

We Need a Clean Heart (Romans 6:6)

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon emphasizes the need for a deeper transformation of the heart, beyond mere forgiveness and self-discipline, and encourages listeners to seek the Holy Spirit's help in overcoming sin.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, Acts 8:15, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:7, Galatians 5:19

Topics: "Heart Transformation", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Ernest O'Neill shares his personal journey of struggling with inward sins and the constant battle to control his thoughts and feelings, despite outwardly appearing as a model Christian. He reflects on the common experience of suppressing inner struggles and rationalizing sins, leading to a lack of true victory and a sense of defeat. O'Neill emphasizes the need to surrender to God, acknowledge the rebellion in our hearts, and seek a genuine transformation through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on self-efforts or external solutions.

Transcript

Last time I tried to share a little of my own life story with you. You remember the change that took place in my life was when God began to deal with the inward problem that I had. I thought it would just be good maybe to spend one more time, giving you a chance to decide about yourself. Now, I would tell you plainly that I think I was. There is a line in Gilbert and Sullivan; "he's the very, very model of a model major general" - well I think I was the very, very model of a model Methodist minister. I think outwardly, you know, I looked pretty good. I think even in my own eyes I thought I was pretty good because I had learned what outward expressions verbally and what outward actions I should avoid in order to keep up the appearance of being a Christian.

I think you do learn to control, don't you? Even in our society, where they say let it all hang out, yet as you grow older you learn to control your feelings and your thoughts and to keep them down and that's what I did. That's the kind of life I lived until I was 30. I'll tell you it was just torture; it really was. I took it for granted that was the way everybody lived. I just accepted that's the way you live. Outwardly you're nice, you're kind, you're smiling, you're friendly and inwardly you keep down all the resentment and all the jealousy you feel for these people who are your friends, so you just hold it all in. You're kind of encouraged to do that, aren't you?

Even the books that come out nowadays, on the renewal of the mind or the control of the feelings; they all kind of encourage you to feel that's what all of us are doing. All of us are on the outside very civilized

people, very nice people but inside we're monsters. And what you ought to do with that beast within you is to work on it, just keep working on it, keep working on it. Read a book on how to renew the mind. Keep trying to think better thoughts. Read a book on how to control your feelings. Read all the, you know, the endless articles in Reader's Digest on how to get yourself to love people. Well don't think of their bad points, think of the good things. Always think of the good things. So you always think of the good things and you keep wondering what do I do about all the bad things I'm thinking of as well.

So, you turn yourself into all kinds of contortions, don't you, to try to clean up the inside. I don't know, loved ones, if you're like me, 10 to 15 years after I set out on that job, I seemed to be worse than when I started. It seemed I could not get hold of these feelings inside me. I thought I would get hold of jealousy and I would get it under control and then I would find the pride springing up. Then I'd concentrate on the pride and I'd read books on pride and books on how to do it yourself and I'd get control of the pride and then the bad temper would spring up. Then I'd concentrate on the bad temper, and I'd go through all those recommendations they give you, how to control yourself, don't think of what is annoying you; don't think about it. Think of what is bright and happy and what's good. I'd go through all that business and I'd get the temper organized and here the old jealousy was up again. I'd just kept going around with hands, hands, hands, trying to keep the lids on the barrel.

That's really what it was like, you know; it really was. It was as if the minister was coming in to visit me and I thought boy, I'd better have everything organized, but I have this massive German shepherd dog that just bounded round everywhere. I mean, I knew he'd be up licking the minister's face. So I put him in this big chest and put the lid down on him and I would bring the minister in and I would sit on the chest, you know, and pretend everything is okay, except that old dog is popping up from time to time and I'm going up and down and saying, oh! And that's what it was like; that's what it was like in my life.

So you could talk about the subconscious and the unconscious and you could tell me to try harder, but from time to time, that was the tragedy; from time to time those feelings would come out. I don't know, you guys, I mean, you have to be the same as I was. You have to be the same. Sure you didn't read the magazines, you didn't go to the 'X' movies, but it was in your heart all the time. It was there and every time you saw somebody beautiful, when you should be thanking God for something beautiful that he had made, this old lust was again knocking up against the lid of the chest and trying to get through.

