

How to Be Born Again

by Ernest O'Neill

The new birth is a radical transformation of our personalities, where our old, perverted nature is destroyed and a new, outgoing personality is created, allowing us to live in accordance with God's original plan.

Duration: 39:37

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:3, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 3:9

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Gods Will"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a lonely evening spent at home. Despite trying to occupy themselves with coffee, flowers, and television, they feel a deep sense of emptiness and longing for companionship. The speaker then discusses the human desire for security, happiness, and significance, and how these desires can lead to selfishness and compromise with sin. They emphasize the importance of aligning our hearts with God's will and living according to His original plan for our lives, which brings true contentment and the ability to pour out love and kindness to others.

Transcript

From time to time God's Spirit has guided us to break from our normal studies in Romans and concentrate on some topic that he wanted us to think of as a family. And I sensed this morning that I should share not on the subject in the bulletin, but on simply how to be born again. Just explain simply and plainly how to be born again.

And I thought that was important to do because the phrase is so popular today. And there are so many ideas going round about the new birth. And yet, the new birth has always been the same down through the centuries.

And there are not many ways to be born again. There is only one way to be born again. And so I'd ask you if you would be good enough to forget even the things you know about it.

And just let's coolly and calmly and quietly deal with this magnificent truth that God has given us. Why do we need to be born again? Answer, because there's a tragic flaw in our personalities. There's a radical flaw in our personalities.

There's a crookedness in us that we all feel. And we feel it should be straight. There's a disintegration that we are all aware of.

And we feel there should be integration instead. That's why we need to be born again. The answer is almost the same as anything that comes from a factory and either at the factory or in transit.

It was in some way damaged. Then it has to be sent back to the factory and made again. That's why we need to be born again.

What is the radical flaw? You'll recognize it immediately I give you the illustration. You're going home one night about five o'clock to your roommate or to your partner or to your family. And you decide it's springtime and I feel happy and I want to make them happy tonight.

So you buy flowers or you buy ice cream. And you go home looking forward to making them happy. You get home.

There's nobody home. So you make a cup of coffee. Put the flowers in the vase or put the ice cream in the freezer.

And you drink the coffee. And there's still nobody home. And then you turn the television on.

And you watch for a while and then your tummy rumbles. And you have another cup of coffee. And then you get out the potato chips.

And you take some potato chips. And you sit there for about another half hour. And then an unbelievable thing happens.

Right alongside that beautiful, kindly, generous desire you have to make them happy, there springs up another attitude that is utterly different. And it's an attitude that begins to say, Where on earth are they? And it just grows and grows. And the two desires are going along inside.

And it's unbelievable to you. You can't imagine how an evening that was to be so perfect can turn out to be so lonely and so tummy rumbling. And at last, of course, they arrive home at 9.30. And they tell you that they forgot to mention that they were going shopping that evening.

Well, they don't meet an ordinary human being. By this time, you are a raving lunatic. And you lay on them every error they ever committed over the past centuries.

And you tell them off for spoiling your evening. And then as you stalk up to bed, the corner of your eye catches the sight of the flowers or the ice cream that you were going to use to give them such a happy evening. And, of course, your heart just sinks.

That's what I mean, loved ones, about a radical flaw in our personalities. All of us human beings are aware that there is one side of us that seems to want to be unselfish and good and kind and outgoing. But alongside that, there is another side of us that wants to be cruel and wants to be selfish and wants to take in for itself.

It's as if we're schizophrenic. It's as if there isn't one personality inside us, but there seem to be two. There seems to be a Dr. Jekyll who is kind and loving and unselfish.

And there seems at the same time to be a Mr. Hyde who is cruel and selfish and hates. And our world is full of books of all kinds and techniques of all kinds for somehow lessening this conflict or modifying it so that at least we can get on with our lives in some sane fashion. And these books continually work on the

principle that we should try to lessen the evil side in us as much as possible.

