying now you're freed also from having to look to the law as your only guide for doing good. In fact, you are now under the spirit of Jesus.

Yet, he says, but does that mean the law was no good? In verse 7 of Romans 7, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!" Then, he talks about his past life as a Jew. "Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin." [The past tense of the verb 'to know'] "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' [it's the pluperfect verb usage.] He's saying in that whole parenthesis the description of his experience as a Jew under the law.

The law revealed to me the power of sin within me and the power of sin to prevent me doing what I should do. "Who shall deliver me?," I used to cry. "Wretched man, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" [Verse 24] Thanks be to God. As I said in Romans 6, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Then, in Romans 8, he goes on to explain what life in the spirit is like. So, loved ones, that's what we've been sharing these evenings. That the normal Christian life is a life of deliverance from the power of sin.

Now, if you say to me, "Does it mean you never make mistakes?" No. We make mistakes. You still have an imperfect mind. It doesn't mean that you're free from involuntary sin. No, I'm sure a thousand times you'll do something and you didn't intend to do it at all. You'll suddenly realize, oh, I shouldn't have said that! That was hard! That was unkind! But I put it to you, those aren't the sins that get you down, are they? Most of us know that.

Most of us know we make mistakes. I don't think any of us think we're absolutely perfect as God is perfect. We know we make mistakes and we know we commit involuntary sins when we don't realize it. But, those aren't the sins that get you down.

The sin that gets you down is the besetting sin, isn't it? It's that thing which you have fought a thousand times. It's that secret sin that nobody else in this room knows that has driven you almost crazy. You know that it fits right in to the normal scriptural definition of sin. "Whosoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." That's what kills you, isn't it? You know it's sin and I know it's sin and yet we do it. We know the attitude is wrong but we find it surging up within us, springing up inside our hearts and we cannot overcome it.

Loved ones, the reason you can't overcome it, is what Paul says in Romans 7. Romans 7:22, most of us are in that same spot. "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self..." Most of us are like the Jew in that way. Most carnal Christians are like the Jew. They delight in the law and they try to obey it, but in verse 23, "...but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members."

That means, I see another, not a law, in the sense that Thou Shalt Not..., but a law in the sense of

the law of gravity. It describes the way certain heavier than air objects behave. That's what he means by law. I see that my members, my limbs, my body, my mind, my emotions, keep operating in a different way.

So, I want to be patient with that person but it's almost as if my own personality has run away with me. It seems to want to be irritable with them. It seems to want to spring out and cut the legs from under them. I see in my old personality another way of working. Another power that is at work that is against what I want and what I am really trying to do.

That, loved ones, is what we've talked about and what the Bible talks about as the sinful nature. The best way that I can describe it to you is this. Our God is really your Father and mine and he really does care about us. He really does know you by name. He actually has counted the hairs of your heads, none of the rest of us know that and you certainly don't know it. He has actually counted the hairs of your head. He knows you and he loves you. The moment you really believe that, of course, you've just realized, 'The Creator of the universe is my Father and he loves me. Boy, I don't care what the rest of them think of me. The Creator of the universe loves me and knows my name. I don't care if the rest of them ignore me.'

Of course, you get a great feeling of how dear you are to somebody who is, after all, the most significant other in the whole universe. Then, of course, if you begin to think for a minute, well, how am I going to make it through this life. Well, why worry? The cattle on a thousand hills are his and he loves me. He's not going to let me starve. He's not going to let me die at the wrong time. See, you suddenly begin to realize he's going to take care of me. He's going to provide for me. Of course, as you begin to realize that, a great happiness and fullness and sense of satisfaction and contentment comes into your heart. Now, that's the way we were meant to live.

That's the way Adam and Eve were living at the very beginning. It was just a restful life. Where they found everything that they had need of in their Father's love. Then, you remember what happened, the power that God had allowed to exist ever since he rebelled against him, known as Satan, was permitted by God to approach Adam and Eve and say, "Listen, you don't really need to depend only on God. You actually can get the things that you need on your own." And they said, "No, no, we can't. We don't want to." But, then, they thought it would be nice to be free to do what we want to do. So, they said, no, no, we can't. And he said, yes, you can. They said, "Where can we get what we want?"

