

Sin After Conversion

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, what we talked about last Sunday was salvation. And you remember, before that we had talked about the fall and this Sunday I'd like to begin probably a study that will take us two weeks, sin after conversion. This is the heart of everything that God has shown us here as a body and this is the division between the men and the boys, or in this age of equality of women and the girls. And this is where all the truths and the power of the Holy Spirit hangs -- and loved ones this is the truth that will drive you in to the depths of Jesus, or will drive you in to the depths of deception and hell. So I ask you to listen to it carefully and to open your hearts to it because this is the center of salvation and the center of deliverance.

Many of us soon after we receive the spirit of Jesus into our spirits and begin to allow that spirit to have his way in our lives, many of us come up against this problem of sin after conversion. That is, we come to verses such as those in James. There are many of them but those in James will be hard enough on you, I would think. James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' said also, 'Do not kill.' If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law."

And most of us after conversion avoid adultery and we avoid killing but there are problems in Matthew 5 that we find ourselves not able to avoid. Matthew 5:21, is not difficult for us at all. Verse 22, is a sword in to our sides. Matthew 5:21, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment." And so we obey the laws about adultery, and the laws about murder, and the laws about stealing but we know that we get angry with people. And the verse in James strikes terror in our hearts because it runs: if you keep the whole law and fail in one point then you're guilty of all of the rest of the law.

And we go further down in to Verse 27 of Mathew 5 and read a verse that normally gives us no problem, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" But then Verse 28, "But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." And we know we often avoid the outward sin but we know in our hearts that we have often given ourselves to the inward attitude and the inward lust. And so many of us soon after we have received Jesus' spirit in to our spirits begin to walk in sins that we cannot get rid of and that's the real problem.

They seem to be sins that so easily beset us. Indeed, many of us can actually point to certain sins and we will call those our "besetting sins" or our "besetting sin". It's not as if we're receiving new light, that we expect that God will show us new things and we'll walk into them. But these are old sins that we know are wrong and we do them, and we do them, and we do them again. And loved ones, as you struggle now listening to me presenting these unpleasant truths to you will you remember the number of verses in scripture that deal with this issue? And will you remember that many great men and women who have refused to turn tail and run from Satan have continually preached upon the repentance of believers and the need for a deeper repentance in believers.

Another verse that strikes home to us is in James. You can see why old Luther did not like James.

James 4:17, “whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” And so if we have any doubt about whether what we’re doing is sin or not, that clarifies it for us. If you’re doing something that you know is wrong then that is sin for you. It doesn’t matter whether it is sin for other people or not, but if you know something is wrong in your life and you do it, that is sin for you. And then you know the verses that seem to drive us in to hell itself and they’re in Hebrews. And it’s Hebrews 6:4, “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.”

And we wonder, have we committed the unforgivable sin? Because it seems that again, and again, we cry with Paul the good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate is what I do.” And then we read a verse like 1 John 3:9 and it defines a child of God so clearly and so simply. 1 John 3:9, “No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” And John just keeps drilling it on, “By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.” And then you remember back in Verse 4, “Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children.”

As if John knew the spirits of error that would deceive us, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Loved ones, probably the greater part of Christendom has read those verses and felt as you have felt. And I’ll tell you the mistakes we make because I was expert in them and you probably are too. One, I tried to rationalize my sin. I decided whoever is born of God does not commit sin and whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it for him it is sin; well I know it’s wrong to lose my temper, I know it’s wrong to get angry. I know it’s wrong to be unclean in my thought life and yet I do it. I do get angry. I do lose my temper. I am unclean in my thought life. But perhaps, that for me is not sin.

I have a very artistic temperament and all artists of course are very emotional people and they would naturally have trouble with things that concern the affections. And so perhaps, that’s my situation that maybe for someone else lust is a sin but for me excess affection in the way some people would call lust is not a sin, it’s just an excessive expression of my particular personality. So, Swedes are incommunicative; not unloving, just incommunicative. Old husbands and wives who are married a long time are just prudent, they are not lacking in generosity to God, they are just taking care of some needs that they have as their life begins to close. Young husbands and wives are not ungenerous to God, they just have a lot more necessities that they have to take care of. And so it goes on.

