

Reformation or Regeneration?

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of responding to our conscience and following the guidance of the Bible in order to experience the new birth and have our spirits come alive to God.

Scripture: John 3:3, Acts 3:19, Romans 2:15, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Repentance", "Regeneration"

Description

Ernest O'Neill emphasizes the importance of listening to our conscience as a way for God to communicate with us, highlighting that our spirit, though insensitive, retains a memory of the Creator through conscience. He explains that following our conscience and seeking guidance from the Bible can help correct our moral compass and lead us to repentance, where we must actively change our behavior in alignment with God's will. O'Neill stresses the need for a personal encounter with God through repentance, acknowledging Christ's sacrifice as the means for new life and a living relationship with God.

Transcript

What do you think God wants you to do? Most people today have absolutely no idea. Indeed, most of us regard the question as meaningless. Most of us believe in God because such belief is the only reasonable way to account for the origin of the universe (or the origin of whatever made the big bang or single cell amoeba). But we have no idea which of our five senses we would use to find out what God thinks. This is because none of the five senses can perceive God - He is spirit - invisible like wind. And the part of us that can perceive Him - our spirit - has become so insensitive through neglect that it is virtually dead. This is why we blank out if anyone asks us what God thinks we should do.

Conscience

But your spirit is not quite dead. Part of it retains some memory of what the Creator is like. It's the part we call 'conscience'. It's the source of those vague feelings we have at times that we have some purpose to fulfil - or that we aren't made to simply cease to exist after death. When we respond to these urgings, God's spirit is able to move towards us. He cannot do anything until we respond because He is committed to preserving our free will. So He is free to communicate with us only after we make an honest response to conscience.

Conscience itself is an urging to live up to the highest we know, and the highest is the mirror of God in our conscience. But many of us, at this point, slip out of our contact with superhuman life and fall into the grip

of human standards that we have stored in our minds. We become preoccupied with our parents' ethical standards or the mores of our social or religious group. This leads often to some religious affiliation or reformation of character. But it does not lead to the regeneration of our spirits and only this brings superhuman life into us.

How do you 'follow' your conscience?

Honestly follow the tiny, flickering light that you sense inside. If it suggests to you that there is a God or that someone put you here for a purpose, then think that thought to God. Think up to him your request for further guidance. He has shown His nature and communicated His wishes to other human beings through the centuries: these revelations are recorded in the Bible - pick it up and read a little. If you read it with an honest desire to find out if God is real, His spirit will contact your spirit through the words of the Bible. This will help confirm and strengthen some of the impressions you've been receiving from your conscience.

Your conscience is part of your own spirit which has been dead for years: so it is not a perfect reflection of God's will. The spirit behind the words of the Bible help to correct and adjust the gyro-compass within you. As you begin to respond in thought to the combined guidance of your conscience and the Bible, you soon find that you're 'way out of line' in your life. You quickly see how 'big-headed' and how self-willed you are, and this prepares the way for the start of personal dealing with God.

Repentance

At this point many fall into a mental-game. They are elated by the truths they see about God and then selves and think this insight itself is all that's needed. So they change their ways of thinking about God and some of the things He seems to want them to do; then they wait for some witness within that God is real. Nothing happens ! This is because God requires us to change the way we're actually living in the light of His will revealed through our conscience. If we become conscious of indolence, then we must will to stop being lazy. If we become conscious of our tendency to lie or boast, then he requires us to stop our dishonest speech. This is part of 'repentance', and this outward change of our behaviour is an essential condition that must be fulfilled before our Creator can bring more life and sensitivity i. our spirits.

As we begin to exercise our wills over our bodies, thoughts, and emotions, God is able to sensitise our spirits enough to begin to realise the crass indifference and contempt we have exhibited to God so far in our lives. The whole meaning of Christ dying in agony on the cross comes home to us as God's own pain when we plunge swords of greed, anger, and lust into His heart. Then our repentance becomes personal sorrow to God for the pain we have caused him - and an overwhelming desire to stop the pain.

Christ or Us

The strong words of the Bible save us here from maudlin introspection and futile resolutions. 'The wages of sin is death...if Christ died for all, then all died'. We see at once that we cannot be improved or made better - either we must die or God must die. Then we see that we actually died with Christ and that our Creator has miraculously put an end to our life in His Son, and raised us up as new creations in His resurrection. Immediately we grasp this and apply it to ourselves, God sends 'the spirit of His Son into us', and our spirits come alive to God.

This is the new birth - the 'birth from above' that Jesus explained in John 3 to Nicodemus. Our spirits then become imbued with the Spirit of God and we begin a living relationship with Christ and His Father. As

we'll see in the next article, the continuation of this communion, as with its initiating, is conditioned by our conscience.

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