

Under Law or Under Grace 2

Romans 8:10b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The Bible talks about dying bodies and living spirits. We get it loved ones from the verse in Romans 8:10, "But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness." So do you see that; dead bodies are with you, and spirits that are alive?

Did you know that from the moment you were born, from the very first moment you were born you were already beginning to die. From the very first moment you were born millions of cells began to die. Now they were replaced, but that process has been going on from the moment you were born. In fact there are millions of cells in your body that are dying at this moment and they are being replaced. Of course the killer is that the replacement process slows up as you get older. It's interesting that from the very first moment you were born, you actually started to die.

Now that obviously was not God's plan in the very beginning. He obviously didn't plan for any death of cells at all and you can see his plan if you look at Genesis 3:22. "Then the Lord God said behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever --." In other words God put a tree of life there, and if we ate of that, we would live forever. That was God's plan; presumably we were made to live forever and to go on and on and on.

What changed it all? When God has a perfect son he is a son that loves him perfectly. He is a son that understands him completely. He is a son that is in perfect accord with him in every way. This son knows exactly how God intends to enable India to feed her whole population from her own land. This son, Jesus, understands how God intends to bring that about. This son understands how God intends to make New York a harmonious community of people that are fulfilled and satisfied with each other. This son Jesus knows how to make your home happy. This son Jesus knows how his Father intends to work in your office situation to bring it into peace and out of conflict. This son Jesus knows all those things.

God does not intend to put him in a 747 and fly him from India, to China, to your office, to your home, to Africa, in every century to bring that about. You're God and mine, planned that you and I would allow this son of his to live, instead, inside of us and to give us the Spirit power that makes him like his Father so that you would go to India or I would go to China. Or you would go to your home or you would go to your office. Or you would go to where they were dumping the industrial pollution into Lake Superior. Jesus, the son of our Creator, would express through you, the wisdom, and the kindness, and the diplomacy, of his Father and the intellect of his Father. And through you his son Jesus would bring the world back under his Father's control. That's the Creator's plan for you and me. His plan was that we would live like that.

And of course, we would be utterly satisfied: we would have an immediate sense of our own value. Nobody could say "Why are you on the earth? Why were you made? What good are you to society?" We would, each one, have such individual differences that would enable his son Jesus to express himself appropriately in each situation throughout the world, that each one of us here in this auditorium

would have an immediate sense of our own value. We would never feel that fellow that got on T.V. seemed in others eyes more valuable than us. We would never feel for a moment that the person who was better known than we were, seemed to be of more value to society. We would immediately have had a great sense of our own value, and of our own worth, and of our own identity, and where we stood in the world.

Of course, we were so individually suited for what God wanted us to do -- each one of you has some abilities that nobody else in this room has. There may be several carpenters here, but each one of you has a slightly different personality that uses that ability and technique, and produces slightly different results with it. There may be many of us here who work with finances and math, but each one of us is subtly different from the other, so that we can bring about slightly different results.

God's plan of course was that we would all realize our difference from everybody else and we would have absolute, emotional satisfaction, in exercising the powers that we alone could exercise in the whole world -- that was God's plan. God's plan was that his son, Jesus, should express the Creator's wisdom and power and love through you in such an individual way, that you, as a result of that, would find total emotional satisfaction in doing it. Of course the result would be such a balanced, well ordered society, that none of us would have any lack for clothing or for food. That was God's plan.

Well I'll ask you -- is that the way you think of your life? I mean, you know fine well all of us hear that. We say "That's very nice. It would be beautiful if that were the way." But loved ones, we ourselves have decided otherwise -- you know that. We've decided "No, we won't do that. We want to live our own way. We want to do our own thing. We want to use the powers of the world for our own benefit. Yes, you may have a plan." Well did we ever know he had a plan -- I doubt that we did. Did we -- in fairness to us? We went to Sunday school and we heard some things about God, but we never really realized how it tied up with us. Whether we knew it or not, we certainly have got onto a kind of lifestyle that does not allow for anybody to use our life, least of all this man Jesus.

We want to do our own thing in our own way. Most of us live to get our own satisfaction; to build together some little bit of a house somewhere and shelter ourselves from the snow and the rain, and build up a little social security so that we'll be able to bury ourselves. We can have that attitude of almost a siege mentality to the universe: our job is to kind of make ourselves secure and get through it as happily as we can. Of course loved ones, once we decided to do that, God had to withdraw the possibility of living forever from us. So he did that, you remember. He decided "Look, if these people I have made are going to do their own thing, I can see their desire to make themselves above everybody else, and they will destroy the whole universe that I have made."

