

What is Sanctification?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Well, what we were talking about was sanctification. That's really, loved ones, what it is. Sanctification is something that God does. It's not something that we do. So often, we think, it's God that justifies me. He justifies me through my faith in Jesus and God justifies those who have faith in Jesus. He justifies the ungodly, we say. He counts their faith in Christ as righteousness. None of us are in any doubt that God does that.

But, then, so often, we turn around and we say, yes, but now we've to become like Jesus and now that's where our bit comes in. "And to him who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." [Romans 4:5] Yes, but now my bit comes in. It's not to him who does not work but to him who works, God gives sanctification.

That's, I think, the error we make. That's where then we come up with our very crass, raw, crude Christian do-gooders. We come up with all our legalism and all our right ethics and our right views on this political question and our right views on that ethical question and our right attendance at church and our right view of doctrine and our right behavior, except that there's very little sweetness or fragrance or life in it all because it's something we produce ourselves.

Loved ones, the truth is sanctification is as much the work of God in us as justification has been. You weren't able to put yourself right with God. It didn't matter how much you did for him. It didn't matter if you gave your body to be burned and didn't matter how much Bible study you did, you never felt right with God until you believed that Christ had died for you.

In view of that, God regarded you now as having been punished sufficiently for your sins and as extending to you his forgiveness and his love. The moment you believed that, the moment you were justified, the moment you felt I'm right with God, I'm not perfect in myself, my life is still a mess in many ways, but I know my Father has forgiven me. I know I've been put right with God. I know I'm justified in being alive here on this earth, even though all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death and I should be dead, I know I'm justified in being alive because Christ has died for me. We realize that that's something God had done.

Indeed, that was one of the great certainties of it and the great confidences of it and the great assurances that we realize this is something that God did. It's not something that I've done. That's how we were put right with God. Then we came into his family and we began to get a closer glimpse of Jesus. We began to want to be like Jesus and want to be like God. That's where we then fell into works.

So many of us, loved ones, in this body and in all bodies, are trying to become like Jesus by willpower and work. Maybe we've avoided salvation by works in our justification, but in our sanctification, we're right in the middle of salvation by works. So, we're tensing ourselves and exerting ourselves and willing ourselves and our hearts are not like Jesus' heart at all. We're not seeing things through Jesus' eyes. How many of us here know in our office in the middle of the week

we should see this the way Jesus sees it? But, we feel something crude and raw inside us. We feel a crassness inside us that we know isn't like Jesus and we know we aren't Christ-like in our hearts.

Loved ones, it's because we have not really accepted that only God can sanctify us. That God is the one who put us right with himself and he's the one who will make us right. He's the one who has enabled us to be born of the Spirit and become his children and he's the one that's going to make us like his children. He's going to take you and he's going to make you like his Son.

That's what sanctification is. It's "sanctus", holy, and "theo", to be made, to be made holy, to be made like God. It's what God promised in Ezekiel, "and I will take away their heart of stone" [hard and crude and insensitive and unsympathetic] and "I will give them a heart of flesh," [a fragrant, gentle heart] like my Son Jesus' heart. [Ezekiel 36:26] That's God's promise and we know it in so many verses. We've quoted for years here in our evening services that verse, "may the God of peace himself sanctify you holy and keep your spirit, soul and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus."

We've quoted that but do you see how it runs, "may the God of peace himself sanctify you holy." It's God who sanctifies you. That's why, of course, we sometimes call part of that work "entire sanctification" because it's in that verse, you see, "may God himself sanctify you holy." That kind of mirrors the first great commandment that he gave way back in Deuteronomy where he said, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind." Not with a little bit of it. Not with most of it but with all of it. So, it goes right through scripture.