The evil side of our temperaments we should lessen by habits of mind control, by ways of thinking about people and thinking about ourselves that will somehow diminish the evil to the point where it virtually disappears. But virtually is the key word. Because what all of us have found is that that's all these techniques or these books ever managed to do.

They seem to diminish the evil side of our temperaments to the point where it almost disappears. But somehow we find that what we're really doing is trying to encourage the good side of us to be stronger and stronger so that it can control the bad side of us. And now we've discovered that the good side only wants to do that so far, up to a certain point.

And then we find that the good side that we're trying to encourage, it seems to break away in all directions itself. It seems to be shot through with evil too. And there comes a time when even it doesn't want to control the bad side.

And so we find that the two are so inextricably mixed that at times we can't tell when the good is uppermost and when the evil is uppermost or when one is winning and the other is losing. And we've got to the point where we see you just can't. You can't tell.

For a while it seems the good is working and then that good seems to break away in all kinds of directions, shattered. And it seems the only thing to do is to destroy the whole thing and start all over again. And that's why we need to be born again.

Because there is a radical flaw that runs right through the center of each of our personalities that is utterly debilitating and destructive to anything we want to be. And that's always what we're saying. The good side is fighting against the bad side so that I can't do what I want to do.

Now, how did that come about? Where did those good urges come from? Well, loved ones, those good urges come from the remains of the influence of the spirit of your Creator inside you. And there is that influence, you know. Even the worst person here in this room has part of the influence of the spirit of our Creator inside them.

And at times that produces good urges. Good, outgoing, unselfish desires to help other people even if it means having to forget ourselves. Those urges come from the remains of the influence of God's spirit in your life.

And you can see that God Himself is clearly that kind of person. I mean, He is generous to the nth degree. God is extravagant in His generosity.

These spring mornings, one bird, two birds, no! A whole hallelujah chorus and orchestra, you know. And one's whistling and the other's chirping and all kinds of singing is going on. And water, a lake here, a lake there, no! Two-thirds of the world's surface, you know, covered with this stuff.

And plenty of salt in it so that we can deluge the French coast with oil and the almighty sea will keep lapping it and lapping it until after three years it's washed it all away. And underneath the ocean, colors that none of us will ever see, colors that nobody will ever see. And yet that's our God, you know, generous and extravagant and outgoing all the time.

And the urges that you feel to be like that come from the remains of His spirit inside you. Now, God Himself is absolute love. And so He made you, made you completely unique and sent you here to earth to do work for Him in bringing His world into the center of His will.

And He gave you a love and a life of His own that you can express in a unique way that nobody else can. And so He intended you to come and do a definite job here for Him. And then because you would work so closely to Him, you'd sense His approval upon your life and you'd be just content.

You'd go to bed each night really content with your situation. And of course, because you'd fit into His old economic scheme for the world, you'd have all the money and all the clothing that you'd need. And so you'd live your life in a real sense of contentment and peace because you were doing what your Maker sent you to do.

Now, the security and the happiness and the sense of significance that comes from that original plan of God for your life, some of that still remains in you from time to time and sends up an odd, unselfish act and an odd, kind word. Because that was God's plan, you see, that you would have so much security, so much happiness, so much sense of significance yourself that you could spend your whole life pouring that out to other people. And so the remains of that are still in you.

And at times, you can get up on a spring morning and you can feel all is well with the world. And there were odd moments in your life when you could sense, yeah, things are right and, oh, life is great. And at those moments, you're able to send out some kindness or some unselfish thought for somebody else.

But, of course, what happened was that our forefathers rebelled against this whole plan that the Creator had for us to pour forth His love and His life. And they resolved that they would live their own life and be their own God. And however intimate was the father-child relationship that God had planned, they said, no, we don't want that.

We want to be our own gods. We want to set our own directions for our own lives. We want to pick our own jobs.

We want to make our own happiness. We want to establish our own security. And so our forefathers, years ago, rebelled against that whole plan of God.

And, of course, immediately they cut themselves off from God and from the sense of love that He gave them. They had to find it somewhere else. And, of course, they began to look in other places.