We make our excuses and we rationalize our sins as shortcomings of our personalities. Justifiable shortcomings that we have because of our background, because our pet dog bit us when we were children, because we have a certain kind of temperament. But however we do it, we rationalize away the sin and call it human shortcomings. Now, we always have trouble with these verses, we always have trouble with the verses that talk about anger, and temper, and adultery, and uncleanness. We always have trouble with them but every time we come to them we slide over the top of them and we

rationalize them away as not being sins in our life but as being human shortcomings. Loved ones, stay with God's truth even should it appear to take you in to hell itself, stay with God's truth. Call sin sin, do not try to rationalize away sin.

The second approach that I took and that I presume you take, and I know whole churches build their doctrine on this, the second approach is to justify sin as being normal in the Christian life. Now, I'll show you the verses if you don't know them so that you can use them until you find the other verses. 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." So that's what I used to say. But look there John is saying, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." So we must have sin, so I'm alright. I'm a normal Christian, here I have sin and I would deceive myself if I say I have not sin.

Now of course, there are two clear meanings for those verses. One is the one that is outlined in Verse 10, "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." And several scholars say, "Do you want to know what Verse 8 means if we say we have no sin, well look at Verse 10. John repeats it again, he says, 'If we say we have not sinned.' So it means that first." If we say we have never sinned we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But secondly loved ones, there's another meaning in Leviticus 4:13-14, and it's an important distinction that God makes early on in his revelation to us in the Old Testament. Leviticus 4:13, "If the whole congregation of Israel commits a sin unwittingly and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done and are guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a young bull for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting."

And loved ones, that's the way all those paragraphs go. Verse 22, "When a ruler sins, doing unwittingly," in other words you can sin unconsciously, you can do something that is not right in God's eyes that you don't know about, at the time you are not aware it is wrong. "When a ruler sins, doing unwittingly any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and is guilty, if the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish." The same one in Verse 27, "If any one of the common people sins unwittingly in doing any one of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and is guilty, when the sin which he has committed is made known to him he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed."

In other words, if any one of us here say, "We have no unconscious sin in our lives," we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. And that I think, is the deepest meaning of that 1 John 1:8, that if we say we have no unconscious sin then we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us because in a million billion ways you are falling short of what God intends for you. So there are a million billion sins you do not know about -- but he holds you responsible for the one you DO know about. That's why James puts it so clearly, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it for him it is sin" -- and that is the sin "for whosoever is born of God doth not commit."

We children of God are intended by him to walk free from conscious disobedience to his law. We may have a million things in us that are not his perfect will for us. We may be doing daily things that we don't know about that are wrong, even things that put other people off, even things that hurt other people. We cannot be held responsible for things we don't know about. But the moment we do know about them we are responsible for them as even Leviticus shows us. And that loved ones, is the meaning then of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And so when we come to know of a sin and confess it

and turn from it, then God forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Don't justify sin as a normal part of the Christian life. Loved ones, it is impossible to justify it. Scripture will eventually get you and you can't get around the fact that from the first chapter in the Bible to the very last chapter, God emphasis one word: obey, obey, obey, obey. And you remember that that verse puts it so clearly in John 3:36: if you do believe you have eternal life but if you do not obey you will not have eternal life -- and faith and obedience are the twin foundations of the Spirit's life in you.

So brothers and sisters, however much you feel even convicted at this very moment about these things, do not rationalize away your sin and do not try to justify it in your life. Here's the verse on which we stand, and it's in that same chapter 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

The heart of repentance is your attitude. The heart of your repentance is your attitude. Actually, the Father is not so concerned with whether your life is absolutely free from all expression of sin -- though he does want that. But, he is not so concerned with that as he is concerned with the attitude of your heart towards this sin. And your spirit begins to harden and grieve the Holy Spirit actually not because of your sinning but because of your growing tolerance of sin in your life. Because gradually, you're rationalizing away the sin and you're beginning to justify it and you're beginning to tolerate it and you're increasing your tolerance for sin in your life. And you're allowing more and more of the work of Satan not only to be in your life but to be there with your agreement.

And when the Father says, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." He means, if you're fighting, fighting, fighting. If you're fighting sin with all your heart and if every time it slays you, you get up and you move again that is walking in the light. Loved ones, walking in the light is walking towards the light. The Holy Spirit is shining his light into your heart and you can either walk towards it even though you hate the things you see there and you can continue to agree with him and say, "Lord I know they should not be there." Or, you can turn your back and keep the light from coming into your life and into your conscience.