So God withdrew the eternal life from us, and probably that's how death entered in. Death probably came in that way; probably the cells began, then, to be destroyed from that moment on. Probably in Adam himself, the cells were not being destroyed in his body; but immediately he and the rest of us rejected God's plan, God had to withdraw the possibility of having eternal lives and he did that. That's one of the ways in which our bodies are dead, loved ones. I think there are other, important, ways, and I'd love to share them with you, because I think some of you are still killing yourselves.

We still kept the memory, somehow, in our minds, that we could do good. We didn't know exactly how

it was planned to happen, but we somehow felt that we were here to do good. Now you find the remnant of that idea in what we are all taught to say to each other as secular people: "I'm in the world to leave it a better place than how I find it" -- that kind of thing. Or "My philosophy is the golden rule: I never do to anybody else what I don't want them to do to me." Or we are brought up to say, when we are getting our educational training, "I want to help society; I want to do good for people." So most of us, even though we don't understand exactly the fact about Jesus living in us, and doing his thing through us, most of us have the feeling we are here to do some good.

Loved ones, the killer is -- we feel we're to do the good by our own efforts, and with our own ability. Indeed many of us feel by doing good, we'll establish our place in society -- we'll establish our value to society. In fact I think it's only maybe two weeks ago, one sister here was thinking of what she would do in life. She was battling between what God had put into her heart, and some thought she was giving to the fact that maybe society needs more social workers and maybe she should be a social worker because society needs a social worker. And many of us are not purely altruistic enough; we want to be a social worker because, maybe, if there are only a few social workers, we'd be of some value. At least we won't go without a job. So we find that, though we often want to do well in society, it's often being tied up with our desire to be somebody, or to establish our value, or to justify our existence. Loved ones that's what brings more death into our bodies.

I'll give you one instance; a lady went with a missionary to India; really, ostensibly, to bring the dear ones in India to Jesus. She went with that attitude "I'm there to do it myself and with my own power, and my own ability." In the back of her mind she felt "It will justify me in the Creator's eyes, and will make me feel like I'm doing something worthwhile." The result was that the conditions that she saw among the Indians began to eat at her heart. They ate at her heart so much, that she not only prayed for hours about the poor people that were suffering those ridiculous economic conditions, but she began to talk at great length to her husband about these conditions.

Then she began to talk about the miserable people that made these conditions necessary in India. As she thought about it more and more, she felt more and more resentment build up against these people that created these conditions. She resented them more and more and more, until the stomach outlet in her body began to tense continually and persistently with the muscle tension that she had over the resentment, and eventually that outlet created so much strain that the stomach itself was not performing as it should and an ulcer began to form inside the stomach. She almost bled to death with the ulcer.

Loved ones, that's an instance of trying to do it other than the way God intended, and death being brought into our bodies. That's part of what God means when he says your bodies are dead and in fact are dying, in a real sense. Obviously, Jesus saw the conditions, and he saw the miserable types that were living off of the poor people in India, and that were making these conditions necessary. He knew fine well that only his Father's Spirit could change those things.

He certainly wasn't going to help them by hating them and resenting them; so he loves those people. He loves even the people who are dictators in our world, because he knows that only love will stir them to be able to receive the life of God's Spirit, that he's pouring in all the time, to try to convict them of what they are doing wrong. Loved ones, many of us are trying to do well in our own way. Of course it's really worse than that, isn't it -- with many of us? We've talked about a lot about living in the Spirit and living in the flesh. In fact many of us lack a sense of value in our

life, because we're not allowing Jesus' Spirit to live in us, and pour out through us, so we really do feel that we are of little value. In fact, many of you would agree at this moment -- you've often felt pretty worthless.

The result is, we try terribly hard to be of some worth to society; we try to establish some worth. We try to establish it in all kinds of ways; we try to establish it by getting attention from each other, by living in the flesh. By getting other people to respect us, and look up to us. We try to do it by using the world itself to establish our importance. Many of us decide "If I can be a very successful businessman, then the world would look at me and see my value."

Many of us, loved ones, try to establish our value to the world by the things that we achieve in it. Many of us, for instance, do it by trying to put everything right in the world. Many of us feel that we are here to do some good -- we see that. How do we do some good? Well we can see some things that are wrong that other people do not see; now if we lay emphasis on those things, then other people will not only change, but they will see that we have a pretty deep insight and we are pretty valuable people to have around.

