

How to Please God

Romans 8:8

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been talking for some time now on Sunday mornings about things like bad temper. You all look so civilized and sophisticated that you probably don't even know what I am talking about so maybe take another example; resentment. You know -- things like resentment or things like those little asides in conversation that you use to draw attention to one of your few virtues.

And what we've been seeing is we have a great tendency to look at those inward attitudes that are not quite right. We have a great tendency to look at them as inexpedient little human traits that we should try to deal with some day. Of course last Sunday we saw and studied a verse that certainly did not encourage us to do that. Now maybe you'd look at that verse; its Romans 8:7.

"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." Now temper is a work of the flesh; God calls temper or resentment a work of the flesh -- or boasting is a work of the flesh. And those works of the flesh come from the mind of the flesh and this verse is saying that the mind of the flesh is not just some little inexpedient trait that you should try to get rid of some day if you can, but the mind of the flesh is hostile to God. It is diametrically opposed to God. It is defiantly antagonistic to him. So the mind of the flesh is not just some little inexpedient trait; that is a misconception on our part. The mind of the flesh is a rebel against God; it doesn't submit to God's law, indeed it actually cannot. So we saw that we need to take a different attitude towards it entirely.

You can see where it stems from and the source of it if you take a thing like lying, which all of us know plenty about, I think. Take the little white lie that we talked about before; the little white lie that we tell to cover up the missed assignment. Loved ones, God has another way completely.

God's approach to that missed assignment is absolutely and utterly different to the white lie and we often don't see that. God's way is an open confession of your failure; an honest admission of your wrongdoing and therefore, an honest opinion of you in the professor's mind. He really sees you as you are -- but as a result of that you have an absolute freedom from strain in the relationship, even though there is embarrassment, at least you're being honest with each other. And on top of that, you have a freedom from stuffing the subconscious mind with all kinds of fear and guilt because you've bluffed it out.

So God's way is utterly different, and of course our way is not that at all. We really want to pretend that we aren't what we appear to be -- careless about assignments. We want him to have a wrong impression of it, that's it. We argue that, "Oh well, I am not really as careless as that, so if he saw that I had missed that assignment, he would get a wrong impression of me." But loved ones, facts speak louder than words and at that moment, you were careless and it is more honest to let him see that you did forget the assignment and really, that's God's way.

God's way is for us to be honest about it; not to try to give a better impression of ourselves than is true. God's way is to open the relationship -- okay so he [the teacher] doesn't think you are perfect, but at least there's honesty between you; at least you're not trying to draw a veil across yourself and pretend you're better than you are.

God's way is utterly different, you see and of course the person that you're following when you tell the white lie is God's enemy. You can see the power that produces the white lie in John 8:44. We continue to be stupid about this, loved ones, we continue to think we're being pretty shrewd and clever and it's really us that are producing the lie. It isn't you know; it's really coming from the heart of the first rebel against God and we're aligning ourselves with him when we tell even a white lie.

John 8:44, Jesus is saying to the Pharisee, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Now loved ones a white lie is not just a white lie -- it's an expression of a whole way of dealing with life's problems that is utterly different to God's. It's completely opposed to truth and honesty and it's opposed to it because you have a feeling deep down, "God can never pull me out of this one on his own. I really have to help him. I cannot see how he can deliver me from this." And really loved ones, it's just utterly opposed.

We keep on pretending that this kind of thinking is endemic to human nature. This is just the kind of thing human beings do and you can't possibly get rid of it, this is the way we're built. And we keep on bluffing ourselves that God is utterly opposed to this kind of thinking but he is satisfied with destroying Jesus instead of destroying this kind of thinking in us and so he is prepared to put up with us continuing to do what we cannot avoid doing. That's the kind of mixed logic we go through.

We keep on pretending to ourselves, "Well, this kind of behavior is endemic to us human beings. We can't be other than this. We can't possibly get rid of this little tendency of the mind of the flesh to go Satan's way, we just have to accept this; even God accepts this. God is satisfied to destroy Jesus instead of destroy this in us and that's why he allows us to continue to exist."

So really loved ones we encourage each other to tolerate inward sin, we do. We kind of build each other up and say, "As long as God is prepared for us to regard him as our father here on earth, then maybe we can just continue like this. We know we really should have that mind of the flesh dealt with. We know we should turn from that way of dealing in the world completely. We know that we should let this be actualized in Jesus' death. This death of Jesus should be allowed to destroy this in us but, oh well, I can't do it. So I am going to go on and try to please God as best I can and maybe as I am trying to please him, somehow the Holy Spirit will cleanse me from this heart of darkness."

