

Self-Managed Conflict or Spirit-Directed Peace?

Romans 7:25

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This is a really exciting Sunday. We're finishing a chapter in Romans. And about 7 years ago, as some of us started to study Romans, because it presented our Creator's explanation of reality. And that was 7 years ago, and I was 33, and some of you were half way through your degrees. And some little babies hadn't been born yet. And some of you were gloriously single, then, at that time. And old LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson, US president] was barbequing on the White House lawn. And the bishops in Rome were hacking things out to try to catch up with Pope John, at that time.

Really, at that time too, my wife was saying, "Well, at the rate you've gone through the first few verses, you're going to be 44 when we finish." And all wives overestimate the speed at which their husbands will do a job. I am going to be 50.

But, oh, it's just been good, loved ones, to live our lives against the backdrop of God's word in that way. It's been good to have, especially in this campus situation, where we all felt the sheer transience of life. It was just good for many of us to settle down into something that transcended changing things. And it kind of gives you the feeling that there is an unchanging set of values that remain while everything about you switches and fades. And so it's been good for us, really, to live our lives against the backdrop of God's own word.

What I'd love to do this morning for a few minutes is just to take this opportunity of setting this last verse of chapter 7 in the context of all the other chapters, because you are dears, you just go with me, looking at the little tiny piece that we look at each Sunday. And you just trust, "Well, I am sure it fits into the whole book, because he has done the whole book up to now..." But anyway it's good for you to see it. It's good for you to see the pattern of the whole book.

So just for a few minutes, loved ones, will you open your bible at Romans 1? I believe that I can outline it to you in a way that enables you to maintain the continuity in your own mind.

God started off by saying, through Paul, that all of us know there's a God. And there's no reason why we should doubt that. There's just no reason at all. Now he says that in Romans 1:19. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

And then God showed us that despite that fact, the clear evidence for His existence, we did not recognize him. Romans 1:21 "For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools." And faced with us like that, God had to withdraw the supernatural power of His Holy Spirit from us, in order to prevent us spreading our chaos throughout the universe. And so that's what he did.

And as soon as he withdrew the Holy Spirit from us, we began to try to establish our own recognition. And that's what we did in Romans 1:28. "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct." He withdrew the Holy Spirit from us that would have prevented these things. "They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers,

haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them." And that's what God presented to us in that first chapter.

Then in the second chapter, he explained to us that He could not let that continue, and that in order to preserve his own hopes for his universe, he simply had to commit himself to eliminating those of us who behave like that. Much as if a drunk man came into the auditorium at this moment, we just couldn't let him come in and sing lots of bawdy songs and do whatever he wanted. It would destroy any fellowship that we have among us. We have to keep him out.

And God was placed in that same position. In order to preserve his heaven and to keep it from becoming a hell, he had to commit himself to eliminating us. And yet instead of doing that, we learn that He did something else later. But chapter two tells that that's what He was committed to doing. It is in some way, neutralizing the power of evil that we had developed in us.

And that's Romans 2:6. "For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury." And that was God's stance at that point. The last time he was faced with that, you remember, he flooded the place out with a flood. And it was all he could do -- eliminate the lot of us, and start again.

Now chapter 3, God explains that, instead of doing that, instead of eliminating us all by a flood or some other catastrophe as in the days of Noah, he regarded us as dying with his Son, Jesus. And as far as he was concerned, to satisfy His own justice that demanded the death of criminal rebels, he regarded us as having died in Jesus. And that's the explanation in Romans 3:25. "...Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." In other words, he allowed us to continue to stay alive in spite of the fact of our sins. And so it was very easy for us to say, "Ah, he doesn't care about sin".

So in order to deal with that divine forbearance whereby he had passed over former sins, and to prove, in verse 26, "To prove at the present time that he himself is righteous..." even though he does not destroy us with a flood, "And that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus," he regarded Jesus' death as our death. And chapter 3, of course, begins to tell us of justification.