The result is, there are many of us, here even, that spend all our time on the negative aspects of life. In order to establish our own value as deep prophets in society, we're always picking out the things that are wrong. We're picking out the thing that is wrong in our office, or we're picking out the thing that is wrong in our school. Or we're picking out the thing that is wrong in our church, or we're picking out the thing that is wrong in our father, or in our mother, or in our girlfriend, or our husband, or our wife: we are always dwelling on negative things.

On day the car goes well -- we don't mention it -- but when the car goes badly -- we're telling everybody about how badly the car goes and what a miserable car we have! When things go well at our job -- we don't tell anybody. But when it goes badly -- everybody knows about the miserable day we had at our job. Loved ones, all the time we're doing the same thing as that dear lady in India, because all those feelings of resentment, and criticism, and negativism, do the same things to our body as they did to hers because all those things bring strain and stress.

And strain and stress have three different effects on the body: they tighten the muscles up, they enable the glands to secrete excess fluid, so that we have trouble with acid in our stomach, and with thyroid fluid, and they affect our whole attitude to other people. Because with this kind of tension we can do nothing about it; we can do nothing but resent them, and hate them. It increases the flow of blood inside us, so that we begin to get high blood pressure.

Loved ones, I don't know how many of us have tension headaches from this kind of thing. Oh -- we're doing well for Jesus -- we're doing it, we're doing it. And the skull, you know, is pretty rigid; it doesn't allow for much expansion and we pump the blood up there because we're on the go all the time trying to do good. And the blood is pumping in, and the muscles are getting tense in the back of our neck and by the end of the day we can't control our headache -- that migraine headache -- we have no control over it at all because we have lost the whole understanding that God put us here to live effortless lives and that he actually knows what our function in this world is.

He has so designed us that we can do it without strain and without breaking up. But that plan includes his son, Jesus. And it's the Spirit of Jesus coming through us, and doing the thing that he wants to through us, that brings us total satisfaction in our world. Loved ones, God did not design

you badly. He did not design you so that you had to pop aspirins every other day. He did not design you so that you had to go continually to get the blood pressure treated. God is a wise person, and if he has made a world where we can design cars that don't break up until the planned obsolescence gets the better of them, if we can design cars that way, and furniture that way, do you not believe that the Creator probably designed you so that you would go without strain? Of course he did.

You see that we bring death into our bodies by the strain that we begin to endure in trying to do things ourselves. Loved ones think of your relationship with your peers: think of how often you go to sleep at night wondering "Do they think well of me" or wondering about somebody that criticized you in the office; you turn and you twist with the strain, and you cannot get to sleep. You get up the next day strained and worn out as if you hadn't slept at all. That's bringing death into your body. That's bringing all kinds of death into your glands, into the flow of your blood, into your whole muscle system. It's bringing death and strain and stress. That's why God says death is at work in your bodies: your bodies are dying.

What I would like to share next week is to what extent that can be changed. But you can see the way in which, immediately, it can be changed by stopping this business of living as if you're here to do your own thing in your own way -- by ceasing to look at your life like that, and by beginning to see that God's perfect son wants to live in you, and do things through you that will bring his Father's world back under his control. Turn to this person, Jesus, and say "Lord Jesus, I want to start living. If that's the way you and your Father planned, I want to start living that way. Will you show me where I'm living apart from you? Will you show me where I'm living in the flesh -- where I'm living in sin -- independent of you? And will you begin to show me what you would like to do in me?"

Loved ones for many of us, it might just mean a change in our careers. It really might. It might mean changing many of the things we've all decided -- "that's what we've to do." With most, the big thing it would mean changing is our attitudes and our approaches to people. Psychologists have listed the attitudes that bring strain and stress. Do you know what they are? They are envy, jealousy, anger, bitterness, strife, resentment, competitive spirit, and rivalry. They've listed the attitudes that bring peace and life and prolong life. Do you know what they are? Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness.

The works of the flesh that Paul lists in Galatians are the things that bring death into our bodies. The things that bring life are the fruit of the Spirit that he lists in Galatians. Remember; Paul had some stressful situations: he was shipwrecked 5 times, he was stoned -- all those kinds of things and yet he went through it all with absolute peace. How did he do it -- by living in the spirit. How did he live in the spirit? He said in Romans "We count ourselves as sheep that are meat to be slaughtered. We count ourselves as people who aren't here to achieve something for ourselves but are really people who don't even exist, as far as our own achievements are concerned. We regard ourselves as people who are dead. That's how we come through life with peace."