He began to explain to them, you can get all the food you need if you just exploit this environment that you see. Look at that fruit on the trees and the crops in the fields, the water in the rivers. You can get what you need if you just use your head. You can develop this world and get what you need from it and Adam and Eve began to feel the same way. Yeah, we can, we can.

So, they began to live independent of God like that and then they began to feel, of course, yeah, but who are we, we are little minions. We're nothings in the midst of this huge world. And Satan began to say, yeah, but look the other people in the world, if you start getting their attention and begin to get them to respect you and to value you, you're going to feel just as valuable, even as dear in their eyes as you used to feel in God's eyes. So, Adam and Eve began to do that.

Then, they began to sense, yeah, but it's not the contentment that there used to be in our hearts. In fact, there's considerable worry and anxiety involved in making sure the crops come in and making sure we do the right thing with the rivers and prune the trees right and use the fruit right. Then

Satan began to say to them, "Well, there are other ways of contentment. There are certain herbs here that you can get that can bring you real peace and contentment in your mind if you just use them right. I know it's not as exciting as it was before walking through the world with the Father and the Creator right beside you but there are exciting things. Look, I'll show you how to get some excitement. Now, you can get some excitement from each other's body, for instance. You can certainly get excitement from doing certain things in these mountains and these rivers and shooting the rapids. He began to show them how to get excitement and happiness without God.

Loved ones, they began to live like that without God and then they had children and they had children's children and all their children and their children's children began to live the same way. Here we are, maybe 10,000 years later, who knows, maybe, as they say maybe thousands and thousands of years later, but that has been bred into our whole race. We have a whole nature, a whole personality, that is trying to get from the world and from people and from things all the things that we were meant to get from God. That's why we have our troubles. That's it.

It's like having an engine that should run on gasoline and you have diesel oil. It's just not right. The equipment isn't right for the power that is meant to operate through it. So, many of us find when we're born of God, Jesus' spirit comes inside us and begins immediately to try to express itself out through our personalities. Except that our personalities are working from the outside in. They are working backwards.

That's where we come smack up against the problem. It's because we have a sinful nature that we find a law in our members working against the law of the spirit within us. That's why it's such a hopeless task for so many of us.

You know that I shared last Sunday that there is only one answer to it. It's the same answer, if you think that manufacturers have to operate, engage in, when they do a recall because some fault has developed in the automobile. Or, that manufacturers of vacuum cleaners do. Or, that any manufacturer does of a complicated piece of machinery that has gone radically wrong. There's only one thing to do. You'll lose your customers and you'll drive yourself crazy if you keep sending them little extra pieces to put on to it. The only way is to bring it back into the factory and either ditch it completely or take it completely apart and remake it all over again.

That's the only way to be delivered from that sinful nature that you and I have. If God doesn't do it, you cannot do it. The problem with us who are children of God is that we have received Jesus' spirit into us by faith. We confessed and repented of our sins and we asked Jesus to come in because we knew only he could come in and give us life. But, then, we found this sinful nature in us and we decided, of all ridiculous, stupid things to do, we decided, well, we can't get forgiveness of sins on our own, we have to receive that by faith and we can't come alive in God's spirit unless he makes it real to us, but we CAN overcome our sinful natures.

Loved ones, that's why we're all in trouble. We're trying to put these sinful natures right. We think that it's our irritability that's the problem. So, we read books on irritability and not being patient. We think it's our lack of love that is the problem so we read other books on how to love people and we think that's the problem. Those aren't the problems. Those are only symptoms. They're symptoms of a Satan-created sinful nature that you have and I have and that has to be changed by God. The only way it can be changed in us is by faith in what he has done through Jesus.

I've always been reluctant to quote this guy too much because I don't frankly feel terribly

Methodist. I don't know that any of you feel terribly Catholic now or Lutheran or Baptist. God seems to have, in a beautiful way, taken us beyond our denominations. Yet it seems important to bring the riches of the men who were a blessing in those denominations and share them with each other. So, I've always been reluctant to quote these dear Wesley brothers. But, I remember one thing that John Wesley said. Years after his conversion, he said, "At last, my brother and I realized that holiness of heart, that clean hearts, that freedom from our sinful natures is received and experienced by faith just as the new birth was experienced by faith. That was, after years of his trying and his disciplining.

