

LIBERTY AND MOTIVE

ROMANS 6:15

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'd like you to look with me at the reactions of two men to the same provoking circumstances and see the difference between those reactions. Now, they are recorded in Luke 22. Here is the context. There was a group of armed guards moving towards Jesus and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 22:50, "And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear." And from the Gospel of John, you find that that was Peter who did that. Peter struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. "But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him." So those were utterly different reactions. Peter returned blow-for-blow and Jesus returned love for hatred and the reaction of Jesus is the normal reaction.

Now this is amazing dear ones. The reaction of Jesus is the normal reaction for any man or woman in whom the uncreated life of God flows. That's right. The reaction of Jesus is the normal reaction for any man or woman in whom the uncreated life of God's spirit flows and the reaction of Peter is the subnormal reaction. This is why you remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks those very high moral imperatives so calmly and quietly.

It is really amazing, isn't it? He just says it quietly. If you have two coats, you have to give one to your neighbor. If somebody strikes you on one cheek you've to turn the other. He says it in full belief that the people listening to him are able to do that. You'll note in the Sermon on the Mount, he isn't exhorting them and saying, "Now do your best, try hard, strain, because this won't come naturally to you." He's obviously just making quiet, ethical directives about something that the people listening to him will have no trouble living up to.

Now you can get that if you look at the Sermon on the Mount at Matthew 5:44-45. Obviously Jesus believes that these things he is giving are not laws at all. To a man that who has died to self and being filled with the Holy Spirit, these are just easy directives that he finds simple to obey. And obviously Jesus expects him to obey them without a great deal of strain or striving.

Matthew 5:44-45, "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." You can see underlying Jesus' whole attitude is the assumption that we, who have God's life flowing through us, will find no great difficulty in obeying these things because Jesus is banking on the fact that we will have been filled with a supernatural life that itself wants to do these things.

Now the subnormal state that most human beings live in, is described in Romans 7:19. We have referred to it several times. This is the subnormal state that most human beings live in. Romans 7:19, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Now I think that's the normal state of most human beings. They respond to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with the feeling, "Oh I want to do it but I can't do it". And Jesus is obviously giving those directives on the understanding that, "You won't have any trouble doing this; it'll come naturally to you."

I think what's important for us this morning to see is that even though Peter and Jesus differed in their reaction; neither of them doubted that they should obey the law. That's important if we're going to go on thinking about this. Even though they differed in the reaction and the response, neither of them doubted that they should obey the law. Now, you'll see that if you look at Matthew 5:17-20. That is Jesus' attitude. Then you can see Peter and Paul's attitude in another verse in Romans. So even though they differed in their response and the levels of their achievement, yet neither of them doubted that they should obey the law.

Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." And Jesus obviously believes that he should obey the law.

Now in Romans 7, you'll see that Paul and presumably Peter with him, even in the midst of his defeat, does not doubt at all that he should obey the law.

Romans 7:7, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!" Paul says, "No, the law isn't that. It's not something to despise. Then in verse 12 it says, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." So even Paul in the midst of that chapter re-describes what defeat is like in the Christian life. He says, "Yes, I have no question in my own mind, I am supposed to obey the law".

Now dear ones, there are two phrases that describe the reactions of Peter and Jesus. You remember Jesus' reaction was that he obeyed without any trouble. It was as if there was something inside him that wanted to love the guard that was coming at him with a sword whereas Peter had a reaction inside him that made him want to strike off the ear of the guard. Now there's a name you remember and a phrase that we used last Sunday to label those two reactions and it's in Romans 6:14.

Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." It's all two phrases. Jesus was under grace and Peter was under law. Now do you see what that meant? Jesus had the grace of the life of God's Holy Spirit flowing through him so he was able to obey the law effortlessly and easily. Peter did not have that within him and he had to strive to obey the law on his own by his own strength.

Now that's the meaning of the two phrases, 'under the law' and 'under grace'. Both men are trying to obey the law but one is doing it by the strength of the Holy Spirit of God's life flowing through him and the other is trying to do it on his own. Now you may say, "Why make such a big point about it? Why label it like this?" Because many of us are under the same misunderstanding about being under grace as the questioner of today's verse that we'll be studying.

Many of us have the same misunderstanding about what being under grace is as this questioner. Maybe you'd look at the verse that we're studying today, it's Romans 6:15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Now many of us have that kind of idea about being under grace. We feel that being under law means you have to obey the law in order to be accepted by God. But being under grace means that you ought to believe in Jesus and try to obey it, and then if you can't, it doesn't matter.

