

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Romans 12:9

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

More than perhaps any other group of people on a Sunday morning, most of us here are in little doubt about what is right to do and what is wrong to do. I suppose it's because you are all very alive, alert people mentally and I have tried certainly to state things as they are here in this book. And you have continued to come Sunday after Sunday and listen. So perhaps more than any other group of people, most of us here know what is right to do and what is wrong to do.

But in our hearts, we're like evil people. I mean most of us here can talk about Christianity because we have shared so many truths together that it's not too difficult to appear to be more knowledgeable than so many other people in our society. And so we can carry on conversations about the faith and about the Christian life. But all our knowledge leaves us dry as dust and leaves us bitter as the Dead Sea because our hearts are still the hearts of evil men and women. Loved ones, I think that's true with many of us.

I think many of us know through and through in our heads how we ought to behave towards each other, towards our friends, towards our colleagues, our relatives, towards our pastors, our elders, towards our friends at church. We know how to behave but we don't behave that way. I met a woman from Belfast on the plane at Christmas time. She had been visiting. We were brought up in a peaceful city, a quiet place. That's what Belfast was. Now of course if you go, the whole downtown shopping area is fortified with barbed wire walls and fences and the army searches you for weapons before you go into that downtown area. So it is a fortified city and of course has little attraction for any of us now that were born there.

But one interesting thing she said was this: "It seems sadder now than it was even seven years ago when the riots first broke out. Because now, the people have got used to it and accept that there will be a number of murders or a number of explosions every month. So they are now complacent about it and it has become the norm for them."

Loved ones, it's easy to think you're going to heaven and end up in hell. It's easy to think that you are Christian because you know all the things and all the stories and all the truths. And maybe you're an elder or maybe you're a great choir leader or maybe you're somebody else. You've told all kinds of people about Jesus, maybe you've led people to Jesus and yet your own heart does not react as the heart of Christ. It reacts as an evil pagan heart.

Now, if that happens, you know you need something from God. Here's one example I know where God spoke to me. It's in Matthew 7:1, and of course we've known this from when we were children. It's one of the earliest things we learned at Sunday school.

Matthew 7:1-5

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck

out of your brother's eye."

We could almost quote that to each other. Yet your dear heart nibbles and nibbles and nibbles, just a little word about the lady beside you in the typing pool, just a little word, not an up-building word, not a terribly bad word. But you know you've spoken it and you know that you've betrayed her. You've said something about her that she doesn't know you said and you no longer have an open confidence towards her because you're conscious of your betrayal. The Holy Spirit is so good. He is determined to get us to be like Jesus. He witnesses to us and we sense a furtiveness. Or it might be with your roommate. Brothers, we're in the same boat. It's not just the ladies.

We say something about another guy on the team or something about a friend (as we call him). We say something about him to another friend and we know from that moment on there is a little part of our hearts that is furtive towards that person. The tragedy is, it has an affect on that loved one too. We're just the "dumdums". We think it doesn't have an affect. We think they don't know about it. But there is a vast interconnecting psychic world and a vast interconnecting spiritual world that makes that person know. They don't know exactly what you've said. They don't even know that you've said it for sure but they sense that there is now a distance between you and them. That's what happens when you judge another.

It's all humanist bluff when we say, "Oh now, we must judge." We all know you have to judge the distance between you and the next car. We all know that. We all know too you have to judge is this person somebody that I can trust in business or in finance. But we all know fine well we're not talking about that kind of judging. We are talking here about the kind of judging where you are the investigator, you are the prosecuting attorney, you are the judge and you're also the guy that puts the black cap on.

You condemn the person. You condemn them with just a little word. With one little word you destroy the other person's confidence in the absent friend. And you build that confidence up in you. You think I am the great God who knows how everything should be. Friend, trust me because I know where that other person stands. I don't know how that friend will ever be stupid enough to trust you when they see you betraying a friend. Surely they know in another hour you'll be doing the same thing with them.

Loved ones, that's what happens. That's what judging is. John Wesley said, "Say nothing about anyone who is dead or anyone who is absent." Say nothing, bad or good, about anyone who is dead or anyone who is absent. The tragedy with you and me is we say, "Now, brother that's a bit extreme. I mean it doesn't do any harm to warn this person about this other person."