And once you turn your back loved ones, once you stop walking towards that light, once you stop letting your conscience agree with God's word, you begin to grieve the Holy Spirit out of your life. Because you see, the truth is this, the one who said to us, "How often should you forgive your brother? Until seven times? Until 70 times seven." He said this because he had seen his father's heart and he knew his father's heart forgave 70 times seven, 70 million times seven. The Father will forgive you forever if you will continue to repent with all your heart, and to fight sin with all your heart, and to refuse to rationalize or refuse to justify it in your life. And only that loved ones, only that uncompromising hostility towards the wrong in your life will eventually drive you to the source that provides the answer and the victory.

Because the truth is, there is no command of God that you cannot obey after what Jesus has done for you. And the only time you will begin to back slide, the only time you will begin to grieve the Holy Spirit, the only time you will begin to approach the unforgiveable sin which is that total rejection of the Holy Spirit, that attitude that says, "No, Holy Spirit you are not the Holy Spirit, you are not. You are a false inhibition that I have. You are a false condemnation that I have." The only

time you begin to approach that is when you yourself begin to tolerate sin and begin to justify it and rationalize it.

But as long as you stand against it with all your heart, as long as you fight it with all your being, God is going to continue to forgive you, and he is going to continue to cleanse you, and going to continue to give you the Holy Spirit to walk on. So how do you walk if you have trouble with sin after conversion? You walk in the continual confession and repentance, confession and repentance, confession and repentance.

I remember one of the old Saints saying, "A saint is not one who never falls but one who gets up every time he falls and keeps walking." And loved ones, those of you who are having trouble with prayer lives, or Bible study, are having it not actually because there is sin in your life but because you are beginning to justify the lust, you're beginning to rationalize away your meanness and your miserliness, you're beginning to stand up and defend your anger, and your bad temper, and your critical spirit, and your self righteousness and that's the only thing that will keep God out of your life.

But, if you keep hating sin with all your heart, you will be drawn towards the blessed cross. That is the key to victory. And all of you who are still talking about your besetting sins and are asking, "How can I get rid of them? How can I get rid of them?" The one thing you can know for certain is that you have not come to the point of despair where you CAN get rid of them. While you still utter a sentence you are not there yet. And those of you who want to defend the sins in your life and want to justify a sinning Christian life, you are nowhere near that place of despair and hopelessness where you find victory through the cross of Christ. But loved ones, if you'll fight with all your heart the Holy Spirit will bring you to that place.

Now, can I show you technically what has happened in your life when you find that you have something there that you cannot overcome, that you just cannot overcome? Here is what has happened loved ones, you remember the plan that God had for us, and I'll try and show it just very quickly and assume that most of us have been here over the past few Sundays. But you remember, that the Father made us in his own image, gave us these capacities, especially three levels of life: spirit, we have spirit; souls, which are the psychological part of us; and bodies. And you remember that God's plan was that we should live in friendship with him and that's the whole purpose he made us, that we would have friendship with him.

And so he intended us to have communion in our spirits with him and as we walked with him the spirit of his life would come through this communion into our spirits. And so all the spirituality, and the blessedness, and the liberty that he has himself in his own personality would come into ours. Would tell us through our intuition what we should do in life. Whether we should be a carpenter. If we were a carpenter what jobs we should do. Where we should live, which country we should live in. Would tell us that through the intuition of our spirits. And then, our conscience would constrain our will in the light of that revelation to our intuition to direct our mind and emotions to do what God wanted. And so we would express all the love, and the joy, and the peace that we felt with the Father, we would express it through our mind and emotions and out through our body and would fill the world with his presence. And that was God's will for us.

Do you remember what we did? We determined we wanted to be like God alright, that's what God wanted us to be, like him. But, we wanted to be like him not in order to have fellowship with him and to be able to be friends of his forever, we wanted to be like God because we wanted to rule the world

as we saw he ruled the world. We wanted to control it ourselves and so we rebelled utterly against this idea of being dependent on his Holy Spirit and on friendship with him and we determined, "No, we'll rule it our own way." And of course, because of that we missed the great sense of safety that we had when we used to be his friends.

There's a great safety that comes from knowing that the Father of the universe loves you and protects you. We missed all the sense of significance that we used to have when we knew that we were doing the job that he had put us here to do. And, we lost the great sense of happiness that we used to have in fellowship with him. And because of that of course, we had to try and get these things from the world and so our whole personality began to work backwards as the green arrows show on this diagram. [The diagram is 3 concentric circles with the center "spirit", next outer circle "Soul", and next outer circle "Body."]