I think most of us have that vague understanding in the back of our minds that being under law is; we have responsibility to obey the law, in order to be accepted by God. But, if we're under grace, we have to try to obey it and do the best we can but if we don't, it doesn't matter too much. Now

loved ones, that's why I want to try to emphasize what being under grace and being under law is.

Under grace, is having the life of God's Holy Spirit flowing through you so that you can effortlessly fulfill God's requirement of you. Being under law is trying in your own strength to obey those requirements and failing to do it. But neither of them allow for an easy-going attitude to the law as if it really doesn't matter. I'll try to make it clear why that's so, a little later on.

In other words, if you look at Romans 6:15 and you look at the question, "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" The answer is really three fold. The first answer is in Jesus' own life. He was a man, the first born among many brethren who experienced the life of God's Holy Spirit flowing through him and yet he obeyed the law in every detail. So the first answer is in Jesus' own life. He was the first born among those who were born of the grace of God's Holy Spirit and he obeyed the law. You'll remember that sinning is not obeying the law.

James 4:17 says, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

1 John 3:4 says, "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."

Now the question is, are we to sin? Are we not to obey the law because we are not under law but under grace? The first answer is Jesus' own life. Jesus was under grace. He had the grace of God's Holy Spirit flowing through him and yet he obeys the law Himself.

The second answer is in Jesus' assumption behind all his statements in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at Matthew 5:38-42. Obviously Jesus quietly assumes here, "These are things that I want you to do and you're not going to have any trouble doing them. I am giving you directives about them. There is a Spirit that you will find coming up from within you if you have really allowed yourself to be crucified with me and then have been filled with my Holy Spirit.

Matt 5:38-42' "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." They are all simple, little directives, not great exhortations to people who are going to have trouble doing this. They are simple little directives.

"Give to him who begs from you and do not refuse him who would borrow from you." Now Jesus loves us and he wouldn't give us things to do that we are not able in the power of the Holy Spirit to do. He would not taunt us or torture us like that. So when Jesus says words like this, it's important for us to take them seriously.

In fact, Jesus goes further; he says that your reaction to the law shows what your attitude is to his Father. It really determines whether you will enjoy the presence of God in your life or not. Judas, (not Iscariot) asked Jesus, "Now how are you going to manifest yourself to us and not to the rest of the world? How are we going to know you're real in our hearts and lives while the rest of the world won't even be able to see you?" And Jesus gave this answer.

John 14:23, "Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word." So Jesus is saying that if you really love me, you will keep my word. You will obey my words, you will obey my laws and as a result of obeying my laws, "and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Then Jesus emphasizes it by putting it in the negative form. John 14:24, "He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine (so don't argue with that) but the Father's who sent me." Then brothers and sisters, Jesus brings home a very stern truth in Matthew 12:36-37. He brings home to us the fact that judgment day will depend to some extent on our attitude to God's law.

Matt 12:36-37, "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." You can see that Jesus is saying there, "On the judgment day, your words and your works will matter."

Now brothers and sisters, that ties in and makes a harmony of the Bible if you go back to that question that Paul put in Romans, "Are we to sin then because we are not under law but under grace?" Obviously the whole Bible is answering, "No". The whole purpose of coming under grace is so that you would be able to stop sinning, so that you would be able to obey the law, and so that you would be able to please God.

Do you see that it's because of a misconception of God's law and God's grace? It's because of that misconception that so many of our generation are absolutely fed up with the kind of thing that we have in Watergate. It's because of the absolute hypocrisy, embezzling and lying among people who are supposed to know better that so many of our generation have begun to smile and be sarcastic about the things we call moral values or their values of Christianity. It's because of this terrible misconception of the difference between God's law and God's grace that so many of our generation are fed up with religious hypocrites -- with so many people in our churches, who say they believe certain things but who will not live that way.

It's because of that terrible misconception, that causes so many of us live in defeat ourselves. Here's the misconception. People believe that God tried first the Ten Commandments and then the Sermon on the Mount. First he said, "If you obey the Ten Commandments completely, I'll accept you into heaven with me."

Then most people who have been brought up even in Christian churches believe that God saw that that wasn't working. Hardly anybody was obeying the Ten Commandments. He saw he was going to have a bit of a flop on his hands, so he decided to change the whole thing. "You don't need to obey the Ten Commandments, I'll make it easier. You just have to believe in Jesus. It doesn't matter about the Ten Commandments. Forget about that, just believe in Jesus and I'll accept you."

