

Me or The Holy Spirit?

John 16:14

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I did a study called "Me or the Holy Spirit", "Me or the Holy Spirit?" You could really say my soulishness or the Holy Spirit, or my self power or the Holy Spirit, but "Me or the Holy Spirit?" To tell you the truth, I thought one possible title could be "That's the Way I Am" because, that's one of the lies I think Satan lays on us, "That's just the kind of person you are the rest kind of have to put up with you." It seems to me that what spoils a close fellowship such as we have in our homes and what therefore poisons the spring that feeds our businesses, is not only sin in the sense of disobedience and self will, but it's soulishness, our own self power.

I've seen more and more that a fellowship such as ours will never rise above the level of an ordinary family until we are delivered from our own soul power, in a sense, from our own dependence on our personality. Not that our personalities have to be wiped out at all, but that the Holy Spirit is to take primary place and is to use our personalities as he pleases, which means of course that we have to come into submission to him rather than ourselves. And I can see that it's very – it's a very deceptive thing because you can feel when you come to a certain amount of deliverance from self will and from elevating yourself. You can feel, "Oh I'm free. I'm free just to swing out and be myself." And of course, if you do that you may want with all your heart to glorify Jesus, and you may be clear in your own motives, and be living for his pleasure alone but you won't bring about his pleasure. You won't bring about his glory because you'll be doing it by your own power and your own personality. And I can see in our fellowship where the Holy Spirit is king, and Lord, and Master there is a holy restraint and there is a graciousness with our dealings with each other and our dealings with Jesus, that enables the Holy Spirit to bring a life and a tenderness, and gentleness, and a truth among us that only he can bring.

So it seems that only the Holy Spirit of truth is able to bring heaven to earth in that way. And he is able to do it only with a group of men and women who have not only died to self will but who have died to their own self power. I'm horrified – it's been interesting for me, you know, from 1975 and the television cameras, and the crowds of people, and Pastor O'Neill and all that stuff, it's been interesting to be away from that and here in this room Sunday after Sunday. And I can only say that it's been great, but it's been a revelation how much you got used to people kind of looking to you, or giving place to you, or making – what they say, paying difference to you, or making preparations for you being in a room, or being glad that you are there. All those things that go you know, with that kind of position. And it's been good in a way to see how much you can live in your own personality without really wanting to and without intending to, and how good it is to come under the loving rule of the Holy Spirit and begin to be concerned with what he wants done and with his elevation of Jesus.

And I can see it here that it's surprising how much we are like that little fella that I've told you about before in Belfast, the little fella that was in the camp that I used to look after, for little children – Belfast Children from the slum places, and they were out playing football, playing soccer and he started to fight with another little guy and I parted them and I said, "What's wrong?". And he said to me, they would probably have called me sir maybe in that situation, "Sir, he thinks he's the fella in the big picture." And the big picture for us going to movies was the main feature. In those days, you used to have a main feature and maybe then you'd have a little comedy feature, and

then you'd have the movie to amuse. So you'd have three different movies on the program in the theaters, but the big picture was the main feature like *Gone with the Wind* or whatever it would be and he was saying, "He thinks he's the fella in the big picture."

The star in the big picture was of course, the most important guy and I think I've been surprised how much we all are kind of wanting to be the fella in the big picture, you know. And even however old we are, however many years have passed, how much we all kind of want to be prima donnas and ballerinas, and want to pirouette, and want people to look at us, and praise us, and all that kind of thing and you can see more and more how that pushes Jesus off center stage.

Those of us who were involved in drama know the business, I can never remember if it's up staging or down staging but you upstage a person you know, when they're at the back of the stage and you're at the front so the people can't see them and of course, actors and actresses who are very ambitious often play games because they know exactly how to block out the other person and so they upstage the other person. And it's surprising how much of that there can still be in us even when we want to glorify Jesus. It's as if, if you continue to operate by soul power or by your own self power.

In other words, to tell you the truth, if you continue not preoccupied with the Holy Spirit that seems to be it. If you continue to be not preoccupied with the Holy Spirit, if you don't come into a place where he is your lord and master here on earth, and he is a dear person that you respect and honor, a tender friend whom you have affection for, it seems it you don't have that attitude you automatically know, almost by default. You fall into the prima donna position again, trying to be the fella in the big picture or the girl in the big picture, trying to get others to appreciate your particular little piece of brilliance, or your particular personality. Or, it's surprising how you can end up just a mighty giant that just wants to spill over everywhere, you know, just wants to spill over everywhere.

