

What Is the Normal Christian Life?

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon explores the true nature of the Christian life, emphasizing the need for genuine repentance and belief to experience lasting peace and freedom from sin through Jesus Christ.

Duration: 32:52

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 7:4-8

Topics: "Sanctification", "Sinful Nature"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the misconception that Romans 7 describes the normal Christian life. He explains that in Romans 6, Paul talks about how Jesus' death freed believers from the power of their old sinful selves. The speaker emphasizes the need for believers to recognize the self-centeredness within them and turn to God as the center of their lives. He also highlights the importance of the law in making believers realize their inability to control their sinful nature. The sermon concludes with the acknowledgment that only through Jesus Christ can believers be delivered from their sinful selves.

Transcript

I thought, loved ones, I should talk about real affection next Sunday and talk about something else this morning. Are you at peace with your Maker now? Are you at peace with your Maker? Do you know that you'll go to heaven when you die? Do you know that Jesus knows you? I mean, have you a sense, yes, I know he knows me. We are on personal terms with each other.

Now, last Sunday, we talked about the two steps that you need to take if you want to answer yes to those questions. If you want to be able to say, yes, I am at peace with my Maker. I do know that I will make heaven my home.

I do know my sin is forgiven. We talked about the two steps, remember. We said, first, you had to repent.

That is, you had to look at the things that you'd been doing in your life up to now that you know disobey God's will and his law for you, and you had to repent of those, the acts and the thoughts and the words that you've done. You had to turn from them, stop doing them. That's one part of repentance.

And then, you remember, the other part we talked about was, see that inside you is a whole attitude that is the real heart of sin. It's an attitude that of a God, really. And you need to see inside you that the reason you have disobeyed God in the past is that you have very much the attitude yourself of a God.

You want your own way often, and you want people to often treat you in the way that really God wants them to treat him. And so you need to see that. You need to see inside you is a great self-centered, self-gratifying monster that is really opposed to God himself, and you need to turn from that and to turn to God and treat God as God and the center of the universe and not yourself.

And then, you remember, the second step was believe. Believe that that sinful self inside you is so diametrically opposed to God that the only thing he can do if he wants to exist in the universe is to destroy it, but the two can't exist in the one universe. And so he's committed to destroy it.

But instead of destroying it in you, which would have meant your being wiped out too, he transferred you in it into his son and he destroyed it there. And you have to believe that gospel. You have to believe that that monster in you has been destroyed in Jesus.

And that's how a person can be a Christian. When you do that, a spirit of peace with God comes into your heart. Just the way when you have tension between you and a friend and you sort the thing out, there comes a great relaxation.

So it is with your maker. A great spirit of peace with God and a great spirit of love for him and for other people comes into your heart. Now, I want to talk this morning, loved ones, about another tragedy that occurs in the lives of many thousands who take those steps.

Really. A tragedy that exists at present in many thousands of lives of people who regard themselves as Christians. And it's this.

It doesn't last. It doesn't last. I don't know if some of you are here this morning, but I know thousands of people who have taken those steps of repenting and believing the gospel.

And they've experienced peace for a while with God. And they've experienced a love for other people. But as the weeks went by and the months went by, they began to be aware again that there was still something evil inside them.

And they began to realize that there was something inside that had not been touched and that still wanted its own way and still rose up and wanted to attack other people and wanted to be respected and looked up to like God. And there are many thousands of Christians who have struggled those first two steps and then have suddenly begun to realize that there's still something evil inside them that has not been dealt with. And what I want to share with you this morning is the tragedy is that many of them and many of you are in the grip of that thing because of deception.

God is allowing that to take place in you to show you why his son really had to die. But you and I and thousands of others don't realize that. And so we kind of rationalize it.

So we have a measure of victory over outward sin and we kind of hold our tongue when we need to and we control our temper as much as we can. But underneath there is this stuff rising inside us wanting to be angry, wanting to get irritable, wanting to be unclean. And we keep holding it down and we think to ourselves, this is it.

This is the best that you've got. And so we rationalize it and we pretend at times it isn't so bad and we pretend it isn't really sin. And then we make the great pretense of all.

We pretend that the Bible teaches that that's the normal Christian life. Now, I'd like to show you why we believe that. And I hope, loved ones, that during this few minutes together, I'll show you why that's a misinterpretation of this dear book.

So I'll show you the chapter that we all use to defend that miserable, defeated Christian life. It's in Romans and it's chapter 7. And it's page 982. Romans 7 and it's page 982.

And most children of God who have taken the first steps to become his children and become born of God, they know they have within them a conflict that is breaking them up and is destroying their victory. But they say, well, I mean, Paul had that. And they go to verse 15 and they say, look, that's just me.

