

Romans 4:25

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This is a really big day for me and for some of you who remember what series we're on -- because today is the end of a chapter in Romans. And in the past five years on campus this is the fourth time we've ended a chapter in Romans. So it is fairly exciting. It's Romans 4:25.

Before we even look at that I should explain that we started to study Romans five years ago here on campus because we believe that Jesus is the Son of the Creator of the Universe. There are all kinds of reasons why we believe that. I don't want to spend time going into it this morning. If you really want to look at that you can check back on the sermons that were preached five years ago. Some of them are on cassette. Some of it is in a book "Why Believe the Bible" that you could look at.

But we do believe Jesus is the Son of God. And we believe that the book of Romans in the Bible, which was written in 57 AD by Paul, was written under the inspiration of the Creator of the Universe. We believe that Romans best explains how to apply the reality of this man Jesus to your own life. So that's really why we're reading and studying the book of Romans -- because we believe it's the best explanation of him who is the real answer to reality that we have in any literary form.

We've been studying Romans 4 for the past year. Because of that we've been dealing again and again with the central neurosis of our time. The central neurosis of our time is really just a kind of paranoia that we all have, a kind of self-doubt, or an identity crisis that it seems all men and women -- at least in western society -- are sharing. This kind of paranoia, or self-doubt, or identity crisis has a practical effect in most of our lives. It results in most of us going around with a chip on our shoulders. We find out that whoever you speak to, whatever age they are, most people at one time or another seem to be going round with a chip on their shoulder.

Here's the chip: they're out to prove themselves. They're trying to justify themselves. They're trying to establish their value in their own eyes, or they're trying to establish their usefulness in their parents' eyes, or their loved ones' eyes. That seems to be the central neurosis of our time. A kind of questioning: who am I? What am I here for? And the resulting effect of that -- a desire to prove that I am someone and that I have a right to be here. It does seem that most of us in the western world doubt our right to be here at all, and we're always trying to prove it to someone else if not to ourselves.

Now the answer that Jesus gave to this was that this sense of rejection that we have, this doubt about our own identity that we have, this sense of loneliness, and this sense of not having any place -- is a correct reflection of the attitude of the only significant other in the universe. It's a correct reflection of his attitude to us. That's what Jesus said. He said, "Don't believe that this is false. Don't believe that this is unreal."

That's what many of us do. Many of us, through psychology and philosophy, try to pretend that this isn't real. No, we don't have an identity crisis. There's no sense in this paranoia that we feel. We try to do our best to wipe out all the symptoms of that paranoia.

But Jesus doesn't do that. He says, "You're dead right. You ought to have a guilt complex. You people ought to have an identity crisis. Because I'll tell you what you've done -- and I have this right from the heart of your Creator who is my Father. You people have tried to live your own life in your own way according to your own plans. You've rejected the Creator's plan for your life, and as a result, he has built into you a penalty of external death. It's the fear of that eternal death that gives you a sense of identity crisis, a sense of impending doom, a sense of angst." Jesus said that.

But we're right to have paranoia. We ought to feel we're being caught at, or being condemned -- because he says you really are. "You people have determined to live your own life in your own way according to your own plans -- without any reference to your Maker who created you for a certain purpose. As a result he has built into his whole system a death penalty. A penalty of eternal death that is now working in you." And Jesus said the proof of that is that you have this guilt. That is one of the marks of this death penalty -- that you have a sense of guilt.

Another mark is that you have a sense of fear. You say it's fear of the mushroom cloud {atomic bombs people fear will be used in some upcoming war}. It's not really. It's fear of that darkness that is going to fall upon you with loneliness when this life is over. "That's why you have a sense of angst, and a sense of guilt, and a sense of not belonging here. Because actually my Father has already declared you have no right to be in this world the way you're living for yourselves." That's the real situation. That's what Jesus said to us -- that that's the explanation for this central neurosis of our time.

