

Selfishness is Hostility to God

Romans 8:7

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Many of us at one time didn't believe in God at all, but I think we began to be faced with the sheer order and design of the universe. We began to see that that could not have come up by chance explosion and that even if it did; someone had to invent whatever exploded. We began to realize that there just has to be an intelligent mind behind the universe, and then we began to look at our own conscience and see that even the worst of us were hounded by our conscience to do things that we didn't really want to do.

We saw that this urge within us to do what was right could not be explained by the conventions of society or by our own education. And that in fact it pointed to the probability that there was some great moral power that was more ideal than our own in the way we wanted to live. And of course, finally, the fact of Jesus Christ and especially the fact of his reliably recorded resurrection that we could not possibly rationalize away, forced us to face the fact that this man was in fact the son of the Creator of the universe.

So many of us here who did not believe in God years ago, have come to the conclusion over a period of years that there just has to be a God and in fact Jesus' words have dealt also with all the tendency we had to rationalize our guilt. I think it's true to say that many of us here in this auditorium this morning at one time or another tried to rationalize away our guilt as old Victorian inhibitions that we had inherited from our parents or from the authority figures in our lives. Jesus' words just didn't allow that as an explanation at all.

Jesus' words kept making it plain to us that our guilt was the human registration of the fact that our Creator wanted us to live a certain way. We weren't living that way and as a result, in order to protect himself from compromise and his universe from destruction at the hands of us selfish people, he put us all into Jesus. And in a supra-spatial, supra-temporal cosmic miracle, he destroyed that selfish, independent spirit in each one of us.

Many of us came to that point where we saw that that had happened. Then we saw that if we lived as if that had not happened, then it may as well never have happened. In other words, if we lived a lie; as if the selfish independent spirit in each one of us had never been destroyed in Jesus, then in fact that selfish independent spirit would still continue to exert its power over us.

So we began to realize that it wasn't simply important to believe that that had happened, but we in fact had to live in the light of that fact, otherwise it would have no power over us. In other words, the lie that you lived by would govern your life. If you lived as if the independent, selfish spirit within you had not been destroyed but was still alive and had every right to govern your life, then that power would in fact govern your life.

If I tell you the whole auditorium is filled with carbon monoxide, poisonous gas, and then you know what we all do -- not breathe another breath! And so even though it's a lie, yet you can govern your life by the lies that you believe. So we saw too, that even though God had destroyed this selfish independent spirit within us in Jesus, if we lived as if it hadn't been destroyed, then it would continue to exert its psychic power but worse than that it's supernatural power over us.

So it was vital to realize that that had taken place, and to live in the light of that fact; that our Creator has destroyed our right to live independent of him and to live for ourselves. That's what we talked about two Sundays ago; we talked about the importance, not simply of believing that, but of living according to it.

In other words, what you live by, the power you live by is the power that dominates your life. You can have all kinds of beautiful thoughts up here in your mind, but if you don't live by them, they don't affect your life. We saw the importance of that in Romans 8:6, if you'd look at it. It's the verse we studied maybe two Sundays ago and it's the verse that emphasizes that, really, we need to walk in the light of the fact that this old self or this flesh, as the Bible calls it, has been destroyed in Jesus, has been annihilated in him, and we live in the light of that.

Romans 8:6, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." We saw the importance of that; that you needed to set the mind on the Spirit; but if you set the mind on the flesh, which was that old independent spirit that makes you feel, "I have a right to do what I want to do," if you set your mind on that, that's the power that will govern your life even though it is actually been destroyed in that cosmic miracle in Jesus.

Really, you can say you love Heather but if you set your mind on Barbara day after day it's obvious who you love. What you set your mind on determines what your life is; and if you set your mind on Barbara and you think of her day after day after day, then you really love her, but there's no point in saying, "I really love Barbara," if you're setting your mind on Heather day after day after day.

Whatever you set your mind on is what really governs your life. You may say, "Oh well, I believe that I ought to run my business for the service of mankind and I ought to try to help people through my business", but if you set your mind, day after day after day, on raising that profit margin beyond what is reasonable, then that's what governs your life and that's what you really believe.