The implication is that there will come a time when we can be entirely holy in our intentions and our desires. I suppose we'll never be absolutely blameless, even before each other -- probably even maybe in our own eyes, we'll never be absolutely blameless. We've minds that are just so clumsy, so undisciplined. We have emotions that fly at times too much in love, emotions that fly too much in indignation and righteousness. So, I suppose we'll never be perfect in the world's eyes, maybe never be perfect in our own eyes. But, God says, we've to be perfect in our heart's intention. He says, I will make you like that. I will sanctify you holy. I will make you holy.

Of course, he does it through the dear person that has been mentioned here already this evening. He does it through his Holy Spirit. There is within you and me a Holy Spirit. It's him that began initial sanctification in you when you first became aware you were a sinner. That was initial sanctification. It was the beginning of being made holy or being made pure inside. When you saw the first crude sin that you were committing in your life and God's Spirit convicted you, right there was the beginning of sanctification.

We should never think of sanctification as something that just happens as a crisis or just happens when we get to heaven. Sanctification began with most of us here the first sin that we became aware we were committing and, the first move we made to try to rectify it. The Holy Spirit was right there making real in us the victory that God had wrought for us in Jesus and giving us grace from we knew not where.

So, that the first improvements we began to see in our life, that was initial sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings conviction of sin. Jesus said when the Holy Spirit comes; he will convict the world of sin. He is the one who brings repentance. We just go along with it. That's it. We don't produce much good ourselves. We just say, yes, to the Holy Spirit when he moves in

us. So, when the Holy Spirit moved in you in conviction and moved in you to repentance, that was the beginning of sanctification.

You remember that carried on for a while and then we talked about the crisis that comes with most of us. We come to a dead stop. Most of us do in our Christian lives. We come to a place where we just can't get any further and we come to the place where we just feel there's a whole something wrong inside me. There's something radically wrong with my whole personality here. I don't do the good I want to do but the evil I hate that's the very thing I do. I find there's another law working inside me in my members. A law of sin that forces me to obey this sin -- this sin that my Savior died to take away from me. Most of us come to that sooner or later.

Of course, it's that that we talk about as the crisis experience of sanctification. Sanctification begins the moment even before we are born of God. Certainly moves forward greatly after we've received the Spirit of Jesus into us and we're born of God. Because we have many holy desires to please our Father and many holy desires to witness to other people.

But, then there seems to come this, what most of us have come to talk about as a crisis. We realize I'm not getting anywhere. I seem to be going further back. I don't know that, well, I can't tell because I haven't asked each one of you here but I doubt if there's one of us who has been born of God for more than two years who has not sooner or later come to a place where we realize this is not getting better. This is getting worse. We begin to see that there is within us something that we were not aware of at all. We knew our heart was crude and crass but we didn't think there was a rebel inside us that hated God and that didn't want his will and that would flare out in temper and anger.

But it seems that most of us come to a place in our Christian lives where that gets so bad that we almost think we are going insane and we do just cry out, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" [Romans 7:24] It's then that the Holy Spirit begins to explain to us why Jesus really did die. Most of us are in the same boat. We didn't really know why he died. We believed that he had died for our sins. We believe that because of that God was willing to forgive us. Our attitude was Lord, if you're ready, we're ready. We don't know why you're ready but, if you're ready to forgive us, we're ready to be forgiven and we sued for forgiveness and confessed and repented of our sins.

Then, as we come to this further crisis in our own behavior pattern, we begin to see why Jesus really died for us. We've shared it often. We've shared the great contradiction that there is in our lives. We're in the office some morning, somebody swears off at somebody on something that is utterly unjustified and we know in our hearts that what that person needs is love at that moment and we need to just smooth right over that and just cure them with a kindly and a tender word. But, there's something inside us that just wipes out at them and tells them where to get off for using that kind of language in our office.

It's there that we discover that there's something in us that works against the movement of Jesus' Spirit. It's then, of course, that we begin to realize that there is this law at work in our members, the Bible calls it, but it's our minds, our emotions and every part of us that works against what Jesus' Spirit is trying to do. It's as if there's an ANTI-sanctification spirit that moves against the sanctifying spirit that is trying to move out. Of course, that's what causes the conflict. We have a desire inside to move out and to express Jesus' holy desires but there's something that is trying to move in.