Of course loved ones, that's why Jesus died. In Jesus, God put this heart of darkness that we have inside each one of us, this sneaking kind of heart that always whispers, "Tell a lie, tell a lie, tell a lie, it's the easy way out." This sneaking heart of darkness that always says, "You have a right to resent that person -- look what they did to you." That heart of darkness was what God destroyed in Jesus on Calvary and God wants us to have that made real in us. But we keep on saying, "Oh well, some day; meanwhile I'll try to please God and turn away from this negative stuff."

Now loved ones, it's that kind of thinking that drives Christians to the brink of nervous breakdowns. It's that kind of thinking that says, "Well I know I should really leap by faith into

Jesus' death and allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse my heart completely but, well, I can't do it just yet, so meanwhile I am going to try to please God as well as I can."

Loved ones, that drives you to the brink of a nervous breakdown and there's one reason for it and it's in today's verse if you look at it: Romans 8:8, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

We trail this "old self" on our backs and this mind of the flesh that always works out that it's easier to lie than to tell the truth. We drag that along on our back and we say, "Well, we know we should dump it at the Cross. We know we should die with Jesus and leap into it by faith. Well, I'll do it someday but meanwhile I am going to try to please God as well as I can." The Bible says if you're in the flesh, you can't please God; you can't love him the way you're supposed to; you can't praise him the way you're supposed to; you can't thank him the way you're supposed to. Those who are in the flesh can't please God.

You see, we make a mistake; we keep thinking, "Well, we know if we're in the flesh we can't avoid bad temper and we can't avoid being irritable at times but we can please God." Loved ones you can't. That's what drives you crazy, because you keep thinking, "Well, I am not perfect" -- we always like to say that -- "I am not perfect." God isn't calling you to be perfect as he is perfect -- he's calling you to obedience. But we always say, "Oh well I am not perfect, I know that, but I can go on and please God as well as possible."

Now loved ones, that's the killer, you can't. If you're in the flesh, you can't please God. You just can't do it. In other words, many of us understand Romans 6 but we don't really understand Romans 7. You remember we mentioned that a couple of Sundays ago; many of us know the problem of Romans 6, maybe you'd look at it, Romans 6:1. We see that problem plain enough. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" We see that; how can we possibly be delivered from losing our temper, from getting irritable, from being resentful, and we see that the only way is Romans 6:6; that God has destroyed the heart of that old mind of the flesh, that fleshly way of thinking that wants to lie, we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

So we agree that's the way to be freed from having to lose your temper. The killer is we're not prepared to take the step in Romans 6:11 that will actualize that in our life, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." We're not quite ready to take that step.

Instead of that we decide, "Well, I am not ready to take that step yet, but I am going to try to please God." So then we turn to Romans 7 and we come up against that problem in Romans 7:15-16, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want" I really want to please him, "but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good." And we come into that problem not now of avoiding bad temper and resentment, but how to obey God -- how to please him, and now we find that there's something in us that doesn't want to please him; we find that as far as pleasing God is concerned, we have in Romans 7:24, a body of death; "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Really loved ones, that's it; as far as praising or glorifying or pleasing God when we're in the flesh, we have a body of death -- you cannot do it. Some of you say, "How can I love God unless I really have allowed the Holy Spirit to fill me?" Well, you really can't; you'll kind of love him periodically.

You remember when Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love me," and Peter said, "You know that I love you Lord" and Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." And then Jesus, as if he didn't hear right, asked him again, "Do you love me" and Peter said, "Yes, I love you." And Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

And then as if he didn't hear him the third time he asked him, "Do you love me?" Now in the Greek the words are utterly different. There are two words used 'Agapao' and 'Phileo' and really the narrative runs like this, "Peter, do you love me?" "Lord, you know I am very fond of you." "But Peter, do you love me?" "Lord, you know I am very fond of you." "Peter, do you love me?" And then Peter, "You know that I love you Lord." [John 21:15-17]

Now you see you can be very fond of God; when you're in the flesh, you can be very fond of him -- grateful to him for all the things he has given us, glad that he is our Father, but you can only love him with all your heart when you've ceased to be in the flesh. That's what the Bible means when it says, "You can't please God if you're in the flesh."

In other words, instead of letting the old horse die on Calvary with Jesus, instead of leaping by faith into Jesus and dying with him as far as the flesh is concerned, we tend to try to beat the old horse into producing the kind of performance that only an absolutely supernatural thoroughbred can produce.