Now we humans are just stupid. We try to pretend it's not real. We try to get away from any feeling of abandonment, from any feeling of being left out of things. We try to do our best to wipe out all the signs that we have been left on our own. So we spend our lives providing food, shelter, and clothing for ourselves so that we'll never see the lack that has now set in our lives because of God's rejection in us.

We try to overlay our sense of fret and our sense of worry with emotional enjoyment of all kinds. We try to get rid of our lack of direction in our lives by manipulating circumstances, and manipulating people into some kind of order that we can perceive.

But do you see all that we're doing is dealing with the symptoms of the neurosis? We're not dealing with the neurosis itself. Now God's answer to the neurosis is always far more complete than ours is. As ours is superficial, so his answer is deep. As our answer is temporary, so his answer is permanent.

Jesus explained to us, "My Father has allowed me to die for you. Actually, if you believe that, the death penalty no longer hangs over your head. You will no longer face a life of loneliness and darkness after this life is over, if you believe what I say -- that my Father has allowed me to die in your place so that you don't need to die. You ought to die because you've lived your own life selfishly. But I've died for you."

"So you're really free from that, and my Father justifies you. He says, 'You're perfectly justified in being in my world.' He says, 'Two people can't die for the one sin. My son has died for your sin. You don't need to die for it now. You're perfectly justified in being here. This is your home. This is your place. I'm glad you're here.'"

Now once a person really believes that God no longer holds the death penalty over us because Jesus has faced that for us, that person enters into a new land. Winston Churchill would say, "Bright sunlit uplands." Just a different kind of place to be. A place where you're really freed from paranoia, freed from the old guilt complex, freed from the old sense of self-doubt, and freed from the old identity crisis. You really just are at home in God's world and you're at home with yourself and at ease with yourself.

You no longer live with a chip on your shoulder trying to prove yourself or justify yourself -- because you know that the Creator of the Universe approves of you and that's all that matters. He approves of you because his Son has died for you and he has no reason any longer for disapproving of you. So it's just a different place to be.

Now why do some of us believe what Romans 4:25 says and still walk around with a chip on our shoulders? Because, I think some of us do. I think some of us believe it in our heads but we don't really walk in the freedom and the liberty that this arrangement of God's brings us into. Let's look at the verse first of all, because it really sums up all that this Chapter 4 says about this neurosis. Romans 4:25: "Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

One reason many of us believe this verse but still walk in some kind of shadow of a guilt complex is found in that word "trespasses." Do you see it there, the word trespasses? It's the Greek word "paraptoma." It means almost the same as sin, but it points to a special characteristic of sin. You can see the same word in Romans 4:15. You'll see the special characteristic of sin that this word "paraptoma" brings out: "For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression." That's the same word as trespass. And God says there, "Jesus has died for your trespasses." That is, for the things that the law exposes to your conscious mind.

One of the reasons why many of us still live in a shadow of guilt is we don't take that definition of trespass or sin. We don't accept that sin or trespass is something that you're conscious of. But, that is what it is. A sin or a trespass is something that you're conscious of yourself having done or are now doing. Many of us don't accept that. Many of us have picked up erroneously a false idea of sin in our past childhood days. Here's the definition we go by: "Sin is any lack of conformity to the perfection of God." Or, "Sin is any deviation from absolute right -- whether we know it or not."

Now many of us here in the theater still walk in practical dealings with Jesus' death on the basis of that definition of sin. Do you see you can't win with that one? You can't win. You're going to be sinning hundreds of thousands of times a day.

There are hundreds of ways in which your mind isn't perfect like God's mind. There are hundreds of ways in which my emotions are not perfectly balanced as God's emotions are. There are hundreds of ways in which all of us deviate from absolute perfection. You all don't have perfect noses. You all don't have perfect hair. You all don't have a perfect tone of voice. Do you see there are hundreds of ways in which we deviate from absolute conformity to perfection in our own behavior?