Loved ones, I suppose because I think we need to see how only Christ could do the thing. Only Christ could make the change for us. I suppose that's why I so often push you back to this. Even though we kind of smile at this thing, it'll more and more become precious to you as you see what the heart of sanctification is because here's the picture, that's the perfect picture of the battle that is within us. [Body-Soul-Spirit picture] The red arrow is there. Are the sanctifying influence and life of Jesus' Spirit within our spirits trying to get through our conscience and out through our souls here and out through our bodies into the world? That outward movement is taking place.

Those red arrows, the Holy Spirit of Jesus within us as born again people, is trying to move out through our spirits and trying to move through our souls here and trying to move out through our wills and our minds, and emotions, and our bodies to the world. But, there is this movement indicated by these green arrows, this whole movement of life that governs our bodies and our souls. In other words, there's that whole movement of the desire to get our security and our significance and our happiness from the world and that's all moving back there.

Until you have it, how it moves, the dirty joke is the very plain example. The dirty joke is told in the office and we know that God loves us and we know that our significance in this world depends on his love. Who cares who else loves us or approves of us if he does. There's that spirit of that assurance that moves out to comment that the dirty joke is not the kind of thing that we should tell or that we should be talking about.

Yet, there's this other law in our personalities that still is concerned with the significance or the approval that we can get from this old world. So, we look at the other people and we think, well, what are they going to think of us, they'll think we're square, they'll think we're religious, they'll think we're do-gooders. So that whole movement of what will they think moves up against us and the battle usually takes place just there.

You remember the way Galatians puts it, for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit; for these are opposed to each other." [Galatians 5:17] The desire of the spirit is to move out and say, that's not the kind of thing we should be talking about. The desire of the flesh for the approval of man is moving against that and they meet just there. Galatians says that is what prevents us from doing what we would. That's exactly the crisis that most of us come into in our Christian lives. It can almost paralyze your life completely. Indeed, that's the mark of defeated Christians. They have many holy intentions in here but they don't govern their lives. They are born of the Spirit but they don't live in the Spirit. They live according to the flesh. They are alive to the Spirit but they're also alive to the world. They love God but they also love the world, too.

Of course, most of us when we come to that place, we try to blast through again trying to sanctify ourselves. That's the mistake we make. We realize the problem is here in our wills. If I could only get my will to obey my conscience, if I could only get my mind to obey my will, if I could only get my emotions to obey my will, if I could only get my body to obey, then I'll be sanctified.

Many of us go on struggling like that until we die. We believe that it's our job to sanctify ourselves. The fact is God has sanctified us. There's a verse in scripture that says, "So Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people." Hebrews 13:12] There's another verse that says, I sanctify myself, though it's really the verb for consecrate, and it is in the RSV Jesus said, "I consecrate myself that they may be sanctified." That's right.

The key to the breakthrough is Jesus' death. That's why he died. Our old self was crucified with Christ. That's the crisis of sanctification. When a person believes that and consecrates himself, then the Holy Spirit sanctifies them. If you say, what actually happens? Do we become instantly, completely mature and whole? No. I'll show you what happens. Christ on the Cross took that old self of yours that worked in a perverted way to death with him. So that now you have a self that is again what it used to be when it was first created.

How does that come about? You consecrate yourself. You say, Lord, here's the blockage. I am willing to let your Spirit govern my whole life. You see, that's what you're saying when you say you're willing to join the conscience directly to the will. That's what consecration is. Lord, I've been living from the outside in. I'm willing to live only one way from the inside out. Then, the Holy Spirit goes to work on you and this is where the beginning of his sanctifying work is. He says, do you mean you're willing to have your will obey your conscience in regard to your profession? And, you say, yes. He says, now, even if it means, and then he chooses the area of your profession where you're not really willing to live that life of self-crucified.

