

How to Become a Christian 1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

... he said, "Look, my Father is the real God but you don't let him be God in your life and because you won't let him be God - he himself has given you up." And Jesus you know, pointed out that there was no other alternative really. Once you had a group of people who wanted to be their own Gods, well it would be like the sun deciding to run in whatever way it wanted throughout the universe. It only has to make a little move and we're burned up or we freeze to death. And if you can image it careering at its own will throughout the universe, it wouldn't be long before it shattered the universe completely and that's why Jesus said, "God had to bring us under condemnation of death once we decided to live without him and be our own gods."

And loved ones, you've seen some of it, you know, in your own homes you know it. Where you've decided to have your own way, you've brought chaos into your home, you have shattered your relationships, you've trampled on top of people. Now, do you see that if God let us continue being our own gods in our own lives we would spread our dirt, and our pollution, and our hatred, and our misery throughout the universe? We have got as far as the Atlantic Ocean with some of our waste oil and I think we'll eventually get as far as space with our garbage. Do you think that if God let it continue there would be no universe left and Jesus says, "Listen, that's why you feel alienated because there's God my Father, has had to condemn you to death and he's only allowing you to live for a little while longer to give you a chance of responding to him."

And this, you know, is the explanation that we found in Romans there, these first three chapters of Romans really explain Jesus' explanation of reality very fully and you have it there in Romans 1:21 where Jesus explains why we feel so alienated and why we feel so lost and lonely. It's not because people won't have anything to do with us or because our parents reject us, or because we have no sense of significance in society, but it's because God himself has rejected us.

It's Romans 1:21, Jesus says this is what we've done, "Although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." And then in Verse 24, "Therefore God gave them up." And you see in Verse 26 again, "For this reason God gave them up." And then in Verse 28 again, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up." And really it's this consciousness deep down that we've been given up by God that makes us feel so alienated.

Brothers and sisters, it's not fear of the mushroom cloud, that's fearful enough. But it's not fear of the mushroom cloud, it's not even fear of death but it's the consciousness planted deep down in us that we know we have run our lives in our own way, and been our own gods, and we're refusing to let God be God in his own universe and therefore we've been rejected by him and we're really under condemnation to destruction, you know.

Now Paul said that in Romans 1:32. He said, men know this. "Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them." And that's why we feel so alienated, we know that this is going to happen to us. In 2:2, "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things." And really we see that it's that consciousness that makes us feel so alienated. No wonder we're having identity crisis, because we're not in the right relationship to the only one who can give us meaning in our universe and we're bound to have an identity crisis, we're bound to be uncertain about where we fit in because

we've rejected the person who knows where we fit in.

Now as we read, you know, and studied Jesus' explanation we began to see that all through this God was anxious to find a way by which he could bring us back to himself, and he was anxious to find a way by which he would not have to destroy us, and by which he could suspend the death penalty long enough to give us a chance to really deal with him again. And you find that running through all Jesus' explanations. But do you see that to just take back his death penalty, to just say, "Listen son, if you want to go right through the universe and destroy all my planets I don't care. I've changed my mind, I'm not going to destroy you any longer."

Then not only the Son but every human being in the universe would say, "He doesn't mean what he says. We don't need to take his justice seriously." And if we can't take his justice seriously why should we take his mercy seriously. And do you see that if God simply changed his mind and said, "Look, murder your way through the whole of the universe if you want, spread your dirt over every planet if you want I don't care. I'm willing to forgive you and take you to myself whatever you're like." Do you see if that happened brothers and sisters we would have gone on destroying, destroying.

But God to be credible at all has to hold to what he said and he said, "Look, I have to destroy any of you who want to be your own gods." And yet God has been anxious all through the ages to find some way of giving us another chance. And you know that Jesus explained to us, "Listen, God has done this, by exercising his judgment upon me instead of you. So that if you are ever in any doubt about whether he hates any independence or rebellion against him, you can look at me. Look, I died in time and space, I died in the heart of God from the foundation of the world, but I died in time and space in the first century AD. And if you're in any doubt that God hates sin and hates rebellion, look, look at what his wrath did to me." And God was able by that means to suspend the death penalty on all of us.