There are lots of things that you don't do as God himself does. You know that. There are lots of things that I say that God would say entirely differently. There are lots of ways in which you and I deviate from absolute perfection. Do you see that that is not sin? That is just creatureliness.

God does not hold us responsible for things that we don't yet know. Say you're saying something against me and I bring it up to you. I don't bring it up to you with a sense of antagonism or hostility. I point out to you, "Look, you said something that wasn't right." I don't come at you with hostility about it. I come with a sense of, "Look this is something you didn't know and you were offending me, but you know it now." Now it's the same with the Father. He doesn't hold you guilty for imperfections that you don't know about.

But do you see? Many of us define sin as any deviation from absolute perfection. So we judge, "We must be sinning in word and deed hundreds of times a day." And the result of this attitude is -- we become indifferent to sin.

We say, "Well, we're sinning hundreds of times a day, so one more sin won't make any difference. So let me carry on. It's a losing battle anyway, an unequal battle that I have. So let me just keep on doing the best I can."

We sink back to a pagan level of being the best kind of person we can be -- which is really doing nothing as far as God is concerned. But do you see that the Father looks upon sin as a conscious knowing disobedience to him? Sin really is a resistance to his will that is exposed by the Holy Spirit and the law during the day from time to time during our lives. So sin itself is something that you know you're doing.

Many of us labor under a constant sense of guilt and imperfection because we think sin is any deviation from absolute right whether we know it or not. That is not sin. Sin is a knowing conscious disobedience to God's law. In other words, the way to walk in the constant brightness of God's justification is to identify your sin when you commit it. You commit some trespass against God, identify it, and confess it to him -- and let it go at that. But if you go by the other definition of sin you constantly labor under a vague sense of guilt which certain powers in the universe are anxious to bring upon you.

Now the Holy Spirit never brings a vague sense of guilt. That's false condemnation. That's false guilt. You know that the psychologists talk about false guilt. They call a lot of things false guilt that are real guilt. But they're right in the sense that there is a lot of false guilt around.

Whenever you have just a vague sense of guilt tied to nothing in particular, that is not the Holy Spirit's work in you. The Holy Spirit always points out a definite word, a definite act that you committed against God, so that you can identify it and deal with it. It's like a disease: you identify the disease and then you deal with it. So it is with sin. You identify the thing by name -- then you deal with it. Make sure it is a sin. Check up in the Bible and see, "Is this thing a sin?" I think if you find yourself washing your hands 25 times a day and feel if you don't do that then it's a sin, you better check with the Bible and see which commandment says you better wash your hands 25 times a day.

The Bible saves us from getting into the midst of false guilt. So if the Holy Spirit brings to you some sense of guilt, ask him, "Alright, what have I done wrong?" If he doesn't tell you what you've done wrong, reject the guilt as false guilt brought about by the evil one who is concerned with stealing from you the freedom of the justification.

There are many examples of this. There's one where it just is so plain that God always deals in regard with sin with known conscious particular disobediences. God is not involved in tantalizing us with a vague sense of guilt. Acts 5:3 says, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?'" Now that's pretty definite, pretty detailed. Ananias couldn't say, "Well, what land? What proceeds?" God just dealt right down the line and said, "It's there that you did wrong."

Now in order to walk in a constant sense of justification sensing that God has justified you -- and it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks of you -- you need to identify trespass as a known conscious disobedience to God's law. That's what you and I are responsible for. God can't hold us responsible for the other things that we don't know about until he shows us them.

Some of you may say, "Oh, but brother! This leads into irresponsibility." No. As soon as God shines the light of his Holy Spirit upon it, you are responsible for it, and he knows when you realize it or not. So the first step is to walk free from that wrong definition of sin. Then you have a chance of walking in a constant sense of justification.

Now many of us have success in that kind of thing. But we still live in self-inflicted darkness because of another misunderstanding. You'll see it there if you look at Romans 4:25 and look at another phrase. It's the first clause in the verse. Romans 4:25: "Who was put to death for our trespasses." There are many people who say they believe that verse, but they still live in a darkness that they inflict upon themselves because they don't really believe those words, "Put to death." They don't really believe them.