I don't know if you know why they called them Methodists. It was a nickname. They called them Methodists because they were so methodical. Wesley, every 4 o'clock every morning, he was up for prayer. Prayed to 6:00 a.m., then preached for an hour until 7:00 a.m., then read and studied from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., and so the day went on. Just methodically. So, he had worked at that. He had tried in every way to discipline his sinful nature out of him. He writes years after his conversion, at last, my brother and I perceived in scripture that the sinful nature you're delivered from it by faith.

Loved ones, that's it. We're delivered from it by faith because God has done it for you. That's what Romans 6:6 means. Our old self was crucified with Christ. It's been done. I know it just boggles your mind and I understand it and I don't know if Einstein would be less boggled than you are but the incredible thing is that Romans 6:6 is actually true. We know that our old self, our old reversed nature, our old sinful nature, was crucified with Christ. It has been done. So that the body of sin, that is this body that has been used by sin by that independent life, that body of sin will be destroyed and we will no longer be enslaved to sin.

The fact is that your old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ before the foundation of the world, the Lamb was slain. And in that eternal realm beyond time and space, God already foresaw that he would have to do a recall on your personality. He did it ahead of time in his Son Jesus and that can be made real in you by your faith in that. It is by your faith in that. That's all that's really needed. You need to just have faith that that is so.

But, first, like Ted, you have to begin to realize that it's possible, loved ones. Oh, my brothers and sisters, I don't want you to believe it on the word of this man. I ask you to look into Romans 6, 7 and 8, and become convinced yourself that God's will for us is to be free from inward sin and to be free not only from the acts of sin, not only from the thoughts of sin, but even from the attitude of sin.

Then, find out, are you free? Then if you aren't, then begin to dwell upon this Romans 6. Now, Lord, it says here that my old self was crucified with Christ. Why, then, am I living under it and under its power? The Holy Spirit will begin to show you and will begin to reveal to you and will begin to expose it to you. Loved ones, as you see that, you will just get more and more sick of that self. I would plead with you to see what Paul says about the law, the law made sin exceedingly sinful. Do you see that's what sin is? Do you understand that?

Sins are swear words. Sins are promiscuity, fornication. Sins in the plural are things that you do or things that you say or even things that you think but sin, itself, is an attitude. It's an attitude of your Self. It's an attitude of your Self to God and above all, an attitude of your Self to yourself. The purpose of the law is to show you that you are an incorrigible god. That's it. Or, that you're incorrigibly a god.

That's the purpose of the law. To get you fed up with yourself. Mad with yourself. At last, perceiving that you have something in you that will not lie down. Something in you that will not be still, that will not be good, that will not be submitted to God. That's the purpose of the law. That's the purpose of the law and the purpose of the descriptions in the Bible to show you that this thing inside you is beyond your power to control.

Loved Ones, I know it sounds like a paradox but only when you have at last come to that conclusion will you seek Christ. I know it sounds wild, but it's true. The real remedy is so radical...death with Christ, that you will only even consider that when you are driven to the end of your own ability to control this inward sin. There's no way around that agony, there isn't. There's no way around that agony.

Do you remember what we have talked about in regard to Finney at times. Charles Finney, the revivalist, [1792-1875] would preach, you remember, go to a church and he'd be there for a week or two weeks of services. He would preach the law, just the ten commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, just preach it and preach it and make clear to everybody where they were going because they didn't obey it. The loved ones would sit there getting more and more under conviction of sin and getting whiter and whiter and more and more scared. The pastor would think, now, wait a minute, preach the Gospel. If you don't preach the Gospel, let us kill ourselves.

Old Finney would be up here slogging away, punching the law, the law, the law. You see why. Because he knew as a wise man of God that only when we human beings are driven in extremis, only when we are driven to an extremity, or when we're driven to almost death itself, will we accept the remedy that God has provided in his Son Jesus for our sin. Loved ones, that's true. I would ask you to even begin to do what I know I did. I said, Lord, bring me to that point. Whatever it costs, bring me to books that describe the way I should be, show me myself until I am sick, sore and tired of it. I'm willing to see it is either hell or it is death with Jesus. Maybe that's it.

