

The Guilt and Power of Sin

Romans 6:1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'd like to try to share a little this morning about our response to God's offer. So that's why we're reading this parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:1.

Mark 12:1-8: "And he began to speak to them in parables. 'A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed; and so with many others, some they beat and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.'"

May God help us to see that we're facing the same offer this morning.
Amen.

Suppose you had a term paper of 10,000 words that you had to complete before the end of the quarter in order to get credit for the course. Okay? So a paper of 10,000 words, you had to complete it to get credit for the course and you had to get it in before the end of the quarter. The end of the quarter comes and you haven't even started the paper.

Now, there are two problems. There's a problem in the professor's attitude in that situation and there's a problem in your attitude. The professor, if he wants to offer you another chance at all, has to find some way of dealing with the unalterable regulations that he is faced with; regulations governing the course. He has to find some way of satisfying those requirements or those demands, if he's going to try to give you another chance. And then you yourself, if he gives you that second chance, have to respond to it with a different attitude yourself than you had when you failed to produce the paper.

Now you can see that the one change in attitude is no use without the other. Now it's the same in any situation where there is a break in personal relationships. Any situation where there's a conflict between two people has exactly those two problems. There's the problem of the offended person who has to find some way of meeting the requirements and the demands of his nature if he's going to give the offender a chance to make things right. And the offender must on his part change his or her attitude in order to take advantage of the second chance.

In other words, there's really no point in you simply accepting the new arrangement the professor has made. There's no point in you going around and telling all your friends "You know I didn't get that paper in, but he tells me that if I do a paper of 15,000 words and get it in, in two weeks time, I'll be okay."

There's no point in you continuing to tell that and believe that and five years later you're still saying it. "You remember that paper? Well, you know he made a new arrangement for me. Yes, he said

that if I did the paper for 15,000 words and got it in, he'd accept it." Ten years from now, you're still telling the same thing.

In other words, no agreement, no easing of tension, no reconciliation is possible unless you change your attitude. It's not enough for you to say, "I believe and accept the new arrangement. And I think it's a good one, Professor. I really do believe it." It's no use. There's no point in you continually saying you accept and you believe it unless you actually respond to it in some way. You can see that clearly.

Now, six years ago, believe it or not, I started Romans. Six years ago, even the Vatican was in great doubt about authority as far as certain statements that we never questioned concerning the Maker of the universe. Six years ago, the Vatican was beginning to question itself and to have its doubts. And that was perhaps the great characteristic six years ago. We were all very uncertain about everything. We were all living in insecurity and very conscious of our own insignificance and very aware of the meaninglessness of our lives. Even the Vatican itself was thrashing around saying "Well, we're not quite sure if we believe the things we used to believe. We're not sure." And there was a great crisis of confidence as far as authority was concerned. Everybody was giving their own version of why we were all feeling insecurity and insignificance. And that's why I felt God prompting me to start trying to explain the problem from the viewpoint of the Creator of the universe.

And that's why we started Romans. Because we felt that in Romans, God -- the Creator of the universe -- was explaining from his point of view what had gone wrong with all of us and with society. And that's what we began to do at that time. We began to explain how the offended person felt. We began to explain how the professor felt and what requirements and what demands he had to face if he was going to open the way for any reconciliation.

You remember the way we describe it. We describe it often in this kind of term: God made us so that we could share the life and love that he already enjoyed with his Son. He made us first with physical life. He didn't give us the spiritual life that would make us like him and his Son. He just made that spiritual life available in the Holy Spirit or the Tree of Life. Remember how often we've shared, that we decided that we'd do without that. We'd live independent of it; we'd live our lives by our own wits and decide what was good and evil for ourselves.

You remember that as a result of that, God who is the only one who really knows how the universe will work, was forced to reject us and to condemn us to separation from that supernatural life. And he had to condemn us to a life that would end after 70 years. That was his only way of preventing us from spreading our chaos and turning his universe into a hell by using our own contorted, perverted knowledge of good and evil. You remember that as a result of that, we all began to experience a great sense of alienation from the Center of the universe. We began to experience great frustration and great loneliness. And this produced in us the psychological and physical symptoms of strain, stress and anxiety.