I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want. But I do the very thing I hate. And they say, now, that's Paul, an apostle.

He said that. And that's, he's speaking as a Christian, isn't he? And now I feel the way he does in verse 16. Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good and that's right.

I'm for it. I want to be good. So, you see, it's not really my fault.

And that's what we get ourselves into. It's not my fault, you see. It's my sinful nature.

The good bit of me that is born of God, that doesn't want to do that, you see. And that's the bit that will go to heaven. But this sinful nature, that's the bit that makes me angry and irritable and bad-tempered.

But, you see, it's not really me. And they go to the next verse in 17. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.

And you know, loved ones, that's exactly what we say. We say, you see, it isn't me. It's sin which dwells within me.

And then the verse 18, for I know that nothing good dwells within me that is in my flesh. And some of us call it our flesh, you see. So we divide ourselves into a good nature and a sinful nature.

We divide ourselves into spirit and flesh. We divide ourselves into the bit that's born of God and the bit that's not born of God. And we plant all on the old Mr. Hyde.

We say, alright, the bad temper, the anger, the jealousy comes from Mr. Hyde. That monster within me that will not be touched by God and cannot be touched until I get to heaven. That sinful nature, my flesh, that's the stuff that's making me sin.

I myself, I'm Dr. Jekyll. I am born of God. And the real me wants to be good and wants to obey, and that bit is good.

Of course, one of the tragedies is the pervy souls outside the church, they haven't learned that kind of tricky logic. And they don't distinguish between you and yourself. And they don't make any distinction between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

And when you lose your temper in the office or you indulge in kind of gossip and criticism, it's all one to them, you know. It's you. It's you, the Christian.

But loved ones, you know that we tend to align ourselves with old Paul here. And we say, now that's right, in verse 19, boy, that is me. I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Now, if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. And we all get back to that, it's sin that's doing this, it's not me. I myself am born of God, but sin is still evil, and that still dwells within me, and it will dwell within me until we meet God face to face.

And then we can describe it, of course, in great detail in 21. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. So I want to love somebody, but I find another kind of spirit rising up inside me, well, what's so precious about them? And you find another kind of critical spirit rising up.

For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, and inside I want to love them, but I see in my members, in my personality, in my mind, my emotions, in my arms, my legs, and my whole personality, I see another law at war with the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. It's as if, you know, I'm trying to work from inside, from God, but my whole personality is still working from outside, still looking at the other people, still trying to get satisfaction from them, trying to get pleasure from them, trying to get them to look up to me. I know it doesn't really matter what they think of me, and I believe that.

I believe it from my inside heart that it's only what God thinks is important, but I find another law at work in my members. Even my little eye is kind of looking out to see, are they praising me? Are they approving me? So I see in my members, in my eyes, in my head, in my arms, in my legs, they seem to act without my direction, and they're always acting on the old plan, where I used to treat the world as God and other people's opinions as God. And that's what he means, you see, and I think many of us say that.

I find a law at work in my members that is at war with the law of my mind. And then in verse 24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? And loved ones, there are thousands of children of God that say, there it is in black and white. That's my life.

Oh, sure, I'll get to heaven, and I have my sins forgiven, and I have a measure of victory outside. But I so often feel with Paul, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? And so many of us believe that's it. That is it.

That's the best the Christian life has to offer. It's what Paul experienced. It's what I experienced.

It's what everybody that I've ever talked to who know Jesus, it's what they experienced. Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death? There's no way out of this except death itself. That'll take the body away, maybe.

And then I'll be clear of it. And nobody ever seems to see that that's verse 24. And that there is, in fact, a verse 25.

But there is something in our hearts, loved ones, that wants to pretend that verse 24 is the end. You know, there is. It's not just an intellectual misunderstanding.

Really, it isn't. We misunderstand what we want to misunderstand, you know. But it's not the end of the chapter, loved ones.

Verse 25. Who shall deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. But if you say that to anybody, especially if you say it to yourself, yourself will come back and say, yeah, yeah, but you see, that's 25A.

Look at 25B. So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. And so most of us say, you see, when he said, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, he didn't mean that you were saved and delivered from this power of sin inside you.

He just meant, you see, I'm still in the same situation. I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. But because Jesus died for me, God forgives the whole lot.

That's it. So it doesn't actually change the situation. It just means I keep on being bound by this sin within me, but I'm forgiven because of Jesus.

So that's why I say, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, it doesn't seem to occur to us too much that his question actually is, who will deliver me from this body of death? It's not, who will forgive me for being in this body of death? Who will accept me despite the fact that I'm bearing the agony of this body of death? He's asking the question, who will deliver me from this body of death? And he replies, thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But because of 25B, so many of us say, well, you see, I mean, he's just saying I'm in the same boat.