I don't know about you, but I think with many of us, it's just lack of opportunity, isn't it? It's just lack of opportunity; We're just afraid or we're scared, that's what holds us back. I mean, ladies, I'm sure you have the same difficulty, but I know how often the old criticism thing got hold of me. I felt deep down that I did really know what was right and what was wrong. I knew that I wasn't altogether right in God. So I felt the only way to prove myself better than everybody else is to prove that I can see what's wrong with them and that's why that criticism riles inside you, it's ready to spark out at any moment.

With me, it would just spark out, you just make that caustic comment that would in your opinion put that person right in his place, but of course, just destroyed the whole conversation. It was just so filled with irritability and anger and resentment, the comment that you thought to yourself, everybody must see it. They all must see it. You were kind of relieved that they didn't appear to notice how sharp your comment was, but you knew what it spoke. It spoke of a massive attitude of criticism inside you towards that person. So you would try to love people and you tried to be everybody's friend. You tried to be a faithful husband and a faithful wife, but really, there was this mass of stuff inside you that had never been dealt with.

Loved ones that was my experience. Now, I would dare to say that there are others in this room this morning who have the same experience. There's no question in your mind that you believe in God. There's no question in your mind that you believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world. There's maybe even no question in your mind that you believe that He's your Savior. Because obviously, those people did who were converted by Philip. Even Simon, the guy who was a magician, he even believed that Jesus was God's son and they were baptized in Jesus' name. I dare say that many of us here have either been baptized as infants in the Lutheran Church or baptized as adults in Baptist Church and we knew that God is our Father and we knew that our sins are forgiven. We even believe we're going to heaven but, our lives inside in our secret hearts are a continual offense to God and are a continual worry to ourselves.

I'll tell you how I did it. I don't know how you're doing it. I rationalized. I began to rationalize. I was in disorder in my personal life. I argued well, you can't be kind of a poetic, intuitional, inspirational, type you know, and be absolutely in order in your own life. So I argued that's just my personality. After all the great artists get irritable from time to time. They're so demanding, you know. They have such a sense know of perfection that they can't avoid it. It just shows you how great they are. So, I rationalized my sin, because that's what it was, you know.

All right, I wasn't drinking myself to death every night. I wasn't committing adultery with somebody else every night. I wasn't doing those things, but inwardly, I had those feelings and attitudes which are called in the New Testament, "the marks" or "the works" of the flesh. Envy, jealousy, strife, selfishness, resentment, those things. I had those inside. Those I knew were sin as really as Sirhan Sirhan's action was a sin; as really as Oswald's action was a sin, those were sin. It was just nobody else saw them except the only person that mattered, He saw them and He saw them night and day because they were there continually in me. I just rationalized them. I said, well irritability, it's the kind of thing a fellow like me can't avoid. In this society, who can be absolutely clean in their thinking? If you're red blooded at all, you're bound to have a few stray thoughts here and there. You can't avoid it. That's what I did. I rationalized as much of the sin within as I possibly could. I rationalized it and called it "infirmities" or "little personality traits" or "little inexpediencies".

Now it always gives me problems because, we'll I show you, if you'd look at that Galatians chapter, that was one of the ones that drove me crazy. It would have been all right if God had stuck with those outward, those big sins. You know, anybody can see a murder as a sin, especially when you're free from it, you're okay. But this Galatians 5 was miserable. Verse 19 is really the place to begin.

Now the works of the flesh are plain. Fornication. Well I felt, you know, that's outward, promiscuity, so I wasn't guilty of that. Impurity. Well, yes, but maybe that was just a personality trait. Licentiousness. Well I didn't think I was very licentious. Idolatry, no. I mean I never saw the devotion to the car or the motorbike as idolatry. Sorcery, good I'm clear of that. Enmity. I mean, you could work yourself up to hostility for people. I don't know about you, if you've ever had a carnal fit. Have you ever had a carnal fit? Really, where you just sit at home and you boil and seethe against that boss who did that thing to you or that guy who did that thing or that wife or that child and you just boil inside and seethe. You know, it's as if you're right there and you go through the whole argument with them, as if they're present. That kind of thing; enmity I knew. Strife, I knew. Jealousy, I certainly knew.

