

Under Law or Under Grace 1

Romans 8:10a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

So that we would all begin together let's look at Romans 8:9 This is the second week we have dealt with this statement and it runs like this: "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." If you've never been here before and maybe you've never thought too deeply about Christianity before, your first question probably is "aren't we all in the flesh? I mean, we are all in bodies -- here we are -- not too many of us are flying around with wings like little spirits. Aren't we all in the flesh?"

So it would be good to clarify that that statement does not mean just your inner body when it says you're in the flesh. Or when it say's you're not in the flesh it doesn't simply mean that you're not in the body; that's not the meaning of it. Nor does it mean, loved ones, that your body is evil, because I think a lot of us have been brought up in a kind of Victorian approach to our physical being so that we've been almost taught to think that our bodies are evil. Now it doesn't mean that: when the Bible talks about the flesh it doesn't mean your bodies are evil. Nor does it mean you're not a spirit, you're in a body.

What it does mean is that you depend on your body or other people or the world to supply all that you need. That's really what it is. It means that you look to your body and other people and the world to supply the needs that you have for food, shelter and clothing, for enjoyment, for a sense of justification and recognition in your life. That's really what it is. Instead of really looking to God you look to these things. Now you may say, doesn't God use some of those things to supply our needs? Yes, but the heart of living in the flesh is you look to those things and grab them when you want them you don't look to God and trust him.

For instance maybe you've been foolish enough to allow some of the magazines or some of the movies on T.V. to stir up tremendous sexual tension inside you. You have at that moment a choice of two ways to deal with that sexual tension: either you can deal with it by living in the flesh -- that is by using your body or somebody else's body to release that tension whether you love them or don't love them. Or you can use Jesus himself. You can look up to God and say "Father I know that only inside marriage is this an incidental expression of love to my partner and I know that outside marriage this is just a childish expression of self love. Lord Jesus I look to you on the cross now; you had no wife, no woman. You had no right to express your own sexual tension this way so Lord Jesus, I ask you by the Holy Spirit to transform this desire for love that I have, this lust for love that I have, into a desire to love you."

You can do it either way. So it's a pretty plain choice, loved ones, all through our lives. You come up against needs that you have and you can either look to God to deliver you from those needs or satisfy them or you can look to your own body, to other people's bodies, or the world and just grab that need whenever you want. That's really what Paul means when he says "you are not in the flesh you are in the spirit. It depends on who you are looking to for an answer." In other words, you can either look to the Spirit of God and you can have an outgoing life where you find these needs supplied because you're looking to God, or you can be a kind of parasite or great sponge that just sucks everybody into your being so that you can satisfy the needs of your body for food, shelter and

clothing, of your emotions for the satisfaction and enjoyment and excitement of your mind for justification and acknowledgement and recognition, and that's it, you see.

So in a way you can say it's really whether you live from the outside in -- which is like the flesh -- or whether you live inside out -- which is the life of the spirit. Now you may say how do you really know which of these two you're in at the present time? God has left no doubt. He has listed certain signs or symptoms of the person who is living in the flesh, and certain signs and symptoms of the person who is living in the spirit. So would you like to look at those loved ones? Galatians 5:19-24. They're good especially for those who are involved in academics, because we are experts at rationalizing and diluting, as you know, and compromising and these things are pretty plain and it's a little difficult to get out of them!

Galatians 5:19. "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Loved ones, I'll let you into a secret if you're here for the first time today: it's because of some of those signs that some of us who have been here Sunday by Sunday for years are rocked a bit when we come to Romans 8:9. And we try to decide if we are in the flesh or are we in the Spirit. And of course Paul says (Romans 8:9) "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." That is; if God's Spirit really dwells in you, you're going to be living in the Spirit.

Then he nails it home and says "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." He is, in a sense saying -- don't try some kind of pedantic caviling with me here; don't say you belong to Jesus and Jesus' Spirit is in you, but you just don't happen to live in the Spirit. He says no -- it's all connected up. If the Spirit of Jesus dwells in you, then you belong to Jesus and in turn you will live in the Spirit.