And then you remember, we've shared often how the great professor started to look at the demands that he was facing and how this mighty Creator of ours, for no reason at all, (he had no reason to step back from his condemnation of us to death, except for a love that you and I can't even begin to understand), this Creator began to make an arrangement whereby he would be able to maintain his own justice and holiness in rejecting us and condemning us to death and yet would be able to give us another chance to receive that spiritual life that he had made available at the beginning.

And you remember how we've often talked about how God had to find someone who would face the penalty that we should face. If he hadn't been able to find that, if he had changed his mind, it would seem to us he was just being easygoing or soft. If he had suddenly said "All right, I told you, you couldn't come and receive my Holy Spirit; now I tell you, you can come." We would say "Oh, God cannot be trusted, he's fickle, and he changes." But God, in order to prevent us feeling that there was no justice or holiness in him, required his Son to die that death and face the death of separation and alienation for us. So never again could we question that he was really a holy and just God. And yet God opened the way for us to move towards his Holy Spirit and to receive the Holy Spirit.

Now that's the burden of the first five chapters of Romans. That's the burden of those first five chapters. The whole point of those five chapters is to point out that God is no longer hostile to us. Despite the fact that we've lived independent of him, been indifferent to him and ignored him, he is not hostile to us. Because of his Son's death on our behalf, despite his holiness and justice, he is able to open his arms towards us.

That's really what all those five chapters are saying. Even though we've offended him mortally, Jesus' death has enabled God to open his arms to us and to say, "Look, I will give you the Holy Spirit of my uncreated life. I'll offer it to you if you'll receive it." Now that's really what those chapters are saying. They're saying that God found a way to do it. That's the point of Romans 3:25b, it's the second half of that verse. It really states that through Jesus dying and paying our penalty to God's holiness and justice, God has found a way to forgive us without compromising his holiness and justice. And you see it there in the second half of verse 25 of Chapter 3. You see the new sentence begins...

Romans 3:25b: "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

It was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous. Even though he has passed over our former sins he is still righteous and just; he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. And the whole purpose of those first five chapters of Romans is to show us how this mighty Person who is in a position of authority has found a way to give us another chance to receive his life.

And that's what it means in Romans 3:24. They are (or we are) justified by his grace as a gift. Actually we have no right to be here on earth after God condemned us to death. And that's why we felt loneliness, frustration and such a sense that this was not our place -- a stranger in the world. But Jesus' death meant that we had every right to be here, every right to be here for at least 70 or 80 years. And that's really what justification means.

In other words, we're really exactly in the same position as the student. The professor has made an arrangement whereby we have another chance to get the paper in. That's it. We have another chance, brothers and sisters, to receive the uncreated life of God's Holy Spirit. But that's exactly the spot we're in. Jesus' death has taken away the sense of condemnation and guilt that we felt and so we feel that this is our home, we have a right. The moment we believe that Jesus has died for us, we begin to feel at home in the world. But do you see, we're at home only until the 70 or 80 years are up. We're here only long enough to give us another chance to do what God originally wanted us to do.

Now that's all that Romans Chapters 1 to 5 is really saying; it's giving us God's attitude. Everything after that concerns our response. And that's really what we'll be doing for the next few of years. We'll be dealing with the rest of Romans and with what our response to that offer is. And that's what determines what you will do after this life ends.

It's not that you believe that God has made that arrangement. You see the silliness of it? It's not that you believe he has made that arrangement. There's no question he's made that arrangement. The moment you believe that, you feel a sense of being justified in being here. But that's only a first step. What we need to do is what God originally wanted us to do: receive the life of his Holy Spirit.

In other words, he's still making the offer. Now we're in a position to receive it but it will depend on what we do with the offer whether we go into outer darkness at the end of this life -- or whether we really go into a life that is far, far better. It's important to see it, because the bulk of our churches have never emphasized that at all. Most of us who have listened to preachers have found that the Gospel ended at Romans Chapter 5, that's it.

