

Romans 5:2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been studying dear ones, the explanation of reality that Christianity gives. We've been studying it as it's outlined in that letter that Paul wrote to the Romans in 57 A.D. This morning we're looking at Romans 5:2. "Through him", that is Jesus, "we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

A lot of us have found that we have had a real sense of discontent in our own lives. Most things have been going well for us and many people might even look upon us as being successful. But deep down we sort of felt that somehow we weren't quite hitting life. We weren't quite making it. And there was a kind of restlessness inside us. Many of us took two alternatives. In one we rationalize the feeling away by saying it wasn't real, we didn't really feel this restlessness, life couldn't be any better than it was and most people were feeling the same half-hearted satisfaction as we felt.

On the other hand we identified it with having the wrong job or the wrong wife or the wrong house or the wrong vacation or the wrong salary. And we gave ourselves to trying harder at all these things to try to make those things right thinking that life itself would get right too. Now, what we've been saying over the past Sundays here is that down through the centuries, outstanding men have consistently pointed to one reason for that sense of restlessness and that sense of uncertainty. For instance, Moses wrote it in Genesis if you would like to look at it, Genesis 1:26. Moses must have written this 1400 maybe 1500 B.C., about three and half thousand years ago.

Gen 1:26, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Moses said God's plan for you was that you would be like Him -- made in His image. Paul wrote it another way in Romans 8:29 maybe 1500 years later. I suppose about 1900 years ago.

Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." And again you see that God planned for us to be like himself -- actually to be like Jesus. And the reason we have so often a sense of restlessness and a feeling that we've missed the mark somehow and we're not quite hitting life as it should be is because really we're not like this man Jesus. And there's something that continually moves inside our conscience and keeps making us realize that. That is the spirit of reality inside us that makes us feel we're not quite hitting it. There's something in life at which we have not yet arrived. Many of us go on 40, 50, 60 years and we never get to the place where we feel we've arrived.

These men say the reason is because you're not fulfilling the plan that your Creator had when he made you. We keep thinking it's because we haven't all the social security settled or we haven't the life insurance settled or we haven't the house finished or decorated or we haven't the children at college. We keep attributing it to some other unfinished task. But really, what the people who have spoken of God have said, is that the real reason we feel we haven't arrived is that we're not fulfilling the plan that God had for us when he first made us.

Now, in what way are we not like God? Well, you know lots of ways if you just look at some of the events in Jesus' life. You'll see it in Luke 2:51. "And he (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them," (that's his parents) and his mother kept all these things in

her heart." And in that way, many of us have not fulfilled God's plan for us. We have either resented our parents or we have put up with them. But really we haven't been to them what Jesus was to his parents. We haven't honored them and loved them. Many of us have not even accepted them. Maybe many of us have just rejected our parents all through our lives. And because we have not entered into the plan that God had for us, we have a constant sense of falling short.

That's really the way the Bible puts it, "All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Well, the glory of God is Jesus. You remember it says in John, "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The reason we have this sense of uncertainty and not having arrived in life is because we have fallen short of the glory of God. We're not like Jesus.

All of us in this theater this morning, we're made to be like Jesus. Your parents were intended to experience Jesus in their homes -- a Jesus who would love them, who would bless them and accept them when they did make mistakes and who would build them up by the respect that you give them. But many of us have not been like that and so God witnesses that in our hearts by a sense of restlessness, a sense of having fallen short. And we keep thinking, "Oh, it's because we haven't achieved all we want to achieve." It's just because we haven't achieved one thing, we're not like Jesus.

You get it you know, if you look at his attitude to his friends, in Matthew 6:14-15. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Many of us have failed to do that. In regard to our friends, we hold grudges. Many of us have treasured resentments over years and years. Many of us have relationships at the moment that are poisoned because a root of bitterness has grown up in our heart.

Some of our friends did something to us or said something to us. At one vital time they let us down and we have allowed a root of bitterness and resentment to grow up in relationship to them. Our lives are not open to them at all. When we meet them there's a kind of a haze over our eyes because we can't be open, we can't be honest with them. We can't really look them straight in the face. That's another way you see in which we've fallen short of God's glory and it's that that makes us feel that we haven't really arrived.

