

Sheer Grace

Romans 5:15

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Would you take the number 72 and now multiply it by 4? Then, divide that by 8. So 72 multiplied by 4 and divided by 8, okay? All right, now will you multiply that by 2? Now, did you get 72? No? Okay.

Now, why? We know how to divide, you know how to multiply. You know that part of it but I am asking you on a Sunday morning to start doing mathematics and you can't get the mind to get up fast enough to start doing it. But part of it is concentration. "I am trying, yes, well, multiply by 8 yes, divide by 4, yes", and concentration so often prevents us really using the abilities that we have.

What did you do last Tuesday? What did you do the Wednesday before? You know that the capacity is there all right. If you stimulated the cortex of your brain with certain electrical charges, you could bring back things that you did when you were a child. So the capacities are there. You can do it, but somehow because of a lack of something inside us, they don't work quite right, do they?

You know most of the "Readers Digest" articles over the past 20 or 30 years are based on this fact; that we use about a tenth of our potential. We have all kinds of mental capacities that are capable of great feats of mathematical and logical calculation but somehow we're not using them all. You remember last Sunday we shared that our minds aren't working the way they were meant to because of the lack of the planned energy that God had provided for them. That's why our minds don't work the way they used to. Yet that deterioration was gradual. Really, it was. I'll prove that to you if you look at Genesis 11:4-6. All our mental capacities began to deteriorate only gradually as they lacked the energy that God had made available to them.

Genesis 11:4-6: "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.'"

You have only to look at the Egyptian pyramids, to realize that men's minds deteriorated only gradually as more and more men produced more and more children who lacked the perfect mind that their great forefather Adam had when the Holy Spirit was available to him. It's only gradually that the mind has deteriorated. As they were without the power of the Holy Spirit, so the mind of the race gradually declined.

You can see it if you examine the Inca civilizations. They obviously were capable of incredible things that we are only catching up with. We all have a feeling that the Chinese civilization, culture and education were even beyond ours, let alone beyond what they are today. So it was only gradually that the effects of the lack of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men and women began to be felt. But it was felt dear ones until we come to this point today where (because we've been so long without the power of the Holy Spirit running through fathers and mothers who had sons and daughters) our minds are really just a fraction and a shadow of what they used to be when God's Spirit of life was available to them.

It's the same with our bodies. The old body is weak again and again, isn't it? Again and again it's sluggish when we want it to work. Repeatedly we will find that it's weary when we want to do something. Yet we know fine well that there are times when our bodies are capable of incredible feats of endurance that we're just amazed at.

I think all of us are amazed at the pain that a woman can bear in childbirth. We're amazed at the unbearable pain that even our own bodies can face when they're really put to the test. We only have to look at some of the tortures that men have gone through in prison to see that the body is capable of much more than really we use it for. Yet it is true, isn't it, that our bodies have shared in this gradual deterioration that we've all experienced through man refusing the gift of the Holy Spirit that God offered to him in the tree of life at the beginning of the world. Yet even that deterioration was gradual too. You can see that if you check up the normal top age for Americans with the top age mentioned here in Genesis 6:3. Obviously men didn't begin immediately to die at 70 years of age or 80.

Genesis 6:3 – “Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.’” There were plain instances in those ancient times where men lived way beyond that. Obviously it was a gradual deterioration. We didn't all end up in this present state of physical weakness and intellectual dwarf behavior. We didn't all end up in this position immediately. It was only gradually, as more and more parents had more and more children who were used to living with fathers and mothers whose minds were not working correctly and efficiently, so that began to be passed on down through the years.

You remember it all really started with what is called “The Fall”. That is why so many of us differ from the evolutionists who say, “Oh, you're getting so much better every day. We can do so many things that we couldn't do before.” But they don't realize that there was a golden age that even the classical authors like Virgil, Caesar and Cicero point to. There was a golden age when things were once far more beautiful and far more perfect than they are today.

We see in Jesus' account and the account of the older people in the Old Testament that there was a time when it was beautiful. Really what we're experiencing is devolution not evolution. What we're experiencing is a great decline, not a great growing or a great assembling. But all that started at the time called “The Fall”.

There was a fall of mankind. There was a time when we were much higher than we are today -- mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. There was a time when we fell from all that. That's the word that's used dear ones if you look at Romans 5:15. That's the verse that we'll study today. That's the word that's used at the end of that first sentence in verse 15.

Romans 5:15, “But the free gift is not like the trespass.” Now the word in Greek is “paraptoma” and actually the right translation of it is “the fall”. It's the first trespass and therefore the original fall. What Paul is saying is the free gift is not like the first fall. The first fall was just that. Literally “paraptoma” means a slip or a fall sideways. It's a false step. It refers to the first slip sideways that man made.

That's really what it was like. It was just a slight deviation from what was God's perfect will for him. That's probably why you and I experience death so often without knowing how we came into it. Actually it only requires a slight deviation from what is God's perfect will for us to begin to

experience this death. You remember it did seem just a little fall, just a little slip.