You remember, an old man was asked, what is it like to be crucified? He said, well, when you're on a cross, you're facing only one way. So, that's one thing it means. It means to be facing only one way -- to be concerned only with God's glory and no longer with your own, only with God's satisfaction and no longer with your own, only with God's pleasure and no longer with your own.

Secondly, when you're on a cross crucified, you have no future. You have no future. The Holy Spirit applies that to you and me, individually. We are all different here. We are all original sinners. We all do it differently. We all have wrong things that are different from each other. The Holy Spirit tracks each one of those done and he asks you to consecrate yourself completely to God and to Jesus' glory and to set yourself apart from yourself, from the world and from other people, and set yourself apart for God to do what he wants with you. That's consecration, loved ones.

The Holy Spirit says, are you willing to open the door there? You have a kind of a check valve there. You have a check valve that unfortunately opens like that. Unfortunately, it won't open that way. But it opens like that. That's why so often you're disturbed, even in your spirit because the soul lets these things through from the outside world. The Holy Spirit says would you in every instance be willing to open only that way? So that no longer can those things come in and begin to dominate the central motivational headquarters in your life and would you be willing to let Jesus out through you in every way, even in marriage -- even in marriage.

There, loved ones, the Holy Spirit asks you, will you consecrate yourself completely and be willing to let all the life in here govern every issue of your life? For most of us, it concerns our motives, our attitudes, our intentions and our reactions. That's it. It's our inner being that it concerns. It concerns your mode of life -- who you're really living for -- whose glory and pleasure are you really living for? Whose satisfaction? What are your real intentions in the things that you do in your life? What do you really intend? What is your real intention when you say certain things to certain people? What is your attitude that none of us here can see?

But you know what it is. What is your attitude? Is it an attitude filled with Jesus' fragrant love? That's what the Holy Spirit deals with us about, loved ones, when he asks for full consecration. There comes a time when he has come to the end of his questionings and he witnesses to you that you are fully consecrated and then he sanctifies you. That's what he does when he

sanctifies you. He works a miracle in your personality whereby he makes your personality like the one that was raised with Jesus after Calvary. He makes you miraculously like that.

That's why so many of us testify about the crisis in sanctification that we suddenly were changed, different. Everything was easier. That's what we testify to. We don't testify that, yes, it was a further step on the way of sanctification. We testify this was such a crisis, this was such a breakthrough, this was such a deliverance, that it seemed as if my heart was cleansed by faith. That's it. That's exactly the words, you remember, they used in Acts 15:9, "God give the Holy Spirit to them as he did to us and cleanse their hearts by faith." That's it, loved ones. It's a miraculous change. The Holy Spirit makes by faith immediately real to us what has happened in Christ on Calvary.

Now, if you say to me, then it's all done. No, it's just begun. It's just begun. Because, you see, now the thing starts working. Now, the flow starts taking place. Now, this Holy Spirit begins to renew your mind. Now, this Holy Spirit begins to reform your emotions. Now, the will begins to work as it was meant to as a good partner to the conscience.

Then, the body begins to be fulfilled by a contented spirit and a peaceful mind and balanced emotions and the body begins to drain away its strain and its tension and the muscles relax and the face begins to look younger. I don't know if the gray hairs go. But, you begin to change. Because the whole work of redeeming your personality at last can begin. So, progressive sanctification then begins and presumably carries on until we meet Jesus face to face. Now, loved ones, that's it. That's what sanctification is.

The crisis of sanctification is the miraculous opening of this gate. Then the miraculous application of that great crucifixion, making it real, blotting that out and raising you up in Jesus allows you to live in that ascended place. That's why sanctification is such a precious term. Because it's not what man does. It's utterly different from man's and woman's poor attempts to read the right books and to work on their own self-discipline.

It's something that the Holy Spirit does as he applies the death and resurrection of Christ to your personality. So, at last, the personality is turned around and changed. At last, Mr. Hyde is put to death and Dr. Jekyll alone lives. That's a miracle that God works. That's why you notice any of us who testify to it, testify to it as the last of all anything that we've achieved or obtained. It was what God did when we gave up on ourselves. And when in despair, we came to him and asked him to sanctify us.