It's not all the other things about economic success and professional success, it's just that we haven't really achieved God's plan for us. Or, if you'd like to look at just one other verse in Luke 22:42 -- "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." And one of the marks of Jesus' life was that whenever it came to God's will over his, he always yielded his. He always yielded his own personal rights. But we, (and you know it yourself) have fallen short of Jesus again and again in that. We will not yield our personal rights.

Of course we have a right to express our own personal opinion whenever we want to. We feel that is a democratic principle that we ought to be able to do that. We wouldn't dream of yielding that right. It doesn't matter who it hurts. It doesn't matter what situation it confuses. We are very reluctant to yield our own personal rights. We're very reluctant to yield our right to our own will to do something at a certain time for the sake of somebody else or even for the sake of God. We're very reluctant to yield our own right to earn money and spend money as we want to. There are many other ways we won't yield our personal rights. And so we're falling short of God's plan for us.

Now, that's really why so many of us feel dissatisfied in our lives. In relationship to the only

significant other in the universe, (i.e. the Father of the whole creation who is alone able to do anything finally for any of us), we have a feeling of falling short, a feeling of hiding from him and not meeting all the plans that he had for us. It's because of that that we have this sense of falling short and of failing. Many of us won't admit this and that's why so many of us have all kinds of physical tension and emotional tension in our lives.

God pointed it out in one of the Psalms. Psalm 32:3-4. Really, many of us even when we hear this diagnosis won't accept it or won't admit it. It's a refusal to admit God's account of reality that brings the kind of physical troubles that we have. Falling short of God's glory is just sin you see, it's just independence of him.

Psalm 32:3-4, "When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." And it's stupid that so many of us take tranquilizers and think what we need is more sleep and more rest or what we need is a vacation – if we can only get another vacation. And really our strength is being dried up as the heat of summer and our face is growing pale and our body is becoming weak because we're disagreeing with the one significant other in the universe, God.

Brothers and sisters, that's the situation in which many of us find ourselves. We try to sort it out by sensitivity groups, by another book on psychology or maybe by taking a degree in psychology. But somehow we still are under this problem of feeling that we haven't arrived. And really as far as God's plan for us is concerned, we haven't arrived. What I'd like you to see this morning is that it really makes a difficulty for God.

Now, I think first of all, to understand justification, you have to see that the difficulty here is not only on our side but there's a great problem that this makes for God. I'll show you it in just a couple of verses. The problem is that God is a just God. Now, that's in Romans 2:6-11. "For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."

That is the first problem God has. He is a just God. He is the director of the universe. He is the final arbiter as far as morality is concerned. He has to hold to what he said, "That anyone who sins against me or who falls short of my glory must die. I must destroy them; otherwise they will destroy my universe." God is a just God and he is bound by His justice.

Now, that would be no problem for God if he was just a just God. But would you look at the other part of God's character in 2 Peter 3:9. "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The real problem is that God is merciful. God is not willing that any of us should perish. Yet, because he is a just God, he is committed to destroying all of us who have fallen short of his plan. Now that is the difficulty that God is in.

You can see what he can do. He can, for instance, just establish his mercy -- just establish his mercy without any concern for justice. Or, he can establish his justice without any concern for mercy. Now that's what he did you remember way back at the time of the Flood if you look at it in

Genesis 7:23. That's what God did initially. He decided, all right, I'll establish my justice. They have fallen short of what I wanted them to be. They'll obviously destroy my universe so I will simply destroy them. Genesis 7:23 is really an event that is reinforced by geologists, by the discovery they have made of the sedimentary rock.

Genesis 7:23. "He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth." God there established his justice. Without justice everything would collapse into chaos, you know that. Without justice we would all do whatever we wanted and the thing would be chaos. Therefore in order to prevent that, God established his justice.

Or you see he could just establish his mercy and this he did too in Genesis 9:15. "I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." God could simply have established his mercy and said, "Look, do what you want. I won't harm you in any way. Live just the way you want, prostitute if you want, be amoral if you want, spread venereal disease if you want, do whatever you want. Pollute the air, pollute the water, and kill each other. I am showing my mercy to you. I am letting you do what you want."

You can see, loved ones, that real love does not express only justice, which is not concerned with the individual. Nor does it only express mercy, which is not concerned with the order in which people live. Real love includes forgiveness and mercy. And you know that's very difficult to establish them both, isn't it? Every mom and dad finds the problem, don't you? Every one of us who own anything that we control, find the old problem of how do you mirror your justice to them and yet how do you show your mercy to them? You can see that mercy without any concern for sin is not mercy at all.

