

The Crisis of Sanctification

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'd like to talk for a few minutes, loved ones, on the crisis of sanctification. Then if there is time to give you a chance to push me with questions so that, especially for those of you to whom it's an absolutely new concept, there might be some clarification. Sanctification is what God does in us. That's what we've said. We can't sanctify ourselves.

We can consecrate ourselves, set ourselves apart from other things, from sin, and set ourselves apart from ourselves, which is what you do when you dive in to save somebody who's drowning. Set yourself apart from your own best interest at that moment. So, we can set ourselves apart from sin. We can set ourselves apart from ourselves and we can set ourselves apart from ordinary pursuits in this life and we can also set ourselves to God, set ourselves apart to God. We can say, Lord, as far as I'm concerned, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. As far as I am concerned, my life is devoted to you to do whatever you want me to do. We can do that, loved ones.

But, we can't change our natures. We can't do that ourselves. With all the books that we read, with all the temperament adjusting books that we study and all the exercise of our willpower, we can't change our natures, which are really the natures of little orphans. That's what we are. Our natures are the natures of little orphans. However good our moms and dads were, we came up in a world that is godless.

That is, a world that says it believes in God but lives as if there's no God. You and I from the first time we entered school we caught that atmosphere around us and it was the atmosphere of orphans. It's a fatherless life. A fatherless child knows it had to make its own way and has no father to look after it. It has to do what it has to do on its own. It has to look after its own future and to prepare itself, it has to watch out for itself, provide itself food and clothing. That's our natures. We came into a world with that kind of nature inside us. Passed down not only from our moms and dads, you see. Many of our moms and dads were holy men and women.

But, this nature has been born and welded into human beings down through the centuries. So, we were born little orphans with a fatherless attitude to everything in life. I don't need to teach you how to worry. You can do it like that. [snap of fingers] I don't need to teach you how to lash out at somebody who's hurting you, you do it. A little orphan has to because it has nobody else to protect it. I don't need to persuade you to provide for tomorrow. Your whole problem is you're so busy wasting today thinking of tomorrow. That's because we have little orphan natures and we can't change those natures. Only God can change our nature. Only he can sanctify us. That is he makes us holy.

Some of you may wonder, well, doesn't he do that gradually? Well, yes, part of the work is gradual.

After the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the real baptism of the Holy Spirit, not simply an experience of a gift, some of us have experienced part of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We've experienced the anointing for power. Some of us have spoken in tongues. Some of us have had the gift of knowledge, the word of wisdom. So, we've experienced part of the power of the Holy Spirit, but we haven't experienced the inward cleansing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So, when you experience

the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in its completeness, an inward cleansing for a pure life and an outward enduing of power for service, then begins the process experience of sanctification.

So, there is a gradual work of sanctification, but there is a crisis of sanctification. Broadly speaking, if you asked me, what's the difference? Well, the difference that I was trying to highlight last Sunday is this; you want your nature changed. That's the crisis of sanctification. You come to the place where you don't only want to change but you're willing for it to be changed. That's the crisis of sanctification.

The process of sanctification is then God's Spirit beginning to pour through your willing personality and renew your whole personality in his image. That is the process that probably takes from now until we meet Jesus. So, that's the distinction, loved ones. The crisis of sanctification is really a readiness to let the selfish will go once and for all and to say to God, Lord, I know I am so bad through and through and through that all you can do is destroy me and remake me. I'm all bad. I just don't do bad things. I don't just think bad thoughts. I am through and through selfish, selfish, selfish, and I am willing, Lord, for you to make real in me what you did to me in Jesus on Calvary. Father, I'm not going to try to patch any more. I need to be remade completely. That's the crisis of sanctification, loved ones.

Then, when you say that, deep, deep down, God's Spirit witnesses to that full consecration that you have made and his Holy Spirit sweetly fills and cleanses your heart. And it's as if you have no enemy within. You have no self fighting you. You have a self that is hid with Christ in God and then the Holy Spirit begins to show you how to renew your mind and your emotions and your will and your body. That is the process that continues.