I think Irene once said a plane that she was in which was kind of – the seats were rather narrow and this rather large gentleman got in beside her and kind of spilled over and you can easily spill over, you know, just so you kind of crumble over everywhere, or everybody, or every conversation, or every situation, or you kind of bounce people out of position. And I can see increasingly that the only way for a tender fellowship to continue is if we treasure the Holy Spirit. Each one of us love him, honor him, and see that only he, only he can keep us in Jesus. Only he can continue to take of the things of Christ and impart it to us.

It seems if we don't have that attitude we end up endeavoring to make the things of Jesus real in us by our own power and that always fails. You can see why it fails, partly because we're determined to do it by our own power and so of course, if we do it by our own power it's our, it's our own power which is unreal because we have no power of our own. It's just a loan power, it's a lent power. But we again, are entering into a lie of Satan just as really as we entered into the lie that we had a right to our own way. Now we think, "Well, we have our own power." But it's a lie and so it's doomed to failure and it produces a fellowship that is Christian in name but is not Christian in tenderness and in spirit, and is not therefore a beautiful place to be, a tender place to be, a safe place to be, a rejuvenating place to be.

When the Holy Spirit is king and lord, all those other things occur. There's life flowing like a river, and there's tenderness, and there's gentleness, and there's awareness of each other, and there's kindness and patience, and there's a sense of restraint, and a sense of self control, and yet a sense of joy, and delight, and exhilaration. But wherever the Holy Spirit is not treasured by

each one – get one little loose cannon, one loose cannon, it doesn't matter whether it's an American loose cannon, an Irish loose cannon, a Chinese loose cannon, get one loose cannon in a fellowship and there'll be a coarseness and a hardness that comes in that is quite difficult to isolate in a sense. So it's very important for each of us to treasure the Holy Spirit.

I probably first was impressed with the all-important position of the Holy Spirit when I read a piece in scripture that again, we all know. It's Acts 5:3 and you remember it's Ananias and Sapphira and of course, they sold a piece of land and then did not give all of it to the apostles for God's work but kept back some of it you remember, without telling. That was the thing, without telling. I mean, they could have come and said, "Look, we sold this and we're giving you this bit and we're giving this bit." But of course, they pretended they were giving it all and so Acts 5:3, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'" And it seems so funny – I suppose, you know, I've been brought up or trained so long as an ordinary pastor, of course, the important thing was are you lying to the other members of the church, or are you lying to me, or your Sunday school teacher, or are you lying to somebody else. But I never thought that if a person came into the office – I'd say to them, "Why have you lied to the Holy Spirit?"

I suddenly became aware how all-important the Holy Spirit is in Jesus' body. It wasn't that he was keeping back part of the land, you hear Peter saying it, "Look, when you had the land it was your own you could do what you wanted with it. Even after you sold it you could do what you wanted. But you inside, in your heart, have pretended and have conspired with yourself against the Holy Spirit of truth who prompted you to do this. You have now conspired in your heart to ignore him and yet pretend that you're obeying him. Now why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" And I suddenly began to realize, "Yeah, honesty with the Holy Spirit is everything."

Honesty with the Holy Spirit is everything. It's the only thing that will keep us in Jesus if we're honest with the Holy Spirit. And you probably know if you've sought God for a clean heart that what comes home to us is the importance of honesty and integrity in our own thinking. I was sharing with Amy that the heart of it is thinking of each person exactly what they know you're thinking. Not looking at a person and thinking something else about them that you don't let them know, but honesty absolute honesty. Not having a thought in your heart about anybody else that they don't know about it, or that you would be ashamed of. That seems to me to be a very important part of a clean heart and that's what the Holy Spirit does.

When you begin to deal with the Holy Spirit about your truthfulness and your honesty with him, then he begins to have some kind of influence in your life. But if you still run a kind of life here, and you have him aside as a kind of counselor and you call him in, "I'd like a bit of counsel Holy Spirit. Oh yeah, that's interesting what you think. Oh yes, well I'll remember that I'll take that into consideration. Okay, go outside the door now and now I'll carry on and do what I think." If you run that kind of life you will be left with your own self and your own self power and no tenderness, and no graciousness from heaven.