They say, "Oh yeah, yeah. He was put to death. And that cry of dereliction, 'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?' That expresses the loneliness, and the darkness, and the pain of eternal death that I will never have to face. It expresses the God-forsakenness that no longer is necessary for me." And then they go on and they say, "But boy, I better suffer a bit for this thing I've just committed. God can't make it that easy. That was something really bad that I did against him. I crucified Jesus afresh in my life yesterday or last night, and boy, God wants me to suffer for it. I must in some way put myself to death for this thing that I have done against my God."

Do you see that that attitude to repentance, which turns it into penance, is just egotistic salvation by works? Do you see that? It creates hours and hours of depression and unavailability to God. Yet many of us live in that.

Many of us don't realize the brightness of immediate forgiveness that God has brought us into by allowing Jesus to bear the pain and the darkness of eternal death. But do you see, God doesn't require you and me to suffer for our sins? Do you see that God doesn't require you to agonize and inflict pain and sadness upon yourself for hours in order to pay for your sin?

That's why Jesus was put to death -- so that you wouldn't have to put yourself to death. But many of us live in that gray twilight world of half forgiveness and half justification of God, and half self-justification -- because we will not simply turn from our sin, express godly sorrow to Jesus for causing his death, and get on with obeying God. We instead want to substitute remorse, and sadness, and depression as if to prove to ourselves that we're worthy of God's forgiveness.

Do you see you cannot accept any substitute but God's substitute? God has substituted Jesus to die

for you and me because of our sins. He does not require us to substitute our own remorse or our own sadness or depression.

Now many of us fail to walk in freedom and liberty of justification -- because when we sin we think to ourselves, "Well, I better repent of this. Well, I better make a good job of this repentance. Okay, get the Kleenex out, and I'll make a thorough job of this repentance. Well, I'm going away at the weekend so I have to be ready for then. Boy, I'm going to be miserable for the next half hour anyway."

Now do you see that that is not of God -- that deal? That is not right. The Father does not require us to put ourselves to death. The Father requires us to see that repentance is a straight deal. It's a love for Jesus, a sorrow to him for causing his death. And it's action. It's turning from the sin. It's stopping doing it. A lot of us want to substitute a lot of emotional sorrow for real action and real forsakenness of sin.

Now walking in God's justification is a bright, free experience. It is a walking free from that vague sense of guilt. It's a walking free from a need for penance. That's where really the plan, I'm sure, in the Catholic Church was good at the beginning -- the idea of penance -- because I'm sure that originally the priest said, "It must be a godly sorrow that you have. It must be a godly sorrow that you express to God." And maybe a little soul would say, "Well, how can I express a godly sorrow?" And maybe the priest would say, "You should do this," or, "You should do that," -- until gradually penance became a kind of ecclesiastical method -- a substitute for real repentance.

It became a way of saving yourself by works, punishing yourself as much as you thought you ought to be punished. Then, of course, you went before God and said, "I've every right to your forgiveness, because I've punished myself." Now that's salvation by works and many of us who claim not to be in the Catholic Church are working the same way. We're practicing penance instead of repentance.

God cannot give you a constant sense of justification unless you walk by repentance and not penance. Some of us walk in that light -- yet we really still don't walk in a sense of justification because of a failure to enter into the reality of the last clause there in that verse: "And raised for our justification."

What it means historically, is that Muhammad could have said to us all, "Okay, I'm going to die for all your sins. I'm going to give my life for all your sins so that you won't have to die for them. The Creator of the universe, who is my Father, he's going to accept my death for your sins, and you won't have to die again." Then Muhammad died and we never saw anything more of him.

We'd all be in doubt. We'd all be in uncertainty. Was he really right in what he said? If he was, surely we'd see some sign. Now you see that with Jesus he said all that and then he came back to life after three days and stayed 40 days here on this earth saying, "You see what I said is true. My Father has raised me from the dead to justify you people in coming before him with confidence that he's going to accept you."