Now loved ones what we should talk about today is a great misunderstanding that we could enter into just because of what we've said so far. It's very easy for us here on Sunday mornings to underestimate the radical nature of the change from living according to the flesh and beginning to live according to the Spirit. It's very easy for us to underestimate the change and the tremendous difference there is between those two things.

It's very easy for us to think that the flesh and the tendency to live according to the flesh just involves some little, inexpedient shortcomings, that we're going to change by simply thinking differently about them. It's very easy, in other words, for us to say, "Okay, I am willing to set my mind on the fact that my old self was crucified with Jesus and this setting my mind on that fact will enable God to change my life and give me power to live an unselfish, loving, victorious life. Yes, I am certainly willing to set my mind on that. I am willing to try looking at things differently." That's what you're saying.

We've to set our minds on the spirit instead of on the flesh, so really what you're talking is a modified version of the power of positive thinking; "Well, I am certainly willing to do that." And it's very easy for us in discussing the whole question just on the basis of logic each Sunday morning to think all we have to do is change our way of thinking; instead of thinking of the flesh all the time, thinking of my selfish, independent spirit, and thinking instead of the Holy Spirit, then I'll suddenly begin to experience a new power in my life.

Now loved ones, no power of thought, no manipulation of the pattern of your thoughts, no attempt at autosuggestion, or the power of positive thinking will ever deal radically enough with that selfish independent spirit inside you. It will not because it cannot. In other words, the independent, selfish spirit inside you and me is far more radical and powerful and evil than we can possibly deal with just by changing our thinking about it.

So loved ones, it is not just changing the way you think. It is not as simple as setting your mind on Barbara or Heather, it is not even as simple as setting your mind on this carbon monoxide poisoning that may be in here; it is in fact a matter of God acting in your own life to do something about that. He alone can deal with that selfish, independent spirit in you. In fact, he has crucified it in Jesus, but he can only actualize that in your life if you see it as the Holy Spirit sees it.

You can never actualize it yourself by auto-suggestion; "I know God crucified my old self with Jesus so I just think that: yeah, he crucified it. Okay, I just have to forget about it and act as if it didn't exist." No, you are to believe that, but finally only the Holy Spirit can actualize that in you; and only when you see how radical is the evil inside.

Loved ones, that's what we're slow to do, really we are. We are wild people; we like to think, "It is bad; Pastor is saying it's bad, but inside my heart there's just a little waywardness, just a little impatience, just a little anger, just a little thoughtlessness about other people. But certainly I'll do what he says; I'll think of it the way he says and it'll all just be washed away gradually."

Loved ones, we are all equally rats, really. We are rats and we better face it: we better face it that the thing inside us is stronger than what we can deal with. Loved ones, why I say that is, that while you think it's something that you can still deal with, you'll only partially deal with it and you'll wear yourself out trying. It is something that only the mighty power of God's Holy Spirit can actualize in you, and only when you become desperate enough for that will you begin to deal with the Holy Spirit.

We were talking this morning in the "Baptism with the Spirit" seminar that Paul's question was, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" [Romans 7:24], and we saw at last that many of us were standing up while, he, the poor fellow was lying down worn out; crying out in desperation. But many of us are standing up and saying -- it kind of chokes us -- but we're saying, "Wretched man that I am" or "Poor man that I am" or "Ignorant man that I am, how shall I be delivered from this body of death?"

Many of us are asking "How shall I be delivered" with the thought in our minds that if we can discover the method or the technique, then we'll probably be able to deliver ourselves, and if we can deliver ourselves then we can fall out of it as often as we want and we'll deliver ourselves again. But in the back of our minds is the thought, "How shall I be delivered from this body of death?"

Do you see it's very easy for us on Sunday morning to discuss this back and forward to the point where we think if we could just see it the right way then we'd know how to deliver ourselves? But loved ones, until you come to the question, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death" the Holy Spirit has not got you in the right place.