Loved ones, who are you? Who are you to destroy that other person's trust in this human being? Who are you not only to govern your own relationships with people but to start affecting every other person's relationship with people? Who are you to do that? What right have we to do that? What right have we to cut apart friendships and relationships by a little word here or a little word there?

Quite apart from the fact that -- do you realize every time you say something bad, something a little critical, something just a little super wise about the other person, you are putting more and more distance between you and that other person? You know it because there's a furtiveness that comes in. Thank God, at least He doesn't let us become insane. He still witnesses to us, "You said something bad about that person behind their back, now you cannot look straight into their eyes with open honesty." Thank God at least the Holy Spirit witnesses that. He keeps us from becoming insane,

dishonest deceivers. But the tragedy is that's what happens.

Every time you say something about another friend, another colleague, another relative, another person in the body, something bad about them, behind their back, the world becomes a little lonelier, a little lonelier. It goes back a little further, it withdraws a little more, you get back into your own little circle just a little more until you're eventually hemmed in a corner, in a straighten place where you feel no one is close to you and you feel you have no friends. Then as many others as do that to you, they feel the same. And so loved ones instead of this being a loving, warm, family fellowship in this world, we're all withdrawing more and more from each other.

But many of us are in that position. We know it's wrong. We know the consequences, but our hearts, our hearts grab every opportunity to tear somebody else down in somebody else's eyes and build ourselves up. We find ourselves with hearts that aren't like Christ. You remember how Jesus put it in Matthew 15:18.

"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man." So don't get caught in the old humanist ploy or "I just said it, I mean, I shouldn't have said it. It was a careless word to say. It was just a manner of speaking." No, no it wasn't a manner of speaking, not according to Jesus.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Oh no, you really meant that. You meant that when you said, "Why is she so stand offish? Why is he so cruel? Why does he not spend more money? Why doesn't he do this or that?" No-no, you meant that. Your little heart was out to kill that other person and to make yourself appear nicer or better than them and to put you in good with the person you spoke with.

Oh no, it was your heart, and loved ones many of us I think are in that spot. We know what's right to do and we know what's wrong to do but our heart dominates us and we speak what is in our hearts and it's not a Christian heart. It's not the Christian heart. I would urge you to see that. I would urge you not to pretend. I would tell you that my own life changed when I stopped pretending. When I started to admit what my own heart was before God and I started to ask Him to change my heart. Above all, don't get used to it, just don't get used to it, don't. It's wrong. It's wrong. It's just wrong.

It's wrong before God, it's wrong for you psychologically, socially, and spiritually. It is cruel and death-dealing to the little soul that you are talking about. It's just wrong, stop it; stop it, before it destroys you. That's what the lady from Belfast meant. They're getting so used to the violence, they're getting so used to the hardness, so used to the shooting and the killing that they're no longer aware that it's going on in their own lives and in their own society. That's what happens to you.

You become a hypocrite. Do you know many of us started Campus Church 10 years ago because we were fed up with the gossiping, criticizing people that would not let anybody live. They were always pontificating and saying what was wrong with everybody else. That's one of the reasons some of us started Campus Church. We said as young university people, "We're tired of this church hypocrisy. We're tired of this religious pretence."

Don't touch it. As open, strong men and women stand up firm and strong and defend your brothers and sisters. Defend your colleagues at work and defend your relatives. Before you know it, God will

begin to use you with them. Some of us say, "Well, you know Pastor that's exactly what I am trying to do. I'm trying to put them right, trying to help them." The poor soul, all they feel is more and more talked about. They feel more and more talked about and actually that's the tragedy with those of us on the other end of this thing, isn't it?

We actually know what we should do. If you've ever been talked about or been criticized behind your back and somebody has tried to destroy somebody else's trust in you, you know how you feel. We know how we should respond and it's there for us to look at in Luke 6:27. Do you remember what Jesus did when buffeted about by the soldiers with their fists? He didn't say a word, not a word. "Like a sheep before His shearers is dumb, so he opened not His mouth." And we know that's what our hearts should do if Christ is there.