It's just that God forgives me because of Jesus. But loved ones, if 25B is the normal Christian life, now look at it. So then I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

If that's the normal Christian life, then all such Christians will die according to what Paul says a few verses later in Romans 8. Now look, Romans 8 and verse 13. Romans 8 and 13. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

And there you see in 25B of the previous chapter he says, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. And he says in Romans 8 and 13, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

So you have a problem. Paul says the normal Christian life is you live in the flesh, and then a few verses later he says anybody who lives in the flesh will die. But not only loved ones have your problems with Romans 8, but you have gross problems with Romans 6. Now look at Romans 7 for instance, verse 23.

See the description there. Verse 23 of Romans 7. But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Now that's a description of captivity, of enslavement to sin.

Now look back at Romans 6 and look at verse 15. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means. Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, as captives, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness.

And then verse 17. But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed. And having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Now loved ones, that's a direct contradiction to what he says in Romans 7. I see a law at work making me captive to the law of sin. And in Romans 6 he says you've become free from sin. So this poor guy, he's drunk.

He does not know what he's talking about. Romans 6 he says you're free from sin. Romans 7 he says you're a slave from sin.

And Romans 8 he says if you're a slave to sin, you'll die. I mean, the man, inspired by God, you don't need to be inspired by God to write that stuff. You just need to be schizophrenic.

Insane. So loved ones, do you see there's a difficulty? There's a difficulty. If you're going to say that in Romans 6 Paul teaches freedom from this monster of sin within us, and then Romans 7 he says no, you're not really free, you're back in it and that's the best that I've got.

And then Romans 8 he says if that's the best you've got, you're going to die. It doesn't make sense. There's no sense to it at all.

I mean, you look at Romans 6 and it's an entirely different story. Look at Romans 6 and verse 1. Here there's no, you know, I do not understand my own actions. I do not do the good I want.

Here it's completely the opposite. Verse 1, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may bind? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. He says that's the whole purpose of Jesus dying, that we would be freed from sin.

Now, what's the explanation? How do you explain those contradictions? Well, if this book of Romans is a chronological autobiography of Paul's own experience, it makes no sense. It doesn't. Because in Romans 6 he says, I was freed from this power of anger and irritability within me.

And then Romans 7 he says, now I live right in the middle of it. And then Romans 8 he says, if I do that I'm going to die. It doesn't make any sense if it's a chronological autobiography of Paul's life.

And that's where many of us get caught. We say that. But no one, no theologian, no exegete says that the book of Romans is an autobiography of Paul.

None. Everybody that you speak to will say Romans is the most logical presentation of reality that exists in this world. It's the best theological treatise you could get your hands on.

Nobody will say it's an autobiography of Paul's own personal experience. Well then why does he talk of freedom from this power within us in 6? And then in Romans 7 he seems to give us all the reinforcement for remaining under this sin in our own lives. Well, it's easy.

It's simple. In Romans 6 Paul is talking about how Jesus died for us and how we died with him. And how through that death we were freed from the power of the old self.

That's what he says. We know that our old self was crucified with Christ. Those little eyes that go out looking for the boss's favor, that little eye and that trend of that little eye was crucified with Christ.

And we can experience freedom from it in a moment by faith. That little bit of you that wants to go out and enjoy lascivious thoughts and lustful feelings, that bit was crucified with Christ and you can have victory over it by believing that in a moment. And that's what he says in Romans 6. And then you see who he turns to in Romans 7 in verse 1. Do you not know brethren? For I am speaking to those who know the law.

Now who were those? Well they were Christians who had been Jews. Do you not know brethren? For I am speaking to those who know the law. You Jews.

That the law is binding on a person only during his life. And in Romans 7 he proceeds to show them how Jesus' death delivered them from the power of evil within them. But now in Romans 7 he shows them how it delivers them from the power of the law to show them how to do good.

And he says you're delivered from the old power of self, you're also now that you're dead with Christ, delivered from the law as the primary guide in your life. Because God is going to put a spirit inside you as he promised in Ezekiel. I'm going to make a new covenant he said in Jeremiah.

I'm going to make a new covenant. Not like the covenant I had with your fathers. I'm going to write my law in your hearts.

And Paul is saying in Romans 6, God through Jesus' death and our death with Christ has delivered us from the power of evil self. And now in Romans 7 he says, and you know, you don't have to now keep looking up the laws to see how to be good. God has put the spirit of his son inside you and you're going to find that your heart wants to do certain things that will please God and you're free now from the law also.

And then he says, now don't say, oh the law was useless then. And he moves into what we call in English writing, you remember in literature, a parenthesis. And he says, no, no, don't say the law was useless.