That is what Jesus referred to when he said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." [Matthew 16:24] Jesus said, there's a sense in which you could take up your cross every day. That's the process.

But, the crisis is this battle that we go through while we still think we can make ourselves holy. If you like, it's the last kick, you know, of the old self. You think you can do it yourself. You see, Lord, I see, I see that I am rotten but I think I can do it myself.

The crisis of sanctification occurs when a brother or sister comes to the place where they say, Lord, I cannot. I am willing for whatever remedy. Death, you say? Death? You mean I have to die to my future and I have to die to what people think of me and I have to die to all that I've thought I should be and have been. Alright I will. If that's the only way I can live for your glory and not my own glory. Yes. That's the crisis of sanctification. The process is the working out of that through your whole personality. So, it's very easy and that's why I keep going back to this whole thing. It's very easy to show you about this. I know that diagrams, you can so easily divorce them from yourself and no doubt that's the danger that we fall into. [Diagram of Body - Soul - Spirit]

Loved ones, the crisis of sanctification is a readiness. You remember how I said to you that unfortunately we have a kind of a one-way valve that opens that way. So, somebody praises us, comes right in here through the body, and we think, oh, we're great, we're great, we're great. It comes right through our emotions. We feel so proud they praised us. Comes to our mind, boy, we must be something, comes to our will and our poor will just kind of withers there on the ground and then it comes right through that one-way valve right into our spirits, disturbs all the humility that Jesus has in our spirits.

Now, the crisis of sanctification is saying, Lord, I'm willing for the valve to open only that way so that when anything comes through this way, when they praise me, it doesn't come through. It just stays out there. Lord, the praise I get is from you. The love that you have for me, that's what I'm really worth. I'm worth nothing more. Men and women don't really know what my value is but you do. It's the value of your own Son and that's all I need, Lord.

That comes through and it comes through this way -- through out spirits. The crisis of sanctification is being willing for the check valve to open that way, instead of that way. In other words, it's being willing to receive and live off God's love alone and to die once and for all to the love that the world gives you. That's a crisis. That's what we mean when we say you passed through the crisis.

Then, loved ones, you see what happens, then you're changed. I mean the crucifixion that took place when our old self was crucified with Christ occurs and you're raised with Jesus. You are transformed into a personality that works from the inside out. So, you see what happens, the Holy Spirit begins to take a will that has been virtually nonexistent because it has been dominated by the mind and emotions and it begins to bring it in obedience to the conscience. Now, that's probably a lifetime experience. All kinds of ways in which you, like the rest of us, have lived with virtually no will at all.

Now, God's Spirit begins to come through your conscience and you come to this unusual experience of exercising your will according to what your conscience says. Suddenly, at last, whatever your feelings are, suddenly you find your conscience telling you to do something and you can exercise your will -- cold turkey. We call it cold turkey because it's so unusual. It's actually the normal Christian life. But, we call anything cold turkey that is just the exercise of the will because really the reason we get into the old drug business and into all other methods of drugging ourselves is because we have no will virtually. We allow ourselves to be utterly dominated by our body, dominated by our emotions. The lack of willpower virtually wipes out our mind and then utterly crushes our spirit.

Now, it comes the other way. The mind, instead of manipulating, the Holy Spirit begins to renew it and bring it to a place where it concentrates on understanding God and understanding the will that he has for you through your spirit. Now, that's a lifetime experience for many of us. I agree with anybody here, doesn't this renewal come to the point where other people could not perceive the lack of renewal. Yes, I think that's God's will. I think God's will is that our souls would come to the point of renewal in this life where God's Spirit would, at least, be able to pour through us to other people.