Now brothers and sisters, that's an absolute parody of what the Gospel is. The Gospel isn't that at all. It isn't that God tried the Ten Commandments and then saw so many of us failing that he thought he'd better make it easy and tie it up to some mental belief or ascent in Jesus. It is utterly different from that, yet so many of us have a tendency to believe that that is the truth. We will almost be cynical and suspicious of any Christian who even attempts to say that he is obeying all God's laws, isn't that true?

We have become so used to that misconception of the Gospel that if any Christian ever comes and says, "God is giving me grace to obey his laws", we'll become a little cynical about him. Is it not that kind of cynicism about the possibility of obeying God's law that has allowed us to put the reputation of the President or the reputation of the nation beyond truth and honesty? In other words, has Satan not practiced upon us a tremendous double take, a tremendous brainwashing? he has

persuaded us to sit very easily by God's laws.

Now if you ask me, "If that's not the Gospel, what is the Gospel?" I think it's very simple. God gave us physical and mental life at the beginning when he created us. We'd last for 70 or 80 years independent of him. But he also made available to us the uncreated life of his Holy Spirit. That is the Spirit that flows through him and his Son. Whoever receives the life of that Spirit automatically becomes like God and like Jesus.

We all refuse that Spirit. We resolve to live with a mental, emotional and physical life that been given to us. We try to do what is right just on the strength of that. We made that attitude so normal in our world that bit-by-bit, we didn't think there was any other kind of life. But with our old self attitude that rejected God's life and opened the way to the power of Satan's poisonous life, we began to normalize that joyless, purposeless, powerless life to such an extent that suddenly there was no sign of what God's life would be like at all in the whole world.

For that reason, God listed the symptoms of that uncreated life. He set it down in laws of my life. He said, "Look, if you only had received the life of my Holy Spirit, you would have no other Gods before me. You would not steal, you would not commit adultery, you would not be jealous, and you would not be boastful." He gave those laws to show us that this is what my life, of my Holy Spirit, would produce in you, if you'd only receive it.

So even the giving of the laws, was really an expression of God's grace. He was anxious not to leave us completely but to tell us, "Look, the normal life that you have made normal in your world, is subnormal. The normal life that I wanted you to live is the life described in these laws."

Then the next step was, (instead of wiping us right out of the earth because he couldn't train our selfish wills to be better) he simply had to destroy them (our old selfish wills). And so he took all of us and in eternity, which is outside time and space, he put us all into Jesus and destroyed those selfish wills of ours. He destroyed that old self attitude that rejects his life so as to give us another chance to receive the life of his Holy Spirit.

So whenever you die to self with Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, you find that the life of the Holy Spirit begins to reproduce the symptoms that are described in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. It is a natural, easy thing for us. In other words, the truth really is that when you live the life of grace, you come into a real liberty so that you can obey Jesus and obey God's laws. Then you find a new motive coming up within you because the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in your heart a love of God that gives you a new motive for obeying.

So the question is ridiculous. Are we to sin because we're no longer under law but under grace? No. Law is just a list of the symptoms of the life that the Holy Spirit produces in you and so once you're under grace and have begun to receive the life of the Holy Spirit, it is as impossible for you to act against law as it is for this Bible to fall upwards. It cannot fall upwards. The law of gravity says, it has to fall down unless it gets outside the atmosphere of the earth. Unless you get outside the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for you to find within you a rebellion against God's laws.

In fact, it is natural for you to find within you a desire to obey his laws. Why? Because the laws themselves are a description of the life of the Holy Spirit and he is in you. Now, I know that with many of us we have for years been going against his laws and it takes a while for some of us to get

that old personality into the right ruts. But nevertheless, it is God's promise that we should come into a place where we will automatically obey these laws because of the life that is within us.

So the question is never are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? The fact is, sin is alien and unnatural to the one who is under grace. I think I should stop and let you ask questions because there are lots of misunderstandings and misconceptions that I know we can have because we have listened to untruth for so long.

Q & A: Brother says, "This ties up with faith and works". For instance, your mother was listening to Billy Graham and he was emphasizing faith, but she is anxious to go off into works. I think many people in churches are anxious to win their way into God's heart.

I think the harmony of faith and works is this. There will be no real works that please God, unless there is first the faith. Unless you are willing to be crucified with Jesus and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, there will be no faith that can produce works. But James is right as he says, "Faith without works is dead." If you find that you have something you call faith inside and it isn't producing works, then you ought to examine not your works but your faith.