You are still not seeing that old independent spirit clearly enough and really until we see it clearly loved ones, you won't ask "who". Until you see it clearly enough for what it is, you'll still think, "Oh well, I can handle this myself -- I can handle it myself." You'll still be asking, "How shall I be delivered", thinking, "Once I know I'll be able to do it."

Now loved ones, that's why I asked you to read that scripture with me this morning. Now would you look at it again and just look at our own reaction to it; it's Mark 8:31, "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

Do you not feel as I used to feel with that? Do you not feel a wee bit of sympathy with Peter? I mean do you not find something inside you saying, "Oh, Lord Jesus, why are you saying that to Peter? Peter is only concerned about you. He wants to protect you and he wants you not to have to be killed and to suffer like that. Peter's just protecting you, he's just being protective. Don't say "get behind me Satan."

Loved ones, it's really that old thing inside us that is saying that, it really is; it's that old, selfish, independent spirit -- we don't like to think it is but it is. Somehow we're not looking at this thing the same way as Jesus is. Some way there's something inside us that is saying, "Lord Jesus, we think this time you're being rather vehement and you're being rather extremist and we really think you're not being fair to Peter." But loved ones, you know Jesus could see right to the heart of the whole thing and he could see that this concern that Peter had for Jesus' safety was really the very heart of rejection of God's whole message of self-denial and self-forgetfulness.

Jesus could see that it was this slipping, sneaking, self-concern inside Peter and concern, even for Jesus himself that was utterly opposed. It was an absolute rejection of God's teaching of self-denial and self-forgetfulness and Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are and undoubtedly he had had the same temptation, "Is there no other way to do this but the Cross? Is there no other way to get men close to the Father, but by you dying?" Jesus identified that with the very heart of Satan himself and he called it Satan, loved ones.

Now do you see what we tend to do; we tend to think that little things like that; a little desire to avoid hardship, a little desire to avoid pain, a little desire to do the thing as easily as you can with as little sacrifice as possible, that's natural, it's just human. Jesus says, "That comes from the power of my Father's arch enemy; that desire in you comes from Satan himself." And loved ones you see what we do with the worst things that are in our hearts; if we do that with Peter's concern for protecting Jesus, and if we do that with our own desire to avoid pain and sacrifice, you know what we do with our envy and our jealousy and our anger and how we tend to say, "Well, it's just a little inexpedient trait inside me and I know I'll have to work on it and I know I'll have to do more prayer about it, but it isn't that bad."

Loved ones, Jesus identifies it with Satan; he says that wherever there is a rising of that selfish, independent spirit, there you have Satan active and alive. Loved ones, why do you think temper is so hard to control if it's all your own production? Why do you think it's so hard to keep your temper if temper is your own creation? If you created the temper, why don't you control it? Other things that you create, other things that you initiate, you're able to control, aren't you?

If the lust comes from you yourself, why can't you control it? You can control what you want to say because that originates from you yourself. Do you see loved ones: the truth is that that selfish independent spirit is the power of Satan himself? It is a supernatural power within you that you are cooperating with and Jesus says, "Look, until you see that the way I see it, until you start saying, 'Get behind me Satan' to that apparent little loss of temper, to that little bit of impatience in you, until you see that that comes from a selfish independent spirit that I could do nothing but destroy on the Cross and that you have to hate with all your heart, until you see it as I see it, I cannot actualize this in your life." And that's why a lot of us aren't getting anywhere in it; because we're not seeing it as God sees it.

We're seeing it as an optional extra that it would be nice to be free from. The Creator sees it as hell itself -- as Satan's power itself trying to take back your life from the control of Jesus and his Father. And until we see it that way, nothing will happen. That's why loved ones, I wanted you to look carefully at this verse that we're studying today, it's Romans 8:7: "For the mind that is set on the flesh," and we tend to think "Well it's not quite doing the right thing; it's not doing the best thing, it's not the best way to live a victorious life to have the mind set on the flesh," and then God comes right through with this next phrase, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" and we rebel against that.