If sin isn't important enough to be punished then it isn't serious enough to forgive, all you do is overlook it. But if justice is not tinged at all with love for individuals then justice itself is something harsh, unreal and impersonal. You can see that God's problem was inside his own nature. "How do I really forgive these dear ones that I love, and yet declare to them that I hate their sin? I detest it and can't bear it near me in my own heaven."

The answer was found in God realizing that if part of himself was punished for our sin, then we would suddenly realize that he hated sin more than he loved Himself. If part of himself was punished for our sin we would suddenly see, "Yes, sin does means everything to God. It means so much that he would destroy his own family for that sin." And we would in no wise be easy about our attitude to sin. Yet God himself would be able to remain just and punish sin and yet be able to extend his mercy to us.

Now, that's really what God did you remember in Jesus. Maybe you'd just look at it because it's the heart of justification. It's Romans 3:25-26. "Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; (he had not destroyed the world again by a flood. He had passed over the former sin) it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous (that he's still a righteous and just God) and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus."

In other words, when Jesus died, it made it possible for God to be merciful to us and yet to retain his just attitude to sin. That's what this present verse that we're studying this morning is saying

in Romans 5:2. "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand." In other words, we stand in a broad and sunlit place now with God because he has no reason to destroy us in order to show forth his antagonism to sin. He is free and able to look upon us with love. Now, that's what justification is, dear ones.

Justification is when God treats you and me as if we had never sinned even though we have sinned. He treats us as if we had never sinned not because he has had any problems wanting to do that. He has always wanted to do that. He has always loved us with all his heart. His problem before was how to do that without seeming to be indifferent to sin. But ever since Jesus died for that sin, we can have no doubt of God's antagonism to sin. If he destroyed his own Son in order to establish his attitude to sin, then we know sin means a lot to God and he will not tolerate it. Because of our belief in that, God treats us as holy people and that's what justification is.

It's God treating us as being holy and righteous people even though we have not been, simply because Jesus has died for us. Now, it might be good to look at one or two things about justification just to be sure of it. Do you see that it's not a subjective feeling to be felt? Do you see that? It's not a feeling to be felt. It's an object of fact about God's character that you believe. You're not asked this morning to feel God's love in justification. You're not asked, "Do I feel I am justified?" You're asked to believe a fact that has taken place in time and space and has enabled God to be merciful towards us even though he still remains just.

In other words, justification is based on our belief in an objective fact that Jesus' blood has been presented before the Father for us. Now it's not a subjective feeling to be felt. So if I ask you this morning, "Do you feel justified?" You can't feel justified. You can't feel justified. If I say to you, "Now listen, because of what you did to me last week -- I am having nothing more to do with you." Then a friend of yours comes along, explains the whole thing to me, makes it right, and I say, "Okay, because of what your friend explained to me, I really love you. I just accept you as my friend."

Now that's not something you have to feel. It's something you have to believe. You say, "Okay. If you say my friend came to you and made things right, all right, I believe it. I may not feel it. I may still come to you and wonder, do you still hate me? Do you still not accept me as your friend? But I believe that my friend has made things right."

It's an objective fact to be believed. That's why you see it says in Romans 5:9, "Since therefore we are now justified by his blood". You're justified in remaining alive here in God's world without being destroyed by a flood because Jesus has been destroyed in your place. You're justified and remain alive. And because Jesus has allowed God to punish sin in him, God is justified in allowing us to remain alive. Now that is an objective fact based on Jesus' sacrifice.

You can see an instance of it in Exodus. It is the effect of the outpoured life before God. It's the effect that the blood of Jesus has on God and the way we are to appreciate it in justification. You remember God explained, "Kill a lamb, and put the blood on your doorpost. When the angel of death passes over all the other houses, he'll see the blood on your doorpost and he'll pass over and not destroy your children." Do you remember that?

Exodus 12:23. "For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you." When God saw the blood, he did not destroy the people.

The people did not sit in their houses saying, "Do I feel that God is going to do this? Can I feel the effect of the blood on my doorpost? Can I feel that God is going to forgive me?" No, they sat inside and said, "God told us to put the blood on the doorpost. He is going to pass over and not destroy us. We rest on that fact. It doesn't matter whether we feel it or not, we believe it."