So the question is not, "Are works necessary?" Works are not necessary for salvation. We are accepted by God because of our belief in the blood of Jesus but works will follow salvation. Works are not necessary for our salvation to be accepted by God but our works are the result of salvation. Faith produces works. James says, "You show me your faith and I'll show you my faith by my works."

So the faith is necessary in order to produce the works. What I have been trying to share this morning is that the works need to be there. If they're not there, we don't shudder and get shook and think we're not Christians. But we do begin to ask the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, have I allowed you to take over all of my life the way I should or is there some area of my life where I am having trouble obeying God's law because I am not letting you have your way?"

Q: & A: Brother is emphasizing that the reason for sharing Jesus with each other is not just that we'll go to heaven. Very often that kind of hedonistic approach has been taken. If you accept Jesus, you'll go to heaven and not to hell. Obviously anyone who is interested in insurance at all will pick Jesus just for their own selfish sakes. It is important to see that the reason we share Jesus with each other is because Jesus is truth, and Jesus is reality. This is the way to live life. Any other way of living life is a lie. Life will not work if it's lived any other way. The reason we should accept Jesus is because he is the Creator's Son and we are kicking the face of the Creator, if we refuse Jesus.

I agree with you brother that the challenge ought always to be to accept Jesus because this is truth and this is reality and his life will reproduce in us the kind of life he, Himself lives.

Q: & A: Brother, you realize that is a massive question and so I am going to indicate a direction that God has used to get through to me. It seems from Matthew 19:9, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of adultery, and marries another commits, causes the other person commit adultery."

On the basis of that, I think you have to take the negative interpretation also. Jesus is permitting a person whose partner has committed adultery, to divorce the partner and yet not be under guilt for it. Presumably they are free to re-marry though many of us would have strong questions even about

the re-marriage.

So to summarize it, it seems to me the innocent partner in a divorce for un-chastity is permitted by Jesus to divorce and would seem is permitted to remarry from things that Paul says in Romans about re-marriage. Or, if the non-Christian partner leaves them then that fits in also to what Paul says in First Corinthians that the person is permitted to let the non-Christian leave.

So the innocent party is permitted to divorce in the case of the partner abandoning them or in the case of the partner committing adultery or committing fornication. It seems that that's the situation. The whole re-marriage situation, many of us hesitate on, but we do think that Paul means you are free to re-marry because he uses the phrase, "you are not bound", and it would seem that he is saying you are free not only to divorce but re-marry.

So it seems God permits the innocent party in a divorce to take part in divorce. I had to refuse the brother and sister who wanted to marry each other. They were now Christians but they had committed adultery and that was what caused the original divorce. Even though I know God has forgiven them now, I don't believe for one moment he wants them to continue in that kind of action.

So I think one has to be very wise and careful. Brothers and sisters, I am very happily married but if we're really given to Jesus I don't see all this rush to run close to the line on re-marriage. If you're married once and God has not succeeded in bringing it into blessing then I think you really need to pray a lot before you marry again especially in these days. I think there's a lot to be done with God's time besides that. But that I say not from the Lord, that is my own opinion.

Well, dear ones, will you think and pray about some of the things that we shared because I do believe that it's some of the reasons for people turning against Christianity and against church people. Let's not make excuses for ourselves. Let's pray.

Dear Father, we know it is not your will for us to come under guilt. That is just not your will at all because you have told us that guilt is something that Satan tries to bring upon us. Conviction is what the Holy Spirit brings but guilt is what comes when we don't respond to the Holy Spirit's indications and directions. So Father we know you do not want us to lie under guilt. You want us to get up to answer Satan by the blood of Jesus and to claim that we are justified by his blood. Yet Father we know that it is Your will that the Holy Spirit who produced a flawless life in Jesus, should be free to reproduce that life in us and Lord Jesus, that's the kind of life we want.

We want to be conformed to your image in every area of our lives. Holy Spirit, we trust you that if there is any place where we're disobeying God's laws, that you will show us in what way we need to enter into a real death to self with Jesus in that area. Show us in what area we need to be filled completely with the Holy Spirit. Father, we would trust you to counsel each of us this coming week, in regard to these things that we may be epistles, seen and read by all men and that we may remind our friends and our acquaintances of Jesus because of the way we speak and the way we act. We ask this in his name. Amen.