

Universal Atonement – Conditional Justification

Romans 6:2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let's pray. Dear Father, we thank you that you are renewing everything. You're transforming everything that our hands touch. You're going to create for yourself a harmonious community that is a picture to the world of heaven here on earth. We trust you to continue it in each one of us, for your glory, Amen.

It really is amazing that we're all here alive today. You may say, "Why is it amazing that we're alive?" Well, because by rights we should all be dead. We really should. We should all be absolutely wiped out. That's exactly what happened, maybe 4000 or 5000 years ago. That's exactly what happened. The Creator looked down and the whole thing (the earth) was much as it is today. And he just decided, "I'll just wipe it out and start all over again."

You remember it's in Genesis 6, if you'd like to look at it. It was the same situation dear ones, as we have today. Genesis 6:5-8; "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

And he carried that out. It's what's recorded there in Chapter 7. Genesis 7:21-23: "And all flesh died (as a result of the flood) that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 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. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark."

And the reason God got rid of everything was because they refused to treat him as their Creator. They refused to treat him as a loving Creator who was in control of everything. They refused to receive the miraculous life power that he offered them. And so, God being a holy and just God had to destroy it before they spread that same kind of spirit throughout the world and throughout his universe. God just wiped us all out. And brothers and sisters, we're in the same situation today.

Many of us don't treat God as our Creator at all -- you know that. Otherwise, why do we worry so much about jobs, about the future in our jobs and about our marital status? It's hard to get around you sisters and brothers too without finding somewhere in the back of your mind a fair little bit of worry or anxiety about, when am I going to get married? Whom am I going to marry? When am I going to get a job that I really enjoy? And really, that worry and anxiety is because basically we don't trust that God can handle the situation. Or we don't trust that he will handle it the way we want him to handle it -- that he won't pick the kind of girl or the kind of fellow that we want to pick.

Basically, loved ones, it's an attitude to God that is the same as took place 4000 or 5000 years ago. We refuse to treat God as our Creator and it goes into all sorts of things. It's the reason why we live so much in the future. It's because we don't really trust that God can take care of the future. In fact we're not quite sure that he has it organized for us or that he has any purpose or

plan in having us here at all. That's why most Christians as well as most humanists live a third of the time in the past and regrets, a third of the time in the future and worries, and part of the next third, they live in the present.

But really, we only live about a third of our lives here in the present. And the basic reason is because we don't treat God as our creator and as a loving Father who has all that organized. And so we don't simply take care of our end of it today and trust him to take care of tomorrow. Do you see that's the same kind of attitude that meant that God had to destroy the world and all the people in it, 4,000 or 5,000 years ago?

As a result of that attitude we all become expert manipulators. You know that we manipulate. We manipulate people, and we manipulate circumstances. We regard ourselves as gods of our own lives and gods of our futures. Our job is to try to ensure that it goes the way we want it to and this is despite the fact that we can ensure nothing.

We spend most of our lives trying to be gods, controlling things and making them go the way we want them to go. And that's exactly the same reason that made it necessary for our Creator to destroy everybody 4000 or 5000 years ago. The reason is plain. If you have a lot of gods, three and a half billion gods, (as there are three and a half billion of us), all trying to run their own lives in the way that pleases them, you're bound to have -- one or two collisions? No, you're going to have a couple of billion collisions. And if you let that continue for long enough they will eventually tear themselves apart. That's why God had to come down and just destroy the whole thing the last time.

Now, why didn't he do it this time? It's because he found a way of giving us a second chance to receive this miraculous life power that he had offered us originally and yet remain a just and a holy God. He found a way in which a holy God and a rebellious wild earth and people could live in peaceful coexistence for at least another few years.

His way was this. He allowed his Son to be destroyed for us so that his justice and holiness could never be called in question. It would be obvious that it had reacted against someone, and someone had taken the brunt of the death penalty for us. And so God was able to give us a reprieve for another few years on earth, to give us a second chance to receive the life power that he had made available originally.

But really that's it, loved ones. It is a reprieve. It's just a reprieve and it's in that sense that Jesus has died for the whole world. He has died for the whole world in the sense that he has died so that the world could have another few more years of life -- another little opportunity to receive the gift that God had originally offered.

That's why we talk about a universal atonement. We say that Jesus by his death atoned for all your past rejections of God's life and all the sins that stem from those rejections. So in that sense, Jesus paid for or atoned for all the things that should have brought your immediate death. But he could only atone as far as putting off the eventual death. All he could buy for us was a reprieve. Now that's the meaning of that verse in 1 John 2:2.