Luke 6:27-37: "But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned."

I don't know if you have been on the other end of that criticism stuff but we know that that's the way we're to respond. We know that. We're to love them. We're to overlook it. We're to live above it. We're to love them and forgive them and continue to give them kindness in return. But don't we find our hearts so often going for a dagger?

We find our own hand searching for our sword to wipe out against them and pay them back. We resist them and set up a cold war with them. We're indifferent to them and therefore help to solidify the barrier that they are trying to build between us. And so many of us find ourselves in that spot except that we are at a more dangerous position because we think we're justified. They're doing the wrong. They're criticizing us. They are tearing us apart. They're saying things about us. They're destroying other people's confidence in us. We have a right to oppose that, that's wrong.

So we get that indignation going, that righteous indignation which can turn into self-righteous indignation and we find our hearts are not like the gentle Jesus. They are not responding like His. They are not responding with patience, with a real confidence that it's our Father who is in charge of our lives, not man's words. Our hearts don't respond like that. Our hearts respond in a petty kind of antagonism that builds up a smoldering hostility between us and the other person. The world gets a little lonelier, and we withdraw a little more from each other. We lose a little more touch with each other and we begin to have questions about why we're here or what our value is.

We need hearts that are different. If you're in that spot, say to God, "God, my heart is not like Jesus' heart. I know how I should be responding to these people. They have taken absolutely unfair advantage of me, but they took unfair advantage of Jesus. They have been unjust to me, but they were

unjust to Jesus. Lord God, I need that heart of Jesus inside."

Remember William Penn said, "The person who is angry with someone else does more harm to himself than the other person", and so it is with us. You could so easily, loved ones, be on the unfair end of this kind of criticism and this kind of gossip. You could be on the unfair end. You could be perfectly right and perfectly innocent and yet by your response to this other person, you could become a dirtier slough of messy despond than even their hearts are. Because there's nothing like resentment to make you sick inside and out, always worrying what the other person is saying about you, moving more and more towards a kind of paranoia where you think everybody is against you.

So many of us know that's wrong, but we need our hearts changed. It's the same with many of us in our daily ordinary attitudes to our husbands and our wives and to our children and to our friends and colleagues. We know how we're to behave. It's there if you look at it loved ones in Romans 12:9-10.

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor."

We know our roommates deserve that from us. We know we should be outdoing one another in showing honor. We know we should love each other with tender and brotherly affection.

We know we should be kind to our wives and our children and thoughtful of them. We should be living in their shoes day-by-day. But instead they get the hardness from our lives. They get a person who is preoccupied with the problems he has with his car or the problems he has with his job or the work he has to do or something else. They don't see a tender, kind father or an understanding husband or wife or a dear roommate who is concerned about them. They don't see that. They come up against this hard indifference that comes from us all the time. They don't meet the loving kindness, the tenderly affection of Jesus' heart.

I think many of us are in that spot. We agree with each other. Every Sunday we say, "Yes, that's the way I am to be with my wife and with my children." But day follows day and we're still hoping to make a change. The reason is our hearts. Our hearts are the hearts of evil men. Our hearts are the hearts of evil women. Loved ones, believe me, you may say, "Brother that's bad psychology." Yes, but it's good theology. That's the right thing to see.

It's not just a little problem you have with gossip. It's not just a little problem with criticism. It's not just a little problem with harshness in your marital relationship. It's not. You have the heart of an evil man, the heart of an evil woman. Say what you like. Maybe you're born of God. Maybe you know all about God. Maybe you know your sins are forgiven. Maybe you know all of that, but your heart is not the heart of Jesus. That's what God explained to us, and what we shared some weeks ago. There is an Old Covenant and the Old Covenant is what the Jews knew. They knew that God had forgiven them for their sins and they knew what they ought to do but their cry was, "The good that I would, I cannot do."