I remember one brother coming to me and saying I really did resent the person who is over me in my job. I really did resent him. I know that was wrong and, when I was filled with the Holy Spirit, that resentment went. But, I still find my mind at times got into a habit of almost automatically resisting what they said. I find my mind doing that at times. I realize there's no reason for it in my heart. I don't really hate them, I love them. I don't resent them any longer but my mind has got used to that habit.

Now, loved ones, repeatedly the Holy Spirit will enlighten you about that and you'll need to exercise your will over your mind until it's renewed. Now, that's part of the process experience of sanctification. I think those of us who have used sarcasm have great trouble with it. Because I

think we come to the place where we no longer want to be sarcastic to people. We no longer want to hurt people but you get into a habit of it. It's a little funny at times, most times it's hurtful. But, you get into a habit of it. You find yourself doing it without any desire to hurt. Now, that's what requires the exercise of the will over your mind.

It is the same with our emotions. Our emotions, they're used to getting joy, joy, joy. You know that's one of the difficulties many of us have had in this business of praising God or worshiping God or a good service, I think many of us are through this now in the body here. You remember how hard it was. We judged a worship service by how good it made us feel or at prayer time by how good it made us feel, even though we were willing to receive our joy from God alone. Yet, our emotions had got used to receiving feedback from the outside. Now, that's the process of sanctification. It's something that goes on daily until we meet Jesus. The crisis, loved ones, is incredibly, powerfully documented. I don't know how many of you wonder, well, now, is it really plain from scripture that the crisis is a crisis? Oh, yeah, if you take your Bibles, I'll try to show you through just a few of the verses and then I'll keep quiet.

You might want to turn to Romans 5. You know how the first thing that most of us face is a sense of emptiness in our own lives or things in our life that are really just messing us up and destroying everybody else around us. So, usually, the first thing we become aware of is things are not right between us and our Maker. Something's wrong in our lives or we become aware that our lives are destroying other people and everybody else and ourselves as well.

So, we become aware of our sins and we become aware all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Then, we hear the gospel, the wages of sin is death and we hear that we will be destroyed for our sin. We come under condemnation from God and conviction of sin. We see the salvation that God has commended his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God, Christ died for us. We don't know exactly why he did, but it's said that Christ has died for us so we're saved and, as sinners, we repent of our sins and we turn to God for forgiveness. Then, Romans 5:1, becomes true to us, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are rightly related to God but then you see the further promise that is made in verse 10, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." See, we were enemies of God and then we were born of God and became His children.

Here's the promise, now we're his children, "how much more shall we be saved and made like him by his life." Of course, the reason we can't be like him is really 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." We see that there's another law inside us and our nature will not let us obey God and so we don't know. We hear this promise, we'll be saved by his life but here we have this nature that won't let us obey him and we can't be like him. We know we're his children, we were restored to his favor, but we're not restored to his image.

Then, you see, in Romans 6:3, what the dear apostles used to explain to the people who had been baptized in Jesus' name, they used to get them together after the baptism service and in verse 3 Paul or Peter would say, "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." So, the explanation is that our life, we'll be made like him in our life because we've been baptized into his death and therefore he says in verse 6, "We know that our former man was crucified with Him

so that the sinful body might be destroyed...”

Loved Ones, here's the interesting thing. In the New Testament Greek, there are two tenses, loved ones, for the past tense. One is the perfect tense which means “I have done something” and as a result “I'm in a certain state now.” So, the emphasis is on the present state. There is another tense that we don't have in English that is called the “aorist”. It means “a past act done and finished with.” The tense in Romans 6:6 for crucified, “our old self was crucified”, is that. It's the aorist. It's something that has been done. It's finished with. It's done. It's done in a moment. It's one single act that is done and finished with.

That's why you're encouraged in Romans 6:11 to have faith, reckon, consider yourselves therefore dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. In other words, you're to have faith now in a moment that this thing was done and is finished with. In other words, it's a crisis. It's a once and for all thing. It's done and finished with. Just as there came a moment when you believed that your sins were forgiven, at that moment you are born of God. So, there comes a time when you believe that you are crucified with Christ, it's done and finished with. It's not a process, it's a crisis.