Whenever you saw somebody who was really better than you, but you were convinced of course or you couldn't admit that they were better than you, so you were jealous and you convinced yourself that "yeah, yeah, they may be able to sing, but look at the way they dress!" So... so jealousy was just a continual kind

of self-defense thing. Anger, Yes that was there all the time. Anger, selfishness, dissention, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. Now, of course the next sentence I mean was "Doom to me!" I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Well, I just ignored that part, I just ignored that. I said that Jesus covered that, I just said Jesus covers... Jesus blood covers that and therefore that doesn't apply to me. I was continually concerned because Paul had written that to a church at Galatia "but loved ones, that's the way I lived my life."

I don't know what you do with the things you do think are sins. I'll tell you what I did! I kept confessing and kept confessing. I confessed and confessed and confessed and confessed, but you know what you do when you do that. You know what happens. Then there it becomes again, you confess it, but it's purely a verbal exercise, you're no longer thinking it important to confess that. I began to see that, that if every time I'm angry, I'm putting a sword into the side of my Savior Jesus, then what I'm doing is getting used to doing that and like a surgeon who cuts people's bodies, but does not feel the pain themselves, I'm getting to the dangerous point where I'm crucifying my Savior anew day after day, confessing it, but not feeling any remorse for it or any repentance.

So, loved ones that was my life. I rationalized away the sin that I could, calling it personality traits and inexpediencies and justifying it even though I saw that in the Bible it was regarded as anything but sin. The things I did really regard as sins I just kept confessing. Though the confessing was becoming more and more meaningless to me. Loved ones, I think that there are many of you here this morning who are probably living like that. I think many of you have got to the point where you've said: "well, that's the life, that's this Christian life". Of course when you say that, you're contradicting this whole Book, which from beginning to end talks about having a clean heart and loving God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and having your life filled with love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness and goodness, and Jesus saying "if you're angry with your brother, you're guilty of a judgement. If you look on their woman with lust your eyes, you've committed adultery with her in your heart" and the Bible is full of those things!

Now, if you're doing that, you're having the same experiences I had. I begun to doubt more and more that God really existed... because I was repeatedly contradicting the things that He had said were true. So it was beginning to affect my own intellectual awareness of God. I did what I'm sure you've done, I read the books, I read the books incessantly. It's just... there are more of them now, do you realize that? There are more people trying to get us to be what God wants us to be without Jesus. There are! There are more books than ever on how to control your temper, how to influence your temperament, how to renew your mind, all kinds of gimmicky little extensions of Dale Carnegie's, "how to stop worrying and start living". The tragedy is many of them do kind of improve the situation, that's right. They kind of improve it, so that you don't have a group of Christians now who have outwardly stainless lives and inwardly have temperaments that are boiling and seething, no! You have many, many Christians now that have outward lives that are pretty reasonable and look pretty good and inside their temperament, there's a kind of lid on it. It's lid! It's only repression and suppression.

Repression is an unconscious suppression. A repression and a suppression and a kind of disciplining of themselves that they have to keep on reading the books, they have to keep on having plenty of fellowship, they have to keep on doing things that make them feel good inside. So they have an appearance of victory within, except that you'll notice they always rebel against any implication that we should be perfect even as our Heavenly Father is perfect. That's right. They'll always do that. They'll go with you up to a point on this business up here which had a victory over anger and jealousy until they come to the point where you quote Jesus words "be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect, which is perfect in love of

course", Jesus elaborates. That they don't like that, because that means that you should always want the best for other people... doesn't matter who they are.

It doesn't matter if it's boss that's just fired you. It doesn't matter if it's your friend who has just criticized you behind your back. It doesn't matter if it's somebody else who has been unfaithful to you. You should always think the best of them and want the best. From where? "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, from the bottom of your heart..." from the bottom of your heart! And many, loved ones, who are Christians today know that they don't do that. They know that the only way they can live in victory is the jealousy springs up and there they go into the old sparring match with jealousy. They get out the right book and they read how they... "now, think, you're just an ordinary person, you're the same as everybody else, you're no better than anybody else, there's no reason for you to be jealous, now renew your feelings of jealousy, change them, replace them with good feedings". They go through all those exercises and they know but they haven't real victory, they haven't really a clean heart. They have a heart that's kind of dirty! But he's telling "the dirt comes up", they slam it down and they fight it. Loved ones, that's not God's victory! That isn't God's victory!