So some of us, of course, feel at this moment, "Do you mean that if I have a pattern in my life (and maybe that's the important word) if I have a pattern in my life of releasing sexual tension by using my body or others or the world; if I have in my life a pattern of delivering myself from depression by using tranquilizers and pills and alcohol and movies that I take into myself rather than looking to God for relief from that depression and worry; if I have a pattern in my life of worrying about losing my job as if my job was the real source of my supplies rather than just one of the many methods that God has used to supply me; if I have a pattern of trying to get my friends to be what I want them to be by leaning on them instead of thanking God for them and trusting him to change them; if I have a pattern of these things do you mean that I am not living in the Spirit but I'm living in the flesh? If that's the situation then the Spirit of God does not dwell in me. If the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in me then I do not belong to him."

Then I answer -- that's not my job to tell you that. It's your responsibility to deal with God's Spirit about these things. My job is to try and set forth plainly before you what God's Word says, so you must deal with that loved ones. Now you might be sitting there and say "Say it's true what you're saying: say it's true that I have a pattern of living in the flesh for many years. What could

be my situation? Am I a Christian?"

Well there are two alternatives loved ones. Either you could be a natural man, which we tried to deal with last week. You could just be a natural, unspiritual man or woman. That is, you could be somebody who has never experienced the supernatural work that God can do inside a person who is willing to surrender their whole life to Jesus. You could be that. In that case your spirit inside would actually dead. Your spirit would just be dead. You'd have maybe your mind, and emotions and will very much alive -- you'd be alive out here in your body, but your spirit, in that case, would just be dead.

So some of you could just be natural men or women; you could just be unspiritual people who have never experienced God making your spirit alive. So when I talk to you about looking up to God at a time of worry and trusting him to supply every need of yours from his riches and joy in Christ Jesus, you can't understand what I'm talking about. You think I'm talking about some kind of auto suggestion where you keep on trying to brainwash yourself like "don't forget there's a God in the sky and he's looking after things." You tie it up with some activity of your mind.

If you were a natural man or woman, however much you've come to church, however many books you've read, then you wouldn't have anything alive in here (in the spirit) to look to. The only way you can fulfill your needs is from the world outside yourself. Now that could be your situation.

You might say to me "Pastor it couldn't be me, because I believe God exists, I believe Jesus exists, I believe he has died for the whole world. In fact I believe many of the things you say here on Sunday mornings." But loved ones do you see you can have all that activity in your mind? You might even say to me "Pastor, I feel enthusiastic; when you get excited about something I feel enthusiastic about it myself." Well loved ones, there are plenty of people who have a lot of emotional enthusiasm for the intellectual concepts they believe in, but all that activity would still be in your soul.

The point about a natural man or woman is they have never come to the place where they have really handed their whole life over to Jesus and received his Spirit into their spirit and begun to walk in obedience day by day to the Spirit of Jesus, believing that Spirit was inside them. So you could be a natural man or woman.

You may say "Oh but I intend to take some steps sooner or later -- I intend to submit my will to this. I intend, some day, to surrender my life to Jesus. But at the moment I have a lot of satisfaction and happiness in the expression of my own personality; in the job that I do, and in my many friends. In fact at the moment, to be honest with you, I feel I have much more liberty than some of you poor souls who have willingly become the slave of Jesus. You seem to have a very narrow mind and view of life; I'm prepared to take every philosophy of life into consideration. I feel in many ways I have much more liberty than you have. Besides, isn't God merciful? Doesn't he know that all men are weak and frail and that every man has an infirmity? Isn't he going to forgive us all at the end?"

The natural man or natural woman tends to take that attitude. You need to decide if you're in that position or not. If you're in that situation then obviously you're going to have real trouble getting anything from the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God is not alive inside you. So you're just baffled when I talk about looking to either one source or the other for the fulfillment of your needs. You really need to deal with that, loved ones.

Can I just push you on that? If you think that you are in that position then you can change it today by really giving your life to this man Jesus, and by really asking him to give his Spirit to you. In that case, a supernatural event takes place inside you, it does -- it's incredible -- and you begin to sense a source of life within you that you've never had before. So that's a natural man.

