

Atonement Means Identification

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 6:3

Genesis 6:5-7; "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 then you remember, in Genesis 7:21-23 is the historical event of the flood.

Genesis 7:21-23; "And all flesh died 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."

Why did God react that way? I ask that because we ourselves are living in a society whose Supreme Court has described that kind of action as a cruel and inhuman punishment. So that's why I think it's a problem to many of us, why God reacted that way. When our own Supreme Court describes capital punishment as an inhuman punishment, then why did God react that way?

You know that most of us, who have come through our educational system recently, have been encouraged to think in that way. You must admit, most of us have the kind of predisposition to believe that there is no evil so absolutely evil that the only thing you can do is destroy it. We really have been encouraged not to think that way. Yet you must admit that in practical affairs that concern our own lives, we do believe that there is some evil that is so bad that the only thing you can do is destroy it.

For instance, we believe that certain clothing that are impregnated with any plague or contaminated with any disease, all you can do with that clothing at times is to burn it and destroy it. We obviously believe it with much of our radioactive material. That's why we dump a lot of it in the deepest depths of the ocean. It's because we believe that there is certain material and certain things that are so bad that you can't do anything but destroy them.

It is interesting that certain governors and presidents, who are responsible for deterring society from destroying itself, obviously think in the same kind of way. They think that there is certain evil that is so bad that you have to destroy it before it destroys us. Yet you know that we have been encouraged to think that there is no evil that is so absolutely exclusive of good that all you can do is destroy it.

You know we have been encouraged to think that it's kind of primitive and bourgeois to believe that you have to destroy something -- that you cannot actually redeem it. We have begun to think that there is no black and white, that there are shades of gray and that there are no things just as bad as that. Yet, we can see that if you carry this to its ultimate conclusion, eventually society itself would not exist if we continue to think in these terms.

We have begun to see that there must be something that is worth preserving. There must be a moral

authority somewhere in the universe that you have to try to preserve if we're not all to take part in the destruction of one another. There was a really lovely, one of the most beautiful movies that has taken off much faster than "Deep Throat". It's just one of the beautiful movies with Walter Matthau and it was called "Kotch". It was the story of an old grandfather. It's just beautiful and really was a great help to us.

Kotch at one point remembered some lines of Latin that he learned at school and it ran, "Quis Custodiat custodias". It means, who will protect the protectors? And I think that's it, dear ones. Obviously a man like Nixon and Rockefeller, however much we may disagree with them on other issues, obviously they have begun to see that if you don't protect the law enforcers then eventually you come to a place where anything goes. If you don't make the destruction of policemen and prison guards an absolute "no-no" that receives punishment, i.e. the capital death penalty, then eventually you get into a society where nobody cares about anything.

So obviously, brothers and sisters, somewhere along the line you have to get the buck to stop being passed. Somewhere along the line you have to settle and decide, "Look, there's something that is so bad that you have to stop it however you stop it." And I think many of us are slowly beginning to see that. Even the psychologists are beginning to see it too -- that there are some things that are so bad that you really have to act to stop them.

Now if you want to see the disease that you and I are in at the moment, you only had to watch "Archie" [TV sit com] last night and you saw the disease, didn't you? We will look after ourselves. The girl was almost raped but we will look after her reputation. Okay, the fellow may go out and rape others but we want to keep the dignity of our own family intact.

That's how far this kind of disease is gone. We have lost the sense of absolutes and the feeling that there's anything worth putting your life on the line for. Now we're being driven back in our cities into apartment blocks where we have security systems on them and we just lock ourselves up in our little caves. We're getting back to the caveman mentality. You lock yourself up, keep your gun on your bedside table and you don't let anybody in to you.

Now loved ones, do you see that that comes when we believe that there is no evil so absolutely evil that it has to be destroyed. Now obviously God did not think that way at all. You can see that on the basis of that piece of history that we've just read, on the basis of the evidence of an alluvial layer of rock throughout the world, i.e. geological evidence for a flood, and on the basis of the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament history. Obviously there came a time when God decided, "This is so evil that all I can do is destroy it, if I am going to preserve anything at all." That's really what we're reading about when we read about that flood. God obviously believes there is some evil that is confrontable only with destruction and that's the only way you can deal with it.