But if you open your heart to the Holy Spirit and you are honest with him, honest in the depths of your being so that it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter if no one ever saw into your heart, if no one ever knew what was in your heart, yet you would feel a strong obligation to keep your heart exactly honest with the Holy Spirit and absolutely clean so that if anybody did care to look in,

they wouldn't see a thing that they cannot see in your life.

So I began to see, honest with the Holy Spirit and truthfulness, and preoccupation with him is the key to having Jesus' death and resurrection made real in us. We cannot make it real ourselves, only the Holy Spirit can do it and you know it's almost like this – that's why I said at times to you and said to Irene about our parents and about your dad and about Amy's, I've said so often those who are – those who have the Spirit of Christ belong to Christ. Christ is looking for his Spirit and it's not – the issue is not have they signed along this dotted line, or do they belong to this church, but what is a person like in their heart to the Holy Spirit? Do they love the Holy Spirit? Do they respond to the Holy Spirit has he has revealed himself to them? And fortunately, we cannot judge – the Bible is so strong you know, "The spiritual man is judged by no one."

You're obligated to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit and then it's you and him. But that is the center of it, the Holy Spirit being king and master in our lives. Some of you may have wondered you know, "Why are certain Christian groups that are very strong on the truth of the Bible and very enthusiastic about the substitution in the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, why is it that so often that there is strife in those groups? So often there is a hardness in them? So often there is a lack of love in them?" Here this is it, don't let's point the finger at them – it's good I only – I did it the other day because I read in "The Calvary Road" to Amy and so I thought, "Okay I will do it." I thought, "Oh yeah, yeah that's right three fingers point back at me if I'm pointing on at you." Yeah, that's true so don't let's point the finger at them.

But any Christian group can have all the truths outlined perfectly, believed very well in their heads, and even be trying to obey them in their works but if they do not honor the Holy Spirit, the tenderness of Jesus' life will not fill the fellowship, and will not fill the family. And I think that's what shows up in our family. In a close fellowship what shows up most is that we're not all here committing adultery, or gambling, or swearing at each other. Those aren't the problems, though we should never think, "We'll never have any trouble with those." But those aren't the problems. The problem is so often self-power, self-exaltation without knowing it. Pride in one's own personality, one's own ways, and the particular traits of one's own personality. It's that that pushes the Holy Spirit off center stage. That's it.

We're concerned here not so much you can see with morality, not even with psychology, not even with culture or with manners, not even with humane attitudes to each other, those all those things are involved, but we're probably concerned with the relationship with the dear person, with the Holy Spirit. We're probably concerned with somebody that we push off center stage and I think with some of us it is because even though we hear Jesus saying, "He is the Holy Spirit," the Holy Spirit is a he, yet we haven't quite grasped that and we still think of him as a force and we still pray to him like that.

Some of it is that but a lot of it is that we have not come to the end of ourselves in the sense of self power. We've come maybe to the end of ourselves in the sense of self will, but in the sense of self power, and the power of our own personalities, and the power of our own souliness we have not come to the place where we are exasperated enough with ourselves, dissatisfied enough with ourselves, dying enough to ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to come into the central position in our hearts and minds.

So that you remember, there's that poem that I may have quoted before where the man says, you know, to his girl, "These are the things I'm dreaming about, now tread softly." "Oh I set them before you

like carpet under your feet, my dreams. Now tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” It’s a bit like that, you tread on the dreams of the Holy Spirit when you walk coarsely, and harshly, and roughly. You tread on the dreams that he has so it’s as if you walk gently with him and tenderly with him because he is such a tender and a gentle person. And so of course, it affects your own behavior, and your own life, and your own ways, and affects the ways you talk to each other and you deal with each other so it brings a whole beauty into a life and it brings a whole beauty into a fellowship and into a family.

So that’s the first thing that I saw, you know, how important he is. Jesus of course, told us all of this if you just glance at a few verses in John 16, it’s very plain that he was saying to us, “You cannot live in me on your own. You will not be able to.” John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” He was saying, “Look, I’m going but my successor is coming. The Holy Spirit, he is my successor. The attitude that you have had to me on earth, I want you to now have to have to him.” And that’s so often the gap in our lives, the emptiness in our lives.