Wherever you examine the words that refer to the destruction of our old nature, wherever you examine that in the Greek in the New Testament, you're dealing with the aorist tense. In other words, your nature is not something you strangle to death. It's not. The Gospel is not that your nature is something you strangle to death or you repress to death or you suppress to death or you kick to death or you tame to death or you starve to death. Your nature is something that was crucified like that. It's finished with and it's done and there's nothing more to be done but to believe it. The reason you're not delivered from it is simply that you don't have faith that that was so. Faith is, of course, belief plus willingness.

Loved ones, this is true throughout. Now, I'll try to show you in just a few more verses and then I'll stop. Colossians 2 is interesting. You get it again there, you see. Colossians 2:20, “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe.” Your death -- it's taken for granted. Now listen, “If with Christ you died”, it's finished with, that's it. Ernest O'Neill, you died with Christ. That was it. You're no longer alive then. If you believe that, that's the case. Or, rather because it's the case you'd better believe it. If you don't believe it, you're believing a lie. If with Christ you died. Then, you can see it yourself, even if you don't go for the aorist tense and all the Greek involved, it's very plain if you look further down at Colossians 3:9, “Do not lie to one another...” Why? “Seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices.” See it's been put off.

That's why you've not to lie. You've to stop lying because the old nature that wanted to lie has been put off. You see the next verse. “And have put on the new nature, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” It's because of that, that verse 5, is an easy command to obey. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. Put them all away and do not lie to one another. Seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on a new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of God.

In other words, loved ones, you believe the old nature to death. You don't try to command it to death or discipline it to death. If you say to me, well, isn't there a place for discipline in the Christian life? Yes -- the discipline of the new nature and the growing in Christ likeness.

Also, there is the renewing of the mind and the emotions. If you like to put it this way, the crisis of sanctification refers to the selfish will that wants to stand up for itself and have its own way and insist on its own rights. The process of sanctification is the disciplining of the old independent soul and the inexpedient traits, human traits that have governed your relationships with others.

I want to keep quiet to give you a chance...any questions?

Your hand went up too fast, I'll take someone else.

Question 1: Can you think of any other examples in the New Testament where the aorist tense is used to clarify what Jesus has done for us?

Yes, yes, I can. Yes, I will try to read them to you, brother, if I can just get it. Seems, loved ones, check out John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth." That's the aorist imperative. Sanctify them, and it means sanctify them once and for all. It's done in a moment. Acts 15:8, And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us.... but cleansed their hearts by faith." It is "cleansed", there is the aorist. He instantaneously purifies their hearts by faith.

That's the emphasis of the aorist. It's an instantaneous experience and moment. Romans 6:6, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed." And that's the aorist at a stroke. That henceforth "we might no longer be enslaved to sin" in the present for he who died. That's the aorist -- once for all has been justified or freed from sin. II Corinthians 7:1, "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the body and spirit." Galatians 2:19-20, "For I through the law died," (aorist) suddenly, died to the law, "that I might live to God. I have been crucified," that's the perfect tense, "with Christ;" and stay dead until now. That is, it results in a present state and "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". So there the emphasis is on the present state but I through the law died, is in the aorist. Ephesians 1:13b, "and that you believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Sealed is the aorist tense. Yeah, and those are only some of them.

Question 2: So the aorist tense is used to state a present state of being that was created in the past?

Oh, I see. Oh, yes, the aorist tense is often used in different verses. Yes, where you would be talking always about an event that happened in the past and is done with.

Question 3: The emphasis between aorist and perfect then is between the state of a thing or an action?