Even the very fact that we rebel against it, does it not suggest that in some way we're not with it as far as God is concerned? We don't immediately agree with his word; we say, it isn't hostile to God; "No Lord, I am here in your church, I am singing your songs and praying your prayers. I am reading your word: I am not hostile to you God, you can see that." Loved ones, the Father knows better.

If your mind is set on your selfish independent spirit, if your mind is set on getting your way whenever you wanted by your power, then God says that mind is hostile to God. With our desire to avoid confrontation, and with our 20th century desire to dilute everything and water it down, and with our desire to kind of blur the edges a little, with that kind of desire in us, we rebel against that and we're saying, "No, it's not hostility to God."

Loved ones, do you see how it goes on; "it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." And really dear ones, deliverance is in this verse if you'd only start agreeing with it; if you'd only start agreeing with God and seeing that this old, selfish, independent spirit in you does not submit to God's law -- you can see that well enough -- but that it cannot; that it has to be destroyed on the Cross with Jesus. That you can't fiddle around with; you can't tame it, you can't train it by autosuggestion, you can't feed it little bits of anger to satisfy it. Finally the only way to deal with it is to get rid of it, and that's what God has done in Jesus. But he cannot do it in you until you hate it enough.

That's why I differ with some of you a wee bit when you say, "Well, you know, anger is not so bad is it Pastor? I mean impatience; everybody has a wee bit of trouble with impatience." Loved ones, God's word says, it comes from hell itself. In other words, if you set your mind on establishing your own fulfillment by establishing a blameless reputation before men, if you set your mind on that, then you will have powers of envy and jealousy that not only do not submit to God's law but cannot. So that's what the verse is saying.

If you set your mind on the flesh; and one of the flesh's ways is to get what it wants by it's own

power when it wants -- if you set your mind on getting fulfillment in your life by establishing a blameless reputation in front of all your friends, all your colleagues in business, all your colleagues in school, if you set your mind on that, then you will have powers of envy and jealousy and pride within you that not only do not submit to God's law but cannot. You're involving yourself, in other words, in an absolute impossibility; an ethical impossibility, a logical impossibility, a spiritual impossibility. Loved ones, it is not possible.

It was just a great day in my own life, you know, when I stopped with my kind of British sophistication and education; when I stopped trying to dilute this stuff down and say, "Oh well, they're all I need is unless self-improvement course or I am okay, you're okay and I'll be okay later on as I begin to just discipline myself a little more." And I began to see, "This is a roaring lion within me that some power greater than myself has to deal with." Do you whisper [gossip]? Now, do you whisper [speak softly]?

Both whispers are good in a way. One whisper is the heart of hell itself. One kind of whispering does harm and comes from Satan, the other can do good. One kind of whispering is done so that you won't disturb the other person in the library, that's good and that's done because you want to help them. The other kind of whispering is done for the same reason -- so that they won't hear you -- but it's not done to benefit them. It's done actually either to hurt them or to pull them down so that you can appear better than them or to establish a confidence with the person to whom you are whispering so that they'll feel you and they share something together that the other person doesn't.

That whispering does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot. In fact, it's absolutely hostile to God because God Himself has set up a whole arrangement for dealing with that person's fault. Jesus said when the Holy Spirit comes he'll convict the world of sin. You're setting up a completely different system by your whispering.

You're saying to your friend, "Well you know I know we shouldn't be doing this but so that you'll be able to pray this person or so that we'll be able to help him, I really want you to know what a tremendous weakness he has. He talks about other people behind their back." And really loved ones, at the heart of it, you've determined "I am going to go my own way about setting the world straight" and really that's what you're doing.

God has set up the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin but you have determined yourself, "I am going to convict them of sin. It's my right. I am God in this universe: I have the right to decide whether this person is right or this person is wrong and I've the right to set up my own communication system to get it home to their hearts." And certainly you'll get it home to their hearts; certainly, you'll get it home to their hearts in such a way that they'll be absolutely overwhelmed. They won't know what to do except fight back and retaliate with other whispers.

