

## Identification is the Condition

Romans 6:4

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Most of us here this morning would probably differ on whether it was ever right to bomb Vietnam. I think we would. If we were to take polls or to begin a debate, probably all of us in the theater would differ in some way from each other. We have finite minds and we have different backgrounds. And it is possible for Christians who are really close together in the Spirit to honestly differ on issues that seem superficially to be very-very clear.

Therefore most of us would probably differ on whether it was right to bomb Vietnam or not. Maybe a majority would feel in one way, but there would be a difference. However, I think I am safe in saying that all of us would agree that one of the problems in the bombing was bombing military supplies and avoiding the destruction of hospitals and schools. All of us would agree that even the selected bombing which had planned to do that, failed far short. I think all of us therefore in the theater would agree that that was wrong, wherever a hospital, wherever a home -- whatever your political view is -- it was always wrong to destroy innocent people.

I think that's one of the real tragedies we would see in the guerilla warfare that is so prevalent in different parts of the world today. It is this old business of the destruction of the military powers and the destruction of innocent powers along with them. Now brothers and sisters, that's just a crude example of a problem that runs through the lives of all of us who are human beings and the life of the Creator of the universe Himself. The problem is this: how to destroy what is evil without destroying also what is good.

That's the real problem that the Creator of the universe faces every day and that you and I face and that medical people face. It's the difficulty with deep ray therapy in connection with certain kinds of cancer. The problem is to find a ray that will pass through normal cells and tissues without destroying them at all and yet when it comes to the abnormal cells and tissue, will destroy them. The whole difficulty is to get some ray that will destroy the evil or the diseased part of the body while leaving alive the good or the healthy parts.

Now that's the basic problem of our dear Creator. You can see it in various places but you could see it in Genesis 18, if you want to look there. It's stated very clearly by Abraham in that record of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You remember God decided that the two communities had rebelled against him so much that there was just no point in letting them continue. He determined to wipe them off the face of the earth. And you get this problem of destroying the evil and preserving the good brought up in Abraham's prayer to God. Abraham is praying to the Father.

Genesis 18:22-26, "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?' (You see that was the question, "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?") Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? (And then this is God's nature you see, and this is the dilemma that he faces), Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all

the earth do right?' And the LORD said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'"

So obviously, God did not have to think a second time. Obviously with an infinite mind such as he had, he had already decided this issue "in the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." But he allowed this conversation to be recorded to bring before us men and women that this was a real issue that he had to face. There was a real difficulty that a holy and loving God had to face when he met evil.

If he was really holy, he had to destroy the evil. But if he was really loving, he had to preserve the good. This was the difficulty that ran through all God's dealings with men. If God was loving then he wouldn't just wipe out the evil and the good together. He would destroy just the evil. Yet if he was really loving, he would want to destroy the evil for the sake of the others who had to be preserved.

Now we saw last Sunday that again God faced that problem when we men and women decided to live independent of him for our own motives of profit, power and success. At that time God had to come down and destroy the whole place with a flood. And that same problem comes up in Genesis 6:6-8. Again there was the problem; there was some evil here but there was also some good.

Genesis 6:6-8: "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.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."

You see that problem coming up again: how to destroy the evil and yet preserve what was good. I think all of us would agree that a holy and just God is committed to destroying evil. I think you'd agree with that. If you're really a holy God then you destroy all unholiness. If you really think that holiness is the thing and is the thing that will make people happiest, then you'll destroy its opposite every time you come across it.

So I think most of us would agree with that. Don't you think that all of us from our own subjective personal experiences would agree that there must somewhere be in the universe, a supernatural power that is able to destroy that evil will that we find so often inside us?

I think most of us would agree with that. But there probably isn't one of us here who has not found within us a selfish evil will that we cannot tackle ourselves. We know somewhere there has to be a power that is so supernatural, so mighty, so loving and so just that he'll destroy this wherever he sees it and yet preserve me myself.