1 John 2:2 -- "and he (Jesus) is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Even the prostitute in Paris that is having intercourse at this moment; Jesus has died for her sins. That's why God does not strike her dead immediately or bring another flood upon the earth. It's because Jesus has died for her sins. She will never be expelled from

God's presence because of his condemnation of her, nor will you or me.

God really has nothing but love towards you and me at this moment. Whatever you have done, whatever you did last night, whatever you did yesterday, God already has received payment for that through his Son's death. So he has no reason to condemn you. That is why you're alive here on earth. That's why you're justified in being here on earth. That's why God is justified in allowing you to be on earth and does not destroy you immediately.

It's the same with that prostitute. It's the same with the two fellows that are at this moment emptying an office in New York somewhere; it's the same for them. God actually has nothing but love towards them at this moment. He forgives them utterly because Jesus has died for that sin that they're committing. So in that sense Jesus has died for the sins of the whole world. In that sense, he has enabled the whole world to continue living at this moment.

Now here is the tragic mistake most of us make. We interpret God's justification for suspending the death penalty (that is, Jesus' death) and giving us a reprieve and a respite; we interpret our justification for being alive here on earth instead of being destroyed by a flood; we interpret that, which is part of justification, as the whole of justification in God's eyes. Now, that's the tragedy.

Many of us say, "Brother, I believe what you have said. I believe that Jesus has died for my sins and that's why I am alive here today. I believe that God is justified in forgiving me, so therefore I am a Christian." But brothers and sisters, do you see that that's only half of justification? The only thing that will finally justify us in God's eyes is if we take the opportunity that he has offered us in these few years more on earth.

If we take advantage of that opportunity to do what he originally asked us to do -- receive the life of this Holy Spirit -- then we will be fully justified by God. Do you see there is a distinction? It is important because I think a lot of us, both Christians and humanists alike, mistake God's justification for suspending the death penalty (in Jesus' death) and our justification for being alive to remain here on earth for another few years, we mistake that as our justification in God's eyes. It is not. The only thing that will justify us in God's eye is eventually doing the thing that he originally asked us to do -- receive of the Tree of Life.

You remember I shared it with you last Sunday. Many of us are like Adam in the Garden of Eden. We're saying, "I am back in the Garden of Eden, and the Tree of Life, the Holy Spirit, is there. This miraculous life power that will make me like God, it's there now. I am back here, I have the opportunity, I am glad I am right with you, Lord."

But God is saying, "You're not right with me until you eat of the Tree of Life." And we're continually saying, "No, no I am right if I believe that because of Jesus, you have made the tree of life available to me again. I am right if I believe that because of Jesus' death, you have let me into the Garden of Eden again." And God is continually saying, "No my son, no my daughter -- you become right with me when you do what I originally asked you to do -- because that's the only thing that will make you like my son and like myself."

In other words, many of us try to substitute an intellectual assent to the fact that God is justified in allowing us to remain alive for another 70 years. We tend to substitute the assent to that truth for really receiving the life of God's Spirit. And so many of us, in church and outside

church, are trying to believe away our guilt on the basis of our mental assent to the fact that God is justified in allowing us to live another few years.

We're trying to believe away our guilt and we can't do it. We're trying to find real justification and many of us will say to me, "But Pastor, I still find myself trying to justify myself. I still find that I am trying to prove myself by the grade I get. I am trying to prove myself to my professor. I am still trying to prove myself to my wife by the way I carry out my job. I am still trying to prove myself to my parents. I am still trying to justify myself in the eyes of my peers."

Loved ones, you do that because you haven't entered into real justification. Real justification is not believing that God is justified in forgiving you. Real justification is not in believing that Jesus' death has enabled you to be here alive on earth for another 70 years. Real justification comes when you do what God asked you originally to do -- receive the life of his Holy Spirit.

Now, you see there is a vast gap there. That unreal justification will never bring a sense of real peace. You are right that there is a universal atonement. Every prostitute, every thief, every critic among us, every person among us who has been sarcastic, those things have been atoned for by Jesus' death. God will never separate us from himself because of those sins. They have been paid for by Jesus' death.

But all Jesus' death can do is keep us from being destroyed at this moment. The only thing that will enable us to live forever is if we receive of the tree of that eternal life. In other words, justification includes receiving of the Holy Spirit. That's really what God wants us to do.