Chapter 4, God outlined the fact that all the Old Testament believers were in the same position, because God had actually destroyed his Son in his own heart in the supra-temporal eternity, before he ever created the world. "The lamb was slain before the foundation of the world." And because of that, God was able to regard even people like Abraham as having died with Jesus. And so you see in Romans 4:22. "That is why his faith was 'reckoned to Him as righteousness.'" Some of us wonder why God was able to forgive people in the Old Testament before Jesus died. Well, Jesus died in God's heart before he died in our time-space continuum. And that's why, "But the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him that raised from the dead, Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

God explains to us, "Look, don't sit in this world and say, 'Huh! God hasn't noticed our sinning.' I

noticed your sinning, but I regard you as having died with my son Jesus. And I regard my death penalty as having been worked out in him, so that you will have this respite of 70 more years to receive the gift of my Holy Spirit. But it's only a respite. And it's just for a while. And if you don't receive that Holy Spirit, you will go into eternal darkness, as you would have done before, if Jesus had not died." And so that is our situation today, dear ones.

This is really what God says in Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We don't need to worry about God coming and destroying us before our time is up. "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand." It's through Jesus' death that we have obtained the right and the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit from God. "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

Of course, God dealt with the whole attitude that we subtle human beings take up, the attitude whereby we say, "Well, now we're not under the death penalty. We can do what we like." And of course, Paul points out that's stupid. Do you say, "Now, we can throw away all the opportunity to receive God's Holy Spirit, now that he doesn't condemn us to death?"

He says, "No, that's not true, because God regards you as having died in Jesus, because you did actually die in Jesus." That's what he explains in Romans 6:1.

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin, still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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." Not as we used to walk, but walk new.

And that's what we've been dealing with the past two years, his whole business of walking in newness of life, and being delivered from living for ourselves. And we've shared that many of us, even after we were born of God, or became Christians, found great trouble with stirrings inside us that we could not control: stirrings of anger and of jealousy and of envy and of unclean thoughts. And we've been dealing with this truth, that God not only regarded Jesus' death as ours, in a kind of metaphorical sense, but he did actually put us into Jesus and destroy us there, and destroy that old self that surges up inside us. And that that's what we can be freed from, that old self.

What is that old self? Loved ones, what we've discovered is, it's an absolutely perverted direction that has developed in our own personalities. It's an absolutely perverted direction in our own personalities. It's a reversal of the way our personalities were meant to work. And Jesus died so that we could be delivered from that. We often think, "Oh no, Jesus died so that God could forgive us."

Loved ones, 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And Jesus died so that we could be freed from this old self, and from this sin inside us that makes us want to rebel against God, and hate those whom we ought to love. And that was the purpose of Jesus' death.

Now the old self always wriggles inside us and tries to get out of the truth if it can. And if your old self is like mine used to be, then you'll be doing the same. And you'll have looked at Romans 7. And you'll have seen that there God points out, "Now if you're freed from this old self, of course, your attitude to the law is entirely different. Before you were freed from the old self, your

attitude was what I described in Romans 7:22. 'For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.' That was your old attitude to my law. 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?'

"But your new attitude, once you've accepted your death with my Son Jesus is, 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' 'I am delivered from that old self.'"

Now if your old self is very much alive, you'll say, "Yeah, but wait, that's not the end of the chapter, and you said it was." Now look at Romans 7:25b. And one girl told me a week ago that her old self chuckled at verse 25a, because she kind of sensed, "Yeah, but wait until he gets to [25] b. Boy, is he going to get a shock." And you know, loved ones, that I have shared that God's normal Christian life is Romans 7:25a, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Romans 7:25a is the normal Christian life, delivered from the old self, delivered from the power of sin within us, able to live victorious lives, free from irritability and free from anger. But if your old self is very much alive, it will say, "But look at Romans 7:25b, 'So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.' But that is exactly the problem that he was describing in Romans 7:22. 'I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law.' Now, there Paul is describing the normal Christian life in Romans 7:25b."

Okay, even if you don't understand any Greek, do you see that if you check the rest of what Paul wrote in Romans 6, the poor man must have been drunk if he now says this, mustn't he? Because, look at Romans 6 first. Look at all the things he says are possible. Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Now can that same man say, "So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin?" Not unless he is suffering from amnesia.

Now, if you look back at Romans 6:7-8, "For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Well, there he says, "He who has died..." and he explains that it's dying with Christ, "is freed from sin." Romans 6:11, "So you also must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Romans 6:15-18, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

Loved ones, even if you don't understand any Greek, you're bound to see that the boy is just contradicting himself, absolutely, if this, 25b is his highest statement about the Christian life.

Now loved ones, will you come with me, and look a wee bit more carefully at the Greek. [Romans 7:25] "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Then "ara oun." "Ara" is 'so' in English. "Oun" is 'then' in English. "International Critical Commentary" -- the most careful and detailed treatment of the biblical text that you can get. You can check it in the library. They have no axe to grind.