Loved ones, do you see the first whisperer, just look at him, Genesis 3:4. So you remember, God had explained the whole thing to Adam and Eve and then in Genesis 3:4, "But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil." Loved ones, the whispering comes from one source, and that harmless whisper that you do in the dorm or that you do in the office, is just as hostile to God as that Satanic whisper that destroyed paradise for us at the beginning.

In other words, the only hope of doing anything with that old self is to adopt the same kind of hostility and hatred to it that God himself has loved ones, and I am with you; you cannot suffocate

that thing. You cannot destroy it. The Holy Spirit alone can do that and until he does, you'll have to walk on in the light of that: that the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin in the Father's eyes. But dear ones, do you see that it is possible to walk with absolute assurance that God has forgiven you because Jesus blood has been shed for you?

It's possible to walk in absolute assurance that God has destroyed you in Jesus so he doesn't want to destroy you again and therefore he forgives you and accepts you. It's possible to walk with absolute peace about your acceptance with God in the one hand and it's possible on the other, to walk in absolute honesty about what is still coming from the bottom of your heart.

In order to walk in peace with God, you don't need to walk as a liar about the heart of this independent selfish spirit within. You can, in fact, walk in absolute peace with God and yet direct a hatred and a hostility and antagonism towards that old selfish independent spirit that enables the Holy Spirit to begin to lead you into the remedy for that. And loved ones, until you see it that way, you know, you will not accept that reality.

You'll say, "Death for that? It's not necessary. Death -- no: more Vincent Peale; a little more reading, a little more power of positive thinking, a little more training in psychology, a little more training and tuning of my own personality, a little more mixing with the right people, a little more prayer, a little more bible reading, a little more effort on my part and I'll be saved from this." Loved ones, you'll never be until you see it as a radical outshoot of Satan himself and go to God and say, "Lord, you destroyed this by a radical remedy by destroying this in Jesus and me in Jesus and Lord I am willing for that." But loved ones until you have that attitude, God can't do it in you.

I think we're all in the same boat -- its silly saying any of us are different. Oh, I sat in the same place as many of you and thought, "There's some other way, some other way" until I saw the truth of this in Romans 8:7: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." And I saw that until it was dealt with on Calvary, I could have no power of victory.

So really that's it. And the way you look at it will determine whether you're willing for Jesus to be actualized in his death in you; the way you see it will determine whether you're willing to go through what Jesus went through.

Are you willing to die to your reputation, as he died to his? Are you willing to die to your right to have things your way at home, the way he died to his? Are you willing to die to your right to get back at other people who unjustly attack you the way Jesus died to that in him? Are you willing to die to your right to have even the things that human beings say you ought to have? Are you willing to die to that the way he died to it?

Loved ones, the moment you are, that moment the Holy Spirit floods in to your life and cleanses out all that hostility to God. It's a miracle that will be made real in you the moment you see the radical nature of the disease and therefore the radical nature of the cure. I'll pray that you come into it because I think Satan deceives us by making us think it isn't as bad as it really is.

So do you see; walk right. Don't get all shook and say, "Oh God isn't accepting me," yes he is accepting you; you're a child of the Father. But now he wants you to please him and he is saying, "You can't please me, my son, my daughter, unless you let me cut that out of you. That's what I did on Calvary and that's what I can do this moment by filling you with the Holy Spirit if you'll let my

life touch you." I pray hat you will. Let's pray.

Father, I would trust you for my brothers and sisters this morning. I would trust you Lord for any brother or sister who is willing to let you deal with this miserable, radical disease within them. I would trust you Father to lead them into the prayer room after this service or lead them to talk with some of the elders or stay behind and sit and pray.

Father I would trust you to show them that we need not go on hoping and hoping and hoping and trying and trying and trying; that it is possible to be freed and to be delivered through your gift of the Holy Spirit. We would trust you our Father to help each one of us today and this week so that we'll be delivered and made free and behave as free men and women; as princes and princesses of God who walk upon the earth free and in victory, to your glory. Amen.