Now, it's emphasized in all the pieces of God's word that talk about justification -- this importance of us actually receiving something into ourselves. You can see it in Romans 3:24-26. They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus -- whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood. And then here it is -- to be received by faith.

In other words you have to receive Jesus' life by faith. You simply haven't to receive the concept that they have stated there by faith. That's only the intellectual belief part of faith. You have to actually receive the life that has been offered.

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 and that he justifies him and then again any who has faith in Jesus. And faith in the New Testament is not just belief that Jesus' death enables us to live for another few more years here on earth. But it means that Jesus himself is the life. He is the Tree of Life and when we receive him into ourselves as a spirit of supernatural life that will make us like God.

That really is what God wants us to see plainly: only He can justify. You see it says that God justifies him who has faith in Jesus. God is justified in forgiving us. We're all justified in being alive on earth. But God can only justify us in his own eyes when we do what he asked us to do: receive of the Tree of Life. You get it again in John 1:12. It's a well-known verse that we have used often.

It shows again that it's not enough to be alive in the Garden of Eden but we have to choose to eat of the Tree of Life if we're going to be justified in God's eyes. John 1:12 -- "But to all who received him, (notice it's received not believed. Belief is part of it but receiving is the vital

part) who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” And then these who received the Spirit of Jesus are people who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Now brothers and sisters too many of us are trying to be born of the will of the flesh or of the will of man instead of, of God. And God can only justify us in his own eyes when we actually receive this life. Why? Because it's the only thing that will make us like God. That's it. And the whole purpose God had in putting us here was not to allow us to live in peace for a few years, but to allow us to receive his supernatural uncreated, inimitable life that makes us like Himself in a miraculous way.

That's why we have to receive the life of the Holy Spirit -- because that's the only one who makes us like God. He's the only one who sanctifies us. Sanctification is making you holy. Justification is treating you as if you are holy. God justifies us. He treats us as if we're holy – i.e. he doesn't destroy us, we're alive here. He should really have destroyed us all because we're unholy, but he has left us to be alive. So, he has treated us as holy. Now, he wants us to receive the life of his Holy Spirit so that he can make us holy and sanctify us.

And loved ones it's the reason why many of us have difficulties with this second part of Romans, which for the next few years we'll find teaches us the whole effect that this supernatural life has in our day-to-day lives. The reason some of us who call ourselves Christians have trouble with the second part of Romans, the reason many of us who call ourselves Christians have trouble with the whole idea of Sanctification, the reason many of us who call ourselves Christians have trouble with this business of being filled with the Holy Spirit, is because we have never actually received the Holy Spirit. We have never actually been born of the Holy Spirit ourselves. We have entered into a mental kind of belief in justification but we have never actually been justified in God's eyes through receiving the Holy Spirit into ourselves at the New Birth.

Many of us have nothing inside us that makes us love God's will. What happens when you receive the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit makes your heart like God's, he really does. He gives you a heart that is like God's. You find you have a heart inside you that wants God's will. You have a heart inside you that is glad every time the Lord reveals something of yourself that is not like him. It's a heart that wants to go after God, that wants more and more of him.

And so when you come to subjects like sanctification or crucifixion with Christ or being baptized with the Holy Spirit, that heart that has been changed by the Holy Spirit coming into you yearns after those things. And so really initial sanctification takes place the moment you are really justified. You are justified in God's eyes the moment you do what he asks you to do.

He said, "Look, I have offered my Holy Spirit to you because that physical life that you have isn't enough. It will die out after 70 years. I have offered my Holy Spirit to you that will impart to you my mind, the spirituality of my mind, the blessedness of my emotions, and the liberty of my will. That will impart to you a supernatural body that will enable you to live with me and the Trinity family forever. Now, will you receive that life?"

And the moment we go over and receive that life into ourselves, that moment we're justified in God's eyes. We have a sense of peace with him. It doesn't matter how justified HE is in forgiving us or how justified HE is in making the tree available to us again. We're only justified when we eat of that tree.

Brothers and sisters do you see there is a vast difference between those two things. That's why Paul asks that question in Roman 5:2. It seems almost the same question all over again that he asked in the verse that we studied last week. So you can see how important he feels it is. Romans 5:2; He answers the previous question, you remember, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" By no means, not at all.

And then he asked this question; "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Now sin, brothers and sisters, is rejecting the Holy Spirit. It's being independent of God and that's rejecting the Holy Spirit. It's resisting God -- and Paul says, "How can we who have stopped rejecting the Holy Spirit still live apart from the Holy Spirit?" You can't do it. It's impossible.

