

Freedom From Self

by Ernest O'Neill

You can be freed from the slavery to self and live a life of freedom and surrender to God's Spirit.

Scripture: Mark 7:21, John 14:16, Acts 15:9, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:7, 1 Corinthians 12:8, Galatians 5:17, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Ernest O'Neill preaches on the search for blessedness and the struggle with inward sin that hinders our spiritual growth. He emphasizes the need for honesty in examining our hearts and the gradual decline in zeal and devotion that many Christians experience over time. O'Neill highlights the distinction between outward sins and inward sin, pointing to the importance of surrendering our 'old self' to God for complete sanctification and freedom from self. He encourages believers to have faith in God's work in their lives and to fully consecrate themselves, allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse their hearts and guide them into a deeper relationship with God.

Transcript

Where is the Blessedness?

"Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul refreshing view

Of Jesus and His Word?"

Do these words express the cry in your own heart? In private as you read this, what is your reaction to this verse? Here between you and this article, where no one else can hear or see, will you be honest about the state of your own spiritual experience? God yearns for you to be honest at this moment--to forget all the outward witness or the pretence you keep up. He is asking you to be yourself and really look into your own heart.

Jesus said this is where all our defeats and personal failures come from. In Mark 7:21, He said, "For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries...." Many of us, who have been Christians for months or years, discover that the first flush of our devotion and gratitude to Christ, the first enthusiasm for prayer and Bible study, the first determination to go out and witness and give our whole future to Christ

begins to dim. We find our zeal diminishing, our devotional habits becoming sporadic, our determination to give all of our life to God's service diluted by the idea of giving part to ourselves.

So our Christian life begins to have valleys in it--long periods when God's presence is not felt, when we even doubt if He has made us His children. Often we fight an unequal battle with our feelings, and more and more they break out in open sin. For a while we find it possible to suppress envy and self-centredness. But now we almost give up the "suppression business" and compromise with these evil impulses. Gradually we lower the standard of the converted life in order to convince ourselves that we are still in grace. But with this outward failure, inward tension and surrendered conviction comes almost a complete breakdown of any attempt at real witnessing. Indeed, we get used to a high profession and a low life, a high degree of tolerance and a low degree of excellence, increasing dislike for hypocrisy but greater scepticism for saintliness.

We begin to doubt the Bible promises and to suspect the personal experiences described there as poetic exaggerations. We comfort ourselves by saying this is the fight of faith in the twentieth century, or we run to a demythologised humanist theology which makes us feel there are others like us.

Is this your experience? It need not be! Why? Because you can go further with God. He has a further experience--a further step after conversion--another miracle which He works in your spirit. It may be that you either did not know of this step or that you did not fully take it. To be half healed of sin is like cutting off the decayed branches instead of exterminating the pest in the tree. As time passes the disease will only spread more irresistibly.

The Problem--Inward Sin

So the Bible throughout distinguishes between the disease and its symptoms, inward sin and outward sins, the heart and the life. As we see symptoms first and treat them, so in conversion we are conscious first of our sinful acts and words and thoughts. We confess them and repent and believe God's word of forgiveness. He gives us His Spirit who regenerates us into spiritual life and gives us victory in the outward life.

But it is the heart where the real disease dwells. It is there where we are at 'dis-ease' with God. It is there that self still reigns. Deep down in the subconscious we still want to maintain a secret independence of God. Inside in our own 'holy of holies' we want to be god, and from that safe, secluded spot we control our surrenders to God's will. Each surrender requires individual treatment and negotiation. Self has to be satisfied where self interest conflicts with God's interest. And gradually, the reclamation begins, and self advances from its hideout in our motives, reactions, desires and tempers. Relentlessly it moves back into the sphere of acts and words and thoughts where once only God's will was done. Holding back a disease brings pain to the face and tension to the body, and these are the marks of the defeated Christian who has not gone all the way with God.

The Bible Remedy

This was Peter's problem when he was forced into open denial of Jesus by his fear of men. But when the Holy Spirit was allowed fully to take over his life on the day of Pentecost, Peter says in Acts 15:9, our 'hearts were cleansed by faith.' This was Paul's problem when he wrote in Galatians 5:17, 'The desires of the flesh(man's desire for inner independence) are against the Spirit,' and it was the solution to the problem when he realised in Romans 6:6 that 'our old self was crucified with Christ.'

God's salvation is a complete one; Christ's remedy for sin is twofold. He saves us from sin's guilt and also from its power. He saves us from outward sins and also from inward sin. He saves us not only from the symptoms but from the disease. He cleanses both the life and the heart.

God can give you a replacement for that old self. Jesus promised His arrival in His fullness. He said in John 14:16, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever, even the spirit of truth." Until now you have had the Holy Spirit! Will you now allow the Holy Spirit to have you? Unless you allow Him into the 'holy of holies' where the disease is nourished, you cannot enter into the second rest, entire sanctification, and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Will you do it?