Now I think many of us are not in that position. I think many of us here this morning have at some time surrendered our lives to Jesus and we have received his Spirit into us. Some of us may never have done that, but some of us have done that. Yet we still find we're living in the flesh; we still live as if Jesus is not within us. We live as if his Spirit cannot supply all our wants. We live as if the King of the universe is not on the throne of our hearts and we really want to live as if he is and we really want to live depending on him for everything, but we really don't do that.

Look at Romans 8:3-4 and just take a moment to pause and think of your own situation. These verses are one of the many statements of the Bible of what God has done for a person who has received Jesus. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Now there may be some of us here this morning who say "I knew all that, but I must admit that the just requirement of the law is not fulfilled in me. I want it to be, but it's not. I want to look to God's Spirit to supply all my needs, but I must admit to you I don't walk that way. In fact I'll have to admit to you I'm under the law and not on top of it. I find that there are many passages in God's word that convict me rather than comfort me. I find that often I'm not receiving from Jesus what I should receive, but I'm going to other sources. I'm not receiving the peace from Jesus that I should receive; often I'm going to the tranquilizer, the alcohol or the movie on T.V. for it -- to try to quiet my mind and get some peace of mind. Often I seem to be living under the law rather than on top of it. I really seem to be living according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit.

So loved ones whether we have never settled accounts with Jesus and are therefore just natural men or women, or whether we have settled accounts at one time in our lives but seem not now to be living with him as the supplier of all our needs, we're all in the same position where we feel rather condemned when we read Galatians 5. In other words there are some of us here this morning who are living under the law -- we're legal men and women; we know that Jesus is inside, and we kind of want to live with him as a supplier of everything, but we in fact don't do that. We find ourselves often condemned by the law rather than described by the law. We are legal Christians -- can you call us that? I don't know; you can't tell. Only God knows what attitude he has to each one of us, we are all in different situations, but we seem to be so called Christians who live under the law. The Bible calls us carnal Christians at times -- we seem to be fleshly Christians; we're living under that law. That's why we're not living according to the flesh.

We are a bit like the thorny ground that Jesus describes in that parable of the sower -- would you look at it loved ones, its Matthew 13:22. "As for what was sown among thorns, this is he, who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." We're the people who want to belong to Jesus. We want to be free from the fear of man. But we find that the cares of the world and the delight in riches seem to have drawn us back into regarding men and women's opinion of us more highly than we regard Jesus' opinion of us.

So for those of us who are Dad's and Mom's here, we're pulled back, maybe half way by deception, into thinking so and so in our office can influence our future. Our future is certainly what our children depend on, so we better be careful what they think of us. Whether it's the boss or our colleagues or the people that we're selling to, we want to be free from man fear. But somehow the cares of the world and the desire of riches and to get on in our job brings us back under this fear of man.

It's the same with us who are on campus. We want to get on, so now the clock has turned full circle and now there's an incredibly extreme respect for academia, where a few years ago we were all despising it, and now we are all racing for the grades. There's no harm in trying to do the job well, but we're racing for them so much so that we stand on our heads in order to get a good grade; we'd do anything to please the professor or the teacher. We'll do anything, often, to please our peers. So we somehow want to belong to Jesus; we want to look to only him for recognition and acknowledgement and justification. We want to be in a position where his Spirit rises within us and refuses to be afraid of the Roman soldiers, of the mob, of the blandishments of Pilate; refuses to be afraid of what men fear, of what men say about us. But somehow we have come back under that fear. Jesus is somewhere inside, but we are not living depending on his opinion. We are definitely saying to ourselves "That is not enough Lord, because you cannot influence our future but these people can, and we're concerned about what they think of us."

So a lot of us, loved ones, live under the law in regard to that. That's why we get into things like envy and pride: envy, pride, jealousy are all concerned with status. You can see that. They are all concerned with status in relationship to what other human beings think of us and what the world thinks of us. Many of us have trouble with envy and pride and selfish ambition because we have not really accepted Jesus' opinion above other people's opinion. We want to belong to him, but we don't take that step. Some of us want to belong to the person who owned nothing, and yet who seemed never to lack anything.

We want to belong to that man Jesus, who seemed to have plenty to give to everybody and yet owned nothing himself. We want to belong to him who told us not to be anxious about anything -- to look to his father who supplied all that the lilies of the field needed and who knew that we had need of these things and that he would supply us with all of the food, shelter and clothing we needed if we would concentrate on finding out what he had put us here in the world for. We want to belong to him, but somehow or another we are drawn by the cares of the world and our desire for riches and we have let those choke off this Spirit of Jesus that rises up inside us and says don't worry.