And really dear ones, we live in a time of respite today, you see. We really live in a time of respite when God has suspended the death penalty because Jesus has enabled him to by dying in our place. And this is you know, the faith that we believe. It's the faith that Jesus had died in our place and that God this morning is willing to forgive any of you for your selfishness, and your lust, and your envy, and our jealousy, and your pride, and your desire to make everybody do what you want them to do and he's willing not to destroy you, but to in fact receive you as his own sons and daughters. And it's all because Jesus has enabled him to. Jesus has enabled God to remain a just God and yet forgive us.

Now this morning we're going to study a question that I think comes up, a very obvious question in the light of all that. And it's that question if you'd like to turn to it in Romans 3:31. This is a big moment for us, we're finishing one chapter of Romans. We do it once every year and a half. Romans 3:31, and this is a question I think that is relevant in the light of our faith you see, that God is willing to forgive us because Jesus has died for us. "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." But that's the question, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?"

There are many Christians that think we do. There are many Christians that say this, "God is running something like the selective service board, and he acts something like old General Hershey used to and he's trying to select from the people in the world the best people who can live in his universe forever. And he decided," some Christians say this, "He decided first of all to select

them by law.” And he was a bit like our clever selective service board, they tried first of all you remember, “We’ll take all the people of a certain age who can’t get to college.” And then you remember in this highly civilized and sophisticated society that we have, then they saw that with all our computers a far, far better way for such an intelligent society was to throw all the names into a hat and pick the first 300 out and they would fight.

Well some people feel that God runs the world something like that. God decides first of all, “Alright, I’ll give them 10 commandments and everyone who obeys the 10 commandments, I will receive him into my universe to live with me in infinity and eternity forever and they will help me to subdue to the rest of universe.” And then some Christians argue, he saw after 1500 years of trying that it wasn’t working and that nobody could obey the law and so they say then he came in with this other idea, “Anybody who believes what I have said about my son’s death, I will accept them into my heaven.” And so many Christians argue, you see, Jesus has changed the whole thing for us. 1God once tried the law as a filter, now he tries belief in Jesus so now if you have faith in Jesus you don’t need to bother about the law at all.

Now dear ones, do you see that this is a parody of the whole doctrine of justification by faith. This is a parody of God’s whole plan, he did not work it that way but do you see that that is the kind of believing that has resulted in churches filled with people who believe that Jesus’ death enables them to sin with impunity. You see that? Many of our churches today and the whole attitude that people have of cynicism towards Christians stems from this fact that many Christians honestly believe that the law was tried by God, didn’t work and now he’s set I aside and he says, “You can disobey as much as you want, my Son has died for you. As long you believe that that’s all that matters, I’ll accept you in.” And many Christians therefore, live lives that are not like Christ at all and yet they keep pleading you see, “Ah, God looks at the righteousness of Jesus not at my righteousness.”

In a real way he does do that but not in the way that I’ve outlined and so many people, many Christians even answer Paul, “Do we then overthrow the law by faith?” Of course, we overthrow it. It doesn’t matter whether you commit adultery, it doesn’t matter whether you’re greedy, it doesn’t matter whether you get angry at times, if you believe in Jesus, if you believe that he died for you, that’s the only thing that God requires. It’s just a new condition now that God has laid down.

Now loved ones, it isn’t so you see, that isn’t the situation at all. God has not set aside the law like that and then brought belief in Jesus in in its place. Here’s what happened, God wanted a group of intelligent and spiritual beings who could share with him the fellowship, and the relationship, and the love that he had with his own son. And so he made us out of love. Now, he made us with the capacity to be like him. Obviously, you don’t have too much satisfaction in discussing Sartre with your dog, and it really requires a certain amount of similarity to have any real fellowship, or relationship with another being and for that reason God made us like himself. He made us with minds like his own, and emotions, and with will like his own and he gave us a body.

But he didn’t want to make us a captive audience. He didn’t want to make us a group of people who fellowshiped with him because they could do nothing else, or who were like him because they were just made like him, and so he made us only with a capacity to be like him. And inside us he put something like the womb inside a woman. He put inside us a spirit, a womb that was capable of receiving a real spirit from him inside it. And he then allowed his Son to walk among us, and that’s the meaning of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden you know, Jesus was God’s only Son and he had the unique spiritual uncreated life of God running through his whole being. And this life

contains the genes of God's character and wherever this life comes it takes God's character.