For most of us, all we have heard is justification. We've heard "Look, you don't need to feel you shouldn't be here on this earth. You don't need to feel you have no right to be here. Jesus has died for you. That's why God has not destroyed the world again with a flood. God is satisfied and happy that you're here. He loves you and his arms are open towards you."

But brothers and sisters, do you see why God's arms are open towards you? It's because he's offering you a life of his Holy Spirit. That's why.

But the great mass of Christians have never gotten beyond Romans 5. We've never got beyond justification. We think that justification is enough. But do you see what justification is? Justification means because of Jesus' death, God justifies us in being here at all. That's where our sense of guilt and alienation came from before. We felt we had no right to be here because God had already condemned us all to death. Now Jesus died in our place, so the moment we believe that, we have a great sense of justification. We stop justifying ourselves, we stop trying to prove ourselves to other people. We feel "No, this is really our home. We have a right to be here."

But brothers and sisters, that is only a preliminary step. We are back in the position of Adam in the Garden of Eden. We are back in that position of innocence because of Jesus' blood. And we are now in the position where we can receive the Tree of Life or we can reject the Tree of Life. But do you see, dear ones, the tragedy that most of us have been taught to believe? It's that, "Look, it's enough to be in the presence of the Tree of Life. This is great. I am back in the Garden of Eden; there is the Tree of Life. We have the Tree of Life here, and I'm justified in being in the Garden. Isn't the Garden beautiful?"

It is beautiful and God is offering us the Tree of Life again. That is no big deal. Adam was in that position. The deal is, are you taking of the Tree of Life. Are you receiving it? Are you accepting the offer? Or are you really continuing to reject it?

Now do you see that's what we're beginning to come into then in Romans 6? It is our response to God's offer. Maybe you'd look at it there and you'll see it very plainly, even in the phrases that Paul uses. In Romans 6:1 he says, "What shall we say then?" He says, in the light of this attitude that I've described your Creator has taken towards you, "What shall we say then?"

He's really saying that everything that happens to you is going to depend on what you say. But you see many of us say "No, no, it doesn't matter what we say. This is what God has done." It's like saying, "No, no, it doesn't matter whether I get the paper in or not, the professor has given me another chance to get it in." But brothers and sisters, that's only a preliminary condition that opens the way of access to the Tree of Life. Everything depends on how we respond to it. That's why Paul says, "What shall we say then?"

You remember God gave us free will. He made available his Holy Spirit which contains the genes of himself and his Son and makes anybody who receives that Holy Spirit like the Trinity Family. And that was why God originally made us. It was so that we'd live with him forever in the Trinity Family. And the only way to become like the Trinity Family was to receive that inimitable, uncreated life of the Holy Spirit that makes the Trinity Family what it is. That was God's original and ultimate intention for us.

Now the whole purpose of making the Tree of Life available to us is so that we should receive it, allow that life to come into us and through us, and sanctify us. It was to make us like God and make us like his Son Jesus. Therefore salvation is composed of justification and sanctification.

But do you know that most of us have only heard of justification? We've heard of Romans 5, the first five chapters. We've heard that God justifies us in being alive here on earth because of Jesus' death. But brothers and sisters, the whole purpose of that is that we might receive this life of the Holy Spirit and allow that life to make us like God and like his son.

Now that's what Paul is really saying if you look at Romans 6:1. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" Are we to continue to refuse his offer of the Holy Spirit so that he may continue to offer it again and again and again? Paul purposely puts the question in a ridiculous manner like that so that we'll see the absolute stupidity of it. But do you see, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue to reject this offer of the Holy Spirit so that God can show forth his grace by continuing to offer it to us again and again and again?"

Part of the reason why it's absolutely stupid is that that offer will cease after you and I die. We've been given a respite. We've been given a reprieve. We have 70 years maybe 80 -- I'm going for 90. But we have 70, 80, 90 years. It's a respite during which time we can receive this life of the Holy Spirit and allow it to transform us and make us like our Father and our Creator -- so that we can really be at home with him forever. Or we can continue to reject it with a silly kind of idea that it's okay, we're justified.