In other words Paul says, "Everyone who is justified is a person who has received the Holy Spirit." And once you have received the Holy Spirit you can't continue to reject him. There is some logic in language and you can't reject and receive at the same time. And if you have received the Holy Spirit then you can't reject the Holy Spirit. If you have received the Holy Spirit to depend on and to lean on him then you can't be living apart or independent of him. It's a contradiction to say that you can and that's what Paul is saying.

Sin is resistance to God's will and independence of his Spirit. Once a person has received the life of the Holy Spirit that person begins to have a heart like God and begins to depend on God and finds himself living dependent on the Holy Spirit. In other words -- living free from that sin of independence.

Now, that's the kind of a truth that is stated in Romans 8:14, if you'd like to look at it. It states those two parts in a sense. Whenever the Holy Spirit comes into you he makes you like God and that those are the only people really who are sons of God. Rom 8:14 -- "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." And that's really how you tell a son of God.

You could believe all that I have said for months and for years. You could believe it all, and understand it better than I understand it. But do you see, it's not believing at all that counts? It's receiving the life that has been made available.

Believing that God is justified in offering you that life doesn't mean that you have received it. Believing that you are justified in being alive here on earth and not being destroyed by a flood does not mean that you have received that life. The heart of justification and the beginning of sanctification is receiving the life of the Holy Spirit. And that is what the New Birth is. That's why we talk about the New Birth being believing that Jesus has died so that God could offer us the Holy Spirit and then receiving that Holy Spirit.

Many of us are trying to substitute intellectual assent and emotional regret for real believing and receiving. Many of us are trying to substitute believing and being sorry, for repenting and actually receiving -- because to receive the Holy Spirit means you have to make room for him. The Holy Spirit will not dwell with sarcasm. He will not dwell with a critical attitude. He will not dwell with a heart that is bent on making as much out of other people as you can. So when the Holy Spirit comes in, he demands that you deal with those other things that are not like him. That's why he is called the Holy Spirit.

So really brothers and sisters, to be born of God or to be justified in God's eyes, we need to

repent and receive the Holy Spirit. Now don't get all worked up over, do I mean by receiving the Holy Spirit being baptized by the Holy Spirit? NO, we haven't come to that at all. I am just talking about becoming a Christian. Being justified in God's eyes means you repent, you stop doing the things that the Holy Spirit doesn't want you to do, and you receive the Holy Spirit of the super natural life of God into yourself. And that begins to make you like God and to sanctify you.

I'd like to stop and pause for a moment so that you can ask a question. If the Holy Spirit doesn't want a question asked, then we can just have a moment of silence.

I am so anxious, loved ones, that you will see that the height of becoming a Christian is much higher than what we have imagined. I am anxious that you will see it and that you will know if you are a child of God or not, and not be in any doubt about it.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply from Rev. O'Neill: The brother asks, "If living apart from the Holy Spirit is sin, does that mean when you receive the Holy Spirit you will not sin anymore?"

The answer is, if you will submit to the Holy Spirit, listen to his voice, and listen to his promptings there is no reason why we should sin in the sense that sin is conscious disobedience to God. Now if you define sin as any deviation from absolute right then we sin day after day because we have imperfect minds and unbalanced emotions. But if you mean by sin, knowing, conscious disobedience to God's will, then no, that is right -- if we will submit to the Holy Spirit once we receive him, we will walk into our life of victory.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply from Rev. O'Neill: The brother asks, "Isn't walking with the Holy Spirit then a lifetime thing?"

Yes, it is. Brother what many of us have found, however, is that we learn to walk rebellious to the Holy Spirit, or walking kind of beside him early on in our Christian lives so that we ran a kind of Christian life. So many of us found that not only had we to start walking in the Holy Spirit but we had to die and deal with a whole lot of that independence that we have bred within ourselves. That's why Paul talks of this crisis in Roman 6. If we would walk on after the Holy Spirit fully and freely, we would walk into victory. But many of us have sunk into compromised self controlled surrenders and that's why we have troubles.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply from Rev. O'Neill: God said he would send the spirit of his Son into our hearts. The problem is and why I emphasis receiving the Spirit is because so many people talk about accepting Christ. They don't mean to receive the spirit of Jesus into themselves. They mean "I accept Christ, I accept Buddha; I accept that this world is spinning around in space." They accept the intellectual concept of Jesus.