And then God said, "Now you men and women, you must receive this life by choice from my Son. So my Son is going to walk among you and I want you to receive this uncreated spiritual life from my Son into the womb of your own spirit and that Holy Spirit of life that comes from me will enable you to be born again in my image. But I want you to be able to choose to be born. I don't want you to feel you have to be born. I don't want you to be like me because I made you like me. I make you with the capacity to be like me and now you've to choose to opt into my trinity family." And that was God's plan and it was his plan from the very beginning dear ones. And you know what men in fact as a whole have done, they decided they didn't want to take part in anything that would make them as dependent on life from God as that, and they began to take the physical life he had given them, not really realizing it would die out after a matter of 70 years, and they decided, "We'll make do with this, and we'll live our own life as we want, and we'll become like gods without his aid."

And so God was faced with a group of people, a group of men and women who rejected his plan for them and he was faced with the fact that they only had physical life and it was going to die out in a short time. And he was faced with the whole problem of bringing that home to them. And you know what God did, first of all he gave a set of symptoms of spiritual uncreated life to men to show them plainly that they didn't have his own uncreated spiritual life within them. And he said for instances this, "Look, anyone with uncreated spiritual life inside them, anyone who has that kind of life from me will put nobody before me in their own lives. They'll spend no more time, or thought on objects made of wood or steel than they do on me. They won't treat me carelessly or lightly, they won't take my name in vain. They will set one day in seven apart for me. They will honor and love their father and mother. They will not do anything to harm another person by word or deed. They will not have unclean thoughts or actions. They will not deprive others of anything. They will not covet people's positions."

And God said, "Look, if you have this uncreated spiritual life in me then these are the laws that describe the way this life works so you'll be able to tell if you have it or not." And so for 1500 years God allowed us to measure our lives against the law. But do you see dear ones, the law was never a means of salvation. It was always a means to expose sin and you remember, you find that if you'd like to look at it in Romans 3:19, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God." That's the purpose of it all, to stop every mouth and convince everyone that they have not received the uncreated spiritual life of God.

"For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." And the whole purpose of the law was so that we see that we had not received what God wanted us to receive. And then you remember, what he was faced with, he was faced with the fact that he was committed to destroy any being that existed by his own life. He was committed to destroy anyone that did not receive his own life in order to protect his own universe. And unless he did that the whole universe would cry that he was an unjust God that did not keep his promises and did not keep his threats and wasn't worth treating as God and that's why Jesus had to die in our place, so that we would have no doubt that God would destroy everything that did not have his life within it. And God took the lifelessness that you have inside you this morning and put it in Jesus and he destroyed it there in Jesus. And so God is able at this time to give life to any person.

But do you see that the whole purpose of God's creation is that we would receive his life. And the whole purpose of faith is not to believe that because Jesus had died God is able to forgive us,

that's only part of the story, that's only the belief part of faith. The other part of faith is to actually receive the life that caused all the trouble in the first place. In other words, it's no use, it's no use believing that God is able to give you the life if you don't receive the life. And do you see that once you receive this life into you, and the person of the Holy Spirit, do you overthrow the law? No, the law is the description of the way this life works and so if you really exercise faith in Jesus and not only believe he has died so God could forgive you but also actually receive light through the Holy Spirit from God, then those laws will be true of you.

You will find when the Holy Spirit comes into you, that you will in fact put nobody before God. You will in fact find in your own life that you'll spend no more time or thought on objects of wood or steel than you do on God. You'll find that you set one day apart in every seven. You'll find that you don't treat God carelessly or lightly. You'll find that you'll honor and love your father and mother. You'll find that you will not do anything to harm another person. You'll find that you are filled with the very life of God himself and that life is described in the laws, and so you'll find yourself keeping the laws. And when Paul asks, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" If it's real faith that not only believes that Jesus died for you but receives the light that he died so that you could receive. Then you don't overthrow the law by no means. You establish the law, you strengthen the law because every one of us who have received the life of God live that law before people.