Loved ones, it's madness. God does not want in Heaven, a mass of people who are running around offending each other, hurting each other, criticizing each other and saying, "It's okay, God forgives us." You can't have fellowship in that kind of situation.

So the whole purpose of God sending Jesus at all was so that the "tree of life", the life of the Holy Spirit, could be opened to us. God does not want us to live in Romans Chapters 1 to 5. He wants us really to begin to live in the midst of the offer. And it's silly for us to think, all we need is to believe that God forgives us and that he's made the offer of the Holy Spirit to us. That's all we need -- to believe. That's silly and it achieves nothing. I don't want to bore you with it but it's like the student who says, "The professor has made a new arrangement for me." But he never does get the paper in. And therefore he never does get credit for the course. And therefore the tension never

is released. And it's the same with us.

Here's what happens if you stop short of Romans 6. You end up with a bunch of hypocrites in churches; people who continue to say, "I can sin with impunity now. It doesn't matter. Jesus has died for me and God has justified me. Jesus has borne all my sins. I can continue to do whatever I want and God will accept me."

The result is, you have masses of people who live hypocritical lives, who aren't at all like Jesus or aren't at all like God. And let's be straight -- that's one of the reasons we're together in the theatre this morning. That's one of the reasons that put us off the church. Many of us were tired of those churches that were filled with hypocrites. Now loved ones, the reason many churches, (not all churches), are filled with hypocrites is because they have stopped short at justification. They have gone up to Romans 5 and they have said, "You are justified in being here because of Jesus' death." But they have not seen why they're here: to receive the Holy Spirit.

I'd like you to be clear on that, that I'm not even saying the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. I'm just saying that if you come through a real New Birth experience, you actually receive the Holy Spirit at that moment. That's how you're born of the Spirit. And that Holy Spirit will continue to make you like God. And what we're going to be talking about for the next number of years from Romans 6 on is how that Holy Spirit expects us to respond to that offer. Loved ones, it's such a new thing for many of us. I'll just stop there. Does anyone want to ask a relevant question? Maybe no one does and that's all right, but it's good to be clear.

Our brother suggests that we don't only listen to the theory of the thing but that we actually make some notes ourselves. That's really why I share at all on Sunday mornings. You cannot become like God through mental exercise. It is through actually receiving that Holy Spirit.

So this is a big exciting moment for me. For six years I've slogged away at Romans 5 to get to Romans 6, 7, 8 and 9 because it is really great. It's the part of the Gospel, the part of reality or the part of truth that we have all been ignoring for years. And that has resulted in powerless and pitiful Christians in our chaotic world. So I'm trusting that God will really transform our lives during these next years.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Well, that's the question for you. What are you saying to God's offer? Are you saying, I'll continue to refuse it so that God can get the satisfaction of continuing to offer it? Well, that's ridiculous. It's just being cruel to God. It's being obtuse to our Maker.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for setting the thing so plainly before us. Thank you Father for showing it all so clearly to Paul and then for giving us your Holy Spirit so that we can begin to see the plain truth about ourselves. And Father we can see, that the big issue is not what your attitude is.

We are glad that your attitude is one of love towards us. We are glad that Satan is deceiving us, when he says you are condemning us. We are glad, our Father, that there is no condemnation in your heart at all towards us. And that the reason we will die eternally is not because you have rejected us, but because we have rejected your second offer, the offer of the Holy Spirit.

So Father, we thank you that your arms are open to us this morning and will be until the moment we die. And in them is this supernatural, uncreated life of the Spirit that can transform us and make us like you. Father we trust you over the next years to begin to delineate clearly for each of us, how we can enter into the full acceptance of this offer. We trust you for a good day today and a consciousness that the offer is open to us every second. All we have to do is look up in faith and receive. We thank you for that, in Jesus' name.

The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and until we see Jesus face to face.

Amen.