You don't need it now that the spirit of God is inside you. But I'm putting a parenthesis, now don't say that it was useless. I'll tell you what it did.

And the parenthesis begins in verse 7 of Romans 7. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means. And he, it's a flashback to his days as a Jew living under the law. It's not the report or the account of a Christian at all.

It's a flashback to when he was a Jew. That the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, that's the pre-perfect, that's the past.

If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. As a Jew it was the law that brought the hideousness of that monster sin inside me home to my heart. I should not have known sin.

I should not have known what it is to covet. If the law had not said you shall not covet. But sin, and he then goes on in the parenthesis to describe the hideous situation that a Jew under the law finds himself in.

But sin finding opportunity in the commandment wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Because of course what the old covenant had, it had no power to enable people to live the way God wanted them to. It had only a law that brought home to them their own hideous, hopeless situation without God.

Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law before I was aware of the law, and many of us as natural men. But when the commandment came sin revived and I died.

The very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin finding opportunity in the commandment deceived me and back killed me. So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good.

Don't say it's useless. The law is essential and here's how it's essential. Verse 13.

Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means. It was sin working death in me when I was a Jew through what is good. In order that sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

And that's all the law can do. It can make you realize this is beyond me. I cannot control this evil self inside me.

We know that the law is spiritual but I am carnal, soul under sin. I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. And he goes on to describe the hideous situation of a Jew under the law.

And then he says who will deliver me from this body of death? That's what I thought as a Jew. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And then he summarizes the thing.

So then I of myself, I on my own, uncrucified, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, with my flesh I serve the law of sin. And then he ends the parenthesis and he goes on in Romans 8 and it continues right on from verse 6 of Romans 7. You don't need the law to tell you what is good because there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

And he goes on to describe the life of the spirit. And loved ones, it is a trick of Satan reinforced by so many of our dear churches that has persuaded you and me that Romans 7 is the normal Christian life. It isn't.

The last part of Romans 7 is a great parenthesis describing the situation of a Jew struggling under the law. And if you say to me, well how come so many of us who are children of God identify with it? Because we're often living under the old covenant. We respect the law, we try to obey it, but we cannot obey it.

We have had our sins forgiven, but we have not been delivered from these sinful natures. And we haven't been delivered from our sinful nature because we have never really seen that that's what Christ did for us. When we came to God at the beginning, he said, I've given my son to die for you.

We said, we don't know why, but we believe that and we thank you for your forgiveness. Now, God allows these things to come up in our lives so that we'll see why Jesus died for us. He died to deliver us from that old self inside you and me that makes us get irritable and angry, that makes us disobey God, that makes us eventually fall from our own best ideals.

Loved ones, the glory of the gospel is that not only are our sins forgiven by faith, but our hearts are cleansed by faith. Not only are we freed from the guilt of sin by faith, but we are saved from the power of sin. And the error that you and I make is we think we're saved from the guilt of sin by faith, but we're saved from the power of sin by reading good books, or by exercising our willpower, or by getting into more Bible

study groups, or by getting into a better church.

And the fact is, we're delivered from the power of sin by the same simple method by which we receive the forgiveness of our sins, by faith. By faith that we were crucified with Christ and completely remade. And loved ones, you don't have to labor under that sinful nature.

And that is not the normal Christian life, and it is not a right interpretation of Scripture. And if you say, brother, why do so many believe it? Loved ones, there are thousands down through the centuries that have never believed it. And to be honest with you, those of us who believe it who want to believe it.

If we want to stay with the right to lose our temper or to get angry or to do our own thing or to do what we want with our lives, well, even Satan will wrest Scripture for his own purposes, you know. So I would encourage your dear hearts to, even if you get the tape of this thing and you go over it again, I don't want you to believe me. I want you to look over it and study the Bible and get it for your own self and your own heart so that you're on solid ground when you come before God and say, Lord, I want to be delivered from this self inside me.

And I believe that it was crucified with Jesus through your Holy Spirit. Will you bring me into this by your own power? And God will, you know. He will.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters, and we pray for each other here because we've been under the burden of these misinterpretations for years, and it takes a long while to just get it straight in our minds. And then, Lord, we don't want it to take a long time to get it straight in our own hearts.

Lord, we believe that whatever can be received by faith can be received in a moment. And, O Father, if you destroyed this old self inside me that gives me so much trouble and enables the power of sin to work through my life as if I wasn't born at all of God, then, Lord, will you, by your Holy Spirit, begin to bring me into this this very day. Lord, if all that I have been up to this moment was crucified with Christ, then, thank you, I accept that.

I regard it as dead now and buried, and no self for me to look after but just this body and this mind of which I am the custodian. And, Lord, I intend to treat it like that for your glory. Amen.

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