Now do you see it's the same with Jesus? Many of us get into trouble with our justification because we want to feel the blood of Jesus. We want to feel what God feels. That's not what you're asked to do. You're asked to believe that the blood of Jesus means your forgiveness to God so you have to accept the meaning of the blood as God accepts. If God treats the blood of Jesus as taking the place of your death, then you've to do the same. You've to rate things the same way God rates them. You've not to try to feel that blood applied, that's the first thing. Justification is not a feeling to be felt.

Secondly, you can never be more justified than you are when you first become a Christian. Do you see that? The blood of Jesus can never justify you any more than it does when you first become a Christian. So, you can never become more justified. You can become the Pope if you want to. You can become the most saintly person that ever lived. But do you see you will never be more acceptable to God than when you first became a Christian and believed that Jesus had died for you. That's because at the end of the day God accepts us all because Jesus has died for us -- not because we're good or holy people.

Now it's good, you see, to establish that because I'd like you to see that that's justification. You can never be more justified than you are when you first become a Christian because you're justified in God's eyes not by how good you are but by Jesus' death for you. Now would you move over with me to this other big experience that we're beginning to talk about in Romans, the experience of sanctification?

You remember that the reason God was antagonistic to us was because we'd fallen short of his glory. In other words, God's will for us is to become like him, to become like his Son. You see that in all kinds of places but you see it there in Genesis 3:26, you remember, "Let us make man in our own image." You see it again in Romans 8:29, "That we are pre-destined to be conformed to the image of his Son." You see it in 1 Thessalonians 4:3. This verse brings out this word "sanctification". Maybe we should look at it just so that we understand it plainly.

1 Thessalonians 4:3. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality." In other words the real purpose God made us was not just to forgive us but actually to make us like him. Now that's what we call sanctification. Those of you who know a little Latin, "sanctus" is "holy" -- and "theo" is "to make or to be made". Sanctification is to make up a person holy. Justification was God treating you as holy because Jesus had died for you. Sanctification is God making you holy.

Now many of us come into difficulty when we begin to move into sanctification. Here's how we do it. We see that we're the same as the Corinthians. You get that in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Many of us see we're the same as the Corinthians. Many of us see that yes, we're Christians. A man like Paul can call us brethren but there is some sense in which we have not entered into real sanctification. We have not really become like God. He treats us as if we're like Him but our own characters are not like Him.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3: "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the

flesh, as babes in Christ.” (Many of us find we are carnal people inside. Yes, we’re children of God but inside we’re not like God even though God treats us as if we were like him because of Jesus’ death.) “I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?”

Many of us, who have been justified by our belief in Jesus’ death for us, are still behaving like ordinary men and women. We get jealous, we get angry, we get impatient, and we get irritable. We haven’t really entered into this experience of sanctification that is not only a crisis event but is also a progressive event. Many of us have not entered into that.

Do you see in that situation Satan is eager to get hold of our conscience. I’ll show you how he does it in Galatians 5:19. Many of us see we’re like the Corinthians. We’re like these Galatians. We’re justified but in this business of sanctification, we have not entered into it in any real sense.

Galatians 5:19: “Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like.”

Many of us who are justified -- we don’t drink and we don’t carouse. But we have envy, we have jealousy, we have dissension, we have anger, and we have hostility to other people. Then we read the next line and this is where Satan often steals our justification from it.

Galatians 5:21. “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” And there our hearts drop. We want to enter into sanctification but we look at that verse and we see, “This is the way I am. I get angry, I get jealous -- so I am not going to inherit the kingdom of God.” Then we take the next vicious step and we say, “I must produce those things in my own life otherwise I am not going to get into the kingdom of God even though I do believe Jesus has died for me.”

Now, loved ones that’s the wrong step because that’s the old self getting up on his hind legs and saying, “I am going to be like God because I know Jesus has died for me. But I can see I have to produce those things in my own life in order to get into the kingdom.” Now dear ones do you see that that is not the attitude that God wants you to take.

God wants you to see that you are acceptable to him even though you sin seventy times seven. You are acceptable as long as your heart is soft enough to repent and you are ready to believe that Jesus has died for you. That’s the basis of your justification. Your sanctification is something that the Holy Spirit begins to work in your own heart and you can trust him to work in time to get you into the kingdom of God.