And that's really what we're involved in; we're trying to beat the mind of the flesh into loving God. You know the tricks we use; in prayers we try to think, "Let me think of all the things God has given me -- that will stir love in my heart. Let me think of Jesus on Calvary -- that will stir love in my heart. I have to praise God: God you're a good God, you're a good God." Well, that's not praising him, "Well, I praise you Lord. Well, I don't feel praise." We try to work ourselves up to please God.

Loved ones, you can't do it in the flesh; those who are in the flesh can't please God. What should we do then? We should leap by faith into our death with Jesus to the world of the flesh, that's what we should do. You should leap by faith into your death with Jesus on the Cross and accept by faith that God has destroyed that old fleshly mind that constantly wants to lie and resent and lose its temper and wants anything but God. You should accept by faith that that has been crucified with Jesus and then submit to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to deliver you. That's the only way.

Now why is it the case that you have to move out of the world of the flesh into the world of the Spirit to do this? What is it to be in the flesh? If those who are in the flesh cannot please God, what does it mean to be in the flesh? Does it mean that you're in a human body? Well, it doesn't mean that; it doesn't mean that you're literally in a human body as opposed to being a disembodied spirit.

Some of us interpret in the flesh, "Oh it means we're here on earth instead of being in heaven." Or "Oh it means we're physical instead of being spiritual." Loved ones, in the flesh means that you depend on what you see and touch and hear and smell and taste for the fulfillment of all your needs. It means you live as if your physical body and your physical environment are the only sources of supply for your own personal needs. That's what it means to live in the flesh.

It means another thing too; it means that when you live in the flesh, you want everything to go the way you want it to. You want your needs fulfilled the way you want them fulfilled, when you want them fulfilled. That's what it means to live in the flesh. Now when Jesus died, none of the sunlight could get through to him in the tomb. He couldn't pick apples and eat. He couldn't use water to wash his body. Whatever peace he had in that tomb, he had to receive it from God alone.

When we leap into Jesus' death on the Cross, we agree to be in the same situation. We agree to be cut off from dependence on physical environment and physical body for the supply of our needs. When Jesus was in the tomb during those three days, nobody could pay attention to him at all. He was just ignored. When we leap into Jesus' death on the Cross, we agree no longer ever to demand that people give us respect, give us attention, and listen to us. That's what leaping into Jesus by faith means and that loved ones, is the only spaceship that is leaving earth and going to the moon. That's the only spaceship that will carry you from the world of the flesh into the world of the Spirit.

You can't get out of living in the flesh any other way but leaping into Jesus death by faith. Maybe it helps to take some plain examples: you come home from a hard day; you've just ploughed through the snow and you're dead beat, dead tired. You battled your colleagues, you battled the professors, you battled everybody and you just fall through the door and immediately think, "Oh, a hot bath, a sauna, a drink, a good meal, a newspaper, TV program, an orderly room, that's all I want and I'll be okay." That's living in the flesh because you know that the works of the flesh stem from those desires. And because she hasn't the meal ready, but that's the vital thing you need for peace and relaxation, so the irritability comes right out.

You want a hot bath, and the 7-year-old son is in the bathroom. Instead of your TV program, she wants to watch "The Galloping Gourmet." Do you see it all lines up loved ones? And we keep on protesting, "Oh but I have a right to receive, that will bring me peace -- that will bring me relaxation." But loved ones, every time you're dependent on the things you see and touch and smell; everything you perceive with your five senses, every time you're dependent on the physical body or the physical environment, you open yourself immediately to the works of the flesh spewing out from you -- the irritability, the impatience, the anger when the newspaper isn't right, the disgust and discontent when the room is disorderly. All of that flows from depending on your physical environment and your physical body for peace and relaxation. That's living in the flesh.

God of course has an absolutely different way. He doesn't believe that's your problem at all when you come home after battling the colleagues and the professors and ploughing through the snow. His way is stated in John 14:27, loved ones if you look at it. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." And we say, "Oh be practical; the peace I need is the peace that comes through my body. My body is worn and strained and if I had a sauna, I'd feel so relaxed. That's the peace I need -- that spiritual peace -- that can't bring quietness to my mind and peace to my body."

That's what living in the flesh is; it's disagreeing with God utterly and completely about what you need, and it's looking to the wrong source for the supply of your needs. The truth actually is, if you would once die to that ridiculous and stupid dependence on those physical things to bring you peace and would instead commit yourself to beginning to look up to Jesus and ask him to make that real to you, he would make it real to you. And believe it or not, you would have peace and quietness in your mind and your body would relax and you would begin to have freedom from strain if you would do it.