We began to try and drain from the world, and particularly from our parents, and from our friends at school, and from our colleagues. We began to try and drain from them the significance that we used to have in the Father's eyes. So we would use our friends in the office to try to establish our own significance. Instead of giving out to our wives continually, we would try and use them to make us important. And so really Archie is funny until you realize that the great majority of the two hundred million of us probably live like Archie Bunker [a male chauvinist comedian] using old Ida to try and build his ego up. And we began to try and use other people to drain from them the happiness that we were meant to get from the Father and so our whole personality became utterly perverted.

Now loved ones, salvation involves two things. One, rejecting this whole direction of our lives, rejecting that with our wills -- and two, believing that God in Christ crucified that on Calvary. Crucified that whole miserable expression that was so much ingrained in us that we could not control it ourselves. And so there are two steps when you become a Christian. One, you reject that whole direction of your life and two, you believe that God has destroyed it in Calvary. That's what Jesus said, you remember, in Mark 1, repent. That means turn the other way. Instead of going this way with the green arrows you go this way with the red arrows and then believe the gospel. Believe that God has destroyed it in Jesus on the cross. And that is salvation.

Now, what happens loved ones, at the moment of conversion is the Holy Spirit speaks to your conscience and normally directs you to one or two expressions in your life that indicate that you live this way. Maybe points out the way that you criticize other people. Maybe the Holy Spirit just comes to your conscience and says, "Do you realize that you criticize other people because you depend for your significance on what they think of you? And you know if you can tear other people down you can make yourself look better in the eyes of your peers." Now, that's one expression of the way in which you're living off the world. That's what sin is, trying to get from the world and from other people what you're meant to get from God and the Holy Spirit will say, "Stop that." And he will light that up to you. He will show you.

Look, you know why you do it. You do it because you think by criticizing other people you'll look better to your peers and so you'll seem a little more important. And it'll take one or two sins in your life; sins are acts, or words, or thoughts that express sin. Sin is an attitude. S-I-N. Sin is the attitude of I am God, I have the right to my way, I have the right to my wishes, I have the right to my desires. And sins express that attitude of sin. And the Holy Spirit will normally bring to your conscience some sin. All he's pointing out is, "This is an expression of a whole attitude in your life." He may take two or three sins, loved ones, he may take five or six, it depends on what kind of a life you're living.

If you're drunk every night and you come home and you tear the place apart, he'll point out that. He'll point out the drunkenness. And maybe you'll be so crude at that time that he can't really light up much more to you as to why that shows a substituting drink and substituting the apparent freedom from worry of drink for the happiness you're meant to have with the Father. Perhaps, he won't be able to point that out; he'll just point the sin out to you. And if you deal with that sin, and turn from it in your will, then the Holy Spirit will come into you and will give you a sense of closeness to God and will regenerate you by his Spirit and that's normally what happens with many of us.

We come to God, deal with a few sins, turn from them in our wills and the Holy Spirit comes in and we have a sense of fellowship with God. Do you see what the blessed Spirit continues to do then? That is two or three sins that he has dealt with in your life and loved ones, you and I have about five billion sins. And the Holy Spirit continues the work of redemption which is to make us like Jesus. And so the Holy Spirit moves on in to our lives and begins to show other things. Now loved ones, if you have not really come to a place where you have deep, deep down accepted that your life has to change completely -- if you have not really accepted that, if you in fact have dealt just with a few sins in your life and have not really settled that -- the Holy Spirit will inexorably and irrevocably, with complete and determined attitude, he will continue to bring home to you that this is the attitude that you have to have in your life and in fact, your life is governed by this. And he will keep on, and on, and on, until he brings that home to your conscience.

Now loved ones, most of us when we come against the problem of sin after conversion are finding that we have not really accepted that that has to be crossed out. That's what happens. Most of us when we have trouble with sin after conversion, we have not really accepted that that has to be crossed out by the cross. And we in fact, have accepted it with those few sins that the Holy Spirit showed us, but now the Holy Spirit is taking us on deeper and we're beginning to see the extent of this crucifixion with Christ and we're balking at it. And that is what a carnal Christian is. A carnal Christian is someone who is balking -- that is backing off, hesitating, drawing back, when they see the full extent of the cross in their life.

Now loved ones, you can only do that so long. But when it first occurs in your life, reject it with all your heart. Fight it with all your heart, but see that what the Holy Spirit is doing is not simply dealing with that sin that you're having trouble with but he's saying to you, "Listen, this is an indication of a whole attitude in you that just still wants to be God. Now look, you are a child of the Father still but do you see where he's taking you? He's taking you the whole way on to the cross with Christ so you can become utterly like him and live with him forever. Now, you have to decide -- are you going to go the whole way?"