So the Old Testament is full of a people who know how to get forgiveness for their sins, a people who know what is right and wrong to do because they have the law beside them, but they're a people who can't do it because their hearts are not changed. And God in those old days was saying, "There will come a day when I will write my law in your inward parts. I will change your hearts. I will take away your heart of stone and I will give you a soft heart of flesh. I will put a clean heart

inside you." And that is what the New Covenant did.

Jesus came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not come simply to forgive our sins. Our sins were forgiven because of His death from before the foundation of the world. God assured all the Jews down through thousands of years of history that their sins were forgiven. But He knew their hearts had to be changed. Jesus came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and to change our hearts. That's the only thing that will change your heart.

"Baptizo" in Greek means immersed. Jesus is able to immerse you with His own Holy Spirit. He is able to fill your heart with His own Spirit so that your heart will not want to criticize others. It won't want to tear the body of Jesus apart or tear the office apart or tear the family apart. It won't want to try to prove itself a big man or a big woman by how brightly you can criticize somebody else. Your heart will be the heart of Jesus. It will have a tender love for others and a kind affection to them and will be at peace itself.

Jesus is able to baptize you with His own Spirit. Now I would say to you that the first step is to be honest about your own criticism, about the dirt and filth that comes out of your own mouth about other people, about the hardness in your own heart towards your family, towards your relatives and towards your roommates. That's the first step. The first step towards the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the honesty and humility to say, "God, that is me. What was described this morning is me. Lord, I know that such a person will not enter heaven." And that's, you remember, what God says.

He says if you have envy or jealousy or strife in your heart, people who have that kind of thing in their lives will in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. And so loved ones, for us who live in times of the New Covenant, it's not this outward stuff that counts. It's the inner heart by which we're judged by God. Jesus came to change your heart and mind and He is able to. He is able to give you His own heart. He is able to baptize you with His own Spirit.

You just have to be willing to live and you have to want to live the kind of life that he lived. That means being willing to be misunderstood as He was on the Cross. They didn't really understand Him yet He was willing to be misunderstood. It means a willingness to be trampled on if necessary by others knowing that God will take care of you whatever man does to you. Above all, a desire to be with your Father in heaven at the end of this life and to be in a heaven of love because that's what it'll be. And only hearts that are clean and hearts that are loving can inhabit it.

Oh I beg you, don't sink into the same hypocritical religion that put so many of us off when we first heard about God. Get your heart cleaned. If you say to me, "Well brother, I'll keep trying." You'll never do it. In 20 years' time you'll be gossiping worse than you ever did before. You'll be criticizing others worse than you did before. You'll never do it by trying. It's only by God changing your heart, by baptizing you with his Spirit and Jesus can do that.

Jesus is able to give you His Spirit. He is able to change your heart and make it like His and all you need to do is go to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, Your heart is the one I admire. Oh Lord, I wish I could be like you. I wish I could see these people. Why, You saw Judas and you knew fine well that he was going to betray you but you never said a word to anybody. Lord, I want to be like that. I want to be able to know a thousand bad things about people but never pass on one of them to another person. I want to be like that, Lord Jesus. Lord, I want to be like you, when they buffeted you in your face with their fists, made fun of you, put a crown of thorns on your head and mocked You. You loved them and you blessed them. Lord Jesus, I want that kind of a heart. Lord, my loved ones at

home are dying because of my own coldness. My roommate feels as if they're living with just themselves because of my lack of generosity and my lack of thoughtfulness. Lord Jesus, I need your heart that lives only for everybody else. Lord will you baptize me with your Spirit?" And the Savior will explain to you what He wants you to do, what He wants you to be willing for, and what things He wants you to turn from. He is able to change your heart. No other man can. This is where the psychologists are left way behind. This is where the silly counselors and the preachers are left way behind. Only one person can change your heart and that's the dear Savior who had you inside Himself when He died on Calvary. He is able to make your heart like His. He is able to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and to cleanse your heart so that you're inside what you are on the outside. Then the family of God and the family of His world begins to love each other.

So loved ones, will you be real? Start being real -- and those of you who are gossiping, stop gossiping, would you? Give it up. Let Jesus have His own way in our hearts and let Him begin to bring an openness and a peace into our offices and into our families and into our communities. "There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God", that's what the song says.