How To Be Freed From Self

FIRST, realise the Holy Spirit is a Person, Jesus' agent in your life. Ask Him to search your heart--your self life--the central headquarters where the 'real you' lives, and to show you how rampant the disease is. This may take several weeks, for you have spent years ignoring and burying these attitudes and motives. Open your will to His work by looking at the signs of inward sin. Do you find resentment or irritation or anger rising up within, even though you may remain serene and smiling outwardly? Do you look for praise? Do you push yourself forward in conversation? Do you get comfort from self-pity? Do you like 'feeling hurt'? Do you ever have bottled -up hostility or impatience which makes you sulk or refuse to speak to someone for hours? All of these spring from our desire to defend self or assert self, because we think we have the right to self.

SECOND, see the sinfulness of this pride, this controlled rebellion against God. Ask the Spirit to show you your real nature as God sees it. That 'old self' is the expression of the carnal nature--that inward bent to be personally independent of God. It is this inner attitude of selfishness which brings about outward or actual sins in our lives over which we were given control at conversion. But it is this love of self that shows our nature is still carnal even though we are Christians. While this disease is allowed to remain at the centre of our lives, we are God's enemies. The carnal nature is rebellion against God. In Romans 8:7, the Bible says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." This is why it is so dangerous. It loves religion, but hates God; it is invisible to us until we become Christians, yet for years it has been contaminating our lives from within. It cannot be beaten by suppression or law. It must be destroyed!

THIRD, realise that this is just what God has done with your 'old self.' Remember Romans 6:6, "Our old self was crucified with Christ!" Just as your sins were borne by Jesus but could only be forgiven when you believed, so your old self--your carnal attitude--was destroyed in Jesus on Calvary, but you can only know freedom from its influence in your life when you believe this. Just as God did a work in your life by regenerating your spirit at conversion when you believed, so in sanctification God will do a second work in your spirit by destroying the bent to sin--by rendering the power of self ineffective--when you believe. God has already in Jesus destroyed that root of bitterness from your life. It certainly was dead in Him, and all that He was for us we can be through Him. God has already done the work in Christ. Are you willing to stay in Christ and appropriate those benefits He has gained for you? Your carnal nature was nailed to the Cross with Christ. The question is, "Are you willing to let it go?" God is able by His Spirit to remove that root of bitterness from your life NOW!

FOURTH, have faith. It is through faith that God does this work in you now. Faith is two-fold--a vote of no confidence in self and a vote of confidence in God.

Are you ready to die to self? Really? Are you ready to be whatever God wants--not what you want, or what you prefer, or what you had planned? Are you ready to hand the future and the present over to His Spirit? Are you ready to be nothing for Him, if He asks? This is what it means to be 'baptised into Christ's death'--to have your name removed and in its place Jesus Christ's, so that 'I live, yet NOT I, but Christ lives within me.' Are you ready to die? This is what giving up the right to self means--throwing yourself wide open, casting down the defences, dropping the guard, forever throwing away that private piece of personality you had planned to take into heaven, and making it public property for Christ to do what He wants with it. Are you ready to say, "I can do nothing good of myself--there is nothing good in me"? This is the first part of sanctifying faith--full consecration. Only when you have laid everything on the altar, only when the sacrifice is complete, will the Holy Spirit witness with your spirit that you have reached the ground of your heart--that you are at last utterly honest with God. You cannot believe for sanctification on top of an incomplete consecration. Faith is not the problem. It springs up in response to full consecration. Until the Spirit witnesses to the completeness of the consecration, allow Him to probe for the career, or the personal influence, or the pride which will not yield. Are you ready to 'reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin,' to have it truly said of you--"For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God"? Has the Spirit witnessed that you are ready to surrender all?

When you are ready for this, then you are ready to receive the gift of confidence in God. He has promised you the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor. He has already counselled you, or you would not be this far. But God has also promised that "He would cleanse your heart by faith." The Holy Spirit is ready at this moment to take complete control of you and your life. Yield to Him now. Rest in His arms. Rely upon Him. Hand that 'old self' to Him for destruction. He is destroying its inner urge even NOW. Take Him by faith, trust Him and obey Him. He will faithfully do His work. He will guide you now. He will take care of the tomorrows. Your only concern now is to pay attention to the Spirit. Mind the Lord. Make no allowance for your own self-directions now. Follow the Holy Spirit's commands at once and in every detail. Your life is now His to use as He pleases for the glory of our Saviour. Let Him bear His fruit in you (Gal. 5:22,23) and manifest His gifts through you (I Cor. 12:8-10).

Free to live--at last! Free from that slavery to self--no longer self defending its rights, but self hid with Christ in God. (Whenever you lose your life for His sake, you will save it.) In fact, when you at last lose yourself in God, you find you are at last free to be yourself!

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