No, no, that's the perfect tense. For instance, if I said, I have set this pen on the piano. I would be emphasizing the state of the pen at present being on the piano. But, if I said in the aorist, I set that pen on the piano; it isn't emphasizing the present state of it. It's emphasizing my act of doing it. I set the pen on the piano.

Question 4: I guess I was wondering in relation to the definiteness of the doctrine of eternal security.

I wouldn't touch that with a 40 foot pole. The doctrine of eternal security, John was saying. You know it's so complex and it is so easy to be light about it. It's such a deep subject, you know.

Question 5: With the emphasis on the aorist tense, it allows us to see that our sanctification and consecration is all the Holy Spirit making it real in us as we respond to him through our wills. Is that right?

And, isn't it true, Joel, that very desire to work the thing out is itself part of a self wanting to be God. I remember thinking; I want to know how I got into this so that I'll know how to get back into it if I get out of it. I mean, there's just no, there isn't that reclining faith in the Holy Spirit, that despairing faith in the Holy Spirit that alone enables him to bring us to the Cross and through to resurrection. So, I agree with you completely.

I think it's interesting. It's good to know that scholarship stands behind the truth that this is an instantaneous experience but it's vital to get beyond scholarship and beyond this logic and this thinking and get to the place where we clasp Jesus in our arms. Well, I tell you, I came to the place where I said, "Lord, I'd rather be where you are, even if that's a Cross, than where the rest of the world is." I think you have to come to that place. Lord Jesus, I'd rather be with you, even if that means death forever. I'd rather be with you than where everybody else is.

Question 6: Some difficulty some of us have is realizing, not only our lack of belief for sanctification, we are forgetting who we are trusting. Doesn't he lead us into truth and life?

That's right. That's right. Brother is saying that the Father, when we are coming to the place of abandonment – "Would I be willing to trust you alone, Lord, for all that I need in the way of marriage or future or job?" – I realize who I am talking to. We're talking to the most loving Father that we have. We're not talking to some tyrant who is going to cut us off at the knees once he gets the mastery of us. We're talking to a dear Father who wants the very best for us.

Brother is saying we need to see that. We're receiving from him a love that is real, instead of a counterfeit love that the world gives. Some saint said, I'm giving up what I cannot keep to gain what I cannot lose. I'm giving up the affection of the world and the approval of the world, which I can't keep anyway, sooner or later I'm going to displease them, to get what I cannot lose, the steadfast love of my Father that will never fail.

Question 7: Can you tell us about how you came into sanctification?

It's tape number 47. One of the things that comes to you, I think, as many of you have heard my testimony, one of the things that comes to you is, it is important to testify to what God has done. I appreciate that Brother, what God has done in your own heart.

But, it is very important, it seems to me, for each one of us to find that we have died in Jesus in a unique way that nobody else has. I would encourage you to see that. You know, I am emphasizing the instantaneous crisis but I think some of you then think, oh, it's a real blockbuster. We think of crisis as the bells ringing and the thunder and lightning flashing. I mean for me it was just a very quiet assurance that I was at last willing, Lord, to be with you, whatever it would mean for me. Whether it would mean disaster or failure or success or misery or whatever. It's a quiet assurance that I was willing and that the Holy Spirit had come in.

So, by crisis, it's important to see we're not talking about a sensational moment necessarily. Though many of us have had that. But, the fact that there comes a time when you're dead and you know you're dead and you know there is no longer any of that old self rising up.

It seems to me Brother, that's what I think I've always had to guard against with you, loved ones, so often we've been a young congregation and it is so easy to impose our own experiences on each because we love each other. I mean it's good that we love each other and it's good to love people who are trying to follow Jesus but it is very important then to see that a necessary condition of being filled with the Holy Spirit is that you look away from other people's experience and you say, "Lord Jesus, I know I was crucified with you. "Will you show me what this means for me and I want to receive it?"