You know, I know some of you when you hear me saying this, they say "oh, don't lay that on me, I'm coming under conviction, don't, don't, don't make me sad!" I'm making you sad, so that you'll get glad and hoping that you won't get mad in between! Loved ones, I'm telling you straight, that's a counterfeit! That's it! Now, don't sit there and say "oh, I'm doing my best, I'm doing my best and you're beating me down and I'm still doing my best." Loved ones, I'm telling you you're doing your best with human efforts. You are receiving forgiveness of sins by faith, but you're not are not receiving a cleansed heart by faith. That's it, that's what I'm telling you. I'm not laying more on you, I'm saying to you that when Jesus died on Calvary He took your heart with Him, and He destroyed it! That's it! And that is to be received by faith into your life, just the same way as you receive forgiveness of sins.

If you keep on hearing me saying that and say "yeah, yeah, well, it's a nice metaphor he told, the statement that my old self was crucified with Christ, yeah, I see how my heart was kind of crucified with Jesus and destroyed, now I have to make that real in my life." No, you haven't, you haven't. That is a miracle that is worked by the Holy Spirit in you, in a mighty work of grace. That's it. You don't read books to get control of the jealousy, you don't read books to clean up your mind. You go to the Holy Spirit who is inside you, who has enabled you to be born of God and you say "Holy Spirit, You said You'd lead me into all truth, that's what Jesus said about You, now will You go through the depths of my heart, that heart of darkness and will You show me what my sins look like in God's eyes? And will You take me down underneath the subconscious into my mode of life and the place where my reactions and my responses dwell, the place where I have not surrendered to God and will You expose that to me until I am so sick of it that I am willing to accept the only remedy that ever solves the problem?" That's it, loved ones! And you have to want to, I agree. You have to want to. The Holy Spirit will not do what you don't want him to do. So you have to want to. So you have to see first of all that you are a dirty sinner and rebel against God in your heart. You have to stop rationalizing the old sins and pretending that those things are not sin, you have to want to be clean. That's why God's words said "if you seek Me with all your heart, you'll surely find Me".

Loved ones, our Father is not hiding from us, He's looking for you harder than you are looking for Him. You just have to want to be clean with all your heart. Start with the Holy Spirit. Start asking Him that. Secondly, see what God says about that self of yours. Romans (8:7) says "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God" it is not subject to God's Law, neither indeed can it be. Just see that. Stop that play acting "oh, yeah, have a wee bit of trouble with sex, have a wee bit of trouble with anger, a wee bit of trouble with

jealousy". Stop that silliness! God's word is plain, the only reason there's sin inside anyone one of us is because our heart is rebellious against God, it is not subject to God's Law and it can not be, and see that it cannot be. See that your heart that you have developed over the years of your life cannot be subject to God. That's why you have such problems.

That's why you think you have it fixed and then it bounces up again. It cannot be! All your doing is making the outside of look better, but you're not curing it, you're not cleansing it. You're not shooting the massive German shepherd dog, you're just holding a lid on top of him and sitting on the lid hoping to hold him down. Your heart, your selfish heart wants only one thing: you! That's right! That's why we're in such trouble. We say all these wonderful things you know "oh, I want to serve the Lord! Oh, I love the Lord with all my heart! Oh, Hallelujah!" Inside there's a whole level of life that says "I love me with all my heart! I want me exalted! Hallelujah for me! I praise me!" That's it, that's it! And you see, while you are pretending that doesn't exist and that these sins are just things that you have to work through, you're on Satan's side. You're protecting that thing. You alone can protect it. You alone can hand that heart over to Jesus. Only you, nobody else can. He won't take it from you.

You must see that mind of the flesh is enmity against God and then you'll remember the thing that brought me such hope when I read it in Romans (6:6): "Our own self was crucified with Christ" it was like water to a thirsty soul in the desert. I suddenly realized they're meaning some cosmic miracle, God was able to foresee the kind of heart I would develop inside and He actually put that into His Son and destroyed it in Jesus. Suddenly I saw, you mean that this can come in a moment to me? This can come in a moment, if it's been done in Jesus, I can receive it by faith in a moment! You mean I don't have to go through years and years of struggling and fighting and defeat? And suddenly I realized: yeah, that's right. That Jesus bore our sins, but He bore our own self.