Remember I told you about the book "None of These Diseases" before. The author, McMillan, is a doctor. He'll elaborate a lot more on some of the things I've shared this morning. Here's the way he says one should live in the spirit: "At the beginning of each day, consider yourself a sheep that is going to be abused even to the extreme of being slaughtered." That's what dying with Jesus means: "Consider yourself a sheep that is going to be abused even to the extreme of being slaughtered."

If you take that attitude of mind, then nothing that comes up should frustrate or disturb you. A man awaiting death, and loved ones those of us who have been at death beds, remember how true this is – “A man awaiting death is not disturbed by many of the stress factors that upset people. He is not upset because his neighbor's chickens are scratching up his flower bed. His arthritis has not worsened because the taxes on his house have been raised. His blood pressure is not raised because his employer discharged him. He doesn't get a migraine headache because his wife burned his toast. His ulcerated colitis doesn't flair up because the stock market goes down 10 points. The crucified soul is not frustrated. The man who willingly, cheerfully and daily presents himself as a living sacrifice, can excellently adapt to the severest situations and, with Paul, be more than conquerors.”

Loved ones really, that's the way to begin to introduce life into your body. You all know as you sit there -- whether you understand the theological implications of the whole thing or not -- you're sitting there thinking “Yeah -- that was quite a headache I had last week.” Or you know fine well how often your stomach muscles have been knotted in bits because of resentment against somebody because you're trying to work yourself up to say what you are going to say to them next time you see them to set the relationship right?

What God is saying is “Ease back, ease back -- I've designed you so that my son could use your life. Okay your life might not gain all the respect that you think it should have, but I'll tell you this: you'll have my approval and I'll receive you at the end of this life. And I'll be pleased to receive you because you fulfilled the purpose that I made you for. So will you ease back from all your old plans that are bringing death into your body, and will you start finding out what my son's plan is, and start living in my Spirit?”

Loved ones, I know you're like me -- I know we're like each other. I know the agony that some of you are going through in your own bodies. Do you see that it is possible to live free from stress? It is possible to live a life free from stress -- it is possible to avoid wearing yourself out to get enough money to pay the doctors bills to keep yourself wearing yourself out. It is possible. It is possible to come into a life that is free from strain in your spirit and free from strain in your body. Will you think about those things as we look forward to next Sunday, when I hope to share some of the ways in which the power that raised Jesus from the dead, as it says in the next verse, can give life also to our mortal bodies? In the meantime, at least you could stop the disease spreading.

Let us pray.

Father, as we all sit here, we can almost feel tension in our bodies. Father, our face has been in a frown so long that we can't remember when it first got into that frown. Lord, we know that it's all connected up with us trying to make our own way down here as best we can. Father, we do begin to see that if you planned everything else so carefully with the planets, with the seasons, with the rivers and the seas, and the atoms, and the structure of the elements, then Lord we can see that you surely didn't throw as complex a mechanism as us into this world without having a definite plan for us.

Father, we are wearing ourselves out trying to make up a plan. Father, we want to know your plan. Lord Jesus, if you're alive, will you speak to us after this service? Will you give us some idea what you want to do inside us? Lord we're tired just living for ourselves. We're tired hitting this job day after day just to get enough money to keep alive. Lord Jesus, we want to find out what you

want to do. So will you, by your Holy Spirit, begin to show us how we could live a life from the inside out, instead of from the outside in? How our bodies could become free from stress and free from strain. In fact, Holy Spirit, we ask you -- would you give us light about the trouble we're having in our bodies at present? If you give us light about that, and enable us to step back from the things that are bringing us stress however much we think they're good things. Will you give us grace, now, to cut our losses, and step back from those, and be quiet for awhile before we find out what you want to do.

Dear Lord we'd thank you for the strain and the stress, because it shows us something's wrong. We do thank you for the headaches, we thank you for the muscle tension, we thank you Lord for the trouble we have with our stomachs. Thank you for the trouble we're having with our blood pressure because, Lord, they're all showing that we're doing something that you don't want us to do.

So Lord now we ask you for light; show us how to step back into faith and out of this strain of unbelief in which we find ourselves. We ask this Lord Jesus, so that even though our bodies are dead because of sin, our spirits will come alive because of your righteousness. Because of the rightness that you have with your Father, we pray that you will bring about that rightness with us for your glory. Amen.