That's why it's so important to see dear ones, that it's not just accepting the idea. It's not just believing in the concept of justification. It is actually receiving the life of this man into us. Do you see that's why there seem to be two kinds of Christians. You know it as well as you are sitting

there. There seem to be Christians that know it all, believe all the right things, go to church, sing all the gospel hymns but they are not like Jesus. They aren't like Jesus. Then there are others that don't know about it at all, but they have received the spirit of Jesus into them. There is a gentleness, softness and a teachability about them that immediately makes you sense you're with brothers and sisters.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply from Rev. O'Neill: Sister asks, "If you're not sure you're a Christian, how do we go about receiving Jesus?"

I think many of us when we listen and see a little deeper into God's word begin to wonder -- just where am I? Brothers and sisters it's just a straight deal -- you repent and receive. You ask the Holy Spirit to show you, "where have I been living apart from you?" And then give him time to answer because he will. Don't speak to him and then do up a ventriloquist job where you speak back to yourself.

Just speak to him, ask him, and don't put a deadline on him. Don't say you must answer before I have breakfast. No. Ask the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit show me, I really want to know where I am walking independent of you, where have I started to walk in the strength of my own mind or in my intellectual belief? Where have I become just an intellectual Christian if there is such a thing? Where have I become just an intellectual believer?"

The Holy Spirit will begin to show you. He may show you the next day a little more. He may show you something in the Bible that will show you a little more. But usually for many of us when we open our consciences to the Holy Spirit, a lot of things will flood in upon us -- things we know we are doing against God's will.

Now, you'll repent of those dear ones, and you stop doing them. You don't cry, you don't say you're sorry, you don't say I am going to try harder the next time. You stop doing it. That's it. That's what you do to a man whom you have crucified. You don't keep pushing the sword in and say, "I am sorry I am doing it." You keep the sword out. You say, "I stop this."

And secondly you receive the spirit of Jesus right there. You say, "Lord Jesus, I have done what you asked me to do. I have stopped crucifying you in my life by stopping my sins. Now I receive you in." And stopping sins, loved ones, is an honest determination to stop them. You can only stop them today. You can't stop them tomorrow. You can only say, "Lord as far as I am concerned I am stopping those things now."

Audience: (Inaudible)

Rev. O'Neill: Sister asks, "Can you actually stop doing the things by nature under our own power?"

You can set your will. God can see your will and he knows whether you're really willing to stop those things. If you're really willing to stop those things he gives you the grace to actually do it. You can be willing to stop and the Holy Spirit is able to tell whether you're willing or not.

Loved ones, I ran that game with God for a long time. I said, "Yes, I'll repent. I'll say I am sorry and I'll stop them. But, really he won't know but I kind of think I might try it again later on." It

was so stupid to think that the infinite God could not see every thought that was in your mind.

That's the way to receive the Holy Spirit. God will only give the Holy Spirit at the New Birth or at justification to those who have actually determined to have done with those things. And God can tell whether you're willing or not. He can tell whether you really mean or not.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply by Rev. O'Neill: That's it brother, that's the battle. I think that's been the problem with a lot of us. Some of us have been humanists and agnostics for years and have never been involved in churches, but many of us have been involved in churches and have tried to seek God and tried to receive him and I think that's the problem.

We have said, "We on the whole want to have done with these this." But, there are a few things that we negotiate with God about. We try to receive the spirit of Jesus in and on top of all this manure. You can't do it. The Holy Spirit will not come in on top of a lot of things. You have to fight your way through. "Am I all the way with you God or am I not?" That's it.

Question from Audience: (Inaudible)

Reply from Rev. O'Neill: I won't repeat the question because I think my answer will probably re-state it. It seems to me there is no question that the Holy Spirit can only be received by a person who totally submits to him at that moment. There aren't Christians who receive the Holy Spirit without completely submitting to him. Those who receive him completely submit to him.

It seems at the moment of justification, at the moment of the New Birth, at the moment of our forgiveness of our sins, the moment we become Christians, (not talking about baptism of the Holy Spirit at all), we must be totally submitted at that moment to the Holy Spirit. The problem is that there are some of us then who cease to be submissive to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit then witnesses that to our conscience. He witnesses that he is grieved. Then we sometimes ask forgiveness for it and we are back under him again. But sometimes we don't ask forgiveness and we don't yield to him. And so there are many children of God walking in various degrees of resistance to the Holy Spirit. And this is where you get what is called carnal Christians. People who were alive but now live as if they are not.

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