I don't think there's one of us here that has not found resentment rising up inside us which knocks our stomach. I don't think there's one of us here that has not found anger flaming out against those we ought to love. We know, "Yes, somebody must be able to destroy that." We've tried to destroy these things ourselves but we're unable to. Or we've found sarcasm that drops so quickly from our lips when we're in a debate or a discussion with somebody and we say, "There must be somebody who can destroy that rising sarcasm inside me." Or we've fought lust that fills our minds with perverted thoughts for so long that we feel, "There must be somebody who can destroy that lust."

In other words, dear ones, there's probably not one of us here this morning who wouldn't say, "Yes,

I've tried to destroy those things inside myself for years and I can't. Those things are destroying my life. Yes, there must be some supernatural power who is able to destroy that." But the problem is, to destroy it and preserve us.

Now you may say, "Well, why if God is able to do this, why do so many of us, even those who call ourselves Christians, why do we live in the midst of lives that are limited by lust, in the midst of lives that are spoiled by sarcasm, in the midst of lives that are destroyed by our anger and our bad temper, why do we live this way if God Himself is actually able to destroy these things?"

I think one of the reasons is that we have never really seen that that is the issue dealt with in Jesus' death. We really haven't seen that that's the problem that God solved in Jesus' death: how to destroy evil and preserve us at the same time, how to avoid wiping us off the face of the earth forever with a flood. That's the issue that is dealt with in the death of Jesus.

Of course for years, we have not been taught that. For years, we've been taught that Jesus' death doesn't deal with that at all. We've been taught that Jesus' death enables God to love us. We've been taught for years, "God hated us until Jesus died on Calvary and then from then on he loved us along with our sin."

In actual fact, God has always loved us and he has always hated our sin. But for years we've been taught that Jesus died to enable God to love us because before he died, he did not love us.

That's why secular psychologists will often differ from the evangelical Christian world today. In some things they'll be right. They'll say, "That's silly. Don't tell people that God doesn't love them. God loves them. God loves even the rebellious people." And in that they're right, the psychologists are right. God has always loved us.

The purpose of Jesus' death wasn't to enable God to love us. It was to deal with the other issue that we mentioned at the beginning. The tragedy with the secular psychologist is, he says, "God not only loves you but there's no evil in you that is bad enough to cause you any guilt. So you shouldn't have any guilt."

It's rather interesting, the evangelicals do the same thing actually because they say, "God couldn't love you until Jesus died for you, but now that Jesus has died, God loves you and loves your sin as well. So you can come with your sin and God will keep loving you." And so, both the secular psychologist and the ordinary evangelical end up producing the same terrible, unscriptural person: a person who lives without guilt in the midst of his sin.

And so often that's what has put us off churches and Christianity. We've seen a lot of people who've said, "Oh God has forgiven me my sins." But they're living in the midst of anger, in the midst of strife, in the midst of argument and in the midst of hatred. So many of us were put off churches because we found the official board arguing, disagreeing, hating, and talking about one another after service.

Now that's what results from thinking that the death of Jesus is there to show us the love of God. The death of Jesus isn't there for that at all and yet we've been encouraged to believe that. The issue in Jesus' death is not God's love. God loves every one of us in this theater this morning. God loves the prostitute that at this moment is engaged in intercourse in some little apartment in Paris. God loves that dear girl, loves her with all his heart.

God loves the member of the mafia who is at this moment, planning to murder someone else. God loves that man. Brothers and sisters, the issue is not God's love. God loves us all. The issue is, how can a God who is loving accept rebellious people without destroying their rebellion? The answer is he has to find some way to destroy the rebellion in order to accept them at all.

Now you'll find that God was always loving. Even if you go back to the first murderer, you'll see it. If you'll look at Genesis 4, you'll see that the Father never had trouble loving those of us who were sinners. You remember Cain was the first one to murder in the world.

Genesis 4:10-13: "And the LORD said, 'What have you done? (he said this to Cain) The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.' Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.'" But, in actual fact it wasn't.