But you see there's another thing that living in the flesh means, you see the emphasis, "Poor me, here I am after ploughing through the snow and battling those brutes in the office and here I am home and all I want, poor little me, all I want is my TV program and my newspaper and slippers and a bath, that's not much to ask." I, I, I, I.

The reason why a person in the flesh can't please God is that they don't want to please God --

they're so busy pleasing themselves. They're so wrapped up pleasing themselves that they judge everything by how it affects them. A person who is in the flesh refers everything to themselves -- they're concerned first and foremost about whether they're pleased or not so they haven't time to please God.

A person in the Spirit pleases himself by pleasing God, but a person in the flesh only wants to please himself. Now loved ones, that's the situation we're in when we're in the flesh and a person in the flesh cannot please God. What we are doing of course is, we're trying to hold on to a fleshly way of thinking and at the same time working a little at pleasing God and you can't.

The mind of the flesh is the Greek word 'Phronema' and it actually doesn't mean so much the mind of the flesh as the thinking of the flesh, the way a person in the flesh thinks. And do you see that you can't think that way -- the way people in the flesh think -- and still please God? You can't do it because you're looking to the wrong source for your needs and you're determined to please the wrong person at heart.

So the motive is wrong and the power is wrong and you cannot please God. That's why so many of us walk such defeated lives. There's only one way; die with Jesus in the tomb with him; leap by faith into Jesus death. See what it involves for you; see what being in a tomb would involve for you, and then decide whether you're ready for that and then don't hang around looking into the tomb, because that's one way to put yourself off; leap by faith into Jesus. Say, "Lord, as far as I am concerned, from this moment on I am going to live my life looking to you for these things. I am tired of being a sponge sucking up from my relatives, from my wife, from my husband, from my friends, from my roommates, all that I think I need. Lord I am dying with Jesus to that. I commit myself now to his death and I believe that you destroyed me with him and now Holy Spirit, I look to you for all my needs." Loved ones, you'll begin to find that the power of the Holy Spirit lifts you on to a new level.

Do you see that you can only stand on the edge of a swimming pool so long? There comes a time when you have to plunge in and trust the water to hold you up. If you keep standing on the edge of the pool and looking at the water saying, "Will that Holy Spirit hold me up?" You'll never find out.

You're wise to look at the length of the pool and to look at the depth of the water but after you've looked at it, there comes a time when you leap by faith into Jesus death and that's the only way to come out of the flesh. Unless you do it, I think you're going to find continual frustration in pleasing God and you're going to find it a terrible burden to keep trying to please him whereas if you leap into Jesus by faith, the Holy Spirit will lift you into a new environment and you'll find that you cannot help pleasing God.

So would you think about it loved ones? Especially I'd love you to see where you're trying to substitute will power for leaping by faith into Jesus. You're trying to pick up the problem instead of change the whole way of thinking. A person who feels they have to depend on a hot bath for freedom from strain is at the mercy of the little fellow who is playing with the boots in his bath and therefore he is at the mercy of his own irritability and impatience when he finds he can't get what he wants.

A person who depends on Jesus for peace is never going to be like that; Jesus is never too busy looking after somebody else to give you the Spirit of peace and so it's possible to live in continual peace and continual quietness. So I pray that some of you are beginning to move into some

of these things this week. Check it out this week, and look at yourself; carry it over into that 5 o'clock time when you get home and say, "Am I living in the flesh here or am I living in the spirit" and you'll begin to see that if you lift off completely and begin to live in the spirit, it is amazingly easy it is to obey God. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we've known times when we come home at night -- even when it's been a good day -- to find ourselves taking the attitude, "Well, we're home and now we can have everything the way we want it." We do admit Father that there's something in us that says we have a right to have it the way we want to; that's why you have a home -- so that you can do what you want when you want. And Father we're surprised when we seem to produce more bitterness and irritability to the loved ones that we share our home with than we ever produced through the day at work and we can see our Father it's because of the level of our expectations. We see that it's because we're expecting from them what they can only receive from you and Father, we see that we live in the flesh so much of our time.

Lord Jesus we've heard your words so often, "Peace I give unto to you" but Lord we just never realized that your peace could bring us real quietness at the end of the day. We've never realized that your peace could do what a Martini could not do Lord, what a song could not do. Lord Jesus, we see that you looked to God alone when you were in the tomb and that you want us to join you there because that's where, indeed, we were placed. We thank you Father.

We thank you that you did crucify us with Jesus. We thank you that you can raise us up into resurrection life if we simply leap by faith. Father, I would pray that some of my brothers and sisters would leap by faith into Jesus death this week and would enter into the life you have for us all for your glory. Amen.