And that's where they began to insist on their own rights and insist on their own ways and determine their own goals and get their own way whatever happened to anybody else. And that, loved ones, is what is called sin. Sin is not individual acts and words.

Sin is that whole attitude to God. No, I want to be God. I want to run my own life.

I want to determine what I'm going to do. I want to get my own way. I want to decide how much I'm going to suffer or how much I'm not going to suffer.

And that sin was bred into our race down through the centuries and that's what you find rising up within you at times. That's it. It's something that's bigger than you yourself.

That's why you can't control it. You notice that. You notice if you lose your temper when you know you should keep your temper.

If you are irritable when you know you should be patient. If you're cruel to your dear one when you know you should be loving. You notice that it's something that seems to take hold of you.

It seems to rise up inside you and you can't control it. Now, that's because it's sin. It's a power that our forefathers developed and bred into the generation after generation.

An attitude to God and an attitude of self-righteousness in ourselves that is bred into us and is passed on to us from generation to generation. Now, as well as that urge inside you that sends up those desires to hurt people and to walk over the top of people, there's another problem. God made our personalities to work one way.

Out that way. Out that way. That's the way His goes.

You will need to look at His Son Jesus to see not a thought for the wounds in the hands. Not a thought for the wound in the side. Not a thought for His own discomfort.

But always going out to other people. Always loving. Always giving out.

And that's what God is like Himself. And God planned for our personalities to operate that way. Going out.

Having the love that we receive from Him and giving it out to others. Having the security that we have from Him, from knowing that He will supply every need of ours and then giving freely to others. Having the sense of significance and identity that comes from doing what He wants us to do here on earth and then giving other people a sense of worth and a sense of value instead of taking it from them.

And, of course, we cut ourselves off from all the source of that love. And so inside we have nothing to give out. In fact, we have a vacuum inside us.

And so we began to take in from the only source we could get. And so we began to try to beat out the other three and a half million people here on this earth to get enough food, shelter and clothing for us, ourselves. We found, of course, we never had enough.

We found we always wanted more. We started to beat out hundreds of other people to try to beat them into a sense of respect for us so that they would give us some sense of significance. And instead of giving out to others, we began to drain from others.

Worst of all, we took some of our most intimate relationships where we should have been giving freely the love that God was giving us. And we began to use our wives and our friends for our own enjoyment. And then if we had any time left, we tried to give them a little.

But usually we hadn't. And so our whole personalities turned in. And the personality that was to go out like that started to work in this way so that, do you see, the personality itself became twisted.

So we not only had an urge within us of sin to have our own way and to establish our own rights, but we also had a personality now that became twisted and perverted so that it was as if, you know, the Spirit of God is somehow still in all of us in some sense. Your little conscience at times is trying to send out something good. So the Spirit of God tries to send out weakly some kindness and some generosity to

other people, but it's as if the pure fresh water is there, but it can't get out of the reservoir because the pipeline is now running uphill.

The personality is working in this way. And the Spirit's trying to get out, but the personality has got used for years to taking in. For years the personality has been taking in from other people.

The Spirit of God wants to go out to somebody this morning from you and compliment them. Compliment them. The Spirit of God wants to say something nice to somebody through you this morning.

But you've been so used to trying to persuade yourself in other people's eyes that you alone are worth complimenting that you're always searching for compliments. You're always looking for praise. You're always looking for men's approval.

So it's as if the fresh clear water wants to get out of the reservoir, but the pipeline is running downhill now and the water can't get up, and instead all the drain water from all the surrounding hills filters down this pipeline. And so inside you, you find a tremendous conflict. Some little weak desires go out to be kind and loving, but coming in is this personality that is utterly reversed and perverted.

Now, loved ones, that's the mess that we are in. And you can see that every human technique will do nothing but modify that or mellow it out a little. But you can see there is a perversion that has taken place in these personalities that you can never fix.

No surgery by a physical medical surgeon will ever do the job. You yourself can never change that personality. It always wants to come in like that.