Now do you see how different that attitude that we take is to the attitude expressed in this verse that we’re studying this morning? Romans 5:2, “Through Him (Jesus) we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.” And it’s the perfect tense that means we stood in this at the time we met Jesus and we stand in it now. We stand in it as long as we believe Jesus has died for us. We stand in it firmly. And then we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Now that’s the attitude the Father wants us to take towards sanctification. It’s not to get into this old self-help attitude, where we say, “I must overcome the anger in myself. I must overcome the

jealousy. I am condemned until I overcome it." No, we rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God. We have a sure and certain expectation that God through the Holy Spirit is going to share his glory, the glory of his Son's character with us through the Holy Spirit. And we rejoice in that and we walk on day-by-day glad and rejoicing.

Now the other attitude is utterly depressing. The other attitude is the one whereby we come into a situation where once again our anger is exposed. We get thoroughly irked with ourselves, thoroughly fed up and irritated and we say, "I can do better than that." And do you see it's "I" saying, "I can do better than that."

It's so different to God's declaration about us that there is no good thing in us. The child of God who is walking on in the right attitude towards sanctification is one who comes into a situation, loses their temper and immediately says, "Father, you're right. There is no good thing in me. I see that you're not accepting me because of anything good that there is in me. I can't even live the life you want me to live. Lord, I thank you for this situation where you've exposed to me again that there's nothing good in me. Father, I want you to show me that I am unable to produce any of the beauty that Jesus had. The only way to do it is for you to destroy me completely on the Cross with him and just give me his spirit through the Holy Spirit."

But do you see it's a totally different way. Now brothers and sisters I share it with you this morning because I know a number of you are anxious to go on into the beauty of Christ. You and I know that that's what has put people off at churches. We've all been crying, "justification, justification, we're saved by the blood of Jesus" but we have not gone on into sanctification. Yet many of you are anxious to go on into it by the old self-help method, and that isn't God's way.

The attitude of the child of God is "Through Jesus we have access to the grace in which we stand". We stand in this grace of God's forgiveness till eternity, as long as we're ready to believe that Jesus has died for us. That's why God justified us. But we also rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. We walk day-by-day grieving each moment when God exposes our own un-Christ-likeness to us.

We greet it as joy and we say, "Thank You, Father. I thank you that you've shown me I am rotten. You've shown me I am absolutely hopeless. I am a selfish, miserable creature. Lord, you're showing me that there's nothing that you can do but destroy this whole thing absolutely with Christ on the Cross and then remake me completely by filling me with the Holy Spirit." But do you see it is a glorious trust that God is going to do this in us?

Oh loved ones, it is not a position of strain and strife. Now I agree with you, there is a glorious desperation that we all come to where we are willing to do anything if God will fill us with the Holy Spirit. But do you see it isn't something that we strain into ourselves or strive into. It is a rejoicing in a sure hope of sharing the glory of God and just look at those things. The glory is of God. It is of God, it isn't of your own producing. It is sharing his glory. It is the Holy Spirit giving you the attributes of Jesus day-by-day. It is a rejoicing. It is not a sad irritation with yourself all the time.

You're only irritated with yourself when you're still hoping for something good from yourself. When you've really given up any hope of getting anything Christ-like out of yourself, then at last, you're ready to rejoice. And then it is a hope, it is a trust and quiet rest that is ready to receive this when God finds it possible to give us -- when you have entered into all the conditions.



Do you see that is the relation of justification and sanctification? If you don't take that attitude, you see what happens. You try to enter into sanctification. You start beating yourself over the head. And because you're not meeting God's standards you fall into salvation by works and you fall out of trust in the blood of Jesus. And so you lose everything. Now that is not God's will for us.

God's will is that we as a body should walk continually day-after-day knowing that God is accepting us because of Jesus' death and yet walking on more and more into the fullness of the Holy Spirit until we're really absolutely like Jesus. That is what God wants.

I pray that those of you who are really serious about this, that you'll back off a wee bit from trying to produce it yourself. And that you'll begin to hand it over to the Holy Spirit by saying, "Holy Spirit, I am a miserable mess -- so big a mess that I can't even begin to estimate what it will cost to put me right." Say to the Holy Spirit, "I am such a mess Holy Spirit; I don't know where to begin. Now will you show me where to begin?" And let him take you step-by-step. He will take you the whole way. Why? Because we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. God will fulfill what he has begun in you and me. That was his purpose in beginning it.