If you look at it in Genesis 3:5, it must have seemed to Adam and Eve that all they were trying to do was achieve God's purpose in a slightly different way. And that was what the Fall was all about. Genesis 3:5 --You remember Satan said, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." It was really just a little slip sideways. It was just Adam and Eve saying, "Yes, God made us to be like Himself. This finding out what is good and what is evil on our own, this will make us like God. It seems we'll achieve the purpose that God made for us originally but we'll just be doing it by a slightly different method."

Brothers and sisters, that's what it is with us. Why you experience further death in your mind, your emotions or your body is normally not because you've committed some terrible devastating sin. Usually it's because you've just rejected a little, God's Spirit for you at that moment. Usually that's where it all comes from. And really the big issue in Christianity is not good and evil, do you see that?

I mean they weren't fulfilling good and evil. Adam was saying, "Well, we know the difference between good and evil, that's all that's needed." That wasn't what God was concerned about. The issue was not good and evil. The issue is, "Would you receive my Spirit's will for you at this moment in your life whether other people call it good or call it evil?" The issue is not good and evil.

In fact, they could have avoided good but done it independent of God's Spirit and still have been falling out of God's fellowship. So the issue is not good and evil. That's why so many ethical systems and ancient Eastern religions are really beside the point. They're all concerned with being good and avoiding evil, but that isn't the deal with God. The deal with God is, "Are you resisting my Holy Spirit inside you or are you not? That's what concerns me."

In other words, you can know the difference between good and evil perfectly. You could always avoid evil and always hit good. But you could be doing it independent of God's Holy Spirit. That is what the Fall is all about. When you reject this Holy Spirit, then the whole personality begins to suffer the decline that we've talked about here.

Really that's what the Fall is all about. It isn't a tremendous rebellion. It's just a slight deviation from what was God's perfect will for him. God said, "Look, here's a tree of life. You can receive my Holy Spirit from it. If you do that, my Holy Spirit will make you like myself. He'll make your mind work perfectly, your emotions will work perfectly, and your body will work perfectly. He'll fill the world with my love and my life. That's all you have to do." But Adam and Eve just turned to the side a little and said, "No, no. We've got to know what is good and evil by ourselves. We'd rather decide it for ourselves. We want to do it without your Spirit."

Well, of course, it was his Spirit that made everything work. It was like gas to the automobile engine. It was like electricity to an electric razor. It was the thing that made the whole thing work. Once you were without that, the whole thing failed and started to decline. That's what the fall is about. I know you were facing it and fighting it in every class, at least in the natural sciences, aren't we? We're fighting this idea that we're evolving into something beautiful. If you give us long enough Nietzsche and the rest of us will become the master race.

Loved ones, it isn't so. We've been on the way down since this fall out of God's fellowship. You remember the death that resulted. The death is outlined plainly in Genesis 3:8. We've mentioned

before the first kind of death that took place there. It was really a death as far as God was concerned. Immediately when men rejected God's Spirit, they began to feel uncomfortable in his presence, really uncomfortable.

Genesis 3:8, "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Up until then there was always a going forward to meet God and say how good the world was and how glad they were that he put them in it. But, "and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Every time you reject that little movement of God's Spirit inside you, there comes some furtiveness and stealth into your life. There comes a sort of discomfort inside.

That's what happened with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9-10., "But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.'" And that's the kind of a result that came about in Adam and in the rest of us.

We no longer felt at home in the universe. We no longer felt this was a friendly place. We no longer felt that there was someone approving of what we were doing. We began to feel fearful and insecure. When thunder and lightening took place (which you remember was just part of the death that the universe itself experienced) we began to be fearful, unhappy and concerned. We began to lack the security that would automatically have come to us if we'd really done what our Father asked us to do.

So there began to be a race of men and women who were neurotics, who were filled with fear at their own shadow. They were filled with terror of the darkness. They were filled with insecurity and uncertainty. They were filled with a need for somebody to approve of them because the great God of the universe did not approve of them. That was part of the death that came. Then you can see what happened in Genesis 3:12. There's only one thing to do when you lack approval or you lack justification, or you lack security. You have to try to prove that everybody else is worse than you and that's what Adam did.

Genesis 3:12, "The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." So man stepped on that long slide into self-justification. The only thing he could do when he knew that he was condemned by the maker of the universe was to decide, "Okay, I have to prove that everybody else is worse than me." From that moment on, men and women began to consume each other.

You know, we do it ourselves. "Okay, they don't approve of me but at least I am not as bad as so and so." Then it becomes your responsibility to prove that so and so is worse than you. Before you know it, you're involved in counting up each other's faults. So that great self-justification method began in the world and men and women began to tear each other down in order to build themselves up.

