

# We Need a Clean Heart

by Ernest O'Neill

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of seeking a clean heart through the Holy Spirit rather than relying on self-effort and rationalization of sin.*

**Duration:** 33:46

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:19

**Topics:** "Inner Transformation", "Spiritual Renewal"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares their personal journey of transformation through God's intervention in their life. They talk about struggling with inward issues such as a bad temper and jealousy, and trying various methods to control their emotions. Despite their efforts, they found that these feelings would still resurface from time to time. The speaker emphasizes the importance of addressing the inward problem and invites the audience to reflect on their own lives and the need for inner transformation.

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## Transcript

Last Sunday, I tried to share a little of my own life story with you. And you remember the change that took place in my life was when God began to deal with the inward problem that I had. And I thought it would just be good maybe to spend one more Sunday giving you a chance to decide about yourself.

Because I would tell you plainly that I think I was, there's 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. And I think outwardly, you know, I look pretty good.

And 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. And 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. And I'll tell you, it was just torture.

It really was. I took it for granted that 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 that you feel for these people who are your friends. And you just hold it all

in.

And you're kind of encouraged to do that, aren't you? Because 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 monstrosity 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 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? And you turn yourself into all kinds of contortions, don't you, to try to clean up the inside. And I don't know, loved ones, if you're like me.

10, 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 the jealousy and I would get it under control and then I would find the pride springing up.

And 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. And 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.

And I'd go through all that business and I'd get the temper organized and here the old jealousy was up again. And I just kept going round with hands, hands, hands, trying to keep the lids on the barrel. And 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 had this massive Alsatian dog that just bounded round everywhere and 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'd bring the minister in and I'd sit on the chest, you know, and pretend everything's okay. Yet, that old dog is 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. 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. And I don't know.

You guys, I mean, you have to be the same as I was. You have to be the same. But 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 down 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. And 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.

It's just, it doesn't, or we're afraid, we're scared. But that's what holds us back. And 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. And 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 so while that criticism riles inside you, it's ready to spark out at any moment. And with me, it would spark out. You just make that caustic comment that would, in your opinion, put that person right in his place.

But that, 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.

And 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.

And so you would try to love people and you try to be everybody's friend and you try to be a faithful husband and a faithful wife. But really, there was this mess of stuff inside you that had never been dealt with. And loved ones, that was my experience.

And 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 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.

And I dare say that many of us here have been either baptized as infants in Lutheran church or baptized as adults in Baptist church. And we know that God is our Father. And we know that our sins are forgiven.

And we know we're going to heaven. But our lives inside, in our sacred 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.

And so, I argued, that's just my personality. After all, all great artists get irritable from time to time. They're so demanding, you know.

They have such a sense of perfection that they can't avoid it. It just shows you how great they are. And so, I rationalized my sin.

Because that's what it was, you know. Alright, 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. And 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.

And I rationalized them. I said, well, irritability is the kind of thing a fella like me can't avoid. And 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. And 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, well, I'll show you. If you'd look at that Galatians chapter, that was one of the ones that drove me crazy.

It would have been alright 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. It's page 1015, loved ones, in that RSV.

Galatians 5 and 19. 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, yeah, 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, enmity. I mean, you could work yourself up into a 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. And, 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 a 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. And so it was, so jealousy was just a continual kind of self-defense thing.

Anger, anger, that was there all the time. Anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. And, 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 bit. I mean, 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 it to a church at Galatia.

But, loved ones, that's the way I lived my life. And I don't know what you do with the things you do, thinkersins. I'll tell you what I did.

I kept confessing, kept confessing. I confessed and confessed and confessed and confessed. But you know what to do when you do that.

You know what happens. Eventually, it becomes a game. You confess it, but it's purely a verbal exercise.

You're no longer thinking it important to confess that. And 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. I'm like a surgeon who cuts people's bodies, but does not feel the pain himself.

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. And so, loved ones, that was my life. I rationalized away the sin that I could, calling it personality traits and inexpediences and justifying it, even though I saw that in the Bible it wasn't regarded as anything but sin.

And 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. And I think many of you have got to the point where you've said, well, that's the life.

That's the Christian life. And 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, goodness. And Jesus saying, if you're angry with your brother, you're guilty of the judgment.

If you look on a woman to lust in her, you've committed adultery with her in your heart. And the Bible is full of those things. And so, if you're doing that, you're having the same experience as I had.

I began to doubt more and more that God really existed. Because I was repeatedly contradicting the things that He had said were true. And so, it was beginning to affect my own intellectual awareness of God.

And 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 old Carnegie's how to stop worrying and start living. And the tragedy is, many of them do kind of ameliorate the situation.

That's right. They kind of ameliorate 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 a lid.

It's really repression and suppression. Repression is an unconscious suppression. It's a repression and a suppression and a kind of disciplining of themselves, but 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. And 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 of, yeah, we should have victory over anger and jealousy until they come to the point where you quote Jesus' words, be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect, which is perfect in love, of course, Jesus elaborates.

And that they don't like because that means that you should always want the best for other people. Doesn't matter who they are. Doesn't matter if it's the boss that's just fired you.

Doesn't matter if it's your friend who has just criticized you behind your back. 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 that jealousy springs up and there they go into the old sparring match with jealousy. And they get out the right book and they read how they 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 feelings. Want the best.

And they go through all those exercises. And they know that. That they haven't real victory.

They haven't really a clean heart. They have a heart that's kind of dirty. But each time 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. And you know, I know some of you when you hear me saying this, you think, 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 the 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're receiving forgiveness of sins by faith, but you're not receiving a cleansed heart by faith.

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. But you keep on hearing me saying that and say, yeah, yeah, well, it's a nice metaphorical statement, that my old self was crucified with Christ.

Yeah, and I see how my heart was kind of crucified with Jesus and destroyed. No, I have to make that real in my life. No, you haven't.

That is a miracle that is worked by the Holy Spirit in you in a mighty work of grace. 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 I appear 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. Now, 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.

And 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 Word 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're 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 and 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, I have a wee bit of trouble with sex. I have a wee bit of trouble with anger.

I have a wee bit of trouble with jealousy. Stop that silliness. God's Word is plain.

The only reason there's sin inside any one of us is because our heart is rebellious against God. It is not subject to God's law. Indeed, it cannot 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 you're doing is ameliorating the situation.

You're not curing it. You're not cleansing it. You're not shooting the Alsatian dog.

You're holding a lid on top of it and sitting on it, hoping to hold it 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, 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're pretending that 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. See that that mind of the flesh is enmity against God.

And then you remember the thing that brought me such hope. When I read in that Romans 6 and 6, our old self was crucified with Christ. It was like water to a thirsty soul in the desert.

I suddenly realized, you mean in 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. And suddenly I saw, you mean this can come in a moment to me? This can come in a moment. If it's being 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 old 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 cleaned 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. And that's what Calvary, that 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.

And 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. And that's the step that I saw. If that happened on Calvary, was I willing to reckon myself dead indeed unto 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. Because I remember back there in Belfast, I remember shortly after I gave my life to Jesus, I remember 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 has

given 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 though we give something to God, we give most to ourselves. And we're really living for ourselves and not for God alone.

And 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 yourself? 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 and 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'll 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 you willing to 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 and He will do a job that no other book writer or preacher, no other psychologist or counselor 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 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 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 dependent upon our hunger and our willingness.

But, Lord, I would pray that you would conference 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. And, 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. And, O 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, that each one of us will deal with you this day on these issues of a clean heart. And 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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