The only one who can change it is the one who originally made it. That personality has to be utterly destroyed, and a new outgoing one that was God's original plan has to be created. Otherwise, there's no point in God giving His Spirit of life to us, because that dear little spirit will continue to be imprisoned within us.

It will never get out to others. Now, that's why a new birth is needed. And that's what God did in Jesus.

He took your perverted, reversed personality, and He took all that evil desire to make yourself God, and to have your own way, and to establish your own rights in the world at anybody else's expense, and He put that into His Son, Jesus, and He destroyed it there. That's the part of the Gospel that applies to the new birth. Now, loved ones, it might be good if you just look at it.

It's 2 Corinthians, and it's chapter 5, and verse 21. It's the piece that we read as the New Testament lesson. 2 Corinthians 5, and verse 21.

It's page 1006. For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. God took the sin inside you, the independence of Him, the urge to be your own God, and He put it into Jesus, and He destroyed it there.

And you see in verse 17 that that means it's possible to create you anew, because He did the same with your reversed, perverted personality. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Why? Because the old has passed away.

Behold, the new has come. Now, some people think the new can come without the old passing away. And so there's a light teaching of the new birth today that is popular.

And it says, just believe, just believe the Lord, believe the Lord. It's that kind of theory, sit back and let it happen, baby. And it just does not work, loved ones, it does not work.

Because God knows that if the old creation is not destroyed, the new will be absolutely suffocated within. And the problem is not God's unwillingness to give us the Holy Spirit. We already have in some sense the remains of God's influence of the Holy Spirit within us when we sense in our conscience that we should do certain things that are right.

The problem is not on God's part. The problem is on ours. Unless we are willing for Him to destroy the old creation completely in His Son, He cannot do anything to recreate us and to make us born again.

So it used to be in the old days, in the old liberal days, when liberalism ruled the roost in theology, people said, imitate Jesus. It's impossible, of course, because the old self won't let you imitate Him. But now there's a great deal of theorizing, just receive Jesus, and that's all you need.

No, you'll crucify the dear Savior again inside you, if that's all you do. You'll crucify Him afresh inside you. Unless you are willing for this intern personality, for this deification of self to be destroyed in Him.

Now, how do you do it? You can't do it. Only the Holy Spirit can. Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will take of the things that are mine, and He will share them with you.

And the Greek word for share means He'll make them real to you. He'll make them real in your life. Only the Holy Spirit can actualize in you the complete reversing of your personality that took place in Jesus' death.

You can't do it at all. So do you see, you're utterly at the mercy of the Holy Spirit. That's the one that we've to deal with in order to be born of God.

We've to deal with the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit is already dealing with you this morning and in past days. He has already pointed out some things in your life that evidence that you are working on an intern personality.

That evidence that you are still deifying self. The Holy Spirit has put His finger on some attitudes in you, some critical attitudes that are obviously treating everybody else as the minions and you as the great God who judges them. The Holy Spirit has put His finger on some actions of yours that are dishonest, some stealing that you have done, some dishonest words that you use to other people to make them think better of you than they ought to think.

The Holy Spirit has already put His finger on different things in your life that show you clearly that you are not crucified with Christ and you're not willing to stop soaking life in from other people. You're not willing to begin to live on God alone. The Holy Spirit has already pointed those things out to you.

Loved ones, the first step in coming to a new birth is agreeing with the Holy Spirit about those things. Stop pretending that they're just personality shortcomings. Stop pretending that they're something that you'll gradually grow out of.

Where the Holy Spirit points out sin in your life, agree with Him. That's what confess means. Confess means agree with God.

And that's what God has said. If you'll confess your sins, I am faithful and just to forgive you your sins. One of the reasons I wanted to share this this morning was that I think some of you are superficial about sin.

You're a little lighthearted about sin. I was glad when several couples came to me and said, Look, we've been living together and we know that that is wrong. And we are both in Jesus and we want to be married.

But loved ones, do you see, that ought not to exist in the heart of a loved one who is born again. So, I say to you, if you're fornicating or you're being promiscuous, forget the new birth. Stop saying you're born of God.