We look around at all the world and look around at the needs we have and the lacks we have in our houses and somehow it's choked off. Though we want to belong to this Jesus, we in fact continue to look to the world. We are influenced by everybody else that says "Don't buy that -- don't buy that -- God can't supply you. God helps those who help themselves. You look to your job and that's what gives you money and gives you food."

God is saying, "Of course that's the method I'm using at this moment to supply you, but it's me whose supplying you. I can use ravens as I used with Elijah if you'd trust me."

So, many of us, loved ones, find the care of the world and the desire of riches bringing us back into this. Many of us want to belong to Jesus who was content with satisfying and pleasing his Father. His meat, his emotional satisfaction was to do what God wanted him to do and we want to be back in that position. We remember how good it was when our Dad gave us something to do in the

garage and we did it -- we were so delighted with his attitude to us and really that was the precious thing to us -- the smile on his face -- we really enjoyed doing it for him.

In fact many of us were in that position when we first started to teach or first started to be an engineer. We kind of thought "You get paid for this as well?!" We really enjoyed it so much. We depended for our emotional satisfaction and our contentment on God and what he was giving to us. And we want to belong to Jesus and do that now, but somehow the old delight in riches has taken over. So we started to look to "Well, if I could ski a bit more, maybe cross-country skiing -- maybe I'll go ahead and enjoy that -- maybe that will lift my spirits. Maybe the spring time; the spring sitting on a boat or on the water skis, that will be exciting. Maybe a vacation -- if I could get that -- that would lift me immensely." So we go from spot to spot to spot. We want to belong to Jesus who got his full joy from the Father and the fellowship with the Father, but somehow we slip to these other things.

Loved ones, that's why we find ourselves in the midst of impatience and irritability; because some fellow has got the skis before we have. Or some fellow's out there with a bigger boat than we have. Or somebody has closed off the lake to ski. Or somehow the snow's too wet to ski. Or somehow the right movie isn't on T.V. Now that's where impatience and irritability comes from. They're only symptoms of the fact that we're looking to the wrong place for the supply of all our needs. God is asking us to get our personalities looking to the right place.

Really, if any one of us are in the position of saying "Well that's our spot -- but who can deliver us from that? Who can deliver us from that ridiculous situation? Who can deliver us from this body of death -- this way of living depending on everybody else that I agree produces all these feelings of irritability and impatience and anger and jealousy within me -- who can deliver me from this?" Jesus. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When you were in your mom's womb did you lack food? Did you lack warmth? Did you lack protection? Did anybody else give you security and protection when you were those 9 months in your mom's womb? Think of all the activity that we all need at this moment to supply all of us. There may be about 800 of us here. Think that we were once all in our mother's womb and we were not doing a thing, really; our mom's supplied everything. We didn't look to anybody else because we had all that we needed.

Loved ones that's what being in Jesus is. Leap into Jesus by faith. Leap into Jesus' womb. Stop pretending that Jesus is in you but he is not able to supply all you need. Leap into Jesus and die with him to other sources of your supplies. Leap into him by faith and say "Lord Jesus I'm prepared to die now to those things that you showed me. Lord I've been reaching for those aspirins every time I've got that headache. I know fine well all I'm doing is killing the symptoms. I know that. Lord I know nobody knows the source of arthritis but I have a fair idea that you have a better idea of it than they have. They change their theories every other year. Lord Jesus I'm not going to just reach for those aspirins every time."

Now loved ones, be wise; it's different for those of us who are in the midst of diabetes. In that sense God will deliver you gradually from the thing as you begin to look to him. You don't just throw the medicines over. So don't just throw the drugs over or throw the glasses away expecting that that expresses to God your faith -- that doesn't. Throw your glasses away when your eyes are strong enough to see on their own. You throw your crutch away when God has strengthened your leg and when you sense that it's strengthened. It's not just a game that you play. I'm talking about the

rest of us who are grabbing for the movie on T.V. to relieve our tension when what we should do is kneel down and say "Lord Jesus, I'm in you. Will you give me that peace that you 'give unto us not as the world gives do you give unto us'? Lord Jesus let me hear you say 'let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.'"