Of course you see that that's the way the world is convicted. The world isn't convicted by preachers standing up and thumping the Bible and saying, "You're a bad world, you're a sinful world." The world is convicted because it sees the law alive in other men and women, it sees Christ walking among them and it realizes it should be like that and it should receive this life.

Now dear ones, real faith does not overthrow the law. Real faith establishes the law because real faith is not just believing that Jesus has died for you. John 1:12 describes what real faith is, "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God." And it's receiving, it's not believing. It's receiving the Spirit of Jesus into you this morning that enables you to live forever. It's receiving the life of Jesus into you that enables you to live the law in your family, and in your dorms, and in your homes. It's receiving the Spirit of Jesus into you that banishes the meaninglessness and the emptiness of your own life because that was God's purpose at the very beginning, that you'd receive his life into you not just believe.

Now do you see dear ones, that faith is not taking the place of obedience? Faith in Jesus does not take the place of the law, but when you exercise real faith, believe all that I've shared with you this morning and then receive Jesus' Spirit into you, you find yourself keeping the law. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "I have come not to abolish the law, I have come to fulfill the law. For not one jot or tittle will pass for the law until all is accomplished."

And brothers and sisters, what most of us have found is whenever we receive this super natural Spirit of Jesus inside us, we find it easy to live above the law. We find it easy to go beyond the law. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, not only to be free from hatred and killing but to be filled with love for your brother and sister." Real love, not just soft effeminate or imitation love, but a real honest, strong, robust love. And we've found that when we received the Spirit of Jesus into us, we've lived well above that law.

Do we then overthrow this law by faith? No, by no means. We establish, we strengthen the law. Now

have you come into that experience, you know? See, all of us believe that Jesus died so that God could forgive us without denying his justice but that isn't what makes you a child of Gods. What makes you a child of God is receiving the spirit of life through the Holy Spirit that God originally planned to give us. And he's willing to give you that this morning, you know. You could receive that this morning.

Those of us who have found ourselves living above the law, do it not by will power or by our own strength or dynamic, but by a miraculous spirit of Christ that God is able to put inside you this morning. You have a womb, like every one of us, you have a womb inside you called the spirit and that womb is ready to receive the seed of the Holy Spirit within it so that you, man or woman, can live the spiritual life that God gave you. So it's possible this morning, you know.

You may say, "Well, what do I do?" Well, just as we bow our heads all you need to do is to say, "God I believe that this is the explanation of reality. I believe this does explain why I feel alienated, and lonely, and insecure. I believe that your Son did die so that you could give me this life. Now Lord God, I'm going to give you my life now will you give me the Spirit of Jesus? I don't know whether you receive it by emotions or by intellect, but will you give it to me? I ask you now in all honesty for the Spirit of Jesus. And brothers and sisters, God will keep his word with you as he kept it with us, you know, and you'll find yourself living above the law really where God himself is.

I pray you know, that he'll give you grace, and wisdom, and guidance to do it this morning. I know a lot of you are sitting there, you know, wondering, "Ah, I wonder what it is all about?" Well really, all I can say is if you're honest with God whether you know a whole lot about it or not, if you're honest with God this morning he can put the Spirit of his Son inside you and can guide you on from that, you know. And if you want to talk to any of us afterwards, there are lots of kids here who experienced this and will share with you either here or in the entrance all, or if you want to talk during the week just call Ashland or call me and get together. But we have found that this does much better than the Ouija board, and the spiritualists, and really it is the answer and we've found it so we believe you can find it. Let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you that you have not left us with no guidance. You have not left us with nearly counterfeits, but you have given us plain clear presentation of yourself and your own plan in your word and in Jesus your son. Now Lord God, if this is true, we would trust you by the Holy Spirit to reveal that truth to us and to make it real to us. Lord God, if we're honestly seeking you we ask you now to make this real to us and enable us to see that this is more deeply true than it is intellectually acceptable. And oh Lord God, we would ask you to put the Spirit of your Son Jesus inside us to take away the emptiness and the loneliness, and the insecurity, and to enable us to be the people that you intended we should be at the beginning. We trust you to do this for the sake of your Son Jesus and so that we will please you and we will live the lives that we were made to live. Amen.