Now what is that evil or what are those attitudes? Well, the attitudes that God felt were so bad that they had to be destroyed were summed up by the writer of an article in the "Minneapolis Star" newspaper last year. He did an article on a survey that he carried out on students at the University of Minnesota who were graduating that year. He was trying to find out the motives that were guiding them in their choice of jobs and he summarized the motives under three categories: profit, power, and success. Those were the three things that were guiding the majority of students who graduated from the university last year in their choice of jobs.

They were going for jobs to give them profit. Or they wanted a job that give them power and

influence. Or they wanted a job that gave them a feeling of success and enjoyment. Now those are the three attitudes that the Creator of the world set out to destroy by that flood. Those are three attitudes that deal with the three areas of our soul: the will, the mind and the emotions. Those are the three attitudes that, if they're allowed to wildcat throughout the universe, will eventually destroy the universe and destroy all of us.

They are the attitudes mentioned in that verse that we've looked at often, you know if you refer back to Genesis 3:6. And these are the attitudes really that the psychologists confirm, make the wheels of industry and commerce turn. Most executives are governed and driven by these three desires or these three needs. You find them there in Genesis 3:6.

Genesis 3:6; "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate."

Now, it was because of those three motives or desires that we decided to set up our own standards of good and evil and decide what was good and evil for ourselves.

Now you can see them there in verse 6. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food." This is the desire to have our own way, get what we want, whatever it costs anybody else. It's the desire to get things. "And that it was a delight to the eyes." It's the desire for enjoyment and happiness whatever it costs anyone else. "And that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." It's the desire to use our minds to manipulate people and circumstances to our advantage.

Those are the three same motives -- the need for profit, power and success. Now the reason those drives are so powerful is that God did make us with a need for security. We really do have a need for security. We don't need all the food in the world but we do need security. We don't need all the clothing in the world but we do need security. He made us with the need for security. So that is God-given.

He made us with a need for happiness. So that is a thing that's God's gift. That's why it's such a strong desire in each of us. He gave us a desire to use our minds to bring things into order. So that is a God-given thing. Now brothers and sisters, that's why those drives are so powerful in themselves. But it was God's intention to satisfy all those by giving us the supernatural life-power of his Holy Spirit. He planned that we would have all those things satisfied by that. But we determined to do it without his life-power and so we began to try to satisfy these things by our own wits.

Many of us have dedicated our lives to achieving security for ourselves. We've given ourselves over to getting all the food, clothing and shelter we can possibly need in this life. Many of us, by excessive life insurance policies, are determined to try to insure it for not only our children but our grandchildren as many generations after that as possible. As a result of the way three and a half billion people in the world have given vent to that desire, there is an absolutely unjust and unfair distribution of wealth and food. And it's because we're driven by that desire to achieve security in the way that we want, to get what we want, when we want it.

We're the same with the desire of happiness. We have such a desire to enjoy ourselves that we don't care who else we destroy. We don't care who else has happiness destroyed, as long as we are happy. We'll do anything for an extra kick, an extra thrill or some sense of exhilaration. It doesn't

matter who suffers or what person has their own emotions destroyed.

It's the same with the mind. We're so determined to use our mind to manipulate circumstances and people to our advantage that we leave everybody else without a free will except us. Now do you see that when you take billions of minds, emotions and wills that are bent on that kind of attitude, you've got a problem on your hands?

If you've got three and a half billion minds trying to manipulate each other for individual satisfaction and happiness, you've got chaos. And when God looked at three and half billion of us using our personalities, our attitudes and our abilities in that way -- he knew there was nothing to do but destroy us absolutely.

So you remember what he did. He withdrew his Holy Spirit from us so that at least we would not be able to live infinitely and eternally. He did that so we wouldn't be able to destroy his world and his universe continually. Then, he destroyed us by putting all those minds, emotions and wills, with all those drives for security, happiness and manipulation of others, into his Son Jesus and he destroyed them on Calvary.

We saw last Sunday that that's why he, as a holy God, is able to offer us again an opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit. It's because his justice has been satisfied by destroying the evil that was in all of us. We call that the atonement. We said that Jesus atoned for all our rebellion against God by actually dying for us and allowing God to put all these tremendously strong drives into him and destroy them there. That made us at one with God. It put us right with our Creator so that we really felt a great sense of acceptance with him.