They don't critically believe in the Holy Spirit. "So then", and then they say, "Summarizing what I have just said about my relationship to law, a terse, compressed summary of the previous paragraphs describing the state of things prior to the intervention of Christ."

"So then,' I'm now summarizing, 'Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, that I am delivered, but 'so then,' I am looking back to what it was like before I was delivered. And then, 'autos.'" It's good for those of you who are studying Greek to keep exercising. So I'll write it in the Greek, "ego." And you can guess what that is just from E G O.

"So then myself, I...", or as this commentary translates it, "By myself, I...", or as another commentary translates it, "On my own, I..." So [putting it all together], "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then summarizing what I have been describing to you was my problem before I was delivered, on my own, left to myself, by myself, I serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. But when I am delivered from self, I serve the law of God with my flesh, and I serve the law of God with my mind". "So then, on my own, un-crucified, unfilled with the Holy Spirit, that's the situation. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

I'm so anxious for you to get it, I'll stop for questions. It's important to get it, because the old self wriggles inside us and would love to get around doctrine if it could. And if it can get any reason for continuing to be angry, it'll do it.

Okay, let me go a wee bit further. What is this thing that God frees us from? Why is it that, "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin?" Loved ones, we've shared it several times. It's for this reason: God's plan was for our personalities to work like that. [Shows diagram of the personality which has 3 concentric boxes labeled "Body", the outside box "Soul", the next level in, and "Spirit" the innermost box. Shows an arrow from God to the innermost box, our spirit, and then arrows from that out to our soul and out to our body and out to the world.] We would receive from the Holy Spirit of God everything we needed, love, security, approval, recognition from God Himself and that would pass out through our personalities to the rest of the world and fill the rest of the world with the same security and with the same love and the same approval. That was the way our personalities were to work.

Instead of that, we began to operate them the other way. We ceased to look to God here [indicates the spirit] for love and approval and recognition and we began to look to others and to the world for those things. And because of that, our whole personality has begun to work in the wrong direction. [Shows arrows in from the world to our bodies and from our bodies to our souls.] That's why we experience things like irritability and anger that we cannot control. We can't control them because the whole 'I', itself is wrong. The whole 'I' is perverted. The whole personality is perverted. It's working inwards instead of outwards. And that's why we have this trouble with inward sin.

What we have seen over the past three years is, God solved this by crucifying that old self with Christ so that we could be renewed and our whole personality could be turned at the right direction. And we could begin, be filled with the Holy Spirit and operate correctly.

Let me give you an example. It was God's will that every man here should receive recognition and approval and sense security and acceptance in his life, because he knew that the Creator had sent him here to do a special work that only he could do, and to be a unique expression of Jesus that only he could be.

That was God's plan. But we human beings have been so used to using our bodies to get that recognition from the world instead of from God that we men spoil beautiful friendships with sisters. We spoil beautiful marriages with our wives, by trying to use them to establish our own value as men, and to establish the recognition of our own manhood. So we manipulate all kinds of boyfriend-girlfriend situations in order to establish our manhood, or our recognition, or the approval of society towards us.

So, with our minds, we serve the law of God. We know in our minds, our real value comes from the value God sets upon us. Our real value comes from the fact that God sent us here to do a special work that only we can do, to be a unique expression of his Son Jesus, that only we can be. We know that in our heads. We serve that law of God with our minds. But with our flesh, we begin to latch on to the power of independent life in the world, that substitutes a counterfeit approval and recognition in place of the approval and recognition that God gives. So we latch on to that. You know it loved ones. You don't need to read "Playboy" [magazine] to see the power of independent life in the world that exists in order to give men their sense of respect, or their sense of recognition, or their sense of approval.

Now it's because of that that, in turn, you know we will trample over anybody to establish that. You think of the dear friends, that in connection with some girl, or some fellow, you have hurt. You've trampled over them in order to make the thing go the way you want it.

But then it's the same with the sisters. You know in your mind, you serve the law of God with your mind, that your value and your worth in this world is established by God, sending you here to do a work that only you can do, and to be a unique expression of his Son Jesus, that only you can be. But with your flesh, you are absolutely cast down if you don't have a date on Saturday night. And you regard yourself as on the garbage heap, if you do not have a boyfriend. And the very thought of living without match. It's unthinkable. You watch old Edith last night on Archie Bunker [TV show], and you hear her saying, "Well, I mean, when I had you," seeing the daughter, "it gave me a feeling of purpose. It gave me a feeling of value in life. It made me feel I was worth something."