Now, loved ones, it is God's will. That's what I Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." This is why God brought us to himself. To make us like Himself. This is what was written into the first chapters of Genesis. "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.....So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him." [Genesis 1:26-27]

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, that's always been God's desire for each one of us here in this room. That we would see things through Jesus' eyes. We can only do that if the Holy Spirit gives us Jesus' eyes and takes away our own eyes, gives us Jesus' viewpoint and takes away our own viewpoint. That's precious and I would encourage, especially those of you who are worn out with trying -- especially those of you who think I cannot do it. You're right. You cannot do it. But, God has done it to you in Jesus, his Son, and the Holy Spirit will witness your full consecration

clearly.

Some people say, "How will I know when I am fully consecrated?" The Holy Spirit will make it clear to you. You'll be in no doubt. If you're in doubt, you're not. But the Holy Spirit's task is to bring you into the victory of Calvary.

So, the first step for many of us is treating him as our counselor and as our friend, as Jesus told us. He said, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things." [John 14:26] So, the Holy Spirit is in each one of us here. Otherwise you wouldn't be here tonight. It's only the Holy Spirit that has given you a hunger to be here tonight so he is within you and he can lead you into that experience. I cannot. And, no man or no woman here in this room can. But, the Holy Spirit can, loved ones. The wonder of it all is he's anxious to, he wants to. He wants to bring you into what God has wrought for you in his Son.

Let us pray.

Dear Holy Spirit, we are more than ever convinced that there will be nothing but defeat in our own lives and a failure in our responsibility to our friends unless you act upon us and do something in us to change us. We believe, dear Holy Spirit, that this is what our Father promised, that in the last days, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. I will give them a new spirit. I will put my Spirit within them and I will write my laws on their inner hearts. Holy Spirit, we believe that promise of our Father and we believe that Jesus suffered outside the gate that he might sanctify us.

Holy Spirit, we come to you now and we want to consecrate every part of our lives to Jesus, for your glory, Lord Jesus. We have no existence apart from you. We would be dead in hell were it not for you. So, Lord Jesus, you alone are the meaning of our lives. We have no meaning outside your life. Indeed, it was you that made us Lord. Without you there was not one of us made that has been made. We know that we owe everything to you.

Lord Jesus, we are aware this evening that as the Holy Spirit brooded upon the waters and brought order out of the formless mass, so now again, dear Holy Spirit, you are willing to brood upon this new creation now and bring out of the formless mess that we have made of it, you are willing to bring a beautiful replica of what God had in mind when he made us at the beginning.

Holy Spirit, we would ask you now to counsel us. We would commit ourselves to hungering and thirsting after this full righteousness until we see things through Jesus' eyes, until we begin to live with his heart inside us and until you have cleansed our hearts of all those wretched feelings, of that resentment and that critical spirit and that anger that surges up within us and that uncleanness that is always there and that pride that is ready to stir up so fast.

Holy Spirit, we are tired of putting up with it, we are tired of pretending that we're good when it's all down there. We know that it's not natural for God's children and we are no longer defending it as the normal Christian life. Holy Spirit, it is not consistent with God's command to love him with all our heart and soul and strength and mind if we're still loving putting our neighbors down or loving building ourselves up. Holy Spirit, we want to be pure and clean from the inside out so that we can begin to be some kind of blessing to you and to our Father and to our dear brothers and sisters here.

Lord, we want to have the fragrance of Christ within us. So, we give ourselves to you tonight and throughout as many of these coming weeks as is necessary until we be sanctified and ready to begin that life of growth and Christ likeness. So, Holy Spirit, we ask you to exterminate the Devil in us so that at last Christ can grow in us.

Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters that those of them who can put up with it no longer will enter in this very night because there is no delay where you are concerned and therefore there may be no delay if we are willing. 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.