Even though I appreciate it, Brother, I think that it gives me opportunity maybe to add that caution. You remember, Nee says, some people have a big crisis experience followed by a lot of little experiences. Some people have a little crisis experience followed by sizable experiences. So, we are all so different. It is important to see it's, actually, it doesn't matter whether you believe all this or not. It doesn't matter whether you agree with all this.

But, it does matter that you see that God has done everything in Jesus that is necessary to enable you and me to live a life that is free from conscious sin. We can't be free from unconscious sin. There'll be lots of things that we'll do that we won't realize were wrong and we'll be sorry immediately and we'll know the Father forgives us the moment it's done. There will always be unknown sin that we commit involuntarily that we commit through ignorance, through mistakes, through errors. But, we can be free from knowingly putting a nail in the hand of our Savior.

Loved ones, that's the important thing. That God has done everything in Jesus that is necessary to change us and make us like himself. Fletcher, of Madeley, would say it was, he would say that he did and he testifies in great detail and he's one of the saintly men that experienced this in the 18th century and others would testify that it is. It seems that God will not overrule our free wills. We are still able to fail to exercise our faith in our death with Jesus day by day.

Now, it seems to me that it's vital every morning we get up, it's vital to take up our Cross daily and say, Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you for this day that you have in me, not me, because I was crucified with you, but thank you, Lord, that you want to do things this day and that I can be out of myself this day and into you. I think that's vital.

Question 8: You mention the crisis of sanctification -- is it really and present moment crisis or is it more a process of sanctifying moments?

I would think that the crisis of sanctification is that dying to receiving from the world. It seems to me all of us can with the Holy Spirit's help determine where in our lives we're still living by the world and the love of the world. It is possible for the Holy Spirit to bring us absolutely up to date with all those areas and particularly the resisting attitude of our wills to that and it's possible to come to a death to that. Lord, I'm ready.

You can't come to a death to the things that are to come but we can come to a death to all that we are at this present time. Then it seems to me, He does something that cleanses our hearts so that when we come to future new things, our whole nature just goes. It's like that.

I thought that one of the best illustrations, and you always laugh at it because it's always funny about a marriage, but, it seems to me it's one of the best illustrations that was in Decision magazine. I think Billy Graham was using it in regard to conversion. But, I think it's sanctification. That sanctification is like marriage. It's one great YES, followed by lots of uh-huhs. It seems to me once you've settled that there seems yeah, uh-huh, yes, that's right. From time to time, there may be a moment because the old mind is used to going the other way. What? But, then, oh, yes, I see it's your will, Lord. Thank you.

So, that's what I was saying, loved ones. It seems to me it's a cleansing of the heart and an eliminating of the resistance to his will that seems to govern so many of our lives who are carnal Christians, those of us who are carnal Christians. I would say there is one clear mark, loved ones that I can recognize in my life. It was, there is nothing, Lord, that you can ask me to do that I would not be willing to do. That's it. I would say that was a clear witness of my own spirit. I was not able to say that before. But, I was able to say, there's nothing that you could ask me to do, Lord, that I wouldn't do. It seems to me that's a part of it. But, loved ones, forget all this stuff and go for Jesus. That's it. Go for Jesus and pull him to you and say, Lord Jesus, I want this, I want to come into you with all my heart.

So, let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you that after we've all described how we came into you. It is a miracle wrought by your dear Father and our Father.

And, Father, we recognize that all we can do is fall at your feet and say by your Holy Spirit bring us into this blessed relationship with our Savior. Bring us into this place on the Cross where there is nothing that he would ask us to do that we could not do or are not willing to do. Lord, we know that that's peace and contentment. That is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Lord, we thank you that that's possible for us and there is no place dearer, no place safer than your heart. No place that is more sure of eternity than your heart.

So, Lord, we want to dwell there where your Father has placed us and we are willing to leave outside everything that is alien, everything that would be rejected by your heart. So, Lord, we thank you for your presence with us this evening. Holy Spirit, we ask you to lead us in for Jesus' sake.

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 evermore. Amen.