You are not born of God if you're still disagreeing with the Holy Spirit on the basic, most plain commandments of the Father. So, you have to start agreeing with Him. But it's the same with, you know, those of us who think we're so religious and continue to be critical of other people, continue to gossip about other people.

If the Holy Spirit has said, Do you agree that that is not Christ? Do you agree that that is still you living off the world and of other people? Loved ones, you have to agree. If you are going to either move into a new birth or if you're going to continue to be born again, you must continue to agree with the dear Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit is a sensitive gentleman.

He says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, but he'll have to open the door, I will come in and will sup with him and he with me. But if he doesn't open the door, I won't knock it down.

The Holy Spirit is unable to actualize the victory of Jesus' death in your personality unless you respond to Him instantly. I think a lot of you are in trouble because you're still arguing with the Holy Spirit. I really do.

And I know it in my own life. I find it less easy to sense the closeness of Jesus or to sense the complete new transformation and creation that He's wrought in my life if at any time I step back a little from what the Holy Spirit is saying. The first step is confession.

The second step is, and listen to this, stop doing it. Stop doing it. That's what repentance is.

Jesus said, Except you repent, you will all likewise perish. You must repent. Be sorry.

Use up three boxes of Kleenex and say you'll try harder next time. No! That isn't repentance. That isn't repentance.

You stop doing the thing. You stop sinning. You stop it.

We're such weak-kneed little creatures, you know. We accept all the brainwashing that anybody gives us and now, of course, we all cry out, Oh, I can't, I can't, I can't. You can.

You can. You can. You can.

And why? Because God has put you into Jesus and destroyed all in you that wouldn't obey Him and has recreated you anew. It's been done. The thing has been done.

All you have to do is act in the light of the fact that you're a new creation. You just do it. And every time Satan says, But you failed a thousand times before.

For years you've been doing this thing. Yes, but I am a new creation. The old has passed away and all things have become new.

My old self. You are right about that, Satan, but that has been crucified with Christ. And I am now operating on the basis of the miracle that God has wrought in Jesus.

And you stop sinning. Loved ones, anybody here who is still sinning wants to sin. That's right.

No, you can play the noble sinner stuff. And I played it for years. Oh, no.

I really want to stop sinning. God has arranged the miracle in Jesus. He has destroyed all in you that used to sin.

All you have to do is agree with that and stop sinning. And it's essential to do it. And I don't know how you all are behaving in your marriages, but if any of you even dream of swearing at each other or touching each other physically in a way that would be hurtful or in a way that would be unkind, you have no experience of the new birth.

You are pretending. Because one who is born of God's Spirit is gentle as Jesus is, is kind as Jesus is, is pure as Jesus is. That's what it is.

That's what the new birth is. The new birth isn't the old struggle that Plato and Socrates had to endure. The new birth isn't the old struggle that you yourself had to endure where you tried to beat down the evil in order to more or less 60% of the time do good.

The new birth is a mighty change that God works in your heart through faith in Christ whereby He implants in you the desires of Jesus and the love of Jesus. And He does that if you're willing. Loved ones, that's it.

The heart of the new birth is your willingness. The heart of the new birth is not even the believing. It's not the believing.

It's not even this, oh, receive Jesus. You have to receive Jesus. But that's not the difficulty of the new birth.

There's no problem in receiving Jesus if you're willing to let Jesus be Lord of your life. But if you're not willing for Him to be Lord of your life, what you receive is an evil spirit that imitates Jesus. And that's why you have such an unsatisfactory Christian experience.

But Jesus comes in when you're willing to repent. That is, you stop doing the things. If you say to me, what if I do it again tomorrow? Then you stop doing it again tomorrow.

What if you do it again the next day? Then you stop doing it the next day. I'm not talking about never sinning. I'm just saying you set your mind ruthlessly and relentlessly against sin.

You determine that you will fight sin in your life at every corner. You declare war, unconditional war on sin in your life. And you stop it every time you become aware of it.