At last, he had done what he knew had to be done. He had destroyed the evil that we had produced in the world and so he was free to accept us as his children. It brought a great sense of justification to us when we began not only to believe that but to receive the Holy Spirit into us -- this life-power that he had originally given us. It has saved a lot of us from trying to get the acceptance of our peers any longer.

Now here's the problem that many of us face. Many of us here this morning really do know that God has forgiven us. We have received the life of his Holy Spirit into us. We do believe that we're justified in God's eyes. But, there are many of us here who have still incredible problems and troubles with those selfish willful desires for security, happiness and manipulation of others.

We still have that problem even though we have received the Holy Spirit. There are many of us who are Christians here this morning that still find those drives are alive within us. We're still driving to get security by other ways and means. We still have problems with greed and covetousness, about clothes and food. Many of us still have trouble with gluttony and sexual desires.

Many of us still have trouble with a tremendous desire to enjoy ourselves emotionally whoever it hurts. Many of us still have difficulties with the desire of the mind to manipulate us to the top of the heap, whatever it costs anybody else, whoever we have to trample over to get the best job.

In other words, there are many of us who really have received the Holy Spirit into ourselves but we still find we have problems with these strong drives of the selfish will. It's outlined there in Galatians 5:17. It describes quite well the situation that many of us find ourselves in, in our own personal lives.

Galatians 5:17, "For the desires of the flesh", (The flesh is not the sexual part of us, or even the physical body. The desires of the flesh are the independent selfish will. If we leave out one of the letters of the word flesh you get the word 'self'. It's really the desires of the flesh, or the self.) "The desires of the selfish will are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would."

And there are many of us who have received the Holy Spirit, are justified in God's eyes, and yet we have problems in this area. These drives seem to be still alive and active inside us. That's why Paul says a few verses later there in Galatians 5:25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Paul says, "If you're born of the Spirit, if you've received the Holy Spirit into you, if you're justified in God's eyes, why not walk by that Spirit?"

But many of us find that we cannot. We say, "Yes, I do want to walk by the Spirit. I want to depend on this supernatural life force of the Holy Spirit to give me all the joy I want. But I find something inside me wanting to get more joy. I want to trust the Holy Spirit to give me the food, clothing and money that I need but I find there's another drive inside me that wants to get all that I want and more if possible than God even wants for me." And so many of us have found that those kind of drives work against each other.

We want to depend on the Holy Spirit but we find ourselves falling back into these old drives for profit, power and success that govern the ordinary person who has never received God's Spirit. Now why is this? It's because you and I think of Jesus' death and of our being destroyed in him as a beautiful idea, that's it.

When we read about God destroying all those drives for profit, power and success in Jesus, we think of that as a neat little analogy. We say, "Yes, that's a nice way to think about how a holy God had to get satisfaction for his justice." Mind you, we think God a bit silly for accepting one man's death for other people's death. It seems unjust. Why punish one person for somebody else's misdoing?

So deep down we think, "We better humor him. This is a strange kind of justice he has but we'll humor him. It's a nice thought, a nice illustration. Yes, Lord, You're right. You put us all into Jesus, we believe that. You destroyed us all there (in Jesus) and now you're prepared to forgive us and to give us your Holy Spirit."

Now brothers and sisters, the tragedy for those of you who have been to church over a great part of your lives, is that most of us have heard that presented as a nice little illustration, a nice little method God has of giving himself an excuse for forgiving us.

We don't see that God really did destroy us in Jesus. God is one who lives in the world that Einstein describes-- where there is no past, there is no present and there is no future. There is just one great present, eternity. There is just one great moment. We fail to see that that mighty God, (who is in a part of the universe, who can see all things as happening now, that happened three thousand, four thousand, five million years ago and that will happen fifty years hence) that great God actually did take your drive for profit, power and success and did put them into his Son Jesus and did actually destroy them objectively by the power of his Spirit. And that's why he is willing to forgive us.

Loved ones, God's justice demands that those things be destroyed. He can't just pretend. He is not a silly God. He can't just pretend and say, "Oh yes, I'll pretend that I've destroyed them in Jesus. Therefore now I'll treat all these people as if they were really good even though they aren't."

No, the only reason God can treat us as good is that he has already destroyed all the evil that we produced. And that's what God tries to get over to us again and again in the Bible. But we keep saying, "It's a nice illustration. Now obviously, if you live in the world of time and space, that couldn't happen. He couldn't destroy the selfish desire or the lustful desire that I have at this moment."