Really brothers and sisters, the will began to be filled with just a great hatred, a great rivalry and a great competition. It's the same kind of thing that we get a little with the A,B,C and D's [grading system in school]. It's that kind of sense that it's us against the universe. That wasn't God's plan at all. That was part of the death and chaos that resulted. The Father then looked on and saw all of us poor paranoids involved in tearing each other down and destroying each other in order to prove to ourselves that we weren't as bad as the rest. He knew that letting us loose in the world would be like letting Lee Harvey Oswald [who murdered President John F. Kennedy] loose in a private

city.

He knew that to let a group of potential neurotics like ourselves loose in the universe would mean we would spread our smear and our dirt and our murder throughout the universe. Do you see that's why God had to prevent us from living forever? That's really why he had to do it. His first job was to limit the amount of harm and pain and agony that we could cause in his universe. That's why you see you get that action of his, there in Genesis 3:22.

Genesis 3:22, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.'" God had to limit the chaos that we could create. That's why he took away first of all our eternal life. He had to bring us to the place where our physical life was limited.

Then you remember he had to withdraw his Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit produces many incidental qualities of divinity that we do not normally think about. The Holy Spirit can enable you to travel through space. Now obviously the Holy Spirit enables us to do certain things at certain times. If that is not appropriate at this present time he doesn't do that. When we go to be with God we'll be able to travel through space and through the universe at tremendous speeds because of the Holy Spirit.

Now, do you see that with that kind of power available in the Holy Spirit we could have wreaked havoc and so God secondly withdrew the Holy Spirit from us? You read that in Genesis 3:24. "He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

Then God subjected the whole world to frustration and futility so that we would know that the Holy Spirit was lacking in it. Genesis 3:18, "thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." That was the kind of death, brothers and sisters, that spread throughout the world and that's the kind of world that you and I have entered into. It's a world that is filled with people who are neurotic and paranoid. It's a world that is filled with people who are trying to prove that they are better than everybody else. It's a world that is filled with people who lack the Holy Spirit and therefore who have minds that are impaired, emotions that are unbalanced and bodies that are physically weak. It's a world that has become a world that lives for itself -- that is, antagonistic to its Creator and determined to live for self alone.

Now that's the kind of world we have entered into, and that's as far as we have got to on previous Sundays. Do you see that the Creator of the universe looked down and saw The Rhine River turned to black ink with the ammunition factories of the Fuhrer? He looked down and saw California, one of his most beautiful creations, blotting out the sun with the greed of businessmen who wanted to succeed whatever it cost anybody else.

He looked down at the rivers of Europe, blocked with garbage and sewage by people who didn't care who lived downstream from them, who didn't care about anybody but themselves. He looked down into our university and he saw people who were supposed to be speaking truth. Instead, he saw them scrambling over one another to try to make themselves superior and using truth to do that.

Do you see that the Father's heart must have turned over inside him? And really what would you do when you looked down and saw all that? Do you see that his own word actually stood against him? His own word stood against him because he had warned man. It's in Genesis 2:17. He had warned man what

would happen if he decided what was good and evil for himself instead of receiving his life. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat for on the day that you eat of it, you shall die."

When the Creator looked down on us, he saw not only the mess and destruction that we have wrought but he saw his own word standing against us. He saw that if he did not act at that moment against us, he would forever be called into question as far as his justice and his holiness is concerned.

If he did not act at that moment then all of us would laugh. We would laugh into his face and say, "You are no God of justice. You'll let us do whatever we want to do." And so he, like a final moral arbiter and authority in the universe, was committed to action of some kind.

Now brothers and sisters, I do not understand it, but at that moment God turned. It is impossible to describe such a turning. But at that moment God turned from the mess we men and women have made and from us ourselves. He turned and I don't think eternity will ever be long enough for us to describe to each other about what that turning involved. But at that moment he turned for some reason or other that we cannot understand.

He looked to his Son and said, "Will you permit me to destroy their sins and requite their rebellion in you instead of them?" And at that moment, Jesus embraced the Cross. Now that is sheer grace. There's really no reason for it at all. But that's why we are alive today and it's impossible to explain it.

It's just impossible. That's why Paul says, "The free gift is not at all like the first trespass." The free gift is not like the first fall at all. Where the first fall spread death, the free gift in the life of that one man Jesus Christ has abounded for many of us. Brothers and sisters, that's why we are alive today. That's why we can even sit in the theater and have the opportunity to say "yes" or "no" to this God, because of sheer grace.

There is no reason at all but that he just loved us with all his heart. One man tried to say it. "I cannot tell how silently he suffered, As with his peace he graced this place of tears, or how his heart upon the Cross was broken, the crown of pain to three and thirty years. But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted, and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear." This Jesus, this same Jesus, this Savior of this world is here this morning and has the same attitude to you.

If you ask me why, I do not know. It's just sheer unmerited grace and favor. Instead of destroying us as we deserved, he destroyed his Son in our place. And he is able and willing to accept us as his children. Loved ones, it's just miraculous and we just to need to thank him for it. Let's pray.