God could have given him a punishment that was greater than he could bear. He could have destroyed him. Instead, he designed a plan whereby Cain could, if he wanted, come back to God. Genesis 4:14: "Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me."

God even showed his love in protecting him. Genesis 4:15 "Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him." And so God arranged for a plan that would enable Cain to come back to the Father if he wanted him to. Genesis 4:16: "Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

In other words, God did not fail to love Cain. He actually provided a way for Cain to come back to him. God does love sinners dear ones, it's obvious. John 8:3 shows a kind of love that many of us would be slow to express primarily because we are so hyperconscious of sexual sins, I think unfairly. Therefore we often don't see criticism of others as being as serious as it really is.

John 8:3-11 : "The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?' This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'"

The issue dealt with at Calvary was not God's love. God loved us. The issue dealt with at Calvary was how to destroy the evil in you and me and yet enable us to keep on living.

Unfortunately, a total imaginary issue has been raised down through the years as the one dealt with at Calvary. That issue was that God couldn't forgive us and didn't love us until he was able to kill Jesus in our place. Then, after he killed the wrong person, he was suddenly able to love us. Even to

a child this seems ridiculous. It seems that God is a petulant tyrant who won't love until he gets a sacrifice offered to him.

Now brothers and sisters, that wasn't what happened at Calvary. What happened at Calvary was that God actually destroyed the evil in you and me in Jesus so that we would be able to stay alive ourselves. But this other idea is taught so much that we begin to feel that Jesus died so that God could love us. And so what happens when we come to a verse like Romans 6:3 is then we interpret it purely symbolically.

Romans 6:3, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

With our normal interpretation of Jesus' death as being the step that enabled God to love us, we say, "Oh Paul, you've done it again. That's a beautiful metaphor. We can see that we're baptized into God's family because Jesus' death enables God to love us. That's a lovely metaphor that you have. You're just as cool as ever with your little illustrations. You're saying in a kind of strange sense that we've been baptized into Jesus' death. Oh that's neat. We know it's not true, but it's neat because we understand Paul that of course, Jesus died instead of us, that was the whole point. Jesus died instead of us so that God would have his anger satisfied and he could forgive us. That's a neat metaphor that you have, a neat little illustration."

And that's really the way the greater part of the Christian world has looked at Romans 6. They've looked at it as a metaphor and as a symbol. They've said, "That's a beautiful symbol. We know of course, we're not baptized into Jesus' death. We know we're here, bright and alive and living. We know that Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to die and so, we know it's just a metaphor."

Yet it sticks in your throat, as you go on to the next verse. You feel that Paul is beginning to draw out a metaphor rather too far. He's beginning to be a bit ridiculous about it. You can accept a metaphor but when you begin to build a whole truth of regeneration and sanctification upon a metaphor and its extension, then you begin to feel that the fellow must be illogical.

And so he goes on in Romans 6:4 – "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." Loved ones, I know it sounds ridiculous but the bulk of the Christian world has held up its hands in horror and said, "Now Paul, back off. Buried with him? Now don't carry it too far. We can see that in some strange sense you can say that we're baptized into his death. But don't say now we're buried with him because we know that didn't happen."

In other words loved ones, you can't interpret this symbolically. You can't interpret these verses as a beautiful metaphor. You have to begin to see that what God did in Jesus' death was to take the evil will, the evil selfish will that produces the lust and the anger and the pride in you and me, and God destroyed it in Jesus. That's the only way a just and holy God could ever forgive people like ourselves.

You see, God has always loved us. There's no problem with that. But as a just and holy God, God can never forgive rebellion. You can see that in ordinary political affairs. You can't forgive rebellion. You can forgive rebels after they lay down their arms but you can't forgive rebellion. You can't forgive a person who continues to be angry and continues to lust. That would be encouraging the very destruction that you sent the flood to stop and to limit when it first occurred in the world.