And the daughter, you remember, replies, "Well now that I am grown up, what gives you a feeling of value or a feeling of worth?"

And in our minds we know it, we know it. We serve the law of God. Yes, we know it can be true. We know that we must have value, apart from whether we are baby machines, apart from whether we have husbands, apart from whether somebody else approves of us. We know we must have value. And we serve the law of God with our minds.

But loved ones, for years we have been operating, for decades, with our personality getting all this from the world, from others. For years we have been getting our sense of approval and recognition from other people complementing us on our dress, or complementing us on the way we made that last pass on the field, or complimenting us for how on the last essay we wrote -- for years we've been operating that way. And we served the law of God with our minds. We say, "Yeah, yeah, I know Lord. I know you're the one that gives me value. But Lord, I don't have a date tonight. Lord, I don't have a girlfriend. Lord, I seem to be a failure in my job. Father I know you're the one that gives me but..." Loved ones, do you see? Isn't that the state we're in?

Now brothers and sisters, don't you see, you're going to be fighting that 'til eternity, unless you

allow God to blot out that whole in-turned personality, unless loved ones, you take the same position as Jesus. You know, it's so ridiculous. We know there in heaven there'll be no marriage or giving in marriage. And yet think of the unhappiness and anxiety we all suffer, either because we are not married or because we are married?

But think of all the agonies, think of all the agonies we go through, and the importance we attach to this. And we know there'll be no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven. We know, moreover, that Jesus gave up any right to those things, and that he was an absolutely integrated personality and had absolute sense of security. And yet, still we keep on taking this attitude.

Loved ones, the only victory and deliverance is to take our place with Jesus on the Cross, and to die to receiving approval and enjoyment, and shelter and clothes and food from the world, and reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin -- that's the independent life of the world that claims to be able to provide all these things better than God can -- and die to all those and come alive to Jesus and to trust in God himself to provide these things for us from within. Loved ones, that's the only way to do, dear ones.

I mean we often talk about it in regard to the sisters, but the brothers, we brothers are in the same mess. If it's not with girls, we're in the same mess with our jobs. If we don't somehow have proved ourselves by 40, we regard ourselves as a failure. It's ridiculous. Jesus was an apparent failure to the whole world. And yet God was absolutely satisfied with him.

But loved ones, do you see the only way is to come into a real death with Christ, to the world and other people providing these things, and come to the ground of your heart where you ask Jesus, "Lord, will you fill me with your Holy Spirit and begin to provide all these things for me? That's what I want and that's what I am willing to face."

Loved ones, that's the normal Christian life. And that's the way to be delivered from this schizophrenic situation where you serve the law of God with your mind, and you're always trying to live up to it, but Saturday night comes, and you go down into depression. Loved ones, the only way out, is to stop looking to people, to wives, to husbands, to boyfriends, to girlfriends, to employers, to our peers, to our professors, to our teachers, to the world itself for these things, and begin to trust God to give us these things through His Holy Spirit.

And that requires you to size the thing up, and count the cost. But I can't describe to you the peace that it brings you into. That is the way into peace, and it's the way into life in the spirit, which we'll talk about for at least the next year in Romans 8.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we see the thing pretty plainly. And Lord, we know this is your plan for us. And Father we know that we can never come into deliverance unless we are really ready to trust you to give us what approval, and what enjoyment, and what food and clothes and shelter that we need. And Father we know that means that we have to stop grabbing these things for ourselves from other human beings and from the world around us.

Father we want to come into this death, whereby we are crucified to the world with Jesus, and the world and other people are crucified to us. And we ask you now, by your Holy Spirit, to take us all through every detail of our lives where we have strain and a lack of peace, and to show us in what

way we have not died with Jesus to self and to the world and to our peers, and in what way we have not come alive to you fully and completely.

Dear Father, we know that the life of the Spirit is life and peace. And we've found for years, that the way of looking to other people in the world is strain and worry and anxiety. But Lord, we know that only when we're willing to die to ourselves in Jesus, will this be made real. And yet we thank you Father, that it is real in your eyes. Thank you that you've destroyed us all in Jesus already that that's a historical fact, and that we're living a lie in pretending that we aren't dead with him. Father, we trust you to expose that lie to us and enable us to see the magnificent truth, and enter into deliverance, for your glory and for our salvation. Amen.