Don't you see that it's silly to think in terms of time and space? Don't you see that even you yourself transcend time? If I ask you, can you remember a year ago? Can you remember ten years ago? Can you remember fifteen years ago? You know that there is really very little degree of difference in the vividness of your memory. You know that things ten years ago, if they were important things or had emotional import to you, you can remember those as well as you can remember things last week. Even in our own time-space lives, we can begin to see that time actually in a sense, does not exist.

You know how difficult it is for you to decide whether last week went slowly or fast? You know that is purely relative. The clock says it goes at the same speed but you yourself know that it went faster or slower according to the things that you were doing last year. In other words, even we ourselves see that time and space do not exist.

Now in God's mind and in God's eternal world, he is able actually to destroy the drives that are making mincemeat out of your lives at present. Now that's what God said again and again through Jesus' apostles. Look at just one of the instances in 2 Corinthians 5:14.

2 Corinthians 5:14; "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all." Most of us kind of accept that and we say, "Yes, Jesus died for us. That's what enabled him to bring us the atonement to atone for our rebellion against God and to make us at one with God."

"Therefore, all have died." That's the second bit that we so rarely realize is true. When Jesus died for us, he was able to do that because we were actually all put into him and destroyed with him. That's why God's justice was satisfied.

There are spiritual powers that God released, just as we release certain x-rays into a thing like cancer to destroy it. God released certain spiritual powers against the drives for profit, power and success that destroy our present lives. He destroyed them in Jesus. That's what Paul is saying in this verse that we're studying today. I explained it before I asked you to read it, because so many of us read it and we just immediately under-interpret it the moment we read.

Romans 6:3, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Brothers and sisters, this was the beginning of light for me in my own Christian experience. This Romans 6 was the beginning of light for me, in a life that had been utterly unsatisfying and defeated as a Christian. Gradually, I began to see that this was true.

Jesus atoned for my sins because he actually allowed me to die with him by faith. If I'd have had to die physically or eternally, I'd have been wiped out immediately. But God was allowing me to die by faith, to die as it were by proxy, in Jesus. The moment I was willing to enter into that and accept it, that moment the Holy Spirit was able to destroy those drives for profit, power and success that

governed my whole life. But for years, brothers and sisters, I didn't believe that we had anything to do with Jesus' death.

I knew that it was because of his death that God was willing to forgive us but I never saw that the real reason for that was because we had actually taken part in his death. Instead of sending another flood, God sent Jesus. He put us all into Jesus and destroyed us there. That can actually be made real in our own individual, personal, subjective experiences today, the moment we're willing to let that happen in us.

So brothers and sisters, this is some of the deeper teaching that God is beginning to take us into in Romans 6. It concerns the whole business of living like a Christian -- not just being a Christian but how to live like a Christian. I think what God wants us to begin to do over these next years, is to begin to see in what way you and I are prepared to take Jesus' death as a lovely analogy, or neat illustration of a holy God demanding satisfaction for his justice -- or whether we're really prepared to believe that God did actually destroy us in Jesus along with those drives for profit, power and success. Over these next years, we'll try to elaborate and draw out all the meaning of this.

It obviously doesn't mean he destroyed our personalities. Obviously it doesn't mean he destroyed our bodies. But obviously, he destroyed the things that are troubling you and me. And what is the proof that they needed to be destroyed? Your own failure to control your temper.

How many years have you been trying to control your temper? How many years have you been trying to keep down lust? How many years have you tried to keep down that envy and jealousy in your heart? Isn't that indication that this is something so powerful and so evil that only a Creator of the world can deal with it? You can't suffocate those things. They really have to be destroyed. I thank God that he has done it and that it can be made real in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.

Father, we would trust you to give us the light of Your Holy Spirit as we can begin to go into the deep things that you want us to share. Father we remember that it was when Jesus started to talk this way that a great many turned away from him and stopped following him. Father, we do not want to be among that number.

Father, we want not only to be Christians in name (only hypocrites) but we want to be Christians in life. We want your world to begin to see Jesus alive in us. Lord, we trust you to give us patience as we go into these deep teachings and these deep truths. We trust you most of all to show us the great need for them in our own lives this coming week. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.