In other words, God is loving to all of us. He loves every one of us in this theatre. He loves you whatever you've done. Brothers and sisters, there's no problem with that. Nobody's disagreeing with that. God loves every one of us with all his heart. He knows you by name. But he can never love the evil in you because if he does, he knows that will destroy his world.

The only way God can ever forgive you is to put the evil in you into his Son Jesus and in a cosmic eternal event of Jesus' death on Calvary, destroy that evil by the supernatural power of his Holy Spirit. That's what Calvary is all about. God destroyed the rebellion there so that he could forgive the rebels. He destroyed the lust there so that he could forgive the prostitute. He destroyed the dishonesty and the lies there so that he could forgive the thief.

He destroyed the sarcasm there so that he could forgive the shrewd. He destroyed the cruelty there so that he could forgive the tyrant. That's what happened in Jesus' death and that's more and more the way we need to see it. That's what you and I have not done for so long.

We've taken a purely intellectual attitude to Jesus' death and thought, "It's a nice illustration that God loves us with all his heart and he's prepared to forgive us." No. Unless we come into a real, vital, subjective experience of Jesus' death, God cannot eliminate the evil in us so that in fact he will be able to preserve the good.

There is a real need to see that Paul means what he says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

You may say, "I still have lust. I still have envy and anger in my heart. It comes up again and again and I cannot control it. What do I do?" Well brothers and sisters, begin to see that God, by a miracle, dealt with that in Jesus. First of all, see that it has been destroyed by God. Then see that you need to enter into this experientially yourself and that it is possible. That's why we talk about the victorious life.

It is possible to live above lust, above anger, above pride and above jealousy, if you are willing to take part in actual fact, in the death in which you have taken part historically, as far as God is concerned. In other words, begin to ask the Holy Spirit. Ask him, "Holy Spirit, I can see that this was destroyed in Jesus' death on Calvary but it hasn't been destroyed in me. Now will you begin to show me? Will you begin to reveal to me how this can take place in me?"

Just one other thing brothers and sisters -- I agree with you that a lot of us have not known this light. I was not brought up in this. I was brought up to believe the old system that God didn't love me until Jesus died for me. Then God was able to love me along with my sin. I wasn't brought up this way.

So if you say, "Now this is a shock to me brother, how do I face this?" Brothers and sisters, if you have really received Jesus' Spirit in a new birth experience, then your spirit will rise to this. You'll say, "Look, if this is what enabled God to justify me and to be justified in forgiving me through his destruction of evil in Jesus, then this is what I want in my own life."

But if you have not really received Jesus' Spirit, then when you come to this truth, you'll back off from it. You'll call it an ascetic experience. You'll call it extremism. You'll say, "No, this isn't

the Gospel.”

But if the spirit in you is really the Spirit of Jesus, then you will rise to this. You will say, "Well, it isn't real yet in my own life but that's what I want. Father, if you could only forgive me by destroying the evil in me in Jesus then I want that made real in my own life."

You know it appeals to you, doesn't it? It appeals to you that a holy God can't suddenly change his mind and say, "I don't mind lust or anger or envy." You know, he can't suddenly change his mind because of even the death of his Son and say, "No, I no longer hate those things. I want a heaven full of people who lust, are angry, envious and jealous." It just doesn't make sense.

It makes sense to us that a holy God has to find some way of destroying the evil in us and yet enabling us to stay alive. The way is, by entering into Jesus' death by faith so that we don't have to enter into a physical death such as was caused by the flood.

I'll stop there just for a moment. I know that sometimes you don't want to ask questions and I understand that. But we would have maybe 30 seconds for questions. Now, we'll be on Romans 6 for some time so you'll have plenty of opportunity to begin to get the implications of it. Don't be concerned if you don't grasp it all this morning.