And loved ones, I'll deal at more length with the actual deliverance next Sunday but could I just say this, do not turn back from the cross. If you turn back there is nothing, there is nothing. Turning back is apostasy. The sin that you're having trouble with is not apostasy but your attitude to that sin is either apostasy -- that is, complete rejection of God, complete rejection of the Holy Spirit -- or it is the attitude of a child of God walking in the light continuing to walk further and say, "Holy Spirit, will you show me in what way I have not accepted crucifixion with Christ in other areas of my life? Will you show me that now and will you bring me into it?" And loved ones, that will be the beginning of a journey that will take you into resurrection land if you hold to that journey.

But it is only through the cross. It is only by setting your face steadfastly towards Jerusalem with Jesus and determining, “Lord, I don’t know what it will cost me and I don’t care what it will cost me but I want Father, to come to the place where I live off you and you only and where I have absolute victory in my life because you fill my life with your spirit.”

Now, loved ones, questions and I’ll try and distinguish between the questions I hope to answer next Sunday and questions that will clarify what we shared now. And I’ll understand it if you don’t want to ask questions. Do you see what I’m saying? That all of you loved ones that get all wrought up every time the law of God touches you and you cry, “The law, the law. He’s preaching the law.” All of you loved ones that feel that, do you see that’s the blessed knife of the Holy Spirit and that he is determined to cut out of you so you can come to the place where you say with Jesus, “The evil one has nothing in me.” That’s the place that God wants to bring you to.

God doesn’t want a group of children are all right as long as you don’t push them too hard. He doesn’t want a group of children who appear to be free of disease until you begin to press the sore spots. Full faith with which you have to approach God and prayer, full faith involves a clean conscience, absolutely clean. So that the word of God can be preached with power and you’ll come up smiling all the time. And oh, that’s a blessed place to be where you can come up smiling all the time, whatever word of God is preached, however strongly the law comes down. Loved ones, that is what salvation is.

And what I’m saying to you is, there is a way to walk until you come in to that deliverance. And the way to walk is to put yourself always on the side of conscience, always on the side of the word of God. “Lord I am filled with Lust. I do get angry. I do lose my temper at time. Lord, I don’t want it. I don’t want it and I confess it and I repent it with all my heart. And Holy Spirit, will you show me in what way I am not crucified in Christ that this should take place in my life.”

Question from Audience:

What happens if we don’t confess a known sin?

Well Bill, that would be the difficulty it would seem to me, that if you have particularly unconfessed sin, I don’t see how you get any sense of God’s presence. Because, every indication in the Old Testament implies that only those – well, “who shall enter in to the place of the most high? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” Paul continually says that; “Let us approach with boldness the throne of grace with a clean conscience and a pure faith.” And so it seems to me that that’s the problem with a lot of our praying. We pray over the top of a whole lot of unconfessed and unrepented of sin. And loved ones, the first thing to do before going before the Father is to get cleaned out. Really, just to say, “Holy Spirit, is there anything questionable?” And then to take an attitude of unremitting and absolute hostility towards that sin and absolute determination to have done with it, and to keep coming back to that.

Question from Audience:

What if you’re sorry for your sin but you don’t make a stand against it?

You know loved ones, that in fact, there is only one kind of repentance, don’t you? There is only one kind of repentance. You stop sinning. That’s the only kind of repentance. You know it’s silly to talk about anything else because if you bring up especially the clearest expression of Jesus’ mercy which you remember, was to the woman caught in adultery. You remember how he spoke, “They don’t condemn you. Neither do I condemn you but, go and sin no more.” And repentance is sinning no

more. Repentance is not remorse. A lot of us feel sorry for ourselves and we're filled with remorse in fact, about what a mess we've made of our lives. And it's all sorrow for ourselves. It is not sorrow at all for what we've done to Jesus. But we're filled with remorse.

Repentance is not remorse. Repentance is not regret. Repentance is not tears, it's not emotion. Repentance is you stop doing the thing. So there's no question that we need to distinguish clearly between the rather vague wishy washy "I'm sorry for my sin" and the strong Biblical emphasis that repentance is "metanoeo". "Meta" is turn, "noeo" refers to your mind. You "turn your mind", you change your whole attitude of your life and you go that way.