We kind of think, Jesus is at the right hand of God so now we’ve got to live like Jesus. But the Savior is horrified – I dare not say surprised but the Savior did not want that. He doesn’t want us – he knows we can’t live like him. He wants us to now turn our eyes to his successor, the Holy Spirit. He says, “It’s to your advantage I’m going away because I’ve to intercede before my Father for the whole world and for you so I’m going away now. But the Holy Spirit will come and he will lead you into all truth. Now, I want you to look to him.” Well, the gap in most lives, of most people who call themselves Christians, is that of course they don’t think that way at all. They don’t think of the Holy Spirit as taking the place of Jesus in their lives, they just think he’s some kind of influence out there that will help them from time-to-time.

That’s not the import of Jesus’ words. His words are very clear, “It’s to your advantage that I go away because if I don’t go away the Holy Spirit will not come to you” and he implies, “if the Holy Spirit doesn’t come to you you’re lost. So it’s to your advantage that I’m going because if I don’t go the Holy Spirit will not come to you. But when he comes to you, he will lead you into all truth.” And then he just goes on, you know, “When he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ‘I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.’”

But he didn’t say, “Therefore, I’m disappointed. I wish I had more time with you,” he didn’t. He said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears,” in other words, Jesus implied, “The Holy Spirit is beside me. He’s listening to me. He hears what I say and he will speak that to you.” “Whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” And so Jesus implied, the Holy Spirit is the one who will be what he has been to the disciples. The Holy Spirit will be that to us and he will not draw attention to himself.

That’s – I think we miss it there. I think we put on our theologian’s hats and we say, “Now wait a minute, I can’t afford to give all my attention to the Holy Spirit because after all the Holy Spirit is not the center of God. He is not God. The Holy Spirit is just a messenger so I dare not give

all my attention to the Holy Spirit.” Well Jesus didn’t say that because Jesus knew if we once took the management of our own spiritual life into our own hands we were lost again and Satan always tries to get us to do that, “Now you should give this amount to God, give this amount of attention to Jesus, this amount to the Holy Spirit, you know, and just divide it up.” Well it’s wrong. It puts the whole management of your own spiritual life in your own hands. Jesus said, “No, the Holy Spirit will not glorify himself, he will glorify me. If you will give your attention to him he will glorify me. He will lift me up. He will elevate me by taking of my life and imparting it to you and making it real.”

So there’s a whole lot more to say but I realize that we have probably been talking for a little while. The Holy Spirit, he will make our family heaven. He will make our family heaven. He will make our lives tender and fragrant if we give our whole attention to him, and he will draw our eyes to Jesus. And how will he glorify Jesus? By taking Jesus’ character and giving it to us. That’s it - but only he can do it and when he does it then there will be an honesty among us, there’ll be a kindness and a tenderness, and a fragrance, and a gentleness that comes straight from Jesus’ heart, and somehow refreshes you and certainly ennoble the person who expresses it, but comforts the rest of us, strengthens us, fills us with joy.

The Holy Spirit is able to bring that kind of life of Jesus to us. Without him it’s cold. It’s cold. It’s cold and raw, and gets colder and rawer as the years go by because we get subtler and subtler, subtler and subtler and more religious and less like Jesus. But if we will honor and respect the Holy Spirit and I’ll try to talk more about it next Sunday, if we will honor and respect the Holy Spirit he will bring more of the beauty of Jesus into us personally and as a fellowship and we will go from glory-to-glory as the years go by. And that’s why if you get a group of old saints there is no fellowship so sweet and so elevating, and so safe, and so secure as a group of men and women who respect, and honor, and love the Holy Spirit and allow him to live Jesus’ life through. Let us pray.

Your name is holy so we are reluctant to take it upon our lips but we hear what you have said to us, Holy Spirit, and we long in our own lives for all that you have described. And we see too that there comes a fullness into our life that takes away the emptiness and we know that that is miraculous. It is you filling us with the invisible water of life, with the power and the fullness of Jesus. And we know that it is all a miracle and a foolishness that as we simply believe you, and pay attention to you, and honor you as our master, as the disciples honored our Savior, as we do that you miraculously impart to us Jesus himself in all his beauty and kindness and tender mercies.

Holy Spirit we know that such a life as that will make our home a palace and will fill every store with beauty into which we enter. We thank you. We ask for your grace dear Father and dear Savior, and for your fellowship Holy Spirit to be with each other now and throughout this coming year and ever more. Amen.