Question from Audience: What about those who haven't died understanding this light?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

I think of my dad who died as a Christian. He certainly knew nothing about the teaching of the Holy Spirit or the teaching of the Cross of Christ in this sense. He understood the forgiveness of sins. It seems to me we're judged by the light that's been given us. The Father lovingly accepts us according to the way we have responded to the light that he has shown us. In other words, we're not teaching something extra above salvation. We're saying this is what salvation includes; now let's see all of what was entered into.

Question from Audience: Then what does God do with the evil that is in man?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

He deals with it according to their reception of what he has already shown them. He begins to destroy that evil in them even now. It's the same as he must have dealt with the Old Testament people before Jesus died. In fact, Jesus visited hell you remember to deal with those Old Testament people.

Question: (inaudible)

Pastor O'Neill:

Sister says what I think many of us have been thinking. Surely in death you'll never have all the evil destroyed in you and it's a matter of just saying to God, "Well, I've tried to obey you and I know there's a lot in me that is still wrong." And that is some of what will be changed. You'll never enter into perfection.

Now, it seems brothers and sisters that Jesus plainly told us that there will be a mighty change that is wrought when we die. There will be many ways in which we have not entered into the perfection of God. We won't have his perfect mind. We won't have his perfect balanced emotions, though they should be much more balanced than they are by that time. The mind should be a little more balanced than it is at the moment. But you're right that obviously we won't be in the absolute perfection of God. There will have to be a mighty change wrought when we die.

Nevertheless sister, it is false to claim that there is no degree of perfect obedience that can come about in this life. It seems that's what Jesus meant when he said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." He had just been talking about the love of God and he obviously meant, "Be at least perfect in love." It does seem to us that as we go on through in Romans 6, we begin to see that God's will is for us to be perfect in our obedience.

We cannot be perfect in the sense that we conform absolutely to his perfection in every detail. We'll still make mistakes. We'll still do things by ignorance. We'll still do things unintentionally. But we can come to a place where we can obey him perfectly. That is, we can do what we know we ought to do. That's what we're talking about. We're talking about that anger that we know we shouldn't have. That's what brings guilt to our hearts and destroys our family life.

We're talking about those things that we know are wrong and that we cannot overcome. Those are the things that God can change in Jesus' death. It seems to me for so long, we who have been in Christian churches have excused ourselves. We have said, "No, we're only human. We can't be free of these things." While the humanist has been looking on and saying, "I live a far more ethical life than you do. Why should I want Jesus?"

So I think it's important for us to see that yes, there is some perfection that we can only enter into when we die -- but there is a perfect obedience that is God's will for us to enter into in this life. Yet, we are never justified by that perfect obedience. We are justified only by one thing, by the blood of Jesus.

So brothers and sisters, will you keep thinking and keep alive on the issue so that you can push me either with written questions or in the coming meetings.

Question from Audience: Does the perfect obedience contribute to our salvation?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

No. Otherwise it's salvation by works. The perfect obedience is a result of salvation, not a condition of it. There's only one condition of salvation and that is being willing to identify ourselves with Jesus. We should do as much as the Holy Spirit reveals to us. The Greek is "into Jesus", to believe into Jesus.

Loved ones, what we're talking about now in Romans 6 is the result of salvation. What I am trying to say to you is, look you've entered into a great hall. Now let's put on the lights and see what is in this hall. That's really what I am saying. You've come into it; now let's see what is in it. These are some of the beauties that I think we've missed. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that there is only one reason why you can accept us and that is because Jesus has died. Father we thank you for that. We thank you that the reason that you are able to

accept us because of his death, is that there in him, you destroyed the evil that is in us. By the power of the Holy Spirit you can graciously make that real in our own lives here today.

Father, we know that we'll always be on the way to experiencing this fully but we tell you, we want to experience as much of it as possible while we're still alive here. Father we want others to see your Son Jesus and not to see our ugliness. We trust you by the Holy Spirit to begin to deal with us more and more so that we will seek and enter into the reality that we were buried with Jesus by baptism into death so that as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we might begin to walk in newness of life. We trust that this newness of life will fill the world with your glory and with your will. We ask this in your name. Amen.