Loved ones, you have no idea how clean you can be. That's right. You have no idea how clean you can be! You don't, you don't... you keep on thinking: "well, if I clean myself up, I could be quite clean." But you have no idea how clean you could be and you have no idea what it is to be clean, to smell clean. You have no idea how good it is to be clean, clean, clean with God's cleanness. That's what Calvary talks about... that dear old heart of yours, that keeps sniping at your friends and that gives you such trouble with unclean thoughts and with anger and pride and jealousy and with resentment, that heart was put into Jesus and was destroyed. As he rose from the dead, you rose with Him and there's a clean heart that Jesus can impart to you through the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That's the step that I saw, if that happened on Calvary was I willing to reckon my self dead indeed on to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, and that's the heart of it. Why you and I have trouble with sin is because we really don't love God and because we really don't want to live for Him, that's it.

I remember back there in Belfast, I remember shortly after I gave my life to Jesus, I remembered it occurring to me "what would it be like to live your whole life only for Jesus? Thinking only of him determined only to please Him" and I remember I then thought, I almost remember the night I thought it. I thought "but what about the other guys, we're all heading for University and we're heading for our careers and nobody else who's giving their life to Jesus, has done that. They're all getting on with their own lives, they're taking care of their own plans for their careers and they're doing a bit of work for God on the side." And I remember determining that's what I would do, too. Loved ones, that's why! That's why we have trouble with sin because although we give something to God, we give most to ourselves and we're really living for ourselves and not for God alone. That's the heart of it. To have your heart cleansed by faith, to have the old self inside you finally resurrected in Jesus, clean and new, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit,

you have to be willing to live your life for the purpose for which it was created for your God, for your Creator, for His pleasure, not for your own. That's it.

When we sin, we sin just because we care for our own pleasure more than we care for God's. So I put it to you, you know. Would you stop first of all defending yourselves? Would you stop defending the defeated Christian life? Because it's a blasphemy! It's nothing to do with Christianity, it's a counterfeit! And then would you decide in your own heart, do you really want to live a clean life? Do you really want to be clean inside? Whether anybody sees inside or not, do you really want to be clean inside so that you feel clean and you love people because you feel love? Do you want to live that life where there are no shades of grey, where you're not constantly justifying yourself in feeling a little tinge of resentment or anger? Would you like to live in the Light? Oh, loved ones, you'll live longer for one thing. Less strain, less worry, less anxiety, you'll live longer, but you live a fuller life. You'll be free to be what you are and not have to keep watching for yourself. Do you want that? Well, loved ones, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit as those dear people were under Peter and John, you have to decide: are you willing to live for Jesus only? For Him alone? Are willing to live your live your life for God and for Him only? Are you? If you are He'll fill you with the Holy Spirit and He'll cleanse your heart by faith. He will do a job that no other book writer or preacher, no other psychologist or councillor can come anywhere near doing.

Loved ones, it is for you, it is. I know I shouldn't ask for questions, but boy I'd love to ask for questions, but loved ones will you... will you be real? Be real! Anything else isn't worth the name of Christianity, it isn't! I'll go on saying that even as I go down, honestly. It isn't, it isn't! Only real Christianity is worth going for and you remember what I think it was Chambers who said: "if this is all there is to Christianity, then I don't want it." And oh, that's the way I felt before Jesus dealt with me in the Holy Spirit. If this is all there is, this struggling against these feelings inside, then it's not worth it. Loved ones, it isn't, because that isn't Christianity. Christianity is not only receiving the forgiveness of sins by faith, but receiving a clean heart by faith and the same conditions are fulfilled. Confess what your need is, turn honestly from self and give yourself wholly to God and He will cleanse your heart.

Let us pray. Dear Father, you alone can do this in each one of our lives and you are dependant upon our hunger and our willingness, but Lord I would pray that You would meet us all this morning, through the plain words of Scripture that sin is rebellion against You and in any form it is wrong and can never be defended. Lord that, for us, it is either Hell or Heaven, it is either sin or obedience, it is either dependence on the world or dependence on God. No, Father I pray that You will keep after each one of us because You love us so much until we are ready to see that the only way to victory is through the Cross and through the mighty miracle, which you did in Jesus. Lord we pray this for each one of us this day and each one of us will deal with you this day on these issues of a clean heart. 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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