Maybe the only ones of us that sue for death with Jesus are those who see the other side of hell. In a way, until you've seen the other side of hell, you won't embrace Jesus and his death and the cost that it brings to you. Yet, it's incredible, of course, when you embrace him in his death he pulls you right through to the other side of Calvary. The light there is so bright that you couldn't describe it, it's so bright. The life there is so free and so liberated it is nothing like this side of Calvary. Nothing. Loved ones, that's God's will for you. That's God's will. So, do not stay on this side of Calvary. I know you are forgiven your sins. I know you're going to Heaven. But, what good is Heaven, if it's a hell of suppression here on earth, when there is liberty with that dear Savior.

Isn't it reasonable to believe that that dear one who hung on the Cross has something secret there for you in that Cross? It's reasonable, isn't it? It's reasonable to believe that there's something more mysterious in that Cross than just him buying our admission ticket into Heaven.

It seems reasonable that the thing is so mysterious and so miraculous, it's likely that there's something in there for us. You, loved ones, who are Catholic, there's some reason why they had the stations of the Cross. [An enactment of Jesus' road to Calvary] Some reason. There must be something in that dear Cross and in that dear death with him that can do something for us that we need. Loved ones, there is.

All those great verses of hymns, "...at the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the Lord, and the burden of my heart rolled away. T'was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day." Those hymns do not refer simply to the forgiveness of our sins. Those hymns are dear and they talk about the Cross. Because it's in the Cross and in your experience of Christ on the Cross, a new death with him, that you're delivered into the other side of Calvary and into light and resurrected life. So, loved ones, it is for you.

I was going to speak about original sin tonight but you can guess I didn't get that far. I'll try to talk about it next Sunday. But, oh, "there is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God. Oh, Jesus, blessed Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before there, near to the heart of God." There is, loved ones. There is a place, really, and it's for you.

[Singing] There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God, Oh, Jesus, blessed Redeemer.

Dear Lord, we would each seek you, individually. We know Lord we are glad for the life that you've given us. We can't be anything but grateful. So much better than what we had before. But, Lord, we have sensed for a long time some of the things that have been shared this evening by different people. Lord, we are tired of pretense and, Lord, we sense that in those verses in scripture that in Christ we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

There is a victory that is more than conquering and not just the sometimes conquering and sometimes being defeated that we experience. So, Lord, we do believe that there is a place of quiet rest, a place where sin cannot molest, near to your heart. If the only way to it is with you, then that's what we want, Lord.

So, Savior, we know that each of us caused you a special pain with our sin that you bore. We know that each of us caused you a special agony because we have a different sinful nature to all the rest here in this room. Lord, we want to know every detail of that and we want to say Amen to what you did on Calvary. We want, Lord, to know everything that you destroyed in us and we want to hand it over to you bit by bit deliberately, saying, Amen, and saying, Lord, we are glad, we thank you for destroying not only my anger but the self pity that I so often like, not only my bad temper but also the unclean thoughts that I so often get pleasure from.

Lord, we would go to the heart of the problem, deeper than all these things, and we would ask you to show us ourselves as we really are, as your Father sees us. We ask you to show us ourself, however terrible that sight might be, Lord. Dear Lord, we seem to want to be so big, so important, like we think we are. We think nobody has the right to cross us. We are god and they have no right to contradict us our cross. Lord, we see that it's not only law, it's defying you, it's setting ourselves up as gods. Lord, we see that you and we can't exist in the same heart. One or the other must go. We see why you crucified us with Christ. Savior, we know that whenever we reach the ground of our hearts, and whenever we come to the end of this resistance to your will within us -- even though you have many other things to show us in future years, yet we know that it's possible to come to the bottom of our hearts and to the end of our resistance to your will. It's possible to come to the ground of our heart.

We know, Lord, that when we come there and are at last willing to receive all that you have done to us in Jesus. Then, Lord, we know the Holy Spirit will witness that we are fully consecrated and he

will sweetly cleanse our hearts from all sin and fill us with himself and bring us to the other side of Calvary where the air is fresh and the flowers bloom and everything is sweeter and more fragrant and more beautiful. Lord, we pray for each other this night. Those of us who want to seek you in the prayer room or in other rooms here in the building or those of us who will seek you tonight at home or those of us who will seek you this week. Lord, we pray for each other that you will keep our feet to the fire and you will prevent us stopping before we reach Calvary. We pray, Lord, that you will bring us into victory 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 throughout this coming week. Amen.