That's what it means historically. Jesus was raised for our justification in that his very resurrection justifies us in going into the midst of death with absolute peace and confidence that God will accept us because of the resurrection.

But the inner meaning of it is this: God justifies you and me in spite of the fact that we've lived our own lives in our own way -- because we believe Jesus has been raised from the dead and his life is available to us day-by-day. In other words, God justifies us because we're willing to receive Jesus' life through the Holy Spirit day-by-day. And honestly, if you are not looking up to Jesus day-by-day receiving his Spirit into your life, you're going to fall back into that walk with a chip on your shoulder. It's just automatic.

You'll fall into it even in Christian groups. You'll be trying to prove that you're the best prayer in the group, or you're the best singer in the group, or that nobody witnesses quite as brilliantly as you do.

You'll be trying to prove yourself in a Christian group all over again -- unless you're constantly receiving the life of the Holy Spirit from the resurrected Jesus, and the Holy Spirit begins to produce in you other additional signs that you are actually justified by God. Produces in you the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness. Begins to produce in you the gifts of the Spirit: the gifts of discernment or healing, or the gift of distinguishing between spirits. But the Holy Spirit as you receive him into you day-by-day will begin to enable you to walk in a complete sense of God's approval -- and therefore, in complete freedom from the need to have man's approval.

Now I don't know, whether you still walk free of that neurosis or whether you walk in the midst of it. But do you see? God has made it possible for us to walk in absolute assurance that he justifies us and that he approves of us. What does it matter what anybody thinks? Then you're able to walk in real freedom from that old paranoia and that old guilt complex.

Now, would you each deal just honestly in your own thoughts about your own experience? I'll tell you this. I have made every one of those errors. I have at some time in my life walked under the darkness that one of those errors brings. So I don't think I can be the only one who has failed to enter into all the meaning of Romans 4:25. So will you identify if and where you've walked in error, and will you just make an agreement with God to walk free from that?

Another way to put it is this: do you walk with self-doubt? Have you an identity crisis? Do you wonder, "Who am I? What am I doing here? What's the meaning of life?" Do you have a sense of paranoia? Do you feel that somebody's getting at you all the time? That everybody is down on you? Well, if you do feel some of those things, then it's because you haven't entered fully into the justification that is by faith in Jesus' death. So you should just deal with God yourself. Or, I'd be glad to talk with you through the week if you'd just call and tell me you'd like to come in, or talk with you after the service, or even pray, or if you just want to stay behind and pray you should do it.

But above all, don't walk in paranoia. Don't walk in self-doubt. That's not the Father's will for us. In a beautiful world such as he has made and in the absolute assurance we have that he loves us, he doesn't want us walking in insecurity. So will you deal as you feel you ought to?

Okay, shall we pray for a few minutes? Father, will you give us clarity to see where we stand in relationship to you this morning? Father, if we have walked with this neurosis of western society in our own lives, we trust you to show us where we have not accepted the full benefits of Jesus' death. Father, if we walk in self-doubt, or if we do not really know who we are or why we're here, Father if we're unsure of ourselves, if we're filled with paranoia, a sense that people are

persecuting us, Father if we walk in this kind of experience, we trust you by the Holy Spirit to give us real clarity and revelation now to see why we are in this state.

And oh Father, enable us to see that Jesus died for us and that you have nothing against us, that the Creator of the galaxy has nothing against us, but that he thinks of us as his own children. That he wipes out from his mind everything that we've done against him, that he has put those things as far as the east is from the west, so far he has removed those things from us and from himself, and that you Father are ready to take us into your arms this very moment and to call us your own sons and your own daughters, and that with you by our side and inside us, there is no need to fear anyone or anyone's opinion.

Father, we trust you by the Holy Spirit to apply this to all of our hearts this morning so that we may walk out of here in freedom and live for you. Amen.