And you confess it to Jesus. And you move on in obedience. And you keep doing that until He brings you into a full understanding of what He has done for you on the cross.

But loved ones, unless you do that, you're playing with the thing. Confess, repent, consecrate. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice unto God,

which is your spiritual and reasonable service.

You give yourself to God. You say, Lord, I'm willing to be the kind of child that Jesus was. I'm willing to live as He lived for you alone.

I give myself to you. I separate myself from all other lesser purposes that I had in mind about bank accounts and homes and futures and successes. And I give myself to you.

Do what you want with my life. Loved ones, if you honestly confess, and you honestly repent, and you honestly with all your heart consecrate, God gives the Holy Spirit of His Son to you. He sends the Spirit of His Son into your heart.

And a beautiful new person is born inside by miraculous supernatural power. And you begin to find sweet water coming out from inside. You begin to find love rising instead of hate.

And you begin to find a kindly spirit coming out from inside you so that, again, you have to almost say, there are two people inside me, except now you say, it must be Jesus inside me. I cannot account for these feelings any other way. But, loved ones, that's the new birth.

And it is for you, but only if you'll have done with sin. And I'd be glad, you know, I'd be glad just to stand here hour after hour, and you could ask me, is that sin? Is that sin? But, oh, do you see? Do you see that you cannot be born of God and shout at your wife? You cannot be born of God and steal pens from your employer. You cannot be born of God and deceive on the income tax returns.

You cannot be born of God and have fights at home, domestic battles. You can't. You can't.

Why? Because Jesus never did those things. And He does not do those things now. And if He is in you, He is not doing those.

And if you say to me, oh, well, does that mean I can never... No, but every time you do sin, you realize it's an alien thing. So, at this moment, as you sit there, your heart rises and you say, brother, I at times fall, but I know those are wrong, and I'm fighting them with all my being. And I am determined, by God's grace, to live clear and clean of these things.

But you're either doing that, or you're sitting there and saying, oh, well, I have to do my best and try to improve and try to be better than I am, but I don't see how I can avoid being selfish with my wife, or being cruel to my children, or being cynical about the people at school. I don't see it. You see, your heart, it's the heart.

It's not even the outside performance, though surely it will show in the outside performance. But it's the heart. Does your heart stand against sin at every turn in your life, or does it compromise with it? The new birth brings you into cleanness.

Now pray and know that God will bring you to it. Father, thank you that it's so clear. Thank you that you talked about it as life and death.

Thank you that you talked about it as light and darkness. Thank you that you talked about it as day and night. Thank you, Lord, that you made it plain that there is absolute contrast between those of us who are born of the flesh and who are still insisting on our own way and wanting our own rights and using other people to get the love and the security that we need.

There's a complete difference between that and your children who want only your way and want only your rights upheld and want only to do your will and want only to share your love and your security with others. Lord, thank you. Thank you that there can be no mistaking what is a valid new birth and what is a counterfeit.

No, Lord, we want to come into the rail ourselves. So, Holy Spirit, will you show each one of us where we're disagreeing with you, where we're still pretending that we hate sin, where we're still calling something our infirmity or our weakness when it is really our downright sin, when we're regarding something as justifiable because of the particular kinds of artistic or scientific personalities that we have. Holy Spirit, show us where we're not calling sin sin in our lives when we see that the first big step towards you is to agree with you.

Stop bickering and stop questioning and rationalizing and agree with you. Agree with you against ourselves. And then, Holy Spirit, we see that we have been put on the cross, that we are new people and that there's no reason why we can't obey our God.

If we're willing to stay on that cross with Jesus, we can simply stop sinning. We commit ourselves to doing that. And then, dear Father, Lord God, who have put up so much with so much from us, Lord, we do not want any longer to stab your Son to death in our lives.

We want to give ourselves to you, to be what you want us to be and to live the kind of lives that you want. So now, Lord God, will you feel free to pour your Spirit through us and we'll let him out every time he wants for your glory. Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore.

Amen.

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