When you're in the midst of tension and the desire to go out and do something wild and something that will give you satisfaction instead look to Jesus. Say "Lord I am in you, I have died to that. When you died I died; I died to my need for that kind of thing and I stand on that by faith. Lord Jesus, I look to you now, through the Holy Spirit, will you give me release and resolution of these tensions inside me? Lord Jesus, let me look into your face, let me treat you as my mother's womb."

Loved ones that's really the way out, that's the way of deliverance. In other words, the impatience, the irritability, the jealousy, all the works of the flesh stem from a person who exists in a fleshly state. They stem from a person who looks to his body or her body, to the world and to others for the supply of their needs. Those who die to that and who put themselves into Jesus womb and look only to him, find that he answers and that he brings about contentedness and quietness and love and peace. That really can be your experience but the secret is; where you look to for the supply of your needs. You know you and I are going to choose -- you can have this to choose right this very day -- you know it.

Its noon and you have the choice: "Well, it's been a good start to the day and that wasn't bad. I kind of understood most of it and now, alright -- what restaurant would we really enjoy?" She says some restaurant and you say you don't like that one it's kind of dark -- immediately you are looking to the wrong source -- that's where the disagreement comes up, over a silly restaurant, because you start thinking that the happiness you have begun to sense this morning will only be able to be continued by looking outside. Or what are you going to do this afternoon? "Well boy I would really like to go out and maybe ride around a little bit in the sunshine." Then your friend says "I'd really like to go home." And because you're looking to that ride in the sunshine to keep up your optimistic feeling, that's where the argument begins. So it runs right on through -- every one of us who are boyfriends or girlfriends that's the whole deal.

Do you look to Jesus for supplying all that you need and then be ready to be him to each other -- or are you trying to grab at what you need for yourself? So it keeps on going: tonight, sleep isn't so good for all kinds of reasons -- Satan is active at night, among other things -- there are all kinds of reasons; heat's too high up for example -- all kinds of reasons. You wake up in the morning and you're worn out. You have the choice of either looking to more sleep, in which case you leave yourself late to get to work, and then you get there late and have to make an excuse or tell a lie. Do you see? Or you can look to Jesus and say "Lord I know that was a miserable night's sleep but Jesus, you are the one that all my rest comes from; you can make this body go forever without any sleep if you want. So Lord Jesus, I look to you for your strength that is made perfect in my weakness today.

So do you see loved ones, it is a very practical thing -- that's what living in the Spirit is. Not one big surrender to Jesus, but a walking in the joy of that surrender. I won't get an easy laugh -- but this is a good illustration: the lady says marriage is one great "yes's" followed by lots of "uh-huhs." That's it with Jesus; it's the "uh-huhs" that are drawing you into trouble, that are bringing you into difficulty. You've really said the great "yes" and then you say "I belong to Jesus." No, loved ones, you belong to Jesus if you walk with him. There's no point in taking a girl

out once and then never again and then you say "We belong to each other" no -- no.

You belong to him if you walk with him; if he's the supplier of all that you need, that's it. It's not a game. It's not a tricky mental game we're involved in where you get a free ticket into heaven when you believe certain things. It's looking to Jesus, a real live person, today, who can supply all that you need.

Shall we pray?

Dear Father we see that we have been distracted by your gifts -- thinking that it was your gifts that gives us emotional satisfaction or joy; thinking that it was your gifts that supplies our material needs and food, shelter and clothing. Thinking that it's your gifts by which we climb to the top of the ladder and get people to respect us and acknowledge us. Lord God, we see that we've been distracted by the gifts from the Giver. No Father, we see that the Holy Spirit within us is well able to make Jesus' health, and joy, and approval of a sense of recognition real in each one of us.

Father, we would lean back into the womb from which we came, even Jesus, the one by whom we were made. We would leap into him now, and die to all the outside sources, knowing that if you did it in our mother's womb when she was just a human being, you can certainly supply all our needs from the one, supernatural person who is Alpha and Omega -- God of life. We thank you, Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and throughout this day and throughout this week. Amen.